

Autumn 2017

History of Nursing Society newsletter

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Drawing by soldier and patient Harry Proctor as featured in nurse Jessie Akehurst's signature book, which she kept during her time working at Southern General Hospital, Somerville College, Oxford, between 1917 and 1919

Celebrating achievements past and present

Welcome to the autumn 2017 issue of the RCN History of Nursing Society (HoNS) newsletter.

I am pleased to say that the society and its members continue to engage in research, investigation and sharing of ideas and enthusiasm.

One particularly interesting piece of work is the service scrapbooks project funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund award. The aim is to conserve and digitise diaries, photograph albums and autograph books from the First World War. Approximately 30 members have been recruited as archive volunteers, either working at headquarters to scan and transcribe the documents or remotely to research the authors. By early 2018 it will be available online but we also have the original documents conserved and safe for the future.

The past few months have seen a number of successes, beginning in May when plaques to honour former RCN presidents Margaret Sparshott and Lucy Duff Grant were placed at Manchester Royal Infirmary. As Dame Betty Kershaw, a former president herself, said:

“We are delighted to pay tribute to these extraordinary figures in Manchester’s nursing history.”

In July we celebrated receiving the Archive Service Accreditation, a new national award granted to archives which meet professional standards and deliver high quality service to members. Also in July, Scottish members attended a garden party at Holyrood in association with the Queen’s Nursing Institute Scotland. Finally, in August the library and archive team were given a Customer Service Excellence award, which is an independent accreditation of the quality and standard of customer care.

There is much to be proud of as we head towards 2018, which will see new exhibitions, commemorations of the end of World War One, the outcome of research by Monica Baly bursary recipients and the installation of a blue plaque to Sidney Browne, a co-founder of the Royal College of Nursing.

Dianne Yarwood, newsletter editor

Something to say?

Send contributions for the next newsletter to the editor:

Dianne Yarwood



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Letter from Claire Chatterton, Chair of the HoNS



The HoNS committee. L-R back: Margaret Graham, Teresa Doherty, Jane Brooks, Jane Kemp, Dianne Yarwood and Alison O'Donnell. L-R front: Tristan Griffin, Claire Chatterton and Denise Alexis

The History of Nursing Society and its members continue to be involved with all kinds of historical events and projects and I remain very grateful to my fellow committee members for all their help and support. Tristan Griffin has recently resigned from the committee and we are currently in the process of recruiting his replacement. We would like to thank him for all he has contributed and wish him well in the future.

March saw the launch of our sixth events and exhibition series, *For Queen and Country: Nursing, Trauma and War*, in the RCN Library and Heritage Centre. It was a joint project with the Defence Nursing Forum (DNF) and ran until September 2017. If you didn't manage to see it in London, it is now on show in the Edinburgh office and an online version can be found on the RCN website at www.rcn.org.uk/library.

We have also been delighted to see the annual History of Nursing Lecture reinstated, under the auspices of the public lecture series funded by the RCN Foundation. The 2017 lecture by Professor Allison Fell from the University of Leeds was well attended and received. The 2018 lecture, *Studies in the History and Science of Trauma*, will be given by Professor Joanna Bourke from Birkbeck College, University of London, on Thursday 15 March at 6pm at RCN headquarters in London.

We were also pleased to be at RCN Congress again last May in Liverpool where we held a successful fringe event focusing on poor law nursing in Liverpool. Thanks to our guest speaker, Carolyn Gibbon, for an engaging and informative talk. We will be in Belfast for Congress next year and hope to run another fringe event there.

Events and exhibitions



The RCN's new events and exhibition series, looking at different aspects of diversity in nursing, launched on 11 October and will run for six months. Plans for future events and exhibitions include the centenary of the flu epidemic and highlighting nursing responses to more recent pandemics. In 2019, the RCN will be marking the centenary of nurse registration.



HoNs Chair honoured by the University of Virginia



HoNS Chair Claire Chatterton (pictured left, on right) was delighted to be the 2017 recipient of the Agnes Dillon Randolph Award, an annual award given to "recognise distinguished contributions by a scholar of nursing history". It was awarded by the Eleanor Crowder

Bjoring Center for Nursing History Inquiry at the University of Virginia in the USA. Claire was invited to give a lecture at the centre and enjoyed meeting the team and the chance to visit the university, which has a beautiful and historical campus in the town of Charlottesville.

