

JOHN HASLAM: HIS WILL AND HIS DAUGHTER

by

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A LAST will and testament is often of great biographical importance and may contain information nowhere else available from which details of family, friends and status can be reconstructed; it may be the only record of the exact date of death (and sometimes even of birth) and may provide the only sizeable autograph specimen making possible graphological identification of snippets like presentation inscriptions and other unsigned samples. It may lead also to the discovery of quite unexpected facts. All this applies to the will of John Haslam (1764–1844), an outstanding figure in early nineteenth-century psychiatry. It has not come to light before probably because it is not deposited in the Central Probate Registry at Somerset House but in the Records Department of the London County Council at County Hall, Westminster (Ref. DL/C/405, July 1845, no. 5). It is on sheet 6 of a bundle of ten documents loosely sewn together relating to the granting of probate, identification of handwriting, etc., as detailed below, and is dated 16 June 1831, that is, thirteen years before his death (see Fig. 1).

It appears that at that time Haslam's only surviving near relatives were a daughter 'Henrietta, wife of James Hunter, and her daughter Harriet Eliza (my grand-daughter)'. Although it was known that he had a daughter from the dedication of his book *On the nature of thought*, 1835 to 'Mrs. Hunter, Dundee . . . whose dutiful conduct, and filial affection have rendered a protracted life the subject of consolation, under all its contingent miseries', who she actually was emerges here for the first time. On sheet 1 (Fig. 2), the affidavit made by Mrs. Hunter on 15 July 1845, praying to be granted letters of administration, she is described as a widow 'of Bethlem Hospital, St. Georges Fields' and on sheet 10, a similar printed form granting her letters of administration, as 'the Matron'. Here also is given the exact date of Haslam's death, 20 July 1844, that it took place at 56 Lambs Conduit Street in the Parish of St. George the Martyr, Queen Square, and that his estate 'without deducting any Thing on Account of the Debts due or owing from the said Deceased' as 'Under the Value of One hundred Pounds'.

Doubtless Haslam left so little because after his dismissal from the post of apothecary to Bethlem Hospital in 1816 following the Parliamentary Enquiry he had to eke out a living in private practice which was hardly likely to flourish in the circumstances and in fact never did, if the figure of about a dozen patients sent by him to private madhouses during the years 1830–1 recorded in the *Reports of the Commissioners in Lunacy* (Public Record Office, London, MS) can

C7N
JH
I, John Haslam, M.D. of No 2 Hart Street
Bloomsbury Square do make and constitute
this my last will and testament. I give all
that I may die possessed of (after my just debts
are paid) to be divided share and share alike,
between my daughter Henrietta, wife of James
Hunter, and her daughter Harriet Eliza Hunter,
(my grand-daughter.) I likewise constitute
John Foster Reeve Esq^r Surgeon of Great Ormond
Street, my Executor, and request him to pay my
Daughter's share to herself personally, and to her
likewise, the share appertaining to her daughter
Harriet Eliza, fully assured that her unimpeachable
integrity will make a just distribution.
witness my hand the sixteenth of June
one thousand eight hundred and thirty one.
John Haslam.

Fig. 1
Haslam's Will

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be taken as an indication of the other years.* What little he received in royalties and fees from his medical and occasional literary writings was probably insignificant. His debts may even have exceeded his assets when he died and this may have been the reason why his executor, John Foster Reeve, surgeon of Queen Square, his neighbour, friend and possibly medical attendant† renounced in favour of Mrs. Hunter. The legal formalities of this renunciation take up the second and third sheets and the granting of probate to Mrs. Hunter sheets 4 and 5. Sheet 7 is a formal statement to the effect that Haslam's estate 'was committed and granted' to Mrs. Hunter on 17 July 1845.

Haslam had omitted to have his will witnessed and accordingly, in order to legalize it, it was necessary to have 'his manner and character of handwriting and subscription' attested by two witnesses who 'have frequently seen him write and subscribe his name'. This declaration which fills sheets 8 and 9 was made by Reeve and Sir Alexander Morison (see Fig. 3) and is the mysterious document to which Denis Leigh (*J. Hist. Med.*, 1955, 10, 17-44), in his study of Haslam referred to illustrate the friendship between the two psychiatrists: 'After Haslam's death Morison attested to his signature to some document.' A search of Morison's diaries (Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, MS) showed that he recorded this event on 17 July 1845: 'Made affidavit as to the late Dr. Haslam's signature to his will dated June 1831 being his handwriting.' Indeed, many entries in the diaries confirm that they had been in close contact from 1824. For instance on 14 July 1844, six days before Haslam's death, Morison recorded: 'Called on Dr. Haslam who had his shoulder dislocated and is in a declining state of health.' On the death certificate at Somerset House, registered by a servant on 25 July, the cause is given as 'Debility'. He was eighty years of age.

These three complications, the renunciation of the executorship by Reeve, the granting of it to Mrs. Hunter and the attestation of Haslam's handwriting probably explain the twelve months' delay of probate.

