

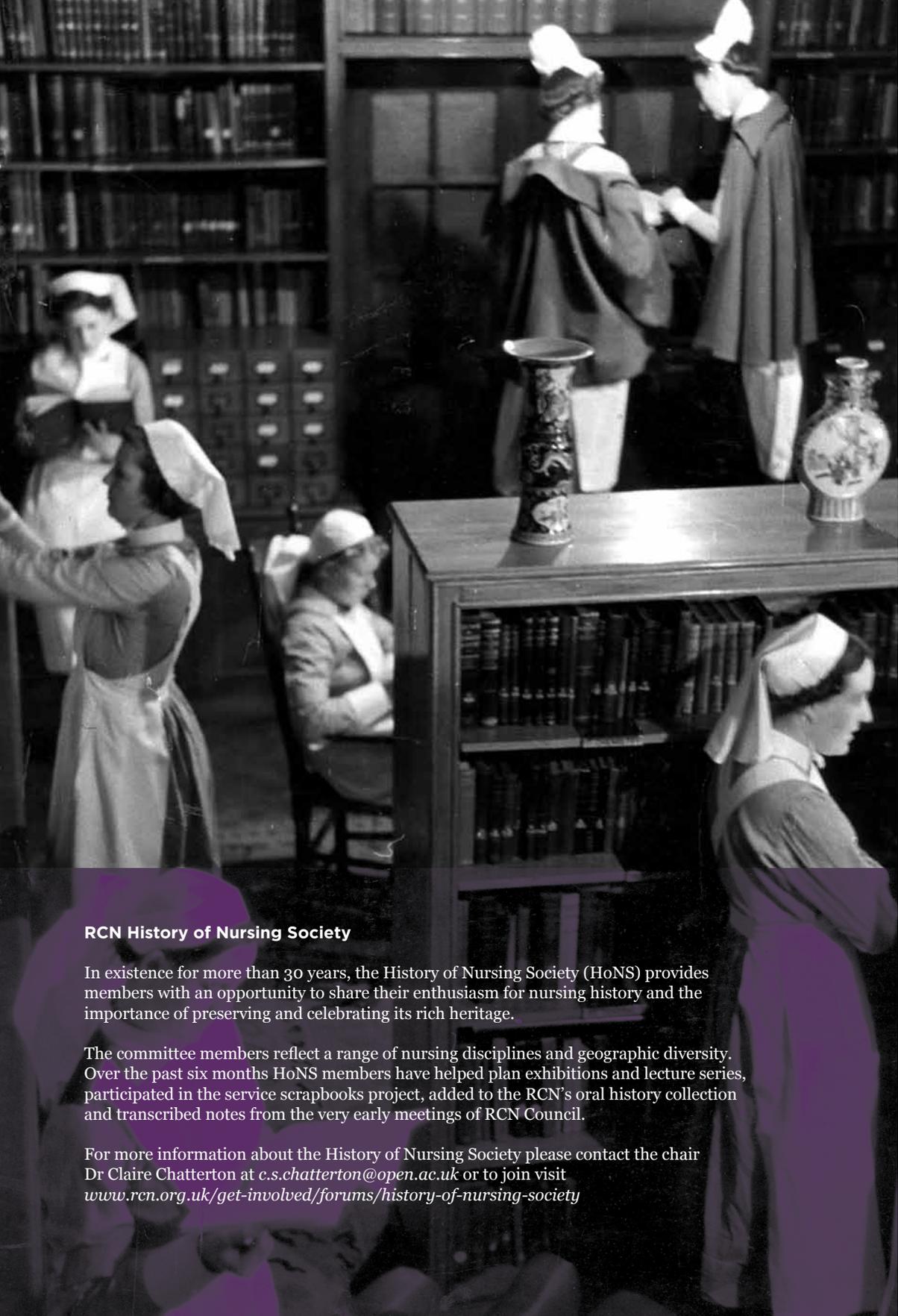


NURSING HISTORY NOW

SPRING 2018



Royal College
of Nursing
History of Nursing Society



RCN History of Nursing Society

In existence for more than 30 years, the History of Nursing Society (HoNS) provides members with an opportunity to share their enthusiasm for nursing history and the importance of preserving and celebrating its rich heritage.

The committee members reflect a range of nursing disciplines and geographic diversity. Over the past six months HoNS members have helped plan exhibitions and lecture series, participated in the service scrapbooks project, added to the RCN's oral history collection and transcribed notes from the very early meetings of RCN Council.

