

## Hathern's Lunatic Asylum

Two journals refer to the existence of a private institution for the care of insane patients in Hathern during the period from 1811 to 1812.<sup>1</sup> The authors record that the proprietor was Samuel Marriott and that the whereabouts of his asylum are unknown. Although the building no longer exists, two Hathern Local History Society members have located its site opposite the Anchor Inn car park on Loughborough Road. This article examines the history of private madhouses in England during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and speculates on the conditions residents may have experienced during their stay in our village.



Depiction of a chained 'lunatic.' Wellcome Images, The Wellcome Library, London.

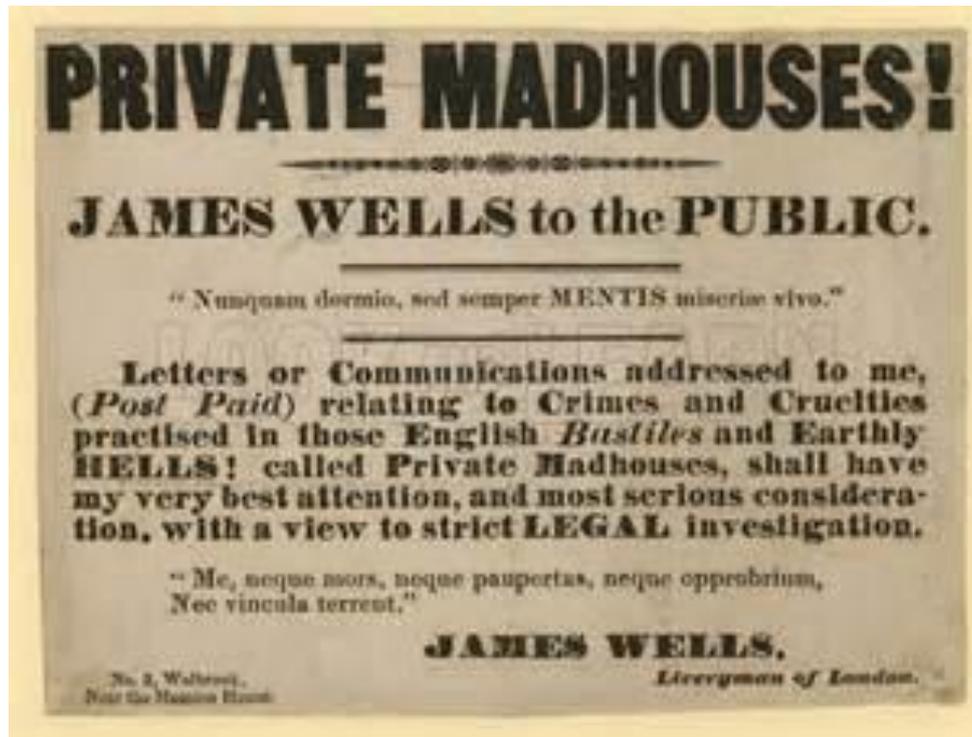
Despite psychiatric medicine being a Cinderella service in the NHS, sufferers of mental illness nowadays expect to receive effective and compassionate treatment. In former times families were often left to manage sick relatives as best they could. Two and a half centuries ago some charitable societies provided a limited amount of care for the insane. Private madhouses sprang up across the country to fulfil the needs of the general community during a time of increased stress resulting from the industrialisation of English society. These were commercial enterprises that catered for those rich enough to afford their services and, occasionally, pauper lunatics whose fees were paid by the parish.

The owners of private asylums came from all walks of life, from artisans and farmers to clergymen and doctors. Until 1774 they were not subject to any form of regulation, and conditions in their premises varied considerably from luxurious to squalid, and treatment could be benign and humane or downright brutal. Public scandals abounded concerning

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter *et al.* 1956; Carpenter 1987.

malpractices, abuses and mistreatment of inmates in the worst establishments. A common complaint was of 'wrongful confinement.' In 1763 a Parliamentary committee found that it was common practice for families to incarcerate inconvenient individuals for the financial or social benefit of other relatives. The press frequently reported on such abuses and carried adverts for legal services to assist victims.



Nothing changes: plenty of 19<sup>th</sup> century lawyers were ready to make a quick penny out of the misery of others.

One example of a notorious case was that of Samuel Bruckshaw who lived in Stamford in Lincolnshire. His business failed in 1770, and he became destitute, desperate and abusive. Despite being sane, magistrates detained him in a madhouse in Ashton-under-Lyme. Until his brother had him released, he spent nine months in chains in a cold and filthy garret, kept hungry, and was not allowed any contact with the outside world. He later tried to sue the Mayor and magistrates of Stamford, but they took steps to ensure that he was unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup>

An increasing sentiment of dissatisfaction led to the passing of the 1774 Act for Regulating Private Madhouses. The Preamble reads as follows:

*Whereas many great and dangerous abuses arose from the present state of houses kept for the reception of lunatics, for want of regulations with respect to the persons keeping such houses, the admission of patients into them and the visitation by proper persons of the said houses and patients: and whereas the law, as it now stands, is insufficient for preventing or discovering such abuses.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ingram 1998.

