

The words 'such tender years' were taken from a letter within a certificate for a three-year-old boy at the time of his admission to a lunatic asylum, as a 'person of unsound mind'. It's also the title of a new book covering the admission of over 100 under 14-year-olds to lunatic asylums in Leicestershire many decades ago. More than 20 of the youngsters were aged six years and under.

The book's author, Diane Lockley, has written for *The Psychologist* about life in Leicestershire's first lunatic asylum (see 'Looking back', June 2012: tinyurl.com/houseofcure). She has been scouring the medical records, which outline the detailed diagnosis – both clinical and mental – which took place at the time of entry. 'Line after line of individual case book entries gave clear insights into the various patterns of treatment,' she says. 'Warm relationships with both staff and fellow patients helped to make the new environment a form of home from home. Everything was generally done to ensure that time within the walls was as well spent as possible.'

From the turn of the century, the admissions usually included a photograph. Lockley says that 'the images

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Images courtesy of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, with commentary by Diane Lockley

inevitably draw any reader closer to the young patients. It is questionable as to whether any of the youngsters were prepared for the studio camera session, as at times the cropped hairstyles and the uniformity of the clothing led to them already having a rather institutionalised appearance. A couple appear to be delighted to be posing in front of a camera, whereas others look alarmed and much more apprehensive.'

Such Tender Years is available from the University of Leicester bookshop (see tinyurl.com/tenderyear).

