
Lunacy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England: analysis of Quarter Sessions records Part I[†]

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Introduction

Fourteen years ago Richard Neugebauer wrote that the most serious flaw in research on the psychiatric history of the pre-industrial era was historians' excessive reliance on printed sources, especially those written by the élite, i.e., physicians, clergymen, political theorists, etc.¹ Now we find ourselves in a greatly improved situation. We have several studies making extensive use of manuscripts and/or writings of less eminent figures, for example: Michael MacDonald on Richard Napier and his patients, Roy Porter on the voices of the mad themselves, Patricia Allderidge and Jonathan Andrews on Bethlem Hospital.² Unlike earlier Whiggish or 'social controllist' historians, they no

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¹ Richard Neugebauer, 'Treatment of the mentally ill in mediaeval and early modern England', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, xiv (1978), 158-69. He also criticized Foucault and Rosen for relying 'upon quite familiar printed sources', in his PhD thesis ('Mental illness and government policy in sixteenth and seventeenth century England', Dissertation, Columbia University, 1976, 11).

² Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (London: Athlone Press, 1987); *idem*, *The Social History of Madness* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987); Patricia Allderidge, 'Hospitals, madhouses and asylums: cycles in the care of the insane', *British Journal for Psychiatry*, cxxxiv (1979), 321-34; *idem*, 'Management and mismanagement in Bedlam, 1547-1638', in Charles Webster (ed.), *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 141-64; *idem*, 'Bedlam: fact or fantasy?' in W. F. Bynum & Roy Porter (eds), *Anatomy of Madness* (London: Tavistock, 1985 & 1989), Vol. 2, 17-33; Jonathan Andrews, 'The lot of the "incurably" insane in Enlightenment England', *Eighteenth Century Life*, xii (1988), 1-18; Colin Jones, 'The treatment of the insane in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Montpellier', *Medical History*, xxiv (1980), 371-90.

longer pick up from printed pages those lines that will serve to reinforce certain aprioristic views about psychiatry in the past.³ They all aim to reconstruct the real world of the insane in the pre-industrial era through analysis of hitherto neglected material. Our understanding of insanity in the pre-industrial (or; I prefer, pre-asylum) era has been greatly enriched by the studies mentioned above.

This 'social history of lunacy', however, did not make an abrupt appearance in the late seventies and early eighties. In particular, we should not forget a short but important article written by A. Fessler as early as 1956.⁴ Fessler collected scattered references to the care and management of the insane from Lancashire Quarter Sessions records, and offered several precise insights into the mechanism of the treatment of lunatics within the framework of the Poor Law in the seventeenth century. The article is well documented, lucidly organized and its points are clear: people perceived two different classes of lunatics and accordingly treated them in different ways. The 'safe' were objects of pity, granted allowance and maintained by relatives or neighbours. The 'dangerous' who aroused terror posed more serious problems to the courts. In dealing with them, Justices of the Peace had three methods: ordering relatives to look after the dangerous insane, commanding parish officers to keep and maintain them, and as a last resort, sending them to the House of Correction. Although Fessler's article is only short, he provided a good basis and a reliable framework for further study.

Fessler had few followers until Peter Rushton published an article in 1988 based on research into the records of Durham and Northumberland.⁵ Focusing mainly on Quarter Sessions rolls, order books and papers, Rushton adopted the general framework suggested by Fessler, and successfully related it to the wider context of social history. He found that patterns of care were different between idiots and lunatics, for the former were 'safe' and some of the latter were 'dangerous'. Accordingly, idiocy was a domestic problem and lunacy, when perceived as dangerous, was an institutional problem.⁶ In addition, the longer time span covered by his paper enabled him to look at the impact of the infirmaries and asylums built in the late eighteenth century. Those medical

³ To cite a few of these 'old-fashioned' studies: E. H. Ackerknecht, *A Short History of Psychiatry*, 3rd ed., translated by Sula Wolff (New York: Hafner, 1968); Gregory Zilboorg, *A History of Medical Psychology* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1941); E. G. O'Donoghue, *The Story of Bethlem Hospital from its Foundation in 1247; C. N. French, The Story of St. Luke's* (London: Heinemann, 1951).

⁴ A. Fessler, 'The management of lunacy in seventeenth century England: an investigation of Quarter-Sessions records', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, xlix (1956), 901-07.

⁵ Peter Rushton, 'Lunatics and idiots: mental disability, the community and the Poor Law in north-east England 1600-1800', *Medical History*, xxxii (1988), 34-50. See also: G. W. Oxley, *Poor Relief in England and Wales 1601-1834* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974); E. G. Thomas, 'The old Poor Law and medicine', *Medical History*, xxiv (1980), 1-19; Margaret Pelling, 'Healing the sick poor: social policy and disability in Norwich 1550-1640', *Medical History*, xxix (1985), 115-37; these three contain information on the care of the insane in this period within the framework of poor relief.

⁶ Rushton, *op. cit.*, 41f.

institutions became predominant over domestic care, as they offered the parishes a preferable, if expensive, solution to the problem of lunacy.⁷

The paper will follow in the footsteps of Fessler and Rushton and examine scattered references to the insane in the Quarter Sessions records of the county of Middlesex, with some published Sessions records of several other counties.⁸ In doing so, I am principally aiming to go further into the areas for which Fessler and Rushton offered an overall framework, and to investigate in more detail such factors as the family, the parish and institutions. We know that madness in the early modern period was principally a domestic problem, but we are still ignorant about the mechanism of domestic care, e.g., who in a family was particularly responsible for taking care of its mad member, what kind of role various relatives played, etc. It is certain that the parish was in many ways crucial in the care of the insane, but our knowledge about how the system of parochial care actually worked is still imperfect. We know a certain amount about the practice of putting a dangerous madman into an institution, but we have neglected the practice of discharging him from it, something that was not uncommon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This paper, therefore, will try to throw more light on details of domestic care, parochial care and institutionalization.

At the same time, caution is necessary when basing research on Quarter Sessions records. As Rushton pointed out, these records are not representative of what actually happened in the care of the insane in this period.⁹ First, they contain the difficult cases that people failed to handle at the local or parish level. Second, and more significantly, they are records of what went on before magistrates in courtrooms. The petitions and orders made there are, therefore,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-6.

⁸ The main county I studied was Middlesex. Middlesex Session Books are available in typescript of c. 4000 folio pages from 1638 to 1689 and from 1712 to 1751. They contain Middlesex Sessions Books Calendar (hereafter MXSB), books 1-470, 676-1090. I looked through all pages of typescript and checked some originals. The catalogue of the Middlesex Sessions Papers (hereafter MJSP) starts from 1640, but the main collection starts from 1680 or so. The published sources whose indexes I checked are: Yorkshire Record Society, *West Riding Sessions Records, 1611-1642*, ed. John Lister (1915) (hereafter WRQS); *The Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Journal*, v (1879) (hereafter YAJ); Somerset Records Society, *Quarter Sessions Records for the County of Somerset, 1607-1677*, 4 vols, ed. E. H. Bates Harbin (1907-12) (hereafter SOQS); North Riding Record Society Publications, *North Riding Quarter Sessions Records*, new series, 9 vols., ed. J. C. Atkinson (1892-1894) (hereafter NRQS); William Salt Archaeological Society and Staffordshire Record Society, *Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1581-1606*, 2 vols., ed. S. A. H. Burne (1929-30) (hereafter STQS); Sussex Record Society, *Quarter Sessions Order Book, 1642-1649*, ed. B. C. Redwood (Vol. 54, Publication of the Record Society) (hereafter SUQS); Chetham Society, *Lancashire Quarter Sessions Records*, ed. J. Tait (1917) (hereafter LQS); *Buckinghamshire Sessions Records, 1678-1705*, 2 vols, ed. William le Hardy & Geoffrey L. Reckitt (1933 & 1936) (hereafter BQS); Hertford County Records, *Notes and Extracts from the Sessions Rolls 1581-1799*, 8 vols (1905-1935) (hereafter HQS); Nottinghamshire County Records, *Notes and Extracts from the Nottinghamshire County Records of the 17th Century*, compiled by H. Hampton Copnall (1915) (hereafter NQS). Hereafter I will refer to the records from these materials by using abbreviations and specifying volume number and page, e.g., SOQS, Vol. 2, 45.

⁹ Rushton, *op. cit.* (note 5), 40.

constructed representations of lunacy cases. They contain information about what happened, and this information is organized in the required format. So another aim of this paper is to clarify the way in which people in the courtroom understood and described problems of lunatics, and to relate it to a wider social and ideological situation.

Family and lunacy

The family was one of the most important social units in early modern England.¹⁰ It was a focal point of economic, reproductive and mental life, and organized the lives of its individual members into the social fabric. Social and economic status, domicile, occupation, religion and so on were very much affected by family.

TABLE 1: *The place in the family of the mad individuals*¹¹

		Middlesex	Other counties
No. cases	Husbands	4	5
	Wives	2	3
	Sons	1	4
	Daughters	2	0
	Widows	2	4
	Servants / Apprentices	2	2
	Not specified	21	33
	Total	34	51

This was also the case with an individual who became insane. The way in which an insane individual was treated, kept and managed was, to a considerable extent, determined by family factors: whether one's family was rich or poor, whether one was married or single, whether one was head of the household, whether one could expect help from the other members of the family, etc. Orders and petitions concerning problems of lunacy were quite often framed around family issues. Unfortunately, Quarter Sessions records do not always contain information about the family status of the lunatic in question. We can, however, make a tentative assessment of the effect of family determinants on the way the lunatic was treated, from the limited sources consulted.

(a) *Husbands and wives*

Social historians generally agree that the tie formed by marriage was the most

¹⁰ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984); Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost - Further Explored*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1983), Chapter 1; Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). The last is, as the author admits, not very strong on the family of lower status.

¹¹ One widowed daughter and one deserted wife taken care of by her father are counted as two cases.

important bond of a family in early modern England, as it is still today.¹² So it seems reasonable to start by examining the cases under the entries 'husbands' and 'wives'.

The predominance of mad husbands is evident: husbands outnumbered wives by nine to five (Table 1), and the gap becomes even wider on closer examination of the actual living state of each lunatic. As one of the two lunatic wives in Middlesex is described as 'deserted by the husband', it is clear that she did not live with her husband when her lunacy was reported to the court.¹³ The other seems to have been a vagrant who was wandering alone.¹⁴ One lunatic wife in Somerset does not appear to have been living with her husband when her neighbours found that she might set her house on fire; it is likely that he was in military service.¹⁵ And in another case in Somerset, a petition was made by the inhabitants when the husband of a lunatic wife was going to be arrested and imprisoned:¹⁶ the petitioners anticipated the hardship of the lunatic wife that would be caused by the imprisonment. A 'normal' wife living with her husband was less likely to be a problem when she fell insane. In contrast, it is certain that all but one of the nine lunatic husbands lived under the same roof as their wives at the time the case was reported: sometimes the wives made the petitions themselves, or the records refer to the suffering of the wives.¹⁷

Not only were there more cases of troublesome insane husbands than of mad wives, but the former were also likely to cause more serious problems. Four of the nine mad husbands were sent to institutions: one to Bedlam and three to Houses of Correction. In contrast, no wife living with her husband suffered long confinement in an institution. One Joane Skotton was committed to the House of Correction in Somerset in 1618, only to be discharged at the next session. Significantly, her husband was one of those who petitioned for her discharge.¹⁸

Moreover, cases of mad husbands and mad wives were represented at court in different styles. Lunacy cases of husbands were nearly always represented as an affliction of the breadwinner of a family, hence a source of financial distress to it, and as a threat of physical violence against others, sometimes including petitioning wives themselves. These compounded difficulties are clearly shown in the petition of 'Ann, wife of John Bryant of Stratton, coalminer', in Somerset in 1656.¹⁹

¹² Houlbrooke, *op. cit.* (note 10), 96-126.

