

Rev Harold Nelson Burden and Katherine Mary Burden: pioneers of inebriate reformatories and mental deficiency institutions

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The Rev Harold Burden and his first wife Katherine created 3100 institution beds in England for inebriates and the mentally defective and provided much of the early residential care for these people before the end of the First World War. However, their personal histories are not widely known. The Rev Burden's life is detailed in a 1933 biography which contains factual inaccuracies and hardly mentions his work with inebriates¹. Current knowledge of Katherine Burden's life is contained in a brief local obituary of 1919² which does not reveal such details as her age at death, or maiden name. The involvement of Rosa Gladys Burden, Harold's second wife, in the creation of the Burden Institute and Burden Hospital has been recently described³ but virtually nothing is known of her early life. This paper is an attempt to rectify some of this lack of detail, and to describe their involvement in inebriacy.

The work of the Burdens occurred during a period of change. The end of the nineteenth century and period before the First World War marked the culmination of the Temperance movement, with a series of Acts enabling retreats for the treatment of habitual drunkards, or inebriates, then compulsory treatment of convicted inebriates in reformatories. This movement culminated in the 1908 Licencing Bill which was thrown out by the House of Lords. This same period saw the development of concern about 'mental defectives', marked by the Idiots Act of 1886, the growth of the eugenics movement, and concern for the permanent care of the 'feeble-minded' that followed the 1899 Education Act. This resulted in a Royal Commission in 1904, that in turn in 1913 led to the Mental Deficiency Act and concurrently the enforced growth of special schools.

Harold Nelson Burden was born 20 March 1860 at Hythe. He was the only son of Thomas Burden, a merchant gentleman who came from a family of farmers in Biddenham, Kent. When Harold was 12, his father died leaving his estate, valued at under £2000, to his wife Sally, in trust to his three children. Harold later moved to London where he married Katherine Mary Garton at Hoxton on 26 September 1888. The Burdens probably met whilst working

in the slums of East London where she is said to have worked performing charitable acts after some initial experience with Octavia Hill⁴. 'Kate', as she was known, was several years his senior and came from a family of tobacco manufacturers and tobacconists in Hull, who had moved to London in about 1847. Her family was probably religious as her aunt married George Huntington, Rector of Tenby, a well known clergyman and writer of religious texts. Her personal wealth is unclear, but it was to her and not Harold that his sisters applied for financial aid in 1907 and in 1900 she personally loaned £750 to the Royal Victoria Home. Though local documents rarely mention her it is clear that she supported, if not led, her husband in their work with the disadvantaged. Her obituary notes 'her firm faith and her hatred of anything tending to laxity of the moral code'.

The Burdens appear to have married with the intention of being missionaries, as Mr Burden was made a deacon just before the marriage and immediately afterwards they left to work as missionaries in Canada. Mr Burden took over the curacy of Uffington, 60 miles north of Toronto, and later became its vicar when he was ordained priest. He later wrote two books on this work⁵, which record the birth and death of their only two children. They returned to England at the end of 1891 due to Kate's ill-health, and took up a curacy in Shoreditch. In 1893 Mr Burden entered Cambridge University, becoming the curate at Milton nearby. They spent 2 years in Cambridge, where he acted as assistant chaplain at St Catherine's (which his biography says was given to help his poverty) and published further works⁶.

In 1895, after graduating, the Burdens moved to Bristol where Harold took up the vacancy of clerical secretary to the local branch of the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS) and the Bristol Police Court and Prison Gate Mission. At this time the Inebriates Acts passed between 1879 and 1894 enabled habitual drunkards to commit themselves voluntarily in the presence of a Magistrate to admission to a licensed retreat for treatment. No licensed retreat for women existed in Bristol. In Bristol there was the:

long cherished desire of the Prison Gate Mission, connected with the CETS to secure a more convenient and commodious shelter . . .

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When the Rev A M [sic] Burden... became the secretary of the CETS he at once threw himself into a movement so congenial, and for which he was so admirably fitted... The funds were collected by the secretary to the CETS from all persons willing to further the particular work, whether such persons belonged to the CETS or not⁷.

