

Psychiatry in pictures

EDITED BY ALLAN BEVERIDGE

Do you have an image, preferably accompanied by 100 to 200 words of explanatory text, that you think would be suitable for Psychiatry in Pictures? Submissions are very welcome and should be sent direct to Dr Allan Beveridge, Queen Margaret Hospital, Whitefield Road, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0SU, UK.



The Worship of Bacchus (detail) (1860–1862). George Cruikshank (1792–1878)

In this huge canvas, which has been hailed as an eccentric masterpiece of Victorian art, George Cruikshank summed up his passionately held beliefs about the social ills caused by heavy drinking. He aimed to convert his audience to total abstinence. The vast array of scenes was designed to illustrate the multiple and disastrous consequences of partaking in alcohol. As Upstone has written: ‘The painting is a dense network of vignettes, presided over by the statue of Bacchus, the Roman God of wine and drunken revelry . . . At Bacchus’s foot, brewers and distillers dispense drink to the crowds, who, losing control, riot madly . . . Ranged along the horizon are all the institutions to which alcohol provides inmates: the ragged school, workhouse, prison, asylum, Magdalen Hospital for prostitutes, and the cemetery’ (Robert Upstone (2001) *George Cruikshank’s The Worship of Bacchus*. London: Tate Publishing). Cruikshank presented a nightmare vision of a society reduced to chaos by alcoholic excess. He dismissed genetic theories as postulated by Francis Galton and held that individuals had the potential to change their behaviour. Curiously, after he died, legal papers revealed that Cruikshank’s estate included a collection of wine, which raises the possibility that, despite all his temperance work, he may have been a secret drinker. This image concludes the series of Cruikshank’s work presented in the *Journal* since the January 2006 issue. Thanks to Tate Britain for permission to reproduce this image, and to Dr Bruce Ritson.