

Obituary

Editor: Henry R. Rollin

ANNE NICOL MACKELLAR BRITTAI, formerly HM Senior Medical Commissioner Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland

Dr Anne Brittain's death in April marked in many ways the end of an era. Born in Glasgow in 1922, she was educated at school and University in her native city. She betokened an early legal as well as medical proclivity by obtaining a BL and DPA in 1945 before graduating MBChB in 1947. She was elected a foundation fellow of the College in 1971 and a FRCP(Ed) in 1981.

Her junior jobs were in medicine and psychiatry at the Southern General Hospital, Glasgow. Anne was wont to dwell on the memorable formative years she subsequently spent at the Glasgow Royal Mental Hospital in the 1950s. Dr Angus MacNiven (a former President of the RMPA), unique in personality and modest in exceptional erudition, was then the Physician Superintendent. Dr MacNiven held the view that real psychiatrists are born and not made. He had a gift of imparting clinical skill and acumen. Book learning, he insisted, could only be brought to life by an apprenticeship of experience and responsibility which entailed (as a must) 'living above the shop' and 'being open all hours'. Anne had the necessary flair.

She came from a gifted West Highland background. Her courteously disguised persistence, discernment and unshakable resolve to get to the real nub of a perplexing human problem was enhanced by a remarkable memory and power of recall. This 'Miss Marple' approach was no mere chance. Her brother Robert, an erstwhile Physician Superintendent of the State Hospital at Carstairs, was a friend and acknowledged confidant of the Stanley Gardner of 'Perry Mason' fame. Anne in a sisterly way shared their interests and confidences.

In 1958 Anne Brittain became a Deputy Commissioner of the General Board of Control which in 1960 became the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland. She became a full Commissioner in 1963 and for about a decade before her retirement some five years ago was Senior Medical Commissioner and Vice-Chairman. As a deputy she visited boarded-out patients at their guardians all over Scotland from crowded city centre to remotest Hebridean croft. As a Senior Commissioner the complex and changing problems of mental and mental deficiency hospitals

were also within her responsible ambit, which ranged from the most difficult of individual patients, and media-prone minority protest groups, to far-reaching considerations of administration, policy concerning the public weal.

She held some definite reservations about the 're-cycling' of the centuries old concept of 'community care'. Her views about this shibboleth were in measured accordance with the title of a BBC programme, 'Everybody's Distant Relative ... But Nobody's Baby'.

The Commission, when she was vice-chairman in 1981, published a document prefaced by the words "The Commission respectfully urge all who are privileged to pursue the dedicated work of serving the needs of persons who suffer from mental disorder to ask themselves the question – Does the Patient Come First?" These words were the title of the publication. These words are Dr Anne Brittain's epitaph.

MMW

ROBERT DOUGAL, formerly Consultant and Medical Superintendent, Downshire Hospital, Downpatrick, Northern Ireland

Robert Dougal, who died recently, was born in Belfast in 1913. He studied medicine at Queen's University, Belfast and graduated MB, ChB, BAO in 1936. He was elected MRCPI in 1941 and proceeded to the fellowship in 1969.

However, having decided on a career in psychiatry he joined the staff of Downshire Hospital, Downpatrick as a junior assistant medical officer in 1936 and proceeded up the promotional ladder at the same hospital until he was elected consultant in 1950 and medical superintendent in 1968. He retired from both positions in 1979. He took the DPM (RCSI) in 1939, the MRCPsych in 1970 and was elected FRCPsych in 1972.

At the time he began work at Downshire Hospital, psychiatric treatment was largely custodial. There was a marked lack of medical staff, and a complete absence of such other disciplines as psychology or social work. In those early days Bob filled a number of roles. He was psychiatrist, general physician, radiologist, pathologist and pharmacist.

The psychotic illnesses were always his main interest, and he was active in the practice of all