¹³ MXSB, bk 158.

¹⁴ MXSB, bk 365. In this case, Ann White, the lunatic wife of George White, was ordered to be conveyed to the parish of St Sepulchre's from St Giles' without Cripplegate.

¹⁵ SOQS, Vol. 1, 99. In this case, it was feared that Emma Carter, the lunatic wife of Richard Carter, might put fire to her house. There is no sign of her husband's presence at that time, and one finds he received a pension for maimed soldiers in 1621 (*ibid.*, 308). The record states that he was in service in France, Ireland and Bohemia.

¹⁶ SOQS, Vol. 2, 46.

¹⁷ The exception is BQS, Vol. 2, 113-14; this is the case of a lunatic husband who killed his wife.

¹⁸ SOQS, Vol. 1, 223, 227.

¹⁹ SOQS, Vol. 3, 35.

Her husband John has put her in fear of her life by his threat and cruel behaviour . . . he liveth very idly being as she believeth a man distempered in his brain and confounding that small estate which should maintain them and six children.

Abigail Note, a Middlesex wife, also petitioned in 1657 that her husband, Ralph, 'has been distracted in his mind and unable to gain his livelihood', and she was forced to hire people to watch him 'for fear he shall do himself or others some mischief'.²⁰ Lovell Hawkins, another Middlesex wife, stated that her distracted husband was 'likely to kill her every moment'.²¹

Mad wives, too, were represented in terms of economic and physical difficulties, but the problems were portrayed in a different way. This is exemplified by the following petition of John Sandholme, a 'poor labourer' in Lancashire in 1681.²²

His wife is extraordinary trouble with melancollie in soe much that shee is danger to destroy herselfe if she should be left in the house alone but for the space of halfe an houre . . . and he is a very pore mann and hath nothinge to maintayne him selfe . . . but his own hand labour and he can not leave his wyffe to work unless he hier an able p[er]son to stay and looke to his wyffe for fear shee distroy her selfe.

Two significant differences exist here: the direction of violence and the reason of financial distress. The physical violence of the mad wife was represented as directed against herself, not against her spouse, and the husband complained that he had to attend her lest she should commit suicide. And her perceived suicidal tendency was reported to be the cause of the financial problems of the family in an indirect way: the husband could not leave her and go to work.

These cases give an image of more competent husbands, both physically and economically, and weaker and dependent wives. According to the image, a sane husband could physically govern a raging wife without serious danger to his own life. No husband said he felt his life to be in danger because of a lunatic wife, and no husband was killed by his insane spouse. In contrast, two wives said that they might be killed by their violent lunatic husbands: one had to hire people to manage the insane husband, and one was actually killed by her lunatic husband.²³ Husbands were more likely to be the main, if not the sole, breadwinner in a household.

With this image of male superiority, it is understandable that sane husbands were more frequently expected to take care of their mad spouses than were sane

²⁰ MXSB, bk 173.

²¹ MJSP, 1689 Dec. 1.

²² Lancashire Record Office, Quarter Sessions Records, QSP 537/6, cited in Patricia Allderidge, 'Hospitals, madhouses and asylums' (note 2), 327.

²³ MJSP, 1689 Dec. 1, and SOQS, Vol. 3, 35, are the cases of petitions from the wives who fear they might be killed by mad husbands. MXSB, bk 173, contains a description of the wife who hired some persons to manage her husband. For the wife killed by the husband, see note 16.

wives to keep and govern their mad husbands. In 1627 a petition was made by the parish officers and inhabitants of the parish of Hardington, Somerset.²⁴

Petition signed by the rector and divers inhabitants of Hardington, asking for the release from danger of arrest of a poor man Lionel Grange for building a house for which they had given permission; he having [a] great store of children and lunatic wife, whom, if he be sent to prison, they will be obliged to keep.

Lionel Grange was probably a cottager, and he was to be arrested for illegal building of a cottage. But the rector and inhabitants of the parish were more interested in him maintaining his children and lunatic wife than in observing the law. (This was not uncommon. Not infrequently, even the judges ordered local landlords to allow poor men to retain 'quiet possession' of their hovels.²⁵) So Grange's fellow parishioners petitioned for his release lest they should be forced to assume charge of his wife and children. They expected him to take care of the lunatic wife, even though he was but a cottage labourer. As long as the husband could work, the villagers thought, he could maintain and manage her.

This expectation can be seen also in a petition presented by Edward Ffox [sic] in Nottinghamshire in 1657.²⁶ His wife, 'being much distracted in her witts, hath of late pulled down part of his dwelling house wherein she was kept, which by reason of poverty he is not able to build'. On hearing the petition, the Justice of the Peace ordered the churchwardens and overseers of the poor 'to rebuild the house'. Thus the session court hoped that the husband could keep the problem of his lunatic wife within the domestic domain.

It would be safe to say that this picture of the superiority of husbands over wives in their ability to cope with lunacy problems was, to a certain extent, a reflection of the real situation of married couples in early modern England. It might perhaps be easier for a male physically to govern a female lunatic than the reverse. There was also asymmetry in the employment situation. The growth of the labour supply from the early sixteenth century brought about a situation especially unfavourable to women labourers, who were at a disadvantage compared with their male rivals. The development of agricultural specialization forced women into less skilled and less well-paid work like carding and spinning, for which wages were often barely enough for their own maintenance.²⁷ The wives of relatively well-off husbands might suffer, sometimes even more desperately than their poorer counterparts, if the husbands could not earn a

²⁴ SOQS, Vol. 2, 46.

²⁵ John Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. 4, 1500-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 445.

²⁶ NOS, 122.

²⁷ Houlbrooke, *op. cit.* (note 10), 108; Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth Century Women: An Anthology* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), Parts 7, 9, 10 & 11.

living for any reason, e.g., death, sickness, madness.²⁸ In general, the opportunity for a woman to make a substantial contribution to the maintenance of herself and the family by wage labour became rarer. Richard Gough referred to a woman from Myddle who 'maintained herself very well by her own labour' as something remarkable.²⁹

It is, therefore, almost certain that there existed real imbalance between the sexes in the degree of hardship caused by the lunacy of a spouse. But I think the Quarter Sessions cases reveal more than that. The evidence shown in the records of the relative ease with which a sane husband might keep his mad wife, and of the difficulty in the reverse case, fits very well with the ideology of male dominance over female within a household. The male head controlled the household and earned bread for the rest of the family, while the wife had to be docile, submissive, and was often expected to stay home to do household chores.³⁰ This ideology seems to have imposed different roles on the husbands and wives whose spouses became insane: powerful husbands had to be able to maintain and govern their lunatic wives, but feeble and dependent wives were put into a difficult situation because of their raging husbands.

Given this situation it is understandable that 'widows' formed a large group, second only to 'husbands' (see Table 1). In general, many widows were left in hard circumstances, and predominated in the list of those who received poor relief, and of those kept in workhouses. Physical weakness and lack of work experience often made it very difficult for them to earn a sufficient livelihood. Even when their deceased husbands had been relatively well-off tradesmen, many widows were ignorant of the trade and could not take an advantage of it.³¹

The situation was surely worse for lunatic widows. If they could not expect help from their sons or daughters, or if their offspring were too young to support them, there seems to have been virtually no means to avoid their being chargeable to the parish. Even a widow with considerable property faced serious hardship when she fell mad, as shown by the case of Elizabeth Baxter, a widow of the parish of Barnsley, West Riding. Though she had 'certaine lands and houses, . . . with certain goods movable and immovable', she could not make any profit from the estate 'by reason of her infirmity', but 'let her lands untilled and her house get to decay'.³²

At the same time, seen from the viewpoint of the ideology of the household headed by a male breadwinner, it is understandable that a lunatic widow faced

²⁸ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726-7), cited in Hill, *op. cit.* (note 27), 135-6, portrays a depressing state of widows of relatively well-off tradesmen.

²⁹ R. Gough, *History of Myddle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 110.

³⁰ See: D. E. Underdown, 'The taming of the scold: the enforcement of patriarchal authority in early modern England', in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (eds), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-36; S. D. Amussen, 'Gender, family and the social order, 1560-1725', in *ibid.*, 196-217.

³¹ Hill, *op. cit.* (note 27), 123-36.

³² *YAJ*, 403-404.

intense hardship, for, as well as being an impotent lunatic, she had lost the powerful domestic support of the husband. The ideological aspect of this problem is made clear by the fact that people did not regard 'widowers' in the same light. While widowship was an independent problem *per se*, widowship was only a part of the problem of old age: proposals for the care of the old consisted of helping widows and old men. Being a 'widower' does not seem to have worked as a particular rationale for relief. Hence no lunatic was described in Sessions records as 'widower'. The perception of the problem of lunacy and old age was underpinned by the ideology of the male-dominated household. The entry of 'widows' in Quarter Sessions records seems to have reflected both the real and the ideological situation of this period, as did those of mad husbands and of wives.

(b) Parents and children

Next, I shall examine the care and management of the insane whom the records state to be a son or a daughter. In these cases, his or her parents always took a vital role in the petition or in the payment for the lunatic's maintenance.

Here, as expected, blood is thicker than water: among seven parents who took the trouble of taking care of, maintaining and paying for their lunatic offspring, only one (in North Riding) is affinal; and the attitude of this father-in-law was somewhat ambiguous.³³ He was generous, but it seems that he wanted to get rid of his insane son-in-law into the House of Correction, rather than attend him at home. The father-in-law was moderately well off, for he could afford to pay maintenance of ten pounds a year, or roughly 50 percent in excess of the usual cost of maintaining a lunatic in the House of Correction in the North Riding.³⁴ In general, rich families rarely sent lunatics to Houses of Correction, which were principally penal institutions. Two parents who agreed to institutionalize their lunatic offspring were both poor: one widow petitioned to keep her daughter in Bethlem at the parish's charge; the father of William Wawbarne in North Riding could afford only 8d. a week for having his son maintained in the House of Correction there, and the rest of the cost was paid by the parish.³⁵ Of all the cases I examined, that of the father-in-law cited above is the only one in which a lunatic was kept in a penal institution exclusively on private payment. This might be related to the legal relationship between the two men.

