

## The History of Mostyn

The small settlement of Llandudno was developed into a seaside resort from the mid-1800s and as the town grew, it was felt that an art gallery would be of great benefit for local people and visitors alike. Between the years 1901 and 1912 there was a thriving cultural community connected to the Mostyn Art Gallery, as it was originally known.

After 1912 the building had several changes in use before opening again as a gallery in 1979 and then undergoing a major refurbishment during 2007-2010. When the gallery opened as Mostyn in May 2010, it was with the intention of showing outstanding international contemporary art and to recreate that flourishing cultural community, an aim which remains today.

### Pre-1900: Art in the local area

North Wales became a popular destination for artists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with Snowdonia being a favourite location due to the picturesque scenery. The renowned artist JMW Turner travelled through the area in 1798 in order to make sketches for his watercolour paintings, such as Conwy Castle. Guide books were produced for artists on tour, an example being *The Beauties of Cambria* (1823) by Hugh Hughes. Born in Llandudno, and with a family home in Glan Conwy, Hughes was a skilled wood engraver and his best known work showed 60 views of Wales.

In 1844, the painter David Cox began to make annual visits to Betws-y-Coed, staying at the Royal Oak. Younger artists were drawn to him and soon numbers of both tourists and residents increased, turning the village into the first British artists' colony. During the summer months, Betws-y-Coed was overflowing with professional and amateur artists from Britain and Europe, with artists being shown as an invading army in an illustration in the Royal Oak Visitors' Book!

### Royal Cambrian Academy

Given that there were now a number of artists in the area, the idea of forming an academy gained support and in 1882 the Cambrian Academy began accepting applications for membership. After obtaining patronage from Queen Victoria the name changed to the Royal Cambrian Academy and although the first RCA exhibition was held in Llandudno, the group soon moved to the Elizabethan mansion, Plas Mawr, in Conwy. Ladies were not accepted as members, although in the future they would be allowed to show their work there.

Attempts to expand the RCA and relocate to Cardiff failed and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the colony was no longer as fashionable, with young painters gathering at Newlyn in

Cornwall. Today the RCA is still going strong with over a hundred members, and their work can be seen at the gallery in Crown Lane, Conwy.

### **Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society**

The need for an art society for women soon became apparent, as there were female relatives of RCA members and also visiting artists who wished to form their own group. The Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society (GLAS) attracted forty members and the first exhibition was held in 1895.

### **Eisteddfodau**

The Eisteddfod is an important annual Welsh cultural festival and the first national event was staged in 1861, although the tradition of Eisteddfodau goes back to 1176. Art and craft were felt to be an important inclusion in 1861 and the exhibition aspect was developed over the following years. Llandudno was host to the festival in 1896.

### **1898-1901: Lady Henrietta Augusta Mostyn**

The land owning Mostyn family was influential in the creation of Llandudno as a tourist town. Lady Henrietta Augusta Nevill (1830-1912) married into the family and after having two sons was widowed at a young age. Her interest in Llandudno included being involved in town planning and she provided financial support for particular public buildings. A keen supporter of the arts, having been a photographer before her marriage (exhibiting as 'The Trio' with her sisters Caroline and Isabel at the Royal Photographic Society in 1854), Lady Augusta was President of the Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society. She also organised women's contributions for the Arts and Crafts Exhibition for the Llandudno Eisteddfod.

### **Mostyn Art Gallery plans**

In 1898 there was a proposal to house a museum collection and the work of GLAS in an extension to the library (on the site of the current library) on Mostyn Street, but in the following year plans were passed for a new art gallery building to be erected in Vaughan Street. Interestingly, the 1896 Eisteddfod was located here.

The initial reason for the gallery being built seems to have been to attract visitors to the town and the gallery would have had a prime location near the railway station and next to the Post Office (built in 1904). GLAS members at that time were exhibiting in the Round Room in Conwy and had outgrown these premises. They were to be offered one rented gallery space in the new building for part of the year (April to September) as the exhibition and sale of their work was seen as being appealing to tourists.

## **GA Humphreys**

George Alfred Humphreys (1865-1948) was a man of significant importance in the development of Llandudno. He worked as an architect on many commissions for the Mostyn family, becoming chief agent of Mostyn Estates in 1921. His insistence on maintaining high standards in terms of design and building in the town, enabled Llandudno to preserve its character.