The resultant Women's Shelter Home, quickly renamed The Royal Victoria Home for Women (RVH), was situated outside the gates of Bristol Prison and, bizarrely, backed on to a public house. It served several purposes, housing convicted or discharged female prisoners as well as being licensed as a retreat for 10 women. It also contained a house for the Burdens as Kate was the Honorary Lady Superintendent. Soon afterwards Harold became its Warden. This home remained the Bristol address of the Burdens for the next 18 years.

The Home prospered as a retreat and was enlarged twice, but its future was overshadowed by the 1898 Inebriates Act. This Act enabled the compulsory detention of convicted drunkards in inebriate reformatories. The physical specifications for these reformatories were more demanding than the previous retreats, and the Act was expected to generate a great need for new accommodation for inebriates. In 1898 Mr Burden advertised his proposal to establish an inebriate reformatory in Bristol and soon afterwards, in partnership with Edward Thomas who had been involved in setting up the RVH, purchased Brentry Villa. This building and its 89 acres on the outskirts of Bristol was purchased for £11 650, using a £9000 mortgage, and licensed as a retreat named the Royal Victoria Homes, Brentry on the 9 January 1899. Mr Burden then persuaded 24 councils to each reserve seven beds and a seat on the board of management by donating £1000. Brentry became the first licensed reformatory in the country on the 30 March 1899, with the original RVH relicensed as the admission ward for women entering Brentry. Mr Burden was Warden of both, supervising the staff 'with the aid of his capable wife' and the homes were run as one, as far as national reports occur.

Brentry prospered, with a large building programme and glowing reports by the Inspector of Reformatories, Dr R W Branthwaite⁸, but it proved difficult if not frustrating to obtain money from the councils to fund the expansion. At the same time the original RVH floundered. The charitable donations to it dried up, and the home was under threat. Kate Burden lent it £750. Its managers wrote to the Brentry board of management, stating it was being used as an offshoot of Brentry without their consent and demanding payment. Matters deteriorated: the RVH was closed at the end of 1900 and in 1902 the Burdens were given formal notice to vacate their residence and the home was advertised for auction⁹.

At this point the Burdens led the creation of the National Institutions for Inebriates (NII). Harold left Brentry as Warden, 'realising that Brentry could not be extended'¹⁰, though he maintained close functional links with it, remaining Honorary Secretary and Vice Chairman of the Board of Management of Brentry, lending it money through the NII. In addition, he recorded the admissions and discharges for Brentry at the NII's London offices using the same annual registers used for the NII's homes. During 1902 the NII acquired three properties: The RVH was purchased before auction, presumably using the money Harold had just inherited following the death of his mother, and was licensed as a pre-discharge home for 20 inebriate women. Whittington Hall, Chesterfield, was leased and licensed as the Midland Counties Reformatory for 57 women on the 1 October and the redundant Lewes workhouse in Sussex was leased and licensed for 120 women as the Southern Counties Reformatory on 19 November 1902. The group flourished and a further home at Ackworth, Yorkshire (originally built as a training college for teachers) was leased and licensed for 90 women as the North Midlands Reformatory on the 24 November 1903. The old Workhouse of East Harling, Norfolk was purchased and then rebuilt as the Eastern Counties Reformatory in 1904, half being licensed for 170 cases on 15 November 1904, then the licence extended to 300 in June 1907. Plans for Ackworth to be enlarged by a further 240 beds were drawn up but never executed.

The ability of Harold and Kate Burden to provide accommodation is remarkable. Between 1902 and 1904 they set up over 450 places for inebriates, with a further 200 set up earlier at Brentry. By 1907 they controlled 617 licensed places under the NII, with Brentry licensed for 240. In 1907 the NII and Brentry together held 60% of all inebriates in reformatories in England and Wales. Their reformatories received glowing reports in the Inspector's annual reports yet were all by far the cheapest in the country to create and to run¹¹. They operated as a single unit from a central administrative office in London, with women being admitted from the courts to Lewes and East Harling, and if they progressed, being moved to Ackworth, and then prior to discharge to either the rural Whittington or the urban RVH. Men could be sent either to East Harling, or to Brentry. The feeble-minded, epileptic and infirm could be accommodated at East Harling.