John Haslam junior

In March 1816 during Haslam's evidence before *The Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to consider of Provision being made for the better Regulation*

* So dire were his straits that in June 1816 he submitted an application for financial help to the Court of Governors who 'taking into its consideration the distressed state of Mr. Haslam and his family . . . agreed to enter into an immediate subscription for their relief' (Bethlem Hospital, Governors' Minute Books, MS) and the following month saw the sale of his books (*A catalogue of the entire library of John Haslam*, Leigh & Sotheby, 1816). It may seem at first glance contradictory to find his name inscribed on the list of Governors elected in 1824 in the Great Hall of St. Bartholomew's Hospital where incidentally he claimed to have attended first as 'a student . . . and afterwards House Surgeon' (*Observations of the physician & apothecary of Bethlem Hospital, upon the evidence taken before the Committee of the Hon. House of Commons for regulating mad-houses*, 1816, p. 54) since to be elected required nomination by a Governor and a donation of not less than 50 guineas. On 5 May 1824 'The Treasurer reported that he had received . . . 50 guineas for the use of this Hospital from . . . John Haslam, M.D. of Hart Street, Bloomsbury, nominated by Joseph Maberly, Esq.' On 7 May he was duly elected, and on 19 May received his charge (St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Governors Minute Books, MS).

† Although Reeve is not known to have had any special connexion with insanity, his son styled himself in *The London and Provincial Medical Directory* of 1857 'Inventor of Instrument for administering nourishment to insane persons who refuse food' which he had described in *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 1853, 6, 311-4. This article clearly shows Haslam's influence for he is the only authority quoted and it is therefore possible that John Foster Reeve junior derived his interest in insanity from his father's friend.

of *Madhouses, in England* (Printed by Order 26 April 1816) his son John Haslam junior was briefly examined and deposed that he was a surgeon in the Navy and had occasionally deputized for his father at Bethlem Hospital, although no record of this appears in the General Court or Committee Books of the Hospital. As he does not figure in the Will we wondered what had become of him: inquiry at the Admiralty Record Office revealed that he had entered the Navy in 1812 as a surgeon's mate at Haslar Hospital and died on duty while serving as surgeon in the *Investigator* on 8 May 1824. (His tour as surgeon in the convict ship *Mariner* from April 1816 to August 1817 led to his publishing a twenty-three page pamphlet *Convict ships. A narrative of a voyage to New South Wales*, London, 1819.) The loss of his son must have greatly added to Haslam's many tribulations during these years.

Henrietta Hunter, née Haslam, Matron of Bethlem Hospital

It is surprising that Mrs. Hunter, who figures prominently in *The Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Secretary of State on Bethlem Hospital*, published together with the minutes of evidence for the Governors in 1852 and again by the Commissioners in Lunacy with their observations in 1853, has never been linked with Haslam let alone as his daughter. It must, however, at once be added that nowhere in these printed reports is there any hint who she was, and that it was only the discovery of Haslam's will which led to her identity being disclosed. It is in itself a remarkable fact that his daughter should have become matron of Bethlem Hospital, a post to which she was appointed in 1840, but more remarkable still and a curious repetition of fate that both she and Dr. Edward Thomas Monro, physician to the Hospital, had to resign in consequence of a public inquiry in 1852 just as thirty-six years earlier her father was dismissed from the Hospital together with Monro's father Thomas Monro following the inquiry of 1815-16 already referred to. Incidentally Morison, who was joint physician with Edward Thomas Monro from 1835-52, was pensioned off at the same time, since visiting or consulting physicians were abolished on the creation of the post of resident physician or medical superintendent with clinical charge.

The only biographical information in the *Reports* of 1852 and 1853 about Mrs. Hunter is contained in her remarks addressed to the President and Governors of Bethlem Hospital in August 1852 answering 'certain statements in the Commissioners' Report' when she declared that she had 'devoted above twenty-two years of her life to the service of the mentally afflicted' (*The Observations of the Governors upon the Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Secretary of State, on Bethlem Hospital, with Appendices*, for the Committee, November 1852, p. 101). Accordingly she must have started her career of mental nursing about 1830 and the clue to where she nursed in the first ten years before her appointment to Bethlem is again contained in Morison's diary: on 28 May 1830 he recorded that at the end of a long conversation Haslam 'said his daughter was applying to be Matron of the Dundee Asylum!' which from his exclamation mark seems to have surprised him as much as it does the modern reader.

Armed with this fact and the knowledge that in 1835 Haslam's dedication to

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his daughter, mentioned above, was addressed 'to Mrs. Hunter, Dundee' we wrote to the present medical superintendent of the Dundee Royal Mental Hospital, Dr. I. R. C. Batchelor, who kindly sent us extracts from the Annual Reports of the relevant years.

Extract from the *Tenth Report of the Directors of the Dundee Lunatic Asylum for the Year ending 31st May 1830*, p. 5:

With regard to the lady who has been appointed to the office of Matron, MRS. JAMES HUNTER, it seems almost superfluous to remark, that her greatest recommendation, in the judgment of the Directors, is the experience which she has had in all the detail and minutiae of lunatic institutions from her very infancy, Mrs. Hunter being the daughter of Dr. Haslam, late Surgeon-Apothecary at Bethlem Hospital, and author of one of the best treatises on insanity which has been hitherto published. But, in addition to the advantages which, it is reasonably to be presumed, Mrs. Hunter must have derived from the instructions of her father, she furnished, as a farther proof of her fitness for the situation for which she was a candidate, the most satisfactory certificates of being a lady of kind feelings, amiable temper and good judgment. . . .