Parents were generally more deeply concerned with their lunatic offspring, in terms of both the length of the care and the intensity of the trouble. In Somerset in 1654 John Watkins applied for relief to maintain 'a son who hath been in distracted condition fore these 14 or 15 years and no way is capable of working or

³³ *NRQS*, Vol. 8, 167.

³⁴ *NRQS*, Vol. 9, 247: in that county in 1744, it was ordered that the governor of the House of Correction should be 'empowered to take 3s. per week, for all lunatics which shall be committed to the said house from the parish officers where they belong.'

³⁵ *MJSP*, 1699 July 13, and *NRQS*, Vol. 8, 165.

relieving himself.³⁶ Fessler mentions a man who informed the JPs that he was in need of relief, because his son had 'been distracted now for eight years soo that he hath [been] constrained for the said [son] sometimes to hire three men to attend him'.³⁷

Elizabeth Taylor, a widowed mother in Middlesex, made almost heroic efforts to cope with her lunatic daughter.³⁸ The daughter, Elizabeth Hurst, had been the wife of John Hurst. After her husband's death, the widowed Elizabeth became so distracted and 'exceedingly outrageous' that there was 'no governing her'. The parish of Stepney, to which she belonged, took no care of her, but let her 'run about the field and streets night and day'. The mother of the lunatic widow did not let her daughter wander, and took her to her own house and tried to keep her there. This is all the more remarkable considering that the lunatic widowed daughter was very dangerous (she even 'bites and wounds' the mother) and the mother was herself a widow.

The helping hand of parents had certain limits, however. Parents rarely helped lunatic offspring who had already married. Six out of seven lunatic sons and daughters seem to have been single when their parents took an active hand. (The exception is the son-in-law in the North Riding.) Four seem never to have married, one was a widow, one a deserted wife. There is no case in which parents meddled in the problem of their lunatic offspring who were married and living with their spouses. If the spouses of their insane offspring were available, the parents thought the responsibility rested on the shoulders of their son- or daughter-in-law.

When a child was chronically mad, he or she had little chance of marriage, and his or her parents provided for a long period. As the parents grew older and weaker, and as their income declined, it became harder for them to cope with the problem of their offspring's lunacy. As the legislation of the Elizabethan Poor Law determined that parents were, *if possible*, responsible for providing for their poor offspring, petitions of parents keeping their lunatic sons or daughters quite often contain a claim of their inability to earn enough. In Middlesex in 1719, George Clarke petitioned as follows:³⁹

In the year 1700 he was overseer of the parish of Thistleworth, which parish, being much in debt, did not reimburse him the money due to him on the balance of his account, and he is now an aged poor man with a distracted daughter to maintain.

The father asked the parish to reimburse the money after 19 years. This shows that so far he had been able to maintain himself and his lunatic daughter. As he had been one of the overseers of the poor, he had been relatively well off. He

³⁶ SOQS, Vol. 3, 226.

³⁷ Fessler, *op. cit.* (note 4), 903.

³⁸ MJSP, 1699 July 13.

³⁹ MXSB, bk 777.

applied, however, for an allowance of money to keep his lunatic daughter at home, stating that due to his old age he could not earn sufficiently.

Similar difficulty was often expressed by the parents, when they assumed charge of lunatic daughters who had been married but had lost their spouse by either death or desertion of the husband. Elizabeth Taylor, mentioned above, finally gave up managing her mad widowed daughter. And when a Middlesex father in 1656 tried to settle the problem of his lunatic daughter deserted by the husband, he found it difficult to keep her and he petitioned as follows:⁴⁰

Petition of Harmon Parence, setting forth that his daughter was married to John Strayne, a hatband maker, to whom the petitioner gave a competent portion with his daughter, but Strayne, being an ill-husband and great spender, did consume all that he had of his own and with his wife, and he is now gone away, leaving his wife and five children unprovided for: and the said wife is in a most distressed condition, and not able to get anything towards her livelihood, being grievously troubled with falling-sickness, and sometimes phrensy; that the petitioner is aged sixty-six and much disabled . . ., but he is willing to provide for the two eldest children if the parish of St. Giles'-without-Cripplegate will provide for the mother and other three children; order made accordingly.

Here we find a motivation with economy in mind: the father's choice of his two eldest grandchildren meant the shortest term of maintenance and the greatest saving of money, or, perhaps, even the chance to use them as labour power. And he said that he was too old and disabled ('by the dimness of his sight') to keep his lunatic daughter. This may be a typical case of an aged parent who had to cope with a problem of lunacy of his married offspring. In England in this period, people generally married late in their twenties. Accordingly, many parents whose children had already married were getting old, and could keep and maintain their disabled offspring only with great difficulty.

These cases of parental care also suggest the importance of the household as a social unit.⁴¹ Many parents were ready to take the trouble to maintain, keep and manage their lunatic offspring as long as they stayed within their parents' household. The cases of long-term care, in which the lunatics remained unmarried, show the parents' willingness to help the lunatic as a member of their own household. And even when the parents became too old to maintain their single lunatic offspring, they still applied for relief to keep their children under their own roof. But once the sons or daughters left their parents' household to form their own, the parents would never meddle in the problem of the lunacy of their children as long as the spouses were available. If the spouses were dead or if they deserted the lunatic and the burden was laid upon the parents, the parents were already old and could argue that they were incapable of providing for their lunatic children.

⁴⁰ MXSB, bk 158.

⁴¹ For the household, see Laslett, *op. cit.* (note 10), Chapter 1.

Domestic care of the insane, therefore, normally took place in households headed by able breadwinners. Decline of their economic ability was quite often mentioned as a rationale for relief.

(c) *Brothers and beyond*

The importance of a household as a domestic unit for dealing with the insane becomes clearer when we look at the kind of care given by brothers. One case has been found in Middlesex, and six in other counties, in which the brothers of lunatics looked after them; only one case concerns a married lunatic, and the other six lunatics seem to have been single. Brothers, like parents, seldom meddled in the problem of those lunatics who had already formed their own households by marriage. And it seems that brothers were not likely to be ordered to intervene while the parents of lunatics were available; no case suggests the presence of the parents. In two cases I have found, brothers started to take care of their lunatic siblings only after the parents' death.⁴²

This is perhaps because the Poor Law did not state that brothers were responsible for the care of their poorer siblings, and Quarter Sessions records were very much a formal discourse formulated around Poor Law. Legally speaking, brothers were not liable to take care of their mad siblings.

Brothers, therefore, quite often received money from parish officers for keeping their lunatic siblings. As already seen, husbands, wives and parents applied for money in Quarter Sessions courts, but when doing so, they always gave accounts of their economic hardship. On the other hand, brothers received money without any special pleading. Six out of seven brothers caring for lunatics were paid for their trouble, either from the parish chest or from the benefit drawn from the property of the lunatics. In Somerset in 1655, a brother of '— Chicke, an idiot' took the 'goods of the value of 20 pounds', which the deceased mother left for the support of her idiot son, and 'took the brother into his own hands promising to maintayne his brother'.⁴³ In the same county in 1654, one Christopher Simcox procured a lease of the copyhold estate of Alexander Simcox, an idiot.⁴⁴ And Christopher promised to allow Alexander 'a competent maintenance out of the estate'. Even when fraternal love apparently conquered the barrier of the household, a man did not extend a free helping hand to his married brother afflicted with lunacy. John Maltravers relieved Peter Maltravers, his mad brother, of ill-treatment by his wife, who treated the 'weak and maze' husband so harshly that 'his screams awakened all South Petherton'.⁴⁵ John succeeded in securing 'nine pound yearly out of the benefit of the tenement of his brother to maintain him'.

Sometimes brothers got the parish to pay for the maintenance of lunatic siblings under their care. In Nottingham in 1690, one Gerrase Jockson was ordered to keep his brother, a lunatic, and the overseer of the parish where the latter was settled made a quarterly payment to the former.⁴⁶ One man insisted that maintenance of his lunatic brother should be a parochial duty, not his: in Middlesex in 1687 there was a dispute between the brother of a lunatic and the parish where the madman was settled, over the cost of maintaining him in Bethlem.⁴⁷ The JPs agreed with the brother, and the parish was ordered to pay.

Even when there was a prospect of being paid, brothers were sometimes reluctant to take care of lunatics. In Yorkshire in 1639, Elizabeth Baxter, a widow, became distracted.⁴⁸ She had 'certaine lands and houses' in her own village, 'to the yearly value of six pounds or thereabout, with certain goods movable and immovable of the value of 20li'. Her 'kindred and friends', however, refused to take care of her.

When a lunatic was dangerous, it seems that brothers became more unwilling to undertake charge of the lunatic. When 'Richard Hygdon, son of William Higdon, deceased' became lunatic, he did 'offend and wrong many of his neighbours . . . to the great trouble and greefe'.⁴⁹ Several persons (apparently including two of his brothers) were appointed to look after him, and they were ordered to take an inventory of all his goods and chattels, and were entitled to 'sell or otherwise dispose of the said goods' to meet the cost of maintaining him. Yet none of the appointees offered to keep the lunatic in his house; the order explicitly stated that the lunatic should be 'ruled in his own house'.

There were, it is true, some brothers who showed genuine concern in looking after their lunatic siblings. In the North Riding in 1754, John Patton took the trouble of discharging his lunatic brother from the House of Correction and 'promised the court to see him taken care of'. (However, the wording raises doubt about whether he himself looked after the lunatic brother.⁵⁰) In Lancashire in 1611 a man informed the court of his sister, a lunatic, who 'continued pulling herself and her apparell in pieces to the great danger not only of spoyling herself by some sudden death but to the danger of the neighbours'.⁵¹ Governing her was so difficult that he had to hire a 'keeper or some friend to look for her to prevent further danger'. There were no doubt occasional instances of the expression of fraternal love to the insane sibling outside the courtroom (for example, Charles and Mary Lamb), but as far as Quarter Sessions cases are concerned, assistance provided by brothers was very limited.

⁴² SOQS, Vol. 3, 255, 260.

⁴³ SOQS, Vol. 3, 260.

⁴⁴ SOQS, Vol. 3, 255.

⁴⁵ SOQS, Vol. 1, 313.

⁴⁶ NQS, 122.

⁴⁷ MXSB, bk 453.

⁴⁸ YA7, 403-4.

⁴⁹ SOQS, Vol. 1, 88.

⁵⁰ NRQS, Vol. 9, 225.

⁵¹ Fessler, *op. cit.* (note 4), 903.

Outside the immediate family, the help of kin was almost non-existent. In Sussex in 1643, Mary Owen, a distracted widow, was received by 'a kinsman of hers' and was kept without charge to the parish.⁵² This is the only case I have found in which a lunatic was seemingly maintained by relatives who were neither parents nor brothers. No brothers-in-law, no sister, sister-in-law, no uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, etc., appeared in the Quarter Sessions records, at least with explicit reference to such status. The absence of helping uncles is a bit surprising, since they were fairly often generous to orphaned nephews and nieces.⁵³ Probably this is because looking after the insane did not have any clear prospect of a time limit, and because uncles could not expect any benefit from looking after their orphaned lunatic – i.e., impotent – nephews and nieces. As for brothers- or sisters-in-law, one could rarely expect their long-term help in general. Richard Gough described how a woman maintained her widowed sister-in-law from 'meare charity'.⁵⁴ No doubt, Gough thought it something noteworthy.

