

# THE MENTAL DISEASES HOSPITAL, SINGAPORE (THE FIRST 100 YEARS) - A SHORT HISTORY (PART I)

Y K Lee

## ABSTRACT

*This article (in four parts) traces the history of the first four Mental Hospitals built in Singapore, which were occupied in 1840, 1861, 1887 and 1928. The management of the patients is described; also their lives and deaths. Mention is also made of the doctors and others who looked after them.*

*Keywords: Lunatics, Jail, Grand Jury, Asylum.*

*(This article has many quotations from primary sources. The author believes that this mode of presentation is more interesting than a re-hash of the results of his research.)*

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Euphemism was seldom employed when dealing with mental diseases in early Singapore. Nobody spoke of "nervous breakdown" or "Woodbridge Hospital". The mentally-ill were known as lunatics and they were confined in the Lunatic Asylum.

A brief resume of the establishment and administration of the Straits Settlements is necessary to the understanding of the developments to be described.

Sir Francis Light in 1786 took possession of Penang Island in the name of the British Government and renamed it Prince of Wales Island. On 28 January 1819 Sir Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore, chosen for its excellent natural harbour and strategic geographical position, and on 6 February 1819 the Union Jack was officially hoisted there. Finally, by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, Malacca was transferred to the British in exchange for Bencoolen on the west coast of Sumatra. Thus by 1824, the three settlements which later formed the Straits Settlements were already established. They were known as the Incorporated Settlements of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca, with Prince of Wales Island as its capital, and were administered as part of Bengal. In 1832, the capital was transferred to Singapore. The headquarters of the Medical Department was also moved to Singapore in 1835.

Since Penang was founded 33 years before Singapore, and was the seat of Government from 1786 to 1832, it is worthwhile to trace the developments and study the official policy regarding lunatics in Penang before dealing with Singapore.

For the first 28 years of its existence Penang had no lunatic asylum. Insane persons were under the charge of the Police. In 1814, the Sitting Magistrate, Mr John James Eskine, wrote to the Governor about the necessity of having a separate lunatic asylum. The Governor and his Council approved this proposal.

This first lunatic asylum was built near the convict lines in the interest of economy and convenience, for the warders who guarded the convicts also looked after the lunatics. This Lunatic Asylum was run on very economical lines by a Committee with the Assistant Surgeon in professional charge. Lunatics who had property or had friends and relatives willing to pay,

were required to pay for part of the expenses. Investigations however showed that all the lunatics were paupers. Those who had sympathetic relatives were looked after at home.

This briefly was the state of affairs in Penang from its foundation to 1832, when the seat of Government was transferred to Singapore. It is important to note that the policy, pattern and trends in development were repeated in early Singapore.

In February 1828, the Senior Surgeon came to Singapore on an inspection tour of the hospitals. He reported that insane Europeans were treated in the Singapore Infirmary, and that insane native paupers were confined in the Jail.

Even after Singapore became the capital of the Straits Settlements in 1832, and the headquarters of the Medical Department in 1835, there was no Lunatic Asylum. The insane were still kept in the Jail.

Soon after his arrival in Singapore in 1835, Senior Surgeon Montgomerie received this instruction from the Governor: "... I conceive it the duty of a Medical Officer to visit the Jail daily with reference to the number of Criminals and Insane persons confined in it. ..."

There was no change in the system by 1837. In 1838, there were beginnings of public agitation regarding lunatics. A letter to the Editor appeared in the Singapore Free Press on 21 June 1838:

"... You and many of your readers are aware that no Lunatic Asylum exists at any of the Straits Settlements, and that it is customary to confine in the Sheriff's Jail, our unhappy fellow creatures who are deprived of their reason. So long as no other place exists specially for them, the Jail is probably the best that could be selected. .... I would respectfully suggest that the Grand Jury apply all the subjects of inquiry to the lunatics confined in public jails. .... It has been proved that in recent cases of insanity under judicious treatment, as large a proportion of recoveries will take place as from any other acute disease of equal severity. It would be a waste of words to impute blame to any of the Straits authorities for not having long ere thus commenced a system of treating lunatics very different from criminals. What has passed is beyond remedy but it will be the fault both of men in power and of the whole community if a system based on the experience of Europe and America be not adopted hereafter. .... The sooner proceedings are instituted, the more information will there be to lay before the first Grand Jury that may enter on the investigations. ...."

