

The saga of James Lucett and the process for curing insanity, Part 2 (1814-38)

Smith, Leonard

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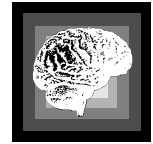
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The saga of James Lucett and the process for curing insanity, Part 2 (1814–38): ‘Insanity cured’

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DOI: 10.1177/0957154X231211727

journals.sagepub.com/home/hpy**Leonard Smith**

University of Birmingham, UK

Abstract

Following the collapse of the Delahoyde and Lucett joint enterprise, James Lucett resumed practice on his own account. He continued to implement his ‘process’, promoting it as a unique cure for intractable cases of insanity. For two decades he pursued his activities, with varying success, at different locations in the London area. He maintained his public profile by extensive advertising, letters to newspapers and published pamphlets, extolling his unique ‘discovery’ and recounting claims of successful cures achieved. Accusations of quackery persisted along with other hostile criticism, particularly from medical men, which Lucett strongly challenged. Periodically he faced more serious difficulties due to legal infractions or financial hardships, but somehow Lucett survived most of these and persevered with his endeavours.

Keywords

Challenges, cures, insanity, private practice, quackery

After the unfortunate collapse of the joint venture with Charles Delahoyde, related in Part 1,¹ James Lucett sought to extract what he could and re-establish himself in practice on his own. He remained outwardly confident that the ‘process’ could provide a cure for long-standing cases of serious mental disorder. For over two decades he pursued his vision, with varying success, at different locations in and around London. He kept himself in the public eye, by advertisements, letters to the press and published pamphlets, in which he amplified his achievements and extolled his unique ‘discovery’. Accusations of quackery recurred along with other hostile criticism, particularly from medical men, which Lucett sought to challenge and confront. Periodically he faced more serious difficulties when, due to some legal or other infraction, the authorities intervened. Financial setbacks recurred, but somehow Lucett usually managed to navigate his way through them and persevere with his endeavours.

Corresponding author:

Leonard Smith, Institute of Applied Health Research, Murray Learning Centre, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK.

Email: l.d.smith@bham.ac.uk

Private asylum practice

Lucett endured only two weeks in the Fleet Prison before his release in early June 1814. Having obtained funds from somewhere, he returned to Ealing House and recommenced business. An advertisement on 5 July referred to 'the continued success attending his process for the restoration of Patients'. However, it proved difficult to retain sufficient custom to keep the large house. By his own admission, he struggled with the 'various difficulties' consequent upon the 'misconduct' of Charles Delahoyde and 'low arts' of Richard Troward. There were also challenges to his credibility. The anonymous contributor to *The Examiner*, who in 1812 disputed Lucett's claims regarding the cure of Morgan, resumed the attack in October 1814. Describing Lucett as 'a quack and a falsifier', he asserted that his 'hot and cold water inflictions' were nothing less than torture, which Lucett denounced as a 'scurrilous and malignant libel' and threatened legal action (National Archives [TNA], PRIS 10/53, 6 June 1814; *Morning Post* [MP], 5 July 1814; *The Examiner*, 2 Feb. 1812, 2, 9 Oct. 1814; Lucett, 1815: 29).

By December 1814 Lucett had moved to a smaller house at Datchet, near Windsor, intending only to receive 'a limited number of patients', drawn from 'the first classes in society'. He assured prospective customers that his mode of treatment had 'in every instance . . . been attended with invariable success, even when pronounced past recovery by the Faculty'. In assertions that became familiar, he referred to the sanction his 'process' had received from 'High Authority' and a 'Select Committee of Noblemen and Gentlemen'. Offering a characteristic irregular practitioner's inducement, he undertook to receive no remuneration 'except for mere necessaries and medicine', until the patient's cure was 'attested by a regular Physician'. Lucett's adversary in *The Examiner* was unimpressed and ridiculed his claims as 'QUACKERY', observing that 'he has taken his flight from Ealing to Datchett'. Undaunted, in March 1815 Lucett revived his previous tactic of employing case illustrations, asserting that 'a Lady and Gentleman . . . afflicted for upwards of 29 years, and certified several times incurable' were both 'perfectly restored' (MP, 21, 24, 30 Dec. 1814; 4 Mar. 1815; *The Examiner*, 1 Jan. 1815; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 26 Mar., 2 Apr. 1815; Lucett, 1815: 29).

Lucett stayed at Datchet for about six months, and in July 1815 he obtained a licence from the Surrey magistrates to receive up to 10 patients at Weston House in Chertsey. He remained there until 1821, enjoying his most successful period since the halcyon days of 1813, with a steady stream of patients from relatively affluent backgrounds. He maintained a high public profile with numerous newspaper advertisements, as well as a series of letters to the *Morning Post*, whose editor evidently took a sympathetic interest in his work (Surrey History Centre [SHC], QS 5/5/4, 9 Feb. 1816 – 5 July 1821, Rear, 11 July 1815, MP, 31 Aug., 23 Nov., 14 Dec. 1816, 2 Dec. 1817, 17 Oct. 1818, 6 Feb., 14 Mar., 17 Sep. 1823). His extended 1815 pamphlet, *An Exposition of the Reasons*, related the history and implementation of the 'process', including Lucett's version of events leading to the demise of the enterprise with Delahoyde. Apart from detailing the perceived betrayal by Delahoyde and Troward, Lucett made an interesting disclosure. He claimed to be the 'SOLE DEPOSITARY' of the 'full extent of the remedy', confessing that 'the process' had only been partially communicated to the Royal Dukes and Dr John Harness when he and Delahoyde met with them. He explained that the 'remedy' had two distinct elements – the 'Curative Process' and the 'Medical Treatment', but only the former part had been fully transmitted. Lucett insisted that he alone knew the full secret (Lucett, 1815: 3–6, 11, 22–6).

A lengthy appendix to the pamphlet included versions of previous case reports, to illustrate Lucett's successes. He recognised that recoveries had not always been maintained, suggesting some patients had been harassed by outsiders' close questioning while they were 'only in a state of convalescence', causing agitation when they really needed 'retirement, forbearance, soothing and

repose'. His plans for development included association with another medical man. Although he did not regard this as absolutely necessary, he realised that it would please prospective patients' relatives. He 'engaged the assistance' of a local surgeon, Richard Smith, 'a man in extensive practice, of good connections, of strict integrity, and of acknowledged abilities' (pp. 28–9, 31, 61). Confirming these arrangements in October 1815, Lucett anticipated that, with the 'professional assistance' of Mr Smith, those committing patients to his care 'will have their most sanguine expectations realised'. He outlined his ethos of treatment:

Mr Lucett has no handcuffs or strait-waistcoats, no bars, nor any of the customary apparatus of a mad-house; his plan is to cure – not to confine; he stops the paroxysms of this dreadful disorder in 24 hours, when the friends of the patients may see and converse with them; and in three months (or thereabouts) a cure is completed.