Both Mostyn Art Gallery and the Post Office on Vaughan Street were designed by GA Humphreys and the distinctive red terracotta façade of the block was made using brick from Ruabon, in Wrexham. The architect also took his civic duties seriously and he was a member of many committees, including that of the Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society.

### **1901-1903: Mostyn Art Gallery and Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society**

GLAS members started showing their work in the new gallery in 1901, but the official opening by Lord Mostyn was in 1902. At this event Lady Augusta Mostyn asked her son to state that she was keen to promote art and technical classes and that these could take place when the space was not used by GLAS (October to March). She made clear that she wanted the young men and women of the town to benefit from the classes, as there was nowhere else in Llandudno where these could be held successfully.

The local press gave mixed reviews to the 1902 GLAS exhibition. 'We are uncertain whether to regard it as an association of well-meaning amateurs and students, or a body of professional artists appealing on their merits to the picture-buying public.' The reporter goes on to say that if the latter is the case, then the quality is rather inconsistent and the article ends with a call for the gallery to be made an educational centre.

## **Clara Perrin and Lily Whaite**

Clara Perrin (1879-1960) lived in Glan Conwy and was secretary of GLAS from 1901-1904. She was an accomplished painter of flowers and worked tirelessly for the group on secretarial matters as well as installing exhibitions and arranging social events. Her childhood friend was Lily Whaite, also a member of GLAS and a talented artist who had received formal training in London. Lily used to spend half the year in Glan Conwy and half in London with her father Clarence, a painter and influential member of the RCA in Conwy. Clarence had art connections in Manchester and London, so Lily often accompanied him on his travels. When the Queen of Romania visited Llandudno in 1890, father and daughter went to meet her.

The lifelong friends exchanged many letters and Clara's witty stories and illustrations kept Lily updated on the society's activities while she was away. In one Clara mentions the fact that Lily has contracted measles and they are worried in case she has infected those at the Private View!

Both women also exhibited elsewhere; Clara at the RCA in Conwy and in Liverpool and Birmingham galleries and Lily, who also painted flowers, in many major British art galleries.

### **Gallery spaces**

The original building plans indicate that there was a corridor gallery, leading to two top-lit main gallery spaces. At one point the walls were painted dark red and the paintings were hung salon-style from floor to ceiling, press reports confirming that there were over a hundred paintings in each exhibition. The spaces were also used for events such as flower shows and chamber music concerts.

### **Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society leaves the gallery**

In July 1903, Sir Joseph Fayrer – Physician Extraordinary to King Edward VII – opened the arts and crafts division of the Gwynedd Ladies Art Society. During a long speech, Sir Joseph suggested that the exhibition and study of handicrafts might also be supplemented by other classes and lectures. A committee representative confirmed that Lady Augusta Mostyn had always planned that the building would be used for instructive purposes.

Plans for change were underway earlier in the year when GA Humphreys was asked by Lady Augusta Mostyn to tell the members of GLAS, via a letter to the secretary, that unless there was a noted improvement in the overall quality of their work, their tenancy would be terminated and in December 1903 GLAS received notice to leave. There is a clue to the more pressing reason where it is said that their patron wanted the gallery to be 'of real practical use to the town'.

Lady Augusta Mostyn seemed to be disappointed that many GLAS members lived as far afield as Birmingham and London and Clara's letters often noted that members were not there to hang work and attend meetings. The idea of creating a type of polytechnic, would have seemed to serve the town in a better way.

GLAS relocated to the Pier Pavilion, a large concert hall and entertainment complex, for the ninth and final exhibition. The area they were given for display was small, but the work received good reviews and in future years some of the group members (such as Dora Thomas, Maud Salmon and Clara Knight) would go on to show their work in other galleries.

### **Commercial premises**

The gallery spaces formed part of Unit 2 of the block called 'Art Gallery Buildings', the other part being a shop. Unit 1 was to the right of the current gallery shop and was rented to a D Thomas as a Studio from 1901-1904. This could have been Dora Thomas, a member of GLAS. Unit 3 was named 'Corona' and it was located to the left of the present entrance, now a community project space. The tenant of Unit 3 opened 'T. Nixon's Corona Grocery Establishment'.

