

HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 23

Derwen College

From early days at the Baschurch Home, Agnes Hunt had encouraged the rehabilitation of ex-patients. Finding employment for "cripples", the term used at the time for those with bodily deformities, was not easy. Some were taken on to the staff of the Home, to perform maintenance or office jobs; others were employed to make splints and surgical boots. In 1926 Dr Eichholz, Chief Advisory Medical Officer to the Board of Education, suggested the establishment of a permanent training centre, which would enable cripples to learn a trade and thus support themselves. Although she was at first reluctant to take on a new task of this magnitude, Agnes Hunt wrote to County Councils and Poor Law Guardians offering to make their cripples self-supporting. Before too long, there were 150 applicants wanting to take part in the scheme.

The hospital managers decided that this work would be best carried out separately from the hospital, so in 1928 an adjoining property known as 'The Derwen' was purchased for £3,800, and became The Derwen Cripples' Training College. The College had its own executive committee, and in 1929 Mr and Mrs Rhaiadr Jones were appointed as first Manager and Matron. At that time, training was offered in the following: carpentry, painting and decorating, upholstery, surgical boot making and repairing, metal and surgical appliances, and splint making.

Over the years, the focus of the Derwen College has changed, and it has now developed into a centre "promoting, through personalised learning, the vocational, educational, personal and social development of young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities". Although its ties with the hospital are no longer a significant factor, the College continues to foster the principles of its founder, Dame Agnes Hunt, and it is recognised as one of the leading specialist colleges in the country.

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 181-7*
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 29*
3. *The Heritage of Oswestry: the origin and development of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry 1900-1975. 3rd ed. Oswestry: The Hospital, 1975, p 70-3*
4. *Derwen College website accessed March 2009 www.derwen.org.uk*