

Library Subject Guide: Nursing Family History

Welcome to the RCN Library and Heritage Services subject guide to nursing family history.

We have split the guide into three sections depending on when your ancestor qualified, with a fourth section for nursing in wartime. To find out which guide you need you can use the following sum for an estimated qualification date:

Year of birth + 18 years (earliest age to enter training) + 2 years (shortest training length)

We hope that you find this useful and wish you luck with your research.

Before 1921

Step 1: Census

The census is a population survey taken every 10 years, which commenced in 1801. From 1841, census records include job descriptions and may show that your ancestor was a nurse or midwife. The census will also record their address, which may be a hospital or a nurses' home. For many nineteenth-century nurses the census is the only surviving record of their career.

It is important to note that census returns use a variety of job titles to describe qualified nurses. They are sometimes classed as domestic servants with responsibilities for childcare. Some of the other terms used include:

- Subordinate or Subsidiary Medical Services (abbreviated to S.M.S)
- 'Poor Law Officials' (sometimes used to describe nurses in Poor Law Hospitals)
- Monthly Nurse
- Sick Nurse
- Attendant or Ward Attendant
- Matron
- Sister

It should also be noted that a person recorded in the census as a 'nurse' did not necessarily have any formal nurse training or qualifications. Some examples include:

- Assistant Nurse
- Day Nurse
- Night Watcher
- Night Nurse

Census can be searched online using a range of genealogy websites. Official holdings are as follows:

- **England and Wales:** Census records for 1841-1911 are available online (pay-to-view) via the National Archives website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/census-records/>

- **Scotland:** The National Records of Scotland's genealogical website has research advice and a pay-to-view online search service for the 1841-1911 censuses
<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>
- **Ireland and Northern Ireland:** Unfortunately, little information survives from the Irish censuses for 1841-91. Contact the Public Record Office for Northern Ireland
<http://www.proni.gov.uk/> and the National Archives of Ireland:
<http://www.nationalarchives.ie/> for access to the 1901 census returns.

Further reading

Jolly, E. (2013) Tracing your ancestors using the census, Barnsley: Pen and sword.

Step 2: Lists of qualified Nurses

You can search many lists to help you find out where your ancestor trained. The following lists are not conclusive but are a good place to start.

Scottish early nursing registers (1885-1930)

You can find the following lists of nurses pre-dating the state registration of nurses at the National Archives of Scotland:

- **HH2/33** Local Government Board (Scotland). Register of trained sick nurses appointed to poorhouse institutions (1905-1927)
- **HH2/34** Scottish Board of Health. Register of trained sick nurses appointed to poorhouses institutions (1906-1930)
- **HH2/35** Scottish Board of Health. Index to register of trained nurses (1885 – 1930)
- **HH2/36** Scottish Board of Health. Special register of certificated nurses (1907 – 1923)
- **HH2/37** Examination of nurses: Register of candidates. Appointments and subjects passed (1904 – 1913)

To make an appointment please see: <http://www.nas.gov.uk/searchRooms/preparing.asp>

Burdett's Hospital Annual (1890-93) and Burdett's Hospital and Charities Annual (1894-1930)

This publication lists the hospitals, institutions, charities and organisations then existing in the UK. It also contains details of senior medical and nursing staff. You can find copies of each year at the following locations:

1890 - 1930	British Library
1922 - 1932	RCN via Ancestry [August 2016]
1928	RCN via Ancestry [August 2016]

These annuals helped create [the Voluntary Hospitals Database](http://www.hospitalsdatabase.lshtm.ac.uk/) 1890-1940. Use this database to find hospitals local to your ancestor. Each hospital profile links to the hospital records database where you can find out which archive holds the records: <http://www.hospitalsdatabase.lshtm.ac.uk/>

Burdett's Official Nursing Directory (1894-1903)

This publication gives information on nursing institutions and training schools. It also lists nurses who paid to appear, giving their names, addresses and brief résumé. You can find copies at the following locations:

1894 – 1896	Unknown
1897	British Library
1898 - 1899	RCN via Ancestry
1900	Bodleian Library
1901-1903	Unknown

Royal British Nurse's Association (RBNA) (1887-1966)

The RBNA kept the first 'list' of qualified nurses. There are 10,000 nurses on this list held at King's College London Archive. The reference you will need is: **GB0100 GB 0099 KCLCA RBNA** You can make an appointment by visiting the Archive's 'visiting us' webpage:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/library/collections/archivespec/visiting/index.aspx> You can also find the 1909 list at the RCN via Ancestry:

Queen's Nursing Institute (District Nursing) (1887 -)

We can trace District Nursing back to 1859 when William Rathbone employed Mary Robinson to nurse his wife at home.