Considering the care provided by the spouses, parents and brothers of lunatics, one can say that Quarter Sessions records show that the idea of household responsibility had a strong influence in settling lunacy problems. The idea (and ideology) of household responsibility was so strong that the household head was sometimes ordered to help his servant who fell insane. As Laslett argues, the family in this period was thought of as three societies fused together: the society of man and wife, that of parents and children, and that of master and servants.⁵⁵ As the servants had their position in the family household, the head of it was thought to be responsible for the care of his lunatic servant. In Middlesex in 1683, when Jane Richardson, servant to one Dr Mamary, fell 'very sick and almost distracted', the JPs ordered that she should be provided for by Dr Mamary or the parish of her legal settlement. Another master in Middlesex was ordered to pay for maintaining his servant in the House of Correction.⁵⁶ In 1639, a woman named Ursula, late servant to Charles Lusty, of the parish of Islington, was committed to the House of Correction, as she 'became so distracted and mad that she did much hurt'. It cost £3 8s. 6d. to maintain her for eighteen weeks. Finally,⁵⁷

the matron was directed to sell the clothes of the said Ursula, which being sold at the uttermost price, except one gown of very small value, yeilded only 26s. Order made for Charles Lusty to pay to the said matron the sum of 42s. 6d. and to take the said gown for his satisfaction, if he be not able to pay, the churchwardens, etc. of the parish of Islington are to do so.

The JPs who settled the problem thought that the master should pay for

⁵² *SUQS*, 40.

⁵³ Houlbrooke, *op. cit.* (note 10), 48.

⁵⁴ Gough, *op. cit.* (note 29), 133.

⁵⁵ Laslett, *op. cit.* (note 10), 2–4.

⁵⁶ *MXSB*, bk 405.

⁵⁷ *MXSB*, bk 8.

maintaining his lunatic servant in Bridewell, if it was possible. Thus, the head of a household was expected to maintain and take care of its lunatic member, whether the lunatic was his wife, child, or servant.

But the relationship of a servant to the household he or she served was not permanent: it finished when the contract expired. The responsibility of the household head existed only during the contractual term, as is clearly shown in the following order:⁵⁸

Order that Anthoney Grey of Sandon be discharged from keeping Jeremiah Salmon, a lunatic, late his servant, as the contract of service made between them was discharged by both their consents before the said Salmon was taken with lunacy. Further order that — Salmon of Little Hornmead, father of the said Jeremiah, shall pay the overseers of Saldon 12d. weekly toward his relief.

The responsibility was thus transmitted from the head of one household to that of another.

To sum up, domestic care of the insane, as seen through Quarter Sessions records, appears to have taken place normally within a household headed by an able male head. Wives, children and servants could in general expect protection (and at the same time, control) from the head of the households they belonged to, and this was evidently the case when they fell insane. Sessions records suggest that it was considered normal for a lunatic to be kept, maintained and governed by the able head of the household. The language of petitions and orders was often formulated around the ability of the head of the household, or the trouble caused by the absence of the competent head.

On the other hand, there was little, if any, inclination found in Sessions records to make the problem of lunacy a 'public' concern: whenever possible, the insane were largely left to 'private' care provided by the household. This use of the household as a vehicle of order was not uncommon in this period. Writers of manuals on the different duties of members of a household represented it as a microcosm of state: a household was a simulacrum of hegemony. And the ruling class often expressed the view that a well-governed society had its basis and model in the well-governed household.⁵⁹ Order in early modern England was to be achieved through the household, and this was also the case with managing lunatics.

Parochial provision

The lunatic cases in Quarter Sessions records involve those who could not be coped with in the private domain. Some are concerned with the allowance of maintenance fees from the parish, some with the confinement of raging lunatics dangerous to others. In these cases the parish played an important role. In particular, when

⁵⁸ *HQS*, Vol. 6, 61–2.

⁵⁹ Amussen, *op. cit.* (note 30).

relatives who would have taken care of the lunatics were not available for various reasons, parochial intervention was a necessity. Domestic care of the insane sometimes needed to be supplemented, or replaced, by parochial care. In this section, I would like to throw some light on how this parochial care worked.

(a) 'Strong hut'

The practice that most clearly exemplifies active involvement by parochial governors is that of confining a dangerous lunatic 'in stronghold'. This custom dates from an earlier period. Walker says that churches were sometimes used for this purpose in the twelfth century,⁶⁰ and Clarke gives some examples of a similar practice in the late fifteenth century, in his analysis of documents related to Henry VI's tomb at Windsor, one of the resorts of pilgrim patients seeking miraculous cures.⁶¹ The Windsor documents record that some dangerous and raging lunatics were confined in a 'strong hut', although the purpose was not stated to be confinement but to be curative tranquillity. When Ann Greene of Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire, became distracted and lost 'her natural discretion, seemed to do nothing in a human way, was wilder than beast and could not be controlled', she was 'shut away by herself in a strong hut'.⁶² Walter Barker, a domestic, went mad and was handcuffed and put in the stocks until a relenting friend released him to be 'confined in a hut'.⁶³

These are a few cases in the period we are examining. In Staffordshire in 1593,⁶⁴

John Pooler and all the residu' of the inhabitants of Cowley . . . have by petition complained that one Hughe Thrustanes is lately become a lunatic person and bereft of his wyttes and therby likely to comytt dyvers and sondry mishappes and casualtyes yf he be not in tyme restrained, for avoydance wherof wee doe decree that the whole inhabitants of Cowley shall joyne with the Constable in ayde for the restrayning and safe keeping of the said Thrustone in stronghold, and that he shall be suffyciently kept and maynteyned att the charge of the whole parishe . . . they shall maynteyne and keepe him in stronghold geving and fynding him suffycient meate and dryncke untill he be restored unto his former remembrance.

Here, 'John Pooler and all the residu' of the inhabitants' were concerned about the care of a dangerous lunatic, and the 'whole inhabitants of Cowley' were ordered to take care of him. A similar order was made in the North Riding in 1633, when Anthony Clarke was found 'distracted and not capable of what he doth or saith', and the 'Inhabitants of the parish of Newton' were ordered to put him 'into their safe-keeping, and look to him that he do no harm, and to keep him dark'.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Nigel Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England, Vol. 1, The Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 29-30.

⁶¹ Basil Clarke, *Mental Disorder in Earlier Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), 151-65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁴ *STQS*, Vol. 2, 316.

⁶⁵ *NRQS*, Vol. 2, 355.

Of course, the use of such terms as 'whole inhabitants' should not be taken too literally, but building the stronghold, bringing meat and drink, and looking after the lunatic might involve the collaboration of several villagers. German evidence, from the records of petitions to put sick villagers in the Hospital of Haina Merxhausen in Hessen in the same period, may help us to see what was happening in English villages.⁶⁶ When a woman got so distracted that 'she smears herself with excrement so horribly', she was kept in a special booth which neighbouring women made. The records imply that several men looked after her. Thus German villagers collaborated to keep a dangerous lunatic in a stronghold, and I think the same was the case in early modern English villages.⁶⁷

Such confinement 'in stronghold' or 'in a strong hut' seems to have diminished in the early seventeenth century. Between 1593 and 1633 only two cases were found in the Sessions records, and no case was found after 1634. The disappearance of 'strong hut' confinement may be due to the building of Houses of Correction, whose role in the care of the insane will be discussed in Part II of this paper.

(b) *Private madhouses and parish nurses*

There were several occasions when parish officers sent lunatics to private madhouses. James Newton in Clerkenwell advertised in one of his handbills that he cured 'a woman, put to me by the churchwardens in 1672' and 'a man put to me by the overseers of the poor in 1674'.⁶⁸ In the same handbill, he laid special stress on 'speedy cure', the effect of which was shrewdly calculated by Newton: cure of a lunatic meant for parish officers a solution of the problem, and the more speedy the cure, the less costly it was.

When a lunatic stayed long in such a private institution, or several lunatics were maintained concurrently by the same parish, the cost became crippling to

⁶⁶ H. C. Erik Midelfort, 'Sin, melancholy, obsession: insanity and culture in sixteenth century Germany', in Steven L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 113-46.

⁶⁷ Here I do not posit something that might be called 'community care', although I think Patricia Allderidge in her 'Hospitals, madhouses and asylums' (note 2) called the seventeenth century the first age of 'community care', with good reason. For general criticism against the idea of 'community', see Alan MacFarlane, 'History, anthropology, and the study of communities', *Social History*, v (1977), 631-52. I owe the principal ideas about the village community to: Laslett, *op. cit.* (note 10), Chapter 3; Keith Wrightson & David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550-1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987); David G. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974); Richard Gough, *op. cit.* (note 29); Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: a London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶⁸ A facsimile copy of the handbill is published in Richard Hunter and Ida MacAlpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 200. For private madhouses in late eighteenth century, see William L. Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

the parish finances. Robert Boadon, a madhouse keeper in Middlesex, perhaps in the parish of St. Martin's-in-the-Field, appealed to the court in 1694:⁶⁹

in some time past your petitioner at the request of the overseers of the poore of the parish of St. Martin's in the Fields . . . did receive and take onto his house several poore lunatic persons in order for their cure who were chargeable to the said parish. Soo that there is due to your petitioner for such his entertaining the said poore lunatic persons the sum of 26lib. 12s. 6d. which the churchwardens and overseers of the poor . . . doo refuse to pay . . .

Although the numbers of patients and duration of their stay are unknown, the total sum of more than £26 must have seemed extravagant to the parish officers.

In these cases, the madhouse keepers claimed that they were able to cure, and probably the parish officers believed it. When parish officers wanted to have a lunatic taken care of with little expectation of cure, it seems they preferred a different method: employing a so-called 'parish nurse' who would feed, keep and maintain the lunatic.⁷⁰ In 1720 Ann Jackson, 'a widow of the parish of St Giles' Cripplegate' in Middlesex petitioned as follows:⁷¹

The churchwardens and overseers of the poor of this parish are now indebted to your petitioner the sum of four pounds and eighteen shilling for nursing for two persons both being lunatic . . . She, being a very poor woman, must miserably perish unless the Honourable Bench will be pleased to consider her sad condition . . .

The petition reveals three major differences between Ann Jackson and private madhouse keepers such as James Newton or Robert Boadon. First, Ann Jackson said her business was 'nursing' the insane, while the madhouse keepers always claimed to 'cure' the insane. Second, Ann represented herself as a woman so poor that she would perish without the payment from the overseers, while James Newton called himself 'Doctor in physicke, alias gentleman' and was often referred to as 'Doctor' by his contemporaries. Third, the bill from Ann for 'four pounds and eighteen shilling' is modest if compared with that from Robert Boadon of over £26. For these reasons, it would be incorrect to count Ann Jackson among the traders in lunacy or the medical or pseudo-medical entrepreneurs; nor is it certain that parish nurses such as Ann Jackson were 'one of the roots of origins of the private madhouse system', as suggested by Fessler and by Parry-Jones.⁷²

The petition of Ann Jackson revealed that the parish not only provided the lunatics with a shelter, but also it helped Ann herself, for she said the salary was

⁶⁹ MJSP, 1684 April 4.