The ghosts of nursing past

HoNS member Claire Laurent was the recipient of the 2017 Monica Baly bursary, which she is using to support research for her book *Rituals and Myths in Nursing*, due for publication in 2019. As part of her research, she's come across some rather spooky stories...

It's that time of year and there's certainly no shortage of ghostly stories when it comes to nursing. Every hospital seems to have one!

Most ghosts seem to be women, very often former nurses who offer help. According to Cate, a student nurse at St Mary's Hospital in London in the late 1970s, their resident ghost Sister Thistlewaite would "take bedpans from patients and we'd hear the bedpan washer go on. If a drip had gone through, the next bag of fluid would fall on the floor. If drugs were due, the drug chart would appear open at the end of the bed."

At St Thomas's Hospital, London, student Mary Anne received direct help from the hospital's ghost. She left a distressed dying older lady to fetch some water only to return to a calm and smiling

woman sitting up in bed on freshly plumped pillows. The patient said she had been helped by the "lady in the grey dress" and died peacefully later that night.

At Manchester Royal Infirmary, a ghostly night sister was said to patrol the wards ready to tap the shoulder of any nurse who dozed off.

They're not all so helpful though. In Sligo General Hospital, Berni remembers talk of the banshee, an Irish supernatural death messenger who was traditionally seen or heard wailing upon the time of death and was associated with families of Gaelic heritage. "If the banshee was heard, you were supposed to rush around the ward and check all your patients to make sure they were still alive!" said Berni.

*If you have stories to share on the custom and practice of nursing over the generations, especially if you have worked in theatres or mental health nursing, please email claire@clairelaurent.co.uk or visit the *Rituals and Myths in Nursing* Facebook page.*



Lady Barrington

RCN headquarters itself is said to be haunted by the "grey lady". In 1883, Lady Barrington was killed by an "accidental" fall on the beautiful painted staircase at 20 Cavendish Square. You can still see the black square on the fifth step where she fell.

20th UKAHN annual colloquium

The 20th UK Association for the History of Nursing (UKAHN) research colloquium took place on 27 and 28 June at the University of Huddersfield and was a hugely successful event with many varied and interesting papers presented.



L-R: Professor Janet Hargreaves from the University of Huddersfield and Teresa Doherty

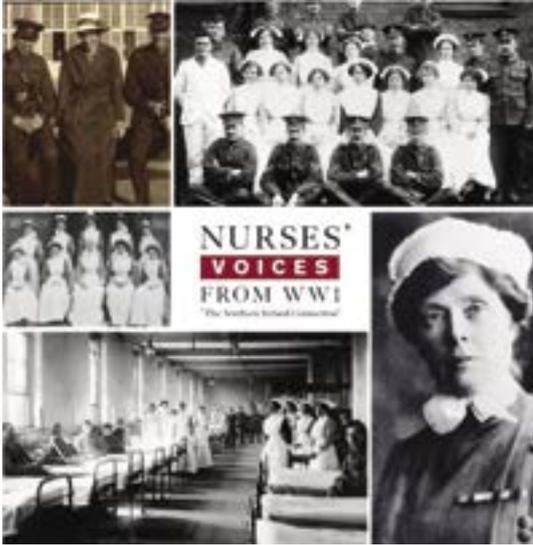
After a preceding afternoon seminar on works in progress, keynote speaker and RCN Joint Library and Archive Manager Teresa Doherty opened the conference with an inspirational presentation on the key workings of archivists and the constant pressures of collection, preservation and provision of archives.

Other highlights included papers focusing on the First World War. The session was closed with Dr Stuart Wildman's rich case study of the difficulties of nursing reform in Lincoln.

To see the full programme, visit <http://ukahn.org/cms/index.php/colloquium/colloquium-2017>

Next year's colloquium will be in July at the University of Chester. If you'd like to attend, information will be posted on the UKAHN website early next year.

Update from the Northern Ireland Network



For the past 18 months the Northern Ireland History of Nursing Network has been meeting to collate information gathered about local nurses who served in the Great War. The search for information has spanned the country. In fact, many nurses identified came from rural districts and it's incredible how many of them travelled to train as nurses

so far from home, then to enlist when war erupted.

The findings have been collated in a new book *Nurses' Voices from WWI: the Northern Ireland Connection*, which aims to recognise the contribution made by these nurses and was made possible thanks to a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It is hoped that this book, concentrating as it does on the contribution made by nurses from this small part of the world, conveys something of the enormity of the task they faced at the outbreak of war and the dedication and professionalism which they brought to it.

