

## **HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 24**

### **Entertainment for Patients and Staff**

#### ***Patients***

From the hospital's earliest days, Agnes Hunt had recognised "the influence of change and happiness on the cure of long-standing disease". As many of the patients were in hospital for a prolonged period, and could be bed-bound for several months or even years, it was important to keep them occupied. At Baschurch there were picnics and outdoor games. A pony named Bobby was used to take patients on country drives. Plays and pageants were also regular patient activities.

After the hospital moved to its present site in 1921, all beds were fitted with wheels, so that patients could be pushed around the grounds, or even further afield. One ex-patient remembers her father pushing her bed along the main road all the way to Oswestry. Another patient memoir tells of a trip made by several young male patients, who were allowed to take the train from the hospital halt to the nearby village of Gobowen, to spend an hour at the Hart and Trumpet public house or to buy fish and chips!

From 1940 onwards, cinema films were shown regularly in the hospital concert hall, by courtesy of the Regal Cinema, Oswestry. After the war, visits to the wards by show business and sports personalities were often arranged by the local branch of the Royal Air Force Association, which in the 1950s brought such stars as Alma Cogan, Max Bygraves, Eve Boswell and footballer Billy Wright. Jazz musician Acker Bilk also visited the hospital as part of the BBC television programme 'A spoonful of sugar' hosted by Michael Aspel.

Christmas was always celebrated in great style in the days of long-stay patients, especially by the children. Services were held in the chapel on Christmas morning before Father Christmas made his rounds of each decorated ward accompanied by staff in fancy dress.

One of the highlights of the summer hospital fete was the best-decorated bed competition, when patients gave free range to their imagination in the hope of winning a prize.

#### ***Staff***

Up until the Second World War most staff lived in, and in the days before television had to make their own entertainment. Thanks to the field behind the hospital, sport played a major role; both men and women played hockey, with the Boxing Day hockey match between doctors and student nurses an important fixture. A cricket team was set up in the 1920s, and there was also a nine hole golf course. Later additions to the hospital sporting calendar included a football team (founded 1971) which played in the Wem Sunday League, a Fishing Club (founded 1973), and a Sub-Aqua Club (founded 1980). The Men's Club was set up for enthusiasts of snooker, billiards, table-tennis and dominoes.

Away from the sporting field, there were activities to suit more artistic tastes, making use of the concert hall facilities. The Orthopaedic Male Voice Choir was formed in 1968 and is still going strong today. Over the years it has raised many thousands of pounds for charity. An Old Tyme Dancing Club was founded in 1972 and continued for some years. The Oswestry Amateur Theatrical Society (OATS) was founded in 1949 to entertain patients and staff. Its successor the Orthopaedic Drama Society started in 1976 and produced one play a year until 1994.

A long-standing Oswestry tradition was the annual hospital show, organised by the resident medical staff, which usually took place during the Christmas season. This was a chance for staff to let their hair down and indulge their acting and musical talents, while poking fun at senior consultants and managers. There was usually at least one performance designed for patients, followed by a staff night when anything could happen!

By the 1970s it was decided to bring all the staff clubs and societies together under the umbrella of a Staff Sports and Social Club. The inaugural meeting was held in 1972, and after much fund-raising, the former Menzies Ward was refurbished and opened for this purpose on 27 May 1977. The Club played an active role in hospital life for many years, but was finally disbanded in 2009, and the building was demolished to make way for redevelopment.

#### Sources

1. *Hunt, Agnes. This is my life. London@ Blackie, 1938. Reprinted by the League of Friends to the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust, 2000, p 135-8, 151-2*
2. *Carter, Marie. Healing & hope: 100 years of 'The Orthopaedic'. Oswestry: The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust, 2000, p 6, 18, 36, 43, 60, 62, 68, 87*
3. *The Orthopod No 7 1958, p 5; No 8 1958, p 5*
4. *Orthopaedic Illustrated No 14 1974, p 15; No 17 1978, p 20*