### **1903-1912: School of Art, Science and Technical Classes**

Mostyn Art Gallery was very much a product of its time, being built by its patron Lady Augusta Mostyn to be a cultural centre for the local population and she, like many philanthropists, supported the idea of self-improvement. A 'School of Art, Science and Technical Classes' was duly created in 1903, with the backing of many Llandudno people. Some of the committee from GLAS appeared again – Lady Augusta herself, the architect GA Humphreys, Mrs Alethea Broome (Vice President of GLAS and wife of Joseph Broome), together with representatives from the Town Council, clergymen and other interested parties.

### **Influential families**

The people involved in the organisation of the school were extremely influential in Llandudno life in terms of civic duties and being members of the various clubs and societies.

Joseph Broome (1825-1907) was a Manchester cotton merchant who spent his later years in Llandudno, giving generously to Bodafon School and other local causes. Every May Day he gave 100 new shillings to local children. Mr Broome played a full part in civic life and his prominent status meant that he became a Vice President of the school at Mostyn Art Gallery, joining his wife on the committee. On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he received a silver casket from the Mayor and a book illustrated by students from the school at the gallery. He is buried in St Tudno's churchyard on the Great Orme.

John Walker (1828-1913) was from a wealthy brewing family – his brother Andrew was Lord Mayor of Liverpool and he had built the Walker Art Gallery for the people of the city, for which he was knighted. John Walker served as a Vice President of the School of Art, Science and Technical Classes and his wife was on the committee. Although he played no major part in public life, he was a generous supporter of the community. The couple had lived at Osborne House on North Parade since 1883. Osborne House is currently a townhouse hotel, which has been styled to reflect the décor of the 1850s.

Many members of the Rathbone family were involved in public service. Harold Rathbone (1858-1929) was from the merchant and ship-owning family and he was an artist influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. His own very distinctive pottery, called Della Robbia, was made in Birkenhead from 1894-1906. Harold's cousin Eleanor Rathbone was an independent MP and social campaigner, supporter of women's rights and pioneer of family allowances. She gave the address at an 'at home' in Abbey Road for the Llandudno branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1908.

## **School organisation and funding**

The provision of classes for adults was a feature in buildings throughout Britain in the early 1900s and at Mostyn Art Gallery the student numbers had reached 159 by September 1904. Both day and evening classes took place and were funded by fees, grants, subscriptions and donations. At this point the local committee made the first of several failed attempts to either hand over control to the County Education Authority or to have the grant of £100 increased. Over the years there were many appeals for donations and in late 1904 it was promised that names of donors would be published in local papers.

Another ongoing concern was the bid to have official status as a School of Art. However, early classes were said to be too elementary and there was frequent mention of the need for better equipment, such as single desks with adjustable tops instead of tables. In 1910 there were still hopes that the institution would widen its scope and become the recognised art school for North West Wales.

In 1907 there was a split in provision, with the gallery retaining art classes and other subjects moving to Lloyd Street School.

## **Classes and students**

A wide variety of subjects was taught as well as art and craft classes including brush drawing, light and shade, oil painting, woodcarving, metalwork and clay modelling. Technical classes such as building construction took place alongside bookkeeping, French and elocution.

Students paid 2s 6d (12.5 pence) per subject for a session October to May 1908-1909 and the fees were returned in full if there was a 75% attendance rate. The list of occupations for students shows that the majority were teachers, although there were three gardeners, two farmers and a millwright in 1904. One lady's occupation was given as 'bank manager's daughter'. This was not exactly the working class audience the school was attempting to serve.

Annual prize and certificate giving ceremonies were well attended and were accompanied by musical interludes from staff and students.

## **Teachers**

John Hanmer Hutchings (1871-1950) was the Head of the School of Art, Science and Technical Classes who organised the curriculum and lectures as well as undertaking teaching duties. He came to Llandudno from Chester in 1903 and had a studio on the corner of Gloddaeth Street and Mostyn Street. Having qualified at the National Art Training School at South Kensington (which later became the Royal College of Art), he was a very experienced artist and craftsman. Hutchings made the Bardic Crowns for two National Eisteddfodau – Rhyl in 1904 and Caernarfon in 1906, the latter crown being in ornate silverwork. After

teaching in adult education he became Art Master at Rydal Mount School (now Rydal Penrhos) in Colwyn Bay 1914-1921.