The Editor joined in the fray and wrote:

".... the confinement of the unfortunate victims of insanity

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Department of Medicine  
Toa Payoh Hospital  
Toa Payoh Rise  
Singapore 1129

Y K Lee, MD, FRCP, FRCPE, FRACP, FAMS, LLB  
Senior Consultant Physician

in the Sheriff's Jail without the slightest provision being made for their proper treatment calls loudly for improvement. A few months ago, there were, we believe, no less than seventeen of these unfortunate beings in the Jail. There is space enough in the hospital yard to construct a suitable building for their reception, and we hope the absolute necessity there exists for providing something in the nature of a Lunatic Asylum will not be over looked."

It may be puzzling for the reader to learn that the Grand Jury was requested to investigate the condition of the lunatics in Singapore. One has to digress here to explain the function of the Grand Jury in early Singapore, which was different from that which is normally ascribed to Grand Juries in Criminal Courts.

Early in English legal history, the jury was "a body of neighbours summoned by some public officer to give, upon oath, a true answer to some question". This system of inquiry was introduced by the Norman kings and was extensively used to supervise the activities of all government departments. It was used not only by the Central Courts, but also by the lower courts, eg that of the Justices of the Peace, where the jury continued to be used for general administrative purposes long after it had come to be used entirely for judicial purposes in the Central Courts.

The Courts of the Justices of the Peace were more than mere judicial courts. A jury was summoned, a general charge as to matters into which the jury must inquire was given and the jury made its presentment. By this process of presentment and indictment, the Court not only tried criminal cases, but also supervised the whole administration of the local government. This was still the practice in England in the seventeenth century.

This jury system was introduced into India by the British in the seventeenth century, and from there to the Straits Settlements. By the eighteenth century, a Grand Jury in England could only present on matters on which an indictment could afterwards be framed, but the original practice persisted in the Straits Settlements until the Grand Jury was abolished in 1873. Hence the Grand Jury was intimately involved in the local administration of Singapore. In practice the Grand Jury received a charge from the Recorder during a criminal session in Court. They then made their investigations, which included visits of inspection. Their Presentment was finally made to the Recorder, who added his own comments, and sent the Presentment to the Governor. He, after studying the Presentment, called on his officials for explanations. Thus, the Grand Jury was not very popular with Government officials.

#### **The First Lunatic Asylum**

Nothing came out of the public outcry, but things came to a head in October 1840, when a lunatic was murdered by another when both were confined in the Jail. The Governor immediately asked Senior Surgeon Montgomerie for a report on the number and state of the lunatics under treatment, and also for suggestions for their better management. Montgomerie reported that there were nineteen insane patients confined in the Jail, and three who were "quiet and inoffensive" in the Poor House. He expected the yearly average of seventeen patients under treatment at any single time to increase with the growth of the Settlement. He recommended that a Lunatic Asylum should be built:

"... that a substantial building with cells sufficient for the separate accommodation of 24 patients be built. The cells need not be more than 7 feet long and 5 feet wide, just sufficient to admit of a doorway and bed place. The building, I should recommend to be of brick walls and tile roofs, 60 feet long and 30 feet broad, having rows of cells in each side with grilled windows to give ventilation and a door to open into the space

in the middle, which would be 60 feet long and 16 feet broad, and being open both ends would form a covered airy place for the unfortunate individuals in bad weather, ... would be all that is necessary at present. If in future, more accommodation should become necessary, by adding to the length of the building, accommodation would be obtained for the patients. The floors of the cells should be laid with bricks on edge, embedded in good mortar so as to admit of being washed, and prevent the patients lifting the floors, which constructed with tiles as in Jail, they have been enabled to do so. The walls of the cells should be constructed of stout planking, and the bed places of the same materials, strong enough to resist the efforts of the patients to injure, which they might do so, with bare hands if weakly constructed. I have recommended wood for walls and bed places in consequence of very bad effects having arisen from the patients in the Jail having destroyed the bed places and by squatting on the floor and leaning against the cold walls, have in several instances cramped their limbs and stiffened their joints so as to cause lameness. ...."

He recommended that the Building be placed in a small enclosure at the corner of the Poor House yard, and submitted a plan and estimate for \$775.16.

Montgomerie did not favour the idea of sending the lunatics to India as the lunatics were all "natives of the East - Chinese, Malays, Buggese and Javanese". He was rightly of the opinion that "they may be more comfortably provided for among their own countrymen than among strangers to their language and habits, provided there is suitable accommodation for them on the spot."

Montgomerie's plan was approved, "it being necessary for the credit of the Government that a recurrence (of the murder) be prevented", and "a piece of ground as a place of exercise, and likewise, of occupation in those cases where the patients can be prevailed upon to employ themselves" was to be included as part of the Asylum.

#### **The Grand Jury**

For the next 25 years, the Grand Jury played a very important part in influencing the management of lunatics in Singapore. The Grand Jury made nine Presentments on the Lunatic Asylum and the care of lunatics during these 25 years, and compelled the Government to improve conditions. After each Presentment there was a spurt of official activity, which the newspaper publicized.