For more information about the History of Nursing Society please contact the chair Dr Claire Chatterton at c.s.chatterton@open.ac.uk or to join visit www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/forums/history-of-nursing-society

Editorial

Welcome to the spring 2018 RCN History of Nursing Society publication, *Nursing History Now*. Formerly known as the *History of Nursing Society Newsletter*, it now has a new format and a shift in emphasis, featuring a more in-depth look at pertinent nursing history topics and the fascinating work that society members have been involved in.

As a reflection of the range of interesting aspects of nursing history, this issue includes the launch of a new website to celebrate the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI), an insight into the recognition of nurses represented by the installation of commemorative blue plaques, and a look back at the work of nurses during the First World War.

On 5 July, it will be the 70th anniversary of the NHS and on pages 10-13 we are featuring an exploration of its first 40 years – the final 30 years will feature in the autumn issue.

This year also sees the 100th anniversaries of women's suffrage, the end of the First World War and the start of the influenza pandemic that caused so many deaths across the world. Next year it is the centenary of nursing registration in the UK and in 2020 the bicentenary of Florence Nightingale's birth. We aim to mark all these and more through this publication and wider History of Nursing Society activities.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of *Nursing History Now*.

Editor



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STORY
TO
TELL?

We're always keen to hear from you about your work, thoughts and stories related to nursing history. Please feel encouraged to send us ideas and items for inclusion in future issues of *Nursing History Now* by emailing the editor, Dianne Yarwood, at d.yarwood@ntlworld.com

Service scrapbooks: immortalising the lives of nurses in the Great War



Nursing and storytelling in the First World War.

The RCN Library and Archives Service has launched a new website – *Service Scrapbooks: Nursing and Storytelling in the First World War* – that uncovers the memories, experiences and achievements of nurses working in the Great War.

Despite being a vital part of the war, the contribution of nurses is often overlooked and the experience of the 17,000 trained nurses who had served in military hospitals by the end of the war is little documented.

When 10 nurses' scrapbooks were uncovered in the depths of the RCN archives last year, it offered a special and unique glimpse into the experiences of these nurses, and their patients, during their time of service.

The scrapbooks and diaries are a veritable treasure trove reflecting daily life in hospitals across the UK and abroad. The pages are filled with autographs, doodles, poems, diary entries and musings of the nurses themselves, their colleagues and patients.

This discovery was too precious not to share with as many people as possible and it was decided that digitising each page to create a web resource was the best way to do this. This required an enormous amount of work, for which the help of History of Nursing Society members was enlisted.

Over the course of the project, volunteers digitised nearly 2,000 pages and transcribed over 83,000 words to put online. They also meticulously researched each one of the nurses. Some proved more elusive than others.

The name May Wilson, for example, was particularly common and so that particular nurse was hard to find. Other cases, however, produced fantastic results and persistent volunteers were even able to find living relatives of two of the nurses, Nellie Carter and Josephine Angois.

Thanks to this hard work, each of these incredible nurses now has her own individual biography. Their stories, along with every page of their digitised scrapbooks can be found online: www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks

Mabel Pearce and Nellie Carter are two of the nurses whose stories and experiences can be discovered online

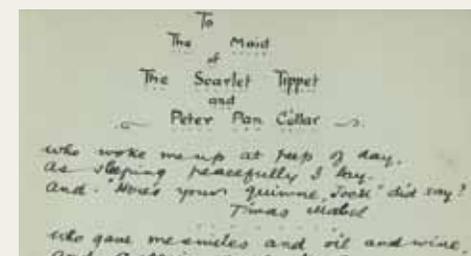
Mabel

Mabel was 27 years old and already working as a nurse when the war started. She signed up to the Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS) straight away, first working in a military hospital in Lincoln and then later being posted to Salonica, a military hospital in Greece.



Mabel in her TFNS uniform at the start of the war

The entries in her scrapbook show she wasn't short of grateful patients. A few of them took the opportunity to pen poems in her honour. One describes her as "radiant and smiling". The RCN's founder Dame Sidney Browne wrote a comment in one of Mabel's later scrapbooks, saying: "Work has been excellent and appreciated by all those you have served under."



A poem penned by a patient in Mabel's honour

Nellie

Nellie joined the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) in 1913 and was posted to the Military Families Hospital in County Kildare less than a month later.

During the war, she worked on board the hospital ship HMS Asturias and in France. She suffered a nervous breakdown towards the end of the war but later went back to working in military hospitals.