Extract from the *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Directors of the Dundee Royal Asylum for Lunatics, for the Year ending 15th June 1841*, p. 4:

The occurrence of the great interest and importance under the management of 1840, was the resignation, on the part of Mrs. Hunter, of the office which she had filled for the ten preceding years. . . . In less than twelve months after Mrs. Hunter had entered upon office, the wards of the female patients had assumed a different appearance; the servants became industrious and active, and attentive to the wants and comforts of those who were in so great a degree dependent on their good behaviour; and a spirit of affection and respect for the Matron, that had never been exhibited before, was diffused generally throughout the Establishment. The system of vigilance, regularity and order, with which Mrs. Hunter began her superintendence was maintained with increased good effect throughout the whole of her incumbency. So that when it was known at the close of 1839 that she was about to be removed to a more extended sphere of professional usefulness, serious apprehensions were entertained that her removal would prove an irreparable loss to the Institution. . . .

Here then was Mrs. Hunter's history pieced together from various sources. That her antecedents remained unknown for so long is perhaps not a coincidence, but suggests a conspiracy of silence when she was appointed to Bethlem Hospital—doubtless intended to save her embarrassment and shield her from prejudice. The Minute Books of Bethlem Hospital merely record her appointment without reference to her previous career, maiden name or sponsors (we owe this information to Mr. R. A. Swain, Bursar, King Edward's School, Witley, Surrey, where the Bethlem Records are housed).

The question remains why Haslam made his will in 1831: we were inclined to think his wife might have died at this time and searched the registers of St. George's, Bloomsbury, deposited at the London County Record Office. But there is no mention of her, neither does she figure in Morison's diaries though he describes frequent visits to Haslam's house. It must be presumed therefore that she died before 1825—the earliest date searched. We did, however, find recorded in the Burial Register and Searchers Reports of the parish the death of Haslam's father, John Haslam senior, on 19 March 1829, aged 92 of 'old age'; and that of Henrietta Hunter, presumably his oldest granddaughter, on 15 June 1829, aged seven of scarlet fever—both resident at his address.

Sketches in Bedlam

The specimen of handwriting provided by Haslam's will is of value for exact graphological comparisons and as such may be used as evidence in the controversy surrounding the authorship of that notorious anonymous account of the inmates of Bethlem Hospital, *Sketches in Bedlam*, first published in 1823. Leigh (*loc. cit.*) claimed that the persistent rumour that Haslam was its author was substantiated by the presentation inscription from the author in a copy of this book in the library of the Maudsley Hospital which he illustrated in his article and which he believed to be in Haslam's handwriting. The question of whether or not Haslam was the author is of more than academic or bibliographical interest since far from being a matter of credit it is so coarse and indiscreet, not to say objectionable, that it throws a damning light on the character of whoever wrote it. It is therefore only fair to Haslam, who suffered sufficiently by his own admissions before the Parliamentary Committee, to absolve him if possible from further and unjustified denigration. The reader will form his own judgment but to us it seems that comparison of the handwritings in Leigh's Fig. 2—the inscription claimed to be Haslam's—with that in our Fig. 1 which is Haslam's shows unmistakable differences which cannot be accounted for by variations of one hand (this is most clearly seen in the R and B and the different formation of r in the two specimens).

That *Sketches in Bedlam* was not by Haslam but by a still unidentified author also agrees better with the internal evidence of the book since the preliminary pages are devoted to extolling the improvements in the Hospital's management which were made as the result of the 'long, minute, and patient investigation carried on through successive sessions by a Parliamentary Committee' (*Sketches*, p. viii)—such were hardly Haslam's feelings about the events which caused his downfall. In addition the case histories are complete to the year of publication, 1823, and the 'Recommendatory attestations, selected from several hundred inserted in the visitors' book' which are reproduced, all date from after Haslam's departure in 1816. The book must therefore have been the work of a 'Constant Observer' on the spot—the pseudonym on the title-page. Further absolving evidence is provided by a two page review of the book in *The Literary Gazette* (19 July 1823), a journal with which Haslam was on the best of terms and whose editor William Jerdan was his friend, in which it was denounced as 'at once a revolting book, a disgrace upon public sense, decency and feeling'. Such language would not have been used had Haslam been the author, since not only had he been a contributor of reviews himself for some years but in the very next issue (26 July) commenced a series of light-hearted skits on society entitled 'The Barley-Corn Club' which Jerdan revealed later 'were from, and principally by' Haslam (*The Autobiography of William Jerdan*, 1853. London; Hall, Virtue; 3, p. 279). Indeed that the book was reviewed at all in *The Literary Gazette* and at such length in such scathing tones by someone obviously familiar with the subject makes it much more likely that Haslam, so far from being the author of *Sketches in Bedlam* was, in fact, the author of the review.