In June 1844, the Presentment was very critical of the Lunatic Asylum:

"... The Grand Jurors present that in the receptacle for the Insane attached to the Pauper Hospital, no means appear to be taken for the cure of the patients. The Building is insufficient; the cages or dens (whatever name they may deserve) being fewer than the patients. In many cases, two madmen are required to be placed together. ...."

Governor Butterworth was furious when he read this Presentment. When he was appointed Governor in June 1843, he went on a familiarization tour of government institutions. At the Lunatic Asylum, he "found a poor attenuated wretch lying dead in one of the Dens, he having expired of Dysentery, and two other inmates completely naked and in so emaciated a condition that their removal to Hospital was forthwith commanded." He had expected some improvement after reprimanding those concerned. He ordered that the Asylum should be placed under the personal charge of the Senior Surgeon, Dr Oxley, who was expected to submit a quarterly report on the condition of the inmates.

The first important step taken by Dr Oxley to improve the lot of the lunatics was to put a medically qualified person, Assistant Apothecary Henry Lloyd, in charge of the Lunatic Asylum, and for Lloyd to be personally responsible to him for

the care of the lunatics. By February 1846, Dr Oxley was able to report that the condition of the lunatics had improved. He had introduced occupational therapy, and out of the proceeds of the work done, he had given each inmate two suits of clothes. There were 30 patients in the Asylum. Oxley introduced the system of non-restraint and attempted to alter the public's image of the Lunatic Asylum as a building whose "sole object contemplated was the prevention of mischief to the public to the entire forgetfulness of the needful accommodation for the patients who were at first caged in their cells like so many wild beasts without clothes or any means of cleanliness .... with a couple of convicts to keep watch to prevent their escape." For his good work, Dr Oxley was highly praised by the Governor.

1847 and 1848 were uneventful years, except for a shortage of accommodation in the Asylum. There was a daily average of 35 patients and sleeping berths for only 24, and the Senior Surgeon was compelled to discharge "harmless" patients in order to make room for "dangerous cases", but he was able to report that "the system of non-restraint continues to work admirably. The men, when not employed, amuse themselves at games. They are apparently very happy, and when junk is procurable, set themselves to pick oakum with alacrity and cheerfulness. They have been clothed entirely from their own industry during the year. ...."

The indefatigable Dr Oxley was always looking for means to supplement the income of the Asylum in order to alleviate the condition of the inmates. In addition to picking oakum, he introduced basket-making. His most ambitious scheme begun at the end of 1848, was that of making gutta percha sheets for surgical purposes. He sold 180 yards to the Medical Board at Calcutta and, thus encouraged he asked for a contract to furnish a constant supply. He did not succeed as the Medical Board soon found that better quality gutta percha could be obtained elsewhere.

#### First Statute Regarding Lunatics

On 10 February 1849, Act IV of 1849, entitled "An Act for the safe custody of criminal lunatics" was passed by the Indian Government. This Act also came into force in the Straits Settlements which were administratively part of India. It declared what unsoundness of mind excused the commission of criminal acts, and provided for the safe custody of persons found guilty of such acts, but acquitted because of unsoundness of mind. It was Singapore's first ever legislative enactment regarding lunatics and the first person committed under the Act was a Chinese, Lim Say Soon:

"To the Sheriff, To wit

Whereas LIM SAY SOON on the 21 August 1848 last past was indicted for murder, and whereas the findings of the Petit Jury was 'not guilty being insane at the time of committing of the deed', and whereas the sentence or judgement of the Court was that 'the said Lim Say Soon was to be remanded until further orders'. Now as the said LIM SAY SOON is still in an insane state, and it being provided for by Act IV of 1849 entitled 'An Act for the safe custody of criminal lunatics' passed by the Honourable the President of the Council of India in Council on the 10 February 1849, it is hereby ordered in accordance with the 6th section of the said Act, and you are ordered to deliver up the body of the said LIM SAY SOON to the Keeper of the Lunatic Asylum, and there to be kept and treated as the Government shall order, and let this be your warrant.

(Sd) W J Butterworth, Governor, 13.6.1849."

Oxley's complaints to the authorities about the acute shortage of accommodation were ignored. On 11 April 1849, in anticipation of complaints from the public, he wrote to the

Governor to absolve his staff from blame: "This is to certify that there is no accommodation in the Lunatic Asylum for any more patients. The Keeper cannot possibly be accountable for any accident that may occur if more be sent. There are only 24 sleeping cots and already 37 patients".

