
COMING HOME Learning and Engagement Case Study

Portrait of The Mission of Mercy, Florence Nightingale receiving the Wounded at Scutari by Jerry Barrett, 1857: Derby Museums



1. Introduction

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) is one of the most celebrated figures of the Victorian era and 2020 marked 200 years since her birth. Her pioneering care of sick and wounded soldiers during the Crimean War (1853–6) made her a national icon, with newspaper reports and contemporary poems calling her the 'Lady with the Lamp'. She went on to campaign for public healthcare reform, supervise the modernisation of nursing, and advise governments on army health provision, sanitation improvements and hospital design.

Nightingale was born into a wealthy British family in Florence, Italy. Most of her growing up was done in England and she spent many summers at Lea Hurst, near Matlock in Derbyshire where the family had an estate. Although her career took her around Europe, she maintained close links with Derbyshire.

The Mission of Mercy shows Nightingale receiving casualties in the courtyard of the Barrack Hospital at Scutari, a suburb of present-day Istanbul, during the Crimean War.

2. Participants

The Museum created specific online content:

- Three pieces for adults (including a partnership project with University Hospitals of Derby and Burton)
- Two activities aimed at children (but open to everyone).

3. Activity

The *Mission of Mercy* complemented an exhibition (at a different site called Pickford's House) that focused on health in the home.

The Museum had to completely re-design the programme relating to the Mission of Mercy after the first COVID Lockdown. Although the galleries were open from July to November 2020, almost all programming was [transferred online](#). In this way, they aimed to reach out to people with interesting cultural opportunities that they could access remotely. The content was made to support their audiences' knowledge and understanding and to connect with them and support their wellbeing during lockdown.

- The Museum created the *Derby Museums From Home* [website](#) which allowed them to develop content to mark the Florence Nightingale Bicentenary. Content included working with University Hospitals of Derby and Burton, through a partnership with [Air Arts](#) - the arts charity for Derby Teaching Hospitals. Staff at the hospitals were asked to share poems reflecting on their nursing experiences to celebrate both the 2020 Year of the Nurse & Midwife and the bicentenary of the birth of Florence Nightingale. The poems were beautifully illustrated by E J Lance and so far three have been turned into film.
- A discussion was recorded between Senior Curator, Lucy Bamford and retired biomedical scientist Dr Mike Hinton. Together they explored the wider context behind the production of the portrait. Their conversation connected to Dr. Hinton's book ['Victory over Disease: Resolving the Medical Crisis in the Crimean War'](#) which was published by Helion Books in 2019.
- In another discussion, Lucy spoke to Anne Ishikawa who is a Co-production Volunteer at Derby Museums. As part of her volunteer role Anne researched the portrait with an emphasis on identifying the other individuals on the canvas and their relevance to the scene depicted in the portrait. Derby Museums is always looking for ways to support volunteers through meaningful opportunities.
- The Museum also created a 'spot the difference' activity for children in the activity section of the [microsite](#) and a [drawing activity](#) that was created by another co-production volunteer, Heather Horvath.

The loan provided an opportunity for the Museum to refresh its Florence Nightingale schools sessions and ready themselves to deliver outreach sessions from early 2021 to adjust to school's needs.

During the period of the loan when the galleries were open, volunteers and visitor services assistants in the galleries supported and engaged in dialogue with visitors.

4. Outcomes and reflections

Co-production is at the heart of Derby Museums and they were pleased to be able to offer valuable experiences as part of the COMING HOME project to two volunteers:

- Anne Ishikawa, who researched the portrait initially for an on-gallery talk, which became but a recorded piece for the microsite. This project helped Anne with her professional development.
- Heather Horvath, who developed family activities for the Florence Nightingale Health in the Home exhibition which sadly couldn't open in March 2020. However, one activity was converted into an online activity on the microsite. This supported Heather's MA in Public History at Derby University.

The organisation was able to trial working with audiences in a new way, while galleries were closed due to COVID. They have decided to continue to develop the microsite and website content beyond Lockdown to ensure opportunities for engagement are available remotely for their audiences.

They were also able to deepen their relationship with Air Arts and University Hospitals of Derby and Burton through a collaboration that brought work from the hospitals into Derby Museums' spaces and website.

5. Selected feedback

"It was brilliant to be part of the Florence team, it so sad that COVID got in the way and that she's had to be returned to London. In my research of her and the painting I felt I got to know her as a person and how the world saw her. I think she would be embarrassed to be held in such esteem. I think she had a deep care of people and nothing would distract from it and her legacy lives on in every nurse we see. It was an honour and inspiration to me. On a personal note she has inspired me to keep persevering in life 'cause it will bear fruit."

Anna (Volunteer)