UNDER AN ARTIFICIAL SUN

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Blog

Meeting the Patients

ents

POWERED BY

Author

Debbie Ballin is an academic, writer and




Nora **Tom** **Eleanor** **Muriel**

This November, as part of the research process for **'Under an Artificial Sun'** I met four former patients of Stannington Sanatorium. The existing oral history material within the archive has given me a huge insight into the experience of being hospitalised with tuberculosis as a child but it is no substitute for speaking face-to-face with the patients themselves.

Nora, Tom, Eleanor, and Muriel all gave me a very warm welcome and fed me with huge quantities of tea, cake and chocolate biscuits. They shared their stories and memories with great stoicism and humour

Many of them told me similar stories, especially in relation to the experience of being separated from their families. These memories highlight how traumatic it was as a small child to be removed from the people they knew and loved most

Eleanor who was around five years old when she was admitted to Stannington, recalls: "*Me and another little boy both had TB and we were both sent to Stannington Sanatorium on the same day. That was the worst day of me life, me grandmother came with me and I was screaming the place down. I was really terrible, so they had to put me in a strait jacket and of course that upset me grandmother and she had to leave us, well I was just distraught but any way time got on and I settled in.*"

This is echoed by Muriel who was only two years old when she first went to Stannington:
"My sister said ... they took me in and they put me in a cot and it was a long corridor and they could hear me screaming all the way as they walked out. Me, sister says to this day she can still hear me, 'don't leave me Mammy' you know, but. I must have settled in alright."

ict and the children were

filmmaker based at Leeds Arts University

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only allowed to have visitors on one afternoon every two months.

Nora who was nine when she was sent to Stannington spoke of her excitement at seeing her father on her first visiting day: *"I remember looking around and seeing me dad and saying 'Oh daddy,' ... I made a beeline straight for my father and of course he said, 'Hello pet,' you know lifted us up and I jumped into his arms and I nearly knocked him out I give him such a crack on the head ...I always remember that."*

Tom who was five, remembers the terrible experience of waiting for his father to arrive: *"I remember sitting up in bed all day on the Saturday waiting for me father to come in through the gates cos he said ... 'I'll come and see you tomorrow when he left,' and I looked for him all day and of course he never came, so I was in tears all day waiting for me father to come."*

Later, Tom relates how it felt when his parents did eventually come and visit him; *"I felt strange when they came to see me quite frankly. I hadn't seen them for two month you know."*

It must have been extremely hard for a young child to make sense of being separated from their parents and loved ones in this way. In *A Fortunate Man* (1997) John Berger considers the way children perceive time, he says, "There are no inevitable repetitions in childhood. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, April, May, June, 1924, 1925, 1926, represents the antithesis of their experience. Nothing is bound to repeat itself. Which incidentally is one of the reasons children ask to be reassured that some things will be repeated, 'And tomorrow I will get up and have breakfast?' Their attention constantly remains on the present in which things constantly appear for the first time and are constantly being lost forever." This elongated childhood perception of time must have made these separations all the more difficult.

Dr Janice Hague Professor of Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam University and I, have discussed these childhood experiences in the context of current understandings of child development. Bowlby (2007) points out that children who stayed in hospital, in the 1950's, for ten days or more, with only brief

 psychological trauma. He

argues, that despite being physically well cared for, these children 'lost hope' of being 'rescued by their parents' and grew up feeling the impact of this throughout their adult lives. In the light of this it is interesting to note how many former patients had fond memories of caring relationships with nurses and porters working within the institution.

Muriel says, "*I used to have a nurse called Nurse Fairlamb and she was plump, with nice white hair ... lovely complexion, lovely smile and she could give me an injection and not hurt me, she was the only one.*"

Whilst Eleanor especially remembered; *"Nurse Dawson... she had a lovely voice and we all loved her, every kid in the ward loved her* "

Bowlby (2007) suggests that young children and babies separated from their families often form strong secondary bonds with other adults. These relationships with nursing staff may have been a factor in the impact of childhood hospitalisation on later life. As Bowlby notes, "Having ... secondary attachment figures will usually increase children's resilience and promote mental health...when these carers are consistent, sensitive and responsive, they can benefit toddlers' social and cognitive development."

0 Comments

Project -Take Off

10/24/2018 0 Comments

Welcome to my blog for **'Under an Artificial Sun,'** a new Wellcome Trust Bursary Award project investigating the impact of childhood TB at Stannington Children's Sanatorium. I am going to chart the projects progress on this blog as it develops and evolves over the next six months.

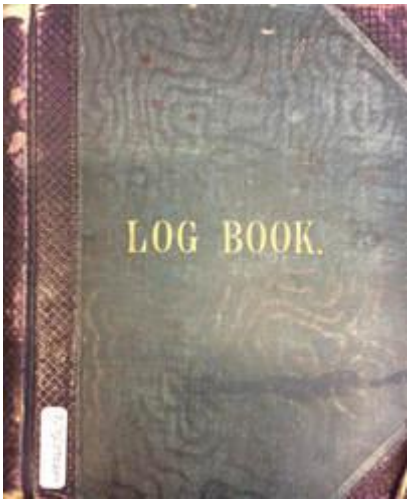
During October, I've been up at Archives researching

materials in the Stannington Children's Sanatorium collection and I'm very excited by what I've discovered so far.

The Stannington Sanatorium collection contains a wealth of material including: patients medical records and reports, radiographs, educational logbooks from the Sanatorium School from 1906 – 1970, the Matron's Medical Record Book from 1906 – 1933, photographs, ephemera and a collection of twenty-six oral history interviews with former patients recorded in 2013.

I am collaborating with Dr. Janice Haigh, Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies at Sheffield Hallam University to understand how these historical experiences connect to contemporary debates on childhood. Janice and I have started this process by reading through the transcript summaries of the existing oral history interviews.

With the help of Sue Wood, Head of Collections at Northumberland Archives, I have also contacted five of the former patients at the sanatorium and am going to interview them in November.



I am now reading through the Matron's Medical record book and the Stannington Sanatorium School Educational log books. These beautiful handwritten texts contain detailed descriptions of the day to day life of the sanatorium. The daily rhythms and routines, the nursing staff, teachers and doctors' the development of the building and resources and the nal thinking.

Threaded through them I have found descriptions of the key historical events of the early twentieth century: the declaration of the First World War in 1914; the armistice celebrations in 1918; the Spanish flu, which led to the deaths of four of the children at the sanatorium and the evacuation of the sanatorium to Hexham Hydro during the Second World War.

The research is already raising lots of questions. What was it like to be isolated and separated from family and friends? What did it feel like to be confined to your bed for long periods of time? Was it boring? Or was it fun having lots of other children on the ward to play with? Did the experience make you more resilient and stronger? Or did the effects of the illness still persist in later life? Was it lonely? How did all that time to think effect your creativity and imagination?