

Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale died in 1910 but she is still remembered today for her forward-thinking advancements in nursing and hospitals. Florence is thought of as the founder of modern-day nursing.

Florence was born on 12th May 1820 in Florence, Italy. She was born into a rich, upper-class British family. The family moved to England in 1821.



As a young woman, Florence believed she had received a calling from God to dedicate her life to the service of others. Consequently, Florence decided to become a nurse. Surprisingly, this decision was much to the disappointment of her sister and mother, who believed Florence should become a mother and wife without pursuing a career. Another reason for their disapproval was that hospitals at the time were dirty and horrible places where doctors had to operate without anaesthetic. Nurses didn't receive training and were not respected.

Florence travelled and witnessed others caring for the sick, which inspired her to follow her ambition of becoming a nurse. At the age of 33, Florence became superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in London, however, it was her nursing during the Crimean War for which she is best known.

The Crimean War began in 1853; Britain, Turkey and France fought against Russia. Florence was keen to go and help when reports reached Britain about the horrendous conditions for the wounded soldiers. Along with a staff of volunteer nurses and nuns, she travelled to Scutari to do her bit.

Florence and her team found that the wounded soldiers were not receiving decent food, medicines and beds were in short supply, hygiene was poor and infections were common. In fact, more soldiers died from infections than their battle wounds. Subsequently, Florence asked the British government for help.

Sewers were flushed out and ventilation improved. The hospital was cleaned and Florence ensured that everyone washed their hands regularly to stop the spread of infection. She bought fresh food and organised a chef to cook meals. Florence worked tirelessly and the changes caused death rates to drop dramatically.

Florence was given the nickname, 'The Lady with the Lamp' by the soldiers as she walked around the wards at night with her lantern. She made sure the men were comfortable and sat with those who were dying to bring them comfort.

In 1860, Florence set up the Nightingale Training School in London to train nurses, the first beginning work in 1865.

Florence had a meeting with Queen Victoria; she informed the queen of the necessary improvements needed in army hospitals. The army began training doctors and hospital conditions improved.



Throughout the rest of her life, Florence campaigned to improve health standards and wrote over 200 books and leaflets on hospital planning. Some of these ideas helped influence practices which are still in existence today. In recognition of her hard work, Florence was awarded the Royal Red Cross by Queen Victoria in 1883.

Florence died in London on the 13th August, 1910. She was so well respected that her family received an offer to bury her in Westminster Abbey amongst monarchs and other significant historical figures, however, her family declined, preferring to bury her near to where she had grown up. Florence had never liked a fuss anyway.

A memorial to Florence can be found in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, Italy; another can be seen in London and hospitals have been named after her.

Did You Know?

There is one known recording of her voice made in 1890: 'When I am no longer even a memory, just a name, I hope my voice may perpetuate the great work of my life. God bless my dear old comrades of Balaclava and bring them safe to shore.'

Questions

1. Which word is most closely linked with 'advancements'?

- deterioration
- improvements
- failings
- decline

2. How do we know that Florence was religious?

3. Give two reasons why her mother was disappointed about her decision to become a nurse.

4. Give two words to describe the army hospital in Scutari when Florence arrived. Give reasons for your choices.

5. Tick the correct box related to each statement in the table:

	True	False
Florence became superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Spain.		
The Crimean War began in 1856; Britain, France and Germany were fighting Russia.		
Florence and her team found that the wounded soldiers were not receiving decent food.		
Florence worked tirelessly to improve the army hospital and changes caused death rates to drop dramatically.		

For those statements which are false, write the correct statement below:

6. If Florence and her team hadn't travelled to Scutari, what might have happened?

7. Which facts show that Florence's improvements have had an impact on modern-day nursing and hospitals?

8. Why is it surprising to find out that Florence's mother and sister were disappointed when she announced she wanted to become a nurse?

9. Write down two facts which suggest that Florence Nightingale was very well respected for the work she had done.

10. Number these statements 1 to 5 in the order they appear in the text

- Florence received memorials in her memory.
- Florence became superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen.
- The Crimean War began.
- She recorded a message which can still be heard today.
- Florence believed she had received a calling from God to dedicate her life to the service of others.