

Report on my research into the development of treatment and theories for mental health problems

Bethlem Museum of the Mind



The first museum I visited was Bethlem Museum of the Mind. When I arrived there, I was struck by the beauty of the front of the museum. Some of the modern museums I have visited recently have adopted a minimalistic, modern and technology focused design; however, I quite liked the older architectural style of this museum. After entering the building before going upstairs the two sculptures that were originally situated above the gates of the of the hospital were placed opposite sides of the staircase. This made me reflect on how most of the hospital building and facilities within it have been destroyed and with it part of the histories of the patients.

Patient record archives

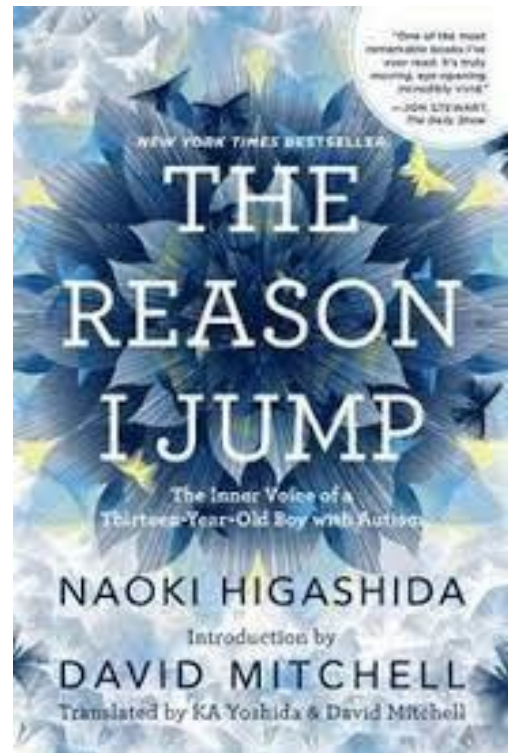
A large part of the museum and perhaps what makes it unique is the displays of patient history displayed in a bureau and as booklets placed on tables alongside complimentary voice recordings. Looking at the black and white photographs made the people feel more real to me. Looking at some of the photographs of them as they were being admitted and as they were being discharged it was interesting to see the differences caused by their personal journeys at the hospital. Reading their notes on how they had acted and if they were recovering or becoming worse felt invasive, especially when the patients felt out of control of their actions. To me it felt rude that I had intruded on this distressing period of their lives. Many patients were described as 'excited' and having some had the diagnosis of acute mania. Both feel less prevalent in modern psychiatry. Many of the patients suffered from poor sleep and/or appetite and some were fed via a feeder.

Art and the mind

Many of the pieces at the museum were great pieces of art, separate from the mental status of the creators. Many of them held deep philosophical meanings and some featured repeating themes. Art has been used in many communities as a form of therapy and can help people to focus on a task while in mental disarray. When visiting the Freud Museum I also found the connections between the mind and art to be a focus in one of the rooms centred around Lucien Freud's work.

The reason I jump

One art piece in the exhibition was an open book with large circular holes drilled into the pages on each side. This again reminded me that the stories presented in the exhibition through the patients' records were only a small part of the whole. Alongside this art piece were a few books relating to mental illness and neurodiversity. One book that took my interest was 'The reason I jump', a memoir written by a 13-year-old autistic boy through the use of an alphabet grid as he struggles to talk. Technology and the support of those around him have enabled him to share his perspective; however, throughout history for many neurodivergent people their opinions have not been shared or considered noteworthy. Reading this book helped me to better understand how some people view the world through a different lens which helps me to be more compassionate in my interactions with those around me.