He reiterated that 'No other person in the world is acquainted with the whole of his remedy', promising that he 'will not take fee or reward until he completes a cure' (*MP*, 26 Oct. 1815).

The legislation of 1774 required periodic inspection visits to private madhouses by two magistrates and a physician. For several years Dr Alexander Morison was Surrey's visiting physician, before his illustrious career as physician to the Surrey County asylum and Bethlem Hospital, as well as in private practice. The Surrey visitors reported on Weston House in February 1816, incorrectly describing Lucett as a 'Surgeon'. There were only two patients in the house, which was 'well calculated for the reception of Lunatics', 'commodious' and 'in a retired and airy Situation'. The patients 'appeared to be under no restraint'. However, Morison recorded a more disparaging perspective in his personal diary, suggesting that Lucett 'pretends to have discovered a cure for madness especially cases of high excitement'. He saw several baths, with 'covers so contrived as to confine patients in them whence I suppose warm and cold baths form a part of his cure' (14 Geo III, 1774; Royal College of Physicians [RCP] Edinburgh, 9 Feb. 1816; SHC, QS 5/5/4, 9 Feb. 1816; Scull, Mackenzie and Hervey, 1996: 123–60).²

In June 1816, under the pronouncement 'INSANITY CURED', which became a staple claim, Lucett proclaimed the 'continued success of the Remedy and Medicinal Process for the cure of Mania'. Weston House's virtues were extolled. It was 'very large, airy and detached, with large gardens', with new rooms added to accommodate additional patients. A carriage was available for people in a convalescent state. In August, Lucett stressed its exclusivity, advising that it was intended only 'for the reception of a select number', with accommodation for 'the first persons of distinction'. He reported that 'a Gentleman, near 70 years of age', who had previously been in 11 madhouses, had recently been 'restored' (*London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 2, 27, 29 June, 16, 23 July 1816; *MP*, 17 Aug. 1816).

Lucett's claims about the rapid abatement of symptoms led one provincial newspaper to observe pithily that 'A mad doctor (Lucett) undertakes to cure insanity in twenty-four hours' (*Chester Courant*, 6 Aug. 1816). In a combative letter to the *Morning Post*, Lucett rounded on his adversaries. He spoke of his 'discovery', the endorsement by 'high authority' and award of 200 guineas by the 'Lords of the Treasury' for restoration of an incurable patient from Bethlem. However, his offer via 'my lamented advocate and friend' Spencer Perceval to advise the royal physicians on the King's treatment had been ignored. Although he had given 'repeated proofs of cure performed', he had been opposed by most medical men, particularly those with 'shares in private mad-houses, whose interest is to fill them, and keep them so, without the means of curing them'. Lucett insisted that he was 'promulgating to the world incontrovertible facts'. His 'great effort' was to ensure that 'the nation should be in possession of the various means' for restoring people afflicted with insanity. He called upon the House of Commons to receive the 'proof' offered of a 'national benefit' (*MP*, 31 Aug. 1816).

In another letter, Lucett unwisely responded to an article in the influential *Quarterly Review*. In considering treatments for mental disorder, its author acknowledged the value of warm bathing, before referring obliquely to a 'proposed remedy for madness' which recently aroused 'a considerable degree of public interest' but had since 'shared the fate of other ephemeral experiments on public credulity'. The treatment consisted of 'an immersion of the patient's body in very hot water, and at the same moment pouring a stream of cold water on the naked head' (Anon., 1816: 402). Delahoyde and Lucett were not specifically named. Nevertheless, James Lucett took it upon himself to deny that 'my secret process for the cure of Insanity consists merely of the combined use of hot and cold water' and that he had 'eventually failed . . . in this peculiar department of the healing art'. He offered 'ocular demonstration' to 'friends of those who are unhappily afflicted', accompanied by a medical man, requesting that they meanwhile suspend judgement (*MP*, 23 Nov. 1816).

In a subsequent 'address to the public', Lucett complained that physicians with 'an interest in private Madhouses' had used unfounded insinuations to prejudice minds against his 'peculiar mode of treatment'. He referred to the cases of three people currently in Weston House, making significant improvements in mental state and behaviour. These included a 'young Gentleman' discharged as incurable from St Luke's Hospital after previously being in a private madhouse in Islington, 'under the care of a Physician, without receiving any benefit'. The unnamed physician, recognisable as Dr Alexander Sutherland, was proprietor of Fisher House, Islington, and physician to St Luke's. He and others were offered 'ocular proof' and the opportunity to see 'several patients, who will soon return to their friends, recovered' (*MP*, 14 Dec. 1816).

Lucett maintained his advertising campaign throughout 1817, always headed 'INSANITY CURED'. He spoke of his unprecedented success and superior accommodation, claiming the recoveries of people who had previously gained no benefit from treatment by Drs Monro, Nichols and Sutherland. Potted summaries of several cases included a man who spent 18 years in nearby Great Foster House. To judge from the Surrey visitors' reports, there was indeed a steady turnover of patients at Weston House, with most discharged home after between three and six months. Several had emanated from nearby counties or the London area, but others came from places further afield like Oxford, Birmingham and Ipswich (*SHC*, QS 5/5/4, 18 Feb. 1817; 9 Jan. 1818; *Morning Chronicle*, 13 Sep. 1817; *MP*, 18 Jan., 4 June, 13 Sep., 2 Dec. 1817; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 21 Sep. 1817). Interestingly, after January 1817, there was no further mention of the surgeon Richard Smith. The circumstances surrounding his departure were unclear, and Lucett never again linked himself to a medical man.

The regular publicity for Weston House continued during 1818, 1819 and early 1820, most of it quite similar and headed 'INSANITY CURED'. Lucett summarised cases involving significant recoveries by people previously declared incurable after many years confined in asylums or treated without benefit by medical men. He periodically defended himself against hostile critics (*Morning Chronicle*, 7 Mar., 18, 21 Apr. 1818, *MP*, 26 Mar., 23 Apr. 1818, 27 Mar., 5, 15 July, 31 Aug., 15 Sep. 1819, 10–26 Feb. 1820; *The Times*, 30 June, 7 July 1819; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 25 Jan., 22, 29 Mar. 1818, 20 Feb., 26 Mar., 9, 16 Apr. 1820). In September 1818, he cited the case of a physician's daughter ready to return home after one month under his care, having previously being treated without effect by 'her father's medical friends'. In response, Lucett received an anonymous threatening letter, demanding that he correct his advertisement or 'the fallacy will be publicly exposed'. He, however, was 'not to be intimidated by a cowardly threat', insisting that he had the physician's permission to provide his address and a reference (*Morning Chronicle*, 29 Sep., 8, 17 Oct. 1818).