Nellie in uniform with her family

The Duchess who 'did her bit'



Duchess of Westminster nurses aboard Sir Thomas Lipton's yacht 'Erin'. From private collection

History of Nursing Society member Patricia Keegan was researching nurse Josephine Angois for the scrapbooks project when she uncovered another interesting story. Here she shares what she learned about the woman who set up a hospital in France under her own initiative, where Josephine spent some time working during the war.

In 1914, Constance, Duchess of Westminster, left her socialite life in London and Chester to set up a war hospital in France.

Sir Thomas Lipton, the tea magnate, converted his steam yacht "Erin" to a Red Cross hospital ship and transported the field hospital to Le Havre.

The medical officers were led by Major Henry E. M. Douglas, while the fully trained nursing staff included a matron and an assistant matron. The committee was congratulated for insisting on trained nurses.

"I am arranging and organising a Base Hospital to go to the seat of war... I myself am giving £1,000 and guaranteeing £400 a month... Money is urgently needed."

Duchess of Westminster, The Chester Courant, 12 August 1914

On 30 October 1914, the hospital opened in Le Touquet, Paris Plage, a popular holiday spot by the sea. It was housed in a former casino which was fitted out for 150-250 patients and included an X-ray room.



Duchess of Westminster's Hospital interior IWM (Q2405)

Constance's letters show that money remained a problem. In one letter she wrote from London on 26 November 1914, it is evident how vital donations were for keeping the hospital afloat.

...am off tomorrow morning at 7.30. Thank God owing to some kind friends and a very nice lady I have got nearly £1,000 so can keep my much-needed Hospital going still.

"The efficiency of a voluntary hospital depends on... the qualifications of the senior medical officer and matron, ... I venture to give first place to the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital at Le Touquet."

Sir Frederick Treves, British Red Cross Society report, December 1914

In October 1915 a simple concert marked the first anniversary of the hospital. Similar events followed and it seems Constance believed it important to lift the spirits of the patients. As casualties increased, the hospital was converted for officers. Members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments, originally trained for service at home, were recruited to work alongside trained staff in the service of the Joint War Committee.

Constance ran the linen room and also worked in the X-ray room, as well as superintending much of the hospital work. Medical admissions included shell shock, trench foot and mustard gas poisoning. Her letters give an insight:

We have been most terribly busy here one inrush after another then evacuations as soon as possible and the gas cases were heartrending... one lives in terror of who may come in, and in what state.

After the war, Constance received the 1914 Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal. In the 1918 Birthday Honours list she was invested as Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for arranging her hospital, in which 15,000 officers had been treated.



Constance, Duchess of Westminster IWM (WWC D8-4-328)

A unique professional organisation: a long journey from elitist to inclusive

The RCN Library and Archive exhibition, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, celebrates diversity in nursing, exploring the lives and contributions of under-represented groups of nurses



Hermione Blackwood and Cathlin Du Sautoy with their two adopted children, 1926

Exhibitions

Hidden in Plain Sight

The exhibition recently moved from London to Edinburgh where it will be on display at RCN Scotland Headquarters until 12 October 2018. You can also explore some aspects of the exhibition online: www.rcn.org.uk/library/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/hidden-in-plain-sight

Pandemic!

The library's current London exhibition, *Pandemic!*, which explores infection control nursing in outbreaks from the First World War flu pandemic to Ebola, launched on 5 April and runs until 23 September 2018. Find out more at www.rcn.org.uk/whatson

The *Hidden in Plain Sight* exhibition was put together by the RCN library team and members of the History of Nursing Society. Dianne Yarwood worked as part of the group of researchers and curators on the project and here reflects on the RCN's own journey to diversity.

1916 – the beginning

When established, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was a unique professional organisation exclusively for female, fully trained, hospital nurses. Its aims were to “support professional advancement of nursing and improve the working lives of nurses.”

By 1918, membership represented around 10% of all female nurses in England and Wales, drawn mainly from the nursing elite. In 1919, State Registration made it easier to identify and attract professionally trained nurses but the RCN Charter specified that only “general nurses” were eligible for membership, which therefore continued to exclude nurses on all other parts of the register.



Student nurse pay protest

1920-1953 – a move towards inclusivity

In the 1920s specialist groups were established in support of sister tutors, public health nurses and, as a separate body, student nurses. Between 1939 and 1953 organisations representing male nurses, children's nurses, mental health nurses and the recently-established enrolled nurses became affiliated to the RCN. This was over a highly political period with nursing shortages, the growth of public sector union activity and government intervention.

