

The L Ward
Parkside Lunatic Asylum
Adelaide, South Australia
September 11th, 1891

Sir, Honourable Governor of South Australia

To begin this letter I must state first and foremost that I am innocent of the crimes with which I am charged. I have been reprimanded to the custody of barbarous brutes in this asylum for the murder of Mr Davy for which I was framed, and I now write to you to secure my freedom.

My Governor, I am a married man and I have got a large family in England and I have got a deal of landed property in this colony which has got income on it. I should not be secured in this retched building with the invalids and lunatics. My governor, Constable Power is a sick man and quite sinful to frame me like this. Power has buried heaps of bodies under his rank, women and children also, and has decided I was to take the fall for his crimes. I only wish to be brought before you to state my case and show that the government authorities are guilty.

I am not a lunatic; I am sound in mind and body as the day I was born and I demand an audience to clear my name before the brutes here succeed in taking my life with poison.

I am yours truly,

The devil and Saint Patrick.

Writer's Note - William Wheaton the Madman

The early history of the ward interests me as it is both when modern medical and mental treatment is taking hold and when Australia is still relatively wild. In this, the Z-Ward has an interesting history because it comes into operation when bush-ranging, cattle rustling, and general outlawing was commonplace. There were, I'm sure, some patients locked up simply because the understanding of the human condition was lacking; perhaps the logic that any man capable of killing possesses some dysfunction of the mind lead to plenty of internments in the asylum.

Having said that, there were certainly men who clearly needed some help, like William Whitton (whom Wheaton is based on). Having gone "insane" at Yatala, claiming to be innocent and making absurd claims about the police, he was shifted into the Z-Ward where I'm sure he continued to act erratically. The delusions of a man believing himself innocent while imprisoned in a mental institution make for an interesting study into late 1800s Australian life which was still, by some measure, a wild and difficult time.

This character is based on the real Willian Whitton and I envision him as a middle-aged labour worker. His delusions make him unstable, but he appears to be perfectly well educated and can be in control. He provides a perfect conduit into the insanity of wild, dangerous colonial living.

**This series of letters was written by Sam Kuhl, a Flinders University student, who was on placement with the National Trust of South Australia. They are works of fiction informed by history and should be read as such. All names and addresses have been made up.*

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