The Nightingale Shore Murder

Death of a World War One Heroine

Rosemary Cook
For my son-in-law Mike Blackburn, who writes today’s crime stories
Acknowledgements

For this second edition, I am especially grateful to Jeremy Stone for his continuing pursuit of information on this story about his distant relative, Florence Shore. Many thanks also to Raymond Davies, who solved the mystery of Annie Shore, Florence’s step-mother, and shared the information with Jeremy and I. I am also grateful to the Dringhouses Local History Group, and the Bishopthorpe Local History Group, for additional information about Middlethorpe Hall and the Wilkinson family.

Even more archivists and researchers helped with this edition, and I would like to thank the following:

• Jane Bass, Archive Assistant, Essex Local Archives
• David Capus, Review Manager, Metropolitan Police Service
• Holly Carter-Chappell, Collections Assistant, Florence Nightingale Museum
• Lydia Dean, Archives Assistant, the Borthwick Institute, York
• Dr Tommy Dickinson, Senior Lecturer in Mental Health Nursing, University of Chester
• Colin Gale, Bethlam Royal Hospital
• Karim Hussain, The National Archives
• Helen Ostell, Neighbourhood Delivery Officer, Greater Manchester County Record Office
• Dr Sue Proctor, Diocesan Secretary, Diocese of Ripon and Leeds
• Tom Richardson, Archive Assistant, North Yorkshire County Records Office
• Nigel Taylor, The National Archives
• Christopher White, Visitor Services Assistant, the National Railway Museum

Special thanks go to descendants of the Hobkirk family for generously sharing their information, pictures and family letters, which contributed so richly to this book.

In particular I am very grateful to Jeremy Stone, great-grandson of Clarence Hobkirk, who sought me out to offer assistance, and who has used his expertise as a former Detective Chief Inspector in the Royal Hong Kong police to comment on the investigation into Florence Shore’s murder. Also many thanks to Julia Lisle, who scanned family pictures and letters for me, and sent them through from Australia.

I must also thank Reid Paskiewicz and Erika Nelson from the United States, for sharing a copy of Patrick Paskiewicz’s unpublished book about Florence Shore with me, following Patrick’s death.

Thank you to my partner Alison and my daughter Kate for reading the early draft, proof-reading, re-organising and improving. Any remaining blips are my own.

The research for this book was greatly assisted by a Monica Baly Bursary granted by the Royal College of Nursing in 2010, for which I am very grateful.

I have received very valuable help and assistance from numerous archivists, researchers and others at record offices and archives around the country. I would like to thank the following for their efforts and their interest in my research:

• Dhimati Acharya, Information Librarian, East Sussex County Council, Bexhill Library
• Kevin Austen, Editor, Merstham Town website
• Matthew Bradby, Marketing and Communications Manager, The Queen’s Nursing Institute, who first found the story of the nurse murdered on a train
I would also like to thank the Hastings and St Leonards Observer for permission to reproduce the photographs of the train guards and the train compartment that was the scene of the attack, in publicity for this book.
Preface to the Second Book

Two things have inspired me to publish a second edition of this book.

The first was the discovery of new information on the story, including the solution to the mystery of Annie Shore, Florence Shore’s young stepmother; and the discovery of a cache of Florence’s medals, amazingly reunited many years after her death.

The second was the growing realisation of how important Florence and other Queen’s Nurses were to the nursing effort of the First World War. In these anniversary years of the Great War, I have been uncovering more and more evidence of the breathtaking heroism and dedication of these nurses. They trained to care for the poor in ordinary British homes, then willingly transferred their skills to makeshift front-line military hospitals, and the ravaged villages of occupied Europe. In tribute to them, I have included more of their stories in the chapters about the War.

This expanded and updated edition also includes more on Florence’s connections to two other famous nurses, Ethel Bedford Fenwick, who fought for thirty years to have nurse training standardised and nurses formally regulated; and Edith Cavell, who was executed for helping soldiers escape from Belgium, and who also had a connection with the Queen’s Nursing Institute.

And in trying to solve the mystery at the heart of this story – who murdered Florence Nightingale Shore – I include the latest information on my search for the elusive murder file which would tell us so much about what the police suspected, even if they could not make a case in court.

Rosemary Cook
York, July 2014
Prologue

The Woman on the Train

It was the first stage in a murder so unlikely and audacious that the first three witnesses on the scene did not even realise it had happened.

The London to Hastings express train had stopped at Polegate Junction, near Bexhill in Sussex, just after five o’clock in the afternoon. It was Monday 12th January, 1920, a dark, rainy evening, and the three railway workmen who climbed into the third class compartment were thinking only of getting home. One had a bad cold. One was on his way back from a funeral. None of them was initially alarmed at what they saw in the carriage.

There was a woman sitting upright in the corner seat on the far side of the carriage, facing the engine. She was warmly dressed in a fur coat, with her luggage at her feet and on the seat beside her. She was leaning back against the cushioned seat, with an open book resting on a newspaper in her lap. The quiet normality of her posture hid the fact that she had horrific head wounds, her clothing was saturated with blood and she was barely conscious. Somewhere between London Victoria and Polegate Junction, someone had hit her with sufficient violence to fracture her skull in three places through her fur hat.

The woman was fifty five years old – it was two days after her birthday – and her name was Florence Nightingale Shore.

It was unusual to name a child Florence in the early 19th century, according to Cecil Woodham Smith’s biography of the nursing icon Florence Nightingale. Fifty years later, when Florence Nightingale was famous for her work in the field hospitals of the Crimean War, this was no longer the case. Birth records show that hundreds of girls were called Florence in the latter half of the century, and some were given both of the famous names as forenames. Florence Nightingale Shore was one of them.

But this Florence was not just named in tribute to the most famous nurse of them all. She was related to her, being both a relative and god-daughter of Florence Nightingale. And she was also a nurse, with a distinguished career of her own. In fact, Florence Shore’s life, before the savage attack on the Hastings train, was full of adventure. Her childhood was marked by family crises and scandals. The travels that brought her to Bexhill had previously taken her to Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, France, Germany and even China. She had nursed in the South African War and in the First World War, where the French African soldiers she cared for called her the ‘White Queen’.

This true story of Florence’s life and death is both a tragedy and a mystery. A tragedy because she did not need to be on that train, or in that carriage, at that time. A mystery because, although the police knew who must have killed her, they could not find him, or put a name to him. It is an unsolved murder that involved Scotland Yard detectives, Dr Bernard Spilsbury, the famous Home Office pathologist, and a bizarre link to Percy Topliss, the ‘Monocled Mutineer’. Now, ninety years after the event, a shocking new theory about the killing has been proposed. And an entirely new suspect has emerged from the research for this book, as a candidate for the mysterious ‘man in the brown suit’ that the police were desperate to find.

This is also the story of Florence Shore’s enduring friendship with another nurse, Mabel Rogers, which lasted more than 25 years, from their meeting during nurse training to Florence’s death. The two were perhaps part of the luckiest generation of women. They were born in the middle of the Victorian era,
into a time of long dresses, stifling manners and total subservience to the men in their families and in society. By the end of their lives, they could make their own living in a respectable profession, and join the men in the war zones of Europe and beyond. The emancipation of women made the development of professional nursing possible; and nursing provided emancipated women with the most extreme test of their desire to be and do something meaningful and challenging.

For Florence and Mabel, of course, it was not history in the making. It was personal adventure, excitement and ultimately tragedy. The beginning of the end came after the assault on Florence, when Mabel Rogers was summoned from London to a hospital in Hastings, late in the evening of 12th January, to sit at her friend’s hospital bedside.
Chapter 1

The Train to Hastings

It was Mabel Rogers who had inadvertently led to Florence to her death. She had accompanied her to Victoria Station in London on the afternoon of Monday 12th January, and chosen her compartment on the train to Hastings.

Florence had been living at Carnforth Lodge, the Hammersmith nurses’ home of which Mabel was Superintendent, since her return to London from war service in France in November 1919. The Home, in Queen Street, was both the residence and the working base for the local ‘Queen’s Nurses’ – district nurses who had trained under the auspices of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Institute for Nurses. Mabel and Florence were both Queen’s Nurses, though Florence was not working following her return from France. A photograph of the two women shows that they looked strikingly similar. Both had dark hair, worn swept up, a broad brow and a straight nose. Florence’s face is a little more rounded than Mabel’s rather square jaw, and her eyes are slightly hooded under curving eyebrows. Mabel’s eyes are larger, under straight brows. Both women have wide mouths, and Mabel’s chin is more prominent and firmer. Each wears the same high collared style of dress with a pin at the neck, and they are wearing their Queen’s Nurse badges on neck chains: Florence’s is the bronze of a qualified QN, Mabel’s the larger silver badge of a Superintendent. Florence was a small woman, only five feet three inches in height, and she was dressed for the journey, on the cold January afternoon, in a fur coat over her long dress, with hat and gloves.

Florence had spent the previous day, Sunday, with an aunt and cousin in Tonbridge in Kent, returning to Hammersmith in the evening. Her plan on the Monday was to travel from London to St Leonards Warrior Square Station, via Hastings, to spend a week with friends in the town. Mabel accompanied Florence from Hammersmith to Victoria Station for the start of her journey. They arrived at the station just after three o’clock, and Mabel selected a carriage for her friend – a third class, non-smoking compartment in the last carriage. By unfortunate chance, Florence had been turned away from a different carriage which she would have shared with another female passenger. Florence wanted a corner seat: the woman already in the carriage told her that, although currently unoccupied, the corner seat was taken. So Florence and Mabel moved on, and Mabel found her friend a corner seat in an empty compartment of the next carriage.

Florence’s third class ticket did not mean that she would travel in poor conditions. The service to Hastings was operated by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, which ran services along three routes, together forming a triangle: from London to Portsmouth and London to Hastings, and along the South Coast in between. In common with most of the other 100 or so train companies, the LB&SCR had abolished second class carriages, leaving only first and third. Competition for passengers between the different railway companies had led to increasing comfort and amenities to attract travellers, in both classes of carriage.

In the early days of train travel, the cheapest seats were in open trucks or goods wagons with no windows. A terrible accident when a train ran into a landslip in 1841 and eight passengers were killed led to roofs being added to the third class trucks. As passenger numbers increased, some express trains initially had no third class, as these services were aimed at the better off passenger. Then the Midland Railway put third class carriages onto its express trains in 1872, albeit with hard wooden benches. Three years later, the company abolished second class and the third class carriages had upholstered seats and
partitions to create compartments. By the 1880s, electric lighting was beginning to replace gas, and lavatories and dining cars were more common in the express trains. Trains were heated by steam pipes running through the carriages, replacing the metal box portable foot warmers that had to be topped up with hot water at stations. Train travel was becoming ever more comfortable, though the traveller’s experience still varied widely depending on the line, class and purpose of the journey. From 1908, the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway ran a famous service called the ‘Southern Belle’, with seven luxurious ‘Pullman’ carriages behind its steam locomotives, providing a fast and enjoyable journey to the seaside at Brighton for day trippers and weekenders from London.

More routine and local services had much more basic carriages, though there was always great pride in the LB&SCR steam locomotives which pulled the coaches. Early versions of the passenger locomotives were painted in a dark green livery, with fine red and gold lines. Towards the turn of the century, this was changed to ‘Improved Engine Green’ – universally described as a mustard colour, rather than green, and the invention of William Stroudley, Locomotive Superintendent of the company. It has been suggested that he was either colour-blind, or cunning: deliberately describing his new yellow as ‘improved green’ to convince his company’s board to make the change.

Behind this smart locomotive, the third class carriage that Florence travelled in was comfortable enough. Outside, it was painted in plain umber, with the company’s initials in gold-shaded black lettering. Inside, the upholstery was sprung or stuffed with horsehair, and buttoned. The walls were panelled with wood, heating was from steam pipes, and the carriage was lit by gaslight. There was a rack overhead for luggage, and a window in each side which could be opened by a leather strap. There was no door handle on the inside: passengers had to lower the window to reach the outside handle, or wait for the guard on the platform to open the door. There was a communication cord which ran between compartments to allow passengers to alert the guard to any problems. Seasoned travellers from this period described the smell of the train as a mix of the coal from the engine – with a different smell in different counties, depending where the coal came from – and gas from the carriage lights.

In 1920, however, the railways were in a state of flux, the consequences of which may have had a direct effect on Florence’s journey. From the opening of the first railways – the Stockton to Darlington line in 1825, and the Liverpool to Manchester line in 1830 – to the early years of the 20th century, there had been decades of expansion, experimentation, competition and development. New technologies for engines, carriages and the wheeled ‘bogies’ on which they travelled, track building, braking systems and signalling had been invented, refined, introduced and replaced. Speed records were set and broken, and new forms of heating, lighting and furnishing of carriages were regularly introduced. All long distance express trains had corridors allowing all passengers – even in third class – access to toilets and the dining cars. From a dangerous if heroic novelty, the railways had become a huge industry, burgeoning with competing companies, advertising campaigns and related businesses such as hotels and omnibuses to complete the journey.

Then, when war was declared in 1914, the Government took over the railways. Throughout the war, a Railway Executive Committee, made up of the general managers of the ten leading rail companies under the direction of the Board of Trade, managed the country’s rail system. Under the Committee’s direction, the railways played a major role in transporting troops and war goods from 1914 onwards. A report in The Railway Gazette in 1919 shows the staggering strain put on the LB&SCR by this work:

‘In common with other railways, the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway was called upon to do important service in connection with the war.

The immediate selection of Newhaven, and some months later of Littlehampton (at one time used
for the company’s Continental services) as ports of embarkation for munitions and war stores, brought a concentrated and continuous traffic over the railway from all parts of the country. All kinds of munitions, military stores and foodstuffs, coming for the most part from the places of production, were carried over the railway as goods traffic, and up to the present the quantity conveyed to these two ports amounts to 6,805,810 tons, while a substantial tonnage passed over the line to other places on the railway.

The number of special trains which were run in connection with this traffic was 53,376. The largest number of loaded special trains dealt with in any one day was 64. The number of loaded wagons handled at Newhaven and Littlehampton was close on 1,000,000. A considerable quantity of war traffic was, of course, also conveyed by ordinary goods trains...

The passenger train traffic, although it did not equal the goods traffic in volume, was considerable, and comprised the conveyance of troops to and from the Army camps on the system or to join the Armies abroad. A large number of horses, guns and stores were also conveyed. A substantial part of this business was dealt with by the ordinary passenger train services, but 27,366 special passenger trains were employed in addition. This makes an aggregate number of 80,742 special passenger and goods trains used for the purpose of the war, and if the running had been constant there would have been a train for every half hour from the day war broke out until the day the armistice was signed.'

By the time the railways were handed back to the companies after the war, they had been working for many years at a rate, and in a role, which had never been anticipated. The railway companies complained that they were not adequately compensated for the impact of this war work on their rolling stock, and the lack of maintenance during this time. While they caught up with the backlog, a shortage of stock led to the withdrawal of restaurant cars, and the re-introduction of older forms of carriage, such as those with non-corridor compartments, especially on the suburban routes.

Non-corridor compartments meant that passengers could not change compartments once the journey had started, except at station stops. Florence’s compartment had no corridor, and so no escape route. Her train was not the luxurious Brighton Belle, with its Pullman carriages and electric lighting. It was an ordinary gas-lit compartment, with a single door on each side leading only to the platform or the track. Perhaps if there had been a corridor on the train, Florence might have moved from her original compartment – or been able to escape from it when she needed to. Perhaps the person who attacked her would have been afraid to do so if he thought he could be discovered at any minute by passengers from a neighbouring carriage. For although the compartment had been empty when Florence and Mabel first joined the train at Victoria, just before the train left they were joined by another passenger.

Mabel had stepped into the carriage with Florence to pass the time until the train was due to leave. They had arrived just after three o’clock in the afternoon, and the scheduled departure time was twenty past three. So after finding the compartment, Mabel put Florence’s suitcase under the seat, leaving her with a large dispatch box, her umbrella and a black silk handbag. Florence, still wearing her fur coat and hat, took the corner seat on the ‘off-side’ – furthest from the platform – facing the engine. She and Mabel talked until a few minutes before twenty past three. That was when a man opened the train door and joined them in the compartment, closing the door behind him. He looked about 28 years old, and was five feet seven or eight inches tall, clean shaven and of slight build. He wore a brown suit of a light cloth, and, unusually on a cold January afternoon, he had no overcoat. He also appeared to have no luggage. Mabel said goodbye to Florence, opened the door and returned to the platform. This would be her last
conversation with her friend of more than 25 years. Mabel waited on the platform, looking in at the window, which was open, until the train moved away.

The train leaving Victoria was a long one, made up of 10 carriages behind the steam locomotive. Although usually crowded, especially in mid-week and at weekends, on this Monday afternoon in January the train was not busy. The journey was non-stop to Lewes in East Sussex, though the train slowed to 30 miles per hour to pass through Gatwick and Three Bridges, to the north and east of Crawley. The route continued through the Balcombe Forest and over the Ouse Valley viaduct, through Hayward’s Heath, Burgess Hill and on down to Lewes. After Lewes, the next stop was Polegate Junction, where the train divided; four carriages would go on to Bexhill and then Hastings, from where Florence planned to continue her journey to Warrior Square station in St Leonards. The remainder of the train would travel on to Eastbourne. It was at Bexhill station, however, that the train staff were finally alerted to the fact that this journey was no longer routine. Something terrible had happened in one of the third class carriages.
Chapter 2

What happened at Bexhill

Bexhill, a seaside town just 10 minutes from the journey’s end, was the last scheduled stop for the train before Hastings. The guard on the Hastings train was Henry James Duck, known as Harry, from the nearby town of St Leonards: Florence’s ultimate destination. Duck had been in charge of the train from Victoria, accompanied by Guard George Walters, and Guard Herriet. A photograph of the three men, who were to be key players in the events that followed, shows them each wearing the long dark jackets of the LB&SCR uniform, with a double row of brass buttons and the company’s initials on the collar. Each wears a watch-chain across the front of the jacket, and a peaked cap with the company badge on the front. Duck and Herriet wear traditional neckties; Walters has a bow tie. Henry Duck has a heavy dark moustache and heavy eyebrows.

When the train divided at Polegate Junction, Duck was in charge of the Hastings portion. He signalled to the guard on the Eastbourne train that all was well when his part of the train was ‘slipped’ just before Polegate, and stepped off the train at the station to check on his carriages. He saw nothing out of the ordinary during this stop. Although he did not notice it at the time, three railway workers – George Clout, Ernest Thomas and William Ransom, all platelayer’s labourers employed by the LB&SCR – had joined the train at Polegate. They had taken seats in the same third class compartment as Florence. Once on the move again, the train took another 15 minutes to reach its next stop, at Bexhill.

It was twenty past five in the afternoon, two hours after leaving London, when the Hastings train pulled in to Bexhill station. On that early January afternoon, it was already nearly dark, and it was raining. The guard Harry Duck later described it as a ‘dark and dirty night’; and he inspected the train by the light of his hand-held lamp. There were no lamps at all at Lewes station, and unlikely to have been any at the smaller Bexhill station, where Harry Duck again stepped onto the platform to check on passengers leaving and joining the train, and to make sure that all the doors were shut for departure. This time, however, the stop was not routine. On the platform, the guard was approached by George Clout, one of the platelayers who had joined the train 15 minutes earlier at Polegate Junction. ‘Have you seen that woman back there?’ he asked Duck. ‘She is in a deplorable state.’ Duck looked into the carriage the man was referring to, and saw Florence alone inside, sitting in her corner seat facing the engine. When he got into the carriage, he could see immediately that she had terrible head injuries.

The platelayers had not realised at first that the lady who they thought was asleep or reading was in fact barely conscious. The carriage was dimly lit, and they would have thought it impolite to stare at a lady passenger. George Clout, who came from Bexhill himself and was on his way home, said that he only began to think that something was wrong about a mile out of Polegate station, when he noticed blood on the lady passenger’s face. He mentioned it to William Ransom, saying he thought that the lady had had ‘a nasty knock’. But Ransom’s hearing was affected by a heavy cold and he did not hear the comment. The remark was heard by the other platelayer, Ernest Thomas: he looked across, but in the poor lighting, he could not tell whether the blood was wet or dry.

Henry Duck made a hurried inspection of the carriage, and saw no obvious signs of a struggle. Florence was sitting in her corner seat with an open book on her lap, and her hat on the seat beside her on top of a small case. The only anomalies were a newspaper, partly on the seat and partly on the floor,
which had blood on it; and Florence’s glasses, which were on the floor.

Instinctively, Duck spoke to the injured woman, asking ‘However did you come by these injuries?’ – but he got no reply. He thought however that the injured woman had heard him, as he later gave evidence that ‘she turned her eyes round’. Other evidence given by the platelayers at the inquest would corroborate this, and raise the disturbing possibility that Florence was still partly conscious at that point, at least an hour after the attack, but unable to call for help. In view of the seriousness of her injuries, the guard made the decision not to remove Florence from the train at Bexhill. Instead, he took the train on to Hastings, while George Walters stayed with Florence in the compartment. At Hastings, she was carried from the train to an ambulance, and taken to the hospital in the town. According to one newspaper report, one of Florence’s friends from St Leonards was at Hastings station to meet her, and saw her carried unconscious from the train.

It was only after the train had arrived at Hastings that Duck became aware of the blood spatters on the back of the seat, and some marks on the floor that he thought might also have been bloodstains. He also did not know at this stage that some of Florence’s clothing was torn, including her undergarments. Something appalling had obviously happened in the blood-stained carriage; and as a seasoned railwayman, Harry Duck must have immediately wondered if it had taken place while the train was in the Merstham Tunnel.
Chapter 3

The Merstham Tunnel

If the Brighton Belle was one of LB&SCR’s proud claims to fame, the Merstham tunnel was a much less desirable one. It had already drawn the attention of the police on two separate occasions, because two other savage murders had taken place in trains on this same piece of track.

The train passed through the Merstham tunnel in the early stages of the journey south, between Purley and Redhill in Surrey. The tunnel was completed in the late 1830s by the London and Brighton Railway company. It is 1 mile 71 yards (1.67km) long, and takes the track through part of the North Downs, north of the town of Merstham. A locomotive travelling at 60 miles per hour would spend just over one minute in the tunnel; at a more sedate 30 mph, little more than two. Time enough, however, for serious crimes to take place on trains passing through.