⁷⁰ For 'parish nurses', see Rushton, *op. cit.* (note 5), 43, and Fessler, *op. cit.* (note 4), 903-4.

⁷¹ MJSP, 1720 Dec. 29.

⁷² Fessler, *op. cit.* (note 4), 906; Parry-Jones, *op. cit.* (note 68), 7, and Thomas, *op. cit.* (note 5), 6, see continuity between private madhouses and parish nurses.

necessary for her subsistence. Another example comes from Buckinghamshire. In 1686, Daniel Mott was paid three pounds by the parish of Chesham for 'keeping Henry Hawkins when he was distracted'.⁷³ Significantly, this Daniel Mott had once been an alehouse keeper who had his licence suppressed in 1680.⁷⁴ So we have good reason to believe that Daniel Mott was poor, and on the verge of being chargeable to the parish. Paying him three pounds for keeping a lunatic might be a kind of relief to Daniel himself, as well as to the lunatic.

This system was similar to that of boarding out an orphan. Parish officers in this period often boarded out orphans and deserted children to poor families in or outside the parish, many of whom were ready to receive the children in return for an agreed rate of payment from the parish. The cost was cheap: one John Turner received 2s. 0d. per week for 'keeping of a lame child and other young children'.⁷⁵ This method enabled the parish officers to kill two birds with one stone: they could provide both shelter for orphans and an allowance for poor families, which would prevent them from becoming a burden on the rates.

This boarding out system extended to the care of the insane. In the following case in Buckinghamshire, one can see how closely the two systems of boarding out an orphan and a lunatic were connected. In 1704, Elizabeth Thomson, a vagrant lunatic, was arrested and committed to the House of Correction.⁷⁶ At the next session, however, the keeper there complained to the court that her maintenance was 'not only a great charge but also very incommodious to the keeper, for he was compelled to keep a nurse on purpose to look after her'. On hearing the complaint, the court ordered her discharge from the House of Correction, to be provided for by one Alexander Oliffe for four shillings a week.⁷⁷

In 1702 Oliffe had been ordered to maintain 'Alice Maxfield, daughter of Catherine Maxfield, deceased, who was born in the gaol'.⁷⁸ He maintained Alice for at least five years, and from 1704-1705 he was paid for maintaining both the vagrant lunatic and the orphaned daughter.

These cases suggest that parishes were not mere distributors of money, but were quite active in coping with the problem of lunacy. There existed a certain grey area between domestic and institutional care: lunatics who could not be coped with by a household did not automatically suffer institutionalization, and

⁷³ BQS, Vol. 1, 209.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 108. For alehouse keepers in this period, see Keith Wrightson, 'Alehouses, order and reformation in rural England, 1590-1660', in Eileen Yeo & Stephen Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 1-27.

⁷⁵ Tom C. Smith & Jonathan Shortt, *The History of the Parish of Ribchester* (London, 1890), 67. For 'boarding out' of orphans, see Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: a Study in Social and Administrative History* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1926), 95. For boarding out of lunatics, see Thomas, *op. cit.* (note 5), 6.

⁷⁶ BQS, Vol. 2, 399, 408, 418.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

parishes often played an important role in keeping lunatics out of institutions, by making use of parish nurses, boarding out, etc. One of the motives was, no doubt, that of economy. This is most evident when people with property became mad and could not maintain themselves and their family by their own labour. For instance, Elizabeth Baxter, a widow in Yorkshire had 'certaine lands and houses . . . to the yearly value of six pounds and thereabout'. But she was distracted, and 'by reason of her infirmitye maketh noe profit or commoditie of her said estate . . . but letting her lands lye untilled'. On hearing the petition from the parish officers, the court ordered that 'the Churchwardens and overseers of Barnesley let someone farm the lands and receive the profits thereof . . . and thereof provide for her'.⁷⁹ This case was not exceptional. One John Staple of Winsham, Somerset, in 1629 was reported to be 'many times not Compos Mentis', and his wife and children were 'in greate want and like to perish'.⁸⁰ But he had been a man of some means prior to falling mad. He had enjoyed 'within the said parish a living of a reasonable competence to relieve and maintain himself, his wife, and children', but he wasted the estate as his affliction rendered him incapable of working. Though the petitioners did not explicitly suggest a solution, it is clear that they expected the JPs to order that John Staple should be maintained on the profit drawn from his estate.

It is very difficult to discern other factors, such as sense of community or neighbourhood responsibility from Quarter Sessions records. Although I am sure these did play a certain role in settling the problem of lunacy, the limited cases do not reveal anything about the attitude of parishioners.

⁷⁹ YA7, 403-4.

⁸⁰ SOQS, Vol. 2, 100.

Lunacy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England: analysis of Quarter Sessions records Part II[†]

AKIHITO SUZUKI*

Management in institutions

I will examine below the means of entry to several types of institutions, their management and sources of trouble there. I use the term 'institution' to include Bethlem, Houses of Correction and gaols.

Since the publication of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la folie* in 1961, the role of institutions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe has been of serious interest to historians of psychiatry.⁸¹ Foucault argued that in seventeenth-century France, people started to confine the insane, on a large scale, in institutions such as the *hôpital-Dieu*, together with the poor, petty criminals, vagrants, prostitutes, sodomists, etc. Since then, lunatics and the other inmates of the institutions formed the group of the immoral and the irrational. Extending this French model to contemporary England, Foucault rather carelessly – or, at least, with virtually no documentation – claimed that the House of Correction and the workhouse played the same role as did the *hôpital-Dieu*, i.e., the crucible of a new perception of lunacy as deviancy from bourgeois norms. It seems that historians now generally agree that the confinement of lunatics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England was not at all large scale as Foucault argued.⁸² But some historians still appear to hold the view that, with certain qualifications, English institutions in this period served the purpose of *confining* lunatics.⁸³ Hence, Houses of Correction or workhouses were institutions of, so to speak, 'small confinement' for various kinds of inmates, e.g., vagrants, petty criminals

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⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972, 1st ed., 1961).

⁸² See, for instance, Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 5–9, 110–11.

⁸³ Rushton, 'Lunatics and idiots: mental disability, the community and the Poor Law in north-east England 1600–1700', *Medical History*, xxxii (1988), 42.

and dangerous lunatics. The main aim of this part of my paper is to examine whether the 'small confinement' model works or not, and to challenge this modified Foucauldian view of institutions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England.

(a) *Bethlem*

In Table 2, it is obvious that the lunatics in Middlesex were far more likely to be sent to Bethlem than those in other counties. In Middlesex, seven out of eighteen cases where an institution was involved were settled by committal to Bethlem, whereas in other counties only one out of 25 were committed there. This was because of the geographical proximity of Middlesex to Bethlem and the expense of bringing a lunatic to London from other counties.⁸⁴ For instance, overseers of the poor in the parish of Eaton Socon, Bedfordshire, left a detailed account of the expense of getting a lunatic into Bethlem in 1751.⁸⁵

Oct. a horse going to London to get widow Stranbridge to bethlem, 8s.; expenses my horse & self 3 days 12s.; turnpikes 1s. 1d.; paid the clark for certificate and petition, 5s.; spent on bondsman, 3s.; Nov., A horse and expenses going to Sandy about Widow Stranbridge, 2s.; paid 2 men for taking her into custody and sitting up, 2s.; . . . Widow Stranbridge's expenses and my own and horse in London, 18s. 4d.; paid the waggoner for his care, 1s.; paid Mr Chattris for his trouble, 4s.; a coach hire, 1s. 6d.; Bethlem fees, 3d.; charges of getting her in 2l. 18s. 6d; paid for carrying her up 5s.

TABLE 2 *Numbers of different types of order or petition*

		Middlesex	Other counties
No. cases	Commitment to Bethlem	7	1
	Commitment to H. C.*	6	16
	Discharge from H. C.*	3	7
	Order to pay H. C.	1	1
	Trouble in prison	1	0
	Total institutional cases	18	25
	Total cases	34	51

* Including those committed to/discharged from gaols

The total sum amounted to eight pounds, which was no doubt more than double the cost of committing a Middlesex lunatic to Bethlem. This extra expense was more than enough to make distant parishes hesitate before sending a lunatic there.

⁸⁴ Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: a Study in Social and Administrative History* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1926), 119.

⁸⁵ Bedfordshire Record Society, *The Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon 1706-1834*, The Publications of the Bedfordshire Record Society, 15 (1933), 84-85.

In a sense, Bethlem was expected, by people in Middlesex, to play the role which in other counties Houses of Correction might play: of keeping unmanageable lunatics. Three out of seven lunatics from Middlesex kept in Bethlem were 'dangerous'. William Landy was 'dangerous to the King's subjects, and to the hazard to their lives'.⁸⁶ Henry Hawkins went about the street 'raging mad' and was 'like to kill' his wife.⁸⁷ Elizabeth Hurst, as mentioned in Part I, was so 'outrageous mad that she bites and wounds' her mother and threatened 'to fire the house'.⁸⁸ The petitions concerning these dangerous lunatics show less an expectation of cure than the hope that Bethlem could relieve them of the care of unmanageable lunatics.

But there is some discrepancy in contemporary images of Bethlem. The governors of Bethlem represented the institution as a hospital for curing the insane, not as a place for depositing unmanageable lunatics; this is best exemplified by passages in John Strype's *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (1720).⁸⁹ JPs sometimes seem to have shared this 'enlightened' view. When a governor of a House of Correction petitioned to the Middlesex Sessions in 1689, for putting 'a person much distracted in mind' into 'Bedlam and elsewhere', he said nothing about the cure of the lunatic, but when the JPs ordered the overseers to 'place him Bethlem or some other convenient places', they specified the purpose as 'for cure'.⁹⁰

(b) *Putting lunatics into Houses of Correction*

It has been generally agreed that Houses of Correction played an important role in keeping lunatics, and this role was limited to keeping unmanageable and dangerous lunatics.⁹¹ Table 3 lists those who were sent to Houses of Correction and gaols.

First, a few words are needed about the policy in the North Riding, since evidence from this county distorts the whole picture. JPs in this area were

⁸⁶ William Landy was at first in the House of Correction, then sent to Bethlem, and returned to the House of Correction and died there. MXXSB, bks 418, 431, 676, 691.

⁸⁷ MJSP, 1689 Dec. 1.

⁸⁸ MJSP, 1699 July 13.

⁸⁹ Patricia Alderidge, in 'Hospitals, madhouses and asylums: cycles in the case of the insane', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, cxxxiv (1979), lays stress on Bethlem as a curing hospital. See also John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* . . . (London, 1720), quoted in Hunter & MacAlpine, *Three Hundred Years of Psychiatry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

⁹⁰ MJSP, 1689 Aug. 3.

