

*Medication &  
Alternative Treatment*

**Early understanding of mental illnesses and how to medicate them was fraught with misunderstanding. For a long time, medical practitioners thought that mental illness was linked to malfunctions of the body and nervous systems.**

**Medicines were widely sold, with or without prescriptions, to a public who were unaware of what they contained. Large numbers of people were regularly consuming poisonous substances under the premise it was curative.**

**In the 20th century drug sales became more regulated, and medications became more targeted to specific illnesses. An understanding of the separate natures of mind and body became more widely understood.**

**Medicinal treatments now are thoroughly tested, and often require prescriptions.**

Would you take medicines that  
you knew nothing about?

Would you take something that  
claimed to cure all your ailments?

You might recognise strychnine today for the way it is deployed in popular culture. Novelists such as Agatha Christie, and movies such as Hitchcocks 'Psycho' use the poison as a weapon.

This is a tonic designed to 'strengthen' nerves. Tonics were sold to strengthen and 'tone' the nervous system, to cure issues of the mind. The term 'nervous illness' reflects early understanding of what mental illness was.

This specific tonic was prescribed to treat a range of issues, from clinical depression to anaemia.

Notably, it contains measures of the poison strychnine. During the 19th century, and into the 20th century, retailing of medicine was largely unregulated, despite attempts at legislation .

Treatments for 'nervous illness' throughout this period often contained poisonous substances. The use of these substances reveals how early attempts at treating mental illness were often more harmful than helpful.



Bottle of Huxley's 'Ner-Vigor', England, 1892-1943

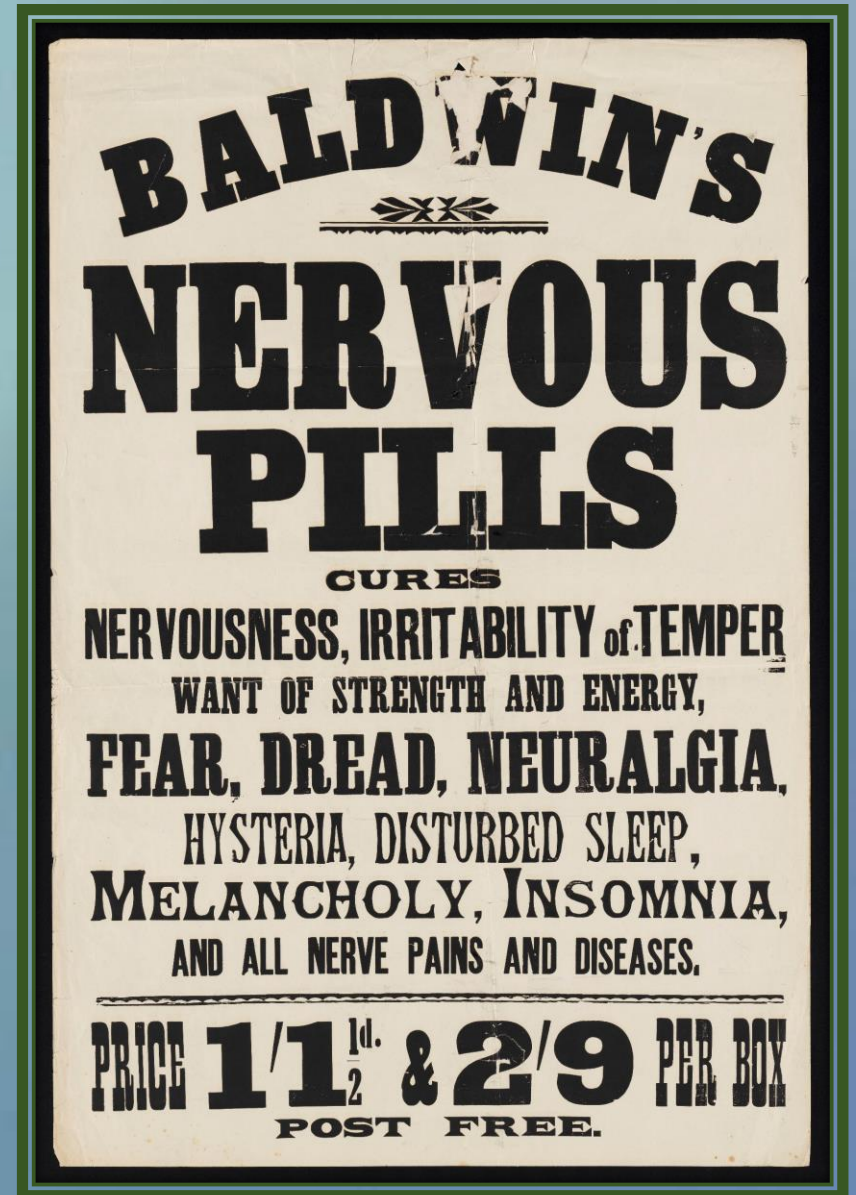
Notice the language used in this advertisement?

What do you think about words such as 'hysteria' and 'melancholy'?

This is an advertisement for pills designed to treat nervous illness, alongside numerous other conditions. Many of the treatments for nervous illnesses were available without prescription, allowing people to cheaply 'treat' themselves at home.

Advertisements for treatments, such as this one, show how many drugs were viewed as 'cure-alls'. Advertisements such as these reflect the growing commercialisation of the drugs industry during this period.

In the nineteenth century, there were no ingredient labelling requirements. Often, people did not know what substances these medicines contained.



**BALDWIN'S**  
**NERVOUS**  
**PILLS**  
CURES  
NERVOUSNESS, IRRITABILITY of TEMPER  
WANT OF STRENGTH AND ENERGY,  
**FEAR, DREAD, NEURALGIA,**  
HYSTERIA, DISTURBED SLEEP,  
**MELANCHOLY, INSOMNIA,**  
AND ALL NERVE PAINS AND DISEASES.  
PRICE **1/1<sup>1d.</sup>** & **2/9** PER BOX  
POST FREE.

*Baldwin's Nervous Pills  
Possibly late 1890s or early 1900s.*

What differences do you see between this bottle and the 'ner-vigour'?

Why do you think they look so different?



Ritalin is a type of central nervous system stimulant, a substance which works by altering the levels of specific chemicals within the brain, introduced for the treatment of depression and narcolepsy.

Its usage changed in the 1970s to primarily treat 'hyperactive children'. This condition is now recognised as ADHD.

ADHD was first recognised in this period under the label of hyperactivity. The change of Ritalin's focus represents the more widespread recognition of different mental disorders, and more specific forms of treatment.

Previously, many were not recognised at all, or treated under one umbrella.

Ritalin remains widely prescribed for treatment of ADHD.

*Empty bottle for Ritalin tablets, England, 1954-1970  
Glass and metal*