



Devon Family History Society
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Devon Record Office



BOWHILL HOUSE REGISTER OF ADMISSIONS

1801-1805

DRO Reference – 3992F/H21

DFHS Book Reference - D037

St Thomas' Hospital for Lunatics was opened as an asylum for mentally-ill patients on 1st July 1801. It was the last asylum to be built entirely by voluntary subscription, as the 1808 County Asylums Act allowed for the funding of asylums by a combination of money raised by rates and by subscriptions. The asylum was built at Bowhill House which was bought by the committee of subscribers in 1800, repaired, and enlarged to accommodate seventy patients. Joseph Gillett was appointed the first Director and Mrs Gillett the first housekeeper, on the recommendation of Mr Haslam, the apothecary of Bethlem Hospital.

The asylum accepted both private and pauper patients from anywhere in the country, but in particular from the south west of England, "*on easy terms, proportioned to their Rank & Circumstances in Life*". It was run by a Committee which met every Tuesday in the board room of the asylum. The relatives or friends of a mentally-ill person had to send a petition to the Committee for their admission as a private patient, together with a certificate of their state of lunacy signed by two medical men. If the ill person was a pauper, the petition was signed by the overseers of the parish to which they were chargeable. If the Committee agreed to accept a patient, he or she also had to have a bond signed by two householders guaranteeing the payment of the patient's board and maintenance. The patients were classified on admission as 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th class, depending on the amount of money allowed every week for their board. Paupers were in the 1st class on 10/6d per week. When the 1st class rooms were full, no more paupers could be accepted unless the parish officers paid a little more to upgrade the patient to 2nd class at 15/- per week. 3rd class was 1 guinea per week and 4th class the most expensive at 2 guineas. After treatment, the patient could be sent home for a specified period on trial and, at the end of the trial, if the doctor at the asylum decided that he or she was cured, the patient would be allowed to return home permanently and the bond could be cancelled.

This register, 3992F/H21, is the first admission register for the asylum and records both private and pauper patients. It lists the patient's name, age and parish, the date and class of their admission, the names of the two people standing surety for the bond and a brief medical history including the dates of any trial periods and the date the patient was considered cured. Information about patients at this time can also be found in the Committee Minute Book, 1795-1805, 3992F/H1/1.

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