Mixed media + interactive exhibits

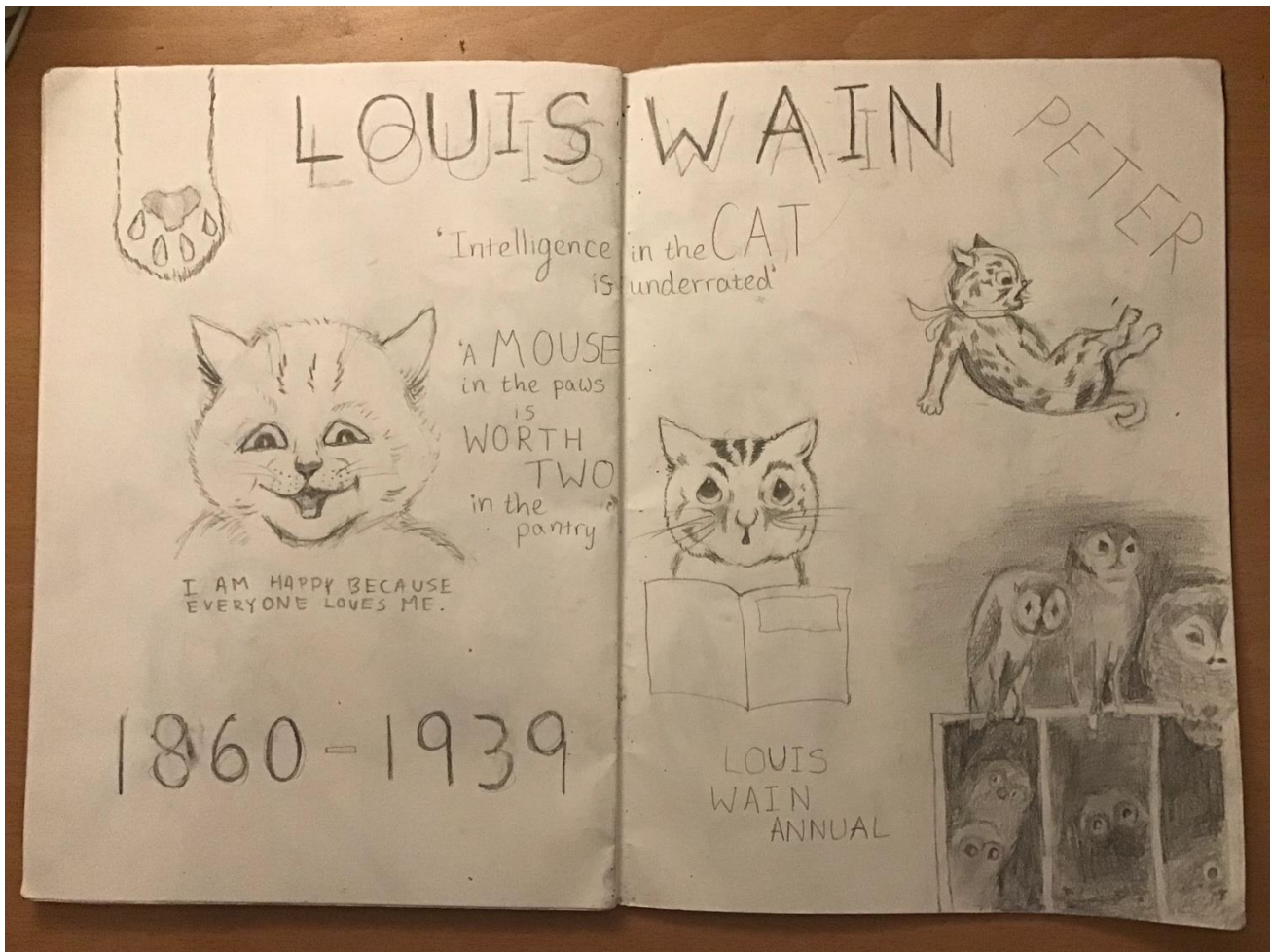
I really enjoyed listening to the audiotapes taken over time of the patients at Bedlam. Much like the black and white photographs this made me feel more connected to their stories and I felt I had gained some valuable insight into what being a patient was like. A variety of mediums were used including pencil, biro, paint, and oil pastels.



Animal therapy

'Animal therapy' is the title of one of the exhibits at Bethlem museum that I visited. I learned that since 1860 a positive link has been suggested between animals and mental wellbeing. Louis Wain, was an artist that was schizophrenic(although there is some speculation around his diagnosis and some say he was autistic), had drawn a series of anthropomorphised cats. Some of his art resembled less of a feline face and became more kaleidoscopic and the shift in his artistic style was thought to be the result of his mental illness, although his work was undated, so it isn't possible to know when the works were created. During his five-year stay in Bedlam he produced many pieces of art including a painting on a mirror of two cats enjoying a plum pudding. Louis Wain cited his own pet cat for the source of his artistic inspiration and Peter became particularly important to him after his wife died. Before his admission to Bedlam his work was popular on greeting cards in Victorian England and he released the 'Louis Wain annual' over several years.