The more recent of the two previous murder victims on the Brighton Line was Mary Sophia Money, whose body was discovered in the Merstham tunnel on 24 September, 1905. Her story is told on the town’s website:

‘In late September 1905 in the mile long tunnel just north of Merstham Station a horrific discovery was made when a member of the permanent way, William Peacock, found the mutilated body of a young woman, later identified as Mary Sophia Money, about 400 yards into the tunnel. This is thought to be the first recorded murder on a train in England. Finding the body was still warm Peacock hurried back to the station to report his discovery to the stationmaster. The police were called to the scene and when they examined the area they decided that the death was a suicide. They figured that the young woman had wandered into the tunnel and been hit by a passing train. This theory changed when the tunnel wall next to where the body lay was examined. A number of marks were found where the soot had been rubbed off. The highest of these marks was at about the level of a person standing up in a railway carriage. It seemed certain that Mary had fallen from a passing train. A discovery, which turned the theory from suicide into murder, was that forced firmly into the unfortunate Mary’s mouth was a white silk scarf. It became obvious that she had been pushed from the train and had not jumped. The body was removed to The Feathers Hotel in the High Street where a local doctor, Henry Crickett, examined it. Apart from the obvious injuries, Dr. Crickett’s examination revealed several bruises and scratches to body, arms and face which he considered may have been caused during a struggle with the murderer, prior to her being thrown from the carriage. No means of identification was found on the body. As the body was still warm when discovered, it was reasoned that she must have been thrown from the train within an hour of William Peacock finding her and the position of the body showed that she had come out of a southbound train. On the afternoon of the following day, Monday 25th September, the mystery of the girl’s identity was solved, when Robert Henry Money, a dairy farmer from Kingston Hill, viewed the body. The body was that of his sister, Mary Sophia Money, aged 22, a bookkeeper at Bridger’s Dairy, Clapham Junction. Mary Money had gone out at about seven o’clock that evening saying she would take a little walk and would not be long. Emma Hone, another employee at Bridger’s Dairy, had no knowledge of any male friends that Mary might have been going to meet. She said that Mary had taken her black knitted cotton purse, which Emma thought was well filled
with money, for Mary had just been paid. The purse was never recovered. A few minutes after leaving home, Mary called at Frances Golding’s sweet shop at 2 Station Approach, Clapham Junction where bought some chocolates in a white cardboard box. She told Frances Golding that she was going to Victoria. She appeared happy and left the shop laughing. Suspicion fell on a number of possible admirers named by Mary’s brother Robert. He claimed to have last seen his sister on that date but there seemed no question that he was involved in the crime. What really did happen to Mary Money on the evening of Sunday 24th September 1905? This is left only to supposition. She seems to have had every intention of keeping a rendezvous with someone, presumably of the opposite sex, at Victoria that evening. A signalman who was in charge of the Purley Oaks Signal Box north of Merstham Tunnel recalled that as the London Bridge train passed, he remembered seeing a couple standing up in a first class compartment. They appeared to be struggling. It seems possible that during this struggle, Mary Money began to scream, her attacker then pushed her scarf into her mouth to silence her and, when the train was in the tunnel, he opened the door and threw her out into the darkness and to her grisly death. The guard of the train reported that he had seen a couple in a first class compartment when his train stopped at East Croydon. His description of the woman fitted that of Mary Money. At Redhill the couple had gone and the guard thought he saw the man but not the woman leaving the station. Over 100 interviews were taken and many railway carriages examined but no arrest was ever made.

The mystery remains unsolved but there is a postscript. Seven years later, in August 1912, at a house in Eastbourne, Mary Money’s brother, Robert, shot two sisters and their three children, of whom he was the father, poured petrol on the bodies, set light to them then turned the gun on himself. One of the women managed, however, to escape despite being wounded. Was this the result of a twisted mind turned by the memories of the earlier killing of his sister, Mary?’

The earlier murder on the line, in June 1881, was also a brutal affair, this time involving a victim who was both stabbed and shot. And on this occasion, part of the crime was witnessed by a woman in a cottage close to the railway line, just before it entered the Merstham tunnel. William Owen Gay, former Chief Constable of British Transport Police, wrote up the story for the British Transport Police Journal:

‘When the 2pm train from London Bridge arrived at Preston Park Station just outside Brighton on the afternoon of Monday 27 June 1881, a ticket collector saw a man step unsteadily on to the platform from a first class carriage. He was covered in blood, hatless, without a collar and tie, and very distressed. The collector went to his assistance and he told the collector that he had been attacked just before the train entered Merstham Tunnel. He gave a description of two men who had travelled in the same compartment and said that after receiving a blow on the head he remembered nothing more until the train reached Preston Park. The collector saw nobody else alight from the compartment but he observed that a piece of watch chain was hanging from one of the man’s boots. He pointed this out and the passenger remarked that he had put it there for safety. The condition of this strange and somewhat battered passenger, who gave his name as Percy Mapleton Lefroy, was such that the station master arranged for the platform inspector to take him to the police station at the Town Hall, while the collector was sent to advise the railway police. Thereafter the situation developed in such a way that the obtuseness of the railway officials and of the borough and railway police became the subject of editorial comment in The Times while other newspapers said unkind things in less polite terms.

Lefroy made an official complaint at the police station and was then taken to the county hospital
for his injuries to be treated. The doctor wanted to detain him but Lefroy insisted upon returning to London where he had an important engagement (although he had only just arrived in Brighton). However, he went to the police station first (buying a collar and tie on the way) and was interviewed by several officers, including the chief constable. Lefroy made a statement and also generously offered a reward for the capture of his assailant. He then went to Brighton station and at this stage somebody seems to have been a little suspicious because he was taken into an office and searched. Two old (counterfeit) coins were found in his possession. He denied all knowledge of these.

In the meantime the carriage was shunted into a siding and an examination made. Three bullet marks were found and there was blood everywhere – on the footboard, mat, door handle, and also on a handkerchief and newspaper left in the compartment. There was, in fact, every sign of a fierce struggle. There were also some coins similar to those found on Lefroy.

In spite of obvious inconsistencies in his story and of the highly suspicious circumstances, neither the Brighton Police, nor the railway police considered it necessary to detain Lefroy. But they were uneasy and although Lefroy was permitted to join a London train, arrangements were made for him to be accompanied by a detective named George Holmes.

At this period some of the railway undertakings, including the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, supplemented their own police staff by the employment of Metropolitan Police officers who were seconded by Scotland Yard for the purpose. The salaries of these officers were paid to Scotland Yard by the railways concerned. Detective Sergeant George Holmes was one of these officers and the widespread criticism of his negligence in this case caused Scotland Yard to disown him by issuing a public statement to the effect that he had been a Metropolitan Police officer for eleven years but was now working for the railway. It is always easy to be wise after the event but perhaps poor Holmes was a little slow as will be seen.

While Lefroy and Holmes were travelling back to London a search of the line was organised. In Balcombe Tunnel, railway staff found the body of an elderly man, later identified as a retired corn merchant named Gold, who lived in Brighton. Gold had been shot and stabbed and near his body was found a knife smeared with blood. It was soon learned that he had been robbed of his watch and chain and a considerable sum of money. The news of the finding of the body was passed along the line and at Three Bridges the station master told Holmes what had happened. Holmes was also instructed by telegram from Brighton not to let Lefroy out of his sight. Lefroy had recovered his balance by this time and on the pretext that he wanted to change his clothes he talked Holmes into accompanying him to an address at Wallington, Surrey where a relative kept a boarding house. They arrived at the house at 9.30pm and Holmes waited outside. He waited a long time because, while his attention was otherwise engaged, Lefroy left the house and disappeared.

A countrywide search was made for Lefroy and his description was published in all the papers. The Daily Telegraph made newspaper history by publishing the portrait of a wanted man for the first time. As usual, men answering the description were seen all over the country and one man was arrested but later released. A conference was held at London Bridge Station and all the railway staff involved were questioned by detective officers. The inquest on Gold was opened on 29 June and lasted several days. Holmes and other officers had a bad time in the witness box and a verdict of wilful murder against Lefroy was returned. The railway company then offered a substantial reward for information leading to his arrest.

Great interest was taken by the public in the daily hue and cry for the missing Lefroy and at last on
8 July he was found in a house at 32 Smith Street, Stepney, where he was lodging in the name of Park. He had kept the blinds down in his room all day and gone out only at night. Bloodstained clothing was found in his room and since he had already been identified as a man who had exchanged some counterfeit coins and also pawned a revolver, the evidence against him was overwhelming. He was a journalist by profession and a plausible type. When arrested, he said: “I am not obliged to say anything and I think it better not to make any answer.” The arresting officer wrote this down in his note book and read it over to Lefroy who added: “I will qualify that by saying I am not guilty.”

Lefroy appeared at Cuckfield Police Court and in due course was tried at Maidstone Assizes before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge. The jury found him guilty after a retirement of ten minutes. Evidence was given by a number of railway witnesses including Holmes, the booking clerk who issued a ticket to Lefroy, the guard of the train, the ticket collector at Preston Park, and also by a woman living at Horley who saw two men struggling violently in a train as it passed her cottage.

Lefroy (whose real name was Mapleton) was hanged at Lewes on 29 November, 1881. At the time of the murder he was desperately short of money and went to London Bridge for the purpose of robbing a passenger. He had hoped to find a lady who would yield to threats but he met a courageous old gentleman who compelled him to murder. Lefroy was a poor specimen and incredibly vain. He asked for permission to wear full evening dress in court because he thought it would impress the jury. He was allowed to take his silk hat and took more interest in this than he did in the proceedings.

It was a long time before the press and public forgot the strange lapse of the officials concerned in the case. The LBSC railway was subjected to a great deal of ridicule and no doubt many police officers were urged to take greater care in future. But they had little cause to worry because it was sixteen years before the next murder on the railway.’

It is impossible to know whether these two murderers deliberately chose the opportunity of the train passing through the Merstham tunnel to attack their victims. As railway carriages were lit, if only dimly, the tunnel could not provide the cover of darkness. But it would have provided cover for the noise of an assault and subsequent struggle, with the rattle of the bogies on the tracks and the roar of the steam engine in the confined space of the tunnel combining to drown out other sounds.

Trains may only have spent a few minutes in the Merstham tunnel, but it was long enough for terrible crimes to be committed there. Later it would be suggested that the tunnel may also have been the scene of the assault on Florence Shore.
Chapter 4

At Hastings hospital

In Hastings, the circumstances of the attack on Florence were not yet under discussion: people were more concerned with saving her life.

The hospital to which Florence had been taken was well-established in the town. It had opened 80 years before as the East Sussex, Hastings and St Leonards Infirmary, funded by subscriptions from local benefactors, and changed its name to the East Sussex Hospital in 1910. It stood in White Rock Road, less than a mile from the railway station. This was a bonus for the transfer of the seriously-injured woman from the railway station; but not a popular location with local people. The Hastings Mail in 1904 had written of the ‘egregious blunder made in erecting such a building in the very centre of a parade especially constructed to attract pleasure seekers ... The discreditable wire-pulling and jealousies and rivalries which resulted in completing the adornment of the parade by erecting a hospital ... out of place.’ The committee which ran the institution had been planning a new hospital on a new site for more than a decade; but building had been delayed by the First World War, and it would not open until 1923.

The doctor who received Florence at the hospital was less well-established. Miss Annie Elizabeth Eveline Beattie – known as Bertha – was an Irishwoman from County Donegal, who had graduated from Queen’s College Belfast less than two years previously, in July 1918. She was one of a very small number of female doctors in practice at the time: a sample of the Medical Register for 1919 suggests that only around four per cent of doctors on the register in that year were women.

The 1876 Medical Act had made it possible for women in the UK to train as doctors, after much pressure and persistence from women pioneers such as Elizabeth Blackwell from the United States, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in London and Sophia Jex-Blake in Edinburgh. They had fought to be allowed to study medicine at University in the 1850s and 60s, either by attending lectures or receiving private tuition, but been unable to graduate or practice in the UK, as they were not allowed to work on the wards. Blackwell graduated from the Charleston Medical School in New York, and Anderson from the University of Paris; while Jex-Blake got her licence to practice from the Dublin College of Physicians after training in Edinburgh but being barred from practising on the wards. Even after the Medical Act became law, some Universities still refused to accept women as medical students. Where places were available, women continued to face prejudice and opposition in taking them up.

Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that both Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Jex-Blake were instrumental in founding medical schools specifically for women in London and Edinburgh, in 1874 and 1886. Opposition to women as doctors persisted for many decades in spite of this: one University in London even reverted to banning women students, at the insistence of their male students, early in the 20th century. As late as 1922, the Daily Mail published a piece by a hospital lecturer casting doubt on the future for women doctors, under the headline ‘Is the woman doctor wanted?’

‘The problem of the woman medical student’ he wrote, ‘does not consist in questions of delicacy in lecturing. There is no embarrassment involved in the lecturing to mixed classes on the physiology of reproduction, nor on the diseases and accidents incidental to the reproductive functions, nor even in the demonstration of patients suffering from such diseases and accidents. A certain delicacy in thought and language is called for. Undoubtedly in the past some teachers
have been prone to consider that audiences of men students were amused by a flavour of coarseness in the discussion of subjects which since the time of Rabelais had been thus flavoured. Times have changed; even the men students look upon lecturers of this kind as survivals from a less civilised past.

Women students have compelled us teachers to abandon the rustic Rabelaisian humour as well as the leering suggestiveness of Stern. The teaching of medicine has not suffered, nor are the teachers or the taught a penny the worse off...

But those problems of delicacy are not those that cause some of us our chief anxiety. There is no little difficulty in finding employment for newly qualified women. Rightly or wrongly they shrink from going into private practice. A few seek the mission field or work among the women of India. The majority however look to Government and municipal service to provide them with whole time appointments and fixed salaries. If they are successful in creating a demand for their services in anything like extent to which they are prepared to offer these services, the wages of a woman doctor will approximate to those of a well-trained stenographer-typist.

Women students and their parents will be well advised carefully to consider the prospects that the medical profession offers before embarking on the long and costly training required for qualification. There is room for a few exceptional woman doctors. Is there a living for women of average ability? The difficulties my own students are encountering in finding work of any description at all makes me wonder.

Meanwhile, the Queen’s University of Belfast, under its previous name of Queen’s College Belfast (which gave degrees from the then Royal University of Ireland), admitted women to all faculties from the academic year 1889-90. The College President, Thomas Hamilton, noted in his Report for that year that medical classes ‘were this year for the first time thrown open to ladies, five of whom availed themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them of preparing for Medical degrees.’ With two women enrolled in art classes, the seven women pioneers at Queen’s University were Margaret Anderson, Eliza Bell (who would graduate with a medical degree in 1893), Rebecca Galway, Henriette Neill (graduated 1894), Lilian Powell (1895), Martha Stewart and Margaret Bell: University records do not show which were the other two medical students in the group.

Dr Beattie was still a relatively new house surgeon when she was called on to admit Florence Shore into the East Sussex Hospital. She found the injured woman semi-conscious, and unresponsive to questions, with three separate head wounds, all lacerated, bruised and bleeding. One was on the top of her head, shaped like an H, and had passed completely through the scalp in places. A second triangular wound on the left side of the head was two and half inches long. An area of bone was exposed beneath this wound. The third wound was curved, one and a quarter inches long. There was a large fracture of the skull, which could be felt as an indented area under the torn scalp. These horrific injuries meant that, by the end of that evening, Florence was deeply unconscious. In the days that followed she would require the best medical and nursing care that the hospital could offer as the staff fought to save her life.

Fortunately, medical care had made enormous strides in the early years of the twentieth century, transforming the nature of care that Florence could receive. One of the most significant developments was the identification of x-rays in 1896 (originally named ‘Roentgen rays’ after their discoverer Wilhelm Roentgen). They were rapidly developed as a diagnostic tool, and by 1913 were being used to try to spot
breast cancer tumours, amongst other things. During the 1900s, optical microscopes and staining techniques were being used to look at the structures of organisms, particularly infective ones. The first successful blood transfusion took place in 1905, and nine years later, blood was being treated with citrates to prevent it clotting and allow it to be stored. Electrocardiograms to monitor the electrical activity of the heart were invented by the Dutchman Willem Einthoven in 1906. Blood pressure measurement was rare in most countries before 1910, but by 1915, a large study by an insurance company in the United States had set the ‘normal’ values for blood pressure.

Blood tests had become routine by 1910, with samples centrifuged to separate out cells from plasma, allowing an estimation of the volume of red blood cells to identify anaemia and check volume following blood loss. At the beginning of the first World War, attempts were being made to design dressings which did not stick to wounds: pulling off dry dressings that had stuck to blood and pus was a sure way to damage the healing tissue underneath. Louis Lumiere, a French surgeon, invented ‘tulle gras’ in 1914 – a dressing made of cotton gauze coated with a mix of plant resin and paraffin wax to prevent adhesion – which would remain in use for another 50 years.

All of these developments were at the disposal of Florence’s doctors in the East Sussex Hospital in 1920, and would have been routine steps in her care. She may have had skull x-rays to determine the extent of the head injury and blood tests to find out how much blood had been lost. Nurses would have constantly monitored her blood pressure and pulse to spot signs of rising pressure on her brain that could lead to further deterioration. Non-adhesive dressings would have been required, and changed regularly, on the bleeding scalp wounds that overlay her more serious head injuries. On that first evening, however, with Florence’s condition so obviously life-threatening, it was clear that there was an urgent need to summon a relative or friend to the bedside. The person they called was Mabel Rogers.
Chapter 5

Young Florence Shore

Mabel Rogers was engaged in a different kind of tragedy on the evening of Monday 12th January: she was watching *Hamlet* at Covent Garden. There she was told, between acts, that a message had been received at Carnforth Lodge with news of the attack on Florence, and the terrible injuries that had left her in a coma in the East Sussex hospital. Mabel’s immediate reaction was to go to her friend, in spite of the hour and the difficulties of travelling alone at night. She caught the 11.20pm train from London, which could take her only as far as Tonbridge in Kent – the same town where Florence had visited her aunt the day before. From here, she drove to Hastings, arriving at the seaside town at three o’clock in the morning. She went straight to the hospital, where she was taken to see Florence, unconscious in bed. Mabel didn’t leave the hospital again until after Florence had died, four days later.

In the long hours at the hospital bedside, watching the nurses caring for Florence, Mabel must have been painfully reminded of all the years that she and Florence had worked together doing the same for their patients. They had met in 1894 in Edinburgh, where they had both chosen to do their nurse training. The Scottish capital would have been a bold choice of destination for Mabel, whose family was from Devon and who had gone to school in rural Oxfordshire. It was a more obvious destination for Florence, since it was her mother’s home city, and her father had trained there as a doctor.

Offley Bohun Shore, Florence’s father, was the fifth child and third son of another Offley Shore and his wife Eliza. He was also cousin to the father of Florence Nightingale, the pioneering nurse for whom Florence Shore would be named. It was Miss Nightingale’s father William who had changed the family’s name to Nightingale from Shore. As Florence’s aunt, Baroness Farina, pithily put it, ‘*The Nightingales were Shores, but changed their name when certain property was bequeathed to them.*’ The property in question was a very valuable bequest from Peter Nightingale, William’s great-uncle, commonly known as Mad Peter. In a letter to Florence Shore, Florence Nightingale would once comment that she was ‘very fond of the name Shore.’

The Shore family had come into the manor of Norton, four miles south of Sheffield, in the 17th century. In about 1666, the manor had been purchased by Cornelius Clarke of Ashgate. When he died, he bequeathed it to Robert Offley, his nephew, from Norwich. In 1751, Stephen Offley of Norton died without leaving children to inherit, and the manor of Norton became the property of Samuel Shore, who had married one of Stephen Offley’s sisters. Samuel had two sons, the eldest of whom, also called Samuel, married a woman called Harriet Foye of Castle Hill, Dorset. Their son Offley Shore inherited the manor: his son, Offley Bohun Shore, was Florence’s father.

The Shore family was well-known in the area, and involved in all kinds of local activities. Offley Shore senior – Florence’s grandfather – lived in Norton Hall as Lord of the Manor. The Manor was ‘a handsome stone mansion in a finely-wooded park’, and Norton itself ‘a small, well-built village, situated on an eminence ... a scattered parish, undulating and well-wooded, very fertile ground, with many herds of milch cows’, according to the local Directory. The area was noted for the manufacture of scythes, sickles, files and cutlery. Offley Shore senior was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Derbyshire in 1832. He lived the busy and varied life of a country gentleman, subscribing to sweepstakes at Chesterfield races, attending dinners and presentations with local MPs, and speaking at meetings about
the Corn Laws. He gave an annual gift of bread to the poor at Christmas, put up a prize of three guineas for 'the best stallion of the draught kind' at the local show, and was President of the North Derbyshire Agricultural Society. In 1841, he served on the Grand Jury hearing the case of the murder of the Earl of Chesterfield’s gamekeeper.

Offley Shore senior was also a business man, but not ultimately a successful one. His financial dealings would cause the family enormous problems and eventually lose them the manor which had been theirs for nearly 150 years.

In the 1830s, Shore sat on the provisional committee investing in the Sheffield, Ashton-under-Line & Manchester Railway. Proposed capital was £800,000 in 8,000 shares of £100 each. He was also on the provisional committee of the Sheffield & Midland Railway, with even higher capital; and he was an Honorary Director of The Farmers’ and General Fire and Life Insurance, Loan and Annuity Institution. With partners Hugh Parker, John Brewin and John Rogers, Shore was also a banker; and it was this, rather than speculation on the railways, that ruined him.

Parker Shore & Co. of Sheffield had been in business for more than 70 years, and two generations. Their bank was so highly-regarded in the area as ‘a legend of trustworthiness’ that a local saying grew up: ‘As sure as Shore’s bank’. But in 1843, the Sheffield Bank failed, and all the partners were bankrupted. Debts proved at the first meeting of creditors amounted to nearly £120,000, which was said to be around one third of the whole amount: an extraordinary amount of money, equivalent to many millions today. Among the creditors were many members of Offley Shore’s own family: Maria Shore, Urith Lydia Shore, Amelia Shore; and the Reverend George Brewin, Offley’s brother-in-law. In December 1843, following several stormy meetings with creditors and the appointment of assignees to oversee repayments, Shore appealed against the fiat of bankruptcy, but failed to get it overturned.

