

## Mental Health Records

This guide provides a summary of the records held at the Somerset Heritage Centre that will help you to research ancestors who were admitted as patients to Somerset's mental health hospitals or asylums during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The most comprehensive records are those that were administered by the mental health hospitals or County Asylums. These can include registers of admissions and discharges, case books and treatment registers. However, the extent of these records varies for each institution. At the Somerset Heritage Centre we hold records for the following mental health hospitals:

### **Mendip Hospital, Wells (collection code: D/H/men)**

Formerly known as the Somerset and Bath Pauper Lunatic Asylum, the hospital originally opened as the county asylum for pauper lunatics in 1848. It served the county of Somerset and the city of Bath until the opening of the Western Joint Asylum (Tone Vale) in 1897, after this date Mendip Hospital provided services for long-stay elderly and mentally infirm patients. It closed in 1991.

### **Tone Vale Hospital (D/H/tv)**

The hospital was built on the site of Cotford Farm, Bishops Lydeard. The first patient was admitted in 1897. Originally known as the Western Joint Asylum and subsequently as the Somerset and Bath Mental Hospital, Cotford, in 1948 it was renamed Tone Vale Hospital. It closed in 1995.

### **Sandhill Park Group Hospital Management Committee (D/H/snd)**

The group was formed in 1948 as a result of the National Health Act (1946) and comprised various hospitals and hostels established for the care of people with mental health problems, of both sexes and all ages, which were formerly administered by the County Mental Deficiency Act Committee. Sandhill Park itself had been given to the county as a school for 'retarded' children and was opened in 1925. In 1948 it became the administrative centre of the Group and remained so until the hospitals were dispersed to the appropriate area health authorities in 1972. Cambridge House in Flax Bourton was renamed Farleigh Hospital in 1956. In 1958 West End House in Shepton Mallet became Norah Fry Hospital and Weymouth House in Frome was renamed Selwood Hospital.

### **Other collections**

Records relating to mental health can also be found amongst some of our other collections. Unfortunately, we hold few records relating to the county's private asylums but references to them are most likely to be found amongst the Quarter Sessions collection. The Quarter Sessions collection contains two main series of 'lunacy' papers (**Q/ALU** and **Q/RLU**). Occasional references to 'lunacy' and asylums can also be found within the Quarter Sessions Rolls (**Q/SR**). The workhouse collections contain papers relating to the admission and maintenance of pauper 'lunatics' (**D/G/-**). A series of records relating to mental health can also be found in the Somerset County Council collection (**C/MD**).

### **Viewing catalogues to mental health records**

The catalogues to the collections referred to in this guide can be viewed on our online catalogue (<https://somerset-cat.swheritage.org.uk>). To view the required catalogue search for the collection code followed by an asterisk (e.g. **D/H/men\***).

## How to gain access to mental health records

As mental health records contain sensitive medical information, access to them is restricted for 100 years in accordance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.

**Records over 100 years old:** Records that are over 100 years old and marked as 'open' on the online catalogue can be consulted in our searchroom. Alternatively, you can request information through our research service – see details below.

**Closed records that contain information over 100 years old:** Some records contain a mixture of entries that are over 100 years old and less than 100 years old (for example a case book covering the years 1910-1950). Such records are marked as 'closed' on the online catalogue and cannot be consulted in person at the Somerset Heritage Centre. However, a search of closed records for cases that are over 100 years old can be requested through our research service – see details below.

**Closed records relating to patients who died less than 100 years ago:** If your research concerns records that contain any information less than 100 years old and which relates to a deceased individual we would ask you to complete and return two forms:

1. 'Data Subject Access Request Form - deceased individuals' (together with proof of death, such as a copy death certificate). A copy of the 'Data Subject Access Request Form - deceased individuals' can be downloaded from our website: <https://swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives/services/depositing/216-2>. Please remember to tick the 'I consent to my details being shared with relevant depositors' box as we are required to pass on your own details, and a copy of the information found in the records, to the Somerset Partnership NHS Information Governance Team before we can disclose the information from such records.

2. 'Research and Copying Request Form' – see details below. On occasion, information in the records which relates to third parties or which may still be subject to Data Protection legislation may be redacted at the request of the Somerset Partnership NHS Information Governance Team, meaning that some short sections of the text may be obscured in the copy you receive.

## Our research service

To request a search of the records through our research service please complete and return our 'Research and Copying Form', which can be downloaded from <https://swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives/services/research>. We would suggest allowing up to an hour and a half of research in the first instance. If the research takes less time to undertake we will charge you accordingly. If further time is needed we will advise you of this. Please allow up to a month for the work to be undertaken.

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