A busy few months

Welcome to the autumn 2015 issue of the RCN History of Nursing Society (HoNS) newsletter

We have had a very busy spring and summer, with the opening of the Those Who Served exhibition at the RCN Library and Heritage Centre in April. The exhibition and associated series of events were developed in collaboration with the Library and Heritage Centre team and remembered the nurses of the First World War.

RCN Congress in Bournemouth saw the HoNS involved in a range of events, from promoting the upcoming RCN Centenary and collaborating with the Mental Health Nursing Forum, to supporting Baroness Williams, who introduced a showing of the film Testament of Youth. Our own professional fringe event was a great success, based as it was on the current exhibition, and stimulated lots of discussion about the role of nurses in the First World War, as well as questions about the role of the RCN in the fight for registration.

This year also sees the end of the first four-year term of office of the society’s steering committee and we are delighted to announce that Claire Chatterton has been re-appointed to serve as chair for the next four years. Appointments to the remaining vacancies will take place in October and full details of the new committee will be revealed in the spring newsletter.

The achievements of the HoNS over the past four years, at a time of dramatic change in the governance of the RCN, have been significant. Membership of the society has doubled in that time and we hope to continue increasing that number as more RCN members embrace the history of their own areas of practice. You can join the society in addition to your current forums, at no additional cost, and we look forward to welcoming you to the autumn series of events, which begins in October.

Dianne Yarwood, newsletter editor
Those who served

September saw the close of an RCN exhibition commemorating the individual nurses who died during the First World War, many of whom were among the first members of the College when it was founded in 1916.

Since opening in April, the Those Who Served exhibition in the RCN Library and Heritage Centre has brought to life the previously hidden stories of these nurses’ lives and experiences through personal letters, documents, reports and photographs.

A series of events was held alongside the exhibition, which began with a talk by senior RCN officer Mark Farmer and HoNS newsletter editor Dianne Yarwood on the early College members who lost their lives during the war.

Several more successful events have followed; Dr Denise Poynter spoke about nurses’ experiences of shellshock, HoNS member Christine Hallett discussed the role of nursing in the Gallipoli campaign, and RCN member and poet Audrey Ardern-Jones gave a moving performance of women’s war poetry accompanied by Lucas Jordan on the flute and Fabricio Mattos on the guitar.

The 70th anniversary of VE day was marked by an illustrated talk by Dr Gosia Bryczynska on the role of nurses and health care workers in the liberation of Auschwitz. An extended version of her presentation can be obtained by contacting the newsletter editor Dianne Yarwood.

The HoNS also held an event on the Isle of Man with the support of the local RCN branch, which focused on psychological trauma in World War One and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and featured talks from HoNS Chair Dr Claire Chatterton and Mark Butler.

These events have received positive feedback from members and non-members alike. Thanks go to Sarah Chaney and Frances Reed from the RCN Library and Heritage Services for their help in organising them.

The history of mental health nursing

From institutional confinement to care in the community, mental health nursing has seen many significant changes throughout its history, with the profession following a very different path from that of general nursing.

An upcoming RCN exhibition will explore the history of mental health nursing, examining the role of the largely untrained and often misunderstood attendants in Victorian asylums to the breadth of nursing roles across hospital and community care today.

Out of the Asylum: The History of Mental Health Nursing is a collaboration between the HoNS, RCN Library and Heritage Services and the RCN Mental Health Nursing Forum.

Themes of treatment, the environment, legislation and education will illustrate the complexity of mental health nursing, challenging stereotypes of mental health care and illness.

The exhibition will be held in the RCN Library and Heritage Centre in London from 5 October to 6 March. A series of mental health nursing seminars will run alongside the exhibition in locations across the country.

It will also coincide with the launch of an interactive online timeline explaining the history of mental health nursing and care.

Don’t miss the library’s main exhibition either – This Is Nursing runs until 23 December and looks back at the last 200 years of the profession. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/library for more information.
Monica Baly bursary

The HoNS was delighted to see Dr Tommy Dickinson mentioned in the RCN Foundation Impact Report 2014 and at the annual Monica Baly Bursary awards at RCN Congress 2015.