In 1845, a family home ‘late in occupation of Offley Shore’, was to let in Spondon; it had a coachhouse, stables and ‘good pleasure and kitchen gardens’. By the end of that decade, Norton Hall was unoccupied. In 1850, the Sheffield Freehold Land Society purchased 31 acres ‘forming a portion of the large domains of Offley Shore which have been brought to the hammer under an order from the Court of Chancery’. Shore was to remain in bankruptcy for at least 17 years, throughout the childhood of his youngest son Offley Bohun Shore. By the time he made his Will, however, in October 1867, he once again had various shares and sums of money to leave to his family.

The Will is a long and very complex handwritten document, containing lengthy explanations of how Offley Shore’s father, Samuel Shore, disposed of his property, and settled annuities on Eliza, Offley’s wife; perhaps in order to protect her from her husband’s financial problems. Offley’s Will makes detailed provision for the disposal and distribution of his own assets, principally to his three sons, Harrington Offley, Sydney Foy and Offley Bohun Shore. There is also a sentence informing his daughter, Caroline Stovin (she had married the Reverend Charles Stovin, from Surrey) that ‘it is not from any want of natural love and affection that I do not make any further provision for her by this my Will but because I consider she is most amply provided for and I am sure she will see the justice of this my Will in favour of her brothers ...’

In keeping with the complexity and changeable nature of the Shore fortunes, Offley felt the need to add a codicil to his Will, just nine days before he died, after he and his eldest son, Harrington, had sold an estate. This gave Harrington a large advantage in the value of the bequests, which Offley Shore senior sought to remedy by leaving another estate to be shared between the two younger sons. This last minute addition was witnessed by Benjamin Spawton and John Bisbey, respectively butler and coachman in the Shore household.
The final curious twist in this financial maze led to a statement being added to the Will and codicil by Spawton, and witnessed by a Commissioner of Oaths, two months later. This listed individually all the changes made to the Will; and confirmed that, though the two witnesses had not actually seen Offley Shore writing the changes and additions contained in the codicil, they were convinced that he had made them:

‘I make oath and say as follows that on the day on which the testator signed the said codicil and just before doing so he rang the bell for me and told me he wanted me and John Bisbey the other attesting witness to the codicil to see him sign the same at that time he was turning over the pages of the said codicil and he had a pen in his hand and though I did not actually see him make the alterations and interlineations above set forth I have no doubt whatever that he then and there made the said interlineations and alterations before he [unreadable] the said codicil.’

Was this just the deceased’s solicitor being over-cautious about a late codicil? Or had someone questioned the changes that altered the balance of bequests between the three brothers, and challenged the witnesses about whether these had truly been made by the old man so close to his death? There is no way of knowing. But with the death of Offley Shore, the Shore family’s destiny passed into the hands of the three brothers. Perhaps Caroline Stovin had cause eventually to be grateful that she was well provided for without her family’s support; because in less than ten years, two of the brothers had bankrupted the family again.

Yet the youngest son, Florence’s father Offley Bohun Shore, had entered a solid profession that held out the prospect of ready employment and a reasonable income. He studied at Edinburgh University and graduated as a Doctor of Medicine in 1860. He was entered onto the Medical Register of England for the first time in 1861; in fact, he was one of the first doctors to be required to register in this way, as a result of the 1858 Medical Registration Act. This was intended to impose some structure on the profession of medicine, which had evolved in several directions over the preceding few centuries.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, ‘physicians’ were regarded as members of a learned profession, while surgeons, or ‘barber-surgeons’, were considered craftsmen. Each part of the profession had its own professional College, concerned with protecting the good name of its members, and upholding the standards of their practice. The Royal College of Physicians, founded by Henry VIII in 1518, lays claim to being the oldest medical college in England. Henry VIII also had a hand in the surgeons’ destiny, bringing together the Fellowship of Surgeons and the Company of Barbers in 1540, to create the College of Barber-Surgeons. In 1745, the surgeons parted company with the barbers to form the College of Surgeons, which received a Royal Charter in 1800 to become the Royal College of Surgeons in London – and later ‘of England’. Surgeons in Edinburgh were recognised as a craft guild as early as 1505, when they were incorporated by a ‘seal of cause’ granted by the town council of Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, in England, Apothecary-Surgeons, with their own Society created in 1815, were generalists who undertook care of people in the community: hence GPs’ premises and consultations are still referred to as ‘surgeries.’ The 1858 Act standardised at least some aspects of these very different parts of the profession, aiming to end what was frankly described as ‘the evils of rampant quackery and illegal practice. The absence of uniformity in training or examination. The jealousies, antipathies and hostilities between members of the profession...’ Whether or not it succeeded in these aims, the Act bequeathed one very familiar aspect of modern medicine: the system of referrals from GPs in the community to consultants in hospitals. This addressed the vexed question of who ‘owns’ the patient when many different kinds of doctor are involved in their care. The result has been neatly summarised as: ‘The physician and surgeon retained the hospital, while the GP retained the patient.’
In October 1861, the newly-qualified Dr Offley Shore married Anna Maria Leishman at St James’ Episcopal Church in Edinburgh. She was just twenty, and the eldest of two surviving daughters of John and Hannah Leishman, a long-established Edinburgh family; her father was a ‘Writer to the Signet’, a form of solicitor, and her grandfather was a churchman. The Leishmans’ younger daughter, Offley’s sister-in-law Margaret would later marry the Baron Liugi Farina as her second husband, becoming Baroness Farina – Florence’s aunt in Tonbridge.

Offley’s home in 1861, once he had left his parents’ house at Clifton, was in Stafford Street in Derby. He wrote a letter to the Committee of the Derbyshire General Infirmary, via the classified advertisements of the Derby Mercury newspaper of 27th August 1861, applying for the position of Junior Physician at the hospital. The paper went on to report that Dr Shore was the only candidate for the position; and he was unanimously elected to it. The retiring Dr Heygate agreed to be his supervisor, and Offley Shore thanked the Committee most warmly for the appointment. The following year, Offley’s brother Sydney married Dr Heygate’s daughter Louisa, cementing the relationship between the two medical men even more closely. At least until around 18 months later, when Offley Shore resigned his position at the Infirmary, ‘in consequence of his removal from Derby having obtained another position.’

So, in August 1863, the Shores’ first child was born in Stamford, Lincolnshire, where Offley had taken up his new post at the Stamford, Rutland and General Infirmary. The impressively-named Offley Bohun Stovin Fairless Shore (his middle names reflecting the surnames of various branches of the family) was to become a very successful soldier, serving in India, Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and Russia. He appears in the Indian Army List in 1912 as a Colonel in the HQ Staff of the Army in India, where his ‘1st class language skills in Russian’ are noted. By the time of Florence’s death in 1920 he would be a Brigadier General, and holder of the Distinguished Service Order.

Florence Nightingale Shore was also born in Stamford, on 10 January 1865. Her namesake and godmother, Florence Nightingale, had been back from the Crimean War for nearly a decade, and was internationally famous for her work there in improving the organisation of the hospitals and the nursing care of the wounded and sick soldiers. Since her return she had published ‘Notes on Nursing’, her hugely popular textbook, and had opened the Nightingale Training School in St Thomas’ hospital in London. Although she had been seriously ill, and lived almost completely confined to her London home, Nightingale was still at the height of her influence. She wrote hundreds of letters, and used graphs and statistics to demonstrate her points to politicians and anyone else she thought could bring about change and improvement in the care of the sick. She was held in enormous public esteem and affection for these achievements.

In tribute to the famous nurse, many baby girls of this time were named after Florence Nightingale, including one in another branch of the Shore family. In 1863, a baby born on 21st March was named Florence Nightingale Shore. But she suffered from an obstruction of the bowels from birth, and died five days later.

Offley and Anna Maria Shore’s daughter Florence, however, thrived. Stamford would have been a good place for a young family. It was an ancient borough and market town, 40 miles from the cathedral town of Lincoln. ‘Morris’ Directory and Gazetteer of Lincolnshire’, published in 1863, gives a glowing contemporary picture of the town as it was when the Shores moved there in the early 1860s:

‘The town, when approached from the south, has an interesting and picturesque appearance; several ancient buildings, with towers and steeples, being seen grouped together; which are surrounded by wooded hills and groves and fields producing excellent pasturage, with a variety of
beautiful landscapes, studded with elegant seats and mansions.’

The population at this time was around 6,800, and the town was a busy and thriving centre of local life, with a 100 year-old Town Hall, Assembly Rooms, a Literary and Scientific Institution, a Mechanics’ Institute, and several reading rooms and libraries. It was ‘well-lighted with gas’ and had schools for both boys and girls, a corn and provision market on a Friday, and fat stock markets held fortnightly. The Stamford, Rutland and General Infirmary, where Florence’s father worked, was ‘an elegant stone building, about a quarter-of-a-mile from the town on the Deeping road, and stands in the midst of a beautiful part of the county.’ The Morris Directory names Mr C Winstanley as house surgeon at the Infirmary, and Miss Eliza Lovell as matron: Offley Shore, a junior physician at the hospital, does not yet warrant a listing amongst either the ‘gentry’ or the ‘trades and professions’ in the town.

A younger sister to Offley and Florence was born in Ashbourne in September, 1866, and named Urith Beresford Ffoye Shore – her names also linking her to the different branches of the family. The family home was back in Stafford Street, Derby at this time, as this is the address listed for Offley Shore in the medical register for 1871; though the family is rarely to be found there together.

In the year of Urith’s birth, Dr Shore published his first, and apparently only, book: a handbook on self-care and treatment in the home ‘for the use of the non-medical public’. *Domestic Medicine: Plain and Brief Directions for the Treatment Requisite before Advice* (price 2 shillings) was published in both Edinburgh and London. Its four sections covered ‘Common diseases’; ‘What to do in cases of emergency – bleeding, poisoning etc’; ‘Management of the sickroom’; and ‘Health promotion, including diet, exercise, sleep and climate’. It was not an original concept: books on domestic medicine had been published in England at the rate of one or two a year during the 1860s. Five were published in 1864, including the eleventh edition of one (Thomas Graham’s *Modern Domestic Medicine*), and the 24th edition of *An Epitome of the Homeopathic Domestic Medicine* (to which had been added an appendix on the treatment of diphtheria). The even more ambitious *Dictionary of Domestic Medicine and Household Surgery*, by Spencer Thomas, was published the year before Offley’s book.

But if not original, Offley Shore’s *Domestic Medicine* was well-received. An enthusiastic review in the London Daily News said ‘This is one of the medicine books that ought to be published. It does not recommend any particular system and it is not in any sense an advertisement for fees. It is from the pen of Dr Shore, an eminent physician ... we can recommend it to the attention of heads of families and travellers.’

The eminent Dr Shore appears in pictures around this time with a high domed forehead, long straight nose, receding hair, and a very full moustache with waxed ends. In 1868, back in Derbyshire, he was taking an interest in local politics, being one of around 100 supporters listed in the Derby Mercury as members of the General Committee for Securing the Re-election of Thomas William Evans Esq and Charles Robert Colvile, Esq, in the South Derbyshire Elections. Their opposition, recorded in an even longer list, was the General Committee for Promoting the Return of Sir Thomas Gresley, Bart, and Mr Rowland Smith. Heading the list of the ‘M’s’ was Sir Oswald Mosley, Bart.

In January 1871, Offley Shore was at a Christmas Ball in the Assembly Room of the Town Hall in Ashbourne, where a local newspaper reported that ‘the attendance was very large and brilliant. Amongst the company present we noticed the following: Mr Offley Shore and Mrs Shore and party...’ In April 1871, neither Offley nor Anna Maria Shore appear in the UK census: perhaps they were abroad, as the three young Shore children were being looked after away from home at the same time. Florence, who was six years old, was a boarder at an establishment in Mickleover, Derbyshire, with her brother,
recorded as ‘Offay’ B Shore, aged seven, and sister Urith B Shore, aged four. The young siblings were in
the care of William Hansom and his wife Elizabeth, who ran the establishment at 58 The Green, Mickleover.

Having left hospital medicine, Offley Shore’s medical interests appeared to turn briefly towards
public health. In 1873, he attended a meeting ‘on the sanitary position in London’, which considered the
work of ‘Mr Stanford, one of the most distinguished chemists of the day.’ Stanford had discovered that
‘animal impurity’ – that is, excreta – could be treated to become a useful purifier; and that charcoal could
be used to stop disease spreading, through charcoal filtration. The meeting, it was reported, ‘was
numerously and influentially attended ... among those present we noted particularly Offley Shore.’ The
meeting is also notable for taking place in the offices of the Colonial Trusts Corporation, at 31 Palmerston
Buildings, Old Broad Street. It could have been this connection, rather than an interest in public health,
which explained Offley Shore’s interest: he and the Corporation had a business relationship that would
soon deteriorate into a bitter financial dispute. The resulting court case would ruin the Shore family
finances for the second time, and tear the family apart.
Chapter 6

‘Complicated questions were pending’

The Colonial Trusts Corporation Limited was an early entrant into the sub-prime lending market. Established just two years before the public health meeting, it ‘undertook to invest money lent to it on the security of land in the colonies, and to pay a liberal rate of interest.’ But although it was a new company, the Corporation was not starting from scratch. It had taken over the business of the Colonial Securities Company Ltd, gaining a ‘good substantial business ... an influential connection, and ... the services of an experienced staff’ at home and abroad. Ten thousand shares in the new Corporation were issued in 1871; and a board of Directors was appointed, chaired by the Right Honourable Viscount Bury KCMG, MP. Lord Bury, who was also Under Secretary of State for War, would later chair the public health meeting on the company’s premises, at which Offley Shore was present: a first indication of a connection between the doctor and the Corporation.

In 1873 the Corporation declared a dividend of 10% for the year; in 1874 the dividend was 12%. That was the year in which the Corporation started selling debentures, or municipal bonds, of counties, towns and other municipalities in the province of Ontario, Canada, ‘at prices yielding between 6% and 7%, payable in sterling in London.’ It promoted the debentures in classified advertisements in local newspapers across the UK and Ireland, from Dublin to Liverpool, and Hampshire to Norfolk.

In these prosperous times for the company and its shareholders, Dr and Mrs Shore and family spent a long summer holiday at Southsea, on the south coast of England. The Southsea Visitors’ List was published regularly in the Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle, with readers invited to fill in a card, available at the post office and other public places, if they wished to advertise their presence in the town. The Shore family indicated that they were visitors at number 1, Eastern Parade, from early July to mid October 1875. Florence was ten years old, Offley was twelve and Urith was eight.

They were in many ways privileged children – the family was well-off, they learned horse riding and languages, and Urith at least learned to play the piano very well. They also travelled in Europe from a young age: in 1872, the children were in Dresden with ‘Miss Bowe’, probably a governess. Portraits of the three children with Miss Bowe show Offley at nine years old, serious and curly-haired with the straight nose and high forehead of his father. Florence at seven has masses of long blonde hair held back by a band; she has a firm chin and a slightly anxious look. Urith is five, still with baby roundness to her face, with long brown hair worn loose like her sister. When Florence was 14, she visited Holstein in Prussia, saving amongst her possessions until her death an envelope addressed to her there. Many years later, one of the children’s aunts would write about their childhood ‘… of the lovely, gay little people they were – of the proud Mother and Grandmothers, how well Flo rode, how eager and alert Offley was …’

But there were shadows over their childhood. Offley would later tell his sister-in-law that ‘we were often promised candy and ponies on a holiday, and then told at the psychological moment that it wasn’t forthcoming and the promise was only an exercise in fortitude! So we soon ceased to cry at disappointments! That’s the way my Spartan Mother brought us up.’

A project known as ‘the new Domesday Book’, which aimed to catalogue people and their lands and wealth, reported the extent of the Shore family’s holdings at this time. According to the Derby Mercury,
Offley Shore’s land extended to 116 acres, with a gross estimated rental of £559 and 16 shillings a year. His older brother Harrington Shore had 58 acres and rental of £293 and 16 shillings a year. The brothers’ financial health was about to be more forensically examined, however, and the Shore family’s comfortable life would be abruptly interrupted, as the fortunes of the Colonial Trusts Corporation took a sudden turn for the worse.

In October 1878, the Corporation issued a circular announcing that it could not pay interest on its debenture coupons, and called a meeting of shareholders. Two petitions were presented to the Chancery Division of the High Court in the same month, asking for the winding-up of the company, which had stopped making payments. A liquidator was appointed, subpoenas were issued for the company’s books between 1875 and 1878, and a winding-up notice was issued. Messrs. Brown and Co, stockbrokers of Fenchurch Street, made a request for summonses to be issued against the Directors of the Corporation, ‘for publishing to the shareholders and others misstatements as to the position of the company alleging certain surpluses, when, in reality, there were none.’ It was suggested that Lord Bury should resign his Government position. But the Lord Mayor of London decided that this charge could not be substantiated, and refused to issue the summonses. In November, another circular issued on behalf of the Corporation pleaded with shareholders to try to save the doomed company – and indicated clearly where the blame for the crisis lay.

‘To the Shareholders of the Colonial Trusts Corporation Limited – I beg to inform you that the arrangements have been completed with the trustee of Messrs. Harrington Offley and Offley Bohun Shore for paying off the first mortgage on the Meersbrook estate, which practically secures to the committee, through the assistance of the said trustee, the carriage of this valuable property, upon which the directors have advanced very large sums of money on very inadequate security viz. a fifth mortgage.’

The statement puts the blame squarely on the previous Directors, for entering into such risky transactions. It goes on to say that the Corporation is trying to re-negotiate the equity of redemption of Meersbrook and the Lendridge estate, and new leases for a colliery and lead mine, owned by the Shores. It ends by begging the shareholders to support the committee in trying to achieve the ‘resuscitation’ of the company, rather than allowing it to be wound up.

Offley Shore, renowned physician, author and landowner of the long-established Derbyshire family, found himself in the bankruptcy court in November 1878. The Pall Mall Gazette reported on the case on 23rd November:

‘The bankrupt had not filed statutory accounts but his debts were put down at £100,000. It was stated that complicated questions were pending between the bankrupt and the Colonial Trusts Corporation, and delay had therefore arisen in filing accounts. An adjournment was agreed to.’

One hundred thousand pounds was a huge sum in 1878, equivalent to at least seven million pounds today, depending on the measure used to compare financial worth across the centuries. So Offley Shore found himself bankrupt, with a wife and three children – now 15, 13 and 11 years of age – to support. In October 1879, Offley was back in court. The Pall Mall Gazette reported:

‘In the Court of Bankruptcy yesterday Mr Registrar Hazlitt sanctioned an arrangement for the settlement of the bankruptcy of Mr Harrington O. Shore and Mr Offley B. Shore, by which the creditors agreed to accept a payment of such a sum as would provide a composition of 1s in the
pound with costs of liquidation. The debts of Mr H. O. Shore were £92,996, of which £68,000 was expected to rank against the estate, with assets of nominal value of £1,982. The liabilities of Mr O. B. Shore were returned at £94,163, and the assets at £3,850.'

Another paper, the Daily News, gave more background on the brothers’ financial dealings:

‘The debtors in this case were two gentlemen connected with the Colonial Trusts Corporation who failed some months since, and whose affairs have been under investigation by Mr C. R. Miles, the trustee. They also appear to have been interested in various collieries, and to have suffered largely by the depreciation of that description of property.’

Harrington Shore, this paper reported, was not a bankrupt, but was treated as a ‘liquidating debtor’, with unsecured liabilities of £92,996, while Offley Shore was bankrupt with unsecured liabilities of £68,000 – £20,000 owing to the Colonial Trusts Corporation. ‘Both gentlemen’, the paper concluded laconically, ‘were mixed up in their transactions in regard to collieries and other public companies.’

Offley Shore would remain in bankruptcy for another 18 months, although his address throughout this period was Queen Anne’s Mansions, Westminster. This was a block of flats built by Henry Hankey in the 1870s, and, at 14 stories high, said to be the highest residential building in Britain. Too high, according to some: Queen Victoria is said to have complained that they blocked the view of the Houses of Parliament from Buckingham Palace. The flats were rented at considerable expense to highly respectable tenants: which raises the question of how Offley maintained this home throughout his bankruptcy, which was finally annulled in April 1881.

The impact of this difficult time on his family is easier to deduce: in the 1881 census, Offley Shore is recorded as 42 years old, married, but living alone in London; an MD but ‘not practising.’ The following year is the first in a pattern of years in which the Southsea Visitors’ List records that Mrs Offley Shore was holidaying in the seaside town, not with Mr Shore, but with Mrs Leishman: Anna Maria and her mother staying at number 1 Marine Parade, or at Purbeck House, Clarence Parade, between 1882 and 1886. When not at Southsea, the two women lived together in London: according to a letter from Anna Maria’s son, they had to move from the Kensington Road to the Richmond Road, ‘the former rooms having been let over their heads.’ The children were all separated: Offley at Sandhurst training for the Army, Florence away in York and Urith staying with relatives. What Offley Shore was doing during this time would later become the basis for a bitter dispute in the matrimonial court.

At the time that her father’s bankruptcy was annulled in 1881, Florence was 16 and, on the night of the census, she was at Middlethorpe Hall in York.