Information provided in the visitors' reports indicates that the physician's daughter was Priscilla Flamanch of Wallingford in Berkshire. Another patient was Miss Augusta Willoughby, the daughter of Lady Willoughby, of Balden in Oxfordshire. The returns reveal a continuing flow of admissions and discharges of people from London and elsewhere, although total numbers at any time

rarely exceeded five or six. Most returned home within three or four months, although a few were evidently 'removed' rather than discharged. In the unfortunate instance of Sarah Wyer of Birmingham, sent into Weston House by her son on 5 November 1818, it was recorded that four days later she 'died by strangulation during the momentary Absence of the Attendant' (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 9 Jan., 12 July 1818, 25 Sep. 1819, 13 June 1820).

A wider stage

James Lucett broadened his campaign during 1820, following the example of another forthright lay practitioner, Thomas Bakewell (Smith, 1994). In March he wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, stating that it was 10 years since he 'proved a plan for the relief and cure of mental derangement', without response from the King's physicians despite encouragement received from the late Spencer Perceval. Lucett highlighted his award of £200 for the cure of William Harrison, the patronage of the Dukes of Kent and Sussex, and acknowledgement by them and Dr Harness of his 'most important and *valuable discovery*'. He had since 'restored a very great number of persons, some of considerable consequence, to perfect *health and reason*' (original emphasis). Lucett told Liverpool that previous attempts to petition Parliament and offer his treatment to the nation had been declined, probably due to 'delicacy' regarding the late King's situation. Now, following the death of 'our beloved Sovereign', he sought permission to publish a pamphlet 'detailing my Offer to Government', whereby 'the Public may no longer be deprived of the benefit and relief in my possession'. Liverpool surprisingly expressed no objection to publication of 'the Plan which you state you have discovered for the relief & cure of mental derangement' or of related official correspondence (British Library [BL], 1820). Lucett naturally interpreted this as Liverpool's personal endorsement and seized every opportunity to cite it.

In 1821 Lucett relocated to Ewell, 20 miles away, obtaining a new licence from the Surrey magistrates in May. This was a smaller house for, as he explained in a letter to the Ewell churchwardens, he did not wish to have more than four people 'at any time residing with me'. Local objections had been raised against the licensing of a house for 'Insane Persons'. The villagers' concerns included 'the extreme Publicity of the House from its Locality, and particularly from its very near vicinity to the Church, the Congregation of which may be and most likely will be very seriously disturbed'. Lucett sought to allay their fears, advising that he had resided beside a church for seven years and 'the Congregation nor a Single Inhabitant have never been *alarmed, or disturbed*'. He seized the opportunity to expound the principles underpinning his practice, whilst adeptly confronting parishioners' objections:

. . . although I profess to relieve a person deranged in forty minutes, I shall never consider my residence a *mad* house or a place of *Confinement*, as never having had occasion to use those unhappy means resorted to in public and private receptacles for lunatics, and if I should be so fortunate as not to be annoyed more by the Inhabitants of Ewell than they will be by any one in my house I shall be properly satisfied with the result. (original emphasis)

Lucett already knew that his licence had been granted, even before a general meeting of local inhabitants (SHC, QS 5/5/4, Rear, 29 May 1821; SHC, 3831/1/1, 20 May 1821, Andrew to Lucett, 22 May 1821, Lucett to Andrew, 2, 3 June 1821; Parry-Jones, 1972: 193).

Lucett's sojourn at Rectory House, Ewell lasted about two years and was not without incident. The Surrey visitors arrived in early July 1821, shortly after the patients' transfer from Chertsey, and found the house 'not so clean or in good order and condition as might be wished', although it was 'commodious and well adapted to the Purpose'. Mrs Lucett explained that 'a thorough repair' had

already begun. Although the visitors were satisfied with the care and treatment given to the three patients, they admonished the absent James Lucett for not having procured new certificates for them and not providing the necessary returns (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 5 July 1821). He had another brush with the magistrates in January 1822. While the visitors acknowledged that the house was much cleaner and in better order, they observed caustically that the 'personal Cleanliness' of the patient James Mackinnon was 'very much neglected'. They added 'a matter of positive Complaint' that care was not taken 'to confine the Patients within the Walls of the Establishment'. The courtyard gate was unlocked during the day, leaving patients 'at liberty to go out . . . unattended into the public Road' (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 9 Jan. 1818, 11 Jan. 1822; 4 Jan. 1823). Clearly, Lucett's progressive practices were considered overly lax compared with what prevailed in other Surrey madhouses.

Lucett did not initially advertise Rectory House in the same way as Weston House. A pamphlet '*Addressed to a Candid and Impartial Public*' was dedicated to the Earl of Liverpool, under whose sanction Lucett was 'induced to offer to his countrymen, and to the world in general, the benefits resulting from his excellent mode of treating and curing insanity'. He hoped to be 'a benefactor of mankind'. He summarised his earlier endeavours, the support received from Spencer Perceval, the Royal Dukes and others, and his cures of people previously considered incurable, with no mention of Charles Delahoyde. There followed self-congratulatory summaries of 15 more recent cases, all having recovered within several months under Lucett's care (Lucett, 1822: 4–16).

Engagement with the press resumed in late 1822. A supposedly anonymous letter to the *Morning Post* in October from 'An Old Subscriber' praised the efforts of a 'gentleman possessing a discovery for the effectual relief and cure of Insane Persons', summarising some of his dramatic results, support from royalty and so on (*MP*, 4 Oct. 1822). Shortly afterwards, in a widely disseminated advertisement headed by the audacious proclamation 'UNDER the Patronage of the Right Hon the Earl of LIVERPOOL, &c. – INSANITY CURED', Lucett trumpeted his 'unprecedented success' where eminent practitioners had failed, showing 'the importance of this discovery'. He followed up by claiming to have recently restored his 'second Medical Character', thereby proving 'the insufficiency of the general knowledge acquired in this peculiar malady' (*Morning Chronicle*, 8–28 Oct. 1822, *MP*, 12–30 Oct. 1822; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 26 Oct., 28 Dec. 1822, 4 Jan. 1823).

Lucett's latest treatment of a medical man soon landed him in real difficulties. Charles Moss was a surgeon from Doughty Street in London, whose wife placed him under Lucett's care in October 1822. However, as the visiting magistrates and Dr Alexander Morison discovered on 4 January 1823, Moss had been accepted without a medical certificate and his details were not returned to the College of Physicians. Lucett explained that this was 'out of Delicacy to his Character as a professional man and at the express Desire of his Friends and himself' (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 4 Jan. 1823; *Oxford Journal*, 2 Aug. 1823). He was presumably not sufficiently naive to be unaware that this magnanimous act was contrary to law.