1960 – male nurses, students and union status

The various parts of the State Registers were combined in 1959, clearing the way for all state registered nurses to become members of

the RCN, most significantly male nurses. The 1960s and 70s saw student nurses and enrolled nurses become full members and the College finally register as an independent trade union. There had been highly successful campaigns to improve pay and conditions and membership numbers saw a dramatic increase.



Male nurse, c1960

1990-2001 – health care support workers

The next significant change in membership was in 1990 with the inclusion of some health care support workers, but it wasn't until 2001 that they were admitted into full membership. The move to a graduate entry profession in 2013, with the introduction of nursing apprenticeships and associate practitioners, has seen the RCN membership now encompass all who are engaged in, or are now retired from, the art and science of nursing.

Present – the voice of nursing

Today the RCN is regarded as the “voice of nursing”, with equality, diversity and inclusivity fundamental to everything it does. The RCN professional forums represent and provide a platform for members' nursing expertise across all specialties, and groups such as those for black and minority ethnic members, executive nurses, students or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) members illustrate the RCN's ongoing commitment to support and represent all nursing staff.

When Arthur Stanley began the process of establishing the College in 1916, his grand vision was that all aspects of women's work in hospitals should be included, ranging from matrons to members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs) and other hospital workers. I imagine that the RCN of today has become an even more wide-ranging, inclusive organisation than he could have foreseen.

The NHS turns 70: how it came about and the first 40 years

In the first of a two-part series, Dianne Yarwood reflects from a personal perspective on the first 40 years of the NHS as it celebrates this momentous anniversary



NHS TIMELINE: marking moments of the first 40 years

1940's

1948

NHS created

On 5 July, Labour Health Secretary Aneurin Bevan formally launched the NHS and health care became free for everyone for the first time.



1950's



1952

Prescription payments

Patients started being charged for prescriptions. In England, it was one shilling in 1952 and now stands at £8.60.

1960's

1958

First mass vaccination programme

There were 8,000 and 70,000 annual cases of polio and diphtheria respectively before these vaccinations were offered to all under 15s.



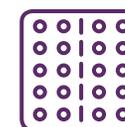
1962

Birth of the modern hospital

Health Minister Enoch Powell's Hospital Plan set out a vision to build hospitals in every place where there was a population of at least 125,000.



1961



Contraceptive pill

The launch of the pill was monumental in giving women more control over pregnancy. It was initially only available to married couples but was offered out widely six years later.

My maternal grandparents lived and worked in the South Wales mining valleys and as a child I was made aware of the local charismatic MP, Aneurin Bevan, and his great achievement: the NHS.

It has been argued that the model for the NHS was inspired by his awareness of the Tredegar Workmen's Medical Aid Society, where free health and dental care was available to its members for the payment of a penny a week.

In Britain the interwar years saw high unemployment, widespread poverty, poor health and high infant mortality. By 1945 the infrastructure was in a poor state, hospitals had suffered bomb damage and there was a significant shortage of nursing staff. Against this background, the Government published a white paper on a national health service.

The winter of 1947/8 was extreme and severe, yet in January of 1948 Aneurin Bevan, who was the Minister for Health and Housing at that time, announced that on 5 July the National Health Service would be launched. In those six months the introduction of the NHS was resisted in parliament and by doctors and dentists who feared a loss of freedom and independence. Charles Hill, known as the BBC's Radio Doctor, broadcast his

opposition to the introduction of a state-run medical service.

However, not all doctors – or nurses – were against the NHS and many joined the Socialist Medical Association (SMA), which actively campaigned in its favour. Avis Hutt, an RCN member from 1935 until her death in 2010, was a radical activist and member of the SMA. She recalled being concerned about dismissal if the hospital had known that she was engaged in any form of political activity.

In January of 1948 Aneurin Bevan, who was the Minister for Health and Housing at that time, announced that on 5 July the National Health Service would be launched

As the implementation date grew closer, community doctors began to advertise for patients and with just five weeks to go the British Medical Association finally ended its resistance. Efforts were made to persuade Bevan to delay the implementation, but the launch date went ahead as planned.

My brother was born just 10 weeks after the beginning of the NHS and my mother was heard to say: "I had to pay for our Dianne, but John came free!" However, that free service only remained truly comprehensive for a short time. The budget of 1951 reduced NHS funding and resulted in Bevan resigning, and in 1952 charges were introduced for prescriptions, spectacles and dental services.