The Hall, in the village of Bishopthorpe to the south east of York, was built for Thomas Barlow, an industrialist from Sheffield, between about 1699-1701. It stood three storeys high, originally with a flat roof and balustrade, though by Florence’s time there it had a pitched roof with an eagle from the Barlow family’s crest on it. The front door, under a columned porch, opened onto an entrance hall and a sweeping cantilevered wooden staircase, flanked by beautifully wood-panelled rooms. Two single storey wings had been added to the house early in the 18th century, enlarging it even further, and there was an impressive stableyard and large garden outside. The Hall had remained the home of the Barlows – Thomas Barlow’s grandsons, John and Samuel, carving their initials in the newel post on the first floor landing in 1764 – until around 1850. That was the year that the last of the family line, Frances Wilkinson, great-great-grand-daughter of Thomas, and widow of the Reverend Edward Leigh, left to move into one of her properties in the village of Dringhouses, and Middlethorpe Hall was let out to tenants.
The census of 1851 shows that the Hall was being used as a private school for girls. Sisters Lucy and Eleanor Walker were the tenants, and there were 21 pupils aged between nine and 18. Ten years later, the school was in different hands. Anna M Johnson, aged 42, is listed in the census return as the teacher, with her cousin Susan Steel, ‘Mamselle Laurency’, the French teacher, and Elizabeth Pearson. There are 35 pupils and seven servants in residence. It is not certain that Florence Shore attended Middlethorpe Hall when it was a school, as no school records survive and she is not listed on the 1871 census – she would only have been six years old at the time. And in the 1881 census, she is a ‘visitor’ although her occupation is given as ‘scholar’. But her application to the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Reserve, some years later, gives York as the place of her schooling, so it is possible that she would previously have been at Middlethorpe Hall as a pupil – particularly as the Shore family was related to the Wilkinsons by marriage.

Coinedidentally, another famous nurse named Ethel Manson, later Ethel Bedford Fenwick, also went to school at Middlethorpe Hall a few years before Florence, and recorded the fact in her ‘Who’s Who’ entry. Mrs Bedford Fenwick would be the leading light in the campaign that led to a formal register of qualified nurses being set up in the 1920s. Her path would also cross again with Florence’s in the deployment of nurses to the field hospitals of the First World War.

Florence’s position as distant cousin and regular visitor to the Wilkinsons is underlined in the slightly exasperated tone of a letter from Frances Wilkinson to her mother Louisa in January 1884, when Florence Shore was 19. Frances Wilkinson was ten years older than Florence Shore, and had just completed a course in landscape gardening – she was on her way to becoming England’s first professional landscape gardener, known as Fanny Rollo Wilkinson, responsible for Vauxhall Park in London, and, with her sister Louisa M. Garrett, a notable supporter of votes for women. She wrote: ‘There seems no help for it but Florence’s coming here before she goes to you. I do not believe she ought to use her eyes without an alteration in her glasses. She says she always squints.’

Interestingly, while her family home was being used for the private education of girls with families who could pay school fees, Frances Leigh (nee Barlow, later Wilkinson) was founding and supporting a school for the children of the village of Dringhouses, just across the Knavesmire racecourse from Middlethorpe Hall. ‘St Edward’s National School, Dringhouses’ had opened in 1849 in a brick schoolroom next to the church, and later moved to a new building paid for by Leigh across the village street.

From 1862, it was compulsory for the principal teacher of a school to keep a daily log book of events concerning the school and its teachers. The log book for Dringhouses School dates back to 1863, and records some of the local events and issues which might also have affected the girls at Middlethorpe Hall, on the other side of the Knavesmire. The scarlet fever outbreak in the village, which saw 24 children absent from school on 30th January 1871, must have equally concerned the teachers at Middlethorpe. In January 1876, the log records: ‘Very small attendance this week due probably to the cold weather and to the fact that one of the children has died of an infectious disease.’ In June: ‘There appears to be fever of some kind in the village, which seriously affects attendance. The Acomb school is closed on the same account.’ In 1879, ‘The school is closed this week owing to the increased spread of measles. There are 45 children at home from this cause.’

While infectious disease was no respecter of class or status, in other places, the Dringhouses school log book points to the differences between the children of the two schools. In January 1870, ‘Mr Ackeroyd, Lady Meek’s Steward, called to pay for Agnes Armison and three of Mr Forth’s children’. And while the girls at Middlethorpe were learning French from Mademoiselle Laurency, the Dringhouses
school children were learning about The Pronoun in their grammar lesson, the Shape of the Earth in Geography, and the names of 36 vegetables in Spelling.

In the very comfortable surroundings of Middlethorpe Hall, Florence may have been at least partly insulated from her father’s financial embarrassment in London. Her 14 year old sister Urith was also not at home with their parents in early 1881: she was boarding with Miss Katherine Walker, and another boarder, 16 year old Letitia Beasley, in Ecclesall, Sheffield. Their older brother Offley, now 18, was a gentleman cadet at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, preparing for his military career. Ten years later, he would be followed there by his cousin, Clarence Hobkirk, the younger son of Margaret Hobkirk, Florence’s maternal aunt. In 1876, Clarence and his older brother Stuart had been left fatherless when John Hobkirk died at the age of just 51, when the boys were aged eight and seven. They may have been particularly close to their Shore cousins, as, many years later, Florence would make provision for both of them in her Will.

Meanwhile, Florence’s father was still trying to make money. Following his bankruptcy, he had set off on a new venture, going to Iceland to invest in borax – a naturally-occurring mineral used in detergents, cosmetics and enamel glazes, which was greatly in demand at the end of the 19th century. Unfortunately, like Offley’s other ventures, this one did not succeed. The children were beginning to think about ways to earn their own livings. In 1882, Offley junior had passed out from Sandhurst and was set on a military career. He wrote to his father about his younger sisters’ ideas:

‘Urith seemed to think that if obliged to ‘go out’ she would take to music more readily than anything else … Florence quite likes the Children’s Hospital idea and is going to write Florence Nightingale … I fear it’s a poor concern she is going for, as regards pay, and will tax her growing strength … I said nothing at all about the possibility of the success of this Borax rendering them free of the necessary [sic] to work for themselves …’

Florence, now aged 17, also wrote rather wistfully to her father in Iceland:

‘I only knew yesterday that you had gone back to Iceland … I hope that you will be well rewarded for your long journey and almost banishment from home. I trust that you will be able to find a good estate which may bring you good return.’

Urith, the youngest daughter, who seems to have spent little time at home with her family, wrote simply:

‘I hope you are getting on successfully at Iceland … Aunt and Uncle are still very kind.’

Offley Shore’s financial difficulties were to continue for years; but in spite of his ‘banishment’ from the family, his son in particular continued to write affectionately to him. In 1883, he wrote;

‘I am grieved to hear you are in such a devil of a fix … would like to know what you intend doing in case the worst should come to the worst’; and three years later: ‘I am so sorry to hear of your financial worries dear Father and sincerely trust you will not be obliged to leave your club which will indeed be a blow to you .. I hear Florrie has been offered a place at £40 a year: is it true?’ and ‘So awfully distressed to hear of your financial hole: it is most annoying and distressing. Especially to me, who can’t assist you and can’t even float my beastly self yet.’

After the family’s financial troubles and separation in the latter part of the 1870s, while the children were growing up, they might have hoped that the next few years would pass more quietly. But a series of
seismic shocks to their family life were still to come: starting in 1886, when Florence’s mother divorced her husband after twenty five years of marriage.
Chapter 7

Shore v. Shore

Anna Maria Shore’s petition came before the High Court of the Justice, Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division, on 11th January 1886. Changes to the marriage laws had come just in time for Anna’s generation. Prior to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, divorce was only possible by an ecclesiastical annulment of the marriage, or through a private (and very expensive) Act of Parliament, which had to be debated in the House of Commons.

The Act recognised that marriage was a contract that came under the jurisdiction of the courts, rather than a religious sacrament, and removed divorce from the ecclesiastical courts. It established the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in London, to deal with petitions for divorce: still an expensive business, but more readily achievable for women with some means. The Act also, for the first time, allowed for men to be required to pay maintenance to their ex-wives, and allowed divorced women to control and inherit property in their own right. However, it was not even-handed in its treatment of the marriage partners. A man filing for divorce had to prove only that his wife had committed adultery: the sole grounds on which a divorce could be granted. But a woman seeking a divorce had to prove not only her husband’s adultery, but also that he was guilty of bigamy, desertion, cruelty, sodomy, bestiality or incest. Or, as Emily Pankhurst reportedly put it:

‘According to man-made law a wife who is even once unfaithful to her husband has done him an injury which entitles him to divorce her...On the other hand, a man who consorts with prostitutes, and does this over and over again throughout his married life, has, according to man-made law, been acting only in accordance with human nature, and nobody can punish him for that.’

Anna Maria’s petition set out the history of the 25-year old marriage, and her case against her husband:

‘The Petition of Anna Maria Shore of 1 Powis Gardens, Bayswater in the County of Middlesex showeth
That on or about 17th day of October 1861 your Petitioner then Anna Maria Leishman was lawfully married to Offley Bohun Shore at St James’ Episcopal Church in the City of Edinburgh
That after the said marriage your Petitioner lived and cohabited with the said Offley Bohun Shore, at Derby in the County of Derby and at Stamford in the County of Lincoln and at Langford Park Maldon in the County of Essex and at 2 Queen Anne’s Mansions in the City of Westminster and that there is surviving issue of the said marriage three children to wit:- Offley Bohun Stovin Fairless Shore born 9th August 1863 at Stamford aforesaid Florence Nightingale Shore born 9th January [although her daughter’s birth certificate says 10th January] 1865 at Stamford aforesaid and Urith Beresford Shore born 9th September 1866 at Ashbourne in the County of Derby.
That in or about the month of June 1878 the said Offley Bohun Shore separated himself from your Petitioner and has never since cohabited with her and that he has deserted your Petitioner without reasonable excuse for two years and upwards.’

This was the last year in which the family holidayed in Southsea together, and just before Offley Shore
was declared bankrupt. Florence was 13 years old. But desertion of the young family would not have been sufficient grounds for a divorce: Anna needed also to prove adultery. Her Petition continues:

‘That on numerous occasions in and since the month of November 1885 the said Offley Bohun Shore has committed adultery with a woman whose name is unknown to your Petitioner at Number 23 Haymarket in the County of Middlesex.

Your Petitioner therefore humbly prays that your Lordship will be pleased to dissolve her marriage with the said Offley Bohun Shore and that she may have such further and other relief in the premises as to your Lordship may seem meet.’

The Petition is signed in a bold hand ‘Anna Maria Shore’, and the signature underlined decisively in black ink.

Offley Shore’s response to his wife’s petition was presented to the Court by his solicitors on 2nd February, and must have come as something of a surprise to Anna. Nearly eight years after their separation, and in spite of her conviction that he was having an affair with another woman, Offley was not going to make it easy for her to divorce him.

‘The Respondent Offley Bohun Shore by Frederick Foss his Solicitor of No. 3 Abchurch Lane in the City of London in answer to the Petition filed in this cause saith

That he denies that he deserted your Petitioner

That he further denies that he committed adultery as set forth in the said Petition.

Wherefore the Respondent humbly prays that the Court will be pleased to reject the prayer of the said Petition.’

In the face of what must have been fairly incontrovertible evidence – as it would surely be obvious to any observer whether or not he had been living with his wife for the last eight years – Offley Shore was denying everything. Anna would have to fight him in court if she wanted to pursue her freedom. And clearly she did: with her solicitors, Goodhart and Medcalf, she set about finding further grounds to convince the Court that her marriage had irretrievably broken down, whatever her husband might say. At a hearing on 11th March, her solicitors were granted permission to amend the original Petition for dissolution of the marriage, by inserting a new paragraph, 3a, which added:

‘That on numerous occasions during the years 1883 and 1884 the said Offley Bohun Shore committed adultery with a woman whose name is unknown to your Petitioner at Number five Jermyn Street in the County of Middlesex.’

What searches, accusations and investigations took place between mid-January and early March to arrive at this new accusation can only be imagined. Had Anna known all along that Offley had had more than one affair, but originally planned to cite only the most recent? Or was this a new and painful discovery for her? Perhaps it was actually a relief: she needed to prove his adultery definitively, if she wanted to be free of Offley, since his long desertion of the family was not enough in the eyes of the law.

The amended Petition with the new accusation was sent to Offley Shore’s solicitors, and a hearing date was fixed for 27th March. It must have been an intimidating occasion. The Right Honourable Sir James Hannen, the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court, heard oral evidence from Anna and from witnesses on her behalf – and his decision was to adjourn the hearing for
further evidence. The details of the Shore marriage were to be examined in pitiless detail.

The final hearing was on 13th April. Further evidence was taken in support of Anna’s Petition, and the two solicitors spoke for their clients. Probably to Anna’s enormous relief – and fury, given what he had put her through – Offley did not attend the Court this time to defend his cause. The Court decided that she had sufficiently proved her Petition, and that the Respondent had been guilty of ‘adultery coupled with the desertion of the Petitioner without reasonable excuse for upwards of two years.’ A decree nisi was granted, with the decree absolute to follow in six months. It might have given a further measure of satisfaction to Anna that costs were awarded against her husband.

Divorce was still an uncommon occurrence at this time – there were only around 300 divorces a year in England in the 1880s – and divorces initiated by women were even more unusual. Anna Maria, whose paternal grandfather was a churchman, and whose father was an important and respectable solicitor in Edinburgh, must have found it difficult to take her marital troubles to the courts. But she does at least seem to have been spared the additional burden of prurient publicity, since the divorce trial occupying the newspapers at the time was that of Lord and Lady Colin Campbell.

Married in July 1881, the couple honeymooned in the Isle of Wight accompanied by a hospital nurse, as Lord Campbell was already suffering from venereal disease. The marriage was only consummated later that year, infecting Lady Campbell – formerly Gertrude Blood – with the condition. After a miscarriage and an operation, in 1884 she applied for and was granted a judicial separation, on the grounds of cruelty: the only way to avoid the obligation of ‘enforced cohabitation’. Later that year, both husband and wife petitioned for divorce, each accusing the other of adultery. In Lady Campbell’s case, she was accused of adultery with four men: a Duke, a fire chief, a noted soldier, and the couple’s doctor. So the case, with the two petitions consolidated into one trial by the Court, was officially known as ‘Campbell v. Campbell and Campbell v. Campbell, the Duke of Marlborough, Captain Shaw, Colonel Butler and Dr Bird.’

The jury cleared Lady Campbell of the accusations of adultery; but no divorce was granted, and the couple remained married until Lord Campbell’s death 11 years later.

For Florence, even after bankruptcy, desertion, adultery and divorce, the family’s upheavals were not over. Just eight months after his divorce was finalised, her father Offley Shore re-married, to a woman young enough to be his daughter.
Chapter 8

The second Mrs Shore

Offley Shore’s second marriage took place in Westminster Register Office on 2nd July 1887. The couple was married by licence by the Registrar: a licence being an alternative to having the marriage banns publicly read in the bride’s and groom’s home parishes on three separate occasions. Licences had to be paid for, but were a quicker – and more discreet – way of obtaining permission to marry than having the banns read. Three public readings of the banns would, of course, offer the opportunity for someone to come forward to object to the marriage.

The marriage certificate described the groom’s profession as ‘gentleman’, and his condition as ‘the divorced husband of Anna Maria Shore formerly Leishman.’ His residence at the time of the marriage was 113 Haymarket, London – the same street in which he was said to have conducted his adulterous affair at number 23. His bride was Annie Wakefield, from Spalding in Lincolnshire, a spinster, and daughter of John Wakefield, deceased. The column for the ages of the parties records that Offley was 48 years old, and Annie was 23. The witnesses do not appear to be close family members of either party to the marriage: they were a Fred and Frank Lampard.

Pictures of Offley Shore in mid-life show him even more balding, with huge Victorian mutton-chop whiskers but no moustache and a bare chin. Young Annie Wakefield might once have dreamed of something more than this quiet wedding in a London Register Office, with no family members to be her witnesses. But she was obviously determined – or persuaded – to become Offley’s wife, for better or worse: for there is a curious post-script to this marriage. A hand-written correction on the marriage certificate was added four years after the event, in 1891, by the Registrar, in the presence of the Superintendent Registrar, and two witnesses by the name of Milford and Boyce.

It is not unusual for corrections to be needed, according to a current Registrar at the Westminster Register Office, if a mistake was made at the time of the marriage, and neither the bride, the groom nor the witnesses spotted it when they signed the register entry. Normally, such corrections should be witnessed by either the bride or groom, or the original witnesses to the marriage – someone who knows the couple well enough to be able to testify to the changes required. But that did not happen in this case.

It also seems unlikely in this case that the parties to the marriage overlooked the mistake accidentally. The correction is to an entry in the ‘ages’ column, where the bride’s age is recorded. ‘In column 3’, the correction reads, ‘for 23 years, read 20 years.’

In the 19th century, the age at which a woman could marry without her parents’ consent was 21. It seems that Annie and Offley were not willing to wait another year to marry with her parents’ consent: perhaps they did not expect to get it. Or maybe Offley did not know when he married Annie that she was under the age of majority. In either case, how the ‘mistake’ came to light, who reported it to the Registrar, why neither the bride nor the groom were available to witness the correction, and what impact the deception had on the marriage, are all unknown. What is clear is that Offley’s second marriage provided Florence, at the age of 22, with a stepmother two years younger than she was.

Annie Wakefield Shore was not what she seemed in other ways too. She gave her father’s name as John Wakefield, deceased, and the family residence as Spalding in Lincolnshire: but no John Wakefield is recorded as living in Spalding, or dying prior to 1887, in UK census records. There is no birth certificate.
on record for Anne or Annie Wakefield, daughter of John from Spalding in Lincolnshire, for the years 1866 or 1867. Family historians often point out that marriage is one of the very few official occasions (the ten-yearly census being another) when the information required is supplied by the parties involved, and is not subject to any external checking. So people sometimes found it convenient to have a ‘deceased’ father to put on the marriage certificate, if the truth was more troublesome. In Annie’s case, there is an obvious explanation for the deception: what she was hiding was the stigma of illegitimacy. Her birth certificate shows that she was born on 7th April, 1867, in Spalding. Her mother was Elizabeth Wakefield, but the columns for name and occupation of the father are blank.

The 1871 census shows that, at the age of three, Anne Wakefield was living in Gosberton, near Spalding, Lincolnshire with her mother, Elizabeth, who was then twenty four; and her grandparents, William and Louisa Wakefield. Louisa had had her daughter Elizabeth at the relatively late age of thirty five. Elizabeth had given birth to Anne when she was just twenty one, and the three generations were living together in Seadike Lane, Gosberton.

The next census shows the first signs of the fluidity of Anne Wakefield’s age. In early April 1881, when she was still 13, Anne Wakefield was a live-in general servant for a farmer, John Huntsman, and his housekeeper, Sarah Squires, in Fengate, Moulton, still close to Spalding. She – or they – reported to the census that she was aged fifteen. Whether the fiction originated with this household, or whether the Wakefields had added a couple of years to her age to make her seem more suitable to go out to work, is impossible to deduce.

How the gentleman Dr Offley Shore met the barely literate (she took two attempts to sign her surname on her marriage certificate), illegitimate and under-age servant girl from Spalding is also impossible to guess. He did have links with the area, having worked for a time at the Stamford hospital, but he had not lived there for more than twenty years by the time of his second marriage. He had, apparently, been conducting adulterous affairs in London for the previous four years. Perhaps he met Annie on a visit to friends in Lincolnshire; or perhaps she was taken to London by her employers, or her family, and met Offley by chance there. Most intriguingly, what was it about this young woman that made the philandering, financially embarrassed and now divorced doctor so determined to marry her, rather than make her his mistress? She had no money, status, influential family or obvious hold over him – was Offley, quite simply, besotted; and did Annie see her chance for a much better life?

Marriage did not end the mysteries of Annie Shore: her later life and her death initially present further puzzles. She was living with Offley in Southampton Buildings in Holborn, London, at the time of the 1891 census. There were no children in the household, and one servant, Mary Chadwick: at 23, she was the same age as her mistress. Strangely, Annie Shore is described on the census list as head of the household, rather than wife of the head; and her occupation is ‘living on own means’ although she is also noted as married, and most wives’ entries do not list an occupation. (What ‘means’ she could have had beyond her husband’s is another mystery.) Perhaps the rather unlikely marriage was over in all but name, and they were effectively living separate lives in the same house. In the 1901 census, Offley was still describing himself as married, though he was alone in a house in Oxford Street in London on that particular night. Annie could simply have been away overnight; or they could have separated in a more permanent way. But Annie Shore nee Wakefield, born in Lincolnshire in 1867, does not appear anywhere else on the UK census in 1901.

There is also only one record of the death of an Annie Shore of the right age between 1901 and 1911, when Offley was described as a widow[er]. This Annie Shore died on 13th August, 1906. Her occupation was recorded as ‘housekeeper’ and ‘wife of ———— Shore’: no first name was inserted for her
husband, whose own occupation was ‘unknown.’ His address was in Westcliff on Sea: a suburb of Southend on Sea. Offley and his family had spent many summers holidaying on the south coast during the 1870s. Could this have been Offley Shore living by the sea in retirement? He had lived most of his life since the 1880s in London, and he ended his days in a nursing home in London. This might have only been because his daughter Urith was living in London at the time, so it was more convenient for visiting him; but equally it may be that he never lived in Southend. Electoral records for the area do not show a Shore living at the relevant address.

If this Annie Shore was in fact Offley Shore’s wife, and Florence’s young stepmother, her life ended tragically. She died in Camberwell House Asylum in London, at the age of 39, of ‘exhaustion due to general paralysis of the insane’ – the third and final stage of syphilis.

This is where the formal record appears to end. But a contact from a family history website, Dr Raymond Davis, takes up the story, passed on to him from family members:

‘Annie later became the mistress of my grandfather, Edwin Archibald Harris (1864-1928) and when she died on 13 August 1906 at Camberwell House Asylum aged 39, he buried her, on 18 August, in his family grave at Manor Park Cemetery, Forest Gate Essex … The tombstone describes her as his wife, but the burial register has Annie Shore, as does the death registration. In 1901 they were living as man and wife at 71 Tankerville Road, Streatham (both knocked about 10 years off their ages) [this is confirmed by the 1901 Census, and explains why Annie Shore could not be found: not only has her age changed but she gives her name as Annie Harris] at a house my mother remembered well. It was Annie’s death in 1906 that left my grandfather free to marry my grandmother in 1907 – he described himself as a widower, which was not strictly true… My grandfather’s elder daughter was named Annie after Annie Wakefield/Shore – my grandmother didn’t seem to mind. And apparently he kept a painting of her over the marriage bed, which my grandmother tried to pass off to a visitor as a portrait of her own mother.’

