

## Sketches from the history of psychiatry

### The Burdens – pioneers in mental health

J. JANCAR, Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist, Stoke Park Hospital, Stapleton,  
Bristol BS16 1QU

Rarely in a lifetime do three people contribute to society in so many ways as the Burdens in Bristol. Here are some of their major achievements:

The Reverend Burden and his wife Katharine opened 'The Royal Victoria Home', near Horfield Prison, for the care of inebriate women and girls in moral danger in 1895.

After the passing of the Inebriate Act of 1898 they founded the 'Brentry Certified Inebriate Reformatory' for men and women, which continued until 3 January 1922 when it became the 'Brentry Certified Institution' within the meaning of the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 and 1919. Mr Burden remained on the Brentry Certified Institution Board of Management as vice-chairman until his death in 1930.

In 1902 Mr Burden founded the National Institution for Persons Requiring Care and Control and became the first Warden. The Institution was financed by Mr Burden himself. In 1904 he was appointed by the Government of the day as a member of the Royal Commission then enquiring into the care of the feeble-minded.

In 1909 Mr & Mrs Burden opened the Stoke Park Colony and later acquired Heath House and Grove Beech House, followed by Hanham Hall and Leigh Court and Whittington Hall, Chesterfield. It is interesting to note that the Stoke Park Colony was the first in the British Isles to be certified under the Act of 1913 as an Institution for Mental Defectives.

In 1930 Mr Burden made financial provision for the first research centre at Stoke Park for research into the causes, treatment and prevention of mental handicap, and appointed the first Professor in Mental Handicap – Professor R. J. A. Berry – as Director of the Research Centre.

In 1933 Mr Burden's second wife, Rosa, donated the sum of £10,000, with the express desire that it should be devoted primarily to the problems underlying the causation and inheritance of abnormal mentality. The 'Burden Research Trust' came into being, with Dr J. A. Fraser its first Director and principal investigator.

In 1939 Mrs Rosa Burden financed and opened the Burden Neurological Institute to be used as a neural

research centre for the West of England. Professor F. L. Golla was appointed its Director.

The Burdens brought together at Stoke Park a group of world renowned scientists and pioneers, including Professor Berry, Dr Fraser Roberts, Dr Norman, Dr Bades and Dr Ruth Griffiths, and at the Burden Institute Professor Golla, Dr Grey Walter, Dr Hutton, Professor Reiss and Sir Wylie McKissock, to mention just a few. The tradition and high standards of international reputation of the earlier researchers and pioneers continue in both institutions to this day.

The most important contribution of the Burdens was the creation of facilities for the care and treatment of thousands of patients who were admitted to the Stoke Park Group of Hospitals and the Burden Institute from many counties of England and Wales. Apart from providing facilities for the patients, the Burdens created hundreds of jobs for various professions and skills, not just for Bristolians but for people from all parts of the country.

#### *The Burdens*

Here are short biographical notes on the Burdens:

##### **Reverend Harold Nelson Burden (1859–1930)**

From his early youth Mr Burden apparently determined to devote his life to the welfare of others, and thus decided, against the wishes of his family, to enter the Church.

After his ordination at Carlisle in 1888, he spent some time in curacies in the East End of London, where he first came in contact with those unfortunates whom it was his constant ambition to help and cheer on their otherwise drab walk through life. Those early contacts undoubtedly moulded much of Mr Burden's later activities.

Then came missionary work in Canada among the Ojibway Indians and the rough lumbermen of Canada's backwoods. His book '*Life in Algoma*', published in 1894, describes his life and early struggles in the lone lands of the outposts of the British Empire. During those years in Canada he built four

substantial churches and two parsonages, all of which he left free from debt, besides carrying out his missionary work which entailed numerous journeys, sometimes involving days of travel by land and water. Constant fatigue, recurrent illness from the climate with its extremes of heat and cold impaired Mr Burden's health so that he was compelled to leave Canada. Two children had been born and had died in their infancy in Canada. He and his wife began their preparations to give up their charge and returned to England at the close of 1891. For the next two years he was Curate of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch and in 1893 entered St Catherine's College, but being married, lived in Swavesey. Meanwhile he accepted a curacy at Milton, Cambridgeshire and acted occasionally as Assistant Chaplain at St Catherine's.

In 1895 Mr Burden was appointed Chaplain of Horfield Prison in Bristol. About the year 1902 he founded the National Institutions for Persons requiring Care and Control, and became the first Warden. He characteristically surrounded himself with a committee who might share in the credit of an undertaking, financed entirely by himself, a fact not then known to the public. His labours were acts of faith and it was enough for him to feel he was doing his Master's work. Methodical and businesslike in his management, he had a brain for finance and was consequently enabled to administer the huge undertaking into which his modest beginnings grew, with efficiency, common sense and a commensurate economy. In 1904 Mr Burden was appointed by the Government of the day a member of the Royal Commission then inquiring into the care of the feeble-minded. This inquiry, coupled with the Commission's visits to Germany and other continental countries in which Mr Burden also took part so aroused his interest in the problem, that he determined to devote the remainder of his life, time, mental energies, great powers of organisation and financial resources to the care and welfare of those mental unfortunates, and he continued to do so until the day of his death in 1930. With the passing of the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 the demand for accommodation of the mentally defective became pressing, and it was partly met by Mr Burden's activities. In fact, without Mr Burden's help during the war years, the Board of Control might have found some difficulty in administering the Act of which it had now become the nation's official trustee.