Meanwhile, Lucett confronted his detractors in two letters to the still sympathetic *Morning Post*. He forcefully re-stated how he had 'perfectly restored' many people certified incurable, previously incarcerated in public and private asylums. However, he had faced 'the prejudice and insinuations of a certain class of persons, interested in private madhouses', who dismissed a 'discovery' they knew nothing about. He claimed in the second letter that madhouse proprietors were actively deterring people from being placed under his care. Nevertheless, citing several cases, he maintained that many 'Ladies and Gentlemen' were 'living witnesses' to the curative results of his treatment. Lucett insisted that he never used 'coercion or confinement' and did not allow restraint instruments in his house. Rather, he used 'scientific means, unknown to any one but myself'. He reiterated his preparedness to disseminate his knowledge through 'ocular demonstration' and to 'initiate any medical Gentleman qualified to join me', to benefit 'the cause of humanity' (*MP*, 6 Feb., 14 Mar. 1823).

These forthright letters were presumably intended to strengthen Lucett's credentials before the anticipated legal action. This was eventually initiated in July 1823. At the behest of Dr Richard Powell of the Royal College of Physicians, the Surrey Clerk of the Peace prosecuted him for receiving a patient without a certificate of insanity (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 15 July 1823). The case was heard at the Surrey Assizes in Croydon. Lucett, 'the keeper of a private receptacle for lunatics', was alleged to have contravened two requirements of the 1774 Act. In addition to protestations of professional delicacy, Lucett claimed the man had been received as a boarder, for the benefit of country air. He had since 'perfectly recovered' from a 'brain fever'. Rather than being treated as a patient, he was 'perfect master of his actions, and even visited some of his patients whilst he was lodging at the defendant's house'. Although the court acknowledged that Lucett was 'a respectable and skilful man', and that the patient was now 'in perfect health and pursuing his professional practice', the jury found him guilty and imposed a fine of £100. Lucett could not pay the fine and a writ was issued, leading to the seizure of both his goods and himself (SHC, QS 5/5/4, Rear, Aug. 1823; *Bury and Norwich Post*, 30 July 1823; *MP*, 3, 6 May 1823; *Oxford Journal*, 2 Aug. 1823). Lucett's apparently unbounded confidence in his abilities and his 'discovery' had led to a potentially catastrophic disregard of official formalities.

Although chastened, Lucett was determined that this setback should not impede his efforts. He was soon released from custody and returned to Ewell to resume business and related activities. In September 1823, he narrated the case of a young woman 'perfectly restored' despite being declared incurable by several medical men. He modestly pledged that, 'for the sake of suffering humanity', he would readily 'instruct the whole College of Physicians, that they may be enabled to practice with success in all cases of insanity' (*MP*, 22 Aug., 12, 17 Sep., 11 Oct. 1823). Lucett's ambitious offer was undoubtedly intended as a pointed challenge to the body he considered responsible for his prosecution and discomfiture.

Professor Lucett

At the beginning of 1824, James Lucett's situation was precarious, which would remain the case intermittently for several years. It was recorded in May that he was again imprisoned for debt, in the Surrey County Gaol at Southwark, and that he and his 'Friends' were seeking release of the debt. He gave up the house in Ewell and the licence was not renewed. He was still in prison at the end of June, when described in the *London Gazette* as 'Professor of a Mode of Treatment for Curing Insanity'. By August Lucett had settled temporarily at an address in Old Brompton, near Kensington, before moving to Rockingham Row, New Kent Road in London's south-eastern suburbs (SHC, QS 5/5/4, 14 Oct. 1824, Rear, May 1824; *London Gazette*, 1 June 1824: 901; *Morning Chronicle*, 4 Aug. 1824; *MP*, 1–4 Dec. 1824; *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1824). This proved to be the start of a particularly unsettled period, as Lucett adjusted to conducting activities on a more modest basis.

While at Old Brompton, Lucett published a revised version of the 'Address' previously issued in 1822. Its new parts confirmed that he was embittered by recent experiences. His grievances were primarily directed at the College of Physicians, toward whom he felt 'no obligation' in regard to 'their opinion of my physical knowledge and judgment'. He insisted that he had successfully treated several of Dr Sutherland's patients within a relatively short time, after Sutherland had failed over a long period. He condemned the injustice to which the College had subjected him for 'the imputed crime' of not submitting a certificate after receiving 'out of humanity' a surgeon suffering from fits that rendered him idiotic. As a result, he had to find damages and costs of over £160. Promises by the surgeon and his relatives to indemnify him had been forgotten. Overall, he claimed to have sacrificed over 'TEN THOUSAND POUNDS' in trying to render 'an essential service to my country, and a general good to mankind'. He consequently found it hard 'to meet with envy,

opposition and ingratitude' (Lucett, 1824: 16–19). Lucett indicated his planned new direction, offering his services to those deprived of them 'from the late proceedings of the college of physicians', without the need for removal from home. Advertising in early December, he claimed over the last three months to have 'effectually relieved' three ladies and a gentleman 'at their respective homes'. He now offered to admit a 'Lady or Gentleman' as 'a Boarder in the Family', at Rockingham Row, thereby not requiring a licence under the 1774 legislation. Advertisements continued into early 1825, with further claims of recent cures alongside the restatement of historic achievements (*London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1825; *MP*, 1–4, 10–11 Dec. 1824, 19, 21, 24 Jan., 1, 12, 26 Feb. 1825; Lucett, 1824: 19).

Lucett did not long remain content with treating people at home. In 1825 he entered into association with William Antonio Rocher, a flamboyant former bankrupt. In April Rocher obtained a licence from the Surrey magistrates to keep a house for reception of lunatics at Mitcham Green. Ambitiously named 'The Recovery', it was 'replete with every comfort', with a 'Garden and Pleasure Grounds'. He advised the public that he had 'exclusively engaged Professor Lucett', well known for his 'skill and experience in the mode of effecting the cure of those who are unhappily deprived of their Mental Faculties'. Advertisements were placed widely and continued for several months. The name 'PROFESSOR LUCETT' was heavily emphasised, as was the success of his 'perfect cure' of the 'distressing malady'. Patients were to be 'under the treatment and medical attendance' of Lucett. As explained in *John Bull*, the 'comforts, &c. of the Ladies' were attended to by Rocher's aunt, those of the 'Gentlemen' by Rocher himself, and the 'Medical Department' by Professor Lucett (TNA, PRIS 10/55, 26 Dec. 1821; SHC, QS 5/5/4, Rear, 12 Apr. 1825; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 17 July 1825; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 1 Aug., 12, 26 Sep. 1825; *Bury and Norwich Post*, 3 Aug. 1825; *John Bull*, 17 July, 26 Sep., 9, 23 Oct. 1825; *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 25 Aug. 1825; *MP*, 24 Aug. 1825; *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, 30 Aug. 1825; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 10, 17 Sep., 1, 8 Oct. 1825).