This is an extraordinary and touching turn of events. Annie had captivated not just Offley Shore, but in a short space of time, another man, much closer to her own age, who lived with her in common law marriage for at least five years, and probably longer. A man who stood by her through the horrors of syphilis in its worst form until she died in a lunatic asylum, then not only buried her in his family grave, but kept her portrait in his house and named his daughter after her. So how had this new liaison come about?

‘My mother’s reminiscences, from her father, were that Annie had blue eyes, that he met my grandfather at The Oaks Club (can’t identify that), that Offley Shore told my grandfather “If you like her, take her” …’

This raises a new possibility to account for the amendment to Offley and Annie’s marriage certificate, made in 1891. Perhaps Offley had already tired of Annie, after four years of marriage – or maybe he was aware that she had contracted syphilis – and wanted a way out. By informing the Registrar of her real age at the time of the wedding (in person or anonymously), perhaps he hoped to open the way for an annulment of the marriage. It is unlikely that he would have wanted to shoulder the expenses of another divorce, as an alternative route to freedom; or to be held liable for the costs of obtaining treatment for her disease. Clearly no annulment was granted, and the marriage remained intact until Annie’s death. Her life until then, although ravaged by syphilis, at least seems to have contained much love and affection from her new ‘husband’, Edwin Harris. The stone he erected over her body in the family grave reads: ‘In loving
memory of my devoted wife Annie who passed away 13th August 1906 aged 39 years.’ In later years, both his brother and Edwin himself would be buried in the same grave.

A year after Annie’s death, Edwin Harris made a more formal marriage. The Gloucester Citizen reported on 8 August 1907:

‘Cirencester. MARRIAGE OF MISS PACK. At Kensington was solemnised the marriage of Miss Eleanor (Nellie) Pack, only daughter of the late Mr. George Pack and Mrs. Jack Gillman, of the Post Office, Gloucester-street, Cirencester, to Mr. Edwin Archibald Harris, of 10, Colville Houses, Bayswater, London, N1, son of the late Thomas James Sandys Harris. There was a numerous family gathering, the bridegroom being well-known in the city as managing expert to one of the leading firms of jewellers. The presents were many and costly. After the ceremony, the bride and bridegroom held a reception at their residence in Colville-square. Part of the honeymoon is being spent at Ilfracombe and the remainder will be at the bride’s house’.

It would be interesting to know whether the mother of the bride knew of the bridegroom’s recent common law marriage, and the dreadful circumstances of his ‘wife’s’ death, before he married her only daughter. However, neither Edwin Harris nor Offley Shore succumbed to syphilis; and the question remains of how the unfortunate Annie was exposed to the infection at a very young age.

In spite of his own second marriage in 1887, Offley Shore had not quite finished with his ex-wife, Anna Maria. In June 1889, his solicitor filed an affidavit to the divorce court, seeking permission to ask for a variation to the divorce settlement. He received it, and submitted his sworn statement in July:

‘I, Offley Bohun Shore, of The Junior Travellers Club, St James Square in the County of Middlesex, Gentleman, the above named Defendant make oath and say as follows:

By the settlement dated the 16th day of October 1861 made in contemplation of my marriage with the Petitioner, the Petitioner takes a life interest after my decease in the sum of £4000 – 5 per cent stock of the Government of Canada equivalent to an income of £200 per annum which capital sum was brought into settlement by me.

I became Bankrupt in 1878 and my life interest in the last mentioned trust funds was sold. Since the date of my Bankruptcy I have had little or no means. My sole means of support at the present time are as Honorary Secretary of a newly founded London Club from which I receive at present no income.

The children of the said marriage are all of full age and are supporting themselves.’

In short, in spite of evidently funding his remarriage and new household, Shore wanted to avoid any further financial obligation to his ex-wife and children: his children were wise to have entered into careers that made them self-sufficient.

The London Club to which Shore acted as Honorary Secretary had re-opened in January of that year with an eminent committee headed by the Duke of Portland. Advertising in The Guardian, it proclaimed itself ‘non-political’, and assured potential members that ‘the proprietary is entirely a fresh one, the late proprietors having nothing whatever to do with the Club; and the arrangements made between the Committee and the present proprietor are such as to justify the Committee in assuring members that the legal position of the Club may now be considered as perfectly satisfactory in all respects.’ With this ominous disclaimer, it is perhaps not surprising that, six months later, the club was still not able to provide any income to its Hon Secretary.
A Registrar of the Court was appointed to investigate the petition and the claims of the Respondent (Offley) and Petitioner (Anna Maria). The Court reconvened in front of Justice Sir Charles Parker Butt on 6th August to hear the Registrar’s report, and to listen to Counsel for both parties. At the end of the hearing, the Court reached its decision:

‘...that the interest of the Respondent in the sum of £1976.4s7d referred to in the said Report be wholly extinguished and that the said Settlement so far as regards the said sum be read as if the Respondent were now dead. And the Court further condemned the Respondent in the costs of and incidental to this application.’

Offley Shore had lost. In seeking to protect the money he had, he lost it down to the last seven pence, and incurred court costs as well. As far as his first marriage was concerned, he was dead.

One month later, in September 1889, Florence’s mother finally put her first unhappy experience of marriage behind her. She re-married, in a much more conventional fashion than Offley, a military man seven years her junior: Joseph Henry Laye. At the time a Lieutenant Colonel, he would go on to command the First Battalion Scottish Rifles. Their wedding, in St Mary’s Church in Harrogate, was much more of a family affair: one of the witnesses was the younger Offley Shore, Florence’s brother, by then an army officer himself with the 18th Bengal Lancers. How Anna Maria obtained a licence to be re-married in church is another of the many Shore mysteries, however: at the time, and for more than another 100 years, the Church of England forbade re-marriage of divorced people in church while their spouse was still living.

Perhaps this turbulent family life gave Florence an unusual sense of self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. Maybe she would always have had a strong sense of adventure and curiosity. Or perhaps she just needed to get away. One way or another, after completing her education in Belgium, she set out on an extraordinary adventure for a young, unmarried Victorian woman – leaving England to work as a governess in China.
Chapter 9

‘Western Dirt’

God and opium explained most of the Western interest in China in the 19th century. The desire to convert the Chinese to Christianity led to a massive influx of missionaries as soon as the borders were opened, under coercion, to foreigners. The desire to encourage, exploit and profit from the Chinese addiction to opium sent traders and merchants into the country, following in the footsteps of the massive East India Company. Other merchants traded in China’s most popular commodities: tea, silk and porcelain. At the time that Florence went to China, there was also a community of British and other foreign diplomats and civil servants, as well as numerous individual Victorian travellers, exploring, collecting and writing about the ‘Mysterious Continent’ (or the ‘Middle Kingdom’, or the ‘Flowery Kingdom’) for the benefit of the fascinated community at home.

This freedom to travel in China was still a relatively new state of affairs. In earlier centuries, the Romans had traded in Southern China, as had Moslem and Arab traders, Venetians and the Portuguese. The Jesuits were credited with having ‘opened’ China in the 16th century. But in the middle of the 18th century, the Emperor had restricted foreign access to China to one port only – Canton – and trade and access were highly regulated. Access to the mainland of China was very limited; use of land for factories, offices and residences was confined to an area beside the Pearl River, outside the Canton city walls; no foreign women were allowed into the country; and an overseer kept tight control on all trade. This long period of exclusion allowed the Western world to build an idealised, romantic picture of China, based on the quality of its exported goods, and the tales of those merchants who managed to visit the very restricted areas open to them. Writing in 1935, E.V.G. Kiernan, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, described how the country was viewed prior to the turmoil that was to follow in the 19th century:

‘The charm of the Flowery Kingdom lies in its dreaming, through thirty centuries, in one mood, or one landscape of moods melting into one another with an incomparable harmony, as perfect as that of a Chinese painting on silk, or of the image called up in half a dozen phrases of a Chinese poem – clouds floating over the Gorges, the wild geese flying towards the South. Wherever the thick volumes of China’s poetry are opened it is the same world, haunted always by the same voices, the same sentiments and familiarities, too poignant, too perfect, ever to be relinquished; a broad moon is climbing the autumn sky, peach-blossoms hang over antique gateways, cups of wine are warmed and books stand on the table to shorten solitary days; there are blue mountains and silken women, slow rivers with stone-arched bridges, the tears and dreams of separated friends, and in the distance the vaguer recesses of feeling that language cannot be forced to express.’

This idyllic view of the country was not to last in the face of Western commercial imperatives, backed up by military muscle. By the end of the 18th century, there was a huge trade imbalance, with the West importing far more of China’s silk, tea and porcelain goods than it exported its own goods to China. Lord McCartney was sent to the country at the end of the 18th century to try to arrange a trade agreement, and an exchange of ambassadors, but his mission failed. So did Lord Amherst in 1816, and Lord Napier in 1839 – he died before an agreement could be concluded. In that same year, the issue of the sale of opium to the Chinese finally came to a head.
The East India Company had had a monopoly on the trade from the 1770s. Indian farmers grew the opium, which the company sold to China. In spite of the Emperor’s edicts against it, opium smoking increased relentlessly in China, fuelling demand for the product. The Emperor ordered opium smokers to be punished by the pillory and bamboo, later increasing the penalty to imprisonment, transportation and death. But still the demand for the addictive opium grew, and the trade was simply driven underground to become smuggling. The Chinese continued to oppose the trade and punish their people for using opium; the British continued to pursue the profits available from the huge Chinese market. A report published in England in 1880 described this period:

Between the eagerness of the Chinese for our Opium, and our greediness for their silver, the wicked traffic soon grew to great proportions. The East India Company continued to develop the trade until in 1838-9, we smuggled into China more than 35,000 chests of Opium. This illicit trade was not carried on without frequent protests from the Chinese Government, which, in 1835, issued an edict, expressly mentioning by name nine of the principal Opium merchants, and insisting upon their expulsion from the country. As this was not done, a proclamation was issued in 1839 requiring that the Opium-receiving ships should be sent away, under penalty of hostile measures if the demand was not complied with. Commissioner Lin [Lin Tse-hsu, appointed to suppress the trade] was sent to Canton with authority to deal summarily with the matter. He demanded that the Opium on board the ships should be delivered to the Government to be destroyed, and a promise given never to bring any to Canton again on pain of death. “I, the Commissioner”, said Lin, “am sworn to remove utterly this root of misery, nor will I let the foreign vessels have any offshoot left for the root to bud forth again.” Finding his orders disregarded, he surrounded the foreign factory by sea and land, thus imprisoning two or three hundred British subjects, with the alternative before them of submission or death. Capt. Elliott, then Trade Superintendent, dared no longer hesitate, but handed over to the Chinese Commissioner more than 20,000 chests of Opium, valued at two millions sterling, which was publicly destroyed by mixing it with salt and lime. But still the Opium ships came and sought to land their cargoes, and in this state of things some outrages committed on both sides brought an open war.’

This was the first Opium War, started in 1839 and ending in 1842, by which time 15,000 British troops had overwhelmed the inferior and under-prepared Chinese forces. The Nanking Treaty, which ended the war, exacted a very heavy price from the Chinese, designed to humiliate the country as well as to facilitate trade with it. The Treaty forced the Chinese to open five ports, afterwards known as ‘treaty ports’, to Western ships: Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai. China was also forced to cede Hong Kong to the British, and to pay 21 million dollars in silver for the expenses of the war, the debts due to merchants for destroyed property, and the value of the opium which had been destroyed. Foreign traders and missionaries were to be exempt from punishment by Chinese law; and a limit was set on the taxation that could be imposed on imported goods. The 1880 account notes that:

‘It was of this war that Mr. Gladstone said, “A war more unjust in its origin, a war more calculated to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I do not know, and have not read of.”’

So relations between the British in China and its indigenous population were constantly under strain. In 1856, the Chinese seized a British-registered ship, the Arrow, owned by a Chinese resident of Hong Kong. The subsequent riots in Canton, attacks on missionaries and the murder of a British official, sparked more military and diplomatic action against China, which became known as the Second Opium
In 1858, another unjust war broke out, and the English, aided by the French, bombarded the million-peopled city of Canton. Field pieces, loaded with grape shot were planted at the end of long narrow streets crowded with innocent men, women and children, to mow them down like grass, till the gutters flowed with their blood. In one scene of carnage, the Times correspondent recorded that half an army of 10,000 men were in ten minutes destroyed by the sword, or forced into the broad river. The Morning Herald asserted that “a more horrible or revolting crime than this bombardment of Canton has never been committed in the worst ages of barbarian darkness”. 30,000 people were burnt out of house and home. And all this for an imaginary insult to our flag, for which ample satisfaction had been offered.’

The 1858 Treaty of Tientsin legalised the importation of opium, protected Christian missionaries, and opened new treaty ports, but did not end the conflict. Finally, with the city of Peking surrounded by the allied armies, in October 1860, the Chinese yielded. However, the Emperor escaped the siege, and some British prisoners were found to have been murdered, so the British burnt down the Emperor’s Summer Palace in addition to demanding compensation. The 1860 Convention of Peking forced China to cede the Kowloon peninsula to Britain, and formally opened the whole of China to traders, travellers and missionaries.

The tragic impact of the opium trade on ordinary Chinese people was described by a Mrs Adams, who was in Nankin in the 1880s. She wrote in ‘Word and Work’ about visiting a woman whose husband’s opium addiction had destroyed the family:

‘The poor woman was in a death-like stupor, and, roused, complained of a great pain at the heart and a weary desire for sleep. My husband gave her a strong emetic, which soon produced the desired effect.

While watching the result of the treatment, the following story was told: “The husband of this poor woman had formerly held a lucrative and responsible position in a Mandarin Yamen, or court. While there he first tasted what the natives call ‘western dirt’. As long as he kept his situation his wife and family did not suffer, but he lost it as the Opium obtained more complete mastery over him. He could get no employment, though the taste grew daily. His poor wife did all she could to keep up appearances and provide for her family, by winding silk and weaving the satin, for which Nanking is noted; portions of their house were let off till they had but one room left for themselves. At last the bitter cold winter set in, and the poor creature found herself without money, without food, and without clothes, for those which should have protected from the cold had long since been sold to buy the fatal drug, and yet the infatuated husband must have money to satisfy the cravings of appetite. At last, the poor wife, in a fit of desperation, determined to put an end to the struggle by taking her life; and thus, ignorant of God, ignorant of the future, she was very near the unseen world, when it pleased God to restore her, as the remedies used were blessed to her recovery. The husband came afterwards to hear the Gospel preached, and seemed very grateful.”

This is but a picture of what is occurring in thousands of families in this city, and in myriads of families in this empire.’

Inevitably, such devastation in ordinary people’s lives led to great bitterness against the British and in particular those who came to China with the express intention of ‘improving’ the people there. The Bishop of Victoria, Hong Kong, was quoted as saying:
“I have again and again been stopped, while preaching, with the question, ‘Are you an Englishman? Is not that the country that Opium comes from? Go back and stop it, and then we will talk about Christianity.’

In spite of the conflict between the opium trade and the message of the missionaries, which led to hostility and sometimes violence against them, missionaries poured into China. In fact, a British war report quoted in the London Illustrated News in 1842 explicitly linked the two issues:

‘Out of evil sometimes cometh good, and the opium trade, which is little understood in this country, may have been the means intended by Providence for introducing the gospel and altering the condition of that benighted country, for that such an event is sooner or later to take place, no Christian can doubt.’

There were already more than 30 Protestant missions in China when J. Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission in 1864, bringing hundreds more missionaries into the country. At the time of Florence’s visit to China, the Mission boasted more than 600 missionaries at work in the country. One was Miss Annie Taylor, who travelled through China to reach Tibet, having felt the call of God to the mission in that country. Her story was reproduced in China’s Millions, the Mission’s own publication, from reporting in the North China Daily News. Miss Taylor had been travelling for almost a year and was passing through Chung-king when the article was published under the title ‘A Lady’s Adventure in Tibet’.

‘Miss Taylor’, the article stated admiringly, ‘in addition to the suffering inevitable in a country so bare of food and shelter as is Tibet, and in a climate where the strongest often succumb, had her existence further imperilled by the treachery of her Chinese servant, and was only saved on more than one occasion from being murdered by the interposition of the more chivalrous Tibetans. And then, nothing but the most undaunted resolution, coupled with a coolness and nerve as astonishing as it is admirable, saved her from perishing a victim to such cold and hunger as it seemed incredible a frail woman should have survived.’

The article went on to relate how Miss Taylor had first attempted to enter Tibet from the Indian side in 1887, but faced illness and near starvation – although she had money, no-one would sell food to an English woman. Two attempts were made to poison her, and for ten months, she did not see another European. Retreating to China, she lived near the border for a year, building relationships with Tibetans and eventually making the border crossing in a convoy with four servants and ten horses.

‘One of her first serious adventures,’ the account continues with considerable under-statement, ‘was being attacked by a band of brigands with white fur coats, leading each a spare horse. Two were killed, eight wounded, and five out of her horses killed, besides much property lost. But a Lama called out to the robbers, “They are women! All women!” so she was not pursued. Amongst Mongols and Tibetans it is esteemed a dreadful thing to strike a woman, so that all women go about unarmed, although every man carries weapons…

On the 28th of September, the party crossed the Yellow River, there very narrow and dangerous, on yak skins blown out, with hurdles laid upon them, and drawn by horses. These rafts are awash all the time, and the water was ice-cold. They then found themselves in the very large Golok district, peopled entirely by robbers. But the Goloks never rob within their own territory. Travellers in making contracts in Tibet always have to agree to pay for a yak, or horse, if it die, or
get stolen on a journey, but not if it be stolen by the Goloks. Their chieftain is a woman, and laws are strictly observed in her domain, and no bribes taken.

The Goloks relate how five Russians came to travel through the country, and they themselves went out to attack them 500 strong, but could kill none, though 12 of themselves were killed. Then came one traveller alone with a tin box. They all wanted that tin box, and still continue to reproach one another that they did not take it, but their belief was that on opening it an army of soldiers would come out. They thought the same with regard to Miss Taylor’s two cases of chest of drawers, besides many other fabulous tales about her.

Annie Taylor did eventually reach her goal, Llassa, and it was there that her Chinese servant turned on her and she was saved by the intervention of the Tibetans. They provided an escort to take her out of the region – but her trials continued.

‘For three days they lost their road; they had no tent. That and every comfort had to be sold, her servant having taken everything he could from her before he left her. When, on the 24th of December, they found the road again, they just hid in the hills for the whole of Christmas Day for rest. During all this part of the journey her sufferings from the rarity of the air were very great: palpitations, gasping, inability to digest their barley food. Of even that they had so little. Noga [the treacherous servant] spread a report that Miss Taylor was travelling with a belt of gold and jewels around her waist. And she had to travel by night, finding the cold beyond what anyone could imagine who had not felt it. Tea froze as soon as poured out, and for three nights they were only too thankful to find refuge in a cave with just room for them to lie down, half suffocated by smoke, so as to obtain a little heat.

On 31st of December, they crossed the Drichu into the Lhassa district, but had to stop near Najuca, within three days’ journey of Lhassa, owing to Noga having gone before, making a great merit of revealing that it was a foreigner coming.

A military chief arrived from Lhassa, very gorgeous in his clothing, and at first rough, then friendly, and indignant with the Chinaman’s treachery. There was a sort of trial. And none who can should miss hearing from this heroic woman’s own lips how she stood out for her dignity as an Englishwoman, till in the end she not only won respect from all, but convinced them of the truth of her story, thereby saving the lives of her two Tibetan servants, who the Chinaman had tried to make out were treacherously leading her into Tibet.

The Chiefs told her as far as they were concerned she could carry on to Lhassa, but they would lose their lives if she did, and they gave her an official and nine soldiers to protect her against the Chinaman, beside supplying her most pressing necessities. Everywhere she found the Tibetans express liking for the English. They had been especially struck by the prisoners in the Sikkim war being kept alive, well fed, and actually supplied with money to go home with. So that there seems a little fear, lest should there be another war the whole people would seek to be taken prisoners!

On the return journey, the horses, which in winter have to be fed with goats’ flesh, tea, butter and cheese, suffered so from hunger they were always tumbling down, until Miss Taylor joined herself on to a yak caravan, and 200 yaks made a way for them through 20 feet of snow.’

She left Lhassa on 22nd January and arrived at Ta-chien-lu on 12th April, still determined to return to Tibet to spread the gospel. The Tibetans, the paper reported, called her ‘Annia’, the name for their women religious leaders: and, to look more like one, she had all her hair cut off.

Florence was in China at exactly the same time as Annie Taylor: perhaps she read about the woman’s
travels in the China Inland Mission paper, *China’s Millions*. If so, Miss Taylor was probably one of the few people who could have made Florence feel that her trip to China as a governess was tame and unadventurous.

Another might have been Alicia Little, part of whose time in China also coincided with Florence’s visit. As Mrs Archibald Little, she was the wife of a merchant who spent 50 years in China, developing several businesses in Shanghai with his brother. Prior to her marriage, however, she had been a novelist, writing romances as A E N Bewicke. In China, Alicia Little wrote twelve more books of fiction, with China as the setting. Her novels centred on some of the key issues of colonial society in China. She wrote about relationships in colonial communities, where junior officers in the foreign service were forbidden to marry for six years, and ‘concubinage’ was common. In fact, it was not banned by the British until 1910, and even then did not stop immediately. Alicia Little wrote about the schools that were set up for Eurasian children – often by missionaries and concerned European women – and which separated the children from their Chinese mothers. But the issue on which Little had the most impact, by moving outside of the realm of fiction into activism, was the Chinese custom of footbinding.

The purpose of footbinding, which had been practised in China since at least the first century BC – and, according to myth and legend, much longer – was to achieve a foot no more than three inches long. Such a tiny foot was considered a sign of daintiness, civility and attractiveness. It also became associated with eroticism and fetish. A three inch foot was known as a ‘golden lotus’, a four inch one was a ‘silver lotus’ and anything larger an ‘iron lotus’. To restrict growth to this abnormal size, footbinding began when girls were between the ages of three and eleven, and was undertaken initially by their mothers or other female relatives. First, the four smaller toes were broken and folded under the foot. Later the arch of the foot was broken so that the foot could be folded in two, with a deep cleft between the heel and the sole, which might be deepened by cutting. Tight bandaging held the foot in this position and restricted any further growth. Infections, gangrene and even septicaemia sometimes resulted, and some girls died. The whole process was extremely painful, and continued throughout the woman’s life. The bound feet restricted walking, so had the effect of confining women close to home. It was not however restricted to higher class women, who had household servants to wait on them; it was also performed in working families, in the hope that it would make the girls more attractive to potential husbands. When this failed, they would resume work in spite of their bound feet.

