

The Blue Plaque

Florence Nightingale

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Florence Nightingale took her Christian name from the town where she was born in May 1820, the daughter of a wealthy Hampshire landowner who was a prominent campaigner against slavery.

Convinced in her twenties of her vocation to nurse, she found it a difficult path for a woman of her class to follow at a time when nursing was not highly respected. Her family were opposed to the idea but her sheer determination won through. In 1851 she was allowed to travel to Kaiserwerth in Germany to study as a nurse and, on her return, she became superintendent of the Institution for Sick Gentlewomen in Distressed Circumstances in London.

When reports of the suffering of soldiers in the Crimean War reached England, Florence Nightingale managed to arrange for herself and thirty-eight nurses to be sent to the military hospital at Scutari. Her zeal and efficiency, and her recognition of the importance of hygiene, resulted in the death rate at the hospital dropping from 42 per cent to 2.2 per cent.

Returning from the Crimea a national heroine in 1856, she spent the rest of her long life as a semi-invalid but campaigned tirelessly for improvements in the training of nurses and the standards of health care, cleverly manipulating the influence her reputation had brought her. She once boasted, probably correctly, that she had "more political power than if I had been a borough returning two MPs."

In 1865 she moved into the house in South Street, Mayfair which is marked by a blue plaque and she lived there for the rest of her life. In 1907 she became the first woman to be awarded the Order of Merit, allegedly receiving it with the words, "Too kind, too kind."

She died on the 13th August 1910 at the age of ninety.



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