

THE BEGINNING OF THE SHELTERED WORK OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT

In the late 1980s, a survey of people using mental health services in this area showed that the aspect of their lives most people wished to change was to find some form of work. A group of concerned individuals got together in 1989 to set up a registered charity, the Sheltered Work Opportunities Project, with a board of trustees to provide such 'meaningful occupation through the use of land.'

Work started on SWOP's first project, Cherry Tree Nursery in 1990, thanks to the secondment of a member of staff from the Dorset HealthCare NHS Trust. Cherry Tree Nursery seeks to provide a realistic and purposeful working environment in a commercial shrub nursery.

In the early days the site was totally overgrown and derelict, and only half of the present site was available to Cherry Tree. Since then the volunteers totally cleared, drained and levelled the site, installed water, electricity and telephones, and erected all the tunnels, buildings, beds and paths you can see today. In 1995 the Council granted Cherry Tree the remainder of the site and, after clearance, the project expanded into the whole site. Cherry Tree now produces over 100,000 hardy shrubs annually.

From one member of staff and four volunteers in 1990, Cherry Tree Nursery now has five full-time and three part-time staff, together with over one hundred and ten volunteers and fifty Friends of SWOP. Four of the staff originally came as volunteers.

As a registered charity, SWOP is a non-profit making organisation, and will probably always depend upon donations to fund salaries and new developments.