



Voices from the Asylum: West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum

Mark Davis, Nicola Swan

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Almost forgotten by time, tucked away beyond the sight of the passerby, there is a little piece of old England, which was for many years a forgotten wilderness. If it were not for a weather-beaten plaque on the gatepost few would realize that beyond the rusted gates there lies, in unmarked paupers' graves, 2,861 former patients of the once formidable Menston Asylum.

To be admitted to a lunatic asylum in the nineteenth century was fraught with danger, and in many cases meant a life sentence hidden away from society. It is estimated as many as 30 per cent of the asylum population was incarcerated incorrectly and up until 1959 there was no form of appeal.

Looking into the faces of the long dead, the forgotten former inmates of this once bustling institution, it is impossible not to feel a certain sadness at their plight. Abandoned by an intolerant society and their families these people all had one thing in common, when death came there was no one to shed a tear or collect their remains. They were given a pauper's funeral and forgotten, until now.

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