Once again, 'Professor' Lucett soon let his self-perceptions get the better of him. On 14 October, the Surrey visiting magistrates and Dr Alexander Morison arrived at the 'Recovery' to conduct their inspection. They found that Mrs Toussaint, wife of a wax chandler, had been medically certified by Lucett, styling himself 'Professor of the Cure of Insanity'. Morison was indignant, and Rocher was instructed to obtain a new medical certificate from someone appropriately qualified. Lucett's action was contrary to law, and both men were fortunate not to be prosecuted. Advertisements for 'The Recovery' ceased shortly afterwards, suggesting its commercial failure. There were undoubtedly acrimonious circumstances, for litigation followed between the two men. Rocher was declared bankrupt in 1828, and seemingly had no further involvement in the trade in lunacy before another bankruptcy in 1838 (RCP Edinburgh, 14 Oct. 1825; SHC, QS 5/5/4, 14 Oct. 1825; *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette*, 6 Nov. 1828: 493; *Sun*, 7 July 1828; *The Jurist*, 1838, Vol. 1, 647; Parry-Jones, 1972: 261).

By May 1826 'Professor Lucett' was back in Old Brompton, now at a different address, announcing 'INSANITY CURED' and once more claiming to be 'under the Patronage' of the Earl of Liverpool. A series of advertisements reasserted his 'Important Discovery' and 'efficacious means' that had received royal approbation. He offered attendance on people in their own homes, and admission to only one person who would 'reside within the family' and have use of a carriage (*MP*, 16 May, 3, 16, 17 June, 6 Sep. 1826). In December 1826, a 40-year-old naval surgeon named John Howe was placed under Lucett's care by his family after removal from Staffordshire's county asylum, where he was a private patient. Howe had spent five years in the Nottingham and Stafford asylums, much of the time in a violent, disturbed state. He was almost certainly the 'Gentleman' described by Lucett in March 1827, who was 'about to return to his friends, in perfect bodily health and mental faculties' (Staffordshire County Record Office, D4585/6, 25 May 1821–17 Dec. 1826, pp. 13, 53; *MP*, 31 Mar., 3 Apr. 1827).³

Nevertheless, Lucett's financial difficulties persisted and it was not long before he left Old Brompton. By July 1827, he had resumed activities at 34 Parliament Street in Westminster, and he sought to project continued success. In October he reported having been absent 'from town' for a period, attending upon 'a Gentleman whose malady had baffled the skill of his medical attendants' but whose restoration Lucett completed 'within one month'. In November he received a gentleman 'under one of the worst species of insanity ever witnessed'. The man had been placed with him 'contrary to the wish of his Medical Advisers', but by late February 1828 he was 'perfectly restored' and about to return home (*MP*, 25 Apr., 28 July 1827, 23 Feb., 1 Mar. 1828; *The Times*, 16 Oct. 1827).

Lucett was evidently prepared to seize any opportunity to proclaim his credentials. In July 1828, he appeared in the Court of Chancery due to a refusal to pay costs accrued in the legal disputes with William Rocher. The Lord Chancellor himself presided. When an adjournment to another day was being considered, it was suggested that Lucett might fail to appear. He protested that he would certainly do so 'from his invaluable importance to the subjects of this country as the *sole restorer to health of Lunatics*' (original emphasis), before flourishing 'a card, with a long description of his qualities printed upon it' for the Lord Chancellor's perusal (*Sun*, 7 July 1828). Two months later, while imprisoned in the Fleet as an insolvent debtor due to refusal or inability to pay his legal costs, Lucett appeared in court as a witness in the trial of the notorious forger Reverend Peter Fenn. Fenn was convicted of forging several people's signatures on bills of exchange, including that of 'Dr' James Lucett, described as a 'physician, residing at Old Brompton'. Lucett was able to prove that his signature on a bill for £150 was a forgery, but Fenn's claim that he often discounted bills for Lucett doubtless had some foundation (TNA, HO 17/82/94; *Evening Mail*, 27 June 1828; *Globe*, 12 Sep. 1828; *London Evening Standard*, 12 Sep. 1828; *London Gazette*, 30 Dec. 1828: 2436; *Morning Advertiser*, 20 Jan. 1829; *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette*, 18 Sep. 1828, 10 Jan. 1829; *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 26 June 1828; *The Examiner*, 14 Sep. 1828; *The Times*, 13 Sep., 1 Dec. 1828).

Lucett had emerged from the Fleet by mid-1829 and maintained a low profile for a while. His infrequent publicity, in which he still declared himself 'Medical Professor for the Cure of Insanity', contained little more than brief re-statements of earlier claims. After various short residences around Chelsea and Pimlico, he had moved again to Bernard Street, Russell Square by April 1830. Here he unusually claimed to have successfully treated a young child 'pronounced hopeless by four Medical Gentleman' (*MP*, 29 June, 12 Aug. 1829, 2, 8 Apr. 1830; *The Times*, 30 June 1829; *Windsor and Eton Express*, 19 Dec. 1829). A more proactive period followed. In July he published a petition addressed to the new King. Boldly describing himself as 'Professor of a mode of treatment for the Cure of Insanity . . . unknown to any other practitioner in Europe', he sought William IV's 'interposition' to make it known 'for a national benefit'. As well as recounting his earlier patronage by the Royal Dukes and a government award of 200 guineas, the petition stated Lucett's more recent attempts to aid the Royal Family. He had offered a 'Treatise' to the physicians attending the late Duke of York during his final illness in 1827, for his 'immediate relief and ultimate restoration', and in early 1830 made a similar offer to the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, in relation to the late King George IV. Lucett did not wish his 'discovery' to die with him, praying the King to initiate an investigation into its merits, so that it 'may not be withheld any longer from the Public by the insinuations of interested persons' (*MP*, 23 July 1830).

Lucett then embarked upon a six-month advertising campaign in which the 'Medical Professor' constantly repeated his earlier achievements and his ability to achieve 'speedy restoration' of even the most deranged people. By August 1830 he had opened a small private asylum, known as Brompton Villa, in Old Brompton. Here he received 'a select number only, upon the principle of cure, and not incarceration'. Once more he sought to attract custom from the wealthier classes in his 'Private Establishment', which was 'replete with every accommodation, and perfectly select',

with 'delightful' grounds and use of a carriage (*MP*, 17, 28–31 Aug., 4–25 Sep., 7–14, 26–30 October, 1–19, 25, 29 Nov., 10–17, 25, 27 Dec. 1830). It appeared for a time that James Lucett's fortunes might once more be on the rise.

