

## **Florence Nightingale and her connection with Leeds**

In 2020 we celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. On 25<sup>th</sup> of November, Stephanie Davies, Community Curator at Lotherton Hall kindly gave a very interesting Power Point presentation about Florence via Zoom to the u3a History group and we were joined by several members of the wider Garforth and Kippax u3a group. Some of the information provided is described below.

The talk centred on Florence Nightingale's connections to both Lotherton Hall and Leeds General Infirmary. The talk provided a fascinating example of how, in her post-Crimea years, Florence worked tirelessly with specialists in different fields to further her causes. The talk was accompanied by a wealth of vivid pictures illustrating everything from ward layouts to architectural details.

Leeds General Infirmary was first created in 1767 as a place for the relief of the sick and injured poor in the Leeds parish. The first site was in a private house on Kirkgate. After four years the infirmary moved to a new site on Infirmary Street near City Square on the site of Aspire, previously the old Yorkshire Bank. It remained there until 1869.

In 1862, Florence Nightingale was consulted on the building of a new hospital in Leeds by William Beckett Denison who was a banker and conservative MP.

The architect appointed for the new Infirmary was George Gilbert Scott, the head of England's largest architects. He was also the architect for St Pancras Hotel adjoining St Pancras Station and there are many similarities between the two gothic design buildings.

The founding five physicians at Leeds General Infirmary were all graduates of the very prestigious University of Edinburgh Medical School and the Senior Physician, Dr Charles Chadwick was president of the British Medical Association in 1869.

Dr Chadwick and George Gilbert Scott visited the French and Belgian Pavilion hospitals whilst researching designs for the construction of Leeds General Infirmary and Scott was also sent to visit the small military hospital at Fulford Road York by Douglas Galton.

Galton was a well respected engineer and his wife Marianne was a cousin and close friend of Florence Nightingale. Their daughter Gwendolen married Frederick Richard Thomas Trench Gascoigne of Parlington and Lotherton Hall.

Douglas Galton was involved in the design and construction of the Herbert Hospital at Woolwich in 1860 which was, at the time, the largest military hospital in the world. He carried his views regarding sanitation into practice when building the Herbert Hospital and published works on hospital construction, healthy dwellings and healthy hospitals.

The Pavilion model hospitals had separated wards which were like individual hospitals. Doctors, nurses and other staff had to exit through fresh air outside before entering another ward.

Other hospitals 'block' or 'corridor' models allowed circulation of air amongst numerous wards and possibly hundreds of people.

The design of Leeds General Infirmary allowed 'perfect freedom of ventilation, abundance of light, cheerfulness of appearance, 8 windows on each side of a ward nearly floor to ceiling, (Florence Nightingale actually wanted one window per patient) and used Parian cement which harden to a marble-like finish and was the ideal non-porous material'.

Leeds General infirmary was the first civic hospital in the Pavillion style, designed to maximise sunlight.

William Denison was familiar with Florence Nightingale's 'Notes on Hospitals' and her evidence to the Royal Commission of the Crimean War which noted her views on a North – South axis to maximise sunlight.

He wrote to Florence in 1862 and she replied in detail, having consulted with Dr John Sutherland, her best medical advisor. She said "The whole wall surface should be exposed to the sun every day of sunshine. North walls are always, more or less, damp and cold." she offered to review the plans for Leeds General Infirmary when they were available and said that she considered the architect, George Gilbert Scott, to be a fortunate choice.

As well as the wards, a winter garden and tennis court were included in the original building.

The cost of building Leeds General Infirmary to the Pavilion plan was four times more than the original estimate. For the site, building and furniture the cost eventually came to £122,329.

To raise money to cover the cost it was decided to hold the National Exhibition of Works of Art in the newly completed building in May 1868. Unfortunately

no profit was made from the exhibition so it did not help with the building costs, just raised the profile of the hospital.

At the opening ceremony a concert took place in the Central Hall under the direction of Mr Charles Halle and musical selections were rendered by a chorus of 200 ladies and gentlemen.

Items were lent to the exhibition by individuals and institutions including the Earl of Chesterfield and HM Queen Victoria.

Despite the cost, LGI was considered a great success and it became a tourist attraction. A pictorial history of the hospital shows it alongside the famous Laribisiere hospital of Paris and the grand Plymouth Naval Hospital of 1758.

A meeting of the BMA ( British Medical Association) was held in Leeds in 1869 and Dr Chadwick was made president.

Tours were arranged of the building, and lengthy explanations were given of the Pavilion model and how LGI exemplified it, by Dr Chadwick and Douglas Galton.

With the military Herbert Hospital in Woolwich, LGI was the first complete hospital built in the Pavilion principle in England.

Florence Nightingale advised that the new hospital must have a good Head Nurse and that each ward should have no more than 24-32 beds for sanitary wellbeing.

When first asked, Florence could not supply a matron and nurses as there was a shortage of trained staff.

Due to industrialisation there were many patients admitted to British hospitals due to accidents from railroads, dockyards and other manufacturing businesses.

LGI did eventually get a Nightingale nurse but not one actually recommended by Florence. Florence did not actually teach any nurses in training but she did mentor leading nurses after their training was complete.

The board asked in 1867 for a matron and twelve additional nurses for the new hospital and by the time that the old infirmary closed there were 5 nurses from the old hospital, 9 nurses from London and 6 probationers or student nurses. In addition to the nurses and 5 doctors there was also an ophthalmologist, Dr Thomas Pridgin Teale.

The matron appointed in 1880 was Louisa McKay Gordon who was from the Leeds area and had previously been Assistant Superintendent at Liverpool Royal Infirmary. She was at LGI for 10 years and went on to be Head of Nursing at St Thomas's Hospital and the Nightingale School in London in 1890. At that time Florence Nightingale examined her credentials and noted that she showed great administrative capacity, uniform kindness and gentility. LGI was considered to be tougher than St Thomas's but Louisa certainly was not. It was reported in the Leeds Mercury that the hospital board had stated that her appointment to St Thomas's was 'no slight compliment to Leeds'.

Louisa Gordon did, however, report that the nurses in Leeds were overworked.

George Scott's plan for LGI did not include a nurses home and this was built in 1879. Although this was a separate building to the hospital to avoid cross-infection, it was linked to the hospital by a covered walkway. This is the nurses home which is currently being demolished to make way for a new Children's Hospital.

The first patient admitted to LGI on 22 May 1869 was Walter Riding, a 10 year old boy from Dewsbury who was suffering from a fractured thigh. The old infirmary was not completely vacated until June.

Florence Nightingale was ahead of her time as exposure to sunlight is back in fashion today. Neuroplasticity experts see that there is a causal link between sunshine, amongst other factors, and the ability of the brain to heal and reprogramme itself.

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