

The History of South Brent Nursing Association

On 5th October 1964, the Torbay Express and South Devon Echo published an obituary:

Mrs. A. G. Collier dies aged 101

Mrs Ann Grace Helen Collier, of Whinfield, South Brent, has died, aged 101, at St Vincent's Nursing Home Plympton.

Her husband, the late Mr. George B. Collier was a principal of the Plymouth firm of wine and spirit merchants, Collier and Co.

Her father was Gen. Reynell Taylor, of the Indian Army, whose home was at West Oghwell, and her mother was formerly Miss Ann Holdworth, of Widecombe House, Torcross. Mrs. Collier was born in Peshawar, India.

For many years Mrs. Collier was president of the South Brent Women's Institute and a member of the Mother's Union. She formed the South Brent Nursing Association in 1901, and was the first local organiser for the British Legion Poppy Day.

Mrs. A. G. Collier was evidently a key member of South Brent's community during the first half of the 20th century, but what was the South Brent Nursing Association her obituary says she formed in 1901?

"Queen's nurses" wanted to attend sickness amongst the poor and working classes in the rural areas around Totnes

On 25th May 1901, Totnes Weekly Times reported "No subscriptions to district nursing associations" at the fortnightly meeting of the Totnes Board of Guardians, presided by J. R. T. Kingwell of South Brent. The attending "guardians" came from numerous south Devon towns and villages, including Buckfastleigh, Paignton, Dartmouth, Ashprington, Berry Pomeroy, Brixton, Dartington, Dittisham and North Huish, as well as T Wakeham of South Brent. On 12th October, an article in the same paper entitled "SUBSCRIPTIONS TO DISTRICT NURSING INSTITUTIONS", says Miss Drake moved that two fully qualified Queen's nurses be engaged at the Guardians' expense, to attend cases of sickness amongst the poor and working classes in the rural districts situate in the Totnes Rural Area.

According to Queen's Nursing Institute's website Queen's nurses were trained by the QVJIN (Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses), which had been founded in 1887 with a grant of £70,000 from Queen Victoria to provide the "training, support, maintenance and supply" of nurses to care for the poor. QVJIN's movement to provide district nurses for the poor had been inspired by the pioneering



Florence Nightingale by https://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/obf_images/6a/ad/789101b9d9be8b364a4acd7ec470.jpg Gallery: <https://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/image/L0019661.html> Wellcome Collection gallery (2018-03-28): <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/f7fap3ah> CC-BY-4.0, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=35991599>

works of Liverpool philanthropist William Rathbone and Florence Nightingale. The Totnes Board of Guardians' district nursing plans were, therefore, part of this expanding national initiative.

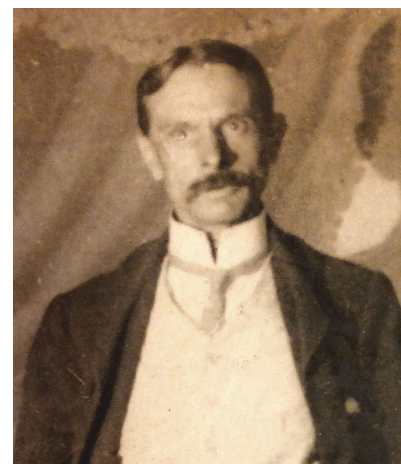
Totnes Board of Guardians move to fund local nursing associations if they treat "outdoor paupers" for free

There was "lively discussion" later in October 1901 when the Totnes Board of Guardians debated outdoor paupers being nursed in south Devon. Mr Bearn "Moved that an annual subscription of £5 be paid to each of the committees where nurses were already established, namely: at Totnes, Buckfastleigh, Brixham, Dartmouth, Paignton, and South Brent, provided the outdoor paupers are attended free of charge." (Totnes Weekly Times 26 October 1901) South Brent Nursing Association seems to have been newly established because, on 14th December, Totnes Weekly Times say "This useful association has been in existence for about two months."