Below are some sketches that I produced inspired by Louis Wain's work:



I also read 'Bedlam' by Paul chambers to gain some insight into how Bedlam was run from its creation in 1247 as a priory to its present-day operation within the NHS. I learnt a great deal about how the hospital was run and who the hospital was run by. I was shocked to discover the extent of the poor treatment of the patients and for how long the poor treatment continued for; although since it was founded so long ago maybe I shouldn't be surprised that their conditions feel so morally wrong when compared to modern day societal norms. Before reading the book, I was unaware of Bedlam's early reputation almost as a tourist destination across England and its status in works of art at the time as the hospital is even mentioned in Shakespeare's work. I found it fascinating that as London expanded and family and community began to feel less important an intolerance of the mentally poorly began to spread and this cultural shift caused the laws to change. A highly renowned anatomist and physician Thomas Willis theorised that the insane should be locked up and brutalised back to good health. This mentality affected many patients of mental ill health from the 1670s onwards.

Wellcome Collection

The next museum I visited was the Wellcome Collection. I was delighted to discover the reading area and library. A book I found particularly intriguing was 'African holistic healthcare'. If I hadn't visited the museum's library I would have never known it existed! Upon reading the content of the book I discovered that many of the treatments for both mental and physical ill health were similar to some

traditional Chinese approaches involving herbal remedies, meridian lines and pressure points. This inspired me to do some more research into the impact of culture on mental health treatment. I discovered that the same illness is described to have different symptoms within different cultures. For example, in one area depression may be characterised by having low mood and missing work; however, in another there may be a stronger focus on psychosomatic symptoms such as muscle fatigue or poor appetite. I read the book 'Culture and Mental Health' to gain a deeper insight into how these interact.

The three exhibits that I visited were the permanent exhibitions 'Medicine Man' and 'Being Human' and the temporary exhibit the archive of the unseen.

Attitudes to health

An example of the art pieces on display which I found particularly striking was two pieces by Dolly Sen reversing the position of the patient who is mentally ill and the 'normals' who are conditioned pity them and give them some form of help if they are charitable enough. I saw this in part as a critique of charity as it shouldn't be up to the kindness of people who are able to support the unwell and poorly but perhaps there should be better and more stable care for when people fall unwell.



In the same exhibition a moving piece of artwork with the words 'every thing is okay' fades in and out of a flat plain white sheet making the onlooker question if the commonly used phrase should be trusted. For me it reminded me of the fragility of the human mind and body and how easily the state of comfortable, stable health can be taken away from people. Alongside this rather ominous message the return of the phrase 'every thing is okay' following it's disappearance reminds the onlooker that there will be an end point of suffering, either by overcoming illness and recovering or through the destination of death. For some, this may feel like quite a patronising phrase that has been thrown around in times of uncertainty and it may be particularly stinging if used when people fail to recognise genuine ill health and dismiss their very real pain and struggles too easily.

The natural world and human health

One of the focuses in the 'Being Human' exhibit was on 'Environmental breakdown' which revealed the effects of the climate crisis and explored potential future outcomes if people don't take collective action to save the planet and in turn save themselves. Shonibare (who created 'refugee astronaut') states that their work 'speaks to the now as well as the future', making links between the recent surge in asthma deaths and the air pollution crisis. Because mental and physical health are undoubtedly intertwined anything that influences physical health influences mental wellbeing.



In the 'Rooted Beings' exhibit I found the focus on different origins of medicine and healthcare to be a refreshing break from the concerns around technology focused healthcare such as the ethical issues within genetic stalking. Many people are under the belief that our current health solutions are the best that they have ever been. It is undeniable that technology in healthcare has come a long way; however, a more modern solution may not always be better. A focus of the exhibit was on the effects of colonial expeditions of indigenous knowledge and natural resources. It looks towards plant biology to learn about how we should try to take care of ourselves and emphasized on how we live in symbiosis with plants. In terms of treatment to aid mental health Ecotherapy is a form of psychotherapeutic support which centres around the outdoors. This practise has been gaining more traction recently especially in light of the pandemic. This may be part of a solution for eco-anxiety that more and more people are beginning to feel the effects of.

