

HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 26

The Dance of Life Mural

The hospital possesses a unique and important work of art in the Dance of Life mural. It was commissioned by the Hospital Management Committee in 1951 for the dining room of the new Nurses' Home. The artist, Mildred Eldridge (1909-1991), was a local art teacher. She was married to the poet and Anglican priest R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), who was at one time curate of Chirk parish church, a few miles from the hospital. The artist's connection to the hospital dates back to 1949, when she was invited to give advice on colour schemes for the new departments rebuilt after the fire of 1948.

The painting of the mural took from 1952 to 1956 to complete. It consists of six panels of differing lengths painted in oils on canvas, each 1.6 metres high, covering a total area of 46 square metres. On completion it covered two entire walls of the dining room.

Long before pollution and the environment became popular issues, the mural tells the story of civilised man's alienation from nature, and his attempt to reclaim a lost natural wisdom. This theme is illustrated with scenes of the countryside and seashore, which contain many beautiful images of birds, animals and plants.

The mural has been highly regarded over the years by experts, notably the artist Stanley Spencer, who came to view it in 1958. Due to redevelopment of the Nurses' Home, the mural was taken down in 2005 and placed in store. It has now been restored to its original condition, and is on public view at Glyndwr University, Wrexham, in the atrium of the Creative Industries Building on the main university campus. The building was opened officially on 31 March 2011.

Sources

1. *Carter, Marie. Healing & hope: 100 years of 'The Orthopaedic'. Oswestry: The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust, 2000, p 58*
2. *Hospital Management Committee 15 December 1949, minute 183*
3. *Orthopaedic Illustrated No 23 1991, front and back cover (illustration), p 14-15*
4. *Powers, Alan. Walls and wards. Country Life Vol 182 No 11, p 96-7*
5. *Parallel lives? Peter Lord on the art of M.E. Eldridge. Planet: the Welsh Internationalist June/ July 1998, p 17-26*
6. *Public Catalogue Foundation. Oil paintings in public ownership in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. London: The Foundation, 2009, p 81, 83-4*