The clerk of the Totnes Board of Guardians wrote to the nursing associations within the Board's remit offering them a three guinea annual subscription in return for free treatment to "outdoor paupers". Totnes Weekly Times published their replies on 27th November. Mrs Mahon of South Brent accepted the offer. "Mrs Edmonds (Dartmouth) acknowledged the clerk's letter with many thanks" and Mrs Hall of Paignton said "the District nurse had always attended pauper patients free of charge and would certainly continue to do so." However, Mrs Horner of Buckfastleigh agreed to "allow the nurse to attend pauper cases in Buckfastleigh and Buckfast in the same manner of other cases, free of charge for one year" She added "As there had been 14 paupers paying 1d. each weekly to the Association and there would be 46 more to attend now, the Committee called attention to the considerable loss their subscription would cause the Association." Mrs Walter J Philips of Totnes said, lengthily, that the offer was financially impossible to accept.

South Brent Nursing Association's first general meeting

South Brent Nursing Association's first general meeting was called on Tuesday 10th December 1901 to elect a new committee and officers.. "Out of a list of subscribers numbering 87, about 30 were present at the meeting. Mr. J. R. T. Kingwell", who, as we've seen, was president of the Totnes Board of Guardians, "was voted to chair, and the following were elected by ballot to form the new committee:—Mr. W. H. Hawke 24 votes, Dr. Style 23, Mrs. Collier 20, Mrs. Speare-Cole 18, Mrs. Ward 18, Mr. R. H. Gill 17, Mr. S. H. Hill 17, and Mrs. Mahon 16. Altogether there were 28 nominations for the eight vacancies, and 231 votes were given. After the election of the committee, the vacancy caused by the resignation of one of the trustees was filled by the election of Mr. F. J. Cornish-Bowden, who kindly consented to accept that office. A difficulty arose over the election of a secretary—an honorary position held since the formation of the association by Mrs. Mahon—who was again proposed by Mr. S. H. Hill, and seconded by Dr. Style, but that lady refused to accept the office, as did Mrs. Green, and Miss Symons. Mr. Mitchell also declined, and eventually Dr. Style agreed to carry out the secretaryship until an appointment could be made. It was decided to make the appointment of treasurer at the next general meeting fixed for 4 p.m. on Friday December 20th. Notice was given that at that meeting the whole rules of the association would be revised, but it was recommended that the newly-appointed committee should first go over the rules." (Totnes Weekly Times 14 December 1901)



Dr Frederick William Style who, in December 1901, agreed to act as secretary for South Brent Nursing Association until a formal appointment could be made (photo circa 1903)

South Brent Nursing Association 1901 census details for the initial eight committee members			
<u>William H. Hawke</u> The Firs Aged 40 Coal and corn merchant	<u>Dr. Frederick W Style</u> 17 Totnes Road Villa Aged 38 Surgeon LRCP	<u>Ann Collier</u> Whinfield Aged 38 Wife of wine merchant	<u>Emily Bremer Speare-Cole</u> The Vicarage Aged 61 Wife of vicar
<u>CNPT Ward</u> Lutton House Aged 60 Widow Independent means	<u>Robert H Gill</u> 3 Fore Street Aged 34 Postmaster baker & grocer	<u>Sydney H Hill</u> Marwell Villas Aged 35 Wine and spirit merchant	<u>Harriet E S Mahon</u> Moorside Aged 42 Widow Independent means

Fund raising bazaar and fete in South Brent school

On 21st August 1902, Western Times reported a community fund raising event similar to modern day events in the building (now the Old School Centre):

BAZAAR AT SOUTH BRENT

For weeks past nearly all ladies of the neighbourhood have been bent on making the proposed two days' bazaar and fete towards maintaining the South Brent and District Nursing Association a great success. The hoisting of the school flag on Tuesday morning, and the gay decorations, showed that a big day was anticipated. Towards afternoon carriages arrived with people eager to promote the worthy object. The whole of the spacious school building was completely packed with goods of every description, while the class-rooms were converted into refreshment rooms, shows, etc, considerably augmenting the funds.