There had been warnings of chaos and extreme abuse of the system, but those fears did not manifest. Instead, although there was very high demand, patients were now able to have the treatment they were previously unable to afford. The costs of the NHS were always higher than predicted but health improved, infant mortality reduced and life expectancy increased. However, as of 1956 there was ongoing underfunding of the service.

Throughout the 1960s – despite long waiting lists, unrest by medical staff over pay and conditions and a cumbersome bureaucracy – the service continued to have widespread support. The decade also saw the creation of district general hospitals, the restructuring of social services and in 1968 the creation of the Department of Health and Social Security.

As a student nurse at the end of that decade, the hospital beds were always full, there was no shortage of equipment or resources, the food for staff and patients was freshly prepared and the majority of hands-on nursing care was delivered by student nurses.

The costs of the NHS were always higher than predicted but health improved, infant mortality reduced and life expectancy increased

The 1970s have been described as "halcyon days" for the NHS, a time of increased spending, of expansion and an increase in the medical consultant base. But nurses and ancillary staff were threatening strike action over low pay and were awarded a 22% increase after the RCN's *Raise the Roof* campaign.

In April 1974 the NHS was re-organised with the aim of providing a fully integrated local health service. New layers of bureaucracy were introduced but it was not the solution hoped

for and by 1979 the complexities of the NHS "defied solution".

The RCN became increasingly political, industrial disputes ranged across the NHS, nurses' pay remained an issue and in 1974 the Halsbury review resulted in an average increase of 33%. I was undertaking the sister tutors diploma course at that time, released for a two-year full-time course on full salary. On completing the course and effectively being promoted, I saw a 50% increase in my salary.

The 1980s was a decade of radical change, with the introduction of "general management" in 1982 following the Griffiths Report. In 1988 social services were split from health at government level. The General Nursing Council was replaced by the UKCC and in 1985 Project 2000 was launched, seeing the beginning of the move of nurse education from the NHS to the university sector.

The decade ended with Margaret Thatcher announcing on a *Panorama* interview that there was to be a fundamental review of the NHS; the "internal market" had arrived and the restructure was launched in 1991. Along with many other senior nurses and tutors

I was required to attend the Kenneth Clarke video launch.

Find out more about the development and evolution of the NHS in our next issue, which will look at the last 30 years of the organisation.



Nurses on their break relaxing in the hospital grounds, c1985

NHS TIMELINE: marking moments of the first 40 years

1960's

1967

Abortion Act

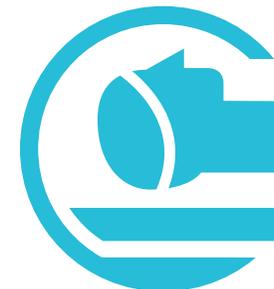
Abortion became legal up to 28 weeks if a woman's mental or physical health was at risk. This was reduced to 24 weeks in 1990.



1968

UK's first heart transplant

Eighteen doctors and nurses operated for seven hours on a 45-year-old man. Successful survival rates weren't achieved until a decade later, however.

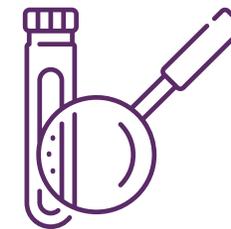


1970's

1972

CT scanners used for first time

After five years of development, CT scanners began to be used on patients, which revolutionised investigations of the body.



1978

First test tube baby

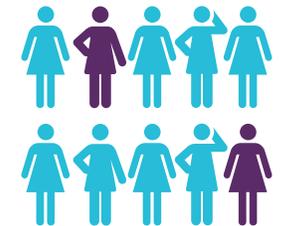
Louise Brown, the world's first "test tube baby" was born at Oldham District General Hospital.

1980's

1988

Breast screening programme

Breast screening for women over 50 was introduced to tackle high breast cancer deaths. Along with improved drug treatments, this screening was estimated to have cut deaths by a fifth.



70!

Find out more and get involved in celebrations taking place to mark the 70th anniversary of the NHS at www.england.nhs.uk/nhs70

Source: BBC News online

The forgotten beginnings of district nursing



The York Home for Nurses at its second address, 37 Monkgate, in the early 20th century. From the Purey Cust archives

In 1887, William Rathbone helped found the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses, which trained and organised the supply of district nurses on a national basis.

This was almost 30 years after he first had the idea to send his wife's private nurse, Mary Robinson, out into the poorest areas of Liverpool to "relieve suffering and teach [the poor] the rules of health and comfort".