Mr Burden began by acquiring the Stoke Park Dower House from the Duke of Beaufort; then followed Heath House, Grove Beech House, Hanham Hall, Leigh Court, and Whittington Hall, Chesterfield; these he had altered and adapted – again at his own expense – to the use and requirements of mentally defective children. New blocks and houses were built and additions made to the older properties. Stoke Park itself becoming the nucleus of

the group of Institutions known as Stoke Park Colony.

It was no light task to found, equip, and build up an institution actually housing over 1,700 patients from the old Dower House with a single patient, yet this is what Mr Burden accomplished. He had long had it in mind, when the progress of his institutions justified it, to submit the material he had so laboriously collected to scientific analysis and investigation. In 1927 the opportunity presented itself and he eagerly seized it. His old friend, the late Dr R. W. Branthwaite, having just retired from the Board of Control, was offered, and accepted, the position of Director of Medical Services at Stoke Park, and did so with a view to commencing research work on the scale desired by Mr Burden. The splendid laboratories, known at Stoke Park as 'the Clinic', were built and liberally equipped. No sooner were these new activities commenced than the death of Dr Branthwaite brought them to a temporary cessation.

Six months later Professor R. J. A. Berry was appointed to the vacant position, and it is characteristic of Mr Burden's energetic keenness that he immediately called for a report and a scheme for the further development of research work at Stoke Park. Almost the last act of Mr Burden's life was to approve of this report, to authorise the various medical and research appointments recommended, and to increase the financial provision far beyond the more modest scale suggested. He did not live to see his schemes for the advancement of scientific knowledge of mental disorders in actual operation, but his widow and successor in the Wardenship made it a labour of love to carry out all those of which he approved and had so much at heart. Mrs Burden herself endowed mental research still further by a gift to the nation of £10,000.

The Clinic at Stoke Park, further enlarged by Mrs Burden, was one of the few laboratories in the world solely and specially devoted to the study of mental deficiency. It was well equipped, adequately financed, and liberally maintained, and one of its special features was a teaching museum of the neurological factors underlying mental deficiency. Stoke Park has thus been added, by the Senate of the University of London, to the list of institutions recognised for practice in connection with the Diploma in Psychological Medicine for candidates offering mental deficiency as their special branch, while the University of Bristol granted similar recognition and availed itself of the unrivalled clinical material for postgraduate study. Before his death on the 15 May 1930, Mr Burden had the further satisfaction of seeing the institutions which he had founded, with accommodation for over 2,000 patients, put in trust for the nation for charitable purposes.

As a Freeman of the City of London and Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Barbers, he

became Master of the Barbers' Company from 1924 to 1926.

Within the grounds of Stoke Park there is a memorial clock tower which bears upon it the following inscription:

In memory of  
HAROLD NELSON BURDEN, Priest,  
of Clevedon Hall, Somerset,  
1859–1930

He gave this estate in trust for the nation. A man of vision, faith, genius and unfailing courage. A pioneer in mental work and research. He lived arduous days and had the joy of seeing the fruition of his hopes and lifelong efforts.

Thanks be to God

*A portrait of the Reverend Harold Burden hangs in the Royal College of Psychiatrists.*

#### **Mrs Katharine Mary Burden (died 1919)**

The life of Katherine Burden may be said to have been spent wholly in the service of others.

After she had completed an ordinary education, she went through a course of special training to enable her to assist others to make themselves efficient in some of the handicrafts of that time. In 1869 or early in 1870, she joined Miss Octavia Hill as assistant in the great work which she had in hand and which made that lady's name a household word throughout the country. In the next decade, while still almost a girl, an opportunity for special work in the East End of London was offered, and she decided to take it up. Her work in the East End of London covered a period of some 16 years and influenced the lives of thousands of persons. Among many other things, she personally supervised social clubs established for their social and spiritual good. During this period she was generally known in East London as 'Miss Kate'.

This work ended on her marriage to the Rev. Burden. She went with her husband to Canada and was his constant comfort and support during three years' strenuous work. In that period, in addition to the regular spiritual care of the people scattered over nearly 300 square miles, churches were erected, graveyards made and other provisions carried out for the better administration of the Church's work in the district, in all of which she did her full part.

On their return to England, the East End again had their sympathetic assistance for a time. In 1895 they moved to Bristol and were instrumental in the promotion and erection of the Royal Victoria Home. The home was at first intended for the care of inebriate women and of girls in moral danger, but before it was completed a suggestion came from the Home Office that the work might helpfully also in-

clude the care of women convicts whose crimes and history before and after conviction showed them to be suitable for the clemency of the Secretary of State. The suggestion was considered a proper one to adopt and a wing was added for their reception.

