

# Time Travel Tuesday: Our Nurses

## Tuesday 12 May 2020

Welcome to Time Travel Tuesday: Our Nurses - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Today, May 12<sup>th</sup>, is International Nurses' Day and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. In honour of Florence's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, The World Health Organisation has also declared 2020 as [International Year of the Nurse and Midwife](#). So, what better time than now to celebrate, commemorate and honour our nurses who have been doing such amazing work responding to the present crisis, along with the vital work they do every day.

On this Time Travel Tuesday, we are reflecting on these extraordinary times today and taking a look at the nursing profession and those working in the borough in the past. Through our [Special Collections of the Prince of Wales Hospital](#), and other hospitals in the area, we will be travelling back in time to find out about the first nurses and hospitals who cared for us from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

[Florence Nightingale \(1820-1910\)](#) is considered to be the instigator of the nursing profession as we know it today. Known as "the lady with the lamp", she led a mission of nurses in 1854 to aid and ease the terrible suffering of the wounded soldiers during the [Crimean War](#) (1853-1856).



Florence Nightingale, c.1860 (image Wikicommons)

Florence's contribution went further than just managing the nurses. She set about practices around hygiene and the use of what we now call Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to curb the rate of infection and aid the recovery of the patients. If this all sounds familiar today, it is no coincidence that the new hospitals set up to deal with Covid-19 patients are called Nightingale Hospitals. In better times you can visit the [Florence Nightingale Museum](#) to find out more about her, or help the museum now with a donation.

The 'Nightingale Nurses' on the Crimean front would most likely have helped local soldiers from the (57<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup>) West Middlesex Regiments. Another key historical figure who might have helped these soldiers is [Mary Seacole \(1805—1881\)](#), the experienced nurse and businesswoman of Jamaica, who followed the 97<sup>th</sup> West Indian regiment to the Crimea. Once there she provided much-needed sustenance and care for soldiers at the battlefield.



Mary Seacole by Albert Charles Challen, oil on panel, 1869. NPG 6856  
© National Portrait Gallery, London, available via Creative Commons.

Mary was a pioneering nurse and heroine of the Crimean War. Her father was a Scottish soldier, and it was her Jamaican mother who first instructed Mary on nursing patients confined to their beds at the boarding house she kept. Mary travelled widely with her husband Edwin Horatio Seacole and gained knowledge in traditional and European medicine practices. In 1854 she travelled to England and funded her own trip to the Crimea a year later, where she established the British Hotel near Balaclava to sell food and medical supplies and provide quarters for recovering soldiers. She also visited the battlefield hospitals to nurse the wounded, and became known as 'Mother Seacole'. At the war's end she returned to England destitute, in ill health and was declared bankrupt. Her work was recognised at the time, and a benefit festival was organised to raise money for her in July 1857. Later that year Seacole published her memoirs, ['The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands'](#). Mary died on 14 May 1881 and was largely forgotten until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when her role in helping others has been better acknowledged.

Contrary to popular belief, Mary never did live in Haringey, but we remember her locally in the naming of a building - Seacole Court on Tottenham High Road near Seven Sisters Road. A good number of local people are also members of the [Mary Seacole Trust](#).

After the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale opened the very first nursing school in London in 1860, called the Florence Nightingale School for Nurses. This was a model used to instruct prospective nurses throughout the world, giving them

training and education for the field they were entering. Haringey has its own link to Florence with the establishment of the Evangelical Protestant Deaconesses' Institute for Training Nurses, by [Dr Michael Laseron](#) in the mid-1860s. Its first Superintendent was a Deaconess from the [Kaiserwerth Deaconess Institute](#) in Germany - where Florence Nightingale first trained to be a nurse! Outgrowing its original location in Snell's Park, the Institute moved to Avenue House on the east side of Tottenham Green in 1868/9.

The institute is described by Sister Christian Dundas, the Lady Superintendent, in 1893 as follows:

“The ladies in this establishment belong to various branches of the Church of Christ, united in a common work – the care of the sick and needy, the tried and tempted, and the little children, with a distinct view to their spiritual as well as their temporal welfare. The sisters receive their training in the hospital attached to the Mildmay Institution, and afterwards occupy various spheres of usefulness at out-stations.” (*Woman's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers* by Angela Burdett-Coutts, 1893; the author [Angela Burdett-Coutts](#) lived in Highgate).