Through this time, the Burdens appear to have had the support and help of two allies in the Home Office. Through their work with inebriates, the Burdens became friends of Dr R W Branthwaite, the Inspector of Retreats and Reformatories, Inspector of Prisons, and later Inspector and then Commissioner for the Board of Control, who was a witness at Harold's second marriage and retired from the Board of Control in 1926 just prior to his death to become Director of Medical Services at Stoke Park Colony. His

reports as Inspector of their reformatories are glowing with compliments. In addition, the Burdens became friends of Sir William Patrick Byrne KCVO CB, who was initially assistant under-secretary of state for the Home Office, working in inebriacy, but later first Chairman of the Board of Control, and who as a man with great knowledge of mental deficiency 'rendered valuable services in bringing the Mental Deficiency Act into operation'¹².

In 1904, Mr Burden was appointed to the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded. His inclusion on the Royal Commission and his later move into Mental Deficiency reflects his close relationship with the Home Office. Sir W Byrne sat alongside him on the Royal Commission. By this time Mr Burden was well recognized by the Home Office as an energetic man who had effectively created and managed a whole group of institutions for inebriates who needed care and control.

The work was begun among inebriates, but as a result of Mr Burden's membership of the Royal Commission, . . . Mr and Mrs Burden, who were working closely with the Home Office, shifted the work altogether to the care of mentally defectives . . . Mr Burden preferred to settle all . . . difficult points [of setting up his Trust] directly with the late Sir W Byrne, who then occupied a high post among the permanent officials of the Home Office . . . At that time the intimacy of the connection between Mr Burden and the Home Office permanent officials was very great and the Home Office was much concerned in the initiation of the work and the lines upon which it was being carried out. But when later the Board of Control was constituted, the special relation between the Home Office and the work gradually came to an end¹³.

It was also probably felt that he already had some experience of the feeble minded as many of those in inebriate reformatories were hopeless cases and feeble-minded¹⁴. He attended most of the meetings, and toured the institutions of Germany and France along with other commissioners. During the witness examination, his main interest appears to be the merit of creating colonies for the permanent care of the mentally defective, and the need for this to be of low cost—he asked about the stigma attached to associating the mentally defective with lunatic asylums, and being administered in the future alongside the insane by a Board of Control. He also submitted plans of his inebriate reformatories, of the proposed Ackworth extension and he submitted detailed plans for a colony for 300 feeble-minded adults with accompanying tenders showing a total cost of £120 per bed including land and fittings (this was never built). The memorandum he attached to the Commission's Report said:

I am in complete agreement with the Report as a whole. But I should like to give prominence to the need for economy in and strict

Governmental control over the establishment of institutions for the reception of mentally defective persons . . .

I am of opinion that the cost of building an institution for the mentally defective (other than for "persons of unsound mind") should never exceed £150 a bed, and for many of the classes of the mentally defective suitable provision can be made at a cost not exceeding £100 a bed¹⁵.

Other Commissioners with the Rev Burden included Mrs Ellen Pinsent, from Birmingham, chairman of their special schools and Aftercare Committee, and influential in the National Association for the Care of the Feeble-minded. In 1906 her husband gave evidence to the Commission on the problems Birmingham had in setting up a boarding school for certain mentally defective children. The project had foundered mainly due to its cost and the resulting inaction by the Council. The Burdens decided to help and took over the lease of Sandwell Hall, in West Bromwich, which had just been vacated as a temporary lunatic asylum for Birmingham. It was initially registered in December 1907 for 150 children as an industrial school, under Ellen Pinsent, with the Rev Burden as Warden, but rapidly filled up and was further expanded to 200 children. This school received very favourable reports from the Inspector of Industrial Schools.

