Our vision: protect, preserve, share and cherish

The RCN History of Nursing Society had a busy 2012. All our activities reflect our vision, which is to protect, preserve, share and cherish our nursing history. Please help us increase our membership this year by telling people about our work, either by sharing a copy of our newsletter or directing them to our webpages at www.rcn.org.uk/historysociety

History of Nursing Society conference

Society Chair Dr Claire Chatterton opened our conference last November by setting out our aims and plans for the future. This set the scene for our keynote speaker, eminent nurse historian Professor Anne Marie Rafferty, who conveyed her passion for nursing history in her usual erudite manner. She focused on the link between historical research and contemporary policy and practice and showed how research can challenge established orthodoxies and stereotypical myths about nursing.

Former Monica Baly bursary recipient Dr Rosemary Cook, Chief Executive of the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine, presented her fascinating research on Florence Nightingale Shore, shedding new light on the social mores of Victorian Britain. This was followed by a presentation by Barts and the London NHS Trust archivist Jonathan Evans, which gave members new insights into the work of Edith Cavell at the London Hospital.

The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback, having finished with a paper by another recent Monica Baly bursary recipient, Dr Tommy Dickinson, a senior lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire. Dr Dickinson presented his groundbreaking research on mental health nursing and “sexual deviation”, which involved collecting oral histories from nurses and former patients who had participated in administering or receiving aversion therapy as an attempt to “cure” homosexuality or transvestism between 1935 and 1974.

Monica Baly bursaries

We announced last year’s winners of the prestigious Monica Baly bursary at Congress, and both share details of their proposed studies in this newsletter (pages 2 to 3). Charlotte Dale’s research explores how the Boer War (1899–1900) influenced the recognition of nursing as a profession, while David Justham’s research investigates nurses’ work with patients suffering with life-threatening infections before the availability of penicillin.

A memorable year

Last year was a memorable one for us as a nation, with both the Olympic Games and the Diamond Jubilee. Sadly, it also saw the passing of two well-known figures, Mr Lawrence Dopson, nursing journalist and historian, and Mrs Edith Parker, nurse educationalist and historian. Both were stalwarts of the RCN History of Nursing Society from its inception and will be greatly missed.

I would like to thank all our members for their continuing support throughout 2012 and for sending me articles, book reviews, obituaries and other items for this newsletter. I believe 2012 was a great year. Let us make 2013 even better by building on our success.

With best wishes

Ruth Davies
Editor
Senior Lecturer in Child Health at Swansea University
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**Monica Baly bursary winners**

Monica Baly bursary winners **Charlotte Dale** and **David Justham** give an account of their research, which was funded by a 2012 Monica Baly bursary.

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**Nursing during the Boer War**

**Charlotte Dale**

I feel honoured and privileged to have been awarded the 2012 Monica Baly bursary by the RCN Foundation. The bursary has not only assisted my historical research but helped to shape the future direction of my career as a nurse and as a historian. Nursing history does not feature prominently in nursing education, yet the number of nurses and historians turning to it is growing. The Monica Baly bursary is essential to both nursing history and new nurse historians alike, to enhance and promote this important field of nursing research.

**Work to date**

I am currently doing my PhD at the University of Manchester, examining how the Boer War (1899–1902) influenced the development and recognition of nursing as a profession. The British nurses of the Boer War are often “lost” between the heroics of Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War and the army nurses who served in the First and Second World Wars. In 1899 the Army Nursing Service consisted of one “lady superintendent”, 19 superintendents and 68 sisters, insufficient to care for the unexpectedly high numbers of sick and wounded. The nurses who went out to South Africa came from widely differing military and civilian backgrounds and gained grudging respect from medical officials.

The Boer War had two central repercussions for nursing. The poor health of the recruits strengthened military nursing by indicating the need for a permanent military nursing force in times of war and peace. It also strengthened general nursing, revealing a clear need for nurses to oversee the health of the wider population. There is an evident lack of in-depth research into this era of military and general nursing, which presents an opportunity to explore whether it was the work of the nurses during the Boer War, and their growing confidence as a result of their work, which influenced the professionalisation of nursing.

