

Nelson Hospital, Merton

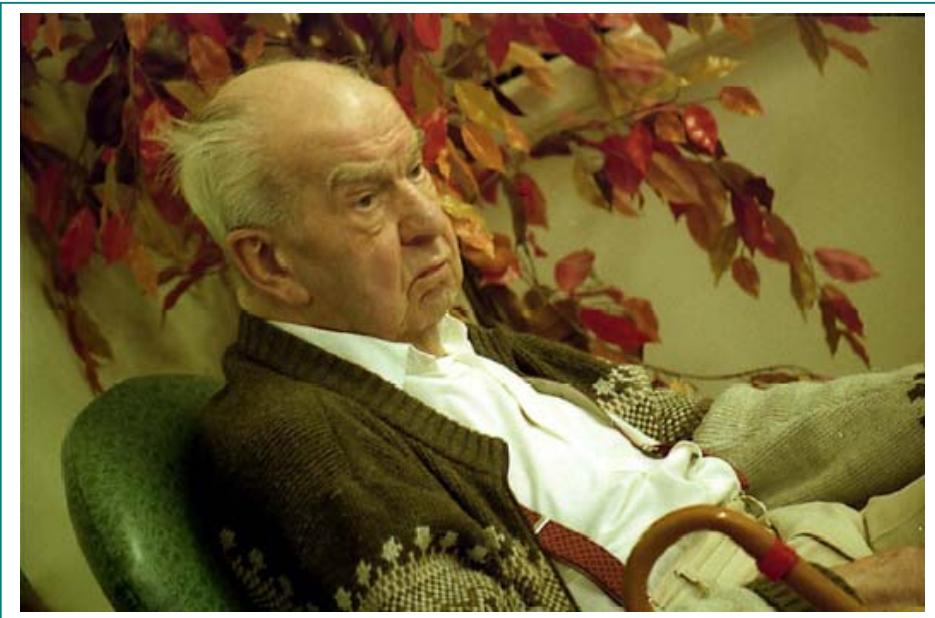
Day Hospital for the Elderly

Reading Friday February 8<sup>th</sup> 2002

Readers : Caroline Carver, Rogan Wolf, John Morris (local poet)

Photographs : Pierre Bascle

Report : Rogan Wolf





*At the beginning of this reading, we had a shock. I had planned it carefully with the Ward Sister who seemed very keen. I had delivered a pack of the poems and she said that in the days before the reading, she would go through them with her patients and get them to select their favourites, either to read out themselves or to ask us to read. And I had brought posters in for her to put up, etc.*

*When we arrived, the posters were up, but the Sister herself was just setting out for her afternoon off. She always took it on this particular day of the week, it turned out, but she hadn't told me. Her staff would be available to us, she said, a grandchild in her arms. And off she went. The patients were in the large sitting room. At this time of day, just after lunch, they always sit there, waiting for the ambulance to come and take them home. As far as we could tell, none of them were expecting us. But then, maybe memories were short. When we said who we were, one of the patients said, very deliberately, he hoped the ambulance would be coming soon !*



*The minute the poems started, several pairs of eyes closed. Had they gone straight to sleep ? The silence was truly profound. Nothing whatsoever in the air except the words of each poem, hanging there (not even the tiniest snore). Surely too intense a silence for people asleep ?*

*Things only really came alive at the end, when we asked them to sign Disclaimer forms, giving permission for us to use Pierre's photographs ! Pierre himself was adamant - when we talked about it later - that people had not been asleep at all and that the words had found lodging. Caroline disagreed. She thought that, although maybe not asleep exactly, the patients had switched off. Pierre was touched by all the energy people put in to signing the forms (and posing for his camera !)*

*At the very end, a man told me he'd enjoyed the reading. He said his favourite poet was Edward Thomas. I immediately started to search through the books for a Thomas to read out. No luck. Then the ambulance arrived. There was real warmth in the hand-shakes, though, as we said goodbye.*