On 24 April 1850, the Grand Jury took up the cause of the lunatics again, when in its Presentment it drew attention to the overcrowding at the Asylum, and to a skin disease suffered by the inmates.

When the Senior Surgeon was asked for his comments, he took the opportunity to reiterate that the building was inadequate and "very ill adapted" for the treatment of the patients. The overcrowding had caused at least fourteen patients to suffer from "itch" for which they had been treated, but he was of the opinion that there could be no cure as "the floor is so undermined by numerous rats, the vermin from which sadly plague the patients and tend to keep up and produce irritation of the skin." The only solution was "an entire renewal of the building, which at the same time might be remodelled and enlarged". He felt that his staff should not be blamed for the shortcomings of the authorities, and that credit was due "for the good effected with such slender means than blame for anything that may have been omitted", and asked for a complement of staff similar to that of an asylum in Bengal.

The Governor ordered the floor of the Asylum tiled and the walls whitewashed as a temporary measure, and instructed the Superintending Engineer and the Senior Surgeon to furnish "a report as to the best means of increasing the accommodation for the inmates with an estimate of the expense of the same."

#### Increased Accommodation

The Superintending Engineer in consultation with the Senior Surgeon, submitted a plan for a building large enough to accommodate 24 patients near the old Asylum, and suggested that "the patients be divided into two classes: those whose insanity is at times of a violent character, being assigned to the old building, where restraint rooms are already in existence; while the new hospital should be appropriated for the reception of idiots and patients whose malady is likely to yield to medical treatment". The plan and estimate were approved on 9 August 1850, thus increasing the accommodation of the Lunatic Asylum from 24 to 48.

#### Life of the Lunatics

A short description of the life of the lunatics in the 1850s will give an insight into the conditions then prevailing:

"The inmates are made to exert themselves not only in picking oakum, but in cleaning their dormitories daily. They have a well to bathe at and have exercise given to them in the compound. They breakfast at 9am of rice, curry and fish, and have their dinner at 3 pm of the same description. They change their clothes once a week, getting a clean suit every Sunday. Whether sick or well, all are compelled to take purgative medicines once a month; and those with any peculiar ailments have specified treatment. Patients when first admitted have some active treatment, eg counter-irritation to the back of the head by blisters and Tartar Emetic ointment followed by a seton, accompanied with the administration of Belladonna, Morphia and Tartar Antimony internally. With respect to the treatment of the patients when under peculiar excitement, which comes on from time to time with many of them, they are *pro tempore* shut up in their cells, and get Morphia, Belladonna and such soothing medicines. Except during these periods of exacerbation, there is no restraint whatever exercised towards them".

#### Europeans in the Lunatic Asylum

Europeans were not admitted into the Lunatic Asylum which was considered unsuitable for them. They were sent to the European Seamen's Hospital, where they created serious prob-

lems, eg attacking the staff and other patients and generally upsetting the smooth-running of the hospital. And there were no means of properly confining and observing them. As a result of complaints from the other patients, Medical Officers were authorised to admit, at their own discretion, European patients into the Lunatic Asylum, which by 1852 had 49 patients with only three elderly convict attendants to look after them. This policy of admitting and confining Europeans in the Asylum together with the natives was not wholly acceptable as it was considered *infra dignitatem*. Since there was no "Lunatic Asylum in Singapore calculated to receive an European, and especially an European addicted to violence", the very few European patients were sent back to Europe by the first available boat unless they happened to be paupers, eg shipwrecked sailors.

In August 1853, the Grand Jury once again found fault with the Lunatic Asylum. They presented that the Lunatic Asylum was used as a place of punishment of convicts by the Superintendent of Convicts, and that the old building was in such a dilapidated and filthy condition that it should be pulled down and suitable accommodation provided.

Senior Surgeon Oxley denied that the Superintendent of Convicts had authority to admit patients. Lunatics could only be admitted by the order of the Senior Surgeon or the Superintendent of Police, and that all insane convicts were seen by the Senior Surgeon before admission. Dr Oxley was so tired of being criticised when he was doing his utmost to run the Asylum with the little means at his disposal, that he wrote to the Governor:

"If the establishment and accommodation be deemed insufficient for the wants of the community, I respectfully suggest that it is for the community and not the Government to provide the means of improvement, and I can only say in conclusion that it will afford me great pleasure in giving my best attention to seeing any means placed at my disposal for that purpose used to the best advantage."

This challenge was not taken up until three years later. In the meantime, to make matters worse, lunatics from Malacca were transferred to Singapore for treatment, and when Oxley asked for more medical staff and attendants, his requests were turned down.