The Kennett affair

Lucett's return to public favour received a severe check at the end of 1830, as he once again succumbed to a temptation to over-reach himself and plunged headlong into confrontation with the medical establishment. The circumstances culminating in the dramatic suicide of Reverend Brackley Charles Kennett were highly contested, but can be reconstructed from published reports and correspondence. The well-connected Kennett had a long history of delusional insanity. On Sunday 5 December, his excited state was causing great alarm to his family. Kennett's wife and mother approached Lucett for assistance. He went to their home in Kensington Gore and remained for two days. On the Tuesday, according to Lucett, Reverend Kennett 'felt so satisfied with my mode of treatment, &c., that he solicited of me to permit him to accompany me to Brompton Villa'. A family maidservant went with him. An alternative interpretation by Dr James Johnson, Kennett's usual medical attendant, was that he had recently become 'much excited by the turbulent state of the times', represented by revolution in France and incendiary attacks in rural England. He believed that he was about to be seized as 'Captain Swing', and went to Lucett's house in order to escape his pursuers (*Bucks Gazette*, 18 Dec. 1830; *Dublin Morning Register*, 15 Dec. 1830; *Globe*, 13 Dec. 1830; *MP*, 13, 15, 17 Dec. 1830; *The Pilot*, 15 Dec. 1830; *The Times*, 13, 15, 17 Dec. 1830).

On Wednesday 8 December, at the family's request, Dr Johnson visited Reverend Kennett at Brompton Villa. He found him 'in a state of great excitement – in fact, in a state of febrile insanity'. James Lucett's interpretation was that the visit itself caused 'increased excitement'. A furious row ensued between Johnson and Lucett. Johnson told the 'Keeper of this Asylum' that he disapproved completely of his 'moral, medicinal and dietetic treatment', and could not attend Kennett in the circumstances. Lucett countered with his standard claims about having restored many 'dangerous lunatics' from Bethlem, St Luke's and various private institutions, insisting that he never resorted to the coercive methods employed in 'Houses of Confinement'. The outraged Dr Johnson advised Mrs Kennett that he would not take medical charge of her husband unless he were brought home. Mrs Kennett saw Lucett the next day to make arrangements and stayed overnight with her husband at Brompton Villa following an amicable game of whist between Kennett, Lucett and their respective wives. On Friday 10th, Kennett's sister Lady Sheffield arrived with a carriage and keeper to remove him. According to Lucett, this occurred against Kennett's wishes and under protest, so he accompanied Kennett to the family home in order to keep him calm. Dr Johnson maintained that Kennett was eager to leave due to a conviction that Lucett was part of the conspiracy against him (*MP*, 13, 15 Dec. 1830; *The Times*, 15 Dec. 1830).

What followed in Kensington was similarly disputed. Lucett remained with Reverend Kennett for a while before leaving. Kennett then 'went into one of the upper rooms, where his mother then was', took up some scissors from the table and 'plunged them into the jugular vein, and continued extending the wound until he sunk to the ground exhausted from the loss of blood'. Lucett subsequently contended that Kennett's distress arose from anxiety about leaving his protection and being placed under Dr Johnson's care. Johnson insisted that Kennett hoped to have Lucett delivered 'into the hands of justice as a conspirator against his own life', and committed suicide in desperation following the 'escape' of his 'chief enemy' (*Globe*, 13 Dec. 1830; *MP*, 13, 15 Dec. 1830; *The Times*, 13, 15 Dec. 1830).

The quarrel between Lucett and Johnson was replayed in the national press, highlighting the chasm separating established physicians from irregular practitioners who relied on experience and

experimental approaches. At the end of a self-justificatory letter giving his version of events, Lucett again proclaimed himself 'Medical Professor for the Cure of Insanity'. Johnson ridiculed the 'improper treatment' implemented by the 'Professor', with his 'system' and 'secret nostrums for the cure of insanity'. This was mere 'quackery', which he was 'puffing off' through the press. Lucett countered that Johnson felt himself 'authorised, by virtue of his diploma to assail the character of other men', accusing him of seeking 'to prejudice me in the minds of the public, and to do me great injury in my profession'. He proposed to Johnson that each 'undertake the charge' of some Bethlem patients, with independent judges determining whose methods were more effective. Unsurprisingly, nothing came of this, nor of Lucett's threatened prosecution of Johnson for slander (*MP*, 13, 15, 17, 31 Dec. 1830; *The Times*, 15, 17 Dec. 1830). Following the controversy, Lucett sought to carry on as normal, promoting his 'Medical Discovery'. However, there was evidently a problem, for he advertised that he would only receive one patient at Brompton Villa, indicating that he did not hold a madhouse licence (*MP*, 25, 27, 31 Dec. 1830).

Matters were about to become a good deal worse for Lucett. Shortly after the extensive press coverage of Kennett's suicide, the *London Medical Gazette* renewed an onslaught upon 'QUACKS AND QUACKERY'. It had previously lambasted the activities of the notorious Harley Street quack John St John Long, who claimed the 'discovery' of a secret remedy for consumption. In September 1830 he was convicted for the manslaughter of a female patient and received a hefty fine. In December, the journal's righteous ire was redirected toward '*Professor Lucett*' (original emphasis), prominent among the other 'several competitors for notoriety'. The article fully accepted Dr Johnson's interpretation of events, suggesting that the incident too closely resembled 'the cases of manslaughter which have of late excited so much public indignation'. Describing Lucett as a 'thoroughgoing quack', the writer mocked his claims of superiority in restoring people declared incurably insane and his alleged receipt of 200 guineas from the Lords of the Treasury. He derided 'Professor Lucett's "system"', citing 'the distrust with which rational men must regard all pretensions which require concealment for their support'. The piece concluded by questioning the legality of Kennett's admission to Brompton Villa and called upon the relevant authorities to take action (*London Medical Gazette*, 1830, VI, 7 Aug., 728–32, 21 Aug., 789–9, 28 Aug., 854–63, 11 Sep., 916–22, VII, 25 Dec., 405–7; Hempel, 2014; Porter, 1989: 30, 224).

The Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy, who in 1828 became responsible for oversight of London's private asylums, took a close interest. At their behest, in January 1831 an indictment was laid against Lucett for 'taking an insane person under his care without the requisite authority or certificate'. 'The King v. Lucett' came to trial in June. Interestingly, the prosecution acknowledged that the Metropolitan Commissioners did not charge Lucett with being 'actuated by any improper motive'. It was noted that his application for a licence in November had been refused by the commissioners without explanation. It was also accepted that Kennett was received into Brompton Villa at the family's request, that he was not kept under duress, had his own servant with him, and was visited by his wife, mother and sister. The jury was undecided and the case was dropped after the commissioners indicated that they had no desire to proceed (*Evening Mail*, 27 June 1831; *Sunday Times*, 26 June 1831; *The Times*, 25 June 1831).