- **England and Wales (1887-1997)**

You can find records at the Wellcome library. The reference you will need is: **SA/QNI**. To make an appointment please see: <http://wellcomelibrary.org/using-the-library/>

- **Scotland (1889-)**

You can find records at the RCN Archive, Edinburgh:

http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/library_and_heritage_services/contact_us

- **Ireland (1890-1967)**

You can find records at the Archives of University College Dublin (UCD) The reference you will need is: **P220/28** and you can make an appointment by visiting:

<http://www.ucd.ie/archives/planningyourvisit/> UCD have produced the following guide to their records:

University College Dublin (2008) An Bord Altranais Archives, Dublin

London County Council Handbooks (1909-1939)

The London County Council (LCC), now the Corporation of London, included the Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) and employed nurses across the city. You can find records for nurses in the annual LCC staff and general services handbook (1909-39) at the London Metropolitan Archive:

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/visitor-information/Pages/default.aspx> The reference you will need is: **LCC**

College of Nursing membership records (RCN) (1916-1923)

The Royal College of Nursing published one volume of membership records for the period 1916-1923. The volume gives each member's name, joining date, address and qualification and is available at the RCN via Ancestry.

Trade and Post Office Directories

Trade and Post Office directories sometimes list nurses and midwives.

- **England & Wales**

You can find directories in most County Record Offices and some public libraries.

- **Scotland (1773-1911)**

You can search digital directories free of charge on the National Library of Scotland website:

<http://www.nls.uk/family-history/directories/post-office>

- **Northern Ireland**

Selected street directories are available to search via the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland:

http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/street_directories.htm

Further Reading

McGann, S. (2009) A history of the Royal College of Nursing 1916-90: a voice for nurses, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- E-book (RCN member only) View this e-book
http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/284509/003551.pdf
- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khZ9uYA-sbc3NL8C2lwJoKfNSJJSeDoaMC5DjdSoX8NAVgS0cB3FIWgHaWQYLQzrICsD9hpggsqMaXcXEOcPXSLkvPioSMb8YnGoP4J6N5bPJIAmHonuA>

Queen's Nursing Institute. (2012) QNI 125: celebrating 125 years of the Queen's Nursing Institute, London: QNI.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khZ9uAJv-BScjSKJOBpdDPU8EQdCW1lJtriLOHblFyXjx0jCI-ORjcEjbCKwAr6EW2Q>

Howse, C. (2008) Rural district nursing in Gloucestershire 1800-1925, Cheltenham: Reardon.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5lBu7XNjS3MzS1MTTgZTINAh0gopIAOg81MLIGAzmsrZOYpuOfkAz0BOhUAPByrADogTEFXAdjyAJb3Um6ulc4eukXJefHQ4Yz4RGPwIV9GeCUBHJAnGA>

Step 3: Nurse training before Florence Nightingale

Religious groups trained nurses for the community before formal training began in 1860. By 1860 there were 118 catholic convents providing nursing services in the UK. Below you can find a list of groups that provided nurse training:

Elizabeth Fry's Nursing Institution (1840)

This institution was the first protestant nurse training organisation. Training was 'on the job' and nurses came from respectable working class families. The largest number of nurses at any one time was 100.