The aim of the Act was to compel asylum owners to register their establishments, obtain licences every twelve months, record details of the patients and those referring them, and to limit the number of those admitted. There were to be mandatory and regular inspections of all madhouses: in the provinces, these fell to the Justices of the Peace. In practice, the Act lacked teeth and abuses continued almost unabated. Nevertheless, it provided a framework and appetite for further legislation and helped to combat the wrongful detention of sane persons. Later legislation, such as the Act of 1808, the 1828 Madhouses Act and the 1845 Lunatics Acts led to the building of borough and county asylums.<sup>3</sup> The Acts enforced the licensing and inspection of all madhouses and required each county to publish lists of all private asylums with details of the names and number of inmates. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were around 40 of these establishments in England and Wales, but a peak of 145 was reached in 1848. By the latter date county asylums had sprung up across the country and the need for private madhouses eventually dwindled.

How did all this relate to our village? Several local newspapers reported that in October 1844 a Lunacy Commission hearing convened in Hathern to investigate the case of Robert Bloor, a former porcelain maker who originated from Derby.<sup>4</sup> He had been lodging with and was cared for by Mr. William Swift in Hathern and the Reverend E.T. March Phillipps, who had much medical experience, also attended him frequently. It appears that he received a great deal of kindness and compassion from these caring individuals. The jury heard evidence of Mr. Bloor's serious delusional illness and returned a verdict of lunacy dating back to 1828. There is also a reference to the existence of a private lunatic asylum in the 19 March 1853 edition of the Leicestershire Mercury, but no details are given.

The Royal college of Physicians of London presided over the Leicestershire County Register of private asylums for 1798-1812. This contains an entry relating to the premises run by Samuel Marriott between August 1810 and June 1811. During this time he cared for 8 patients, 4 men and 4 women. Hunter *et al.* surmise that this was probably a small business catering for chronic cases since two of his patients were certified by Dr. Arnold who arranged for their admission to Hathern. One had twice been an inmate of Arnold's asylum in Leicester in 1803 and 1804. All eight patients came from Leicester, Nottingham and Loughborough; none were Hatherners. Carpenter points out that "unfortunately there is no local record of this asylum." This is true, but two Hathern Local History Society members recently examined a copy of the 1778 Enclosures Award map and located a house by the roadside on a plot of land belonging to Samuel Marriott.<sup>5</sup>

There is no surviving house from this period at this location, but three modern houses currently occupy the site, namely numbers 91, 93 and 95 Loughborough Road opposite the Anchor Inn car park. The photos on our History Society website are reproduced here; confirm the presence of a building immediately to the south of the Wakes Field before its demolition.

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<sup>3</sup> The Leicestershire County Lunatic Asylum opened in 1837, and the residents were mainly acute cases. The original premises survive as a listed building in the main part of the campus at the University of Leicester. Patients eventually transferred to Carlton Hayes Hospital.

<sup>4</sup> Leicester Chronicle, Leicester Journal and the Derby Mercury.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Mee and Andrée Bagley.



The above photo shows the Georgian terrace that was almost certainly the site of Samuel Marriott's home and private lunatic asylum.



In the above 1950's view of the Anchor Inn, a cyclist is just about to pass Samuel Marriott's house on his right. It was probably demolished shortly after the photograph was taken.



This photograph shows the Anchor Inn and its various out-houses. Note the filling station to the right that was disused by the early 1970s and eventually replaced with a group of modern houses. Across the A6 is the Wakes Field, and it is possible to see a large tree and part of Samuel Marriott's house.

Carpenter acknowledges that it not possible to know what conditions prevailed at Hathern. It is to be hoped that Samuel's professional association with the well-respected Dr. Arnold indicates that his patients enjoyed a degree of comfort and humane treatment. Little else is known about the life of Samuel Marriott. We know that he married Elizabeth Woodcock in Hathern on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1760. His wife died on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1810 aged 73 years; Samuel survived for a few more years until the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1814 when he was 78 years old.<sup>6</sup> It appears, then, that he was in his mid-seventies during the period of registration of his asylum. It is not clear whether he was directly involved in the care of the patients or delegated it to others.

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<sup>6</sup> See the joint Headstone (Number 129) relating to their burial in Hathern Churchyard David Harbidge's survey of headstones. A hard copy is kept in Hathern Church and an electronic version appears in this website.

## Further Reading

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