

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 35

Records of patients in London hospitals



Introduction

Many of the monastic hospitals which had cared for the sick poor of medieval London were suppressed on the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s and 1540s. St. Bartholomew's Hospital, St. Thomas' Hospital, and Bethlem Royal Hospital were saved by the City of London Corporation, which obtained grants of the hospitals and their endowments from King Henry VIII and from his son, Edward VI. The hospitals were refounded as secular institutions, St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas' caring for the physically sick and Bethlem for the insane. Over time they established their virtual independence from the City of London.

Thomas Guy, a London publisher and bookseller, left the fortune which he made out of the South Sea Bubble, to found Guy's Hospital which opened in 1725. Other major London hospitals, including the Westminster, Royal London, Middlesex, and St. George's Hospitals, were established in the 18th century on the voluntary principle. Medical men gave their services free while wealthy subscribers gave money each year to support the hospitals, in return for which they gained a share in the government of the hospital and the right to nominate patients. Medical schools developed in association with the hospitals.

Many categories of the sick, including pregnant women, the mentally ill, and patients suffering from incurable or infectious diseases were excluded from most hospitals. Voluntary hospitals were established from the mid 18th century onwards especially to care for some of these patients. They included Queen Charlotte's Hospital, the City of London Lying In Hospital, the Smallpox Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics, and the London Lock Hospital (for patients suffering from venereal disease). During the 19th century many more voluntary hospitals were founded in London ranging from major teaching hospitals such as St. Mary's Paddington and the Royal Free to small local general hospitals to serve the ever expanding suburbs. Specialised hospitals were also set up to treat particular types of diseases.

During the second half of the 19th century the discovery of anaesthesia, the introduction of antiseptic and then of aseptic surgery, and the reform of nursing brought major advances in hospital care. The Nightingale School of Nursing was founded at St. Thomas' Hospital in 1860 with money raised by public subscription to express the nation's gratitude to Florence Nightingale for her work in military hospitals during the Crimean War. Other hospitals established similar schools of nursing.

Except for Bethlem Royal Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital opened in 1751 and the Lunatics House at Guy's, the only provision for the mentally ill was either admission to a private madhouse or confinement in the workhouse. An Act of Parliament of 1808 allowed Justices of the Peace to build county lunatic asylums to provide more humane treatment of pauper lunatics and hopefully to restore many to productive life.

Middlesex was one of the first counties to take advantage of this act opening Hanwell Asylum (now St. Bernard's Hospital, Ealing) in 1831, followed by Colney Hatch in 1851. Surrey established its first asylum, later Springfield Hospital, Tooting, in 1841. The City of London built its own lunatic asylum, Stone House Hospital, at Dartford in Kent in 1866.

The Metropolitan Poor Act of 1867 sought to remove other classes of sick paupers from the workhouse. The London Boards of Guardians were obliged to build separate workhouse infirmaries into which trained nurses were introduced. Nurses from the Nightingale School started schools of nursing at Highgate Infirmary in 1871 and at St Marylebone Infirmary in 1882. The Metropolitan Poor Act also established the Metropolitan Asylums Board which provided fever and smallpox hospitals for those suffering from infectious diseases as well as asylums for harmless and incurable pauper lunatics for the whole metropolitan area.

In 1889 responsibility for the county lunatic asylums passed to the newly formed county councils. The City of London retained control of its asylum, Stone House Hospital. The Local Government Act of 1929 abolished the Metropolitan Asylums Board and the Boards of Guardians for London and Middlesex and transferred their responsibilities, including those of the former City of London Board of Guardians, to the London County Council and Middlesex County Council, which thus became major providers of health care. Their plans for the modernisation and development of their hospitals were brought to an abrupt halt by the outbreak of war in 1939.

In 1948 the post war Labour Government established the National Health Service with the intention of providing free health care for all from cradle to grave. The N.H.S. took over all the London and Middlesex County Councils' hospitals, all the London teaching hospitals and almost all the formerly independent voluntary hospitals and set about trying to weld them into a coherent hospital service.

Many smaller hospitals in London have closed during the last 50 years. Services have been concentrated on fewer sites either in large modern hospitals or often, as at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals, in a combination of old and new buildings. Most of the large Victorian mental hospitals on the periphery of London have closed to be replaced by community based services.