This outcome went some way towards repairing Lucett's damaged reputation. He naturally interpreted his acquittal as a vindication, and resumed regular advertising with all the familiar claims. In July 1831, he insisted that 'from a recent circumstance, no practitioner will be permitted to interfere again with any one placed under his charge'. He ambitiously offered consultations every Tuesday and Friday 'upon all cases of Lunacy as well as Chronic Disease'. In October, Lucett announced a vacancy following his cure of a lady who returned to her family after seven months at Brompton Villa, having previously been separated from them for 14 years. By November he was back on the offensive, emphasising his continuing successes despite the 'insinuations of

unprincipled men' seeking to suppress his 'medical discovery' (*London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 3, 4, 8 Nov. 1831; *MP*, 18, 25 July, 20 Aug., 20, 22, 24 Sep., 1 Oct. 1831; *The Times*, 17 July, 25 Aug. 1831).

Prophet without honour

Lucett's fortunes never really recovered after the Kennett affair. By early December 1831, he had moved from Brompton Villa to a much less prestigious district south of the River Thames. At St James's House, Old Kent Road, he offered 'speedy restoration' to people 'afflicted with Nervous Debility, Settled Melancholy, Aberration of Mind, &c'. He could receive two 'Boarders', following amended legislation regarding unlicensed madhouses. In January 1832 he dismissed his critics as 'envious or interested men', unable to judge the merits of his 'medical treatment', and in May he reiterated his insistence that he was 'sole possessor of a Medical Discovery' for restoring deranged people. By the end of October Lucett had moved again to Harleston Place, Camberwell. Once more, he accused 'Madhouse-keepers' and others of spreading 'evil reports' to deter customers, reviving his earlier offer to 'undertake the restoration' of people in their own homes anywhere in England (*MP*, 8 Dec. 1831, 6 Jan., 9 May, 31 Oct., 5, 8, 10 Nov. 1832).

The scope of Lucett's activities was clearly in decline, and there was a hint of desperation in a pamphlet published in 1833. Deploring the lack of knowledge shown by 'the faculty' on the treatment of insanity, he emphasised his 20 years' experience, royal approbation of his 'mode of treatment' and all his earlier achievements. He deprecated the lack of recognition accorded him by politicians and the outright hostility of physicians and madhouse keepers. In one particularly quirky section, Lucett alluded to the parliamentary investigation of Bethlem in 1815, and the subsequent dismissals of Dr Thomas Monro and the apothecary John Haslam, openly claiming 'some credit' for instigating the enquiry. Despite all his setbacks he still hoped for 'the approbation and respect of every philanthropist'. Aside from the pamphlet, little else was heard of Lucett in 1833, other than a brief announcement in December advising that he continued to attend people anywhere in England and that there was a vacancy at Harleston Place (*MP*, 3, 5, 7 Dec. 1833; Lucett, 1833: 3–12).

After a period out of the public eye, Lucett was thrust into it again in September 1835, following some encounters involving Bethlem Hospital. He had become associated with General Charles Palmer, the reforming Whig M.P. for Bath. Palmer had clearly fallen under Lucett's influence, and was well-versed regarding his claimed abilities and achievements over a long period. He also believed that Lucett had helped bring about the 1815 enquiry into the hospital's management (*The Times*, 12 Oct, 1835; Fisher, 2009). Unfortunately, Palmer's unquestioning admiration for Lucett's abilities led both men into considerable difficulties with the hospital's hierarchy. Lucett's real intention was almost certainly to gain the opportunity to conduct a trial of his treatment methods on a Bethlem patient, similar to that which occurred 20 years before.

Two unwitting patients became instrumental in what transpired. Ellen Mack was a single woman aged 22, admitted in May 1835. She had no history of insanity, but had been found in the street 'running wildly about'. On admission she was 'incoherent and very violent – says she is a *Queen &c*' (original emphasis). For several months she was kept in a strait-waistcoat. In July General Palmer visited Bethlem, in the company of a governor named Burgess. While there, he saw Ellen Mack, 'in a frightful state of excitement', and was alarmed by her screams. He returned a week later by arrangement with Burgess, accompanied by Lucett who brought along 'the remedy to allay her excitement'. While Palmer and Burgess were seeking the surgeon's consent to administer it, Lucett took things into his own hands, having been left alone with Ellen Mack. After managing to calm her, he removed a bottle from his pocket and was about to 'surreptitiously' pour some liquid

onto her head when a keeper intervened. The surgeon then arrived and refused his approval. He reported the matter to Sir Peter Laurie, President of the Board of Governors, and an order was promptly issued not to permit any experiments on the patients (Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives [BRHA]: 1835, CB-020, p. 39, 22 May, 28 July; HCM-28, 10 July–11 Sep.; *MP*, 24 Sep. 1835; *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 24 Sep. 1835; *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1835).

Although recognising that Lucett had acted imprudently, Palmer would not leave matters there. He persuaded Ellen Mack's mother to apply for her discharge from Bethlem, with a view to placing her under Lucett's care, promising that 'they would treat her like a lady, and cure her'. As Ellen was a City of London pauper patient, the application was dealt with by the Court of Aldermen. After hearing evidence from Palmer, Mrs Mary Mack and Sir Peter Laurie, the discharge was refused. An acrimonious correspondence between General Palmer and the Bethlem governors ensued in the press, and he unsuccessfully presented a petition from Mary Mack to the House of Commons calling for an investigation. Ellen Mack herself remained in Bethlem until May 1836, when she was discharged as 'Uncured and fit for the Incurable List' (BRHA: 1835, HCM-28, 11, 18, 25 Sep., 9, 23 Oct.; CB-019, 1836, p. 39, 20 May; *MP*, 24 Sep. 1835; *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 24 Sep. 1835; *London Evening Standard*, 24 Sep. 1835; *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 24 Sep. 1835; *The Times*, 24 Sep., 12 Oct. 1835).

Palmer and Lucett initially had more success in the case of Joseph Gough, a Bloomsbury publican first admitted to Bethlem in October 1834. According to his wife, he had for several months 'been deprived of sleep and appetite'. He ate 'absolutely nothing', his 'only nourishment' being beer and spirits, accounting for his 'feeble state of body'. After six months in Bethlem, Gough improved sufficiently to be allowed leave of absence under his wife's care, with assistance from an attendant. Five months later his condition had deteriorated and he was 'in such a state of excitement as to make it dangerous to keep him longer in the house'. In late August 1835, Mrs Gough went to Bethlem 'in great distress' to seek assistance. While there, she encountered General Palmer. After the house surgeon advised that her husband could not be readmitted because his one-year term had almost expired and the case was 'incurable', Palmer offered her Lucett's services which she 'gladly accepted'. According to Palmer, Gough was 'in a state of great excitement and delusions of mind'. Lucett applied his treatment, which consisted initially of 'a powder' that caused Gough to collapse and be violently sick, before 'bathing and rubbing his head with a lotion'. He slept soundly and awoke next morning, eating a 'hearty breakfast' before Palmer saw him 'perfectly in his senses'. Gough remained in a 'weak and nervous state' for some days, but was able to attend to his customers and keep late hours (BRHA, 1834, CB-019, p. 110, 3 Oct.; *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1835).