The institute later went on to become the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI), which is celebrating its 130th anniversary this year.

As part of the QNI's anniversary celebrations, a new website has been created to bring this history to a wider audience. It will continue to have content added to it and exist as a permanent and growing resource for anyone interested in nursing, medical or social history. Visit the site at www.qniheritage.org.uk



Dame Rosalind Paget, the first superintendent of the Queen's Jubilee Institute for District Nursing

While it is generally accepted that organised district nursing was invented by William Rathbone, this isn't in fact the whole picture and not all existing organisations were affiliated with the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses. York, for example, had its own established nursing institution, the York Home for Nurses, which provided free nursing in the homes of the "sick poor" by specially trained nurses. Former Director of the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) Rosemary Cook shares a glimpse into the history of this forgotten institution.

The York Home for Nurses was established in 1870 by the Dean of York, Dean Duncombe. The home provided private nursing services and used the income from this to provide free nursing for the "sick poor" of the city. Nurses from the home were sent out to hospitals, as well as to individual patients. The annual report of 1895 showed the home's coverage to span from Northumberland to Cornwall, and Lincolnshire to Ireland. Some nurses also went abroad with their patients.

At this time, when district nursing was still at its beginnings and infectious diseases rife, the nurses were at significant risk. A grave in York cemetery holds the remains of three of the home's nurses, and one of the sisters. But the district nurses made a big difference to the health of the poorest families in York. In 1902, Dr Norman Goode, Assistant Medical Officer of Health for the city, wrote: *"Testifying to the excellent manner in which the nurses carried out their work...during the epidemic of measles and whooping cough...from the time they commenced the work the mortality from these diseases diminished rapidly and the epidemics ceased to spread."*

Unifying district nursing

In 1905, the home developed a scheme for unifying district nursing across the city and the outlying areas, where district nurses had previously been provided by the Jubilee Institute.

The home differed from the institute in that it actively sought donations of money and goods, and provided welfare support to the poor as well as nursing care. The institute didn't do this, influenced by Florence Nightingale's

insistence on separating "the noble art of nursing" from poor relief.

The home divided up the right bank of the River Ouse into three areas, with one of its nurses living in each district. This set the pattern for district nursing in the area until the inception of the NHS.



The Purey Cust Nursing Home. From the York Explore archives

The Purey Cust Nursing Home

In 1912, the city of York decided to honour Arthur Purey-Cust's 32 years' service as Dean of York with a testimonial fund. The Dean had been Chair of Council of the York Home for Nurses since 1881 so the money was used to build a new nursing home in his name, which took over the assets and business of the York Home for Nurses in January 1914.

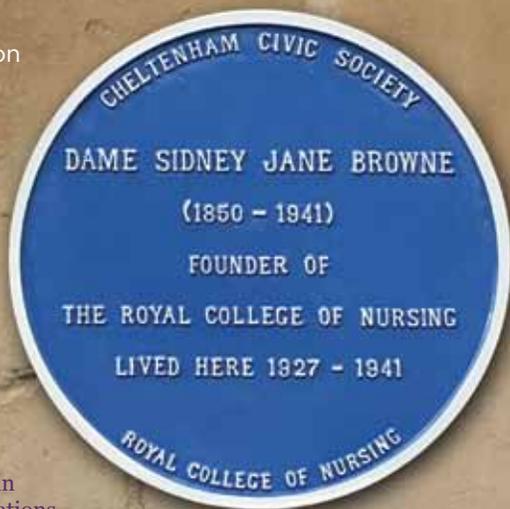
In 1948, when the NHS came into being and district nursing was moved to local authority control, the home had investments of over £8,000 in the District Nursing Fund. It was agreed that the income should be spent on amenities and comforts for the sick poor in the city, keeping alive the original charitable intentions of the York Home for Nurses.

Rosemary will be speaking to the London and South East History of Nursing Society group on 6 September about The York Home for Nurses. For more details please email d.yarwood@ntlworld.com

Blue plaques for nurses

Blue plaques represent a fantastic tradition for showcasing and remembering local people. The plaques link the stories of significant men and women with the buildings that shaped their lives

Until recently, there were only four blue plaques honouring nurses. These – all in London – were for the usual suspects: Florence Nightingale installed in Mayfair in 1955; Ethel Gordon Fenwick in Marylebone in 1999; Edith Cavell in Whitechapel in 2006; and Mary Seacole in Soho in 2007. However, the First World War commemorations have seen a small but significant increase in blue plaques honouring nurses. Seven new plaques have been installed and four of these were for RCN members:



Elsie Knocker
A nurse, and her friend Mairi Chisholm, who both served in WW1. Exeter.

