

The Symbolic Lamp of Nursing

Introduction

On the occasion of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Dr Mona Grey was presented with a replica of the lamp carried at the Annual Westminster Abbey Service to mark her contribution to nursing in Northern Ireland. She has donated the lamp to the League and it is now in the Archives.

The Spirit of Nursing Affirmed in the Historic Traditional Symbolic Lamp of Nursing in Miniature.

Florence Nightingale as Superintendent of nurses recruited in the British Isles to staff the Barrack Hospital in Scutari in the Crimean War (1854-56), carried a lantern when doing nightly rounds of the four miles of wards of the Barrack (Military) Hospital. This vigilant and diligent watch over the hundreds of wounded patients added to the numerous other administrative duties essential in the management of patient care in a hospital, singled her out for respect and affection by the soldiers who recognised her by the title "Lady with the Lamp".

In recognition of her demanding work at Scutari an appeal was made for funds in England, to commemorate her on her return home from the Crimea. This met with generous support. With Queen Victoria's patronage the "Times", in consultation with Florence Nightingale, established an executive committee to manage all the monies raised in the national appeal named "The Florence Nightingale Foundation"

With Florence Nightingale's approval one of its first duties was to establish a school for the training and education of nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in London.

The Florence Nightingale Foundation

The policy of The Florence Nightingale Foundation remains unchanged today, as it continues to appeal for funds to expand its original aims directed to the education of nurses through awards of annual travelling scholarships. The selected subjects, for research and study, were to promote the progressive development of the nursing profession, to prepare it to provide higher and improved standards of nursing care and so meet the demands made on it by the advances in medical and health sciences, plus technological, diagnostic and therapeutic practices.

Following the Second World War, a funding appeal was launched by the Nurses and Midwives journal, inspired by its editor Elise Gordon and supported by Mrs Mimi Bennett SRN.SCM. nurse tutor at the Westminster Hospital. The active patronage of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother was a great asset to the fund. The objective of the fund was to commemorate, in a roll of honour, the names of British Commonwealth Nurses who died in the war. The memorial fund was to be managed by the two named founders and the Chief Nursing Officers of the Departments of Health of the four countries comprising the United Kingdom. Its committee of seven included the President of the Royal College of Midwives UK. I was privileged to serve on the committee until I retired in 1975.

With considerable help from the Queen Mother, the tiny Nurses Chapel in Westminster Abbey was furnished. The Roll of Honour was kept in the chapel. The committee annually awarded a limited number of scholarships for advanced nursing studies. The residue of the fund was ultimately transferred to the Florence Nightingale Foundation to continue its work with identical policies.

First symbolic lamp

In or about 1964/1965 an unsolicited generous donation of £500 was given to the foundation. After considerable thought and research a sterling silver symbolic lamp was commissioned. The lamp was to be borne in procession annually in a service of commemoration of the Lady with the Lamp, in Westminster Abbey on or around the birthday of Florence Nightingale: 12th May 1820. The Foundation is responsible for this unique service of dedication, using the historic traditional symbolic lamp of nursing and the roll of honour of the British Commonwealth Nurses War Memorial Fund. The historical set up of the foundation would not permit any amendment to the title of the annual service in the Abbey.

Replica lamps

The original symbolic lamp has a replica in Wales and in Northern Ireland (1984), where it is in the safe custody of a Nightingale nurse - Mrs Joan Thompson OBE, who represents Northern Ireland on the Florence Nightingale Executive Committee in London. Mrs Thompson, supported by a very small executive, is responsible for the annual, celebratory, commemoration. This interdenominational service is held around the same time as the national service, at a different venue each year to meet the wishes of the profession in Northern Ireland. A representative from the Foundation headquarters in London normally attends the service.

Miniature replicas

The ten outreach, miniature, symbolic Lamps of Nursing are exact replicas of the original lamp, kept in Westminster Abbey. The Northern Ireland lamp is used to take the ideals and aims: of historical vigilance, observation and communication, to learning centres of excellence. It is used for display and appropriate incorporation in events promoting the professions of Nursing, Midwifery and Health visiting, as the core of health and life sciences at the University of Ulster.

History of Nursing lecture

The endowment of a History of Nursing Lecture in July 1997 was the seed from which the miniature lamps came into being between 1997 and 2002. The prelude in the programme at the launch of the historic lecture was the presentation of the first exquisite silver symbolic lamp, an exact miniature of the lamp held in Westminster Abbey and was commissioned from the same jeweller in Belfast as the Northern Ireland Lamp. Further presentations on similar lines have been made as a follow on to the endowed lecture in July 1997. They are:-

2001

South Bank University, London which has been absorbed in its centre of excellence the Royal College of Nursing Institute of Further Education and Research - to mark the progressive development of the profession in the United Kingdom.

2002

University of Sheffield - a past president of RCN from there was present at the launch of the endowed lecture.

Queens University, Belfast, School of Nursing and Midwifery.

RCN Northern Ireland Board - Linked with Ulster and Queens Universities through the Institute.

Golden Jubilee Gilt Lamps

Florence Nightingale Foundation

Council, Royal College of Nursing.

2003

Coronation Anniversary - plans still in progress.

Queen Margaret's College, Edinburgh University - to acknowledge the profession's heritage. It pioneered a history of nursing diploma course.

Dr Mona Grey - for her contribution to nursing in Northern Ireland, this she then donated to The Royal London Hospital League of Nurses. Dr Grey is a life member.

Jamaican Nurses Association - in acknowledgement of the British Nurses War Memorial Fund and of Mary Seccole's individual contribution in the Crimean war.

Conclusion

The owners of the historical traditional miniature lamps will follow the original aims and objectives which set up the Florence Nightingale Foundation and endeavour to promote the reasons which led to the establishment of the endowment of a lecture by making the subject known and appreciated as the profession's heritage.

The history of nursing from the internet

There is a fund of information related to the history of nursing and the traditional symbolic lamp of nursing, especially in the USA. In America several lamps are inscribed with the words 'patient care first' and are worn as pins at graduation, this also applies to the professional Philipino nurses.

The scripture union also uses the 'Aladdin Lamp' design of the nurses.

The traditional symbolic lamps of nursing are not icons. Through custom they represent something else for nurses: emblems of manifestation, compassion and diligent vigilance.

The symbolic lamps of nursing do not belong to any particular religion, or creed. They may be exhibited and used appropriately at functions and events. Badges significant to the service of a profession, prepared through education to take anything other than the first place for itself and to pledge itself to do so in whatever custom happens to be basic to its particular creed.

Through all of the worlds' religions, churches, chapels, temples, minarets, mesas, synagogues and mountain tops. There is spirituality from the embryo to eternity.

The profession of nursing knows, and with that knowledge dedicates and rededicates itself worldwide.

Based on an article in 'The Review' by Dr Mona Grey

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