**Outcomes**

I conducted my research at some excellent UK archives. The archive evidence fed into a master’s assignment at the University Currie (2005) explored fever nursing between 1921 and 1971, but did not explore nursing work in general hospitals. Other histories of nursing tend to focus on the political and organisational changes rather than the clinical work of nursing, which is my study’s focus. While text books of the day describe what nurses should do, there has been no systematic study of nurses’ reports of their actual work. This study addresses the gap using oral history accounts from former nurses. It provides an example of oral history contributing to the understanding of the day-to-day work of clinical nursing.
Janet Wells, or Sister Janet as she became known, was born in 1859 in London to Benjamin Wells, a noted musician, and his wife Elizabeth. In November 1876, aged 17, she entered the emerging profession of nursing by joining the Evangelical Protestant Deaconesses Institution and Training Hospital as a trainee nurse. Undeterred by what she learned of the hardships that she could expect to experience, Janet remained determined to succeed in her chosen vocation. Although she had some experience of charitable visiting in the poorer areas of London, young ladies of her age and class were always steered away from the worst of the slums, so she really had very little knowledge or understanding of the appalling conditions in which the very poor lived. With her enthusiasm for a career in nursing growing by the day, she was soon to find out.

Russo-Turkish War heroics

Upon qualifying, she was immediately sent to the Balkans to assist the Russian army medical teams in the 1877/8 Russo-Turkish War. In the depths of a bitterly cold Russian winter she was thrust into an appallingly cruel war where she was required to treat many thousands of seriously wounded soldiers – frequently on her own and with scant medical back-up or resources. She also had to constantly fight off packs of starving dogs, wolves and ferocious rats which infested the whole area.

On the battlefields of Zululand

In early 1879 she returned to England but was immediately requested to go to South Africa. Alone, she was sent more than 200 miles across wild and unpopulated bush to take control of the distant British army medical post at Utrecht in Zululand, where she cared for sick and injured soldiers after the Anglo-Zulu War. She visited many famous battlefields, including Rorke’s Drift, where she administered medical care. She also had to constantly fight off packs of starving dogs, wolves and ferocious rats which infested the whole area.

Back home

On 28 October 1879 she returned to England to resume her nursing career. She was not yet 20 years old. In 1880 she met her future husband George King, who she married in 1882. They went on to have two daughters.

Janet was widely recognised for her dedication to nursing. She received the Russian Imperial Order of the Red Cross for assisting the Russian army in the Balkans, the South Africa Campaign medal for her participation in the Anglo-Zulu War. In 1883, by Queen Victoria’s command, she and Florence Nightingale were the very first recipients of the Royal Red Cross, which was awarded for special devotion and competence displayed in their nursing duties with Her Majesty’s troops.

Sister Janet was my great grandmother. During her time in Zululand she kept a scrapbook of pictures (including one of King Cetshwayo) and flowers that she picked from the battlefields, which we still have to this day, along with her Royal Red Cross.

I grew up always wanting to be a nurse and completed my nurse training in 1980 at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London. I am still nursing today in our local day surgery unit.

Charlotte Dale BSc (Hons) RN, PhD student, University of Manchester

My research aims to give a voice to nurses working during the late 19th and early 20th century and explain the period’s role in the evolution of nursing and the increase in recognition of nursing as a profession. It is exciting that the RCN continues to support such endeavours in nursing scholarship, aiding those who receive the bursary to develop as nursing historians. Receiving this award has boosted my confidence to aim for a future position as a nurse lecturer, further helping to enhance and promote the study of nursing history to other nurses and scholars.

Charlotte Dale BSc (Hons) RN, PhD student, University of Manchester

One respondent said “penicillin revolutionised everything”, meaning everything in nursing changed. Others expressed similar sentiments. Approaches to environmental cleaning, general nursing care, wound management, and the nursing of patients with acquired infections changed. This study provides important insights into nursing practices to control infection spread, especially the prevention and management of acquired infection prior to the availability of antibiotics. It has the potential to inform future nursing practices at a time of increasing microbial resistance to a range of bacteriocidal and bacteriostatic drugs.

David Justham RN, PhD student, University of Manchester

David Justham RN, PhD student, University of Manchester
I first became aware of the power and poignancy of oral history recordings during a History of Nursing Society conference in London in 2006, when I attended a presentation entitled *And Mother Came Too* delivered by Carol McCubbin and others from the Nurses’ Voices project at St George’s, University of London.

Listening to someone who trained in the 1930s recounting how her mother had accompanied her brought back to me my own experience in 1964. My mother and I trained at the same hospital, and the matron was very keen to tell her how different life in the nurses’ home was, compared to 1945 when mum qualified.

So, in that dramatic way in which we are so often “struck by the obvious”, I became an enthusiast for recording nurses’ memories before the opportunity is lost forever.

The RCN started an oral history project in 2010, led by Susan McGann, who had previously been the RCN’s archivist. It aimed to collect the memories of nurses who worked in London hospitals from 1930 to 1990. The project was called *Tuppence for the Doctor, Penny for the Nurse: Memories of Public Health Nursing from the Royal College of Nursing Archives*.