You can find records for the institution at the Wellcome library and the reference you will need is **SA/QNI/W** To make an appointment please visit: <http://wellcomelibrary.org/using-the-library/>

Records at London Metropolitan Archive:

1. Training Institution for Nurses for Hospitals, families and the sick poor at St. Johns House (1848)

The Anglican Sisterhood at St. John's house were not like the traditional nun; they didn't have to take vows and were able to marry. Training lasted 3 months but later increased to one year. Once trained, nurses worked in London hospitals as head nurses responsible for training other staff. St. John's took over nursing duties at King's College Hospital in 1856 and Charing Cross Hospital in 1866 until 1883. The reference you will need is: **H01/ST/SJ**

2. London Biblewomen and Nurses Mission (Ranyard Mission and Ranyard Nurses) (1868)

Mrs Ellen Ranyard established the nursing branch of the organisation in 1868. As with St. John's, training was for 3 months and increased to a year by 1893. The reference you will need is: **A/RNY/**

3. Metropolitan and National Association for Providing Nurses for the Sick Poor (Metropolitan District Nursing Association) (1875)

With the support of Florence Nightingale, the association's mission was to train and provide nursing staff to visit the sick poor in their homes. The reference you will need is: **Ms 14618-14655, Ms 14811- 14812, Ms 14891-14893**

More information about the above organisations and others can be found in this guide produced by the London Metropolitan Archive:

London Metropolitan Archives (2010) Information leaflet number 36: History of nursing: major sources at London Metropolitan Archives, London: London Metropolitan Archive.

To make an appointment to visit the archive please see: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/visitor-information/Pages/default.aspx>

Further Reading

Helmstadter, C. & Godden, J. (2011) Nursing before Nightingale, 1815-1899, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

- E-book (member only) View this e-book
<http://www.myilibrary.com/browse/open.asp?id=329735&entityid=https://shibboleth.rcn.org.uk/idp/shibboleth>
- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5lBe6iAXQdg8wE0zcQFrmeAucvEiAM2Agl6asr12JSTQRXaMVZISgU21FIV_E DdUtCF0DmpOgrAGshU19ACdDarlJtriLOHblFyXjx0bCM-0djI3MwENI-JRxlAFg4mUA

Borsary, A. (2012) Nursing and midwifery in Britain since 1700, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khZ9sAG7hGJqAj0sG3IFoamYGmhTgZYF1hBWBvWSE3M6UctlyjUiEzTwHaJVYAyianKoAOj-NmkHJzDXH20C1KzouHjmnEJxoDW_qWoPvV8UgCANVEJpl

Step 4: Nurses Leagues (1899)

St. Bartholomew's formed the first nurses' league in 1899. Leagues would publish a regular magazine or, later, have a website for alumni to keep in touch. When nurse training became a degree based course, some leagues became university alumni associations. To find out if a hospital had a nurses' league, see:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?st=adv&dss=range&hb=oth&q=nurses+league>

Further Reading

Use this subject search for details of books the RCN libraries hold on nurses leagues:

[http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?ho=t&fvf=ContentType,Book%20%2F%20eBook,f%7CLanguage,English,f&l=en&q=\(nurses%20league\)](http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?ho=t&fvf=ContentType,Book%20%2F%20eBook,f%7CLanguage,English,f&l=en&q=(nurses%20league))

Step 5: Midwifery

- **England and Wales**

The Midwives Act, 1902 mandated the state enrolment of midwives. Midwives had to enrol with the new Central Midwives Board (CMB) by 1910. You can find their membership and certification records at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG). You can access these by contacting the RCOG library: <http://www.rcog.org.uk/content/information-enquiries>

- **Scotland**

The Midwives Act, 1915 mandated the state enrolment of midwives with the Central Midwives Board, Scotland. You can access the CMB Scotland (1917---68) at the RCN via Ancestry:

- **Ireland**

The Midwives Act, 1918 mandated the state enrolment of midwives with the Central Midwives Board, Ireland. You can find the CMB Ireland Roll of Midwives 1919---85 at University College Dublin (UCD). UCD have produced the following guide to their records:

University College Dublin (2008) An Bord Altranais Archives, Dublin: University College Dublin

Royal College of Midwives

The Midwives Institute (c.1880) now the Royal College of Midwives played a crucial role in the passing of the Act. You can find their membership and certification records at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG). You can access these by contacting the RCOG library: <http://www.rcog.org.uk/content/information-enquiries>

The Royal College of Midwives have produced a guide to searching for Midwifery ancestors that you can access here:

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and The Royal College of Midwives. (2014) Tracing midwives in your family, London: RCOG Heritage.

