

South Yorkshire Pauper Lunatic Asylum

Opened in 1872 this Asylum at Wadsley, Sheffield, became the area's centre of residential care for people who were mentally ill, in those days known under the umbrella title of insanity. Before 1872 people from Tickhill whose mental health caused concern were taken to the Asylum at Wakefield opened in 1818. The Asylum at Wadsley received payment from parishes once a doctor had agreed the patient needed treatment and a JP had signed the order sending the patient to the Asylum.

Between 1872 and 1911 seven women and thirteen men from Tickhill, whose ages on admission ranged from 20 to 86, were treated at this Asylum for lengths of time lasting from one month to 21 years. Although called a Pauper Lunatic Asylum many patients had occupations including domestic service and trades before their illnesses. The occupations of patients from Tickhill included five labourers aged from 39 to 73, a tailor aged 60, gardener aged 51, cattle drover aged 55, joiner aged 47 and cook aged 21.

Several of those admitted to the Asylum recovered to continue their occupations. They included joiner John Alderson whose illness was due to 'concussion of the spine'. John was admitted on 3 June 1903 then discharged on 13 June 1904. He was working as a joiner at the time of the 1911 Census as was his apprentice son age 16. John lived for many years after his illness, dying aged 72. Annie Anstock, a cook when she was admitted on 1 December 1899, was discharged one year later and had resumed her work as a cook by the time of the 1901 Census, but in Barnsley. William Sentance began his treatment at the Asylum on 17 March 1908 aged 48 and was discharged after a comparatively short stay on 19 May. He was working as a gamekeeper near Newark at the time of the 1911 Census.

Some sadly died in the Asylum; the usual arrangement was for burials to take place at Wadsley. However, several patients who died at the Asylum were brought back to Tickhill for burial as shown in the following two examples. The oldest Tickhill inhabitant to receive treatment at the Asylum was Sarah Watson, aged 86, a resident of the Maison Dieu (Mizendew) almshouses. The supposed cause of her insanity was listed as 'drink', but the admission record also notes that Sarah had senile dementia, did not know the day of the week, was very feeble, suffered from heart disease and had been unwell for 18 months. She was admitted to the Asylum on 19 February 1885, died there on 23 February 1887 and was then buried at Tickhill on 27 February. Mary Ann Palmer became a patient at Wadsley on 4 July 1883 aged 58, the cause of her illness was not known. She died on 15 August 1883 and was buried at Tickhill four days later, mourned by her husband, James, a master shoemaker of Sunderland Street, whose moving tribute on her gravestone states:

'Afflicted as thou wast, my wife, / Thou bore it with content / With humble patience ever mild / Thou left us to lament'

The youngest person to be admitted from Tickhill was William Deakin aged 20, son of John Deakin a constructor and excavator who lived on Sunderland Street. William was admitted to the Asylum on 21 March 1889 and remained there until discharged on 20 January 1911 'not improved'. On admission William was described as having little intelligence and being unfit to look after himself. He could not answer correctly the simplest of questions and he tore his clothes but could not explain why. Although in feeble bodily health he was fairly well nourished. His survival at the Asylum for over 21 years attests to his care there.

Regulations covering the behaviour of staff and general care of patients show considerable concern for the patients' welfare: providing daily outdoor exercise, comfortable and home-like wards with plants from the garden, birds and pet animals and a variety of entertainments. At the same time, expectations of the staff's behaviour towards the patients were high from showing kindness and consideration to being conscientious about security, cleanliness and the administration of medicines. In 1901 the patients were looked after by a medical superintendent, 4 assistant medical officers, a professional nurse, 5 'chief attendants on the insane', over 100 'attendants on the insane', a housekeeper, and 12 domestic staff.

For a mental health history timeline see website <http://studymore.org.uk/mhhtim.htm>

Admission records kept by Sheffield Archives: Sarah Watson Ref.: 2884 NHS3/5/1/5; William Deakin Ref.:3286 NHS3/5/1/7
Regulations and Orders of the Committee of Visitors for the Management and Conduct of The South Yorkshire Pauper Lunatic Asylum kept by The University of Warwick Modern Records Centre Ref.: MSS 229 Box G/2

Admission records for 9 Tickhill women admitted to the Asylum at Wakefield before 1872 can be seen at the website
<<http://www.historytoherstory.org.uk>> Search for Tickhill.

The Asylum was subsequently renamed Wadsley Mental Hospital in 1930 then Middlewood Hospital from 1948. The hospital closed in 1998 and became a private housing development with many of the original buildings converted into apartments.