Alicia Little was vehemently opposed to footbinding, which was called ‘one of the greatest curses in China’. In April 1895, she founded T’ien Tsu Hui, the Natural Feet Society, and persuaded women in Shanghai to join. Together they sent 10,000 copies of an anti-footbinding leaflet around China, and collected examples of where the practice had been abandoned to encourage other places to follow suit. (The support of the ruling dynasties for footbinding has waxed and waned over the centuries as the leaders changed – the Europeans were not the first to suggest that the practice should be ended.) Later, Chinese women took over leadership of the Society and the movement joined in the wider cause of more liberation for women in China. In 1902, Tz’u Hsi, the Empress Dowager, issued a proclamation banning footbinding. But it was the 1911 revolution, which ended the Ch’ing dynasty, which also finally – formally – ended the practice of footbinding. Like many such customs, it was several decades later before the practice really died out. But Alicia Little’s campaigning work, described in her book ‘Intimate China’, certainly helped sound the death knell for this mutilation of Chinese girls, and was probably her proudest achievement.

Florence Shore’s stay in China is more of a mystery than the lives of the traveller and the novelist who left their written records. There is no record of how Florence came to be working as a governess in
China, or the exact dates of her stay. She was not recorded in the UK 1891 census, which took place on the night of 5th/6th April, so it seems likely that her stay in China included this year. Her application to train as a nurse in Edinburgh must have been made in 1892, by which time, her hospital record shows, she had worked for two years in China, so allowing time for her to make the application and be accepted, she must have been back in England by Autumn 1892. The journey to and from China was a long one – it took Hudson Taylor five months to travel from England to China by ship in the 1860s, though the coming of steam ships and the opening of the Panama canal speeded up the journey soon afterwards – so it is possible that Florence was out of England for the best part of three years.

Florence was said to have been religious throughout her life, and her great uncle on her father’s side, George Brewin, was a curate in the parish of Wortley, near the Shore home, for the whole of his ministry. Perhaps he was able to help Florence find a position as governess to a missionary family during their posting to China. Or she could have worked for a merchant’s or diplomat’s family, based in one of the treaty ports. One of her references for the nurse training school in Edinburgh, to which she applied immediately after her China trip, was from a Mrs Mackintosh, of 22 Balderton Street, London. Was this the family whose children Florence had taught in China? The Mackintosh family was not resident at Balderton Street at the time of the 1891 census, so they may have been in China at that time, with Florence working for them as a governess. Whatever the nature of her employment, she would have returned to England with some extraordinary new experiences from life in the Middle Kingdom. Victorian society in Edinburgh, where Florence went next to start her nurse training, was, quite literally, a world apart.
Chapter 10

Nurse Florence Shore

For most of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, hospital nursing had been the province of drunks and paupers. But by the time Florence Nightingale Shore began her nurse training at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, on 1\textsuperscript{st} January 1893, the influence of her godmother Florence Nightingale had radically changed nursing. Nightingale had made it possible for respectable lay women to become nurses, and opened up one of the very few alternatives for middle class 19\textsuperscript{th} century women to a life of marriage and children, or spinsterhood in the homes of male relatives.

A Nightingale Fund for the training of nurses had been established by admirers of her work while Florence Nightingale was still in the Crimea, organising the nursing in the army hospitals. By the time she returned to England, a sum of £55,000 was available, and the Nightingale Training School was set up at St Thomas’s Hospital in London in 1860. The core of the curriculum was set by Nightingale herself in her book ‘Notes on Nursing’, and ‘Nightingale nurses’ were recognised as educated, knowledgeable and skilled people, in stark contrast to most others calling themselves nurses. (Registration of trained nurses, and the legal protection of the title ‘nurse’, was still sixty years away.) Nightingale nurses were soon in great demand in both hospitals and workhouses. The matrons of several of the famous London hospitals had passed through the Nightingale school, as had those in charge at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, the army’s Royal Victoria Hospital at Netley, and the Cumberland Infirmary. Miss Spencer, in charge of the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh when Florence Shore applied there, was also a Nightingale nurse.

Florence’s decision to become a nurse was, unsurprisingly, influenced by her godmother. She wrote to Florence Nightingale about her desire ‘to become a hospital nurse ... probably inspired by your kind interest in being my godmother.’ In another letter she added that her ‘ultimate hopes are to become an Army nurse as you were.’

The Royal Infirmary Edinburgh was a venerable institution, already more than 150 years old when Florence arrived. It had been set up in 1729, following an appeal for funds by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, with just four beds in its first building, the ‘Little House’ at the head of Robertson’s Close. It was granted a Royal Charter in 1736, and moved seven years later into new premises in the present Infirmary Street. The ‘Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh’ had more than 200 beds. Further building, including two additional surgical hospitals, created increasingly cramped conditions and finally led to the RIE moving into a specially-commissioned new hospital in Lauriston Place in 1879. This was the hospital to which Florence applied for her nursing training.

Her application came with recommendations from Mrs Mackintosh in London, and from Mrs Brewin, wife of the Reverend George Brewin. Florence was within days of her 28\textsuperscript{th} birthday when she started her nurse training, and had a lot more experience of the world than most women of her age and time. However, the rules of the hospital that governed probationers’ work and their lives were all about compliance and conformity, and they applied to everyone from the youngest and most raw, to the oldest and most experienced. The Regulations stated that:

‘The Managers of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary have made arrangements for giving a year’s training to women desirous of working as Hospital or Private Nurses.'
Women desirous of receiving this course of training should apply to the Lady Superintendent of Nurses, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, subject to whose selection they will be received into the Hospital as Probationers. Probationers are admitted between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age, single or widows; a certificate of age and other information will be required, according to the form printed at the back...

The term of the Probationer’s training is a complete year; it may, however, be extended for another quarter, and Probationers will be received on the distinct understanding that they will remain for the required term...

They will be lodged in the Hospital, in the ‘Nurses’ Home’; each will have a separate bedroom, and they will be supplied with board, including tea and sugar, also washing, and with indoor uniform, which they will always be required to wear when in the Hospital. They will serve as Assistant-Nurses in the Wards of the Hospital.

They will be paid £10 during the year of Probation. This will be in addition to the uniform.

At the close of the year their training will usually be considered complete, and during the two years next succeeding the completion of their training they will be required to enter into service as Hospital, District or Private Nurses, in such situations as may from time to time be offered to them by the Lady Superintendent, and will receive £20 the first, and £21 the second year, with indoor uniform.

The names of the Probationers will be entered into a Register, in which a record will be kept of their conduct and qualifications. At the end of a year those who passed satisfactorily through the course of instruction and training will be entered in the Register as Nurses, and will be recommended for employment accordingly. After the three years’ term is completed, engagements may be terminated by a month’s notice on either side.’

The Regulations also included the required text of a letter, to be sent by each Probationer to the Chairman of the House Committee of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, one month from the date of entry, confirming her commitment to the three year term:

‘SIR, – Having now become practically acquainted with the duties required of an Hospital Nurse, I am satisfied that I shall be able and willing, on the completion of my year’s training, to enter into service in a Public Hospital or Infirmary, or as a District or Private Nurse, and I engage, in accordance with the Regulations of the House Committee, and in return for the advantages bestowed upon me, to continue in such service for the space of at least two years, in whatever situations may be thought suitable to my abilities. I am, SIR, etc., etc.’

Such a controlled environment was entirely the norm in the new world of more professional and respectable nursing. And the Edinburgh school came highly recommended. Florence Nightingale wrote a note to her god-daughter at the beginning of her training, in a letter dated January 3rd 1893, expressing approval at her choice of institution:

‘Dear Florence Shore – In answer to yours that you are now at Edinburgh, accepted by Miss Spencer as a Probationer, and a better Hospital, and a better Nurse Training School you could not be in, let me wish you a good New Year, and give you joy that you are accepted at the Royal Infirmary School as Probationer. Many good New Years. Yours sincerely, Florence Nightingale.’

So Florence’s nurse training began at a chilly Scottish New Year, on a salary of £10 per year with
uniform, food and accommodation. Her training record shows that, during her probationer year, ‘she was almost twenty-six weeks in Medical Wards, nearly twenty six in Surgical, and on leave for three days.’ At the end of this exhausting and demanding year, Florence’s supervisor reported on her impressions of the new Nurse Shore. They must have come as a harsh blow to Florence, carrying the weight of her godmother’s name and her father’s history at the same institution, and after a year of such hard work.

‘She proved kindly, fairly capable’, the note on her training record begins, optimistically, before following up with ‘not very bright or thoughtful, nor possessed of tact. She did not carry out the promise of the first few months.’

Yet Florence must have impressed some of her tutors: she was awarded second prize in anatomy and physiology, and presented with two books, ‘Shakspere’s Works’ and Norris’ Notes, by Charles W. Cathcart MB, FRCS, Lecturer.

In spite of any misgivings about Nurse Shore’s performance, the Infirmary did not – as it could have – decide to extend her training by the extra three months. Instead, Florence was taken onto the staff on 1st January 1894 as an ‘Extra Night Nurse’. Her routine in this post is set out in instructions to the night staff:

‘Early tea, to be put round at 5.30am, and bed-making and washing may be commenced immediately afterwards. The nurse must not disturb any patient who is asleep until after 6am. (Helpless patients who are awake may be washed between 5 and 5.30, but the other patients are not to be disturbed.) The sideward beds are not to be made until after 7.15am.

The temperatures, pulses and respirations to be taken by the day nurses, excepting in the case of patients on four-hourly charts. The night nurse must pay constant attention to the freshness and ventilation of the ward...

The night nurses will set up patient’s breakfast trays, and clean one turret. Centre lights must not be put up until 6am, and if side lights are required they must be shaded. Blinds not to be pulled up till after 6am. Sideward patients to be visited at regular intervals. Sideward doors to be left open from 10.30pm onwards.

Night Nurses must not visit other wards, or go into the grounds or across the balcony during the night, and they are requested to be quiet in the corridors when going to and from the dining room for meals.’

Later, Florence returned to day duty, and she was sent to a variety of different wards as she worked out her two years’ contracted service at the hospital. By this time, she was earning £21 a year – equivalent to around £5,000 today.

It was during Florence’s second year at the Royal Infirmary, in April 1894, that Mabel Rogers came to Edinburgh for her nurse training, and the two women met for the first time. Mabel was almost exactly the same age as Florence. Her father was a solicitor; she came from a family of four girls in Reading and went to school in Oxfordshire. It was reported that Florence and Mabel ‘became great friends at once.’ It was a friendship that would last for the rest of Florence’s life, and see their two careers run inseparably throughout that time. When Florence finished her required two years’ service at the hospital (plus an additional nine months) and left for a brief holiday, in September 1896, Mabel still had a year’s service to work. During this time Florence went to the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin to learn midwifery. She would complete the course in May 1897, at the age of 32, at the same time as Mabel finished her two years’ service in Edinburgh. Florence’s stay in Dublin would be almost the last time they were separated for 17 years.
Chapter 11

The man midwife of Dublin

By the time Florence started her training, men had effectively muscled in on the business of attendance at childbirth.

They had been interested in it for centuries: Leonardo da Vinci was drawing babies in the womb, based on knowledge gained through dissection, as early as 1500. The first printed book on midwifery (by a man) was published in 1513 and other major works appeared in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was during these centuries that the ‘man midwife’ became commonplace. *Man-midwifery dissected*, published in 1793, actually argued against the trend. It depicted men midwives surrounded by instruments and medicines, while the woman midwife was shown in a domestic context, implying a more natural and gentle approach. Apart from different approaches to the birth itself, there were also strong factions which regarded a man’s involvement at the birth as simply indecent. Morals and methods aside, though, there is no doubt that the men midwives contributed a great deal to the knowledge about childbirth and the procedures surrounding it. They were responsible for the invention and refinement of many familiar elements of modern childbirth: anaesthesia, forceps for difficult deliveries, and obstetric surgical procedures. And in Dublin, the hospital itself owed its existence to the passion and persistence of a man midwife.

The Rotunda Hospital (*Ospidea an Rotunda*), which Florence chose for her training, was another famous and venerable institution. It had been founded in 1745 by Bartholomew Mosse, a surgeon and man-midwife, as the ‘Dublin Lying-In Hospital’. Mosse was born in 1712, and served an apprenticeship to a Barber Surgeon in Dublin. From 1733 he practised as a surgeon and man-midwife. Midwives at this time had no special training, but could be licensed by Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin; following trips to Europe to develop his midwifery knowledge, Mosse obtained his licence from the College in 1740. The winter of 1739 to 1740 had seen a dreadful potato famine in Ireland, and the appalling conditions in which destitute mothers gave birth were the spur for Mosse to found a hospital to provide for these mothers in Dublin. He also wanted to train midwives and surgeons to care for mothers in the other counties of Ireland.

The first premises of the Dublin Lying-In Hospital were a former theatre, which opened as the hospital in 1745. As the number of women needing its services rapidly outstripped the facilities, Mosse raised funds for a new, purpose-built hospital through a combination of fundraising events – plays and performances of Handel Oratorios – and lotteries which he ran himself. For one of these he was charged with fraud and arrested in Anglesey. He escaped to mainland Wales and eventually back to Dublin, where he managed to explain away the misunderstanding over his handling of the lottery money. Mosse worked with the architect Richard Cassells on the design for the new hospital, insisting on small wards – which later helped to limit the spread of the often-fatal puerperal (childbirth) fever – as well as a tower on top of the building which, while having no practical purpose, became a famous symbol of the hospital. The Rotunda name came from one of amphitheatres included on the site as venues for fundraising activities.

The hospital was awarded a Royal Charter in 1756, which set up a system of Masters for the institution, each to serve a single seven year term, which has continued ever since. The new hospital opened the following year, making the building already 120 years old when Florence arrived, while the
institution itself had more than 150 years of history. Mosse did not live to see his new hospital in action for long. He died in 1759 at the age of forty seven, in poverty, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Donnybrook Cemetery.

Florence’s midwifery training followed a long period of development and some bold new experiments in the care of women giving birth. Chloroform had been used in the Rotunda for forceps deliveries from the mid-1800s. A home birth service had been established twenty years before Florence’s arrival, incubators were being used for premature babies, and the first Caesarean section at the Rotunda was performed just 10 years earlier. More than one hundred sections were carried out during the Mastership that ran from 1889 to 1896. By 1896, the Master (the wonderfully-named Dancer Purefoy) was reporting the extensive use of gynaecological surgery, and the opening of the first Pathological Laboratory at the Rotunda.

But it was not all progress and success at the hospital. Puerperal fever came in epidemic waves, as it did at all maternity institutions, killing many of the mothers. And the doctors struggled to find ways to reduce the rate of infant mortality, which at times was as high as one baby in six, without a full understanding of infection control, and without antibiotics. All they could think of was increasing the ventilation of the wards. Florence must have seen many tragic losses and much grief during her midwifery training: experience that would stand her in good stead for future work in two war zones.

As soon as she was back from Dublin, Florence and Mabel enrolled at the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses in London, and started their district nurse training there in June 1897. They were about to become ‘Queen’s Nurses’.
Chapter 12

‘The story of a successful experiment.’

‘Hospitals,’ Florence Nightingale wrote in 1876, ‘are but an intermediate stage of civilisation. At present hospitals are the only place where the sick poor can be nursed, or, indeed, often the sick rich. But the ultimate object is to nurse all sick at home.’

Florence Shore’s godmother is chiefly remembered for her influence on the nursing of wounded soldiers, and the organisation of hospital nursing. But she was also a prime mover in the founding of district nursing, and took a close interest in the development of nursing in the home throughout her life.

The idea of an organised system of nurses specially trained to care for people in their own homes originated with William Rathbone (the sixth of the name), a Liverpool merchant and philanthropist. When his wife was gravely ill following the birth of their fifth child in 1859, Rathbone engaged a nurse, Mrs Robinson, to care for her. Mrs Robinson was to have an enormous influence on her employer. She demonstrated ‘the great comfort and advantage derived from trained nursing, even in a home where everything which unskilled affection could suggest was provided,’ as Rathbone later wrote in his own history of district nursing. After his wife died, Rathbone engaged Mrs Robinson for a further three months, to take her nursing skills into the homes of the ‘sick poor’ in Liverpool.

After only a few weeks, however, she baulked at the task. Rathbone records:

‘She returned to her employer and entreated to be released from the engagement. Accustomed though she was to many forms of sickness and death, she was not able to endure the sight of the misery which she had encountered among the poor.’

This is hardly surprising. Liverpool was in the throes of a population explosion: from a population of 75,000 in 1800, the combination of famine in Ireland and the growing trade with America through Liverpool’s port had brought thousands more people flocking to the city. By 1871, the city had more than 490,000 inhabitants, thousands of whom lived in windowless cellars, in spite of efforts to clear them after the Liverpool Sanitary Act. Thousands more lived in court houses: tall, narrow buildings with one room on each floor, built around a courtyard and back-to-back with other courts, restricting the flow of fresh air. Whole families shared single rooms in these houses, and sanitation was primitive, with only one or two toilets for the whole court. The one tap in the courtyard, serving everyone in the court house, was often only operational for part of each day. Infectious diseases such as typhus and cholera were commonplace, poverty led to all the ills of malnutrition, and there was virtually no organised health care available to people who could not pay for it, other than the workhouse hospitals.

Of these, Rathbone had considerable knowledge. He had already been involved in trying to improve standards at the Brownlow Hill workhouse infirmary: an institution of 1200 beds, overseen by two female officers, who, though not nurses themselves, supervised the nursing. They were assisted by pauper women ‘who’, Rathbone observed, ‘were as untrustworthy as they were unskilful’.

In spite of the huge number of beds, the hospital was over-subscribed, with three or four patients to a bed – not all of whom, in Rathbone’s view, needed to be there:

‘Many of the male patients with sore arms and legs were mere malingerers, who thought it more
agreeable to hang round the fire and be pampered with hospital diet than to earn their own livelihood by working outside’.

After consultation with Florence Nightingale – with whom Rathbone collaborated and corresponded throughout his life – Miss Agnes Jones was brought in, with nurses from St Thomas’s Hospital in London, to tackle the hospital’s problems. She immediately began to reduce the numbers of patients, and attempted to introduce training for the pauper women. Both Rathbone and Florence Nightingale were devastated when Miss Jones died after just two years in post.

‘Exhausted by her unremitting labours’, Rathbone wrote, ‘Miss Agnes Jones sank under a severe attack of typhus fever. In the church of the workhouse the beautiful ‘Angel of the Resurrection’ by Tenerari, with inscriptions by Miss Nightingale and the Bishop of Derry, preserves the memory of her life and death.’

Mrs Robinson, meanwhile, was persuaded to stay on in spite of her misgivings, and continue her work with the sick poor in their own homes. She found, Rathbone reported with satisfaction,

‘… that she was able to do great and certain good… patients who had been given up as hopeless by the doctors; patients who, without the assistance of skilled nursing, would have been hopeless even in well-provided homes, were restored to health by the aid thus afforded.’

So the model worked, and Rathbone wanted to extend the benefits of home nursing to more of the sick and needy in Liverpool. He was ahead of his time in his conviction that people were better cared for in their own homes. In his book, he sets out four good reasons for home rather than hospital care that perfectly match the arguments put forward for ‘care closer to home’ today. His arguments started with the observation that many people had chronic conditions that could not be cured, so had to be dealt with at home. In addition, people preferred to be at home with their families; and hospitals lacked the capacity to cope with the level of demand, if everyone with any ailment needed to be taken in to hospital. Finally, he pointed out, hospital care was expensive, so it was more efficient to care for people at home.

But he ran into a problem in setting up a home nursing service. There were not enough properly trained nurses – such as those trained by the Florence Nightingale method at St Thomas’s in London – to recruit into the service. Rathbone, after his experiences with trying to improve hospital care, was absolutely convinced that a dedicated training school for nurses was the key to good care.

‘It was not quite a new idea,’ he wrote, ‘For the authorities of the Royal Infirmary in Liverpool had already realised the want of such a school. As a step towards the improvement of the nursing standard, the matron of that institution had been empowered to pay a salary of £16 to any nurse who deserved it. This salary was certainly not an exorbitant one, and yet no more than four nurses could be found worthy to receive it. Any ordinary nurse of that time, if paid more than the usual salary of £10, would most probably have incurred dismissal for drunkenness after the first quarter-day.’

Rathbone approached Florence Nightingale, who had supplied Agnes Jones and nurses for the Brownlow Hill infirmary, to see if she could spare more nurses for his district work. But all the Nightingale nurses were needed for hospital work, so Miss Nightingale suggested that he start his own training school. The Liverpool Training School and Home for Nurses was built in the grounds of the Infirmary, and paid for by
William Rathbone. It was closely linked with the Infirmary, and aimed to provide ‘thoroughly educated professional nurses for the Infirmary; district nurses for the poor; sick nurses for private families’. The curriculum for district nurse training included technical class instruction in hygiene (ventilation and sanitation – students had to be able to draw a diagram of the sanitary and plumbing system of a house); nutrition and diets; fevers (diagnosis and disinfection); diseases of women; monthly nursing including the care of newborn infants; practical sick cookery; bandaging; and the use of medical and surgical appliances.

Meanwhile, on the practical side, Liverpool was divided into 18 districts, deliberately made coterminous with parishes or groups of parishes in order to foster the cooperation of the clergy; although the service was strictly non-denominational. A lady or committee of ladies was appointed to superintend the work of each district (but not, as they were not themselves nurses, to supervise the nurses). The lady superintendent’s duties were to visit – in person or by deputy – all cases under treatment, to ensure that the nurses were ‘working faithfully and well’. She examined the nurse’s register of patients and heard reports on patients; and arranged the supply, custody and distribution of medical appliances. The superintendents also kept memoranda of expenses incurred, and articles lent. Alongside district nursing, Liverpool had instituted that much less appreciated species, the health service manager.