The bursary is awarded every year by the RCN Foundation to fund scholarship in nursing history. A recipient in 2011, Tommy’s area of study was the medicalisation of homosexuality in the late 20th century and he used the bursary to interview former patients and nurses around the UK.

Monica Baly founded the HoNS and persuaded the RCN to appoint a professional archivist. On her death in 1998 she was regarded as Britain’s leading nurse historian.

The bursary is awarded each September, and last year’s recipient was HoNS committee member Dr Jane Brooks. Details of the application process can be found at www.rcnfoundation.org.uk.

Cavell anniversary

Join members of the HoNS for a special event in Salford on 12 October to mark the centenary of the execution of nurse Edith Cavell.

A whole morning of events has been organised at the Sacred Trinity Church on Chapel Street, starting at 10am. There will be talks from historian Sir Ian Kershaw and HoNS’ own Christine Hallett, as well as an act of remembrance at the war memorial outside the church.

Nurse Cavell was a member of the congregation at Sacred Trinity while nursing in Manchester from 1906-7.

No booking is required but if you would like more information please email HoNS Chair Dr Claire Chatterton at c.s.chatterton@open.ac.uk or visit the RCN library website.

To coincide with the anniversary of Nurse Cavell’s death a memorial service in Portsmouth on 17 October will honour the nurses from the city who served in the Great War. It takes place at the Holy Spirit Church in Fawcett Road, Southsea, from 2pm. All members are welcome to attend.

As part of another project to mark this important anniversary, artist Charron Pugsley-Hill is creating a blanket of handmade poppies. It consists of 49 poppies made by 49 women – Cavell was 49 when she died – and Claire joined Charron at a workshop to contribute. ”I had a wonderful day with other women inspired by the story of Edith Cavell,” she said. For more information visit www.charronpugsleyhill.com.

Centenary countdown

It’s now less than four months until the start of the RCN’s 100th year. In 2016, the College will be recognising its history, celebrating present achievements and planning for a successful future.

As part of the centenary celebrations a range of exciting activities and projects are being planned. This includes a dedicated exhibition in the RCN Library and Heritage Centre which will look at the history of the College as the voice of nursing, exploring how membership has grown and changed over the last 100 years and how the RCN has supported and spoken for the profession.

For more information on this project, and others, visit www.rcn.org.uk/rcn100. Here you’ll also find a range of centenary merchandise, including a commemorative badge (pictured) which has proved immensely popular with members since its launch at RCN Congress this year.

Our stories: defence nursing oral histories

Members of the RCN Defence Nursing Forum have spent the past few months interviewing nurses and health care assistants (HCAs) who were involved in supporting UK combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Forum Chair Major Chris Carter said the aim of the project was to inform and educate the nursing profession and general public about the role of nursing in the armed forces, and to provide a tool for future generations.

“It’s really important to think about what we’ve achieved and how we preserve that for posterity,” he said. “With the end of combat operations in Afghanistan last year it felt like an appropriate time to start the project. There are many personal and professional stories to be told and it’s important we start to gather those for the archives.”

The RCN has been collecting oral histories since 1986, charting the lives and experiences of individual nurses from the early 20th to 21st centuries. The results of this project will provide a welcome addition to the College’s archives. The project launch will coincide with a Defence Nursing Forum workshop, held jointly with the RCN Ethics Committee, at RCN headquarters on 5 November. This will be followed by an evening remembrance ceremony.

For more information on the oral histories project visit www.rcn.org.uk/defence. For details of the workshop and remembrance ceremony visit www.rcn.org.uk/Defence15 and www.rcn.org.uk/Remembrance15.

News round-up

By Claire Chatterton
A remarkable woman: remembering Aunt EJ

Dianne Yarwood talks to Ross Houghton, who has fond recollections of his aunt, a nurse

Although Ross’ aunt was called Eliza Jane, she disliked her first name and so became known as EJ to family and Jane to friends.