Dora Thomas (1859-1932) was a former member of the Gwynedd Ladies' Art Society and after studying art in London she taught life drawing at the school with her brother Edward. All the brothers and sisters in the Thomas family were talented and their father was Henry Thomas, a homeopathic doctor and 'Proprietor and Medical Superintendent' at the Hydro Hotel. As a young woman, Dora wrote to artist, critic and social thinker John Ruskin and the reply to her is currently in a museum in the US. Dora's continued love of painting and of landscape in particular is obvious from her many artworks showing local scenery. She exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in the Autumn Exhibition of 1900 and at the Mostyn Art Gallery many times.

Dr Roland Rogers (1847-1927) taught vocal music and theory, harmony and orchestral classes as well as conducting the gallery orchestra for social events. He was the much acclaimed organist and choir master of Bangor cathedral and his other teaching positions were at Bangor University College and Rydal Mount School, Colwyn Bay. Dr Rogers won several competitions at National Eisteddfodau, famously conducting the Penrhyn quarrymen's choir. His composition *The Garden* won the cantata section at the National Eisteddfod in Llandudno and the piece was played at the annual prize giving ceremony at the gallery in 1905.

Robert Gresley Jones (1878-1964), a local clerk, taught the Pitman shorthand method of writing at the gallery.

Classes in dressmaking, cutting and art needlework were undertaken by Miss Rosina Hutchings, daughter of the head teacher, who had a first class diploma from the Tailors' and Cutters' Academy and had studied at the Royal School of Art Needlework.

Teachers were paid 3s 6d (17.5 pence) per hour in the 1907-1908 season but in the financial crisis of 1904 they had to accept reduced salaries.

## **Exhibitions**

Exhibitions were still held at the gallery during the years of the school, these being curated by John Hanmer Hutchings. The role of the curator in the Edwardian era was very different to the role today, and would not have carried as much prestige. Although he did seem to have a lot of input on what was happening at the gallery, it's not clear how many decisions Hutchings would have made. Loans were obtained from South Kensington, where he trained, so he could have been using his contacts there. The walls and the floor space would have been filled – newspaper reports note over 200 artworks in just one of the galleries.

The wealthy benefactors were also involved in terms of loans from their own collections and using their networks to secure art and craft pieces. The Rathbone Collection, loaned by retired Birkenhead pottery owner and Llandudno resident Harold Rathbone, was shown at Mostyn Art Gallery in August 1906. Visitors were charged 3d (just over 1p) entrance fee to

see work connected with Celtic life and sentiment, intended to inspire those in the classes and to encourage a love of art amongst the local people. Alongside work by Ford Madox Brown and Spencer Stanhope, Rathbone displayed his own paintings and examples of Della Robbia pottery from his factory. Also on view were many objects including stained glass window panels, books, cartoons and a French harp.

The Summer Exhibition of 1904 was intended to be the first in a series of annual events in Llandudno's social calendar. Visitors saw a loan collection of watercolours, oils and pastels with various examples of craft processes, such as a leatherwork door curtain, furniture from the Paris Exhibition of 1900, reproductions of gold and silversmiths' work from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and Turkish tiles. A 1912 exhibition presented wild animals of South Africa and Persian ornaments, together with a 'charming' series of paintings of local subjects.

## **Lectures**

Llandudno's vibrant social scene included a range of lectures, often hosted by the town's clubs and societies in public buildings. An early lecture at the gallery in 1903 was given by John Hanmer Hutchings on the subject of woodcarving, for which he had a particular enthusiasm. The talk was illustrated by means of lantern slides, photographs and prints. In May 1904 the gallery school committee arranged a lecture at the Town Hall by Herr Otto Salomon on the subject of sloyd – a system of manual training with an emphasis on woodcarving. Following this, a sloyd class was set up at the Mostyn Art Gallery.

The academic AJ Wyatt gave a lecture on William Morris in 1906 and the local newspaper reported that the audience was 'enthralled'. Wyatt had collaborated with Morris on a translation of Beowulf in 1895, the limited edition print of the book being handmade at Morris's own company Kelmscott Press. The gallery presented examples of tapestries, embroidery, wallpaper and tiles from Morris & Co, together with a selection of books.

As Hutchings was a member of the Llandudno Field Club, this enabled him to call on members of that group to give lectures on natural sciences, archaeology and history.

