

WHAT DID FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE DO FOR US?

Florence Nightingale never enjoyed the “buzz-fuzz”, as she called it, around her name but yet she remains famous today. So what did Florence Nightingale do for us?



Florence was 71 when this photo was taken in one of her favourite rooms, the Blue Room, at Claydon House.

HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

Florence could not accept that poorer people in Victorian Britain had no healthcare. Her work with William Rathbone to introduce trained nurses into workhouse infirmaries gave medical care to people who could not afford to pay for it. It laid down the idea of free healthcare for all – and that would eventually lead to the creation of the National Health Service in 1948.



Every year on 12 May (Florence’s birth date and International Nurses’ Day) a service is held in Westminster Abbey, London to give thanks for the work of Florence Nightingale and all nurses.

TRAINED NURSES

Without the Nightingale School of Nursing, Florence could not have helped to bring trained nurses into workhouses. From small beginnings, the training brought skilled nurses into hospitals in London and elsewhere. They in turn set up training schools in other cities and abroad, while others became district nurses or midwives.

BETTER HOSPITALS

Florence’s research into hospital design made her an expert. She advised people on how to build better, safer hospitals in Britain, its empire and elsewhere.

SANITATION

Florence relied on evidence to prove why things needed to change. The reports and diagrams she produced after the Crimean War sent a strong message to MPs and the army: bad drains, overcrowding and poorly designed buildings allow diseases to spread. As a result, army hospitals and barracks were improved but she also helped other campaigns to demand decent drains and sewers across Britain.

PROMOTING GOOD HEALTH

In her seventies, Florence wrote:

“What is health nursing but the cultivation of health. What is health? Health is not only to be well, but to use well every power we have.”

Florence urged people to improve the surroundings of the patient – bring flowers into the room along with beautiful objects, make sure the patient could see plants out of the window, or spend time in a garden. Alongside this ran the idea that people should take care of their health in order not to become patients in the first place. Take exercise outdoors! Eat a good diet! Keep the home free of germs!



All these messages are as relevant today as they were two hundred years ago.

JOBS FOR WOMEN

Florence supported the idea of votes for women, but did not devote much time to the cause. However, she gave a huge amount of time to establishing nursing as a respectable, paid job for women and also supported people who were working for better education for women.



The votes for women campaign celebrated her achievements. This banner was carried by nurses in uniform at the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies march through London in 1908.