EJ was born in Scotland in 1886 and is listed in the 1911 census as a “hospital nurse”. During the First World War she served in the Territorial Force Nursing Service and spent time in casualty clearing stations and field hospitals in France. She was awarded the Royal Red Cross for her services.

“In the field she must have seen the most harrowing sights in the course of her active service, but never referred to those experiences in my hearing,” says Ross. Instead, his insight into his aunt’s wartime experiences came from his mother, EJ’s younger sister.

Following the war, EJ moved to London and married Andrew Anderson, a businessman. She noticed that while the city was not short of nursing homes offering good medical care, the need for surgery meant transfer to a hospital.

She boldly decided to fill this gap and opened what she claimed was the first surgical nursing home in London, in Beaumont Street. Such was its success that it soon moved to Mandeville Place, behind Selfridges, and Beaumont Street became the nurses’ accommodation.

EJ was joined by another nurse, known to Ross only as Fleming, with whom she had served in France. Fleming was a theatre sister and took charge of surgical nursing and operating theatre activity. The King’s physician and surgeon reportedly sent patients to the home, and Ross recalls many anecdotes about famous people who passed through the doors.

Ross first became aware of his aunt in 1934 when, aged three, he had his appendix removed at the nursing home. He remembers being her favourite nephew, perhaps because he was an only child, and has fond memories of his time spent with her.

“Although I was very young at the time I have clear memories of staying in Mandeville Place,” he says. “In fact we stayed there in 1937 for the coronation of George VI. I also remember my aunt had a liftman who, to the horror of her friends, was an ex-convict to whom she had given a chance to reform. She told me he was her unfailing eyes and ears throughout the establishment – her in-house MI5!”

This most successful venture was sadly terminated in 1942, when the nursing home was hit by a bomb. Many of the fittings and furniture were moved to EJ’s large house in Southport and stored in the billiard room.

EJ herself retired from nursing at the end of the war and spent her time with the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service and other charities. Having been a widow for many years she later lived in a flat in Regent’s Park with her former cook turned companion. She died in 1968 aged 83 – a remarkable woman in many ways.

Museum memories

Jenny Janes, a retired RCN member from East Anglia, explains how attending RCN Congress led to an article about her local museum appearing in a regional newspaper

Like many of its kind, the small museum in my town, Halesworth, Suffolk, has had a poignant First World War exhibition for the last few months. The museum has some photographs and memorabilia from the family of Cecilia Reed, matron of the Patrick Stead Hospital in Halesworth from 1913 to 1936.

In a book about the hospital, J.W. Newby reveals how during the war the building was used to accommodate British sick and wounded. According to Newby, Cecilia Reed was mentioned in dispatches for war service.

In an amusing anecdote he also describes how a patient from Stowmarket wanted to build a crystal radio set with a cat’s whisker detector. He brought the equipment into the hospital and asked the matron for permission to test it – she consented on the condition it didn’t blow up!

Among the memorabilia is a silver medal presented to nurse C. Reed by the committee of the Norwich and Norfolk Staff of Nurses for 10 years of faithful service between 1900 and 1910. There is also a certificate of registration, dated 22 September 1922, from the General Nursing Council of England and Wales that was set up following the Nurses Registration Act of 1919.

Finally, there is the matron’s black, leather-covered Book of Common Prayer, small and well-used. There is a small, faded cutting of a prayer pasted inside the front cover: “O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work done. Then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Did she say the prayer for herself, or to comfort injured soldiers or patients in their last hours?

The museum has also recently undertaken a successful 1970s “living history” project to capture people’s memories. At RCN Congress a few years ago, our branch delegates realised that between us we covered five decades of nursing training, and we were fascinated by the differences. The East Anglian Daily Times subsequently published an article about us a few months later.
Joining the cause

John Adams learns about a French wartime nursing home in Northamptonshire

The complex wartime relationships between Britain and France are rarely discussed in this country, but in 2012 an article in a local Northamptonshire paper caught my attention. It described how a French woman had recently visited Wellingborough, where her mother had founded the Free French Convalescent Home during the Second World War. After contacting her by email, I was fortunate enough to meet Pauline Genu (née Mitchell) in person on her next visit to the town.