## **Llandudno Field Club**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a huge increase in the pursuit of natural history and antiquities as a hobby and several hundred societies were founded. Membership would have been a combination of academics, enthusiasts and those who saw an association with the group as being a worthy part of their civic duty. Field Clubs were highly organised, with largely middle class members. The clubs were formed in order for members to investigate the local area, to study nature and historical sites in the environment and to collect specimens for further research at home. There was also a social aspect to the meetings and excursions and being in the outdoors had obvious health benefits.

Meetings tended to be serious affairs with lectures, detailed reports on fieldwork observations and opportunities to display finds, lend instruments and exchange books.



Scholarly proceedings were often produced and these give valuable information to scientists and historians today. Extensive libraries were formed, together with collections of specimens which sometimes became the basis for local museums.

Llandudno's Field Club was founded in 1906 and many of the people associated with the School of Art, Science and Technical Classes at the gallery were active members. Lady Augusta and others in the Mostyn family supported the group, with GA Humphreys specialising in the built environment and archaeology. Mr Gresley Jones was the curator/librarian of the impressive collections as well as being head of the microscopic section and the Rathbone, Walker and Broome families were all enthusiastic participants. One of the most famous members of Llandudno Field Club was Angela Brazil, the author of popular school stories for girls.

### **Harry Thomas (1864-1938)**

Harry Thomas was a talented gardener who worked for various local people, including GA Humphreys. He lived with his wife and family in Nant-y-Gamar Road in Llandudno.

Being a member of a highly creative family, Harry attended art classes at the gallery, using his skill to make drawings of botanical and other specimens, which were noted in his diaries. In 1909 he won prizes for 'Drawing in light and shade' and 'Model drawing'. Subjects which interested him greatly were astronomy, botany, meteorology, geology and marine biology and he played an active role in the life of the Llandudno Field Club. Harry gave a lecture at Mostyn Art Gallery in 1906, interestingly to Llandudno Football Club, and this was accompanied by lantern slides and diagrams. The title was *Notes on some Marine Forms of Animal Life found in Llandudno Bay* and the observations made are useful to marine conservationists working today. A tragic bicycle accident in 1917 left Harry with brain damage and no more diary entries were made.

We are able to learn about Harry's daily life from his detailed diaries, only 4 of which survive. The text is supplemented by drawings, photographs, postcards and newspaper cuttings and world news is interwoven with stories of family life.

### **Rifle Club**

The Art Gallery Rifle Club was in operation in 1906 and for one competition the club used a borrowed 22 bore rifle with smokeless powder ammunition – within the building! The club was connected to the National Service League, which had a goal of peacetime conscription and members undertook physical exercise as well as rifle training. More than 60 young men joined the group, usually using air rifles on a range which was 80 feet long and located in the corridor at the back of the gallery.

## **Social events**

In addition to the lectures, social events were held at the gallery and the Entertainment Committee was in charge of putting these together. They were usually musical evenings, with students and staff joining others to sing, play musical instruments and perform recitations, the latter being a forte of Mr Gresley Jones. On one occasion GA Humphreys acted as MC, introducing a variety of entertainment.

Penny Readings in the Mostyn Art Gallery were organised by the Primrose League, a political group with Conservative principles of which Lady Augusta Mostyn was the ruling councillor in 1906. The readings were given as part of an evening with musical entertainment and the price of admission was one penny.

A newspaper notice also mentions a games night featuring ping pong, progressive whist and the board game of Halma.

## **Boots**

During the years 1905-1943, Boots Cash Chemists occupied the space where Mostyn's shop is located now. The company opened stores in 'pleasure resorts' such as Llandudno, Scarborough and Buxton, as visitors from the industrial towns were already familiar with the brand. Two ornate door surrounds were removed to allow the Boots frontage to be built and the curved windows were installed as part of the building improvements. The window areas would have been ideal spaces to promote healthcare items and toiletries.

The nature of the Llandudno business is stated as 'Chemists and druggists, sale of stationery, books, fancy, leather and silver goods, prints and artists' materials, also circulating library'. The provision of a library was introduced by the company in selected stores from 1898 onwards and pavement advertising outside Mostyn Art Gallery promoted this innovative service.

## **Other commercial premises**

Nixon's grocery store located in Unit 3 Art Gallery Buildings closed in 1907, with the on-site sale of goods and equipment. On offer were objects such as a tea scale, marble butter block, kneading trough and grocery counter, together with a hand cart and 'useful pony'.

