

14/05/2020



Dear Club Members,

Your fibre this month is named called Athena, who was the pet owl belonging to Florence Nightingale. May 12th is the 200th Anniversary of her birth. She is most famous for being "The Lady of the Lamp", a Victorian paragon of womanly virtues, and for modernising nursing and turning it in to a profession. Even now nurses in the USA take a Nightingale Pledge as the equivalent to the Hippocratic oath taken by doctors.

Nightingale announced her decision to enter nursing aged 24, which was met with opposition from her family. She came from an affluent, well connected family where daughters would have been expected to marry well and go on to have families of their own. As a young woman she travelled widely in Europe, and it was in Athens, Greece where she rescued the little owl who she named Athena. The owl became her constant companion for the next 5 years. However during her preparations for her departure to the Crimea the owl was placed under the care of a family member, and the story goes that neglect, and pining for Florence led to Athena's death.

In 1850 Florence went to Kaiserswerth-am-Rhein in Germany, and spent time with the Lutheran community. The work of the Pastor and Deaconesses in caring for the sick began her nursing career, and whilst there she received 4 month of medical training.

In 1853 she was appointed Superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Harley Street, London. She remained there, training nurses until October 1854, at which point she left, along with 38 other volunteer nurses, and 15 Catholic nuns, to take up posts nursing soldiers who had been injured in the Crimean war. She was deployed to Scutari (in modern day Turkey). Conditions in the hospitals were appalling. This is the point at which Florences class and connections came in to play. She wrote a letter to The Times highlighting the problems faced, and the British Government were shamed in to action. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was commissioned to design a prefabricated hospital, that could be put on a ship in England, sent to the Crimea and quickly constructed. The death rate in this new hospital was 1/10th of that in the pre-existing hospitals.

With the Victorian trend for creating women heroines (Grace Darling receives similar treatment in the press and public conciousness), Florence was lauded for revolutionising the nursing care and conditions in hospitals in the Crimea. However, she simply played a part in improving the conditions. There was a limit to improvements of hygiene with nursing care when the sewers and other aspects of the hospitals were hopelessly overwhelmed. The Sanitary Commission arrived in the Crimea 6 months after the arrival of Florence and her team of nurses, and this team of men flushed out sewers and improved ventilation in the hospitals. In fact the death rate at the hospital where Nightingale and her nurses work was far higher than in many of the other field hospitals because the hospital own which they worked was built on top of a sewer so the men were continually drinking contaminated water.. Until the sanitation and ventilation was improved nursing could do nothing other than provide comfort to men dying of Cholera, Typhus, Dysentery and other diseases.

After she left the Crimea she established the first Nursing school in 1860, and by 1865 trained nurses were now being employed as staff in the workhouse system. Prior to this the standard of care

in the sick wards of workhouses was extremely variable, with nurses usually being widows or former servants who were unable to find work elsewhere.

Nightingale's greatest skill is probably that of a statistician, however that was an area of knowledge which was seen as a manly pursuit, so not publicly acknowledged at the time. She excelled in creating visual representations of data, which she used to convince the politicians and public to fund her reforms. In particular she created a form of pie chart called the polar area diagram, which illustrated seasonal variation in patient mortality due to different factors. .

Florence lived to the age of 90, and she's a complex woman to try and understand. She was often difficult, hard to work with, demanding of her staff, and could be downright rude and offensive. She was snobbish about the work of Mary Seacole, a British Jamaican nurse who also worked in the Crimea. She must have been very strong willed, because she truly defied all public conventions about how a woman from her class should live, this drive and ambition may well colour contemporary accounts about her personality, to many of the people who she came in to contact she would have been a true maverick.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading-

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/nightingale_01.shtml

<https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/florence-nightingale-1>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/florence-nightingale-saving-lives-with-statistics/ziksmfr>

BBC documentary, only available in the UK for 23 more days-

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00c0nqz/florence-nightingale>

A digital copy of the illustrated book about Florence Nightingale's pet owl, written by her sister Parthenope. She sent the book to her sister whilst she was ill in the Crimea to try and cheer her up.

<https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/news/nightingales-owl-in-the-wren/>

Athena the Owl, who is now on display at the Florence Nightingale museum-

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/athena-florence-nightingales-owl>

Florence's Nightingale as a statistician

<http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/lady-with-the-diagram>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/aug/13/florence-nightingale-graphics>

UK seasonal deaths over the past 5 years presented in a similar style to that used by Nightingale-

<https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/covid-19-florence-nightingales-diagrams-for-deaths/>

Mary Seacole

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Seacole

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

40% 18.5 micron Merino

20% Alpaca

20% Baby Camel

20% Mulberry Silk