Health care institutions often leave considerable deposits of official records but attempts to find archival information on this one have so far drawn a blank. The only information I have been able to find comes from local newspaper articles and the archives kept by the family.

The convalescent home was established by Jeanne Mitchell (née Pelletier), who had served as a nurse in the French army in the First World War. During that conflict she had been awarded the Croix de Guerre for her role in organising the evacuation of the military hospital at Saint-Just-en-Chaussée in 1917. While there she met and subsequently married a British soldier, Albert Mitchell, and the family divided their time between France and Britain.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the family was living in London. Their children were evacuated to Wellingborough, and the parents subsequently joined them, setting up home in Spring Hill House in the town. When General de Gaulle appealed for members of the French armed forces to join his organisation, la France Libre (the Free French), in 1940, Jeanne immediately responded and turned her house into a convalescent home. Official recognition was conveyed by General de Gaulle himself and the Duchess of Gloucester. Between August 1940 and July 1944, just before Paris was liberated, 360 service personnel from French army, navy and air force units were treated there.

After the war, Spring Hill House was used as a social club for railway workers, but later became derelict. In recent years, Pauline has visited Wellingborough to raise awareness of the home and her campaign has borne fruit with the decision to name the 48 flats to be built on the site Mitchell House. Were it not for her tireless efforts, the existence of the home would have remained unknown to local people.

Celebrating 50 years of Ty Maeth

Dianne Yarwood remembers the Welsh Nursing College Appeal, which raised funds for the RCN Wales office in Ty Maeth

Now approaching its 50th anniversary, the imposing white building with the iconic RCN hands owes its existence to a massive fundraising effort.

The first RCN Welsh Board was formed in 1962. Based in a small and expensive office in the centre of Cardiff, thoughts soon turned to the need for a permanent base in Wales.

An appeal was launched in September 1964, with a television broadcast by comedian Harry Secombe. Undaunted by the task ahead, Welsh nurses began fundraising. A huge range of activities took place, from whist drives to cocktail parties – even a film premier. These were often reported in the society column of the Western Mail.

I was a student nurse at Llandough Hospital at the time and Matron Jackie Foden asked us to get involved. As many of us had joined the Student Nurses Association it felt right to lend our support.

A number of us were sent to sell flags in Cardiff on a Saturday afternoon. This happened to coincide with a rugby international between Wales and France. Although our collection boxes were filled, I doubt many of those French fans knew what they were supporting!

Overall £300,000 was raised, and a location for the new office was needed. Ty Maeth was chosen for its proximity to the University Hospital of Wales, then under construction, and on 27 October 1965 the building was officially opened by Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowden.

To find out more about the 50th anniversary, visit www.rcn.org.uk/wales. To join the Llandough Nurses Association, email Ros Harvard at rosharvard@yahoo.co.uk
Dianne Yarwood recommends
*Nursing Tales: Personal Reminiscences of Sexual Health Nursing in the Twentieth Century* by Madelaine Ward (Bound Biographies, 2014)

As Madelaine Ward tells us in her introduction, this is not an exhaustive work of reference, but a light-hearted approach to describing the development and evolution of sexual health nursing. She covers a century of health care and nursing practice and does so in an engaging and informative way.

Starting with some treatments of the venereal diseases during the First World War and then moving via Marie Stopes, family planning clinics, the pill, abortion law reform and AIDS, the book finishes with the technical revolution of the 1990s. There are some comments made about nurse education and the development of specialist practitioners, but more credit could have been given to schools of nursing and universities, especially in the field of AIDS education.

Madelaine has aimed to set the development of sexual health nursing in its social context and she has achieved that to some extent, for example the growth of family planning services in the post-war baby boom years. The book is well referenced and the inclusion of short biographies of *A Few Luminaries* is a nice touch.