The book and accompanying exhibit was launched on 19 October in Belfast.

For more information, contact Margaret Graham: mgraham890@googlemail.com

RCN members serving in the Great War

The nursing profiles and personal accounts that are told in the book have been collated from local archivists, museums and family memorabilia.

Lucy Sinton Kelly is one of the featured nurses. She trained in what was the Belfast Union Infirmary (now Belfast City Hospital) then joined the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve and served on hospital trains in France. She survived the war although many brave nurses sadly did not.

Lucy Sinton Kelly's RCN certificate



Reflection on a visit to Belfast

RCN archivist Fiona Bourne visited her colleagues in Belfast and discovered a wealth of excellent archive items

After almost 20 years at the RCN and several visits to Belfast, I finally set foot in the RCN Northern Ireland headquarters recently. I was met by library colleague Pauline Moore who showed me their lovely library facility. I have now admired the air-conditioned library complete with comfy seats, a fridge full of treats and, oh yes, lots of great books and journals.

The Northern Ireland branch of our History of Nursing Society had accumulated a great deal of fascinating records from the country, donated over many years by nurses and RCN members.

Members came in to help us sort and select items for preservation in the RCN archive, including almost a dozen small collections of personal papers, letters, photographs, lecture notebooks, certificates and badges.

We ended up with four crates of new records to be added to the RCN collections including one from RCN Fellow and local hero Mona Grey, who shaped the early Board in Northern Ireland, instigating fundraising with the famous plays she wrote and directed.

The History of Nursing Society members, organised by Margaret Graham, worked enthusiastically with us on this and we also had a chance to discuss future ideas. Margaret (pictured right) and the group have so many ideas for historical projects we want to support them with.



Lorna Finlay and Margaret Graham

Thanks to RCN Northern Ireland Director Janice Smyth for her support in arranging this visit. We hope to return again in the near future.

Archive online journal

The RCN's Fiona Bourne explains how to make the most of the archive's online resources

We have many journals at the RCN Library and Archives Service, electronic and print. Not surprisingly, as our library is almost a century old, there are journal titles in our collection from all around the world dating back to the 1880s. Find out more at www.rcn.org.uk/library/collections/special-collections/historical-nursing-journals

Top search tip!

You can do a full text search on the content of any of the volumes of *Nursing Record* and there is a separate page listing the volumes for browsing. Keep search terms simple and it works better. Your search will bring up a page of results which show the search term in context. These link to PDFs which you can email or save as you wish.

Back in the late 90s, the archive team gained funding to digitise one of these journals. We chose the extremely rare *Nursing Record* which was first published in 1888. It changed its name to the *British Journal of Nursing* in 1902 but is no relation to the current publication of that name.

It went live in 2001 as the first free fully-searchable historic nursing journal. It's a great resource for historical events, names and places, family history, military history and for nursing biographies right up to its final volume in 1956.

It quickly became obvious that lots of people found this online resource invaluable to their research. Every time we update the website we have to move the webpage, though, and researchers find that their bookmark no longer



works, but it is still there! We have recently made another move to http://rcnarchive.rcn.org.uk/cgi-bin/advanced_search.pl#

Even after 16 years and many facelifts, it is still a unique resource in nursing history.

Special Scottish visit

Sophie Volker, RCN Archive Specialist, remembers politician Aileen Campbell's visit to the current exhibition in Edinburgh's archive

In August, the Scottish Minister for Public Health and Sport, Aileen Campbell, visited RCN Scotland headquarters. She was invited to the building to view the new exhibition, which focuses on public health nursing.

Sian Kiely, the head of the Learning Hub which is hosting the exhibition, talked the visitors through the display cases, pointing out a number of highlights, such as Florence Nightingale's inscribed copy of *The Water Babies* and some 19th century vaccination lancets. I had prepared a



Theresa Fyffe, Director RCN Scotland, 2nd from left and Aileen Campbell, Scottish minister, 2nd from right

small archive display to complement the items already in the museum cases, and it was a wonderful chance for me to show off the breadth and excellence of the RCN's archive collection.

The minister, whose constituency is Clydesdale, was interested to see some

of the postcards of nursing homes and hospitals in and around Lanark. She also enjoyed hearing about our oral history collection. It turns out that she had written a dissertation about oral history whilst at university and needed no convincing as to the importance of our collection.

