

## Broadmoor Revealed: Some patient stories

### Richard Dadd (1817-1886)

For many years, Dadd has been perhaps the most celebrated Victorian resident of Broadmoor. He was born on 1 August 1817 in Chatham, the son of a chemist, Robert, and his wife Mary. Richard was the fourth of seven children, a total of four of whom died insane.

Dadd's father was an intellectual man, the first curator of the Chatham and Rochester Literary and Philosophical Institution's museum, and Dadd himself attended The King's School at Rochester. When he was seventeen, the family moved to London, and at nineteen he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools where he completed his training as an artist.

Dadd was influenced by literary and classical themes, and in the early 1840s had begun to create the fairy paintings for which he would become best known. His work attracted the patronage of Sir Thomas Phillips, a solicitor from South Wales who had been knighted for his part in ending a Chartist riot. Phillips wished to undertake the Grand Tour of classical sites across Europe, and he wanted Dadd to accompany him and draw what they saw.

They began their journey in July 1842, travelling through Belgium, Germany and Switzerland before reaching Italy, then moving on to Greece, Turkey and Palestine. Dadd seemed to enjoy the tour, and wrote various letters home detailing his wonderful experiences. He was fascinated both by the scenery he encountered and the people he met, and a record of these compositions appears to have remained locked within him during his years of treatment. Decades later he would bring them out to influence the works he completed in Bethlem and Broadmoor.

Although the tour itself was meeting expectations, by the time they reached Egypt Dadd had begun to exhibit signs of mental illness. His mind had been untethered and was running free across a new spiritual landscape. He was soaking up the culture of ancient Egypt, and this was to influence his belief structure for the rest of his life. Dadd appears to have been aware of his increasingly weak grip on reality, and some of his letters hint at an effort to try and rationalise the source of his feelings. His health seems to have deteriorated very quickly from this point. He and Phillips crossed to Malta and then to Italy again, and by now he was reporting regular delusions. He would later describe his first irrational impulse to the staff at Bethlem and Broadmoor - his desire to kill the Pope at a public appearance in Rome, an impulse he resisted as he felt the Pope was too well protected.

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When they reached Paris again in May 1843, Sir Thomas sent for a doctor to examine his travelling companion, and Dadd was duly sent home. Phillips wrote to the family that Dadd's character had completely changed to become suspicious and withdrawn. Over the summer friends and family became increasingly worried about him and wary of him. A doctor consulted by the family recommended that Dadd was committed and put under restraint. His father was reluctant to agree. This was to be the last act before Dadd took matters into his own hands. On 28<sup>th</sup> August 1843 Dadd asked his father to accompany him to an inn at Cobham. After enjoying a meal together, they walked to Cobham Park, where Dadd attacked and killed his father, first trying to cut his throat with a razor, and finally stabbing him with a knife.

Dadd was aware that he had done something wrong, even if he wasn't exactly sure who or what it was that he had killed. He fled to France. He later stated that he was on his way to kill the Emperor of Austria, but whatever the truth in that, only two days after killing his father he attacked a complete stranger who was his travelling companion, while riding in a carriage through a French forest. He was arrested by the French authorities and identified himself as a wanted man for the Cobham killing.

Initially he was sent to a succession of French asylums, having been certified insane, before he was extradited to England in July 1844. He never stood trial for the murder of his father, but was found insane when he came to plead. He was duly given the HMP order - to be detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure - and sent to the criminal lunatic wing at Bethlem on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1844. Records of his time at Bethlem are available at the Bethlem Royal Hospital archives.

It was only after he had been received into custody that some explanation came as to Dadd's motive for his acts. When he was arrested in France, the police had found on him a list of 'people who must die', with his father's name at the top. A search of his lodgings in England had uncovered various portraits of his friends, all with a bloody slash from the artist added across their throats. Notes from his stay at Clermont Asylum in France indicated that Dadd believed that his father was the devil, and that he had been commanded by the Egyptian god Osiris to kill him and other people. This was a delusion that he maintained once he was in Bethlem, that he was on a mission to battle the devil - who could take many forms - and that he himself was descended from Osiris.

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Almost immediately that he was confined to Bethlem, Dadd began to paint again, something he would continue to do for the next forty years. He appears to have been very insular during his time at Bethlem, and did not associate much with other patients. However, he formed a close bond with one of the doctors, Charles Hood, and with steward George Haydon, the same steward that Edward Oxford had also written to years after his release. Hood was a reformer who sought to create Bethlem as a refuge for its patients. Haydon was a writer and artist as well as being a steward of lunatic asylums, and had spent time in Australia as a youth. It seems reasonable to assume that Dadd found some encouragement from them both.

