

Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD

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 Professor Robert Howard, Box 070, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF, UK.



Annie Altschul teaching psychiatric nurses, 1950s, Bethlem Hospital

There was no more important figure in the development of psychiatric nursing in postwar Britain than Annie Altschul (1919–2001). Having fled her native Austria under threat of Nazi occupation, she spent the war in London, training in general nursing and midwifery, then gained psychiatric nursing qualifications at Mill Hill Emergency Hospital, to where Maudsley Hospital staff had been evacuated. Of Mill Hill she later wrote: ‘I found an excitement about the work that I had not encountered before. Everybody was expected to make a contribution. The staff, both doctors and nurses, were very keen to learn and every patient was regarded as interesting and someone from whom we could learn a lot. I worked with people I had only read about until then, Dr Maxwell Jones, Dr William Sargant and Dr Emanuel Miller and each of them made a considerable impression on me’ (quoted by Peter Nolan (1993) in *A History of Mental Health Nursing*. London: Chapman & Hall). Returning to the Maudsley after the war, and while still in her twenties, she became involved in nursing education, progressing in due course to the rank of Principal Tutor at the then-merged Bethlem and Maudsley Hospitals. She relinquished this post to join Edinburgh University’s Department of Nursing Studies in 1964, and chaired that department from 1976 until her retirement in 1983. Annie Altschul was a Socratic teacher of the old school, an active researcher, and a pioneer writer on – and robust advocate for – the role of the psychiatric nurse. She inspired and challenged a generation of students. In retirement, she courageously documented her own struggle with and treatment for clinical depression, maintaining that ‘I was lucky in my encounter with the psychiatric services and in my choice of colleagues and friends’, while admitting that ‘I must have been a difficult patient to care for’ (Vicky Rippiere & Ruth Williams (1985) *Wounded Healers: Mental Health Workers’ Experiences of Depression*. Chichester: Wiley). She died, aged 82, on Christmas Eve 2001. Photograph reproduced by permission of Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives & Museum. With thanks to Colin Gale (Archivist, Archives & Museum, Bethlem Royal Hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 3BX, UK; tel: 020 8776 4053) for supplying the image and text.