The RCN’s archivist at the time, Susan McGann, said that she wished to increase the stock of oral history records and was looking to recruit interviewers. Three of us volunteered, were duly trained and set forth, armed with an RCN archive prompt sheet, to interview people who we thought might be interesting. However, a year later only one interview had been conducted, so we rethought our approach and have since recruited more than 20 willing interviewees from the membership of the London and South East History of Nursing Group. Using a semi-structured approach and a digital recording device, nearly half of the interviews have now been completed. Since we began the work, Susan has retired. The RCN’s Archive and Information Services Manager is now Teresa Doherty, a committed supporter of oral histories. Our next big challenge is to ensure that these new records are catalogued and accessible while we complete the remaining interviews.

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As schools of nursing merged and then moved into the universities, some London nurses’ leagues closed down, while others have gone from strength to strength. Some years ago the London leagues came together, hosted by the RCN London region, with the aim of providing support and encouraging collaboration. Although there does not seem to have been much collaborative activity, it does seem to have stimulated an interest in capturing the recollections of nurses.

The RCN launched an online catalogue of its oral nursing history collection in September 2010 at a meeting of the London and South East History of Nursing Group, along with the publication of *Tuppence for the Doctor, Penny for the Nurse: Memories of Public Health Nursing*. The RCN’s archivist at the time, Susan McGann, said that she wished to increase the stock of oral history records and was looking to recruit interviewers. Three of us volunteered, were duly trained and set forth, armed with an RCN archive prompt sheet, to interview people who we thought might be interesting. However, a year later only one interview had been conducted, so we rethought our approach and have since recruited more than 20 willing interviewees from the membership of the London and South East History of Nursing Group. Using a semi-structured approach and a digital recording device, nearly half of the interviews have now been completed. Since we began the work, Susan has retired. The RCN’s Archive and Information Services Manager is now Teresa Doherty, a committed supporter of oral histories. Our next big challenge is to ensure that these new records are catalogued and accessible while we complete the remaining interviews.

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Living history

At about the same time as I started the RCN activity, I was asked if I would agree to be interviewed for an oral history project being undertaken by the League of Charing Cross
Hospital Nurses. It seems that I was working in the School of Nursing at Charing Cross during a time of significant change (1985–1992). It can be quite a shock to realise that you are regarded as a part of history, at a time when the novelty of retirement has not yet worn off. A few weeks after agreeing to be interviewed, I made the mistake of asking when it was likely to take place. It emerged that interviewer training had not yet started and I was asked if I would like to join the project. So, nearly two years later, the group has made over 35 recordings and has access to transcripts and recordings made some time earlier.

A wealth of data

Funding for the project was obtained by Margaret Dorman, Chair of the League of Charing Cross Hospital Nurses, and we are fortunate in being able to have the recordings transcribed. But with such a wealth of data, it has been a challenge to decide how to make it available to members of the league and the wider interested community. The original idea was to analyse and edit the transcripts using the themes we identified at the beginning of the project. This would generate a “script” for a DVD which would include audio extracts, pieces to camera and photographs. However, given the considerable amount of data which would need to be excluded, it was decided to produce a paper product…perhaps one book, perhaps several, perhaps even a series of booklets.

Currently a small group of us is analysing and editing transcripts for the period up to 1952, using a number of themes which include matrons, buildings, training and early experiences, and ward routines. We hope to have something ready for printing by the end of the year.

Margaret Dorman and I gave a presentation to the London and South East History of Nursing Group about the Charing Cross project as a “work in progress” last December at the RCN London regional office in Gray’s Inn Road. If you would like to know more about our group, just email me for details at dyarwood@ntlworld.com

# Report on the 29th annual American Association for the History of Nursing conference

**Pauline Brady**

The beautiful and historic town of Savannah was founded in 1733, and escaped the American Civil War largely unscathed after General Sherman presented it to President Abraham Lincoln as a Christmas gift.

The 29th annual American Association for the History of Nursing (AAHN) conference took place there, hosted by the Georgia Southern University School of Nursing.

The four-day conference attracted over 100 delegates, mainly from the USA and Canada, but also a few from the UK and Ireland. A workshop on the implications of culture, context and place for methods preceded the official opening of the conference. Tributes were paid to Rosemary T McCarthy and Eleanor Kroch Herrmann who had died on 26 June and 31 July respectively.

In memory of his wife, Lawrence Hermann has instigated a fund for an annual keynote lecture in Eleanor’s name. The first of these was given by the Josiah Charles Trent Professor of the History of Medicine, Margaret Humphreys MD PhD. In her fascinating lecture she explored the outcomes and impact of good and bad health care for soldiers from the Confederate and Union Armies during the American Civil War.

