



Lunatic Asylum and Mental Hospital Records

Background

Before 1808, lunatics were housed either in privately run asylums, charitable institutions or the parish workhouse. In 1828, Justices of the Peace were given the power to build and maintain asylums from the county rate (the council tax of its time). This was not compulsory until 1854. In 1888 responsibility for asylums was given to the County Council and in 1948 to the National Health Service.

From 1774 privately run asylums had to be licensed by the Quarter Sessions. The main privately run asylums in the county were in Fairford, Fishponds (near Bristol), Northwoods (Frampton Cotterell) and Barnwood House (near Gloucester).

The 1st County Asylum in Gloucester was built in 1823 in Horton Road, Gloucester and was closed in 1988. The 2nd County Asylum at Coney Hill was opened in 1885 and closed in 1994. The County Asylum was funded by private donations, Gloucester Borough Council and from the county rate. Until 1860 it treated both pauper and private patients. Pauper patients were usually transferred from a workhouse or gaol. Private patients paid for their own care. From 1860 private patients were treated in the newly opened Barnwood House.

Data Protection and Asylum Records

Medical records contain sensitive information about patients and staff members. For this reason most records are closed for 100 years. If you wish to access information in a closed record you will need to seek the permission of the organisation which owns the records. Please contact the archives (email: archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk) for more information.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

The County Asylums (Ref: HO22 and HO23)

The two hospitals were administered together so the records can cover one or the other hospital or both. Most of the records in HO22 refer to Horton Road; most of the records in HO23 refer to Coney Hill. After the 2nd County Asylum was opened, patients were often admitted to the 1st County Asylum and then transferred to the new institution.

The main records available for patient information are:

- **Admission & Discharges books** (HO22/60; HO22/61; HO22/62)
 - Give date of admission, medical condition
- **Catalogue of Patients or Civil Registers** (HO22/63)
 - Give more detail than some admission registers.
 - Include name, age, previous place of abode, who sent them to the asylum, bodily condition, form of mental disorder, cause, date of discharge or death.
- **Alphabetical Registers of Patients** (HO22/66)
 - Give patient number, date of admission, name, marital status, age and date of removal, discharge or death.
- **Case Books** (Horton Road: HO22/70; Coney Hill: HO23/70)
 - Give details about the patient and their condition when they were admitted. Include regular notes summing up the condition of the patient.
 - If the patient was in the Asylum for a long time you may need to look at a few case books.
- **Case Papers filed by date of admission** (HO22/83/2)
 - Cover people who were discharged or transferred from the asylum.
 - Issued when the patient was admitted; give the date of admission together with an assessment of their condition

- **Case Papers filed by date of death** (HO22/83/3)
 - Cover people who died whilst in the asylum
 - Issued when the patient was admitted; give the date of admission together with an assessment of their condition
- **Medical Journals** (Horton Road: HO22/65; Coney Hill: HO23/65)
 - A day to day diary of events, new arrivals, incidents and statistics.

What records should I use?

If a patient died in the Asylum (this is normally noted on the death certificate) you can go straight for their **case papers** and then to the **case books** which cover the dates they were in the asylum.

If a patient did not die in the Asylum (or you do not know if they did) you need to find out when they were admitted using the **admission registers** or **civil registers**. This will allow you to find their **case papers** and details of their treatment in the **case books**.

There may be more than one register or volume covering the same date. This might be because one covered pauper or private patients or there was a change in how records were kept so two series were used at the same time. You may need to check both.

Staff Records – a separate guide is planned, to cover these records

Private Asylums

Generally fewer records survive for the privately run asylums.

- Barnwood House (Gloucester) (Ref: D3725)
- Fairford Asylum (Ref: D1070/VII/76-80 and plans D1070/VI/2)
- Fishponds (near Bristol) some records held at Bristol Records Office and Bristol Library
- Northwoods (Frampton Cotterell) – No records held at Gloucestershire Archives but there are a few documents which refer to Northwoods (including coroners reports Ref: CO1)

Quarter Sessions

Between 1808 and 1888, some administrative records for the asylums, both the County Asylum and the privately run ones, are included in the Quarter Sessions records. These records include plans of the buildings, licences, reports and accounts for the private asylums and reports, accounts and correspondence relating to the County Asylums and the returns of criminal and pauper lunatics. These cut-off dates are not applied rigidly and these records include some post-1888 material. For more information see Research Mini Guide 34: *Quarter Sessions*

County Council Records

From 1888 to 1948 responsibility for asylums passed to the County Council so the records form part of the Council records. These records include agreements for the reception of mental patients at the county asylums and annual reports of the asylums. These cut-off dates are not applied rigidly so some earlier material is included. Most records are held under the reference C/CAV.

How to Find the Records

To view a list of records in a collection please use our online catalogue, which can be found on our website at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives. Use the references given above as your search terms. Try searching using the keyword “asylum*” for other related material. You can refine your search, for example by date.

For more guidance on using our online catalogue please see the Help page and FAQs. Or you can watch a short YouTube tutorial.