*Nursing Tales* is an engaging read, and although largely descriptive and lacking in critical analysis, it is no less interesting for that. I would have liked more detail on how she collected her reflections from former colleagues and friends and think that there is potential to draw upon those as a rich source of historical data.

Rosemary Cook recommends
*The Hospital on the Hill – A Century of Care – St Vincent’s Orthopaedic Hospital Eastcote* by Jacquie Scott (Pitkin, 2014)

Jacquie Scott, the last matron of St Vincent’s, has written a fascinating and detailed account of the hospital’s 100-year history. *The Hospital on the Hill* is filled with images, stories and quotes that poignantly illustrate not only the evolution of the institution, but the revolution in medical and social norms over a century.

The hospital was founded in 1907 as St Vincent’s Home for Crippled Boys – a sign of how differently the world viewed disability and care then. The poor children who were sent to the hospital suffered from diseases and limb deformities classed as incurable at the time, and their futures often looked bleak. Treatments were tough and relied on splints, callipers, repeated operations or the healing properties of fresh air – many of the children lived in unheated, open air wards.

And yet despite this, *The Hospital on the Hill* is a joyous and optimistic book. It is filled with letters, diaries and recollections from children who had a wonderful time at St Vincent’s. They had pets, went on trips to the seaside, dressed up, had parties, took exams, and joined Scout troops. There were gardens and fields, workshops and schoolrooms, and an atmosphere of affection, respect and ambition for each individual that would never have been possible in the workhouses or orphanages. It speaks volumes that there was an Old Boys’ Association, and that some of the boys stayed on at, or returned to, St Vincent’s and worked there until retirement.

And it was not just boys – the hospital expanded to include girls, babies and adults, including soldiers with terrible orthopaedic injuries sustained during the First World War. The children were given an education, and were taught useful skills to enable them to contribute to society as disabled adults.

This is a genuine and moving record of the children and adults with physical needs but boundless capacity whose lives were transformed by their time at St Vincent’s. The lovingly detailed and wide-ranging accounts of ordinary children’s lives in a most extraordinary setting stay in the memory.
**BOOK REVIEW**

**Alison O’Donnell** recommends  
*In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War* by Yvonne McEwen (Edinburgh University Press, 2014)

In the painting by Sir John Lavery from 1919 which graces the front cover of this book, the faces of the two nurses in uniform are blurred. As the author notes, Lavery chose to depict “what they were rather than who they were”.

This hazy image of what military nurses experienced during the First World War is vividly made clearer as the text unfolds. McEwen has explored the position of nurses and nursing, both in terms of care giving and in relation to the wider social and political setting. She has drawn on unpublished official and unofficial documents, letters and diaries to give a new voice to the narrative of the time.

**Stuart Wildman** recommends  
*Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* by Christine Hallett (Oxford University Press, 2014)

The relationship between the trained and volunteer nurses is covered in depth and the book also dispels a lot of the mythology about the contribution of voluntary aid detachment nurses. Added to this, the professional relationships between nurses working in the casualty clearing stations, the hospitals, those on barges and hospital ships, the Royal Army Medical Corp, stretcher-bearers and orderlies have also been investigated. The physical and psychological effects the war had on those who nursed between 1914 and 1919 are also highlighted.

The book also has an excellent index and bibliography to assist further reading and research, with detailed examples and footnotes, as well as three appendices. Appendix 3 is particularly poignant, as it lists the British and Dominion nurses who died in the conflict.

McEwen has given the women who served as nurses during WWI their due position and voice, placing their care giving skills and qualities within the political framework of nursing and the wider context of this time.

**“GIVES A NEW VOICE TO THE NARRATIVE OF THE TIME”**

Christine Hallett’s first book on nursing in the First World War, *Containing Trauma* (Manchester University Press, 2011), took a thematic approach and focused on the work of nurses as they dealt with shock, wounds, infection and rehabilitation.