The space was converted into the Oriental Café, where tea and coffee were served in Japanese cups of egg-shell china. Pure Ceylon tea was sold in packets at two shillings and sixpence per pound. The café was so popular that it had to be extended soon after opening and a large tea room seating fifty people was opened at the rear. Butter, cream, eggs, fruit and biscuits were also stocked.

Unit 1 was rented out to J Dicken & Son from 1904-1939. The company started as a wholesale cabinet manufacturer and Frank Dicken (son of Joseph) was a popular local furniture retailer.

## **1912-1918: Death of Lady Augusta Mostyn**

The School of Art, Science and Technical Classes continued to develop its programme of classes, lectures and exhibitions until it closed in 1912, following the death of Lady Augusta Mostyn. The classes then moved to Central School (now Ysgol Tudno), together with some staff such as John Hanmer Hutchings and Edward Thomas.

### **Drill hall**

During World War I the gallery spaces were used as the headquarters for the Volunteer Training Corps, which was the equivalent of the Home Guard in World War II. Harry Thomas writes in a 1915 diary entry that as part of his volunteer duties he undertook stretcher bearing practice in the gallery. A newspaper article mentions how the veterans were getting fit due to the nightly drills and the average age of participants was said to be about 50. Youths under military age joined the junior section, which was felt to provide beneficial basic training enabling an easier transition into the regular army at a later date. There were obviously a lot of volunteers as due to congestion the Craig-y-Don contingent moved to Kelly's Garage and the owner of Red Garages (behind the gallery) also offered extra space there. Some of the drills were undertaken outdoors, with Vaughan Street being a starting point.

The chairman of the Drill Committee was GA Humphreys and several professionals and business owners joined to provide structure and administration. A fundraising initiative raised money to buy a rifle for each volunteer – Lord Mostyn contributed £50 – and a local policeman gave instruction in musketry.

The rooms were also used for training by the Voluntary Aid Detachment, which provided nursing aid at local hospitals and eventually at hospitals closer to the battlefields overseas.

### **Belgian Refugees**

Following the invasion of Belgium by Germany in 1914, over a million Belgians sought refuge and 250,000 came to the UK. Wales took in 4,500 and Llandudno played its part. Most of the 60 refugees given a home by the Conwy area were housed in Deganwy, but Lord Mostyn offered accommodation in the Art Gallery Buildings above the Oriental Café and Tea Rooms.

A postcard sent from Llandudno by a refugee in 1917 mentions that all is well with her family, including the children. She is concerned for her brother, the recipient of the postcard, as he is in a Prisoner of War camp in Soldau, Germany. She has been writing to him regularly and sending parcels, but has not heard anything back for a while. She hopes to be able to see and embrace him soon.

The refugees left in 1919 and Mostyn Estates sent a claim for £65 depreciation to the Belgian Refugee Committee.

### **1918-1939: Commercial usage**

In the period between the two world wars, the gallery building was mainly used for commercial purposes. Boots was still operating in Unit 2, with J Dicken & Son's furniture business occupying Unit 1. Judges Photographic Publishers took over Unit 3 from 1921 to 1939, although the unit was sold to the General Post Office in 1924. The gallery spaces in Unit 2 were listed as 'Travellers' Showrooms' from 1924 to 1932 and the rent was split between J Dicken & Son and the North Western Hotel (later the Tudno Castle Hotel).

### **1939-1946: American troops**

Over 3 million US servicemen were stationed in Britain after December 1941 and local people remember American troops staying in Llandudno – there being a surge in numbers between March and August 1944. Those arriving in Llandudno belonged to the General Field Hospital units and they came to the town for a few weeks of medical training, before heading south to be closer to the casualties or the field hospitals on the newly liberated European mainland.

Billeted in hotels and private houses around the town, the men and women underwent hard physical training on the Promenade and in fields off Oxford Road. Nissen huts were erected in the area to serve as kitchens.

Any Llandudno houses with spare rooms were told to take in Americans and the town, already housing Inland Revenue staff from London, was overcrowded. The US military police ('Snowdrops') feared chaos if all the soldiers were there in the evenings, so they kept guard and only allowed them out street by street.