In April 1856, there were 75 patients in buildings intended for 48 at the most. Of these, two were murderers who required strict isolation and four were women who needed separate cells. Dr Oxley wrote to the Governor: "I beg to call attention to the Rules & Regulations laid down for Lunatic Asylums throughout Bengal, to be found in the Bengal Medical Code, pages 251-253, wherein ample provision is made for the management and care of such establishments." A fortnight earlier, the Sitting Magistrate, Mr Dunman, had tried to persuade the Municipal Commissioners "to go to the expense" of a ward for female lunatics, only to be told that "it is not within their province to grant it, it being a Government and not a Municipal duty". The Government, however, did not consider it its duty either.

#### Public donation

Despite public comment in the newspapers regarding the "non-existence of any public provision for the proper custody and treatment of insanes", there was no Government action until prodded by a donation by two Chinese merchants, Low Joon Teck and Chung Sam Teo, who were the Opium Farmers, ie they had the Government monopoly to sell opium in Singapore. On 28 May 1856, they wrote to the Governor and placed \$3600 at his disposal "to be employed in the erection of some building that will be of permanent utility and advantage to the poor classes of this island, and mark in a small way the interest we feel in this prosperous island". The Governor immedi-

ately wrote to India on 12 June 1856, regarding the necessity for enlarged and improved accommodation for lunatics in Singapore, and informed the Indian Government that he proposed to build a medical complex which would include a new General Hospital, Lunatic Asylum, Medical Stores and Dispensary, and that the donation of the Chinese merchants would be used for erecting the Lunatic Asylum, Medical Stores and Dispensary. The Indian Government approved this proposal in October 1856, with two modifications. The Governor-General had decided that the Lunatic Asylum should be built with Government funds because "it was an object for which everywhere the Government itself undertakes wholly to provide, and that no part of the very handsome donation offered by the Chinese merchants should be diverted for the purpose". The whole donation was to be used to build the General Hospital. The Lunatic Asylum was to be entirely separate from the General Hospital.

#### Indian Mutiny and Act 36 of 1858

By a twist of fate, the decision to use Government funds (\$9496) to build the Lunatic Asylum, instead of hastening, further delayed the building of a new Lunatic Asylum in Singapore. When the Indian Mutiny broke out, all Government spending was curtailed. Only works of military importance were sanctioned, and those that involved "unnecessary expenditure" were shelved, and this latter category included the Lunatic Asylum. Work on the General Hospital, however, started in the Kandang Kerbau district, where the whole medical complex was eventually built.

Since there were no funds to build a new Lunatic Asylum, the old one was repaired and "rendered as complete and comfortable as the limited space set apart for it would admit of". But more and more patients were admitted. The Police sent many who were suffering from "temporary excitement caused by the use of Ganjah (Marihuana) or other Narcotics, and remain, for want of proper securities, a considerable time in the Asylum". By the end of 1858, there were 86 patients under treatment, and as a temporary measure, some were placed in the Jail. This was discovered by the Grand Jury in January 1859, and there was another hue and cry. The situation was quite intolerable for the medical authorities. Fortunately, on 14 September 1858, "An Act relating to Lunatics" (Act XXXVI of 1858) was passed by the Indian Government which also came into force in the "Stations of the Straits Settlements". The preamble stated that it was "expedient to provide for the reception and detention of Lunatics in Asylums established for that purpose". The main provisions of the Act were:

- "(1) Government may establish Lunatic Asylums, which shall be managed according to rules, and have Visitors.
- (2) The appointment, duties and powers of Visitors.
- (3) The Police to apprehend lunatics, and bring them before a Magistrate or Commissioner of Police, who may commit to an Asylum, unless friends or relatives are willing to be responsible for them.
- (4) The Order (Form B) and the Medical Certificate (Form A) necessary for reception into an Asylum."

The Singapore Government found that it was not possible to carry out the provisions of Act 36 of 1858 as the existing facilities were inadequate. As the Act authorised the establishment of Lunatic Asylums, an appeal was made to the Governor-General to rescind his order and to sanction the erection of the contemplated Lunatic Asylum. By April 1859, the number of lunatics had increased to 106 and the Grand Jury drew attention to the fact that because of inadequate accommodation, a number of them had to sleep in the workroom without supervision, thus endangering their lives.

## The Second Lunatic Asylum

Later in the year, the Governor-General approved the erection of a new Lunatic Asylum in Singapore. Plans were made for this Asylum to cater for the needs of the whole Straits Settlements. "It is in many respects desirable that all Insane throughout the Straits should be sent to an Institution especially appropriated for the reception of patients of this description where they will be subjected to an uniform course of treatment under the supervision of the Senior Medical Officer, an arrangement not only likely to be attended with beneficial results as respects the number of recoveries effected, but also prove far more economical than the system of establishing a small asylum at each of the different Stations."

