



A Patient at Bethlem Hospital, 1892

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

In Victorian times, Bethlem Hospital was an institution in south London that was dedicated to the treatment of mental health problems. Most of its patients were adults but people as young as 13 were admitted from time to time. Sometimes patients were given drug treatments, and in extreme cases put in temporary isolation. Generally however, the hospital acted as a refuge for people in distress and up to half of its patients left recovered.

William Cole, seen in this photograph, was 15 when he came to Bethlem in 1892. Fifteen months earlier he had been hit on the head and had suffered from dizziness and concussion ever since. Some of his behaviour had worried his mother. She reported that he had lit bonfires in their garden and thrown tiles at her when she tried to put them out. He had also made firecrackers out of gunpowder. The doctors who saw William thought he was quite intelligent and had been reasonably well educated. He was never formally admitted to the hospital and left after a week.

Source: Archives and Museum, Bethlem Royal Hospital Ref: CB-143