Gough's apparent recovery was so marked that Palmer felt justified in publicly contrasting the hospital's systemic and therapeutic failures with Lucett's 'invaluable remedy'. Echoing his mentor, he insisted that making known 'such discovery' to the world would be 'one of the greatest benefits to mankind'. However, Palmer's optimistic declarations were premature. On his recommendation, Joseph Gough was moved to Lucett's house in Camberwell. After some months he escaped and, according to his wife, 'returned home without a cure having been effected'. In April 1836, she applied for his readmission to Bethlem as he was 'again labouring under Insanity'. He was not 'fit for business' and had been 'turning customers out of doors'. He had attempted to cut his throat with a razor, 'used great violence towards his wife' and threatened to shoot her. The governors agreed, 'under the special Circumstances of the case'. After two months in Bethlem he was discharged 'well', perhaps indicating that his disorder had always been of a remitting and relapsing nature (BRHA: HCM-28, 29 Apr. 1836; CB-021, 1836, p. 99, 5 May, 1 July; *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1835).

These debacles doubtless stemmed from James Lucett's misguided attempts to re-establish himself as a reputable practitioner, but they almost certainly had the opposite result. Little more was

heard of him, at least in the British press. Nevertheless, evidence that Lucett continued to practice for a few more years, treating people in their homes, is contained within a pamphlet published in Paris in 1838 entitled *La Folie* (Lucett, 1838).⁴ This curious publication's provenance is unclear. Certainly no English equivalent appears to have been produced, and there is also no direct evidence that Lucett lived or practised in France at any time, or published anything else in French. It can only be surmised that he despaired about ever convincing the British public as to the merits of his 'discovery' and sought to influence opinion in France, where the therapeutic endeavours of Philippe Pinel and Jean Esquirol had attracted great attention (Goldstein, 1987).

In the pamphlet Lucett advised that 'laborious research' into the means of curing insanity had 'occupied thirty years of my life'. However, everything had been done to hinder him and 'deny the public the benefit of my discoveries'. Although struggling against 'innumerable obstacles', he had nevertheless achieved success beyond what he could ever have anticipated. He recounted his early cures of several hopeless patients, the patronage of the Dukes of Kent and Sussex and, inevitably, the reward of 200 guineas from the British government. He once again claimed credit for raising concerns about abuses in Bethlem Hospital and the resulting parliamentary investigation in 1815 (Lucett, 1838: 3–8). Lucett then summarised several more recent cases, some not previously publicised. These included that of a man treated at his home near Broadstairs in Kent, earlier in 1838, who showed a rapid improvement within four days and had since fully recovered to demonstrate 'the integrity of his reason'. Lucett's main purpose in publishing the pamphlet was evidently 'to seek an opportunity to submit myself to a public and irrefutable trial, which will reveal the legitimacy of my claims or my incapacity'. He wanted this to happen in a 'great establishment'. If successful, he expected to receive 'the remunerations which are the price of merit'. However, he concluded with an undertaking that, if he could not demonstrate 'the superiority of my curative means', he would 'return straight away to private life, and the public will no longer be bothered by my claims' (pp. 8–12).

La Folie was perhaps intended as some sort of valediction. There is no record that Lucett achieved the goal of a public trial of his 'discovery' or his methods. The indications are that he kept his word and retired into 'private life', being around 70 years of age in 1838. However, it is apparent that his subsequent circumstances were far from favourable. In the 1841 census his address was recorded as Camberwell Workhouse, and his occupation detailed as 'formerly Clerk in the Bank' (HO 107/1050, Camberwell Workhouse, fo.29, p.4). James Lucett died alone and largely unremembered in Camberwell Workhouse 10 years later, on 11 March 1851, at the age of 83 (London Metropolitan Archives [LMA]: (1837–56), CABG/175/002, 11 Mar. 1851; (1829–55), P73/GIS/055, no. 1235, 19 Mar. 1851).

Discovery or quackery

By the time of Lucett's abortive attempt to experiment on a Bethlem patient in 1835, he had evidently moved away from his original water-based treatment to the use of powders and lotions. It is not clear when he made this transition, and he never publicly revealed the nature of his much vaunted 'discovery'. The common thread appears to have been the use of drastic means to induce shock or impair consciousness, to be followed by a period of stupor, extended sleep and then a more settled presentation. That Lucett was an irregular practitioner who never acquired any medically related qualification is beyond doubt. His practice was based upon acquired knowledge, experience and a fair degree of hyperbole. Although he always categorically refuted allegations by professional medical men and others that he was merely a quack, he did exhibit several key features of the genre identified by Roy Porter (1989: 60–122). These included claims of sole possession of a secret remedy, the alleged achievement of large numbers of cures in cases where established physicians had failed, and the endorsement of important people in high places. There were also offers of treatment without payment unless a cure took place, proposals to undertake public demonstration, and the adoption of a title which signified special expertise, like that of 'Professor'.

The highest point of James Lucett's career in the treatment of insanity came in 1813, when he and Charles Delahoyde enjoyed a relatively brief period of great public celebrity. The widely proclaimed achievement of remarkable results with some hitherto intractable cases even appeared to raise the possibility of an actual cure for madness. The ignominious collapse of their enterprise, and Delahoyde's flight, seriously dented Lucett's quickly acquired reputation. Nevertheless, he demonstrated considerable resilience in rebuilding his practice, albeit on a more modest scale. A continued reaffirmation of his 'process' and the uniqueness of his 'discovery', supported by regular repetition of past achievements and examples of recent cures, proved sufficient to attract a clientele prepared to pay for the possibility of elimination of mental sufferings. Somehow Lucett was able to sustain this over a period of two decades, though with some marked fluctuations in his fortunes. In the end, a tendency toward rash decisions proved to be his undoing. A stubborn belief in the efficacy of his treatment methods, and a dream of reviving former glories, led him into reckless measures that were only ever likely to end in discomfiture.

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1. See *History of Psychiatry* 35(2).
2. I am grateful to Dr Nick Hervey for references to the Morison diaries.
3. I am grateful to Professor Alannah Tomkins for the Stafford casebook reference.
4. I am grateful to Dr Claire Deligny for locating this pamphlet.

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