Following this, and the passing of Section 62 of the Children Act (1908) which allowed for the reception of feeble-minded children into industrial schools, the Burdens expanded further into their care. Their friend the Duke of Beaufort, leased them the Dower House at Stoke Park, where his parents had recently lived and died, and the surrounding land in Stoke Gifford, Bristol. The first girls arrived on the 22 April 1909, and within 18 months the Dower House contained almost 300 girls and boys, and was receiving very enthusiastic reports by the Inspectors.

The years 1908–1909 mark a turning point in the Burdens' work. During this time magistrates reduced their use of reformatories when sentencing criminal drunkards. Though the incidence of convictions for alcohol related offences did not fall, the commitments of drunkards to reformatories halved between 1907 and 1908. From this date none of the NII's inebriate reformatories were ever full again even though a Home Office Committee publicly reinforced the need for reformatories in dealing with inebriacy. The NII relied on London for most of their clientele, and with a further fall in London committals during 1909, Lewes had an average population of only 50 women. Lewes was closed at the end of 1909, with its licence and lease surrendered and East Harling became the only institution via which all inebriates entered the NII. However, the collapse continued: the RVH was closed in August 1910; Ackworth in September 1910; Whittington Hall discharged all its inebriates by the end of 1913. The last NII's inebriate reformatory, East Harling, admitted its last case of inebriacy in November 1912 and transferred its final

35 inebriates to Brentry in November 1914. Brentry continued to admit inebriates from a wide area and still contained 150 inmates by the end of 1916, but numbers fell to 60 by the end of 1917, and 19 the following year. The last inebriate admitted to Brentry arrived in March 1921 and the last two left in November of the same year.

The Burdens changed the use of all their old reformatories to caring for the mentally defective. In 1911 the RVH and Ackworth were reopened for the mentally defective and East Harling started taking feeble-minded boys alongside inebriates: Whittington Hall reopened in October 1912, when Ackworth finally closed. In 1916 even Brentry pragmatically made arrangements to change its use to admit men with mental deficiency.

The Burdens' change to care for the mentally defective was formally recognized in 1913 when they set up a trust to own the freeholds and leases of the properties where they were working, and called it the National Institutions for Persons Requiring Care and Control (NIPRCC). In 1914 they then set up the Incorporation of National Institutions for Persons Requiring Care and Control (Inc-NIPRCC) as a limited company running the institutions and paying rent to the NIPRCC. This split stood the NIPRCC in good stead when the National Health Service came into force, as this split forced the Minister of Health formally to purchase the properties from the trustees.

The change from inebriacy to mental deficiency was not an entirely smooth one. East Harling, their largest institution, was holding 400 mental defectives by the end of 1915, when complaints arose about the administration and condition of the patients and the Board of Control 'after much discussion and correspondence' with the NIPRCC decided that the certificate had to be surrendered. During 1916 all 400 were either discharged or transferred to other premises, and the premises stood empty until they were sold in 1933, after Mr Burden's death.

With the closure of East Harling the NIPRCC institutions were reduced to three locations:

Sandwell Hall. This continued to take boys under the Industrial Schools section of the Children Act, as well as voluntarily sponsored by both Education Authorities and Boards of Guardians. It started to have empty beds in 1916 and was effectively closed in 1922. The final four residents were discharged to Stoke Park as 'Special List Workers' in December 1923, and the building's lease terminated on 25 March 1924. The building was demolished in 1928.

Whittington Hall. This was enlarged in 1912 and held 370 women by 1916. The Freehold was purchased by the NIPRCC in 1926. It has only recently closed.