Emma Duffin
Who served as a VAD in WW1 and VAD Commandant in WW2. Belfast.

Annie Brewer
A psychiatric nurse who served in WW1. Newport, Wales.

Dame Sidney Browne
RCN founder and President and Matron-in-Chief during WW1. Cheltenham.

Edith Appleton
RCN member, who served in WW1. Deal, Kent.



Family archives

Margaret Anderson
RCN member, who served in both WW1 and WW2. Killeel, Ulster.



Ulster History Circle

Dame Maud McCarthy
RCN member, Matron-in-Chief in WW1. Chelsea, London.



IWM (Q 108193)

As part of its centenary celebrations in 2016, the RCN organised to have a blue plaque installed commemorating one of its founders Dame Sidney Browne at her Cheltenham home. RCN Library and Archives Manager Teresa Doherty reflects on the importance of the occasion.

Sidney Browne (1850-1941) was one of the RCN's founding members, alongside Sarah Swift with whom she worked during the war. She was also integral in setting up its first Council and was the first Honorary Treasurer of the College as well as the inaugural President.

Born into a medical family in Kent in 1850, Browne chose to go into nursing after attending a series of lectures given by the pioneering district nurse Florence Lees. She served across the globe as part of the Army Nursing Service, and was given many accolades and awards for her contributions. She became Matron-in-Chief of the Queen



Dame Sidney Browne

Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Services (QAIMNS) in 1902.

After retirement from the army in 1906 she became an active campaigner for the state registration of nurses and also helped establish the Territorial Force Nursing Service in 1908.

“Put a high ideal before you, and do your future service in a greater strength than your own, and your life will be for the betterment of the world.”

Dame Sidney Browne

Current RCN President Cecilia Anim, who made the application for Dame Sidney Browne's blue plaque, attended its unveiling. She spoke with the current homeowners about Browne's enormous contribution to nursing, which will now be marked with this commemorative plaque. Sharing stories like this in local communities reminds all of us that ordinary people do extraordinary things, and that nursing is truly an important part of all our lives.

The timing for Browne's plaque was particularly appropriate as just months previously a new nursing course began at the University of Gloucester in Cheltenham, whose campus is only 10 minutes' walk away. The students were really inspired to hear about Sidney Browne, her leadership and care for nurses and were really proud that she had lived just around the corner from where they are studying. Who knows, maybe one of those students could be a future RCN President?

- In order to have a blue plaque:
- the person must be dead
 - the building where they worked or lived must still be standing
 - the person should have made a significant national contribution
 - the current owners of the property must agree to the plaque being installed.

Lady Sybil Grey: Empire, War and Revolution

By Simon Boyd
Hayloft Publishing Ltd

Anglo Russian Hospital, Petrograd

Dianne Yarwood offers a glimpse into Simon Boyd's book, concentrating particularly on Lady Sybil's experiences with the Anglo Russian Hospital in Petrograd.

This detailed and compelling book draws upon personal diaries, letters and the family archive collection to tell the life story of the author's remarkable grandmother, Lady Sybil Grey. It is written in three parts: her early life, the First World War and her final 40 years as wife and mother.



Lady Sybil Grey

At the outbreak of war, Sybil trained as a member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) for just three weeks at Newcastle Royal Infirmary. She followed this by working at Howick Hall, her family home which accommodated a convalescent hospital for officers. She went on to run the hospital, gaining valuable experience, which she no doubt drew upon when, at the persuasion of Lady Muriel Paget, she set up the Anglo Russian Hospital in Petrograd.

Although not a professional nurse, a shortcoming pointed out in the *British Journal of Nursing*, she was socially very popular and - of course - comfortable in the company of aristocracy.

She writes of her arrival in Russia in October 1915, of problems with some of the medical staff and of interference from an egotistical princess. She also writes of her frustration at waiting for part of a former palace of a Grand Duke on Nevsky Prospect to be converted into a hospital.

The hospital opened in February 1916 and admitted just 14 men, 11 medicine cases and three slightly wounded. However, five days later, with very little warning, 49 sick and wounded men were admitted. The story of the establishment of field hospitals follows, drawing upon the correspondence between Lady Sybil and her mother Countess Alice Grey.