### **Donut Dugout**

The American Red Cross was quick to provide medical and recreational services for its troops abroad. Wherever the American soldiers were based, some sort of facility would appear: for larger groups there were service clubs, aero clubs and camp clubs, whereas mobile units called Clubmobiles served outlying divisions. Remote bases, such as Llandudno, had a Donut Dugout located in the best available place within walking distance of the soldiers – Art Gallery Buildings. Boots left Unit 2 in 1943 and although the new tenant was listed as the Inland Revenue, the Donut Dugout was in this space, probably for a short time in 1944.

American women would usually run the centres, with the help of volunteers and they served coffee and doughnuts. Morfydd Phillips, who was Headmistress of Lloyd Street School, worked there one evening per week. Any remaining doughnuts could be taken by staff at the end of the day and her nephew David Atkinson said the taste was 'out of this world'.

Relaxing in the area of the gallery which is now the shop, the US troops would have enjoyed reading publications such as *Yank, the Army Weekly*, listening to American music and writing letters to their families.

## **Inland Revenue**

While part of Unit 2 was registered to the Inland Revenue, the gallery spaces were rented to the Treasury Valuer and it's possible that the building was used mainly for storage.

Having been designated a 'safe' area, Llandudno became the hub for the Inland Revenue in the war years and around 5,000 staff and their families relocated from London. Over 400 hotels, boarding houses and private residences were requisitioned in order to provide offices and living accommodation. Visitors were sent away and staff given notice, and landlords expressed concern about losing summer business.

Although some never settled away from London, others recognised the advantages, in that people who had once lived miles apart and only met in the office, could now get together regularly. A variety of clubs and societies were set up and staff joined the Home Guard, did voluntary work and provided Christmas parties for local children. The Ormescliffe Hotel (now the Llandudno Bay Hotel) became the Inland Revenue recreation centre, with many games facilities. Dances and keep fit were held in the ballroom, and on a practical level there were washing and ironing spaces. A monthly magazine, the Ormescliffe Gazette (priced at one penny) provided reviews and articles and kept everyone up to date with the social scene.

James Callaghan (1912-2005), who later became Prime Minister, had an office in the Imperial Hotel for most of the war. His work included billeting and entertainments and he supervised the Ormescliffe Hotel activities for staff.

The move back to London began in June 1945, but it was a gradual process as buildings had been damaged in the Blitz. Phil Roberts recalls having plenty of plumbing work in Llandudno's hotels, as no maintenance work had been done.

## **Commercial usage**

Unit 1 was occupied by the Orme Cycle business from 1941-1991. The owner had swapped premises with J Dicken & Sons and the furniture retailer moved further down Vaughan Street. A very popular shop in the local area, Orme Cycle sold bicycles, prams and toys.

Unit 3 was owned and occupied by the Post Office; the space at the front being used for storage, whereas the room at the rear was converted into the sorting office. Designed by the gallery's architect GA Humphreys, Llandudno Post Office cost £7,500 to build and was opened in 1904 by the Postmaster General, Lord Stanley. It was the best equipped post office in North Wales and the third largest in Wales after Cardiff and Newport. The Vaughan Street premises had a new telegraph system and the telegram service took up most of the

second and third floors, employing a number of messenger boys. Many Llandudno families were employed at the Post Office, either at the counters or sorting and delivering mail and it was seen as a job for life. The Post Office sorting office moved to Maesdu Road in the late 1990s and counter services transferred to WH Smith in 2016 when the 1904 building closed.

### **1946-1979: Wagstaff's music shop and showrooms**

Many Llandudno families remember the gallery being occupied by the Wagstaff's music business for a period of over thirty years.

After spending his early life in Yorkshire, Albert Wagstaff (1858-1927) settled in the Manchester area and became a piano dealer in the late 1800s. The business stocked pianos, organs, sheet music, gramophones and records and its success meant expansion, with a shop in Rochdale and a large store in the Victoria Buildings in Manchester city centre. The growth of the family business in the Edwardian era saw the Wagstaffs living in Cheshire, in a large house with tennis courts and stables.

Albert's son Vincent began learning about being a musical instrument dealer at a young age, but World War I meant that his career was put on hold. Vincent formed his band *The Zelo Four* in 1924 and afterwards the *Zelo Band* (now with more members) toured the north of England, playing at dancehalls and for various functions such as the Leeds Infirmary Ball where 600 dancers took to the floor.

In December 1940 the Manchester store was destroyed in the Blitz, with the loss of over 200 pianos. The family home was also bombed, so the Wagstaffs relocated to Llandudno, opening a music shop in 1941 at 1 Vaughan Street. In 1946 the business moved up the street to where the Mostyn gallery and shop are now sited.