As a city, Liverpool took great pride in its role in the invention of district nursing. At the 1909 Jubilee Congress, celebrating 50 years since William Rathbone’s engagement of Mrs Robinson, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool said with evident satisfaction:

‘I do not know that Liverpool has ever distinguished itself by any theory for the re-construction of the world, but no town has ever been more ready to suggest or more glad to execute any practical scheme for the alleviation of any practical need, than Liverpool has been.’

It was a friend of William Rathbone’s, Charles Langton, who instituted another practical aspect of district nursing that would shape the working lives of Florence Shore and Mabel Rogers, along with thousands of other district nurses. He suggested that, rather than being isolated in lodgings or rooms of their own, district nurses should be accommodated together in a ‘district home’, under the supervision of a professionally-qualified matron. This would allow them to support each other, and learn from each other’s experiences. It also allowed the matron to ensure that they were engaged in proper nursing and not in ‘poor relief’ – a major concern of Florence Nightingale’s, who felt that acting as welfare agents ‘demeaned the noble art of nursing’. With training, nurses’ homes and a service in place, the ‘Liverpool model’ (or the Rathbone/Nightingale model) spread rapidly to other cities. In 1868, the East London Nursing Society was founded on a similar model, although without the district homes. The Metropolitan and National Nursing Association, initiated by the Council of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, and supported by the Duke of Westminster, was set up 1874; and most of the other major cities in England followed suit. Florence Nightingale was in no doubt of the success of this new model of nursing:

‘As to your success’ she wrote, ‘What is not your success? To raise the homes of your patients so that they never fall back again to dirt and disorder: such is your nurses’ influence. To pull through life and death cases – cases which it would be an honour to pull through with all the appurtenances of hospitals, or of the richest in the land, and this without any sickroom appurtenances at all. To keep whole families out of pauperism by preventing the home from being broken up and nursing the bread-winner back to health. To drag the noble art of nursing out of the sink of relief doles. To show rich and poor what nursing is, and what it is not. To carry out practically the principles of preventing disease by stopping its causes and the causes of infections
which spread disease. Is not this a great success?"

William Rathbone’s own assessment of his scheme, in his history of district nursing, was simply that it was ‘the story of a successful experiment’.
Chapter 13

‘Do not be discouraged’

Successful it certainly was, but success is not always enough. The achievements of the district nursing service in each area were entirely dependent on the funds that could be raised locally by the Lady Superintendents to pay for it. Funding the training schools and the nurses’ wages and accommodation was a constant struggle, replicated in districts across the country, year in and year out. Then, as Queen Victoria celebrated the golden jubilee of her reign, everything changed for district nursing.

The ‘Women’s Jubilee Fund’ was set up to collect money from across the country as a celebratory offering to the Queen; and in 1887, the Queen assigned the bulk of it to support the work of trained nurses caring for the sick in their own homes. A committee of three Trustees was appointed, headed by the Duke of Westminster, to decide how best the funds should be used to achieve this. In 1888, Sir Rutherford Alcock, one of the Trustees, wrote to The Times newspaper, enclosing the Report of the Committee. It recommended that the Women’s Jubilee Fund of £70,000, producing income of around £2,000 a year, should be applied ‘to found an institution for the education and maintenance of nurses for tending the sick poor in their own homes’. A provisional committee, including William Rathbone, who was by now an MP, was appointed by the Queen to settle details of the projected charity. The Metropolitan and National Nursing Association was established as the core of the London training school, with the Liverpool Association affiliated to it. The following year the ‘Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses’ was established by a Royal Charter, and William Rathbone became Vice President to the first Council of Trustees of the Institute. The principal charitable objectives of the new Institute were set out in the Charter:

‘The training, support, maintenance and supply of women to act as nurses and midwives for the sick poor and the undertaking of preventive and supervisory work for securing their health and the health of their children.

The establishment (if thought fit) of a home or homes (including training homes) for such nurses and midwives and of maternity hospitals for the instruction of such nurses and midwives and clinics for their instruction in child welfare.

The co-ordination and supervision of centres for any of the aforesaid purposes and generally the promotion and provision of improved means for nursing the sick poor and securing their health and the health of their children.

To co-operate with other Corporations, bodies and persons in carrying out any of the above objects with power to make grants of money to such Corporations bodies and persons in furtherance of such objects.

To establish branches of the Institute in the United Kingdom or elsewhere with a view to aiding or advancing the main objects of the Institute.’

It was to this Institute, just eight years after it opened its doors, that Florence and Mabel came for district nurse training mid-way through 1897.

Florence Nightingale had had a lot to say about the selection and training of district nurses. Specifically, she considered that the district nurse:
… must be of a yet higher class and of a yet fuller training than a hospital nurse, because she has not the doctor always at hand; because she has no hospital appliances at hand at all; and because she has to take notes of the case for the doctor, who has no one but her to report to him.

In hospitals and infirmaries they may say “Where everything is provided, it is easy to be clean and airy, orderly and godly, but look at us in our one room – and a sick person in it into the bargain – and with no appliances”. Here the trained district nurse steps in. Here, in the family, she meets them on their own ground.’

She was also very keen on the potential for district nurses to be what she called ‘health missioners’ – teaching people how to look after their health and to care for themselves when sick, and showing by example the standards of cleanliness and good order which would speed recovery and prevent complications.

‘We hear much of ‘contagion and infection’ in disease’ she wrote in 1890. ‘May we not also come to make health contagious and infectious? The germs of disease may be changed into the germs of health.’

So Florence and Mabel’s district nurse training at the Jubilee Institute covered not only the understanding of diseases and treatments, but also how to ‘put the room in nursing order’, and the principles and practicalities of public health. The examination in hygiene in 1898 tested candidates with the following questions:

‘What are the two particular dangers against which we have to guard in the case of indoor air? Mention Nature’s chief agencies for keeping outdoor air fresh, and how far we must copy these indoors.’ (The answers were ‘Impurity and Stagnation’ and ‘Wind and Rain’, with emphasis on ventilating the sick room in order to change the air three times an hour.)

‘What are the three essentials to absolute safety in the water carriage system of drainage, and describe each.’ (The soil pipe must be outside and the pipe under the closet must be trapped; there must be good ventilation around the soil pipe; the soil pipe should be as straight as possible, made of lead, with perfectly fitting joints. Overflow pipes ‘should be warning pipes ... to tell when water is wasting from too full cisterns, baths, etc; they should not be connected with waste-water pipes, but be carried straight through the outside wall over a drawing room window or anywhere that they will attract notice to waste going on.’)

‘What do you understand by cubic space? How large must a room be for safety if three people, one child and one dog are to sleep in it, and it is lighted by one ordinary gas-burner?’ (Cubic space is ‘the amount of space obtained by length, breadth and height together ... a person should have 1,000 cubic feet of air space with proper ventilation in a sleeping chamber ... and this amount of air space is what is demanded for every prisoner in England by law.’ The room should be 25ft by 25ft by 12ft, to contain three people, one child, one dog and one gas burner. A dog, the nurses were required to know, needs 300 cubic feet of air.)

A Queen’s Nurse textbook from 1889 illustrates the breadth of practical knowledge and skills, and the spirit of resourcefulness and invention, to be instilled into the students. It was written by Mrs Dacre Craven, formerly Florence Lees, a ‘Nightingale nurse’ from St Thomas’ Hospital, and the first Superintendent General of the Metropolitan and National Nursing Association. Her book, ‘A Guide to District Nurses and Home Nursing’ was written for trained district nurses, and starts by repeating
Florence Nightingale’s assertion that ‘For district nursing, a better class of woman and a higher education are needed than for a hospital nurse, or even for a hospital Superintendent.’

Its contents include, under ‘Personal qualifications’, chapters on ‘Management and Tact’, and ‘The Nurse as Sanitary Agent’. In the section on ‘Arrangement of the Sickroom’, there are chapters on ‘How to remove Furring and Stains from Utensils and from Pans of WC’s’; and ‘Extemporary Outside Blinds’. The section on ‘Cleanliness’ is lengthy and includes ‘Cleansing teeth and gums’, ‘Preventing Bed-sores’, ‘How to get rid of Vermin that may infest Beds and Bedding’, and ‘How to extemporise Bedpans, Urinals and Spittoons’. Amongst the more clinical tasks, it covers ‘How to perform Last Offices for the Dead in a room occupied by the Living’.

Fortified with this knowledge, Florence Shore and Mabel Rogers passed their Institute exams and were entered onto the Roll of Queen’s Nurses in December 1897. Florence was Queen’s Nurse number 947; Mabel’s Roll number was 915.

It was the practice of the Institute, once a nurse had completed her district training and been entered on the Roll, to deploy her wherever there was a vacancy. Since district nurse posts had to be paid for by funds raised locally, and success in doing so relied on the energy, inventiveness and persistence of the local Lady Superintendent, the availability of posts did not necessarily match the degree of local need. Nor did it matter where a nurse might want to work. If funds could not support a Queen’s Nurse (and lodgings, and a horse or donkey and trap for their travel), then there might only be a ‘village nurse’ instead. These were local nurses who had received less training, and were not regarded with nearly the same respect as Queen’s Nurses.

So it was almost certainly not by choice that, when Florence and Mabel completed their training as Queen’s Nurses in 1897, Mabel was sent to work in Sunderland, while Florence went to Reading. This must have been a wrench for the two women, who had been great friends, and worked and studied together almost continuously for the last four years. Perhaps it was this separation, and the prospect of starting a new job alone in a new town, that affected Florence’s mood, and led to the words of encouragement contained in another letter from her godmother, dated 8th December 1897:

‘My dear Florence Shore – If you will allow me to call you so. I am very fond of the name of Shore. Thanks for your kind letter. Let me send you £2 2s for your little clock. I hope this will be enough to get you a serviceable clock. Do not be discouraged, for you are discouraged. You will find the real joys begin when you are actually at work, or rather, perhaps, you will find then that you do not want joys. I should like to hear from you from Reading if you are so good as to write to me. I think District Work brings one more in heartfelt contact with one’s fellow creatures than anything else. And when one knows that doctors who know say that the mere visit of the Nurse diminishes the mortality, one thanks God who puts such God-like powers into our hands, provided they are genial hands. Excuse haste and pencil – Ever yours, F. Nightingale.’

Florence Shore wrote back quickly:

‘Thank you very much for your very handsome present: indeed it is much more than I expected. I shall value my little clock very much indeed. Thank you too for your kind words of comfort. I do indeed mean to put my whole heart into my work and hope that I may be permitted to be of a little use and comfort to some of my fellow creatures. I am going to Reading next Thursday.’

Florence bought a Mappin carriage clock with her godmother’s gift. She also had another, more important
wish granted – after a year at Reading, in December 1898, Florence joined Mabel at the Sunderland District Nursing Association. The two women worked there together for most of the next fourteen years. Most, but not all, because it was during this time that Florence and Mabel joined the Army Nursing Reserve. Less than two years into their time at Sunderland, they embarked on their first overseas nursing experience, when they were sent to South Africa during the second Boer War.
Chapter 14

‘Many honourable women’

Many nurses from the Army Nursing Service were already war veterans by the time the second South African war started in 1899. The Service had been formed in 1881, and its members had served in Egypt and the Sudan. They included many who would become famous names in the First World War in due course, including Maud McCarthy, later Matron in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France. By the time the Second Boer War began, in 1899, Queen Victoria’s daughter Princess Christian had formed an Army Nursing Reserve, which Florence and Mabel joined. Nurses from both the main service and the reserves were sent to help tend the wounded and nurse the local people held in the British-run refugee or ‘concentration’ camps in South Africa. They also helped to staff field hospitals close to the front lines of the war. The Nursing Notes journal of 1904 had no doubt about the need for the new service, and in particular the service of the women nurses:

‘One very definite good has been a direct outcome of the war in South Africa, and that is the reorganisation of Army Nursing upon a basis which gives every promise of excellent results in the near future. The absolute inadequacy of the Army Nursing Service to meet the requirements of war on a large scale, became evident within the first few weeks of the Boer War. Up to that time there had been some obstinate clinging to the old prejudice against the presence of women within sight or sound of battle; those in authority refused to recognise the fact that times had changed, and that with the next serious war the services of fully trained nurses would surely be demanded. The employment of Civil Surgeons, accustomed to depend largely on the help of the nurse for the best results from their own skill, undoubtedly hastened the severance of the red tape swathings which had hitherto prevented the expansion of the Service. South Africa proved once and for all that where there are wounds and sickness there also must be the trained nurse...

When we realise that the Army Nurses available for active service at the beginning of the war numbered less than 100 all told, that the Army Nursing Reserve consisted of only some 200, and that the total number of nurses employed in South Africa amounted in round figures to something like 800 before the struggle ended, instead of being surprised at the failures which occurred we can only wonder that the ‘undesirables’ were on the whole so few.’

The Second Anglo-Boer War, or South African War, began in October 1899, after years of tension between the British and the Boer South African leaders. First Transvaal and then the Orange Free State declared war on Britain. It lasted until the Surrender of Boer Independence in May 1902. Joseph Chamberlain, who, as Secretary of State for the Colonies was formally responsible for South African affairs, is quoted as saying that the man in the street ‘knows perfectly well that we are going to war in defence of principles [such as peace and good governance] – principles upon which this Empire has been founded and upon which alone it can exist.’ This was not, however, the whole story. One commentator added:

‘Chamberlain did not however, mention the need to preserve British authority in an area containing one of the principal life-lines of the Empire in the Cape sea route to India, the Government’s desire to stop foreign infiltration into that region, and its wish to see that if the
Transvaal continued the strongest province in Southern Africa it should do so under British auspices.’

So war was engaged in South Africa, and after some serious initial setbacks, the British troops began to prevail. It was in 1900 that Brigadier General E Y Brabant suggested setting up protected camps for those townspeople who had surrendered, and for the families of neutrals, non-combatants, and men ‘on commando’ – that is, fighting outside of the organised ranks of the South African forces. The need for such refugee camps was exacerbated by the British ‘scorched earth’ policy, which destroyed homes and farms, leaving the families homeless and unable to grow food to feed themselves. In addition, some families were removed to the camps with the idea that this would persuade their menfolk to stop fighting in order to retrieve and look after them.

By the end of the war, there were more than 40 camps for white people, with more than 116,000 inmates. More than 27,000 people died in these camps. There were at least another 60 camps for black people, with almost as many inmates, of whom 14,000 died. In both camps, the vast majority of deaths were amongst the children.

Lucy Watchorn, a Queen’s Nurse who spent a year in South Africa nursing in the Boer camps, wrote an article for the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine about her experiences. She describes the camps as ‘quite unorganised as far as the nursing was concerned’ when the British nurses first arrived, which meant that ‘the sisters started with a free hand’. Very soon, it appears from her account, the nurses had instigated the kind of order and routine that their own training had taught them was essential to good nursing care:

‘A year in a country like S. Africa, everything quite fresh – the whole country and life there making new impressions and giving new thoughts daily – charms and fascinates in a way which can never be forgotten and leaves in one’s mind a seemingly endless train of thought.

The glorious sun soaks through you, and the pure, fresh air makes you feel you have never really breathed before. The sunsets, the thunderstorms and the nights of South Africa are living things in one’s memory. In the Autumn of 1902, English trained nurses were sent out by the British Government to nurse the Boer women and children of the Concentration Camps in Orange River Colony. Thirty sisters left England for this duty and upon arrival were drafted off in twos and threes to the various Concentration Camps in the Colony...

The week we landed the mortality in the camps varied from eight to twenty-seven deaths a day. One must, however, take into consideration that the infant mortality among the Boers is always very high and also that had they themselves been a little less calvanistic and a little more energetic they would most certainly not have lost so many of their dear ones. We divided the camp roughly into camp and hospital. The camp consisted of long rows of single bell tents in an irregular square. Each tent was the property of one family. Everything except cooking was done in this tent, the space not being so limited when one understands that the whole undressing that a Boer considers necessary is accomplished when he has taken off his shoes. The cooking is done in little mud ovens built outside, which were on the same principle as our old country ‘stick’ ovens, where sticks are placed in the oven, lit, allowed to burn, then raked out and the bread put in. The rest of the food, meat, potatoes, onions and vegetables, were all cooked together in one utensil over an open fire...

The Camp Sister trained twelve Boer girls to take temperatures, make poultices, give fomentations, sponge and do slight dressings. Each girl had two ‘lines’ [of tents] which must be visited every morning before nine, every tent entered, and the temperature of any suspicious case
The sister had a small bell tent in which solutions, simple remedies and dressings were kept, and here she met her nurses and took their reports, visiting any serious case herself and reporting to the doctor. If the temperature of the patient was found to be 102 he was promptly removed to hospital.

The sister then went to the dressing tent where surgical dressings were done and medicines given out. After this she went with her nurses to show them any fresh treatment, or to dress any case confined to bed in the tents. Then to the soup kitchen, where soup was made daily and served to all the children of the camp, and beef tea and benger prepared for the camp invalids.

The nurses meanwhile helped in the tents, nursing under the sisters’ directions, helping with the children and cooking for those too ill to look after their own duties, and being generally useful...

The hospital consisted of marquees which could have the sides removed partly or as a whole. This let us have plenty of fresh air. Throughout the whole war the sun and healing air were the sisters’ best allies. When we found it impossible to get the blankets washed we put them out in the sun, which baked them through and through. The mattresses also we had to disinfect in this manner. At the end of the campaign these small camp hospitals were as well equipped and managed as a cottage hospital at home.

The Boer nurses in the hospital – trained by the sister – had each charge of a marquee. It took the sister an hour to go round to each case under her care, this, of course, was without doing anything for the patient. However, we found the Boer girls most trustworthy and most anxious to make good nurses. We had a great variety of diseases, measles in a most virulent form ending in chancre mores being our most trying sickness. We had enteric [fever], dysentery, pneumonia, cancer, phthisis [TB], diphtheria, gangrene, burns – many of the most serious caused by lightning, etc, etc.

Our water supply was limited, but we were always able to get enough for hospital purposes. All excreta was carried right away from the hospital, boiled in huge boilers and afterwards buried. At first one great grief was that we could get no fresh milk; this was afterwards remedied. Goats’ dung was the chief remedy used by the Boers; this was applied irrespective of the cause or nature of the wound; proving ineffectual, the patient was considered doomed by fate for an early grave and no further effort was made to avert this destiny.

Sandstorms were a great trial to us. They rose in a few minutes without any warning, tore wildly along in thick clouds of dust, wrenched the tents from their fastenings, and often carried them off bodily. Upon the first sign of these storms, we had to rush out, tighten all the ropes and close the marquees as quickly as possible, but in spite of all precautions, beds and patients were thick with dust, and all one’s morning work had to be done over again. Other storms we had of hail. Hailstones the size of pigeon’s eggs and larger, fell with a hard rattle on the ground sometimes when falling on the tents ripping through the canvas. The farmers told us the hailstones, on account of their hardness, the rapidity and force with which they descended, were a considerable danger to cattle.

The Boers were very kind to us – ‘the good and lovely English sisters who so far have come to nurse our loved ones’ – and the Boer girls we found most anxious to improve themselves...

The girls are fond of sewing and make their own clothes. They were delighted to learn new stitches from us. They have their own little dainties, always wear huge caps to protect their faces, and big pinafores of Kate Greenaway cut, their hands always covered, if only with mittens made of roughest leather. They marry young and age rapidly, lose their neat figures, and are old women at thirty. The young boys are most attractive, with their strong brown limbs, round smiling
faces, blue eyes and lint white locks. They are clever fingered and quick witted. Out of old milk tins, under their nimble fingers, grow candle-sticks and cups and vases, out of wooden boxes, chairs and stools, out of bones, brooches and pen holders, out of coins, rings – and out of clay, quaintly modelled figures, sometimes as elaborate as an ox-wagon with a span of oxen. When taught games of draughts and marbles, their eager brains soon grasped the play, and one diplomatically disappeared after the first shrill shriek of delight proclaimed ‘sister’ was beaten...

We have left all this behind, and the whole often seems as if it had never been. The Boers are back to their farms and are slowly gathering up the threads of life where they had dropped them three years before. One wonders sometimes, knowing that in the great scheme of the Universe we can never trace the end of an action, how far the double influence of our lives on theirs and theirs on ours will extend.’

Another nurse, Miss Cross, working in one of the largest concentration camps in South Africa, also wrote proudly of the impact of the English nurses, and in particular the ‘splendid management of the Sister-Matron, who reduced chaos and confusion to order and regularity’, so that the camp at Potchefstroom in the Transvaal ‘headed the list in the General Inspector’s reports’. The scale of the operation of the larger camps is evident from the reports from Potchefstroom, which had between 8,000 and 9,000 inmates, and included general hospitals and a maternity hospital. It was divided into five camps, each with three sections, and each with a camp nurse reporting to the head nurse. It had a swimming bath ‘where two or three dozen can comfortably bathe together in constantly running water’, baking ovens, a soup kitchen, and two stores ‘for those who wish to buy without going to town.’ It even had schools, with sixteen teachers.

Florence’s service in South Africa lasted from April to September 1900; and coincidentally, her brother Offley was in the country at the same time. He had been suffering from tuberculosis, and, following treatment in Switzerland, was recommended the climate of South Africa in preference to a return to Russia or India, where he had previously served. Florence’s nursing service was not in the concentration camps, but as a Sister at the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital, Deelfontein; Mabel Rogers was a Sister at the same hospital.

Deelfontein was a village in the Northern Cape, 29 miles south of De Aar, one of the centres of the hostilities, and nearly 4,500 feet above sea level. The planned military field hospital was funded by subscriptions raised from the British public, with fundraising efforts for the ‘Imperial Yeomanry Hospital Fund’ led by Lady Georgiana Curzon. She wrote letters to newspapers early in 1900 asking for donations, saying:

‘I am very anxious to bring before the notice of the British Public that £50 will equip a bed in the Yeomanry field hospital. May I suggest that subscriptions should be raised in big towns or groups of villages to equip beds, and that these beds should be called after the town or village that equips them?’