As for Edward Oxford, the Broadmoor case notes repeat some observations on the patient made at Bethlem in 1854: 'For some years after his admission he was considered a violent and dangerous patient for he would jump up and strike a violent blow without any aggravation and then beg pardon for the deed. This arose from some vague idea that filled his mind, and still does so to a certain extent, that certain spirits have the power of possessing a mans body and compelling him to adopt a particular course whether he will or no.' He was reported to binge eat until he vomited, and otherwise behave eccentrically, believing that he was a special one.

Also like Oxford, Dadd was amongst the Bethlem patients who were transferred to Broadmoor when the latter opened. Dadd made the great trek to the country on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1864, a few days short of his 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. At the prescribed initial examination of a new patient, his tongue was recorded as being 'broad and flabby'. He was still convinced of his delusions - 'Makes laboured attempts at justification of the two criminal assaults saying it was in "justification of the Deity".'

He settled in to his new accommodation quickly, and soon began painting again. By November 1864 his case notes record that he was engaged in a detailed fairy painting. He received money from his family regularly, and in the patients' account books kept by the Hospital his signature records his receipt of brushes and board that he purchased for his work. These accounts also record many purchases of foods with strong flavours - possibly to offset the more bland asylum menu - such as herrings, gingerbread and peppermints.

His notes regularly state his seeming contentment, as well as the continuation of his delusions. One conversation with Dadd written up by Dr William Orange, the second Medical Superintendent of Broadmoor (and whose portrait Dadd painted), was on the subject of chess, and how the pieces can be either friendly or unfriendly to the player depending on the spirit associated with the player.

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He suffered from gout from time to time - though also kept up an intake of wine and spirits - and was placed in the Asylum infirmary during the summer of 1868. He was evidently unwell for some time, as by 1870 he is recorded as having lost three stone over the past two years. However, he regained his health and by 1872 had begun to paint decorations around the stage in Broadmoor's Central Hall, which he continued for several years. Dr Orange's son also remembers Dadd painting a mural along one wall in the Superintendent's house, work which, like most of the Hall decorations, is now lost.

In 1877 Dr Orange records a detailed conversation about the murder of Dadd's father. Dadd was not convinced that the man he killed was his father, but had been convinced at the time that the gods required him to make a sacrifice. Dadd was able to describe the murder scene, and his reaction when his father fell: 'Dadd (posing himself with upstretched arm), thus apostrophised the stary bodies "Go," said he "& tell the great god Osiris that I have done the deed which is to set him free."' Dadd also states that the attack in France had been brought about by his observation that two stars in the constellation of ursa major were moving closer together, thus convincing him that a further sacrifice was demanded by the ancient gods.

But despite his continuing delusions, Dadd was evidently no bother to the medical authorities. He remained insane, but in other respects was simply becoming another old man. No entries were made on his case from 1878 until 1885, when he was removed to the infirmary in Broadmoor's block 3 with what proved to be his final illness. Dadd had spent his first years in Broadmoor in Block 3, part of the Hospital's original buildings. There is evidence to suggest that he was later moved to Block 2, the 'parole' block, where the better behaved patients were allowed more freedom, both of movement and to plan their own days.

We know that it was to Block 3 that he returned in June 1885, and he stayed in the infirmary from then until his death on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> January 1886, aged 68, from consumption. He is buried at Broadmoor. He outlived most of his immediate family, though there are a few papers in his Broadmoor file which relate to the dispersal of his estate. The file adds that various letters from solicitors had been taken by the Broadmoor steward - sadly never to return to the file.

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Dadd's reputation was recognised during his lifetime, though due to his situation he was not particularly celebrated and only rarely exhibited. His passing was not noted at the time of his death, and it was only in 1974 that a major exhibition of his work was first curated, at The Tate. A substantial collection of his work is held at the Bethlem Royal Hospital Museum in south east London, which includes a number of paintings that remained at Broadmoor after Dadd's death. One of his most significant works from Bethlem, *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, is on permanent display at Tate Britain in London. A lost work, *The Artists' Halt in the Desert*, was discovered in 1987 during filming for the BBC's Antiques Roadshow and is now in The British Museum.

### Sources:

Notes about Dadd at Broadmoor were taken from the relevant case books (D/H14/D2/1/1/1 and D2/1/3/1), and his case file (D/H14/D2/2/1/130), here at the Berkshire Record Office. Entries for purchases made by Dadd can be found in the patients' account book (D/H14/D3/3/1/1).

There are various books available about Dadd. The two which brought him back to attention are:

*Richard Dadd*, by Patricia Allderidge, Academy, 1974

*Richard Dadd: the Rock and Castle of Seclusion*, by David Greysmith, Macmillan, 1973.

There are also various sources of information about Dadd online. If you want to jump straight to his wikipedia entry then it is at

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Dadd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dadd). The collection of Dadd art held at

Bethlem Royal Hospital Museum can be viewed at

<http://www.bethlemheritage.org.uk/gallery/pages/LDB867-1.asp>.