One of the gallery spaces served as a showroom for pianos, organs and other instruments, with the other being used for restoration work and what is now Mostyn's shop was a further retail area. In the early days there was an alcove room packed with piano rolls to be used with player pianos, also called pianolas. Sheet music was stacked in piles. Eric Williams worked at Wagstaff's in the 1940s, remembering that one of his jobs was to wind up the cabinet gramophone for customers to listen to records before they bought them.

Linda Wagstaff worked with her father in the shop and she enjoyed helping with restoration of pianos by painting the pegs, brushing the hammers and cleaning the ivory keys with Brasso. Her role included much of the administration work and she was in charge of buying sheet music for exam pieces. Staff were skilled at French polishing as well as mending instruments, making replacement parts, repairing radios/record players and other electronic equipment both in the shop and in customers' homes. Vincent used to look after pianos at the local theatres including the Arcadia and the Pier Pavilion and entertainers such as Russ Conway would regularly call in at the shop. Vincent Wagstaff enjoyed demonstrating instruments for his customers; his main instrument was the tenor sax, but he also played piano, organ, accordion and clarinet.

In 1977 Wagstaff's downsized to just the shop. After Vincent Wagstaff passed away in 1979, the premises were taken over by Rushworths, the long-established Liverpool music company. Rushworths of Llandudno closed in 1997.

### **1979-2007: Oriel Mostyn Gallery**

The artist Kyffin Williams and others had suggested in 1976 that the main part of the building should become an art gallery again. After the music showroom spaces became vacant, restoration work was carried out and the Oriel Mostyn Gallery opened in August 1979, continuing to show exhibitions until 2007.

### **2007-2010: New design and refurbishment**

The building undertook a major redesign and refurbishment in the years 2007-2010. During this time, the gallery operated from a temporary structure at the front of the premises.

In order to extend the building, the area previously sold to the Post Office was acquired again, together with other later additions to the rear and commercial premises to the right. Funding came from many sources, principally Arts Council of Wales capital lottery grants, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Heritage Lottery Fund and several charitable trusts and foundations. The contractors were RL Davies & Son from Llysfaen, near Colwyn Bay.

The design, by Ellis Williams Architects, integrated the old and the new. The façade, canopy and galleries were restored while other areas were demolished and remodelled. The architect leading the design team, Dominic Williams, is also known for his award-winning design for the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art on Tyneside and he identified natural light as the key quality.

The spire of the building is clad in anodised aluminium tiles to give a golden landmark for the town. The concrete area known as the 'Tube' is the main architectural feature of the building, linking front and back, ground and first floors, old and new. It is structurally complex and the flying bridge carrying the staircase was difficult to create. The material is board-marked concrete, poured in situ. The shuttering was lined with boards which had been sandblasted to bring out the grain. Ready-mix concrete was then poured in and when the boards were pulled off later, small wood fibres were left visible.

The original 1901 galleries were completely refurbished. The new, large gallery also has light as its main feature, brought in through a saw-tooth roof. Inspiration came from museums in Switzerland. The angle of each saw-tooth is different, to cut out visual intrusion from surrounding buildings and to minimise direct sunlight on the gallery walls.

The concrete desk in the shop was a late decision, when it was realised that the cost would be no more than for a wooden desk, given that concrete was already on site. The smooth concrete is a deliberate contrast to the board-marking of the Tube.

The terracotta façade, using early Ruabon brick, has decorative features including the Muses. It was found to be in poor condition due to the corrosion of the steel fixing elements cast into the terracotta. The front façade could not be altered due to the building being listed, but the rear of the building offered the architects an opportunity to design a contemporary exterior. This makes a striking impression as the first view of Mostyn for those entering the town by car. The main material is board-marked concrete, but painted black with the marking running vertically rather than horizontally, to both form a contrast and to carry rain downwards. The gold tiles link with those of the spire and are topped, in the same material, with the word 'oriel', which is 'gallery' in Welsh. The rear has two large sets of black doors for bringing artworks into the building and the whole forms an interesting contrast to the more traditional design at the front.

### **2010 – present:** Mostyn

The building has won numerous awards, including the National Eisteddfod of Wales Gold Medal for Architecture and a RIBA award.