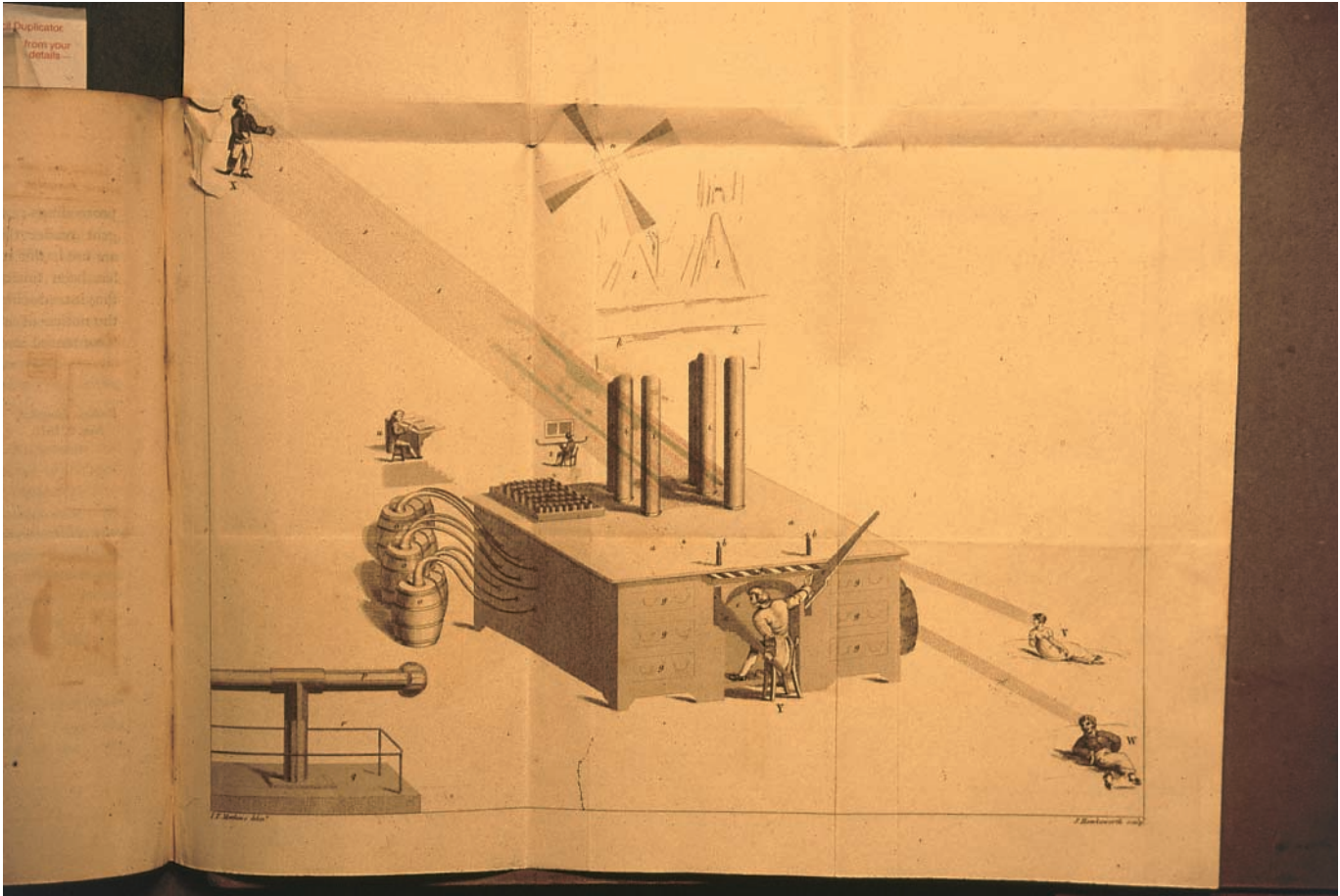


Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD



The Air-Loom (1810)

James Tilly Matthews (died 1815) became something of a celebrity patient in Bethlem. A tea-broker, he decided in 1792 to act as an uninvited go-between on behalf of the French to try and prevent the outbreak of war with Britain. Amazingly, he managed to convince the French that a set of eccentric and spurious peace terms were authentic. After failing to convince the government in London that the French government's response was real, he returned to France and was quickly arrested on suspicion of spying. By 1796 his French captors, unsure whether he was "a clever spy or a dangerous lunatic", had decided to release him. He returned to London where he interrupted a debate in the House of Commons by shouting "Treason". He was committed to Bethlem on 28 January 1797, and from then until his death in a private asylum in Hackney his family campaigned unsuccessfully for his release on the grounds that he was sane. John Haslam, apothecary to Bethlem, wrote the book *Illustrations of Madness* (1810) in order once and for all to settle the dispute about Matthews' mental health. The book contains a verbatim account of Matthews' delusional beliefs and hallucinatory experiences and stands as the original description of all the positive symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. The illustration was drawn by Matthews and shows the members of his gang of persecutors and the "Air-Loom" that they use to transmit their thoughts and influence to him from the basement of the hospital. While (presumably) Matthews is held in the mesmeric warp of the loom, the Middleman works the controls and is pictured in the act of "lobster cracking" his victim. Other gang members, with colourful names like Sir Archy or the Glove Woman, work as "repeaters or active worriers" to enhance the torture or are involved in recording the activities of the machine.



2001: A Mind Odyssey is a celebration of the arts, psychiatry and the mind. For further information see <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/campaigns/2001/> or e-mail: awedderburn@rcpsych.ac.uk