Further Reading

Borsay, A. (2012) Nursing and midwifery in Britain since 1700, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42Jg>

[AfZbU5khZ9sAG7hGJqAj0sG3IFoamYGmhTgZYF1hWBvWSE3M6UctlyjUiEzTwHaJVYAyianKoAOj-NmkHJzDXH20C1KzouHjmnEJxoDW_qWoPvV8UgCANVEJpl](http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khZ9sAG7hGJqAj0sG3IFoamYGmhTgZYF1hWBvWSE3M6UctlyjUiEzTwHaJVYAyianKoAOj-NmkHJzDXH20C1KzouHjmnEJxoDW_qWoPvV8UgCANVEJpl)

Reid, L. (2011) Midwifery in Scotland: A history, Irvine: Scottish history press.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khZ9sAW98mJubmBhacDKK-mSnloOUalQqZeQgg69pBS_e4GaTcXEOcPXSLkvPioSMW8YnGoFPpQIf24pEEAL_fHXw

Fealy, G. (2005) Care to remember: nursing and midwifery in Ireland, Cork: Mercier Press.

- Available for RCN members to borrow from RCN Library Services
http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU5khpYlZmAlrNFAdzckgANpQo1CSrwAa9wJddsHNIOfmGuLsoVuUnBcPHayl_z4RrAV0IQkABAODjHRM

Cowell, B and Wainwright, D, (1981) Behind the blue door: the history of the Royal College of Midwives 1881-1981, London: Balliere Tindall.

Step 6: Training or Employment record

Florence Nightingale set up the first nurse training school at St. Thomas Hospital, London in 1860. Her passion for formal nurse training led to her establishing a three year training course. News of her success spread across London and the United Kingdom where many more hospitals began to offer training.

The hospital records database lists UK hospitals past and present. You can search for hospitals in the area where your ancestor was living to find the archive that holds records for nursing or staffing: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/hospitalrecords/search.asp> For example, type 'Manchester' in the 'town name' search box and chose 'Astley Hospital, Manchester'. Scroll to the bottom and you will see that records relating to Nursing 1896-1946 and staff 1929-1950 are found at Wigan Archives Service.

Please note that due to changes in the NHS some records in the database may be out of date. If you are unable to locate records, check with your local record office. To find your local record office, you can search here: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

Step 7: National Archives: Discovery

You can search the National Archives Discovery for information on local archives and their recent accessions. To search, chose 'advanced search' and enter your key word. For example, your ancestors name, hospital name, or general search term such as 'nurse' and check the 'search other archives' box at the bottom: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Step 8: Historical Nursing Journals

If you haven't found a record for your ancestor using the above lists; your next step will be to search nursing journals and local newspapers. Journals include information on appointments, profiles on nurses and hospitals as well as news in nursing and opinion pieces.

Nursing Record/British Journal of Nursing (1888-1956)

Digitised journal available freely online.

http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/library_and_heritage_services/library_collections/rcn_archive/historical_nursing_journals

The Nursing Mirror (1907-1985)

<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU1ngKysMDTngSy6ArXVOBj5oP1ghN7OoCHR3ipSba4izh25Rcl48dMwiPtHIElh5gl7txSMJAjtJHNY>

The Nursing Times (1905 -)

<http://rcn.summon.serialssolutions.com/#!/search?bookMark=ePnHCXMw42JgAfZbU1nAR9yZABtvZkYcsJLRyMzlijJOBf9oPVgBvcuBmkHJzDXH20C1KzouHDlnEJwlTWBCM8lrCQBuqRxB>

Viewable by appointment only at the RCN Library and Heritage Centre

http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/library_and_heritage_services/library_services/access-policy

For local newspapers, you will need to either consult your local archive or the British library newspaper archive:

http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/?utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=brand&utm_content=brand&utm_term=Britishlibrarynewspaperarchive&gclid=Cj0KEQIA0-GxBRDWsePx0pPtp4sBEiQACuTLNsyHG34nZKnN50zIWkDdXtnp281Oy_rGp6ngnX1KWXAaAva8P8HAQ&dclid=COetgKXC9MgCFcooFgodwqcOJw