A pioneering nurse who attended the Deaconesses' Institute was [Kate Marsden \(1859-1931\)](#). Kate trained at Dr Laseron's institute in the 1870s, before going on to nurse in the Russo-Turkish war 1877-1878 in the Balkans. Here she came across soldiers suffering from leprosy. Strong-minded and determined, Kate decided to help those suffering from leprosy, initially working with the Red Cross in Europe and Russia. In 1891 she set off to Siberia in search of a cure for leprosy and, although she did not discover a cure, she did set up hospitals for the treatment of the disease there. Her Siberian mission saw her elected one of the first women Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society. Her legacy still lives on in the work of the [St Francis Leprosy Guild which she founded in 1895](#), which still supports people and communities world-wide in fighting the disease today.



Kate Marsden, nurse and founder of the St Francis Leprosy Guild in 1895.

The Deaconesses' Institute continued to grow as an organisation and the building enlarged to help accommodate demand. The local carnival brought people of the locality together and for many years they helped to raise money each year in support of the hospital. The hospital was renamed Tottenham Hospital in 1899 when the voluntary Deaconesses were replaced by paid nursing staff. In 1907 additional extensions were added to the building and it was opened by the then Prince and Princess of Wales (becoming King George V and Queen Mary in 1910). It was in 1907 that the name was changed to the Prince of Wales General Hospital.



Prince of Wales General Hospital, Tottenham Green, c.1910

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



1. S. FREDA 2. S. GERMAN 3. S. ELLA 4. S. MARIA 5. S. MAGGIE 6. S. OLIVE STRAND 7. S. MARTHA 8. S. SUSAN 9. S. EDITH 10. S. LUCY  
 11. S. HOPE SIMMONDS 12. S. SELINA 13. S. MARCIA - APTED. 14. S. CHRISTIAN - DUNDAS 15. S. ESTHER ATKINSON 16. S. JENNY - WELLS  
 17. S. SARAH - HUME 18. S. FLORENCE ROCHE 19. S. ISABEL MAXWELL 20. S. MAUD CHAMBERS 21. S. PHYLLIS 22. S. ADA FUTTER  
 23. S. ELIZA TINDALL 24. S. AMY MORGAN 25. S. ADELINE ROCHE 26. S. AGATHA DONALDSON 27. CHILDS.

Nurses at Tottenham Hospital c.1880s. The hospital was welcoming to all. We know very little about many of these nurses' backgrounds, not even knowing their surnames. But it is important that here we have a record of who they are in this photograph, including Sister Freda (back row to the right) who was of African-Caribbean heritage.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Student nurses, with the Director Frederick Drewett at Tottenham Hospital c.1890 - 1900  
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Nursing skills are perhaps some of the most transferable and adaptable skills. Many nurses in the past and today, like the early pioneers before them - Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole and Kate Marsden - have left the comfort of their homes and moved countries to nurse in war zones, in times of famine and disasters such as earthquakes and floods to help others. People also have come to the UK to be trained as nurses and stay, whilst others have returned home to nurse.



Asarto Ward, c.1905

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Asarto (above) was adopted by Mary Ward, a nurse working in Sierra Leone. She brought the eight-year-old back to Tottenham with her in 1899 at the request of her dying mother. Asarto also trained to be a nurse at the Prince of Wales Hospital and returned to Sierra Leone as a young woman to work in hospitals there.



The Laseron Ward, Prince of Wales Hospital – named after its founder, Dr Michael Laseron  
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Student nurses being taught in class at the Prince of Wales Hospital, c.1910  
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Prince of Wales Hospital nurses relaxing in the Nurses' Drawing Room, c.1910  
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)





Prince of Wales Hospital nurses with Neddy the Donkey.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

[This film of 1932](#) from our collections at Bruce Castle Museum & Archive has been recently digitised for us by the London Screen Archives team at Film London. It shows the opening of the new extension of the Prince of Wales Hospital. Before the NHS and central Government funding, such hospitals were often built through subscriptions and donations, as was this part of the hospital.



Prince of Wales Hospital student nurses c. late 1960s -1970

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Across the road, just before the Tottenham Town Hall, another hospital was established in 1889, the 'Jewish Home and Hospital for Incurables'. It was predominately funded by subscription and donations, given by the large Jewish community in Tottenham at the time, to care for the wider London Jewish

