

psychiatry, that the method shown in the movie is a travesty of ECT as practised today.

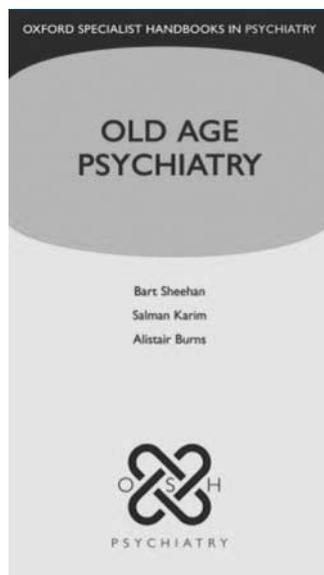
Nowadays, the use of a professional anaesthetist is mandatory, as is the use of a muscle relaxant to obviate skeletal fractures. Further, there are universally available standardised electrical machines to replace the original hit-and-miss version.

Although the success of ECT in the treatment of depression is established beyond doubt, the sad fact remains that we have not the slightest incontrovertible evidence of how it works. In other words, it remains empirical and it also remains that empiricism is an offence against pure science.

However, as the concluding chapters indicate, there are pointers along which progress can be made.

Henry R. Rollin c/o Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG, UK. Email: serian@rcpsych.ac.uk

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.109.070003



Oxford Specialist Handbooks in Psychiatry: Old Age Psychiatry

By Bart Sheehan, Salman Karim & Alistair Burns.
Oxford University Press.
2009. £34.95 (hc). 232pp.
ISBN: 9780199216529

This handbook is a rare thing – a pocket-book that fits into real pockets. This concise volume should be useful to a range of readers. It could be read cover to cover by medical students on a 2-week placement in old age psychiatry. Topics likely to crop up for junior doctors on call in psychiatry or general medicine are dealt with in a very practical way, such as managing an older person after an overdose or the management of delirium in a general hospital setting.

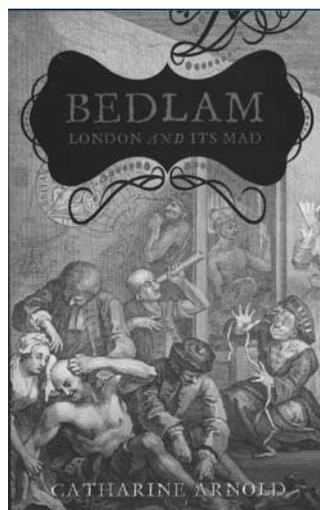
The nine chapters include basic topics such as dementia, delirium and mood disorders, but wider issues, such as services or ethical and legal issues, are also allowed consideration. Sections on differential diagnosis of dementia and the range of ways in which late-life depression can present are particularly well done. Space is also found for the neurobiology of late-life mental disorder as well as areas of scientific development within the field, for instance vascular depression, and hot topics in service provision, such as ‘Are antipsychotics dangerous in dementia?’

On closer inspection, one or two topics could be improved. Trainees might value a more comprehensive list of possible causes of delirium and the advice on maintenance treatment of depression seems slightly woolly. There is little room to include case examples in a book of this format and one wonders whether most of them will go unread.

In summary, the authors are to be applauded in their efforts to produce a book which is practical yet stimulating and has so little impact on our planet’s scarce resources.

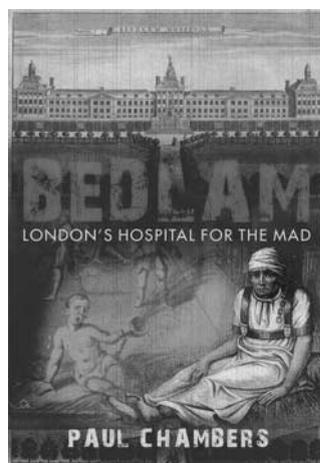
John Cuthill Consultant for Older Adults, Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline KY12 0SU, UK. Email: jcuthill@nhs.net

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.077255



Bedlam: London and Its Mad

By Catharine Arnold.
Simon & Schuster UK. 2009.
£7.99 (pb). 320pp.
ISBN: 9781847390004



Bedlam: London's Hospital for the Mad

By Paul Chambers.
Ian Allen Publishing. 2009.
£19.99 (hb). 304pp.
ISBN: 9780711033870

Whereas *The History of the Bethlem Hospital*¹, though excellent, is both expensive and difficult to procure, we have here two accessible books on a similar theme, with the more lurid term ‘Bedlam’ used as the key attention attractor.

Catherine Arnold, having previously written about London’s Victorian cemeteries in *Necropolis*,² has an ear for a good story. She starts in the 13th century with Simon Fitzmary, who, possibly inspired by an angel whispering in his ear but also somewhat of a political operator, gave over land north of St Botolph’s at Bishopsgate, where Liverpool Street Station is now, for the foundation of a charitable priory dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Bethlehem (hence ‘Bethlem’ and its derivative ‘Bedlam’). The monks soon fell on hard times, however, and by the next century had to appeal to the mayor for funds. The focus on the mad arose in the 1370s when King Richard II ordered the priory to take in the lunatics, then being looked after at Stone House near Charing Cross, as he considered them to be too near his palace. An early