

Northamptonshire Record Office holds the records of the Northampton County Lunatic Asylum, otherwise known as Berrywood, and later called St. Crispin Hospital. It was opened on 30 June 1876 as the pauper lunatic asylum for Northamptonshire with 61 male and 54 female patients. It was located in the parish of Upton and to the west of the larger village of Duston. The Asylum was three miles west of Northampton.

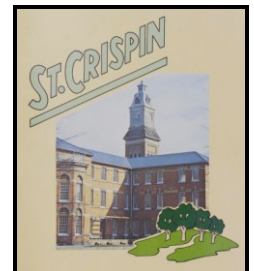
Previously pauper lunatics had been taken in by the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, close to Northampton, just off the Billing Road, which had opened in 1838. That asylum was by the late 1860s considered too small to take all the pauper patients as well as the private fee paying patients. The Commissioners in Lunacy were also unhappy that the Asylum was governed by an independent board of directors. In 1870 they had recommended that the county build a separate asylum for pauper patients. In 1878 the General Lunatic Asylum, having become a purely private asylum, changed its name to St. Andrew's Hospital. It still functions today as the largest and one of the most prestigious independent psychiatric hospitals in the country.

The site for the County Lunatic Asylum at Berrywood was purchased by the county in August 1871. The architect of the Asylum was the County Surveyor of Staffordshire, Robert Griffiths and the contractors were Messrs. Smith Bros. of Northampton. The striking architecture was even used as a location of an episode of Dr Who, starring Tom Baker, in the 1970s!

In March 1915 the asylum took in 193 patients from the Birmingham City Asylum at Rubery Hill when that institution was made into a war hospital for wounded soldiers. The War Office soon required more beds so in July 1915 the County Council offered the asylum as an additional war hospital. Patients were dispersed to other asylums in the Midlands and the Duston War Hospital was opened at the end of October. It continued at Berrywood until March 1919, the patients arriving back at the end of November. By 1940 the hospital was able to accommodate 1,066 patients. After the War the asylum became known as the County Mental Hospital. The hospital was nationalised, along with other similar Victorian institutions, following the introduction of the NHS in 1948. It finally closed in 1995.

The Records

As well as records relating to the management of the Hospital, including the work of the Management Committee and its various sub-committees, the Committee of Visitors, the Treasurer, Medical Superintendent, Tutor, Chaplain and Farm Bailiff, we also hold records relating to the nursing staff, such as wage books, and to the patients.



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The Record Office also holds many useful records for those tracing ancestors who were patients at St Crispin's Hospital. Below are the details of the admission registers and case books we hold.

Admission Registers provide details of the sex, status, occupation, abode, chargeable and certifying authority, form of disorder and cause, bodily condition, duration of attack and date of discharge, and the removal or death of patients. The Record Office has the following admission registers

- Registers of admissions (pauper) for 1876-1891 and 1897-1906
- Registers of admissions (private) for 1876-1906

Case books provide the following information: details of patients on admission - followed by a day to day report of the patient. Photographs of patients on admission, from 1900, and also on discharge (if applicable). Case books have their own individual indexes at the front of each volume.

The Record Office has the following case books

- Female case books (14 volumes) covering the years 1876-1911
- Male case books (13 volumes) covering the years 1876 – 1910

How can I access these records?

Records over 100 years old are on open access, and can be viewed in our Search Room. Please be aware, however, that some of the records in the St Crispin's archive are very fragile, so please contact us in advance of a visit to discuss whether the document you require can be accessed.

Records under 100 years old are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act, 1998, and if you wish to obtain information from patient records less than 100 years old, we have a procedure in place, which includes a research request form, to help you obtain the information you require.

Before we can proceed with obtaining information from patient records that are less than 100 years old, we need to have proof that the patient has died, as the Data Protection Act applies only to living individuals. Ideally, we would need a copy of a death certificate. The death certificate is a very useful source of information to those researching their family history, and we recommend obtaining a copy of this certificate as part of the research process. If you are not sure how to obtain a copy of a death certificate, Record Office staff will be happy to advise you on how to proceed.

1. If you are unable to supply a copy of the death certificate, and the patient died in the hospital, we can carry out an initial search of the relevant death register, assuming it has survived, to confirm the person has died. The fee for this would be £5.00 per register, and you will need to provide a focus of up to 5 years to search. If more than one register needs to be searched then an additional charge of £5.00 will be made per register. Once we have established from the registers that the person has died, you can book further research at our standard rate of £24.00 per hour. If there is no entry stating the person has died, then we cannot proceed without proof of death, and there is no refund of the £5.00 search fee.
2. If you are unable to supply a copy of the death certificate, and the patient was born over 100 years ago but did not die in the hospital, we can search the admission register, assuming it has survived, to confirm the date of birth. The fee for this would be £5.00 per register, and you will need to provide a focus of up to 5 years to search. If more than one register needs to be searched then an additional charge of £5.00 will be made per register. Once we have established from the registers that the person was born over 100 years ago, you can book further research at our standard rate of £24.00 per hour. If there is no entry stating the person was born over 100 years ago, then we cannot proceed without proof of the birth date, or evidence that the patient has died, and there is no refund of the £5.00 search fee.
3. If you are unable to supply a copy of the death certificate, and the patient was born over 100 years ago, then we will accept a copy of the birth certificate as proof of this, as we assume a lifespan of 100 years. However, if there is any uncertainty that the birth certificate relates to the patient being researched because, for example, the details do not correspond to information we find while researching, then we will not be able to proceed without further evidence that the person has died.

Please be aware that if the patient did not die in the hospital, and they were not born over 100 years ago, then we will not be able to proceed without a copy of the death certificate. Also, even if the patient has died, we may still not be able to release all of the information from their records if it includes Third Party information.

What is third party information?

This term refers to information about other individuals mentioned in a document. For example, a report on person A might also contain personal information about Mr B and Mrs C. In this example person A is known as the Data Subject, and the information about Mr B and Mrs C would be third-party information.

Northamptonshire Record Office's contact details

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