Other presentation themes included education, leadership, women’s health, rural health, mental health, world war, culture and religion.

Two members of the RCN History of Nursing Society presented papers. Dr Claire Chatterton delivered a paper on *The Most Sensational Strike of Modern Times: the Battle of Radcliffe*. Dr Pauline Brand gave a talk called *Listen to Those Tales of Individual Misery and Give Help of the Right Sort: the Private Lives and Personal Tragedies of the Midwife-Nurses Selected to Work in the First Birth Control Clinic in England*.

In addition to the concurrent sessions there were opportunities to view posters, meet Nursing History Research editor Patricia D’Antonio and for doctoral students to have lunch with experienced nurse historians.

As the conference was held in Georgia, it was inevitable that there would be some links to Margaret Mitchell’s novel *Gone With the Wind*. Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler duly made an appearance at the conference banquet to run the auction. The conference reception, silent auction and conference banquet provided plenty of opportunities to socialise, network and share ideas about the history of nursing. Overall it was a very well organised and stimulating event.
The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) recently hosted a group of students from the University of the Third Age (U3A) who carried out a shared learning project. The two institutions met through Dr Susan Cohen, who researched some of her book *The District Nurse* in the QNI archives.

The shared learning project focused on the QNI’s collection of Queen’s Nurse badges (pictured), some of which date back to the 19th century. The QNI has an archive collection of books, magazines and memorabilia, but before this project, it hadn’t had a proper opportunity to investigate the links between the badges and individual nurses. It was contacted quite often by retired nurses, their descendants, or historians with an interest in social history, asking about the badges in particular. However the badges, numbering more than 200, were boxed away, uncatalogued.

All that changed with the arrival of the U3A group in March last year. After an initial introduction to the practicalities of the project, including the split of the archives between the QNI’s offices and the Wellcome Library collection, the group started work on identifying the badges, their history and their owners. This was possible using the digitised Queen’s Nurse roll, which contains key biographical and career information for thousands of nurses who worked “on the district” from 1889. The group catalogued the badges and identified many of the nurses who had worn them.

The QNI’s Communications Manager Matthew Bradby says: “One of the first things we found was that there were badges in the boxes that we didn’t even know we had. Some badges had been endowed by particular families, such as the Tates of Tate and Lyle, and the Ismays, who built the Titanic. Of course, all this was before the NHS, when nursing services were often supported by private donations.

“We also found that each badge had been issued more than once, as they remained the property of the institute and had to be returned when a nurse retired or left the service. So, in spite of some badges having a name or a number inscribed on them, they might have had many “owners” over the years. In some cases, badges had been passed down from one nurse to another nine times.”

The U3A students presented the findings of their project work to QNI trustees and staff last June and the QNI hopes to make the information public on the charity’s heritage website: [www.districtnursing150.org.uk](http://www.districtnursing150.org.uk)
ROSEMARY COOK recommends

Memoirs of the “Iodine” Surgeon


This new book is unusual in that it was written more than 70 years ago, by a man who died in 1943. John Lionel Stretton was a celebrated surgeon, the third generation of surgeons in his family, who worked at Kidderminster General Hospital until he was 78 years old. On his retirement, he writes: “Many of my friends and colleagues have repeatedly urged me to write a book… I have no wonderful tales of adventure to tell, no hairbreadth escapes by land or sea or in the air. But a man who has lived for nearly 80 years and spent nearly 60 years in active work as a doctor… can hardly fail to have garnered some useful experience, to have passed through thrilling incidents, and to have acquired definite views on life.”

His account of these, in a series of anecdotes and recorded speeches, makes up the bulk of the book. It is a wonderful, breathtaking romp through medical life in Victorian and Edwardian England. It shuttles between the minutiae of skirmishes with patients (who stole his umbrella, who didn’t pay their bills, who reneged on a promise to bequeath him a cow) to a heavyweight battle of letters in *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* over his claim to be the first to use tincture of iodine (and ban shaving) pre-operatively to sterilise skin. He had views on everything from school punishments to experiments on live animals, feeding children in crèches, and the importance of a ready supply of spare parts for motor cars.

Stretton appreciated the roles of nurses in surgery and was keen to help with their education (though he did insist on them attending a lecture in the dark during an air raid “to keep them quiet and give them something else to think about”). Along the way, he also invented a fold-up operating table that would fit in a canvas bag, and “an improved, adjustable” commode.

This book is a gem of medical history, told in fascinating detail by a clever and dedicated man who deserves to be much better known.

DIANNE YARWOOD recommends

The Nightingale Girls


Given the current popularity for nostalgia and the success of television programmes such as *Call the Midwife* and *Downton Abbey*, it is not surprising that a series of historical novels has been commissioned.

