



Sutton Mandeville

State of mind of the Rev. Thomas Talbot 1826

A Commission having been directed to F. Whitmarsh, esq. Barrister; and W. D. Whitmarsh, and S. Foote, esqs., Attorneys, to enquire into the state of mind of the Rev. Thos. Talbot of Sutton Mandeville, in the county of Wilts, a Jury was yesterday summoned from the most respectable inhabitants of Salisbury; and an inquest held at the Black Horse Inn, in that city.

The warrant for holding the inquest having been read, the Commissioner-in-Chief, (Mr F. Whitmarsh) in a very concise, but able and convincing manner described the character of Insanity, in all its variations and degrees. Having stated who was the *subject*, and what the *object* of the investigation.

Mr OSMOND deposed, that he had known Mr Talbot for 15 years; observed some difference in his behavior about Michaelmas, 1823, but cannot speak precisely as to the day. Made an inquiry with regard to his health, said he was *well*, but pointing to the air, said he "*wished if some of us could get rid of them.*" Saw him again on Christmas eve, he was knocking at the gates of some of the witness's friends; asked who he wanted, Mr Talbot said in reply that he had a message for a friend of his in London; asked him what was the matter? Said he was harassed by innumerable beings in the *air*, throwing *balls*, and he could not at all manage to get out of the reach of them, either in one part of the country or the other. Had been molested in London by them; said he was a bow-street officer out of place, and, any other inconsistent, wild, and extravagant things, which fully convinced the witness he was of insane mind: he also stated, that he had killed a man and a woman.

WILLIAM TARGETT was then examined. He is a master tailor of Salisbury; has known the Rev. Mr Talbot for 23 years. Has often conversed with him, always thought him a rational and intelligent man. In the month of December, 1823, observed a difference; he then spoke in a *random* way; could not speak as to the day, it was before Christmas day; witness worked for him, and said that Mr Talbot informed him he had been to London, and was used ill; that air balls or blows had injured his head and his sides; that Billy Wyndham had injured him as well as many others; that he had some lusty fellows from London to take his part, and that Salisbury should know the succeeding day; they should all have the head-ache except witness's family. He made some observations with regard to Mr Squarey and Mr Elderton; said these fellows had used him extremely ill, in striking him with air blows; they had hurt him in the head, and they would blow witness out of his (witness's) shop, if they watched him through the key-hole. In a few days afterwards he sent for witness to the White Hart, asked him to get some one to go to Bishopstone for him, to get his rents from a Mr Hibberd. There were no rents due, or at all belonging to him. Witness considered him deranged.

Dr THOMAS stated that he was called in professionally to see Mr Talbot, and was perfectly satisfied that he was laboring under mental derangement. Was desirous of discovering the chord upon which the malady moved; found it to be the belief that he was shot at by invisible beings, through tubes loaded with air. He saw him the succeeding day at Dr Prevost's; the Rev. Hugh Stevens was present; he was laboring under the same delusion; Witness signed the certificate for his removal to the Asylum; saw him three weeks ago, and he was still in the same state of mental aberration. – He then saw him with Dr Fowler and Mr Sampson; when he spoke of magic lanterns going before him, during the night; said he had no rest or peace. He was very impetuous, much disturbed, and talked very incoherently. Witness made an affidavit which had been presented to the Chancellor.- When in bed, he said that the air tubes forced their way through the apertures, and that he protected his head by the pillows; the invisible beings never told him why they shot at him; he saw the magic lanterns, but was not afraid of them. –Had (he said) as good a head as Doctor Fowler, and made use of many other expressions, which thoroughly convinced the witness that he was decidedly not of sane mind. He considered a *lucid interval*, to be an interval in which the subject was collected on every point; but this he had never witnessed with regard to the unfortunate gentleman, now the object of this inquiry.

Dr FOWLER had seen the patient professionally; being inspecting Physician, he made no note or memorandum of the precise time when he saw him; it was about two years since. Conceived him incapable of drawing any rational conclusions from what was proposed to him. Is decidedly of opinion that he is a lunatic, and thought so from the first time he saw him. He seemed to retain all the materials of thought, but they were reversed; his faculties were not suspended, nor overpowered, but totally deranged. Endeavored to ascertain the *extent* of his malady – of its existence he had no doubt. Asked how he could suppose that through the walls, windows and shutters, any thing could come to injure him; his reply was, that nothing was pervious to air, and that it was *air blows* that he was annoyed with. Was present when Doctor Thomas was there, and confirms the statement in the affidavit. The unfortunate lunatic was then brought in. He was most respectable in appearance, and looked very healthy.- He underwent a long examination. Every reply, however, only served to depicture a great mind in ruins – occasionally sensible of its original dignity. He stated that all he wanted was *liberty*; detailed the effects of the *air blows*; confirmed in every point the assertions of Drs Fowler and Thomas; and cautioned the Jury how they found a verdict against the Lord's anointed.

After the charge from the learned Commissioner, the Jury returned a verdict, "That the Rev. Thos. Talbot had been of insane mind from the 24th December, 1823."

During the whole of this long investigation, the commissioners displayed the greatest patience; and the utmost delicacy was observed by Mr F. Whitmarsh in examining the lunatic; every regard was paid to his situation and circumstances; and he was soothed into the belief that at a future period he might again be happy – insane, or not insane.

Source: Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette, 30 March, 1826