

## **Nervous Women: Two centuries of women and their psychiatrists.**

**ISHRAD Symposium Oct 2012** Dr Guislain Museum ,Ghent ,Belgium

By Dr Arpan K Banerjee Chairman British Society for the History of Radiology

The Museum of Dr Guislain may not necessarily be on everyone's to visit list when making a trip to the picturesque medieval city of Ghent in Belgium but this would mean missing out on experiencing one of the world's finest museum on the history of psychiatry. Dr Josef Guislain (1797-1860) was one of Ghent's most famous medical sons. He was a pioneering psychiatrist who unshackled psychiatry patients in Ghent following the example of Pinel at the Salpêtrière in Paris. The site of the museum is the Guislain Hospice, the first mental hospital in Belgium. The museum houses an extensive collection of exhibits and artefacts pertaining to the history of psychiatry as well as a fine gallery devoted to the history of neuroradiology. It also hosts unusual art exhibitions on themes relating to madness and art produced by the mentally ill.

In October 2012 it hosted a fascinating exhibition for several months entitled Nervous Women-two centuries of women and their psychiatrists. The exhibition takes inspiration from the book by Lisa Appignanesi *Bad, Mad and Sad*. The exhibition is about how psychiatry has dealt with women over the last 200 years. The exhibition uses 8 case studies to illustrate the way society and psychiatry have evolved in dealing with mental health issues in women and these are all complemented by unusual works of art to illustrate the themes running through the exhibition.

Philippe Pinel the famous French physician of the late eighteenth century was in charge of the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris from 1795 and involved in treating Mericourt nicknamed 'the panther' who was a female revolutionary fighter in the French revolution and this case illustrates the links between political beliefs and the medical labelling of these people as insane, something that is still happening in some countries in the twentyfirst century.

The cases used also include the famous French neurologist J-M Charcot and his most famous patient with hysteria Augustine. Charcot made hysteria almost

fashionable in the late nineteenth century and the case of Augustine illustrates the link between theatricality and psychiatry as never before and resulted in Augustine acquiring the title of Sarah Bernhardt of the asylum.

Sigmund Freud and his famous patient Anna O are illustrated along with the beginnings of psychoanalysis. Anna O went on to become empowered and became involved in the feminist movement in Austria.

Marilyn Monroe and her psychotherapist Ralph Gregson are included in the exhibition. Marilyn Monroe illustrates the complex sexual ambiguities and insecurities in the iconic Hollywood actress.

Even the antipsychiatry champion R D Laing and his patient Mary Barnes are used to illustrate the counter culture movement of the post 60's era. The walls of the exhibition are filled with unusual pictures including a nineteenth century educational illustration of the 13 different tasks performed by women (multitasking is not a new concept).

In this exhibition the changing fashions of psychiatry through the last two centuries and the changing roles of women from being oppressed in the nineteenth century to greater freedoms and life choices in the twentieth centuries (not necessarily without their own different set of problems) provide a provocative and challenging food for thought for the interested visitor.

On 27/28 October 2012, the museum was host to the second ISHRAD international meeting organised by the distinguished radiology historian Rene van Tiggelen. A variety of talks primarily on the history of radiology as pertaining to Belgium including the modalities of ultrasound, CT and MRI and radiotherapy were presented in addition to talks on military radiology during World War 1. Delegates were able to see this exhibition in addition to being given a tour around the neuroradiology galleries which displayed a fascinating collection of items of great interest to medical historians. Several members of the British Society for the History of Radiology attended this meeting and all commented on what an interesting time everyone had.

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