This book adopts both a geographical and chronological approach to the work of nurses from the allied nations, taking the reader from the beginning of the war through to 1919 and across the various settings.

The introduction addresses the myths associated with nursing during the war and in particular the role and status of the volunteer aid detachment nurse (VAD). The author gives a balanced account of the roles of both professional and volunteer nurses and succinctly analyses the myths of the “courageous, bullied VAD; the romantic nurse; and the nurse as heroine”.

Overall *Veiled Warriors* is a detailed and often moving account of the work of nurses at the frontline. It contrasts the stationary fronts in France and Gallipoli with nursing on the more mobile battlefields of Russia and Serbia. It also covers nursing in Romania, Salonika, Palestine, East Africa and India. The reader develops a good understanding of what it was like to care for the injured in conditions that were challenging and often hazardous for both nurse and patient.

Most of the accounts are told from the perspective of nurses from Britain, the Empire or the US. Hallett states that she has produced a history which is “partial and distorted” and from an “Anglocentric perspective”. Although this may be true, I think she does herself a disservice as this is a cracking read which gives an insight into the experiences and contribution of nurses to the care of the injured during the First World War.
Celebrating research

Dr Jane Brooks from the University of Manchester reports on another highly successful UK Association for the History of Nursing (UKAHN) annual colloquium

This year’s event took place at the Infirmary Museum at the University of Worcester in July. It was an excellent day, and much enjoyed by all who attended. Several papers were presented by speakers from the UK, US and South Africa.

HoNS chair Dr Claire Chatterton kicked things off, presenting a paper called Britain’s Fight Against the Cruel Sea: Disaster Nursing and the East Coast Flood of 1953. The paper was co-written by Pauline Brand from the Open University, who unfortunately could not be present.

This was followed by a paper from PhD student Christine Gowring, based on her research on complementary and alternative medicine and the attitudes to such practices. She highlighted the concerns of nursing staff about the perpetuation of the medical model, even in areas where other models would have improved patient care, and the great difficulties they faced in changing the status quo.

The next few papers had an international flavour. Dr Mary Ann Thompson from Louisville, Kentucky gave a paper she had co-written with Sara Bolten called Sisters of Charity: Nurses in Civil War Louisville, Kentucky. It focused on the controversial use of Catholic nuns to care for soldiers in a staunchly anti-Catholic state.

Ingrid Ussher, from the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, then spoke about her PhD research into race and gender issues among Swedish missionaries in the country in the early to mid-20th century.

After lunch Rima Apple, from the University of Madison-Wisconsin, gave a keynote presentation called Politics and Public Health: A History of Community Nursing. It explored the work of public health nurses in the early 20th century and the political acumen they needed in order to provide nursing for those under their care.

Returning to home territory, Dr Fran Badger from the University of Birmingham presented on poor law midwifery and nursing in the English Midlands between 1834 and 1881. This was followed by a paper from colleagues at the University of Worcester on a collaborative project to introduce the history of nursing to children and young people.

The penultimate presentation from Dr Sue Hawkins was on the work of Catherine Wood, the lady superintendent of the hospital now known as Great Ormond Street, and a protégée of the hospital’s founder, Dr Charles West.

Seán Graffin, a PhD student at the University of Ulster, wrapped things up by discussing his project to create a “lost register” of 19th-century nurses at the Union Infirmary, Belfast.

Next year’s colloquium, in May 2016, will be hosted by the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, Surrey and is being convened by Dr Keiron Spires. Information will be available nearer the time on the UKAHN website: www.ukahn.org

Testament of Youth

A screening of the film Testament of Youth, based on Vera Brittain’s memoir of the same name, was a highlight of RCN Congress 2015.

The story follows Vera, played by Alicia Vikander, as she abandons her studies at Oxford to join the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) during the First World War.

The film was introduced by Vera’s daughter, Baroness Williams of Cosby, who answered questions from the audience before the screening and also spent time afterwards speaking to individuals, posing for photographs and signing books.