⁹¹ Michael Ignatieff laments that 'history of the house of correction awaits its historian', in *A Just Measure of Pain: the Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989). For a general understanding of the House of Correction, I relied on: George Nicholls, *A History of English Poor Law*, Vol. 1 (London: P. S. King & Son, 1904); E. M. Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900); Marshall, *op. cit.* (note 84); A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: the Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1985); Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History Part 1, The Old Poor Law* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927).

TABLE 3. *The described status of lunatics sent to penal institutions*

Male		Female	
<i>Middlesex</i>			
1684	W. L. dangerous	1639	U. — dangerous
1689	F. F. dangerous	1639	— D dangerous
1689	H. H. dangerous	1653	— — v.
<i>Other counties</i>			
1638	G. B. dangerous	1613	E. C. dangerous
1650	J. D. dangerous	1640	A. H. dangerous
1656	J. B. dangerous	1660	D. H. —
1697	G. L. dangerous	1684	D. G. —
*1721	W. W. —	*1738	E. C. —
*1722	T. A. dangerous	1740	A. H. — v.
1728	— — v.		
*1742	R. T. —		
*1744	J. S. —		
*1746	R. D. —		

* North Riding case; v., vagrant; a dash indicates unspecified or unknown

exceptionally eager to put every lunatic into a House of Correction, and from 1721 to 1746 all lunatics referred to the court were put into Houses of Correction, whether they were dangerous or safe.

If we exclude the North Riding cases, the results agree quite well with the framework suggested by Fessler and Rushton (see Part I): those lunatics who were sent to Houses of Correction were perceived as dangerous, and JPs did not put lunatics indiscriminately into the institution. In Middlesex, five out of six lunatics ordered to be sent to the House of Correction are described as dangerous. The only other case concerns a vagrant, who was a fit object for the House of Correction whether sane or insane, and it is hard to tell whether she was confined because of lunacy or because of vagrancy. In other counties, four male lunatics sent to the House of Correction were all dangerous. Female lunatics in other counties pose a problem. Only two out of five female cases contained suggestion of 'danger'. Unfortunately, there is little information about the two that were neither dangerous nor vagrant, and there is no way of telling why they were put into the House of Correction. In total, however, 11 out of 16 lunatics who were sent to the House of Correction were perceived as dangerous, three were vagrants, and there were only two lunatics for whom the reasons for custody are vague.

What kind of behaviour, then, was perceived as a danger caused by lunacy? Regrettably, the Quarter Sessions records only occasionally include descriptions of specific dangerous behaviour. The actions of dangerous lunatics were usually described in a general and vague way, such as 'very much mischief' or 'commit

⁹² Rushton, *op. cit.* (note 83), also notes this remarkable aspect of the North Riding.

many outrages and abuses'. Among cases where the behaviour was specified there are only two kinds of misdeed: physical violence against the person, and violence against property.⁹³

Physical violence against the person was, when used as a rationale for sending a lunatic to an institution, more often directed against others than themselves. Institutionalized lunatics were homicidal rather than suicidal.⁹⁴ (Suicidal madmen were more likely to be kept in their own houses under the care of relatives or persons hired for the purpose.) In Somerset in 1650 one John Day was so distracted that 'all persons coming unto him are in danger of their lives'.⁹⁵ A Middlesex husband was likely to kill his wife.⁹⁶

Violence against property often involved arson. Emma Carter in Somerset made her neighbours fear that 'she should set on fire where she dwelleth'.⁹⁷ Joan Skotton in Somerset was so distracted that one of the villagers suspected 'she should lately set on fire the house of William Phippen to the value of 50 pounds and upward'.⁹⁸

But what about the other, vaguer kind of danger, i.e., 'moral' danger? In his study of the Montpellier *hôtel-Dieu*, Colin Jones finds 'the perceived danger to the public which the insane constituted was sometimes moral rather than physical'.⁹⁹ And Michael MacDonald, looking at a period and region very close to that covered by this paper, argues that early seventeenth-century ideology held considerable sway over popular notions of madness. The clients of Richard Napier often considered those people as mentally disturbed who 'repudiated one's place in the family, destroyed the symbols of social and economic status, and disregarded the conventions of deference and demeanor'.¹⁰⁰

The Quarter Sessions records are disappointing in this respect, for there are very few cases which include any moral reprobation of the lunatics in question. One lunatic was described as 'cruel and idle', and some were said to be 'disorderly', but they were a minority.¹⁰¹ Indeed, there is a case that shows people clearly distinguishing between these two types of behaviour. In Somerset in 1673, the inhabitants of Charleton Adam reported to the court that:¹⁰²

Abraham Barnes of the said parish is a very dangerous, idle and disorderly

⁹³ Clients of Richard Napier had a similar perception about lunacy: see Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 121–32, and *idem*, 'Popular Beliefs about mental disorders in early modern England', in Wolfgang Eckhart & Johanna Geyer-Kordesch (eds), *Heilberufe und Kranke in 17.- und 18.-Jahrhundert* (Muenster: Burgverlag, 1982), 148–73.

⁹⁴ For suicide and madness, see MacDonald, *op. cit.* (note 93), 132–38, and *idem*, 'The secularization of suicide in England 1600–1800', *Past and Present*, cxi (1986), 50–100.

⁹⁵ SOQS, Vol. 3, 125.

⁹⁶ MJSP, 1689 Dec. 1.

⁹⁷ SOQS, Vol. 1, 99.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 223, 227.

⁹⁹ Colin Jones, 'The treatment of the insane in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Montpellier', *Medical History*, xxiv (1980), 376.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, 'Popular Beliefs . . .' (see note 93), 151.

¹⁰¹ SOQS, Vol. 3, 305.

¹⁰² SOQS, Vol. 4, 128.

person, putting the petitioners to great charge and expense in relieving him, delighting himself wholly in an idle course of life, and vending up and down in the country most horrid blasphemy to the dishonour of Almighty God.

He was sent to the House of Correction at Shepton Mallet, not as a lunatic but as a disorderly person. Two years later, the governor of the House of Correction stated that:¹⁰³

Abraham Barnes, late of Charleton Adam, who was lately sent by a Justice to the House of Correction for being an idle and disorderly person, is in great need of some maintenance, seeing that he is in a distracted condition and unable to maintain himself by his own labour.

The behaviour of Abraham Barnes described in the 1673 petition was a stereotype of ideological deviation: idleness, wandering and blasphemy. The petitioners did not use the term 'lunatic' for him, but perceived and described him as a morally degenerate person who wilfully did many misdeeds; he was treated accordingly. It was the governor of the House of Correction who found him a lunatic. Then the perception of 'idle and disorderly person' was replaced by that of a person who was 'unable to maintain himself' and needed some relief and maintenance. When people saw Abraham Barnes as a man who is to be morally condemned, there is no mention to his lunacy. And when people found him a lunatic, the language of condemnation disappeared, and that of impotency took its place.

Even when a dangerous lunatic was put into a penal institution, people rarely used the terms 'confinement', 'restraint' or other terms that appeared very frequently when they sent criminals and vagrants there. They preferred 'keep', 'maintain' and 'give food and drink'.

Although I found little moral reprobation in the Quarter Sessions records, I am not disagreeing with MacDonald's assertion mentioned above. We are looking at different aspects: consulting the Reverend Richard Napier, a country clergyman, might be totally different from making a petition to the court. The latter had to be much more formal and must have involved a legally rigorous language to represent lunacy: lunatics needed some help, not punishment. And unlike their French counterparts, English lunatics who were sentenced to confinement in the courts were relatively free from moral reprobation; the danger was represented in very visible ways.

In such a situation, JPs developed a certain logic for putting a lunatic into House of Correction. One of the two most powerful arguments to justify confinement was 'rule of law'. When JPs put Emma Carter (a lunatic who raised fear among the inhabitants that she should set fire to her house) into the House of Correction, they ordered she should be kept '*in such manner as law requireth* for all such dangerous and disordered person'.¹⁰⁴ In 1618, another dangerous and

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ *SOQS*, Vol. 1, 99.

arsonist lunatic was sent to the House of Correction, and JPs said 'she should be kept *according to the law* appointed for such persons'.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, these orders were made almost a century before the 1714 Vagrant Act, which empowered JPs to arrest and confine dangerous and disorderly lunatics.

The second rationale behind confinement was protection of the peace and safety of the local community. A dangerous lunatic was, JPs argued, a threat to domestic and local safety. Institutionalized lunatics had very frequently been described as likely to do harm to the family, 'dangerous to the neighborhood', a 'hazard to the lives of King's subject', and so on. And a JP thought it his duty to put them to the House of Correction 'for the prevention of further mischief'.

The stress laid on the rule of law and the public benefit was in keeping with the other activities of JPs. As E. P. Thompson argues, ruling-class control in the eighteenth century was located primarily in a cultural hegemony, and JPs fashioned the image of paternalist guardian of the community. In the practice of confining dangerous lunatics in bridewells, JPs relied on the same strategy: 'rule of law' and paternalist authority.¹⁰⁶

But was there an insidious coercive process hidden behind the façade of paternalism? In other activities of JPs, their hegemony sometimes served to conceal coercion against the lower orders, as is shown by the contributors to the (now classical) *Albion's Fatal Tree*.¹⁰⁷ The myth of a uniform 'rule of law' was sometimes challenged when a conflict occurred between the different notions of law held by the ruling class and by the plebs. Douglas Hay argues that 'law was used by the ruling class as an instrument of gross coercion masked by a rhetoric of majesty, justice and mercy'.¹⁰⁸

This was not the case, however, with the confinement of dangerous lunatics. I could not find even the slightest signs of conflict between coercive JPs and protesting common people; JPs do not seem to have been eager to confine a lunatic against the will of relatives and inhabitants. The confinement of a lunatic to the House of Correction was often on the initiative of common people – family, relatives and neighbours of the dangerous lunatic.¹⁰⁹ If there was any conspiracy concerning the confinement of dangerous lunatics in pre-asylum England, it was not of the ruling class against the plebs, but of the sane against the insane. The sentiments or opinions of the lunatics themselves seem to have been completely ignored. There is no case in which a lunatic participated in the decision-making about his treatment.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰⁶ E. P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, vii (1974), 382–405.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Hay et al. (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Hay, 'Property, authority and the criminal law,' in Hay et al. (eds), *Albion's Fatal Tree* (note 107), 17–63. See also: John Brewer and John Styles (eds), *An Ungovernable People: the English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Hutchinson, 1980); Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁹ See the cases in which the relatives petitioned to keep lunatics in the House of Correction: *STQS*,

(c) Lunatics not sent to Houses of Correction

Although the overwhelming majority of lunatic inmates of Houses of Correction were those perceived as dangerous, this condition did not automatically lead to confinement. As many as seven out of eighteen 'dangerous' lunatics were treated outside the bridewells. As argued in Part I, a member of a household headed by a competent male rarely suffered confinement even if he or she was dangerously insane, unless the head of the household himself became distracted. Accordingly, no wife living with her husband, no child living with able parents, no parent living with a competent child, was to be found in the list of lunatics sent to the Houses of Correction.

