

THE HISTORY OF St IVES - CORMWALL

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PERCY LANE OLIVER OBE (1878-1944)

Percy Lane Oliver was born on April 11th 1878 at the home of his grandparents, Paul and Marjorie Curnow, in Fish Street, St. Ives. In 1921 when he was working in London as Secretary of the Camberwell Division of the British Red Cross, he and a few Red Cross colleagues responded to an urgent request from the nearby King's College Hospital for a blood donor. One of the group became the hospital's first donor to give blood as a volunteer without financial reward. Oliver's experience on that occasion led him to the concept of voluntary blood donor panels and the system he then devised.

He worked tirelessly on the system for the rest of his life and was admired and copied in countries around the world. His system is now incorporated into our National Health Service through the National Blood Authority. Oliver was awarded the OBE for his work in hospitals and among refugees in the First World War but during his lifetime he received no public recognition of all the pioneering work he did in the field of blood transfusion.

Oliver died in 1944 and it was not until 1972 that any public reminder of his contribution to modern medicine was forthcoming. It came in the form of a plaque placed in the Haematology Department of King's College Hospital. In 1979 the Greater London Council attached one of their 'Blue Plaques' to the house in South London where Oliver and his family carried on the administration of the voluntary service, and in 1992, with the co-operation of St. Ives Town Council an appropriate plaque was provided in the newly opened Stennack Surgery in St. Ives.

King's College Hospital is now part of the King's Healthcare NHS Trust and to mark the 75th Anniversary of that first voluntary blood donation and the start of Oliver's work, the Trust felt that something more tangible than a plaque was needed. It was decided that one of the hospital's new wards should be named after him. This was done on Thursday December 12th when a plaque referring to Oliver's work, was unveiled in the Oliver Ward.

It is hoped that patients who receive treatment in the Oliver Ward may be encouraged to become volunteer blood donors that, in itself, would be a tribute to his work.

Excerpt taken from St. Ives Times & Echo, 6th December 1991 - Copyright Tom Richards