*The Nightingale Girls* by Donna Douglas is the first in such a series and is set in a fictitious London teaching hospital in the 1930s. The hospital is described as having a gracious Georgian façade, with many extensions and outbuildings set around a central paved courtyard with a cluster of plane trees. I am sure I will not be the only one to be reminded of the London Hospital when reading that description and this is an early example of the background research which was obviously and quite extensively undertaken by the author.

Essentially this is a story of three young women, from very different social backgrounds, who become friends because they are student nurses. While it would have been very easy to portray these characters as stereotypes, Donna Douglas has given us three girls (remembering that they are all below the age of majority) who are quite believable without stretching credibility too far.

As previously mentioned, it is obvious that a great deal of careful research has been undertaken by the author, and mostly the details ring true as a representation of nursing and health care in the East End of London in the 1930s. However, there are number of apocryphal tales included which will no doubt bring a smile to readers who are nurses, or even those who have heard stories from older family members of all those false teeth being cleaned in one bowl.

Ultimately this was an enjoyable read and although efforts have been made to portray the harsh realities of life in poverty and of health care before antibiotics and the NHS, the overall feel is of a work of romantic fiction set among the bed pans.

It is not historical biography, but no less enjoyable for that fact. I have no doubt that the book and its sequels will be embraced by those who enjoy historical fiction, and given that it is well researched, will also prompt many recollections and memories in readers who were nurses in the mid to late 20th century.

Dianne Yarwood, retired nurse educationalist

RCN members can buy a discounted paperback online for £3.07. Order it from Foyles bookshop through RCNXtra. Log in via www.rcnxtra.co.uk. You will need your RCN membership number and password.
Laurence Dopson 1924–2012

Laurence Dopson, the nursing journalist and historian, died in Musgrove Park Hospital in June at the age of 88, after a short illness. His career lasted over sixty-five years, and his last pieces appeared in the week after his death.

Originally intending to pursue a medical career, Laurence had to leave Edinburgh University for health reasons before he qualified. The chance appearance of an advertisement seeking a reporter for the *Nursing Times* led to some freelance work followed by a post on the staff. He was proud to have been the first man employed in the editorial department of a nursing journal in Britain.

He soon made his mark. In the first week of July 1948, the *Nursing Times* published an edition marking the inauguration of the National Health Service. It was dominated by a major article from the twenty-four year old Laurence, tracing the roots of the new service all the way back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws. What were to become the trademark features of his writing were already present at that early stage. It was immensely scholarly, with a reference list running to over forty sources from the specialist historical literature, yet it was written in an immediately accessible style. It reminded nurses that there was to be much more to the NHS than acute care in high-tech settings. Provision for older people, the mentally ill and those with chronic health issues may have lacked glamour, but were still very much needed. Finally, it showed that even dramatic changes in health care build on what went before. A profession with no knowledge of its history is as bereft as an individual without a memory.

Laurence was a supporter of the RCN History of Nursing Society (as it became) from its inception. An important paper published in its Bulletin 9 (1985/6), displayed his detailed knowledge of the development of nursing journals and their impact on the profession. In more recent years, he was best known for his nursing obituaries in *Nursing Standard* and *The Independent*. Laurence was always generous in sharing his sources and contacts, and I am only one of many nurses who have benefited from his kind assistance with research and publishing projects.

In his final article, published in last week’s *Nursing Standard*, Laurence wrote that “an obituary writer has to be a researcher, historian and detective”. He had these qualities in abundance and together with generosity, humility and cheerfulness, they describe the man.


Edith Parker 1932–2012

Edith Parker had a distinguished career in nurse education and is remembered warmly by her colleagues and by generations of her former students at the Charing Cross and London Hospitals, and subsequently at the Princess Alexandra and Newham College of Nursing and Midwifery. She also played a major role in the wider nursing profession, including senior positions with the General Nursing Council.

Her abiding fascination with nursing history was a key feature of her career. She had been a member of the RCN History of Nursing Society since its inception, a founder member of the London and South East group, and also, at various times, its secretary and chair. Her strong personality and natural leadership ability, which combined firmness with a determination to ensure that all points of view were heard and valued, made her an ideal committee chair, skilled in guiding members towards the optimum outcome.

Always ready to support new initiatives to broaden the reach of nursing history, she was an enthusiastic promoter of the *Cinderella Services* conferences organised by Stephanie Kirby. In 1998, with Sheila Collins, Edith published *Learning to Care: a History of Nursing and Midwifery Education at the Royal London Hospital, 1740–1993*.