Even dangerous lunatics without domestic means of support were not automatically sent to a House of Correction. In Somerset in 1628, Richard Parsons and John Gibbons, two inhabitants of Hiffarence, petitioned:¹¹⁰

one Henry Collard als. Shalder of Hiffarence of late become lunaticke and distracted so much that he is bothe unruly and dangerous and for the prevention of further mischeffe the inhabitants of the said parish have placed the said Collard with one John Appledore. The said Collard having sufficient means to mainteyne himself and thereupon the said Parsons and Gibbons on the behalfe of the inhabitants of the said parish have petitioned this court to order that the said Collard may be maintained by his owne means, etc.: Order made by the court for the said Collard to remayne with the said Appledore where now he is and that he shall be mainteyned and relieved by out of his own means.

Henry Collard seems to have had no domestic protection, but his possession of sufficient means to maintain himself kept him out of the bridewell. Significantly, JPs did not dispute the arrangement made by the petitioners. They gave brief instructions on security, ordering them to take 'special care of the well governing and keeping Collard', and allowed him to stay out of the Houses of Correction. Neither the petitioners nor the Justices were eager to institutionalize a dangerous lunatic when he was relatively well-off and could afford to pay for an alternative. There is another case, also in Somerset, in 1612 in which the comparatively large property of a dangerous lunatic saved him from being sent to the House of Correction.¹¹¹

(d) Discharging lunatics from Houses of Correction

Not infrequently lunatics were discharged from penal institutions. As seen in

Vol. 2, 316, and Fessler, 'The management of lunacy in seventeenth-century England: an investigation of Quarter-sessions records', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, xlix (1956), 904. Also A. J. Fletcher wrote, 'there were ways in which laws and custom clashed, but for the most part they coincided', in 'Honour, reputation, and local officeholding in Elizabethan and Stuart England', in Fletcher and Stevenson, *op. cit.* (note 108), 114.

¹¹⁰ SOQS, Vol. 2, 71.

¹¹¹ SOQS, Vol. 1, 88.

Table 2, in Middlesex there are three orders and petitions for discharging lunatics from the House of Correction, and two reports of trouble in the bridewell related to lunatics. In other counties, there are six orders for discharging and one petition about trouble in a House of Correction caused by a lunatic. Until now, historians of insanity – especially Michel Foucault – have laid one-sided stress on the practice of putting lunatics in penal institutions, and have ignored their discharge.¹¹² We should now ask why some lunatics were discharged from a House of Correction.

Some petitions complained about the parish not paying money for the maintenance of lunatics. In Middlesex in 1653 JPs ordered 'a mad woman brought from West Drayton to the House of Correction to be remitted unless the parish will provide for her'.¹¹³ In Somerset in 1638, though one 'George Bernard of Glaston was about six weeks since committed to the House of Correction at Shepton Mallet for that he was a lunaticke and a disorderly person', 'the Governor of the said House returned him to Glaston againe by reason he had noe maintenance from the parische of Glaston to releevve hime there'.¹¹⁴ So if the parish did not pay, JPs and governors of bridewells did not hesitate to discharge the lunatic, however dangerous he or she was.

Parishes were not very ready to pay, since the charge for keeping a lunatic in a House of Correction was considerable. The average sum given for outdoor relief in late seventeenth century ranged from a shilling to one shilling and six pence per week, according to the estimate of Dorothy Marshall. Especially hard cases sometimes required two shillings.¹¹⁵ To keep a lunatic in a House of Correction cost more than twice as much. In the North Riding in 1744 the governor of the House of Correction was 'impowered to take 3s. per week for all lunatic which shall be committed to the said House from the parish officers where they belong'.¹¹⁶ In Middlesex in 1684 several parishes jointly paid the sum of 4s. per week to maintain 'William Landy, a madman' in the House of Correction. Next year they were ordered to pay 5s.¹¹⁷ One bill (probably an extreme one) in Northumberland in 1724 amounted to as much as 7s per week.¹¹⁸

Keepers or governors of Houses of Correction were also reluctant to keep lunatics, and they frequently made petitions to be freed from the troublesome business. Lunatics sometimes did physical damage to the equipment of the building. In Middlesex in 1639, a mad widow 'broke and spoiled divers goods' in the House of Correction.¹¹⁹ In the same county in 1732 one William Moncreas

¹¹² Rushton devotes only one paragraph to the problem; see Rushton, *op. cit.* (note 83), 46.

¹¹³ MXSB, bk 123.

¹¹⁴ SOQS, Vol. 2, 293.

¹¹⁵ Marshall, *op. cit.* (note 84), 93-4.

¹¹⁶ NRQS, Vol. 9, 247.

¹¹⁷ MXSB, bks 418, 431.

¹¹⁸ Rushton, *op. cit.* (Note 83).

¹¹⁹ MXSB, bk 4.

caused greater trouble in a prison.¹²⁰ He was committed to the prison 'for breaking the windows of Elizabeth Shelton, pulling part of her house down, and threatening to set fire to it'. He was imprisoned as an ordinary criminal. But after his committal he was discovered to be 'disordered in his senses, sometimes to a great degree'. The governor put him into the felon's room 'to prevent mischief'. But 'the floor being out of repair, Moncreas tore it up and has broke it almost to pieces . . . which hath created a great deal of mischief and disturbance'.

These cases show that the penal institutions in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries could not effectively manage dangerous and raging lunatics. One governor in Buckinghamshire had to 'keep a nurse on purpose to look after' a vagrant lunatic.¹²¹ Many governors' petitions complained that lunatics were not 'fit objects' for the House of Correction.

There is a further reason for the reluctance of governors to keep lunatics: the policy of Houses of Correction was to make the inmates work to earn their own living, and many lunatics were incapable of this. In Somerset in 1635 a lunatic was discharged from the House of Correction because 'he was not able to work'.¹²² In 1675 the keeper applied for an allowance of money for a lunatic who was 'unable to maintain himself by his own labour'.¹²³ In general the House of Correction was an institution for those who were disorderly but, at the same time, sturdy and able to work.

Lunatics were also discharged for more fundamental reasons. There are signs that people sometimes thought that lunatics should not be punished, and so should not be kept in a House of Correction. The following case illustrates the view against confining lunatics in penal institutions.¹²⁴ In Middlesex in 1746 one Jane Ralphs was committed to the House of Correction at Clerkenwell for 'taking out of her landlady's porsett the sum of seven pounds'. The court decided that Jane Ralphs 'should receive the correction of the said gaol and remain there a fortnight to hard labour'. On hearing the sentence, several neighbours went to the Justice responsible and informed him that Jane Ralphs was 'actually lunatic and a great object of charity'. The justice was 'pleased to order them to make the petition', in which 'they humbly pray the justices to consider her condition and to order that she may be discharged from her imprisonment without any correction'. The people thus thought she should be discharged *because she was a lunatic*. Significantly, a Justice seems to have agreed that lunacy was in itself an adequate reason for discharge, and Jane Ralphs was discharged.

Of course, not all those committed to penal institutions were discharged if it was found that they were actually lunatics. Abraham Barnes of Somerset, mentioned above, was not discharged when the governor found him lunatic, but

¹²⁰ MXSB, bk 899.

¹²¹ BQS, Vol. 2, 421.

¹²² SOQS, Vol. 2, 293.

¹²³ SOQS, Vol. 4, 171.

¹²⁴ MJSP, 1716 May 10.

an allowance was requested from the parish to maintain him in the House. So there was neither a clear imperative for putting a lunatic in the House of Correction, nor abhorrence of the practice. Some lunatics were committed to penal institutions because of their lunacy, some discharged for the identical reason.

The evidence presented here conflicts with Foucault's argument and shows that the practice of putting lunatics in penal institutions was variable. In fact there were not many lunatics in institutions, and some were actually discharged from them.

Workhouses

In Middlesex (Table 4) there is a decline in the number of cases reported to the Quarter Sessions court over the period 1640–1749. The change lies not only in the number, but also in the nature of the cases. Two entries under 'Not known/Elsewhere' in the decade 1730–39 concern the trouble caused by a lunatic in prison, and discharge from apprenticeship owing to the incurable madness of the master. Two in 1740–49 are concerned with settlement. As time went on, there seem to have been fewer cases in which relatives or parish officers took an active hand in dealing with the insane. A decline is also found in the number of lunatics ordered to be kept in penal institutions. I would like to suggest that this decline in the number of lunacy cases handled in Quarter Sessions court is due to the emergence of a new type of institution – the workhouse.

TABLE 4. *Committal of lunatics appearing before Middlesex Sessions*

Years	Where committed			Total
	Penal inst.	Bethlem	Not known/Elsewhere	
1640–49	2	—	—	2
50–59	1	—	6	7
60–69	—	—	—	0
70–79	1	1	5	7
80–89	1	3	3	7
90–99*	—	1	—	1
1700–09*	—	—	—	0
10–19*	1	—	3	4
30–29	—	1	—	1
30–39	—	—	2	2
40–49	—	1	2	3
Total	6	7	21	34

* gap in Quarter Sessions Books

The idea of the workhouse is as old as Elizabethan Poor Law.¹²⁵ The

¹²⁵ Marshall, *op. cit.* (note 84), 125. For general information on workhouses in this period, I owe much to the works listed in note 91.

legislation of 43 Eliz. C2 sought to compel parishes to provide for the poor to 'set on work . . . all such persons, married or unmarried, who have no means to maintain themselves'. This idea was partially realized in London's Bridewell and other Houses of Correction, in the sense that the inmates of the institutions were expected to maintain themselves by their own labour. These institutions served, however, for the confinement of the unruly, especially vagrants. Furthermore, parishes were very slow in following the order to build workhouses.

The first important and successful realization of the idea of the workhouse occurred when John Cary built one in Bristol. In 1697 several parishes of the city of Bristol were, by an Act of Parliament, formed into a Union to build a common workhouse. Following Cary's success, several towns erected workhouses, after the passing of private Acts of Parliament. The Workhouse Test Act in 1722 gave parishes permission to join together to build a common workhouse. As a result, from the 1720s there was a great increase in the building of workhouses. In 1732 there were at least 30 in and around London and Middlesex.¹²⁶ The period which saw the erection of numerous workhouses is almost identical with that when the Middlesex Sessions lunacy cases began to decline. Sending a lunatic to a workhouse was exclusively the business of parish officers and workhouse keepers.¹²⁷ Quarter Sessions and JPs were not concerned with committal to workhouses. It is understandable that the increase in the number of lunatics put into workhouses led to the decrease in the number handled in the Quarter Sessions.