The opening ceremony was performed by Miss Carew, of Marley, who spoke in eulogistic terms of the good work done by the Nursing Association, and that everyone would support it as much as possible. The sale was then formally declared open, and a busy business at once commenced.

A jumble sale, kindly conducted by Mr. John Maye (auctioneer), proved very remunerative, as did Mr. Sidney Hill with his gramophone. A concert of tableaux organised by Mrs. G. Collier proved very successful, Miss Sherwill, Miss Tope, Miss Hawke, Miss Kingwell, Miss Stranger, and Mr. Murch taking part. There were numerous side shows. The string band, under the direction of Mr. Coombe, played good selections during each day. The concerts given by Miss Lottie Taylor in the old Devonshire dialect proved an enjoyable feature.

A baby show caused much amusement, the children of the following winning prizes :— First prize under one year old, Mrs. G. Collier ; second. Mrs. Garland. Second class— First prize under one year old, Mrs. Elford ; second, Mrs. J. Rowlands. There were numerous entries.

The weather yesterday was rather more favourable, and the event was again well patronised. Each day terminated with a successful public dance. All the arrangements were carried out in a splendid manner under the direction of Mrs. Mahon, who is to be thanked for her arduous duties. Among others who rendered valuable assistance were Dr. Style, Messrs. W. H. Hawke, S. H. Hill, S. Collins, W. Murch, W. R. Gay. The net profit of the two days are about £40.

The first AGM of South Brent Nursing Association

Five months later, on 1st December 1902, Western Times reported South Brent Nursing Association's first AGM took place in the village school (the modern day Old School Centre). South Brent's pioneering district nurse is named as Nurse Vere. When committee members were elected, there was no change but for the vicar's wife, Emily Speare-Cole being replaced by a Miss Lovell. Mrs. Mahon had evidently failed in her bids to avoid being secretary because she was reappointed as honorary secretary. Alongside her, Dr Style was reappointed as honorary medical advisor, and Mrs. Ward as honorary secretary:

SOUTH BRENT NURSING ASSOCIATION.

The first annual meeting of the South Brent District Nursing Association was held in the Board Schools Friday evening. There was a fair attendance. Mr. W. H. Hawkes was voted to the chair. The first annual report was presented by the hon. secretary (Mrs. Mahon) which was very encouraging, and testified very firmly to the benefits derived from the existence of the Association, which is so far in its infancy. During the year Nurse Vere had made no less than 1,516 visits to patients. The report further thanks those who have been instrumental in making the various efforts successful., especially in connection with the recent bazaar, which contributed very substantially to the funds.—The treasurer (Mrs. Ward) also appended the balance sheet, showing income by subscriptions £52 17s. Proceeds of Mr. Sanders' concert £10 5s 9d, Colonel Emery's lecture £1 5s 6d, bazaar £45 2s, together with donations and fees, making a total receipt of £127 7s 5½d. On the expenses side was nurse's salary, being £45; fitting up her rooms £17 1s, coal and lights £4 15s, and other sundries, the balance in hand being £40 18s for the ensuing year. The business of electing a Committee by ballot was proceeded with and resulted in the re-election of the old committee, with one addition. The ballot was declared as follows :—Mr. R. H. Gill 20 votes, Mr. W. H. Hawke 20, Mrs. Mahon 20, Dr. Style 20, Mrs. Ward 20, Mrs. Collier 19, Mr. S. H. Hill 13, Miss Lovell 9. On the proposition of Mr. Hull, seconded by Mr. S. H. Hill, Mrs. Mahon, Mrs. Ward and Dr. Style



Mrs Ward who was re-elected honorary treasurer of South Brent Nursing Association at their first AGM in 1902. Photo circa 1920.