The beatification of Hanna Chrzanowska

HoNS member Gosia Brykczynska celebrates the forthcoming beatification of a remarkable woman and nurse

Hanna Chrzanowska was born in Warsaw on 7 October 1902. She was one of the first women to graduate from the newly opened Warsaw School of Nursing in 1924.

Upon finishing her training, Hanna was sent to Paris on a Rockefeller scholarship to study community nursing, which defined her area of interest for the rest of her life. Hanna spent most of her professional life as a nurse-teacher, responsible for community nursing.

During the war, she worked as co-ordinator of relief services for refugees. After the war, she went back to teaching community nursing. During these post-war years, right up to her death, she was also involved in running the historical section of the local branch of the Polish Nurses' Association. She was so keen on this work that she nominated a young nursing friend to be her successor – just in case this area of research should fall into disfavour!

Hanna helped set up a professional nursing journal (of which she was editor), and worked on the first Nursing Act in 1937. In addition to her nursing activities, she also wrote novels and published poems.



Hanna seated far left. Credit: Krakow Association of Catholic Nurses and Midwives

“Never in my life have I regretted that I am not a physician. Instinctively I knew that medicine was one profession and nursing was something entirely different. I simply felt this distinction in the depth of my being, long before I could theoretically describe it.”

Quote from Hanna as featured in Gosia's book

She took forced early retirement in 1957, and proceeded to set up parish nursing in Kraków, at one point co-ordinating over 300 volunteers. It is this work for which she is best remembered.

Hanna was a devout Catholic and the opening of her beatification cause was

requested by her nursing colleagues and students. It is the first time that a professional group approached a diocese to start the beatification process. Twenty years after the process was started, and after the accumulation of many documents, witness testimonies and even a miracle attribution, Hanna will finally be the first registered nurse to be beatified next year.

Colours of Fire

Gosia is currently working on an expanded and revised edition of her book *Colours of Fire, a biography of Hanna Chrzanowska*. In addition, a short pamphlet is being produced in English. As Gosia states in her book, Hanna was “an incredible woman, even if not beatified”.

Diary date:

The London and South East group

Now in its 16th year, the London and South East HoNS group continues to meet quarterly at the RCN London region offices in Cavendish Square. The meetings take the form of a presentation on an interesting historical event, or similar, followed by a general discussion and sharing of information. The next meeting of

the L&SE group will be at **4pm on Thursday 6 December 2017** where Gosia Brykczynska will be speaking about Hanna Chrzanowska. It will be a fascinating presentation, not to be missed.

If you would like more details of the group, please email d.yarwood@ntlworld.com

What is beatification?

When the church beatifies someone, they are proclaiming that this person led a holy and virtuous life and that they are able to speak to God on behalf of the living who revere them. There are many steps involved and rigorous research is required to reach this stage, which involves the attribution of a miracle as the final stage. Once beatified, a person becomes blessed and the church supports their public veneration.

Nursing on the battlefield

Neasa Roughan, Archives Assistant at RCN Scotland, celebrates the arrival of a new donation

The RCN in Scotland recently received a fascinating donation of personal papers from the great niece of a WWI nurse, Clementina Addison. She came bearing a bulging carrier bag, which turned out to be a real treasure trove of material, including dozens of picture postcards sent by Clementina to her sister Christie during her time nursing in France during the war. There were also some pocket nursing texts and prayer books, a nursing badge from her training at Leicester Royal Infirmary, photographs, a silver locket containing a miniature English dictionary, newspaper clippings, and a Russian silver belt buckle.

Clementina was born in Lancaster in 1890, the daughter of a cotton cop dyer. Her family moved to Lancashire sometime in the 1910s, and Clementina decided to train as a nurse when she finished school. Immediately after she



Clementina surrounded by her patients in France

qualified, she decided to go to France with the French Flag Nursing Corps. This was quite unusual at the time, as most nurses would have chosen to nurse with the British Red Cross. However, Clementina spoke fluent French and, as there was a great shortage of nurses in France at the time, she decided to go there.

Sadly, Clementina contracted an unspecified disease around January 1916 and was sent home to Britain where she died a few months later.

She was posthumously awarded the *Medaille d'Honneur Des Epidemies* for her work with French soldiers with infectious diseases, as well as the *Medaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise*.

Clementina's family are rightly proud of their ancestor, and because of this they want to be sure she is remembered and her surviving records and possessions are looked after for posterity, which is why they came to us. We will ensure that Clementina is not forgotten.