Hospital Archives

Over 80 hospitals, many now closed, have deposited their records in London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). The extent of our holdings for each hospital ranges from one volume or document to hundreds of feet of archives. LMA holds the archives of four major London teaching hospitals - Guy's, St Thomas', St George's and Westminster Hospital - as well as archives of local hospitals such as Edgware General Hospital, Hounslow Hospital, Lambeth Hospital, the Miller Hospital, Putney Hospital, the Royal Northern Hospital, St Mary Abbot's Hospital, St Olave's

Hospital, West Middlesex University Hospital and many others. Special hospitals, for example Chelsea Hospital for Women, the Evelina Hospital, and the Royal Eye Hospital, and infectious diseases hospitals including the Brook, Joyce Green and North Western Hospitals have deposited their records with us. We also hold the archives of several former psychiatric hospitals including St Luke's Hospital, Banstead, Friern (formerly Colney Hatch Asylum), St Bernard's (formerly Hanwell Asylum), St Lawrence's Hospital, Caterham, and Springfield (formerly Wandsworth Asylum).

Most surviving records relating to patients admitted to Saint Thomas' Hospital 1690-1800 have been digitised by the London Lives project. See the London Lives website.

Some hospital records have not yet been catalogued and can only be made available for consultation by prior appointment at least a week in advance.

Guides to Hospital Records

A hospital records database compiled by The National Archives and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine can be searched on the National Archives website. For each hospital this gives brief details of records known to have survived and where they can now be found, though coverage of records still held by hospitals is limited.

A map showing the location of hospitals within the Metropolitan Police District in 1944 published by King Edward's Hospital Fund for London may be consulted in the Information Area of LMA. The hospitals are named and a key provides additional information. Our Library contains copies of Burdett's Hospitals and Charities for 1895 and for most years from 1903 to 1930 (26.1 BUR) and The Hospitals Year Book (now the IHSM Health and Social Services Yearbook) from 1931 onwards (26.1 HOS). These list hospitals giving their addresses and brief details about size, type of patients admitted, and which health authority was responsible for them. Hospitals are included in the "Trades" section of Post Office Directories for London as well as in the "Streets" section under their address.

Lying In Hospitals

Several lying-in hospitals were established in mid 18th century London. Records of four of these have been deposited in LMA. A fifth lying in hospital known as the New General Lying In Hospital was opened in Oxford Road near Hanover Square in 1767 under the name of the Queen's Hospital. It shortly afterwards moved to a larger house in Store Street near Tottenham Court Road, where its patients included single women. The hospital closed about 1800 and no records of patients are believed to have survived. We also have transcripts in our library of the registers of births and baptisms in the lying-in wards of the Middlesex Hospital, Mortimer Street, St Marylebone, which opened in 1747 and closed in 1807 (60.531 MID).

These hospitals were principally intended for the “wives of poor industrious Tradesmen or distressed House-keepers” and the wives of soldiers and sailors. The large London teaching hospitals did not usually admit women for childbirth before the late 19th century, though their medical students and staff delivered women in their own homes.

The archives of Guy’s Hospital held by LMA include:-

- Registers of mothers delivered by Guy’s Hospital Maternity Charity 1853-1915 (H09/GY/B/21/1-17)
- Maternity record books 1871-1896 (H09/GY/B/22/1-5).

British Lying In Hospital, Endell Street, Holborn (H14/BLI)

Founded in 1749 for married women only, it was situated in Brownlow Street, Long Acre, Holborn until 1849 when it moved to Endell Street. It closed in 1913. Registers of births and baptisms 1749-1868 are held by the National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU (RG8/52-66). They have been included in the International Genealogical Index. LMA has a delivery book 1856-1860 and case books 1905-1909.

City of London Lying In Hospital, City Road, Finsbury (H10/CLM)

Also for married women only, this was founded in 1750 in Aldersgate Street in the City of London and moved to City Road in the parish of St Luke, Old Street in 1773. It was renamed the City of London Maternity Hospital in 1918. After part of the building was destroyed by bombing in 1940-1941, the hospital moved to Hanley Road, Islington. It closed in 1983.

Records deposited in London Metropolitan Archives include:-

- Inpatients’ admission registers 1750-1769, 1861-1948
- Baptism registers 1813-1978
- Out-patients’ admission registers 1872-1953

General Lying In Hospital, York Road, Lambeth (H1/GLI)

The hospital opened in 1767 as the Westminster New Lying In Hospital although it was situated in Lambeth in Westminster Bridge Road. It admitted single mothers as well as married women. Its name was changed in 1818 to the General Lying In Hospital. It moved to York Road, Lambeth in 1828. The hospital closed in 1971.

Records deposited in London Metropolitan Archives include:-

- Admission registers 1767-1944
- Affidavit books with details of settlement 1812-1858
- Delivery books 1828-1877

- Baptism registers 1872-1918
- Medical Officers' case books 1882-1910
- Out-patients' registers 1877-1882, 1900-1918

For baptism registers 1794-1872 and settlement examinations 1780-1816 see the parish records of St Mary-at-Lambeth which are also in our care.