Stoke Park. Between 1909 and 1917 the Burdens greatly enlarged this colony: building new accommodation and using the old RVH and part of their new private residence Clevedon Hall (purchased 1914) as 'holiday home'

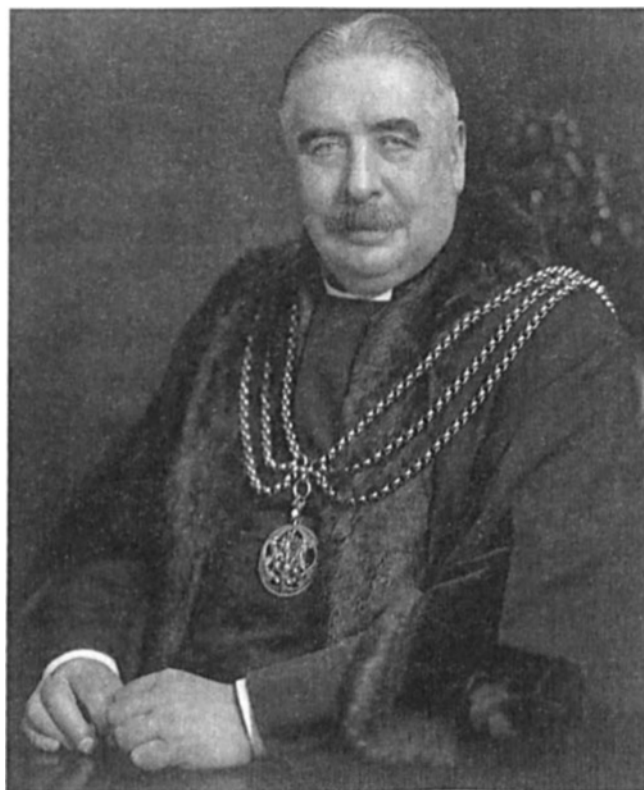


Figure 1 Rev Harold Nelson Burden

accommodation. During the First World War they leased several properties in Stapleton close to the Main Colony and Hanham Hall, several miles away. Later on in the War they bought the freehold of Stoke Park and also Leigh Court, on the other side of Bristol, arranging to pay for the latter in instalments. By 1917 the Stoke Park colonies were licensed as a single colony for 1528 inmates, the biggest licence in the country. It further expanded but has contracted since the 1980s and Stoke Park Hospital itself is due to close in 1997.

Katherine Burden died aged 63 (or 65) on 25 October 1919, a month after a stroke stopped her active work for the NIPRCC. She was buried in the cemetery used for Stoke Park residents. She left behind her a personal estate valued at £4256, and an effusive obituary that emphasized her personal labours for the institutions and her great popularity². It records that though neither of her own children survived, she was particularly fond of the children in her institutions.

By the time of Katherine Mary Burden's death in 1919 the Burdens, as the sole Trustees of the NIPRCC, were providing almost 2000 places for the 7000 people in Certified Institutions for the Mentally Defective¹⁶. Her death marked the end of the rapid growth of the NIPRCC.

A week before his sixtieth birthday, Mr Burden married his intimate friend, Rosa Gladys Williams, who had been superintendent matron of Stoke Park since 1914; she was the daughter of a clergyman. During the 1920s Harold Burden appears to have become more involved in the City of London. In his youth, soon after entering Cambridge, he

bought his membership of the London Company of Barbers¹⁷. He became master of the Company from 1924 to 1926 and joined several other London Guild Companies. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature and of the Royal Empire Society.

In his final 4 years of life, Mr Burden created a private limited company, Great Stoke Estates Limited, and transferred his land to it. This company then proceeded to buy all the freeholds of the institutions still occupied under lease and many nearby farms, amounting to almost 3 square miles of land around Bristol and Chesterfield. Some of this land and the institutions were later sold to the NIPRCC after his death, when the company was dissolved.

Harold Burden died on the 15 May 1930 from heart disease. Unusually, the Board of Control inserted a note in their annual report:

... with much regret we have to record the death... of the Rev. Harold Nelson Burden... he served on the Royal Commission on the Control of the Feeble-minded, his experience and knowledge proving of great value to the enquiry... The institutions under his control... were among the first to provide certified accommodation for the mentally defective, and proved of great assistance at a time when the supply of beds was extremely limited. In the conduct of these institutions his administrative abilities were invaluable; and we feel that, as a pioneer in this sphere of work, a debt of gratitude is due to him. We wish to record our sincere appreciation of the valuable help he rendered in advancing the working of the Act¹⁸.