Clementina's obituary and locket, which hides a mini English dictionary only legible through the magnifying lens in the casing

Postcards from the front

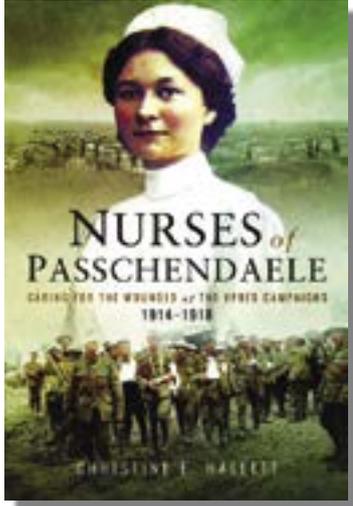
Clementina sent postcards to her sister Christie every few days, most of them depicting local landmarks near where she was based, but also paintings she liked and illustrations of the troops. A few of the postcards include photographs of her and the wounded soldiers she was treating. Clementina was clearly pressed for time and wouldn't have been permitted to say much in correspondence about what was happening around her in the trenches.

Her messages to her sister were therefore usually brief, occasionally mentioning acquaintances of theirs who had been wounded or killed in action. One of them



mentions the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Another intriguingly mentions a German officer who said he had witnessed a host of angels on the side of the allies on the battlefield – clearly a reference to the Angel of Mons legend, which was supposed to have occurred a few months previously.

Claire Chatterton recommends *Nurses of Passchendaele* by Christine E Hallett (Pen & Sword, 2017)



One hundred years ago, between July and November 1917, one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War was raging in Belgium. Known as the Battle of Passchendaele, or the Third Battle of Ypres, it is remembered for its muddy quagmire and huge loss of life. One of the most poignant sights at the recent memorial events held to mark its centenary was that of 54,000 poppies falling from the high arch of the Menin Gate at Ypres, the world's first memorial to those who fell in the First World War but were never found. There

was a poppy for each name engraved upon the vast gate. This battle was the culmination of three years of fighting in the area known as the Ypres Salient and throughout the war it has been estimated that over 800,000 men on all sides of the conflict lost their lives in this part of Belgium.

“A MOVING AND ENGROSSING NEW BOOK”

Christine Hallett has written a moving and engrossing new book which remembers the nurses who cared for the men of this campaign on the allied side.

Some of the nurses worked in very dangerous conditions. The casualty clearing stations near the frontline frequently came under aerial bombardment and, as a result, some nurses were injured or died. One young staff nurse, Nellie Spindler, from Wakefield, lost

her life one morning as she slept. As she lay exhausted from a night working in a casualty clearing station, her life was taken by a fragment of shrapnel when it came under heavy aerial bombardment. Her colleagues, led by their sister in charge, professional army nurse Minnie Wood, continued to work all day until evacuated later that afternoon. Sister Wood was later to be awarded the Military Medal for her actions that day. Their stories are only one example of countless acts of nursing stoicism, compassion and professionalism displayed in the most extreme of conditions.

Hallett uses nurses' letters, diaries and personal accounts from archives all over the world to tell their stories and she paints a vivid picture of the conditions in which they had to work. Their courage and compassion is clear. Siegfried Sassoon, the war poet, famously said “I died in hell, they called it Passchendaele” and the nurses who endured this hell were themselves profoundly moved by their experiences. Their professionalism shines through in their writing, as does their resilience. This book is a fitting testament to their work and a compelling read.



Nellie Spindler was one of only two WWI nurses to be buried in Belgium.

HoNS member Liz Howard-Thornton laid fresh flowers on her grave on the anniversary of her death.

End of Passchendaele commemoration

On 8 November, an event to mark the centenary of the end of the Battle of Passchendaele and the death of England test cricketer and soldier Colin Blythe, who died on the last day of battle, was held at Lord's Cricket Ground.

Author Christine Hallett, RCN HoNS member and Chair of the UK Association for the History of Nursing, was featured as an interviewee in the film *They Called it Passchendaele*, which was made with children from All Souls School last year. The same children recently came to RCN HQ to partake in a creative writing workshop with RCN writer-in-residence Molly Case. Some of their poems were read out as part of the day's events.

If you've read a book related to nursing recently and would like to review it for the next issue of this newsletter, get in touch with editor Dianne Yarwood at d.yarwood@ntlworld.com