

Celebrating Occupational Therapy at the Astley Ainslie hospital

This article was submitted by Maggie Carson (AACT Executive Committee: Tree Group Chair)

This year World Occupational Therapy Day was marked on 27 October 2021 and has as its theme "*Belong. Be You*". The aim is to promote the power of diversity and inclusion by encouraging people to work together to build community and resilience.

This struck me as the perfect date to hold a small ceremony in the grounds of the Astley Ainslie hospital to bring together past and present Heads of Occupational Therapy education in Edinburgh and beyond, retired Occupational Therapists who trained and work(ed) at the hospital, Occupational Therapists currently working on site and members of the Astley Ainslie Community Trust (AACT) a community group looking to work with NHS Lothian to protect the historical green space and in particular the trees, when the NHS eventually moves their services off site.





L-R Kirstin Dawson, Jessica Murphy, Emma Barnes, Averil Stewart, Irene Patterson, Clephane Hume, Fiona Brownlee, Maggie Carson (AACT), Sheena Glen, Fiona Maclean, Sheena Blair.

The Astley Ainslie hospital is an important site for a number of reasons: one being that it was here in 1937 that the first School of Occupational Therapy in Scotland was established in

what was then the Astley Ainslie Institution. This came about because of the interest and foresight shown by the hospital's first Medical Superintendent, Lt. Colonel John Cunningham, who in the early 1930's had been concerned his patients were not getting enough rehabilitation as part of their convalescence. Speaking to another doctor at an international conference he learned about the impact Occupational Therapy was having on patients' recovery in Canada. He soon made arrangements for a Canadian Occupational Therapist, Miss Amy de Brisay to come across and work at the Astley Ainslie with significant results. Realising that they couldn't continue to rely on visiting Canadian Occupational Therapists, an Occupational Therapy Training Centre was officially opened in 1937.

The purpose of the event was to commemorate the planting in 1997 of a Canadian Dawn Redwood tree in front of what is the first ever purpose built Occupational Therapy Building. This tree was planted to mark sixty years of Occupational Therapy education in Scotland as part of a three day event co-ordinated by Queen Margaret University where the School of Occupational Therapy eventually moved to. Another tree, a wild cherry, had been planted in 1994 to commemorate the 21st Council meeting in Edinburgh of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists.

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But there is nothing in the Astley Ainslie grounds to evidence why these trees are here. On speaking with some of the current and former staff it seemed a great pity that the significant role the hospital has played in the development of Occupational Therapy across Scotland and indeed the world may eventually be lost. It also struck me that publicly marking the significance of these trees might help to protect them

from being felled in the future unlike some of the trees around them.

For that reason and through specific donations to the ACCT, we have raised money to purchase and install two plaques to commemorate the significance of these two trees. Some of those attending the ceremony were also present when the Dawn Redwood was planted and include Professor Averil Stewart, former Head of Occupational Therapy at Queen Margaret University and Sheena Glen who was then an Occupational Therapy student but has recently retired from her post as Occupational Therapy Lead Clinician for Neurorehabilitation Services at the hospital. It was lovely to be able to invite them back.



Dawn redwood

Other retired Occupational Therapists who had a key role to play on the day were retired Occupational Therapists Clephane Hume who has befriended the Dawn Redwood and Fiona Brownlee who befriended the wild cherry tree as part of AACT's 'Befriend a tree campaign'. You can read more about their tree stories and others here www.aact.scot/tree-posters. If you would be interested in befriending a tree yourself please see our web pages for more information on how to do this (www.aact.scot/tree-befriending) or feel free to contact me Maggie@aact.scot.



Fiona's Tree (Prunus Avium) at Ashley Ainslie