In November 1859, the Chief Engineer was ordered to commence work on the new Lunatic Asylum, and to complete it "with the least practicable delay". There were, however, delays as more funds were required as additions and alterations were found necessary during the construction. Another hitch was the water supply. Water from the well sunk in the hospital compound was of bad quality and offensive in smell. Digging deeper did not help and drinking water had eventually to be obtained from wells in a neighbouring sandy ridge, although water from the well in the hospital compound could be used for bathing.

In April 1860, the Grand Jury presented that of the 121 patients in the Lunatic Asylum, there was one woman, who was confined in one of the small cells and exposed to the view of all other inmates. The Jurors suggested that the lack of proper accommodation for females be rectified in the new Asylum. The Senior Surgeon supported their recommendation and in addition asked for a separate ward to be built for "the confinement of lunatics of a higher class", and that a "small but separate compound may be set apart for such cases in the New Asylum." This was not sanctioned.

With all the delays, 1860 did not see the completion of the Lunatic Asylum.

In January 1861, the Grand Jury again presented "the Lunatic Asylum as being a disgrace to the Settlement". This time, they did not comment on the inadequate accommodation knowing that a new building was nearing completion, but concentrated on patient care and the dieting of patients. The Resident Councillor immediately assembled a committee to inquire into the alleged bad state of the Asylum. The Committee visited it, inspected the food and deemed it wholesome, and from the appearance of the inmates considered them to have been well-fed. They concluded that there was no justification for the sweeping statements and severe strictures of the Grand Jury. This time the Governor supported his officials. He also blamed the community for their indifference: "that the present Lunatic Asylum is a disgrace to the Settlement cannot be denied, but for this disgrace, a certain amount of blame is attached to the community at large, who must have been well aware that the want of funds alone prevented the local authorities from authorising the erection of a more suitable building, and should therefore have come forward with liberal contributions to aid in the advancement of a work of real charity." The Governor had apparently forgotten the donation of the Chinese Merchants.

The new Lunatic Asylum was completed in May 1861, and on 23 May 1861, the patients were transferred from the old to the new Asylum. The Senior Surgeon was apparently quite satisfied with the Asylum, for he reported, "The buildings are very well arranged and great attention has been paid to ventilation. The cells are lofty and spacious, but the grounds around the building need draining. We are now laying them out and inducing the patients to assist." He also started planting trees "which will shade the buildings and protect the pa-

tients from the sun". He soon found that 13 attendants were insufficient for the new Asylum and had to ask for three more convicts "until the insane can be taught to do some work". There were no complaints or dissent when this article appeared in the Straits Times of 7 September 1861:

"... The Buildings which stand on the borders of the Race Course comprise the Seamen's, the Police and the Lunatic Hospitals, and have been constructed with all the improvements and conveniences which time and experience have suggested. . . . We now pass on to the enclosure surrounding the Lunatic Hospital which are exactly counterpart in size and outward appearance to the two buildings we have already described (the Seamen's and Police Hospitals). The larger building is allotted to those suffering from the milder forms of derangement. Here everything is kept in the most perfect order and cleanliness, and all appear to be comfortable and well-cared for. The smaller building is divided into cells for the confinement of the more dangerous lunatics. These cells are small but clean and well-ventilated.

It is a strange sight to see the imbeciles of so many nations mixed together. All seemed to be more or less happy. Some have laid out small patches of ground as gardens, and they take great delight in keeping them in order, and are most scrupulous in protecting them from their more mischievous fellow sufferers.

We were at first surprised to find that the accommodation for the lunatics took up as extensive buildings as both the other hospitals, but to hear that the number of lunatics are nearly treble that of all the other patients, we cease however to be astonished at this, when we reflect that the tenants of our medical hospitals, in most cases, recover and are discharged within two or three months of their entry, whereas mental maladies while seldom fatal, are generally permanent, and we meet in the Lunatic Asylum, not the cases collected during a number of months, but the accumulation of years . . ."

However, by January 1862, the Senior Surgeon was already asking for modifications to be made to the Asylum to accommodate Europeans. "There are at present two Europeans under treatment, and one Armenian female suffering under incurable Nymphomania. The accommodation for such cases is very bad, surrounded as they are by natives of all classes, and occasionally confined near criminal lunatics. At a trifling cost to the State, a portion of the compound might be walled off, and accommodation built for some eight patients." There were 127 inmates under treatment then, "employed at making bamboo blinds, in picking oakum; others in the garden, and in keeping the dormitories and grounds in order. Generally speaking, they work cheerfully especially when encouraged by a small allowance of tobacco or present of fruit."