There is no doubt that some lunatics were put into workhouses. Lunatics raging and groaning in workhouses were a very familiar image in the mid to late eighteenth century. Those who wrote about workhouses rarely failed to mention a lunatic when they made a list of its various inmates. In 1794 Thomas Gisborne referred to the workhouses as receptacles of 'orphan, deserted children, friendless old men and women, the chronically infirm and the bedridden with a few lunatics and idiots'.¹²⁸ Promotional publications, produced by lunatic hospitals (e.g., St Luke's in London, hospitals in Manchester, Newcastle, etc.) built in the latter half of the eighteenth century, expressed disgust at the contemporary habit of putting lunatics into workhouses and proudly stated their noble business of relieving lunatics from such an inappropriate incarceration.¹²⁹

Indubitably these contemporary descriptions were overstated, as many of them were written by those hostile to the existing system of workhouses. The

¹²⁶ *An Account of the Work-Houses in Great Britain, in the Year 1732*, 3rd edition (London, 1786), lists more than 30 workhouses. See also *An Account of Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor* (London, 1725).

¹²⁷ Marshall, *op. cit.* (note 75), 131.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Webb and Webb, *op. cit.* (note 91).

¹²⁹ For voluntary lunatic hospitals in the later eighteenth century, see Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (note 82), 129–36. The critical attitude towards private madhouses was best shown in several articles in *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1763, cited in Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

self-styled reformers of the workhouse system were apt to make exaggerated use of a handful of lunatics to give the reader a terrifying image of the workhouse. According to an account of the workhouse in St Andrew's Parish, Holborn, in 1732, only two out of 62 inmates were 'lunatics'.¹³⁰

It is certain, however, that workhouses gave the parish officers another, cheaper, alternative in dealing with lunatics. Indeed, when the parishioners of St Giles' in the Fields built a workhouse, the mad were named explicitly as one of the targets: it was thought that the parish would be relieved of part of the burden caused by 'the lame, blind, mad, infirm etc.'¹³¹ In 1747 the parish officers of St Sepulchre tried to put Margaret Everson, who had been discharged from Bedlem as incurable, into the parish workhouse.¹³² From the 1720s, then, workhouses seem to have provided lunatics with limited shelter.

(a) *Promiscuous confinement?*

We should now ask whether the workhouse was an instrument for the Foucauldian confinement of the insane. Eighteenth-century workhouses have generally been regarded by historians, following Sydney and Beatrice Webb, as 'general mixed workhouses'.¹³³ The Webbs argued that the workhouses in the eighteenth century served several different purposes, e.g., as a device for profitably employing pauper labourers; a penal establishment for the idle and morally deranged; and an asylum for the impotent poor. Accordingly, they find in the workhouses a promiscuous mixture of those who could not find work, vagrants, prostitutes, the lame and the insane. This would support Foucault's argument that promiscuous confinement appeared in eighteenth-century England centred in the workhouse. This section will examine whether we can apply the Foucauldian model to the workhouses in this period.

Foucault argued that those who were confined in workhouses belonged to a category of the irrational,¹³⁴ and some eighteenth-century writings may appear to support this. When the rector, churchwarden, overseers and principal inhabitants of St Mary Whitechapel in Middlesex were summoned to the House of Commons to be examined about their petition to erect a workhouse, one 'Mr. Nathanael Fowler, ex-overseer, divided people into four classes: gentlemen, tradesmen of great dealing, tradesmen of lesser degree, and 'a large unruly herd of men'.¹³⁵ He described the last class as 'those who are scarce rational, or most commonly act as if they were not'. Here the poorest and the lowest class of

¹³⁰ *An Account of the Work-Houses . . . 1732* (note 126), 7.

¹³¹ *An Account of Several Work-Houses . . . Poor* (note 126), 22, lists as its targets: '162 above seventy years of age, 126 parents overburdened with children, 185 children whose parents are dead, 70 sick at parish nurse, and 300 more lame, blind, mad, infirm, etc., of different ages'.

¹³² MXXSB, bk 1039.

¹³³ Webb and Webb, *op. cit.*, 218.

¹³⁴ Foucault, *op. cit.* (note 81), cap. 2 & 3.

¹³⁵ *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxiii (1733), 270–1.

people were identified as irrational. And Sir Thomas Blount wrote in *A Natural History* (1693):¹³⁶

The numerous rabble that seem to have the signature of man in their faces are but brutes in their understanding . . . 'tis by the favour of a metaphor we call them men, for at best they are but Cartesian automata, and having nothing but their out side to justify their titles to rationality.

Thus there was some strong identification of the poor with the irrational in this period, though it is doubtful whether the idea was representative of the age.

But we cannot identify the 'irrational poor' with those who were put into the workhouses, because in England people had for a long time drawn a sharp distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, and the workhouses seem to have been intended mainly for the former. Significantly, Mr Nathanael Flower and others were *not* going to build a workhouse to keep what he called the 'scarce rational' poor, but to deter them from coming to the parish:¹³⁷

The ragg-fair draws numbers of Scotch and Irish into the parish, who live in an idle way, and frequently become chargeable to the parish; but, if a workhouse were erected, and made convenient for setting the poor to work, those sort of people would avoid coming into the parish.

A workhouse, they thought, would serve as a deterrent to solve the problem caused by the idle, morally degenerate, incorrigible and 'irrational' poor, not by keeping them inside but by threatening and driving them out.

Thomas Alcock had a similar expectation about the workhouse in his *Observation on the Defects of the Poor Laws* (1752). He suggested building 'hospitals' or 'poor houses' to keep children and the aged, and to make them work inside. Alcock's 'hospitals' were also to solve the problem of the idle poor, but in a different way. The idle poor, he thought, would not want to be put into the poor house, since it would 'look like a sort of exile, and be deemed some hardship and punishment' by the idle.¹³⁸ Thus, he claimed, the idle poor 'would endeavour to subsist themselves by their own work', lest they should be put to the poor house. Both Nathanael Fowler and Thomas Alcock expected the workhouse to play a role in solving the problem of the idle, morally condemnable and irrational poor, by menacing them away. The workhouse threatened them, but it did not contain them. The Webbian 'general mixed workhouses' were not what people *intended*.

The workhouses, at least in the early eighteenth century, do not seem to have housed a lot of idle beggars. In 1725, questionnaires were sent to workhouses in and around London, and answers were compiled in a pamphlet *An Account of*

¹³⁶ Quoted in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitude in England 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), 43-44.

¹³⁷ *Journals of the House of Commons*, *op. cit.* (note 135).

¹³⁸ Thomas Alcock, *Observation on the Defects of the Poor Laws* (London, 1752), 63.

Several Work-Houses for Employing and Maintaining the Poor. It gave short descriptions of the number of inmates, their conditions, method of employment, etc., for more than 30 workhouses. Among them, there is only one workhouse that kept 'vagabonds and sturdy beggars' with the impotent poor. The overwhelming majority stated that they kept 'the aged, children, and the unfit for labour', and lunatics were included in the last category.¹³⁹ Unlike Francis Bacon who proposed a 'general and promiscuous institution', people in the eighteenth century did not try to confine the deserving and undeserving poor together, and it is wrong to regard the workhouse as an institution *intended* for confining together several sorts of 'the irrational'. The morally depraved species, who Foucault believed were strongly associated with the insane, were rarely mentioned. No alchemist, sodomist, sufferers from venereal disease, prostitutes, or morally depraved persons were mentioned as proper objects for the workhouse. Indeed, a late eighteenth-century pamphlet for the effective government of the workhouse explicitly refused such persons. It would not admit any patients suffering for venereal disease, as 'too indiscriminate an admission of persons infected with the venereal distemper, would . . . encourage such persons to persevere in a wicked and abandoned course of life'.¹⁴⁰ And 'persons of an idle, vagrant disposition, who live upon the public, by making a trade of imposition' were also severely refused. And the pamphlet 'earnestly' recommended the officers 'to consider the workhouses only as an asylum for the aged, for orphans in an infant state, for idiots, lunatic, and the lame, blind, sick, or otherwise infirm and diseased persons'.

So, *pace* Foucault, the lunatics in workhouses did not, and were not intended to, form a category of the 'irrational and immoral'. Even if one could find promiscuous confinement in eighteenth-century workhouses, this was not due to a new formulation of the idea of irrationality. Neither the Houses of Correction nor the workhouses served as the crucible in which identification of lunacy with deviancy from social norms took place, as Foucault wanted us to believe.

(b) *A new classification of lunatics?*

In the seventeenth century, there was no gradation among the lame, blind, idiot and lunatic; they formed a cluster of the disabled. Lunatics were neither superior nor inferior to the other sorts of disabled people. A new perception of lunacy, however, seems to have emerged from within the workhouses: lunatics came to be regarded as distinct from the rest of the disabled (with whom they had formed a category of the impotent poor) and also as totally impotent, for the following reason.

Once workhouses started, the aged, orphans, the lame, the blind, idiot, lunatics,

¹³⁹ *An Account of Several Work-Houses . . . Poor* (note 126).

¹⁴⁰ *Hints and Cautions, for the Information of Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parishes of St. Giles's in the Field and St. George, Bloomsbury* (London, 1781).

etc., were put together and were set to various kinds of work. Such labour did not require skill nor physical strength, so everyone could do something for the workhouse. In the workhouse of St Andrews, Holborn, 'nine old men and women pick ockam [sic], four women and boys spin noyl, nine knit noyl yarn into caps, two make the woollen cloaths, two make linel cloaths, two cooks constantly attend the kitchen, two make beds, three nurse those that are sick'.¹⁴¹ The governor of the workhouse wrote that they employed even an idiot for the task of picking oakum, and they found that even the lame and the blind could pick oakum.¹⁴² In the course of making all the inmates of the workhouse do something, the governors seem to have found that lunacy was the most severe form of impotency, and lunatics were totally unable to work. The list of inmates does not give any description of employment for 'two lunatics'; apart from one child being nursed, these lunatics were the *only* people who were not employed in any kind of work.

This picture emerging from workhouses seems to have been crucial. Thomas Alcock formulated an image of lunatics as completely impotent people, writing that among those who should be taken care of in workhouses 'very few of them, except the sick and those disabled in their senses, would be found to be absolutely incapable of labour'.¹⁴³ Among the inmates of workhouses, lunatics were singled out as '*absolutely* incapable of labour'.

The workhouse itself did not bring about any new division of the poor: its targets were the people who, in the seventeenth century, had been given outdoor relief as the impotent poor, and it still continued to keep the lunatics, together with the lame, blind, old and idiots, as the disabled poor. It was, however, in the workhouses that lunatics came to be distinguished as the only group of *completely* impotent.

The appearance of this new image of lunacy might be connected with the explosion of interest in the problem of pauper lunatics in the next century. People were concerned primarily not with the lame, the blind, etc., but with the insane. They organized special committees for solving the problem of lunacy and erected buildings that were designed to house exclusively the mentally disabled; they did not do this for the rest of the impotent. But the process from the workhouse to lunacy reform is not subject of this essay, and I would like to leave open the question of the extent to which the eighteenth-century workhouse experience was vital for lunacy reform in the next century.

¹⁴¹ *An Account of the Work-Houses* . . . 1732 (note 126), 7.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Alcock, *op. cit.* (note 138), 63-4.