

Nurse Elizabeth Hunter

District Nurse & Midwife in Gatehouse.

by Margaret Wright (née Hunter) : grand-daughter

My grandmother, Elizabeth Duguid Nicol, was born at Capperhook Farm, Chapel of Garioch, Aberdeenshire in 1875. Her father was John Nicol, farmer, and her mother was Mary Leslie Nicol. Despite having the same surname, they were not related. Elizabeth was the third child in a family of nine.

I do not know where Elizabeth trained to be a nurse but it was probably in Aberdeen. Three of her sisters (Jean, Isabella and Mary) also trained as nurses. Two of her brothers were policemen. It has been suggested that these two occupations were considered 'safe' when it came to youngsters moving to a big city, since housing and other support was given to people in these professions.

I do not know whether there was a specific invitation, but in the late 1890's Elizabeth moved from Aberdeenshire to Gatehouse of Fleet in Kirkcudbrightshire where she was employed as a nurse at Cally House. The then laird of the Cally Estate, ageing Horatio Granville Murray Stewart, needed to be nursed. He died in 1904. In the 1901 census Elizabeth was a lodger in a house in Castle Douglas, 15 miles from Gatehouse, and was listed as a sick nurse.



A young Nurse Nicol



Elizabeth (Liz) Hunter about 1914 with her young family, Freda, Arthur and Nan.

In 1904 Elizabeth married James Hunter, the clerk of works on the Cally Estate, and moved to the Cally Saw Mill in Ann Street, Gatehouse. Between 1906 and 1910 she and James had 3 children.

In 1913 Elizabeth's son Arthur developed a life threatening ear condition. An emergency mastoid operation was carried out on the kitchen table at the Saw Mill House by the local doctor Alexander Dott, and Elizabeth assisted him.

She had started nursing again officially by the 1920's when she was appointed the first nurse of the Gatehouse Nursing Association and was a popular local figure. A number of people who are now in their 80's and 90's have proudly said that they are 'Nurse Hunter babies'.

They include Bobby Carson who was born on 22nd June 1925 at Conchieton Farm, Twynholm. Nurse Hunter also delivered Bobby's siblings John, Willie and Betty. When Betty was born, young Bobby was annoyed by all the fuss about his new sister so he went to the hen-house and smashed a load of freshly laid eggs. Nurse Hunter was not amused and gave him castor oil as punishment. Bobby says this punishment did not work - he likes castor oil !



Left - Nurse Hunter with newborn baby Bobby Carson 22/06/1925.



Right - a young Bobby Carson, who liked castor oil.

Elizabeth later worked with another local doctor, Dr. Alexander Craig.

In 1926 twin boys were born in Gatehouse and they were named Nichol Hunter Shaw (known as Hunter) and Alexander Craig Shaw (known as Craig) in gratitude to the help given by the doctor and nurse. Sadly Hunter died as a youngster but Craig Shaw lived in Gatehouse until he was 70.



Elizabeth Hunter c.1935 (age 60)

Even after she retired, she would treat minor wounds at her home. One day some local lads decided to make a 'bomb' which of course caused some minor injuries when it exploded. The boys chose to go and see Nurse Hunter to be patched up rather than go home to their parents.

Mrs JAMES HUNTER, GATEHOUSE.

Mrs James Hunter, Drumaber, Gatehouse, passed away last week after a lingering illness. As Nurse Nicol, she came to Gatehouse over 40 years ago, and after her marriage to the late Mr James Hunter, joiner, she continued to give her services to those who had need of her. About 20 years ago, when Gatehouse Nursing Association was formed, Mrs Hunter was appointed their first nurse, discharging her duties untiringly for a number of years, and leaving behind her a memory which will long linger in many homes of the district. An enthusiastic member of Girthon Parish Church and Woman's Guild, Mrs Hunter, in her leisure hours, enjoyed a game of bowls. She was always ready to help in any good cause, was bright and cheery, and a good neighbour and friend. She is survived by a son and a daughter. The funeral took place to Anwoth Cemetery, and among many floral tributes was one from Gatehouse Nursing Association.

Elizabeth died in Gatehouse in 1944, 7 years after her husband. This obituary was published in the Galloway News.

**PRESENTATION TO MRS HUNTER,
GATEHOUSE.**

A few ladies representing subscribers assembled at Anwoth Mansie, Gatehouse, on Saturday afternoon to meet Mrs Hunter, Cally Sawmill. For some time Gatehouse has had no resident doctor, and even previous to that time Mrs Hunter, who was a trained nurse, always willingly gave her skill and able assistance when called upon until a doctor arrived from Kirkcudbright. It was thought fitting at this time to acknowledge her services. Accordingly, Mrs Malcolm Cross, Cally, on behalf of the ladies, handed to Mrs Hunter a well-filled Treasury note case, accompanied with grateful expressions from the community for her many kindnesses to the sick. Mrs Hunter thanked the ladies present and all the subscribers for the unexpected and handsome way in which they had recognised her services, which she had been pleased to render to rich or poor when asked. After the presentation, Mrs Saunders hospitably entertained the company.

Dr Alexander Dott died unexpectedly in October 1916 leaving Gatehouse without a local doctor, the nearest being in Kirkcudbright 9 miles away. A situation that continued until after the end of World War I. Elizabeth stepped in to help out whenever she could. To show their appreciation, Elizabeth was given a present, as reported in the Dumfries & Galloway Standard 23rd Dec, 1916.

Nurse Hunter understood the strain on young mothers with large families. In 1930 after the birth of Hamish



MacInnes, she realised that his mother Catherine was a long way from home (she was from the Isle of Skye) and had 4 other young children to cope with. Looking at the 3 MacInnes girls, she chose Chrissie, aged 7, to accompany her on her rounds. Chrissie was delighted and for many years dreamed of becoming a 'Nurse Hunter'. Chrissie is seen here, dressed as a Nurse Hunter, in the local gala,