



Ethel Gordon Fenwick

1857-1947

State Registered Nurse No.1

Ethel Gordon Manson, born in Morayshire in 1857, is considered to be one of the foremost leading figures in nursing. Ethel moved to Thoroton Hall, Nottinghamshire at a young age after her widowed mother married George Storer, MP for South Nottinghamshire. She commenced her nurse training at the age of twenty-one, firstly at Nottingham Children's Hospital and then Manchester Royal Infirmary. She went on to work as a Sister at The London (now Royal London) Hospital and was Matron at St Bartholomew's Hospital London for six years. It was at Barts that she met and married Dr Bedford Fenwick and her career as a nurse came to an end, as in those days women could have a family or a career, but not both. A prolific writer, Ethel acquired the Nursing Record in 1893 and became its Editor in 1903. It was renamed the British Journal of Nursing, and through its pages for the next 54 years her thinking and her beliefs were clearly revealed.

Disagreeing with Florence Nightingale, Ethel believed that there was a need for the training of nurses to be at a recognised standard, for which she campaigned vigorously. Her campaigning eventually resulted in the Nurses Registration Act 1919 and Ethel appeared as "Nurse No 1" when the register first opened in 1921.

Ethel founded the Royal British Nurses' Association in 1887, as well as several other nursing organisations. In 1899 she was instrumental in the foundation of the International Council of Nurses, now based in Geneva. They now represent over 27 million nurses worldwide.

A special service of thanksgiving was held on Friday 20 May 2022 at Thoroton Parish Church, Nottinghamshire. The service celebrated the life of Ethel Gordon Fenwick SRN and also recognised the restoration of her grave in the grounds of the church. The service was the culmination of over 5 years work by the Ethel Gordon Fenwick Commemorative Partnership, a group of nurses and other interested parties who collectively sought to raise the profile and status of State Registered Nurse number 1.