Freud Museum

Freuds personal life

When I visited the museum, I was most shocked by his interests in multicultural goods. I wasn't expecting him to be so interested in different cultural relics. I was also very impressed by his library including lots of literature and science. I think an aspect of his life that is often downplayed is the image of him as a refugee. In March of 1938 Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria placed Austrian Jews in great danger. He spoke on his experience of being a refugee that many would have felt they can relate to. He has described himself as having 'read more archaeology than psychology', and he stated that he has sacrificed a great deal for his

collection of Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiques. This was the smallest museum out of the three that I had visited. It is in Sigmund Freud's last address at 20 Maresfield Gardens in London.

Professional contributions

When he founded psychoanalysis, he brought many therapeutic techniques that still greatly effect current treatment. His work also includes dream analysis as he believed that the id (a section of the unconscious that presents all primeval, aggressive and sexual urges) challenges the ego during sleep. He theorised that by analysing dreams he would have a method of uncovering what is going on in the unconscious mind. In this theory often referred to as 'Freudian psychology' Freud believes that all human personality can be split into the components, the id, the ego and the superego. Freud suggested that the human mind can also be split into the conscious and the unconscious and compared the brain to an iceberg, the tip of the iceberg representing the small part that is the conscious mind. Freud held some interesting views around the psychodynamics of women, and he had some theories around homosexuality (relating to his theories of psychosexual stages) which wouldn't be considered appropriate or accurate in the modern age. He was also one of the first people to look into cerebral palsy which was at the time called cerebral paralysis.



A very famous Victorian day bed

In Freud's study there is the first psychoanalyst's couch. Since it was gifted to Freud by Madame Benvenisti as a token of how grateful she was for his work, it has become a symbol of the practise of psychoanalysis and even for many without much knowledge of psychology they are still aware of this famous piece of furniture.

Wolf man was a pseudonym for Sergei Pankejeff, a Russian aristocrat who was one of Freud's patients. His family had a history of mental ill health and his sister committed suicide in 1906 and the following year Sergei's father Konstantin did the same a while after Sergei went to Munich to seek treatment. The treatments that Sergei explored included voluntary stays in various elite psychiatric hospitals. In 1910 he was referred to Freud and he met with Freud frequently for four years. After Freud's psychoanalysis of a dream that Sergei had in which he saw a walnut tree with white wolves perched on it's branches and felt terribly scared Sergei was pronounced cured from his previous inability to have bowel movements without the assistance of an enema and debilitating depression. Sergei may not have been particularly happy with the treatment that he received in Freud's care describing the interpretation as terribly 'far-fetched'. During his lifetime his case was painted as a one of Freud's great successes and Sergei detested the 'propaganda' and the way in which his case was a 'showpiece for psychoanalysis'. In the museum there were two artistic interpretations of Wolf man's dream.



Anna Freud

Anna Freud was a pioneer of child psychology. She started a teaching apprenticeship then spent six years working in her old school and as a reward for passing the entrance exams for her apprenticeship, she took a trip to England. When Anna worked as a teacher the Austrian school system was focused not on ensuring that pupils learn but instead to create citizens who would obediently serve the Austro-Hungarian empire. During her time as a teacher, she was perceived by others as a compassionate teacher, impressing her colleagues, superiors and her pupils. Some key aspects of Anna's work were that she believed children shouldn't be psychoanalysed until at least six years of age and that the time before that should focus on the child's environment to support their development. In contrast to her father, she didn't position on a couch and would instead allow them to move freely while being treated. She also allowed patients to use art materials at their leisure. This links nicely to art therapy practises used today. Other than her work in consulting rooms she also worked in and founded a myriad of projects and institutions dedicated to children's well-being.

Lucien Freud

The last room that I visited in the museum before enjoying the gardens was a room dedicated to Lucien Freud. Lucien Freud was an artist who lived between 1922 and 2011. His room in the Freudian Museum features his illustrated childhood letters and some book covers that he designed. His work is characterised by his signature brush strokes, colour palette and texture of skin. He often painted friends and family that are now displayed in the museum. He loved horses from a young age and recalled sleeping in the horses' stables at his school as he was so fond of them.



I have had a truly positive experience visiting these three museums and through looking at the exhibits and by taking on further reading I feel that I have seen several different approaches to mental health problems and how solutions have evolved over time.