By March 1862, the grounds of the Asylum were already tastefully laid out with shrubs, flowers beds and grass plots, and the Asylum considered to be in excellent order, when Cholera of a most fatal type broke out there. 41 out of the 127 patients fell victims to the disease and 12 died. This was regarded as a small mortality by the Senior Surgeon, "when we consider the class of patients; many refuse all medicines; some requiring to have a dozen persons to force them to take their medicines." He was at a loss to account for this outbreak, for "at the time, the buildings and premises around were in perfect order", but he thought that the Cholera was "caused by the great heat and protracted drought we lately experienced succeeding unusually wet weather. It may be that the subsoil is faulty and needs to be thoroughly drained." (The *Vibrio cholerae* was discovered by Koch in 1884). This he asked to be attended to immediately. The water supply could have been the cause of the Cholera. Although wells had been sunk in the

neighbouring sandy ridge, pure drinking water was not obtained because of percolation of surface water through the conduit bringing the water to the Asylum. By the end of 1862, the defects in the masonry aqueduct were repaired, and excellent water was conveyed into a large covered reservoir in the compound, and pumped into pipes by the patients themselves. This enabled the shower baths to be fully used too, "source of universal benefit to all the patients and a potent auxiliary in the treatment of the insane". The prevailing types of disease were "mania and mono-mania". Many of the former were caused by the use of narcotic drugs and were much more amenable to treatment, which was "the use of the shower bath or cold douche, a careful regimen, the free use of antimony with salines and kind treatment".

In June 1863, it was decided to implement fully the provisions of the Lunacy Act (Act 36 of 1858), and the Resident Councillor, the Commissioner of Police, the Executive Engineer, the Residency Assistant Surgeon and Police Magistrate were appointed Visitors to the Lunatic Asylum *ex officio*. This Act gave wide powers to the Police to admit patients to the Asylum, and as a result many "old emaciated Chinese" and men "perfectly moribund from chronic disease and want" were admitted. The Police were hard pressed to clear the streets and markets of vagrants and those abandoned by their relatives, and found their powers under the Lunacy Act very useful! Not so the Senior Surgeon who reported that in 1864, there were 69 admissions, 46 discharges and 37 deaths and "the mortality has been greater than usual; in many cases, the patients have been almost in a moribund state when brought to the Asylum and sunk from sheer exhaustion". In 1865, the average daily number of inmates was 128, and there were 25 deaths. "nearly all of them were admitted in a more than usually filthy emaciated moribund state." Overcrowding soon became a problem, and orders were issued to Medical Officers "to cause a placard to be suspended in every ward . . . showing the number of cubic and square feet contained in the ward, the number of patients it is calculated to hold, and the number of patients actually admitted, . . . with a view to enabling any overcrowding to be at once detected, and when practicable remedied." To make matters worse the Governor ordered the number of convict orderlies reduced from 15 to 13 in March 1865, and modified their duty hours: "all should be present from 6pm to 8am. One-third should be allowed during the day to absent themselves from their posts for cooking purposes."

Although the Lunacy Act, section 7, empowered the authorities before admitting a lunatic into the Asylum, to require friends and relatives, who could afford to, to pay for the expenses "which may be incurred for the lodging, maintenance, clothing, medicine and care of the lunatic", in practice, only a very few patients paid for their stay. The Government bore the expenses of running the Asylum. In 1865, the lowest tender for the supply of provisions and firewood was 16 cents per day for each European patient, and 6 cents per day for each native patient. Rice was supplied by the Government Commissariat Stores.

The Grand Jury made their last Presentment on the Lunatic Asylum on 18 October 1865:

" . . . the cells resemble places of punishment rather than cure, and contrast most unfavourably with those in the Convict and H.M. Jails, which are intended for the former purposes only. . . . Part of the foundation of this building has given way, and in some instances, the walls have cracked. . . ."

This time, the Grand Jury was ignored by the authorities. Grand Juries in India had just been abolished, and the local authorities saw in this the coming demise of the local Grand Jury (which was abolished by Ordinance VI of 1873 passed on 9 September 1873).

In January 1867, it was proposed that a nurse should be employed in the Lunatic Asylum. This was approved, and for the first time in Singapore's medical history, a female employee worked in the Medical Department. Her salary was 22 Rupees a month, and the reasons for employing her were: "The nurse, though attached to the Lunatic Asylum, would be required to attend equally upon the patients in the adjoining General Hospital as upon Insanes. At present, the only Attendants at both Establishments are male convicts. There are always at one or the other of the two institutions, patients in the female wards, and it is consequently highly desirable for many reasons that a nurse should be entertained for the purpose of taking charge of them."

