

## HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 9

### The Hospital in World War Two

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the Board of Management decided that civilian orthopaedic patients should continue to be treated, whatever arrangements were made for members of the armed forces. The hospital was designated a base hospital and reorganised under the Ministry of Health Emergency Service. Government funds were provided and extra huts built to accommodate service patients. Hospital life continued as normally as possible during the war years. Providing a proper 'black-out' on open-air wards was difficult to achieve, and much of the night nursing had to be carried out by torchlight.

Treatment of children was largely moved away from the main site, with the establishment of hospital annexes. In 1940 Lord Kenyon provided 60 beds at his Gredington estate near Whitchurch, and in 1941 another annexe was opened at Aston Hall, a country house on the outskirts of Oswestry. By the end of the war, the total number of beds available in the hospital plus annexes had almost doubled: in 1939 there were 360 beds, and from 1942 to 1945 there were 715.

Battlefield casualties were at first not as numerous as those at Baschurch during the First World War, but they began in earnest after the invasion of Europe. After the D-Day landings in June 1944, two wounded paratroopers arrived within 48 hours. A train shuttle service from Gobowen station brought a steady stream of wounded men to the hospital. There was a huge workload in the operating theatre. Operations began at six a.m., with a four a.m. start for theatre staff, and could continue for eight to ten hours. This happened several times a week. In 1944, there were 787 military admissions; more than twice the number in the previous year. Around this time, the first commercial production of penicillin led to its availability for the treatment of infected wounds, strictly for the use for service patients. However, the Resident Surgical Officer at the time, Mr Norman Nisbet, recalls also using the drug on civilian patients with secondary tubercular sinus infections, with dramatic results. The sinuses cleared up within days, but unfortunately this was not to last, as penicillin-resistant organisms soon developed.

After the end of the war in 1945, hospital managers had to adjust to new challenges as plans for the Welfare State came into being. These led to the birth of the National Health Service on 5 July 1948.

#### Sources

1. *The Heritage of Oswestry: the origin and development of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry 1900-1975. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oswestry: The Hospital, 1975, p 77-82*
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 40-47*
3. *Joint Issues No 4 2004/5, p 6*
4. [www.shropshireroots.org.uk](http://www.shropshireroots.org.uk) No 7. *Medicine and Health*