Late in 1916, whilst watching a ballistics demonstration, Sybil was injured in the face by flying shrapnel. Her letters home are both stoical and practical. She travelled to England to recover, but returned to Russia and stayed until March 1917. In that time she planned for a new field detachment in Kiev, sought to calm relationships in Petrograd, was involved in sheltering one of the assassins of Rasputin and witnessed the beginnings of the Russian revolution.

This short review cannot do justice to this engaging account of a truly remarkable woman, I encourage you to read the book and discover so much more.

Meet the author...

Were you aware of Lady Sybil's exploits when you were growing up?

I knew that she'd been involved in the war and that she'd been to Russia. I particularly remember the stories she told me about Rasputin, which I found terribly exciting as a young boy. However, going through her trunk full of letters and diaries was a real voyage of discovery and I found out so many new things about her and our wider family.

What was the most surprising thing you learned?

That my grandmother was clearly not a suffragette and seemed to have little sympathy for them! In one of her letters she pokes fun at a society lady who was in prison and on hunger strike. It's surprising because she seems a prime candidate with her independent, adventurous mind-set!

When did you decide to write the book?

Even as a young man the idea had been mentioned to me by my mother so when all this material suddenly appeared, it was the natural thing to do. She was such a courageous and amazing person; I really felt that writing her story was something I needed to do.

How did you decide which content to include in the book?

I knew that I wanted my grandmother's story to be the central narrative and I started by transcribing all her letters and putting them in chronological order. That gave me a great

starting point. It wasn't easy though and I had to leave out so many other interesting people and stories. There was a whole stack of letters between her and her mother, who was also quite a character with a sharp wit.

What's next? A series about Lady Sybil's life perhaps?

There has been some interest in turning the book into a series or film. I'm not actively pursuing this but it would obviously be very exciting if something did come of it. In the meantime, I've caught the writing bug and think another book could be next. Perhaps about my great-grandmother or another of the many family characters I came across doing my research.

She was such a courageous and amazing person; I really felt that writing her story was something I needed to do



Patients learning their letters

Get involved

RCN Congress
12-16 May 2018



The History of Nursing Society is holding two events at RCN Congress in Belfast.

The NHS, 70 years and counting
Sunday 13 May, 5.45pm, Meeting Room 3A

Learn about the battle for a National Health Service, introduced despite strong resistance from the medical profession, wonder at the changes which have taken place, and test your knowledge in our NHS quiz.

Identifying the long-term effects on nurses caring for casualties of conflict
Tuesday 15 May, 5.45pm, Boardroom 1

The Northern Ireland history group explore how storytelling can expose the long-term impact on nurses caring for people injured by bombs and bullets.

To find out more about Congress visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress

History of Nursing Research Colloquium
10 July 2018



The 21st UK Association for the History of Nursing Research Colloquium will be held at the University of Chester's Riverside Building, Castle Drive, Chester CH1 1SL from 9am-5pm.

Full details are available on the UKAHN website: www.ukahn.org/wp/ukahn-colloquium-2018

For any queries please contact the organiser Dr Claire Chatterton at c.s.chatterton@open.ac.uk

The Monica Baly Bursary



Applications for the Monica Baly Bursary close on 31 May 2018. The bursaries are worth up to £1,000 each to support scholarly activities relating to the history of nursing. For more information please visit www.rcnfoundation.org.uk

In 2017, Siobhan O'Connor received the bursary to take forward her exploration of the life and work of Derek Hoy, one of the first nurses to examine how technology could be designed, developed and implemented to improve patient care. Siobhan has since been selected by the RCN Foundation to receive an Impact Award in recognition of this work, which will be presented at RCN Congress on 12 May.

History of Nursing Society committee vacancies

There are three vacancies for the steering committee for a four-year term of office commencing in January 2019. The recruitment will run from Saturday 12 May to Monday 30 July and all members of HoNS are eligible to apply. Shortlisting of candidates will take place in August followed by interviews in October.

"Without the efforts of the steering committee members, the input and support of the Library and Archive team and other RCN staff, we could not achieve all we do. Our membership continues to rise and we would love to see that continue – please do join us!"
Dr Claire Chatterton, Chair of HoNS

For more information and to apply visit www.rcn.org.uk/appointments

Stay up to date

The History of Nursing Society pages on the RCN website are currently being revamped to make them more accessible to members and will include a new blog. Look out also for the society's new Facebook group and the online promotion of the articles within this publication.



Royal College
of Nursing
History of Nursing Society