Mrs Burden took a leading part in the work, aided it financially and brought her personal influence to bear on the inmates with much success.

The passing of the Inebriates Act of 1898 made much larger accommodation for inebriates necessary. Premises were taken at Brentry and the assistance of County and County Borough Councils invited, 24 of whom decided to contribute to the establishment of the institution. For three years both Mrs Burden and her husband gave it their continuous attention. Every woman who entered the institution came under Mrs Burden's influence and received her help.

In the early part of 1903 the greater need of the National Institutions became clear to them, and the Institutions for Inebriates at Ackworth, Chesterfield, Harling and Lewes had the care hitherto restricted to Brentry. A few years later work for the mentally defective was added to the existing work of the National Institutions. Mrs Burden's labour of love was extended to them. She constantly visited all the institutions of the Incorporation of National Institutions and each year travelled many thousands of miles in so doing. Her influence on staff and inmates never failed. The work during the 14 years from 1903 four times doubled itself, but up to the day on which her work ceased for ever, her visits to institutions were continued with unfailing regularity.

Stoke Park Colony, with its six ancillary institutions, was the largest, not only of the national institutions, but of all certified institutions in the country. A large part of Mrs Burden's time was spent at the Colony. Her bright, kindly, winning presence was a constant pleasure to the staff, and delight to the patients, especially to the little ones, of whom she was particularly fond.

She died on 25 October, 1919 and is buried at Ridgeway Park in Bristol, the usual place of burial for patients passing away at Stoke Park Colony.

#### **Mrs Rosa Gladys Burden (1891–1939)**

After the death of his first wife, Mr Burden married Miss Rosa Williams, who was the Superintendent of Stoke Park. Following the death of her husband, Mrs Burden was appointed, in 1930, Warden at Stoke Park Colony.

In 1933 she donated the sum of £10,000 and with the gift expressed her desire that it should primarily be devoted to problems underlying the causation and inheritance of normal and abnormal mentality. The Burden Mental Research came into being.

In 1935 Mrs Burden, as Chairman of the Trustees of the Burden Trust, built at Stoke Park, at the

suggestion of a surgeon, a clinic for surgical treatment of the mentally defective patients in Stoke Park Colony. The idea was later abandoned and the Medical Research Council suggested that the premises be used as a neuro-research centre for the West of England. Mrs Burden accepted the idea and gave further financial support and the Burden Neurological Institute was opened on 12 May 1939. Professor F. L. Golla was appointed Director of the Institute, Dr W. Grey Walter was in charge of the Physiological Research Unit, Dr E. L. Hutton was in charge of psychiatric research, Mr L. D. MacLeod and Mr A. Tingey were appointed as biochemists, and Professor Max Reiss was in charge of the Endocrinological Unit.

Sir Wylie McKissock, Mr Willway and Professor Lambert Rogers gave their services in the beginning, later the Surgeon-in-Charge was Miss Diane Beck. These neuro-surgeons and the staff dealt with all the neuro-surgical casualties from the west country for several years.

The Institute became nationally and internationally known for its work, especially in the studies of electro-physiology of the CNS, electro-encephalography, and the physical treatment of mental disorder. Just before the Second World War,

the Burden Institute initiated the practice of electric convulsive therapy in this country, and soon after the first leucotomy in Great Britain was performed there. Since then many discoveries and observations have been made in the Institute.

Mrs R. G. Burden died in 1939, and she is buried with her husband, the Reverend Burden, at Clevedon near Bristol.

The Burden Trustees are still financing research projects in the United Kingdom, and in addition they are generously supporting the Burden Institute.

In 1969 the Burden Trustees instituted 'The Burden Research Gold Medal and Prize' to encourage research into mental handicap. To date 11 eminent psychiatrists in this field have received the coveted award.

## References

- BERRY, R. J. A. (1933) *Mental Deficiency – Stoke Park Studies – First Series*. London: MacMillan.
- JANCAR, J. (1972) Fifty Years of Brentry (1922–1972). *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, **87**, 23–30.
- (1981) *Research at Stoke Park, Mental Handicap (1930–1980); the Supplement to Stoke Park Studies*. Dorchester: Dorset Press.

---

## Miscellany

### Professor Joseph Sandler

Joseph Sandler, Freud Memorial Professor, University of London, and Director of the Psychoanalysis Unit, University College London, was elected to the Presidency of the International Psycho-Analytical Association at its 36th Congress in Rome.

### New publication

*Standards for Quality* gives guidelines for those concerned in using, planning and providing services to meet the needs of people with a disability. It can be obtained from Choice, 152 Camden Road, London

NW1 9HL, price £2.50, including postage and packing.

### Flat to let

A first floor one bedroom flat near Willesden Green Underground Station (close to Tavistock Clinic) is to let for six months or a year. It is suitable for a professional couple or one person (£175 per week, negotiable). Further information: Lucia Alvarez de Toledo, 138B Melrose Avenue, London NW2 4JX (telephone 01 450 5344; fax 01 452 7735).