Harold left his estate, worth £149 161, to his wife Rosa Gladys Burden, who became the new Warden of the NIPRCC. Under her direction and after her death in 1939, the NIPRCC enlarged its interests by further enlarging Stoke Park Colony and consolidating the land owned by the NIPRCC, by financing the Burden Mental Research Department and the Burden Neurological Institute at Stoke Park, and by later supporting a local Bristol school for mentally handicapped children and several theological colleges. The NIPRCC sold its property and now, as the Burden Trust, makes grants totalling over £100 000 annually to institutions coming under the purposes of the trust first set out by the Burdens in 1913.

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NOTES

- 1 Berry R J. *Stoke Park Monographs on Mental Deficiency and Other Problems of the Human Brain and Mind. No. 1, The Burden Memorial Volume*. London: MacMillan & Co, 1933 reprinted along with an obituary for Kate Burden in Jancar J. *Research at Stoke Park, Mental Handicap (1930-1980)*. Bristol: Frenchay Health Authority, 1981. The current paper is based on a much more detailed and unpublished work by Dr Carpenter
- 2 *Clevedon Mercury* 8 November 1919
- 3 Cooper R, Bird J. *The Burden*. Bristol: White Tree Books, 1989
- 4 The letter of Octavia Hill (dated 1870) quoted in Kate's obituary cannot refer to her unless her age on her death certificate (63) is severely underestimated as for it to do so she must have been working in the slums when aged 14!
- 5 HNB (Burden HN). *Life in Algoma; or, Three years of a Clergyman's Life and Church Work in that Diocese*. London: SPCK, 1894
HNB (Burden HN). *Manitoulin; or, Five Years of Church Work among Ojibway Indians and Lumbermen Resident upon that Island or in its Vicinity, by an Asst College Chaplain at Cambridge*. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1895
- 6 HNB (Burden HN). *Duty's Call. A Story of a Girl's Work in the Service of Others, and Her Reward. With Some Brief Sketches of Undergraduate Life*. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1896
HNB (Burden HN). *Addresses on St Matthew's Gospel. By an Assistant College Chaplain at Cambridge, Part 1*. London: T Brown & Co, 1896
- 7 Thomas Edward. Letter. *Bristol Mercury* September 1902 (copy at Bristol Record Office, uncatalogued)
- 8 It grew to a licence for 311 inmates, though it deliberately did not exceed 200. See annual reports of Inspector of Certified Reformatories, in *British Parliamentary Papers* for descriptions and plans.
- 9 Uncatalogued material at Bristol Record Office
- 10 Report of Departmental Committee as to the operation of the Law relating to inebriates—Evidence, appendices... statement of Rev Burden. *British Parliamentary Papers* 1908;[Cd.4439]XII 861:86
- 11 Annual Reports of Inspector of Certified Reformatories for 1906, 1907; for costs and for details of operation. *British Parliamentary Papers* 1907[Cd.3685]X 589;1908[Cd.4342]XII 1107
- 12 *Third Annual Report of the Board of Control for 1916*. London: HMSO 1917. Chairman of Board of Control 1914-21, apart from when seconded to post of Permanent Undersecretary to Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1916-1918
- 13 Part of an Instruction to Legal Counsel by NIPRCC, dated 1947, in possession of Burden Trust trustees and deposited in Bristol Record Office, quoted with permission
- 14 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded, Vol. 5*. *British Parliamentary Papers* 1908[Cd.4219]XXXVIII 1:242
- 15 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded, Vol. 8*. *British Parliamentary Papers* 1908[Cd.4202]XXXIX 159:511
- 16 *Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Control for 1919*. *British Parliamentary Papers* 1920XXI 229.
- 17 *List of Freeman of the City*. Corporation of London Record Office; CFI 2336
- 18 *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Control for 1930, Part 1*, London: HMSO, 1931:93

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