Queen Charlotte's Hospital, Marylebone Road, St Marylebone (H27/QC)

(now in Goldhawk Road, Hammersmith)

This hospital which confusingly was also at one time known as the General Lying In Hospital, admitted both single and married women. It may have originated in a house in Jermyn Street in 1739. After operating from various addresses in Westminster and St Marylebone, it moved to Bayswater in 1791. In 1809 the hospital was reorganised and renamed in honour of Queen Charlotte. It moved to Marylebone Road in 1813 and finally to Goldhawk Road in 1940.

Records deposited in London Metropolitan Archives include:-

- patients' registers 1809-1949.

For baptism registers 1881-1927 see the parish records of St Mark, Old Marylebone Road, which are also in our care. The City of Westminster Archives Centre holds a volume containing birth and bastardy certificates for 1791-1797.

Access to Patients Records

Hospital records are subject to a period of restricted access in order to protect the confidentiality of living individuals. It may therefore not be possible for you to consult all the records yourself. We are able to undertake research on behalf of an individual to provide information from hospital records but we do have to ensure that the information is only being released to either the individual concerned or in the case of a third party request that the patient concerned is deceased. We do charge for undertaking such searches within our records.

We suggest that in the first instance you contact the enquiry team who will be able to advise you on how to proceed with your particular enquiry.

Other sources of information about hospital patients

General Register Office

All births and deaths in English hospitals after July 1837 should have been registered. LMA now holds microfiche copies of the General Register Office indexes to births,

marriages and deaths. It is also possible to access this information via websites such as Ancestry and FreeBMD which are available free of charge at both LMA and Guildhall Library. Once you have obtained a reference you would then need to contact either the General Register Office or alternatively the registry office where the event was registered.

Postal applications for copies of certificates should be sent to the Postal Application Section, Office of National Statistics, General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. Certificates can be ordered on-line at the General Register Office website or by telephone on 0845 603 7788.

LMA cannot issue certificates or provide any further details than those included on the indexes.

Baptism Registers

These are considered to be the records of the hospital chaplain. Baptism registers may be found either with the records of the hospital or with the records of the parish in which the hospital was situated.

Notification of Births

The archives of the Middlesex County Council include registers of notification of births for various districts in Middlesex (but not the whole county) 1930-1947 and for the Twickenham area 1914-1950 (MCC/HS/NB). These include births in hospitals situated within these districts.

Workhouse Registers

Registers of patients in workhouse infirmaries which passed from the Boards of Guardians to the London County Council or the Middlesex County Council then to LMA and which were never in the possession of N.H.S. hospitals are catalogued with the archives of the Boards of Guardians. Entries in the Hospital Records Database indicate whether any hospital has ever been a workhouse or workhouse infirmary and include references to any patients' registers surviving amongst the Board of Guardians' records. The archives of Middlesex County Council include one admission and discharge register for Wellhouse Hospital 1931-1940 (MCC/WE/PA/1/210).

Registers of patients in psychiatric hospitals

Middlesex Sessions Records

The Middlesex Sessions records contain annual returns from parishes of lunatics and the mentally defective chargeable to the parish 1825-1889 (MA/A). Some years are missing. They also include notices of death and discharge from Hanwell Asylum

1846-1853 and from Colney Hatch 1852-1853 (MA/A), and registers and other records relating to pauper lunatics maintained by the county 1853-1890 (MA/A/C/1-17).

Metropolitan Asylums Board and London County Council

Amongst the records of the Metropolitan Asylums Board is one register of deaths of patients in Belmont Asylum 1905-1908 (MAB 2267). The archives of the London County Council Public Health Department include some registers of patients in L.C.C. asylums dating from 1895 to 1928 (LCC/PH/MENT/4/1-38). These do not form one continuous series, but several short series of registers.

Boards of Guardians

Most patients in L.C.C. and M.A.B. mental hospitals before 1930 were admitted through the Board of Guardians for the poor law union from which they came. The records of the London Boards of Guardians include registers of lunatics and the insane maintained in asylums. Sometimes copies of reception orders or admission orders for lunatics survive. These normally include a medical certificate and a statement by a relative or friend of the patient. Many of these records can now be viewed though not yet searched on the [Ancestry website](#).

Middlesex County Council

The records of Middlesex County Council Assistance and Welfare Departments include registers of lunatics for Brentford, Hendon and Willesden Unions who were patients in M.C.C. mental hospitals 1889-1946 (MCC/WE/PA/3/1-7).

Published in October 2008 and revised March 2010 by
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