Since the Grand Jury had been snubbed by the Executive authorities, the Press took upon itself the duty to criticise and express public opinion on the management of the Lunatic Asylum, among other things. The first opportunity came on 1 March 1867, when two lunatics escaped. These two men were confined in the Asylum for murder while of unsound mind. For months they had made themselves useful to the Superintendent in tailoring, gardening and controlling their fellow inmates. A cow-keeper, whilst admitting the Superintendent's cows, had left the back gate open, and the men escaped. The Daily Times wanted to know whether this was a preconceived plan, and demanded an inquiry. The railing around the grounds of the Lunatic Asylum was immediately strengthened. The Governor ordered stricter security measures:

"All criminal lunatics should be kept in irons, and their employment outside the compound wall on any pretence whatever, strictly prohibited. When the lunatic has been confined for some time and appears quiet, the irons should be of a light description such as mere ankle irons. The Police are to be informed immediately a lunatic escaped".

#### The "Transfer" and Change of Policy

The administration of the Straits Settlements was transferred from the India Office to the Colonial Office on 1 April 1867, and the Settlements became a Crown Colony, and had a new Governor, Sir Harry Ord. The transfer was long sought after by the inhabitants of Singapore, especially the mercantile community, as they felt that the Indian Government did not have their interest at heart. On 18 December 1867, the Secretary of State for the Colonies instructed the Governor to submit replies to certain questionnaires on Hospitals and Lunatic Asylums. The Governor replied on 5 June 1868, that he considered the Hospitals and Lunatic Asylums to be properly managed establishments, and informed the Secretary of State that it was intended to use the Lunatic Asylum at Singapore as the hospital for the treatment of all cases of pauper lunacy in the Straits Settlements. An analysis was prepared from the information supplied by the Governor, and he was informed by the Secretary of State on 12 November 1868 that "the state of the Hospitals and Asylums is not such as would have been inferred from a perusal of your despatch". He was instructed to ascertain for himself the state of the hospitals and to submit a report. The Lunatic Asylum was criticised: "The Lunatic Asylum of Singapore consists of four large wards, each capable of holding 25 patients, and 14 cells. One of the wards is going to be broken up into cells. This is probably an inexpedient measure, but the Attendants of a Lunatic Asylum would always be anxious to put as many patients as possible into cells, because they are thereby saved the trouble of pacifying the troublesome." The fact that the Attendants were convicts was also commented on, as were the means of restraint employed (handcuffs and tying to the bed), and the fact that no records were made of such restraints. It was also pointed out that there was no resident doctor, "a condition which the highest authorities

say is indispensable to efficiency". The Governor protested about the "unwarranted assumptions", and was told on 7 July 1869 that there was no intention to charge the medical authorities with a want of principle or neglect of duty. The purpose of the criticisms was to indicate the standard of care expected. Henceforth the Lunatic Asylum was to be managed according to the rules and principles set out in the Digest on Colonial Hospitals and Asylums, a copy of which had been sent to Singapore on 18 December 1867. This Digest had been published on 14 January 1867 by the Colonial Office with the assistance of the Royal College of Physicians and the Commissioners in Lunacy. The Secretary of State added:

"What has been the desire of Her Majesty's Government is that the Colonial authorities concerned should make themselves thoroughly conversant with these rules and principles; should bring the institutions for which they are responsible into conformity with them when conformity is practicable, and should explain the grounds on which they consider in any particular that conformity to them is impracticable or inexpedient owing to local circumstances, taking care always that the conclusions derived from a wide and cumulative experience of such institutions dealt with by the highest professional and scientific authorities in the Empire should not be too lightly set aside in deference to local or individual opinion."

The financial aspects of running the Asylum efficiently, however, had to be solved by the local authorities. Fixed hospital charges were introduced, and the Police were reminded of their duties. The Colonial Secretary sent a circular to the Commissioner of Police on 11 August 1869:

"Commissioners of Police will in all cases where lunatic patients are admitted into Asylums upon their recommendation, enquire and report whether their friends are able to pay for their subsistence, and in such cases, will inform the relatives of the patients that the following rules have been framed by Government for the maintenance of the Lunatic:

For European patients - 30 cents per day.

For Native patients - 15 cents per day.

Payment at these rates to be made monthly in advance.

By His Excellency's command,

R. MACPHERSON,  
Colonial Secretary,  
Straits Settlements."

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*For further information, please contact:*

Ms Jo-Ann Brinkley  
Executive Secretary  
AIDS Society of Asia & the Pacific Division of Medicine  
Prince of Wales Hospital  
Randwick NSW 2031 Australia  
Tel: 612 3992752  
Fax: 612 3989887