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psychiatry in pictures

Untitled pictures (date unknown) by Denis Reed (1917–1979)



Denis Reed was a patient in Glenside Psychiatric Hospital in Bristol during the 1950s and 1960s. These two images portray everyday life in the hospital from the patients' perspective. A sensitive and skilled artist, Reed evokes the atmosphere and activities of the institution. His sketchy, transparent style is reminiscent of Toulouse-Lautrec.

Glenside was originally the Bristol Lunatic Asylum, which had opened in 1861 to take patients from the lunatic wards of St Peter's Hospital. By 1910 it was enlarged to accommodate the increasing numbers of patients being admitted. During the First World War it became a military hospital and provided 1460 beds for war casualties. Sir Stanley Spencer drew on his experience as an orderly there to create the paintings that now adorn the Sandham Memorial Chapel. Although a second mental hospital, Barrow Hospital, was opened in 1939, Bristol Mental Hospital became overcrowded during the Second World War and remained so in post-War years, with a high proportion of long-stay patients. In 1959, following the Mental Health Act, Bristol Mental Hospital was renamed Glenside Hospital. Glenside Museum is situated in the former Chapel at Glenside. It was set up by Dr Donal Early. Together with the collection of paintings by Denis Reed, it houses a permanent exhibition of hospital life between 1940 and 1980. For further information see www.glensidemuseum.org.uk

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