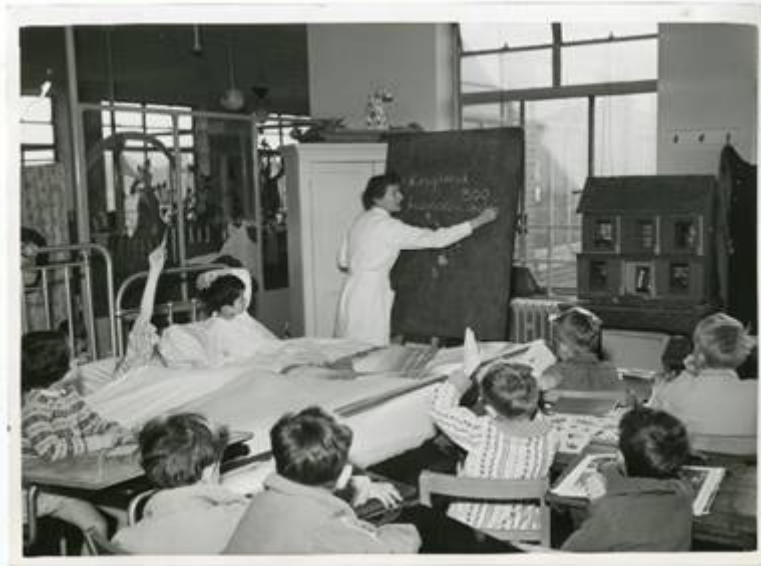
population. At various points in time, it had a synagogue, a concert hall and a nurses' home. It closed in 1995 and, like the Prince of Wales Hospital, it has been converted into flats.



The 'Jewish Home for Incurables', Tottenham High Road, 1907  
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Keeping to Tottenham for the moment, we have another hospital in the south of the borough which has been in St Ann's Road from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Built as the North Eastern Fever Hospital, it was opened by the Metropolitan Asylums Board on 8 October 1892 to treat patients suffering from fever and diphtheria. In 1930 the London County Council took over the running of the hospital. In 1948 it became part of the National Health Service (NHS) under the control of the North East Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board and Tottenham Hospital Management Committee. The hospital was renamed St Ann's General Hospital in 1949. It is now part of the NHS Whittington Trust.





Two photographs of St Ann's Hospital showing nurses on the Children's Ward c1950 - 60s. © Fox Photos Ltd.

From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Moving over to the west of Haringey, there was another locally funded hospital, Hornsey Cottage Hospital which opened in 1910. 'Cottage Hospitals' were, as the name implied, smaller and more intimate institutions, where medical staff were able to treat their patients on a personal basis. Hornsey Cottage Hospital had just 16 beds at its opening, unlike the larger institutions in Tottenham where patients were in large wards. The hospital did expand though, and in 1927 a further extension was made and it was renamed as Hornsey Central Hospital. A nurses' home and a children's ward were added in the 1930s. The hospital closed but the site in Park Road in Crouch End is still a health care facility today.



Hornsey Cottage Hospital Nursing Staff, c.1910

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Hornsey Cottage Hospital, c.1910

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

In 1888 the Hornsey Local Board of Health built a hospital for infectious diseases on Irish Corner, a piece of wasteland at the bottom of Coppetts Road in Muswell Hill. Originally known as Hornsey Isolation Hospital, it was regarded as a model institution for the care of people with infectious diseases. Coppetts Wood Hospital, as it became known, was operational until 2008 and in 2019 the hospital was demolished. This important building and institution is being commemorated through a project called [Goodbye Coppetts](#) which would like to collect the reflections and memories of those who worked there and used the services. They would love to hear from you if you have anything to add to the project - just follow the link for their contact details.



Hornsey Isolation Hospital with nursing staff in grounds, c.1900

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

From 1948, the story of nursing changes with the establishment of the NHS and the [new arrivals of women and men from the Caribbean](#) especially, who were recruited to help and work for the new National Health Service. A very timely oral

history project to record the memories of NHS staff is [NHS at 70 The Story of Our Lives](#). Set up to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NHS in 2018, the project is very significant and has been running for two years. Dr. Peter Mitchell, one of the Project Co-ordinators, gave us a talk and shared some of the inspiring stories he has been collecting for the project when he came to our Local History Fair back in February. At the time he was looking for people from Haringey who have worked for the NHS in any field – clinical, administration, facilities, catering etc. - to record their memories. So please do get in touch with them if you would like to contribute to the project.

The roles that nurses have had, and continue to play, in all our lives are varied, wide-ranging and incredibly important (don't forget our previous post about care in the community and [the health centres](#)). We are sure we all have one special nurse who we would like to thank. But let's thank them all for their work now and in the past on this special day. Happy 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday Florence, and Happy International Nurses Day to each and every one of you!

Take care, stay well  
Best wishes  
From us all at Bruce Castle

**Julie Melrose**  
Archivist

**Deborah Hedgecock**  
Curator

Haringey Council, Haringey Archive and Museum Service, Bruce Castle Museum, Lordship Lane, London N17 8NU