South Brent Nursing Association

The eight committee members elected at the first AGM in December 1902
and the honorary officers appointed

William H. Hawke

Dr. Frederick W Style
hon. medical advisor

Ann Collier

CNPT Ward
hon. treasurer

Robert H Gill

Sydney H Hill

Harriet E S Mahon
hon. secretary

Miss Lovell

Just as its modern-day cousin, South Brent Caring, does today, press cuttings reveal that South Brent's new nursing association was supported by lively community fund raisers. These carried on right through the first half of the twentieth century, until, in August 1948, control was passed to the local authority, as reported in Western Times on 20th August 1948:

NURSING

South Brent District Association

Following the annual meeting earlier in the summer, South Brent District Nursing Association held a general meeting on Monday to pass the financial statement for the quarter up to July 5th. after which the control passed to the local authority.

Both meetings were attended by the collectors and others interested in the care of the sick, but the presence of a greater number of people would have been appreciated.

It was decided that the assets of the Association, amounting to £387 18s 11d. should not be allocated to the Devon Nursing Association Trust Fund, but should be left in the control of the committee to use in the cause of nursing.

There was unanimous agreement that £100 be sent to the elderly nurses annuity fund. This fund is to help those nurses who are too old to come under the modern salary and pension schemes and through overwork and a lifetime of poor pay are left in bad health and are often uncared for. Some of these nurses came to the rescue when Brent and district were in difficulties and there must be many who have felt grateful to them.

It is hoped to procure a bath-chair for the use of patients if satisfactory arrangements can be made for its allocation.

The proceedings were wound-up by a happy proposal, which was enthusiastically supported by all, that a present be given to the nurse, Miss Chapple, in recognition of her valuable services. It is sincerely hoped that the nurse will regard the committee and Association as a source of help whenever she needs friendly support.

All was not quite over for South Brent Nursing. Exeter and Plymouth Gazette recorded their AGM in September 1949 in the Church Hall. Their report tells us the members of their final committee, and that they decided to include the "South Brent and District Infant Welfare:" in their sphere (see cutting below), but there is no future press coverage of South Brent and District Nursing Association, and the enterprise appears to have petered away.

SOUTH BRENT

NURSING—The annual meeting of South Brent and District Nursing Association took place in the Church Hall on Friday, Dr. Creasy presided. It was decided the committee formed in 1948 should carry on for the ensuing year as follows: President, Dr. Creasy; chairman, Mrs. Jones; hon. treasurer, Mrs. Raikes; committee, Mrs. Armstrong, Mrs. Briggs, Mrs. Edgcumbe (Avonwick), Mrs. Foster-Deacon (North Huish), Mrs. Hanks, Mrs. Le Fanu, Mrs. E. J. Luscombe, Mrs. H. Soper, and Mrs. Spragge. The South Brent and District Infant Welfare was discussed, and it was decided that the committee will include this centre in its sphere of interest. Miss Chapple, the district nurse, and Miss Hall, the health visitor, were both present and were very helpful with their advice.

In conclusion, Mrs. A. G. Collier's 1964 obituary was partly accurate in saying "She formed the South Brent Nursing Association in 1901". She was part of the original committee of eight, but doesn't appear to have formed South Brent Nursing Association on her own. It seems to have been through a trickle down effect from the accessible nursing drive originally instigated by Florence Nightingale and Liverpoolian philanthropist, William Rathbone, in the 1850s. The establishment of nationwide district nursing was enabled by the formation of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses in 1887. When, in 1901, Totnes Board of Guardians debated how best to sponsor district nurses for towns and villages in the area, they decided to offer three guineas worth of annual funding to any local nursing association if they agreed to provide free care to "outdoor vagrants". Some refused, but South Brent's formative nursing association accepted the offer. South Brent Nursing was enthusiastically supported by the community and flourished for the first half of the twentieth century. However, it seems to have petered out after the local authority took control in 1948. Nothing replaced it until more than sixty-years later when, in 2012, local resident, Sue Burgess, founded South Brent Caring. According to their website:

It was Sue who realised in 2011 that there was a need for a local charity providing care and help which was not provided by statutory agencies. Sue built the charity up from nothing and there are now over 100 clients – vulnerable & isolated members of the community who are looked after by over 70 volunteers, living in the same area.