At this time, the plan was for a hospital of 100 beds, with five doctors, eight nurses and ‘the usual complement of ambulance men and supernumeraries’.

By the end of January 1900, £11,000 of the £30,000 target had been raised, and many doctors and nurses were volunteering to go to the new hospital. Beds were to be named South Suffolk, Kerrison, Woolverstone, Ipswich and Bury St Edmonds, after some of the early donors; and Queen Victoria herself donated £100 for two beds. Princess Christian presented silver badges and personally-signed certificates
to forty nurses who had been selected for service at the hospital; and the first contingent of staff sailed for South Africa – a journey of around 17 days – in the SS Norman on the 10th February. Others, including many of the nurses, sailed on the Guelph. The Senior Army Surgeon in charge of the new hospital was Colonel Sloggart, and the Senior Medical Officer was Mr Alfred Fripp, who had been Surgeon in Ordinary to the Prince of Wales, and assistant surgeon at Guy’s Hospital in London. Miss Mary Fisher was appointed Lady Superintendent of the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital – she had been a ward sister at Guy’s Hospital, and had experience of running a cottage hospital at Watford as well as a convalescent home at Saltburn-on-Sea. With this preparation, she and her two medical colleagues formed the management committee of the hospital.

By the end of March, the base hospital at Deelfontein was open and the field hospitals were being prepared. The hospital, set on the veldt between the hills and the railway line, was huge. Its tents and prefab huts extended for nearly half a mile, with roads and named streets (with lamp-posts) running through it. One newspaper described approvingly the concerted effort to set up of the hospital, saying:

‘The whole of the staff, medical officers included, have worked with an amount of energy which would have gladdened the heart of those at home, who may be inclined to think that a medical man is never in his element unless he is clothed in the regulation frock coat and top hat.’

The hospital soon had 800 beds, and plenty of work to fill them. It became a pioneering centre for the use of x-rays in diagnosis, under the leadership of the Surgeon-Radiographer, Major John Hall-Edwards – who later lost an arm to x-ray damage. Hall-Edwards wrote an article for the British Medical Journal, describing life at the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital at the time that Florence was serving there:

‘Shortly before the close of 1900 our accommodation was considerably reduced by sending up country a number of marquees which had been placed at our disposal by the Government. Even now, however, we have a larger number of beds than it was the original intention of the Committee to supply, and were it not that a large number of our patients are convalescents, it would be impossible for our small staff to keep pace with the work.

For about two months prior to the invasion of Cape Colony our hospital contained so few acute cases, that to all intents and purposes it was little more than a rest camp for convalescents. Since January 1st however our work has gradually increased, until at the present time we have as much work as we have ever had with the same number of beds. At the present time our staff consists only of six medical officers, and our commandant (Colonel Sloggett). We have in hospital 587 patients, 170 of which are acute cases, including 48 cases of enteric fever. On the surgical side our work has of late much increased, and twice during the last fortnight we have, for the first time in the hospital, received wounded men straight from the field.

For the last three weeks intelligence wires and scouts have regularly arrived, telling us of the presence of Boers in our immediate neighbourhood. Last week a scout was fired at from a kopje only two miles distant from the camp, and one night a Kaffir kraal less than a mile away was visited by six Boers, who questioned the natives about the hospital. They were anxious to know how many rifles we had in stores, the number of our horses, and the strength of the guard at the railway station. On hearing of this our store of rifles and ammunition was despatched to De Aar, and orders were issued prohibiting any of the staff from riding more than a mile from the hospital…’
A telegram from Colonel Sloggort, the Chief Army Surgeon and ‘commandant’, summarised their work more tersely in early April:

‘Deelfontein treated seven officers, 402 men ... 69 men yeomanry. Present patients 275 ... expecting 100 fresh cases Bloemfontein today. Securing all possible Yeomanry patients. Everything running satisfactorily ... base camp furnished hospital hut and bedding for sickness amongst arrivals.’

One of the nurses working with Florence and Mabel at the hospital also wrote about her experiences at the Imperial Yeomanry. Her letter, published in a Scottish newspaper, reminded people back home that, just as in the concentration camps, infectious diseases were as big a problem for medical staff as war injuries:

‘Not many bad surgical cases, but so much typhoid for which of course we have special tents. We have had only 14 deaths in the 7 weeks and they were all from enteric [fever], and as we have over 500 patients, that is a very low death rate!’

An article in the British Medical Journal, written by Dr H. D. Rolleston, a consulting physician to the hospital, reported that nearly 15% of the medical and nursing personnel of the hospital also went down with enteric fever: nursing in South Africa during the War was not just demanding and stressful, it was also dangerous.

A picture of the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital shows one of the long metal huts with its windows standing wide open, and four Sisters in the doorway. They wear ankle-length white aprons over their dark dresses with red crosses on the sleeves, and long white veil headdresses. Another picture shows the tent housing the ‘Devil’s Fountain’: the camp newspaper, edited by Newland Pedley, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and formerly Senior Surgeon to the Dental School at Guy’s Hospital.

Florence’s time at the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital saw it set up and its services getting into full swing during the peak of the war. A letter from one of its patients describes the regime and treatment in September 1900, just before Florence left to return to England:

‘After leaving Kroonstad hospital the major sent me over the Y. Detail camp, where I stayed a few days expecting to be sent up to Pretoria to join the fighting line again. However for some reason or another they packed some dozen or so down here to Deelfontein, much to our delight. This camp and hospital, you must understand, is organised especially for the Yeomanry, and splendidly it has been carried out, everything is tip top, the grub particularly. My diet sheet for today consists of: Breakfast: porridge, coffee, bread, butter and jam. Lunch: Mellin’s food or Benger’s food, and 4oz of port wine. Dinner: chicken (tinned), potatoes, rice pudding, bread &c. At 4: extras, beef tea, milk pudding. Tea: tea, toast, butter and jam. Supper: soup mince, arrowroot and milk pudding. Besides which we have a big jug of fresh milk, a can of condensed milk, a tin of cocoa and another of Benger’s food ...
Lady Chesham comes round every other day with tobacco, cigarettes, cigars (all good quality), daily papers, note paper &c. For recreation there is a well-stocked library, cricket, football, concerts. Every evening church service. You would scarcely believe the amount of flesh I have put on within the last days.’

In spite of the enormous contribution that nurses were making to the nursing of wounded and sick people...
both in the camps and in the hospitals, they did not always escape criticism, as the Nursing Notes of 1904 recognised with its reference to the few ‘undesirables’. A snippet published in the October 1902 edition, from a letter sent by a nurse Superintendent in South Africa, gave some hint of the problem. She commented that ‘the nurses are crowding in and no rooms are to be had’, then asked in exasperation,

‘Why do such helpless sort of creatures come and start growling about the country at once? Oh me, I fear some of them will be very disappointed. Impress on them at home – that good all round nurses are required here, and women with some grit besides their training, and that this is a new country.’

A bigger grievance amongst South African nurses – referred to as ‘colonial’ nurses – was that these imported British nurses were recruited in preference to local professionals, in spite of their lack of experience in the country. The Morning Post described the problem in February 1900:

SOUTH AFRICAN WAR NURSES: FROM A COLONIAL POINT OF VIEW. The trained nurses of South Africa are not in the calm and tranquil mood that befits their profession. As at first colonial volunteers were refused permission to fight in the ranks, so since the outbreak of war nearly all the applications of the colonial trained nurses for appointments on the Army Nursing Staff have met with official refusal. Local nurses are overlooked and rejected, and such volunteers are informed that “plenty of nurses are coming out from England,” “No more nurses are needed,” etc. Surely the height of absurdity has been reached when applicants in Capetown have been gravely advised that their only chance of attachment to the Army Medical Service is to journey to London and to endeavour to join a draft of nurses from home … So the trained and certificated nurse stands idle while time is lost and money is expended in the importation from England of nursing material which could most satisfactorily be supplied on the spot.

It is perfectly fair— and the colonial women are the first to concede this— that the British Army Nursing Reserve Corps should have a chance of active service. But it is clearly unjust to the highly-trained certificated women of South Africa that the nursing material for the Army should be chosen almost entirely from “Uitlander” sources. Many of the nurses in the Colony have gained their certificates in the best British hospitals. They are the sisters and daughters of settled colonists, men with a stake in the country. All are used to colonial ways, and have colonial sympathies. In addition, they have a specialised knowledge of malarial and local diseases. Many of them have served useful apprenticeships in mining hospitals, are “salted” to the hardships of a rough-and-ready life on the veldt, and are accustomed to the eccentricities of a colonial commissariat. In fact, they are just the women needed for camp and field hospital, and nurses with such useful practical antecedents should have had the first chance of attachment to the Army Nursing Service in South Africa.’

Whatever their shortcomings, the British nurses were brave women to risk the long journey to another continent, the perils of disease and the deprivations of life in a war zone, in addition to the danger of death or injury. Nursing Notes reminded readers in January 1902 that some nurses had died in the course of their nursing service in the South African War:

‘The shadow of the war has fallen on our ranks also – nursing sisters have laid down their lives for their country in battles none the less grim because waged in the hospital tent instead of on the open veldt. The response to the demand for more and yet more nurses was as ready as to the call
Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem in recognition of the nursing sisters who had died in South Africa, published in ‘The Five Nations’. It was reprinted in Nursing Notes in November, 1903, under a heading which read:

‘So much criticism has been deservedly expended upon the doings of nurses in South Africa that it is pleasant to quote this sincere appreciation of the devotion shown by those who died at their work, giving their lives for their country as truly as any soldier.’

The poem, called Dirge of Dead Sisters, read:

Who recalls the twilight and the ranged tents in order,  
(Violet peaks uplifted through the crystal evening air?)  
And the clink of iron tea-cups and the piteous noble laughter,  
And the faces of the Sisters with the dust upon their hair?

(Now, and not hereafter, while the breath is in our nostrils,  
Now, and not hereafter, ere the meaner years go by-  
Let us now remember many honourable women,  
Such as bade us turn again when we were like to die.)

Who recalls the morning and the thunder through the foothills,  
(Tuft of fleecy shrapnel strung along the empty plains?)  
And the sun-scarred Red-Cross coaches creeping guarded to the culvert,  
And the faces of the Sisters looking gravely from the trains?

(When the days were torment and the nights were clouded terror,  
When the Powers of Darkness had dominion on our soul-  
When we fled consuming through the Seven Hells of fever,  
These put out their hands to us and healed and made us whole.)

Who recalls the midnight by the bridge’s wrecked abutment  
(Autumn rain that rattles like a Maxim on the tin?)  
And the lightning-dazzled levels and the streaming, straining wagons,  
And the faces of the Sisters as they bore the wounded in?

(Till the pain was merciful and stunned us into silence  
When each nerve cried out on God that made the misused clay;  
When the body triumphed and the last poor shame departed-  
These abode our agonies and wiped the sweat away.)

Who recalls the noontide and the funerals through the market  
(Blanket-hidden bodies, flagless, followed by the flies?)  
And the footsore firing party, and the dust and stench and staleness,
And the faces of the Sisters and the glory in their eyes?

(Bold behind the battle, the open camp all-hallowed,
Patient, wise and mirthful in the ringed and reeking town,
These endured unresting, til they rested from their labours-
Little wasted bodies, ah, so light to lower down!)

Yet their graves are scattered and their names are clean forgotten,
Earth shall not remember, but the Waiting Angel knows
Them that dies at Uitvlugt when the plague was on the city-
Her that fell at Simon’s Town in service on our foes.

Wherefore, we they ransomed, while the breath is in our nostrils,
Now, and not hereafter, ere the meaner years go by,
Praise with love and worship many honourable women,
Those that gave their lives for us when we were like to die!

Florence and Mabel returned to England aboard the SS Britannic, which left Cape Town for England on October 6, 1900. On board were 20 wounded, who were named individually on the shipping list. Four of them were nursing sisters. There were 60 other ‘sick laying down’ and 395 convalescents; 10 ‘wounded laying down’ and 128 convalescing from wounds. Only six on board were there simply ‘for passage home’. And on board ‘for duty on voyage’ were Florence Shore and Mabel Rogers, with five other nurses and three surgeons.

* * *

Their service in the war earned Florence and Mabel the South Africa campaign medal. In all, Florence received four medals related to this conflict, all now in the collection of the Florence Nightingale museum in London: the Queen’s South Africa medal, which was silver and showed the Queen’s head; Princess Christian’s Army Nursing Service Reserve medal; a medal commemorating the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital, with the Prince of Wales’s feathers and a crown; and a special medal presented by the County Borough of Sunderland, inscribed on the reverse with her name and ‘for services rendered in South Africa during the Boer War. J. G. Kirtley, Mayor.’

* * *

The City of Sunderland was immensely proud of its soldiers and nurses who had served in South Africa, and welcomed them back with great ceremony. In October 1902, after the war ended, the Council passed a unanimous resolution:

‘That the Council hereby records its appreciation of the heroic devotion to the Empire displayed by Nurses Mabel Rogers, Florence Nightingale Shore, and Florence Elizabeth Filkin in going out to South Africa and there rendering signal service to the sick and wounded in the recent war. And that a certificate on vellum of such appreciation, sealed with the Common Corporate Seal, be presented to each of those nurses.’

The presentation took place in November, at a special meeting of the Council at which nearly 100 volunteers were also given the Freedom of the Borough, and a special plaque was unveiled to the soldiers and nurses. The Mayor, addressing Nursing Sisters Rogers, Filkin and Shore, and the officers and men of
the Imperial yeomanry, Durham Light Infantry and Field Telegraph Corps, said he offered them ‘on behalf of the Corporation and the inhabitants of the town a cordial and earnest welcome home from South Africa’. The local paper, reporting his speech, recorded that:

‘There was one word he would specially like to say on behalf of the nurses who volunteered. They went out in a warlike spirit, and the excitement that accompanied the soldier who went out on the field of battle. They went out to nurse the sick and the wounded at great sacrifice to their own personal comfort, parting from friends, not knowing to what they would be subject. (Applause.) Those brave nurses went from our midst, and he was told on the highest authority that the devotion they exercised in the discharge of singularly difficult work was most creditable to themselves and the institution they belonged to. (Applause.)’

He then presented the three nurses with their certificates and the gold medals inscribed with the borough arms. The memorial tablet of bronze and brass was unveiled, listing all the men from Sunderland who had served in the war, and recognising the ‘heroic devotion’ of the nurses. Florence and Mabel’s return could not have been more gratifying in its recognition.

* 

And though she left the Transvaal in 1900, that was not the end of Florence’s connection with South Africa. She was to become a godmother in 1910 to a girl called Margaret Dru Drury, daughter of Jean Wilkinson, part of the family at Middlethorpe Hall whom Florence had visited so often. She had married a British doctor working in Grahamstown, South Africa. In the meantime, though, Florence and Mabel returned to the Sunderland District Nursing Association, to take up their posts nursing the ‘sick poor’ of that town as Queen’s Nurses.
Chapter 15

One Queen’s Nurse, two furnished rooms and a bicycle.’

Sunderland – an industrial city twelve miles south of Newcastle on the north east coast of England – was a very different experience for the two Queen’s Nurses who had trained in the cultured capital cities of Edinburgh, Dublin and London.

The major industry in the city was shipbuilding, fuelled by export trade via the River Wear in coal, salt and glass. Ships had been built in Sunderland since the 14th century, and between 1846 and 1854, Wearside shipyards produced almost a third of all the ships built in the UK. Towards the end of the 19th century, wooden ships gave way to composite vessels of wood and iron, then steel cargo ships and tankers, all fuelling demand from the yards. During this time the population of the town expanded tenfold, from just over 15,000 in 1887 to nearer 150,000 in 1911. In 1904 and 1907, the Sunderland shipyard started by William Doxford and Sons in 1840 won the ‘blue riband’ for the highest production rate in the world. Success in its main industry was reflected in the public face of the city. The Gazeteer of the British Isles recorded in 1887 that:

‘Its facilities as a port have been greatly improved of late years; a harbour has been made by two stone piers 590 and 650 yards long, extensive docks have been constructed, and a lighthouse has been erected on the N. pier-head, 64 ft. high, with 2 fixed lights 73 and 55 ft. above high water and seen 13 and 6 miles; on the S. pier-head is a fixed light 58 ft. above high water and seen 10 miles. The harbour, with the docks, is 78 ac. in extent. A large trade is done with the Baltic ports and with Holland ... After its coal trade and shipping, the town depends chiefly upon its shipbuilding; it has also large marine engineering works, works for heavy iron-forging, and for the mfr. of glass, cordage, earthenware, &c. Sunderland has many handsome public buildings (including several charitable and educational institutions), excellent sanitary arrangements, and parks, museum, free library, school of art, and public baths.’

One of the ‘handsome public buildings’ of the city was the Victoria Hall. Opened in 1872, it was a gothic-style building used for public meetings and entertainments. Fifteen years before Mabel and Florence arrived in the city, the Hall had been the site of a tragic disaster, when around 2,000 children were attending a show. As they hurried towards the exits at the end of the entertainment, excited by the offer of prizes for certain numbered tickets, they encountered a narrow stairwell and a door bolted to open only 20 inches wide. Unable to get through the slender gap fast enough, the children at the front were crushed and suffocated by the weight of the crowd pushing down the stairs behind them. One hundred and eighty three children died, including an entire Bible class of 30 children from the local Sunday school. A statue of a grieving mother carrying a dead child was erected in Mowbray Park in the city, as a memorial to the victims of the tragedy. Florence and Mabel must have passed it many times during their time in Sunderland, as the park was only a few hundred yards from the Nurses’ Home in Murton Street.

It was not all good news and success in the Sunderland shipbuilding industry, either. Work in the shipyards was hard and dangerous, with death and injury to workers a commonplace occurrence. Medical officers at shipyards, and safety clothing and equipment, would not be introduced until after the second World War. The work was also subject to peaks and troughs in demand for ships, and the resulting
fluctuations in wages made life even harder for the families of the workers. During Florence and Mabel’s time in Sunderland, the town went through one of its worst depressions, from 1908 to 1910, when work was scarce, wages were cut and men laid off from the shipyards. With such large numbers of people employed in such dangerous work, and the endless need for nursing of injuries and illness in very poor families, it is not surprising that the workers and the Queen’s Nurses soon became acquainted.

When Mabel Rogers had first arrived in Sunderland at the beginning of 1898, the staff of the Sunderland District Nursing Association at 28 Murton Street consisted of a Superintendent and four nurses. Demand for their services was high, and local factories began to pay a subscription to ensure that their workers could be treated by Queen’s Nurses when they needed them. By 1901, there were five nurses working from the Home, in addition to Mabel Rogers, who was appointed the Home’s Superintendent, and Florence, who became Assistant Superintendent. Two of the nurses, Margaret Wilson and Isabel Russell, were from Scotland, Kate Gibson had come from Norfolk, and Elizabeth Rose from Staffordshire. Annie Heyward was by far the most exotic arrival, having been born in Spain. Three servants – Ellen Barnett the cook, 16 year old Annie Sawkings the housemaid and 15 year old Margaret Scott, the scullery maid – looked after the household.

Running the household and overseeing the servants was one of Mabel’s principal duties as Superintendent. That role had to be combined with being a teacher of probationers and inexperienced nurses, and the main contact for local doctors, the Committee of the Association, the general public who supported the Association, and patients and their friends. The struggle of the Superintendent of a small home to balance the competing demands on her time were described in an article in Nursing Notes in October 1903:

‘One adviser will tell her, “What is needed is to rouse local interest in the Institution. You must accept invitations, make all the friends you can, never refuse to see a caller, and keep well up with all social duties.” From another quarter she will learn, “A Superintendent’s first duty is to be an efficient Hausfrau.” From a third, that her nights must be given to study and her days to teaching. Yet another friend is of the opinion that now is the time for a little rest. Finally, as in a multiplicity of counsellors wisdom may always be found ... someone is sure to ‘ingeminate’ the wholesome truth that Nurses and Superintendents, Homes and Committees, Patrons and Reports and Donations and Doctors all exist for the sake of Patients, and that they are the persons who must hold the centre of her thoughts, and with whom all her duties, from least to greatest, are more or less directly concerned.’

The same article, by Miss M Loane, sets out how the district nurses in the Home should be looked after. For all the hardships and challenges encountered on their rounds, every effort was made to ensure that the women who had chosen the life of a district nurse were comfortably and securely provisioned by the Association throughout their service. The aim was:

‘To see that every person in the house knows her work and does it, to be careful that the work is not excessive in amount, and is done in the healthiest and pleasantest circumstances possible, and to ensure that each member of the household, from the senior staff nurse to the youngest servant, is regularly supplied with all that she is entitled to or really needs.’

To achieve this, Miss Loane dictates that the furniture in the house should be ‘strong and light’, stairs covered with canvas, and wallpapers varnished ‘so that they can be washed from time to time’. Bedrooms for each nurse should contain
‘a really comfortable modern bed with light, warm bedding, a wardrobe or hanging cupboard of some kind, a roomy chest of drawers, an easy chair, a washstand and pedestal cupboard, a dressing table and looking glass, a small table, a waste-paper basket, and a linen basket... Nothing looks better in a bedroom than white table covers, etc, but as it appears to be an ultimate law of nature that District Nurses must spill ink over these articles, it is best that they should be of woollen tapestry, or art serge that will bear re-dyeing.’

In the nurses’ sitting room, she recommends comfortable chairs, a bookcase filled with books ‘that nurses will read’ (‘care should be taken that they are light in weight and extremely well printed’), a daily newspaper, vases of flowers and, if possible, a stand of growing plants. The pictures should preferably be water-colours,

‘cheerful in subject and treatment. If war-like members of the Committee insist on presenting chilly engravings with mountains of wounded men in the foreground, effusive generals in the centre, and ruined villages in the distance, let them by hung in the hall where no one need look at them, or in the board room where the donors can enjoy them at leisure.’

The daily routine of the household was also aimed at providing a comfortable home life for the nurses. There was a clothes horse by the fire for wet cloaks, and talk of work was forbidden at meal times, which were eaten around a communal table with flowers, polished cutlery and glasses, and hot plates and dishes. The Superintendent was reminded that

‘she is not catering for hungry schoolboys, but for women, perhaps not over strong to begin with, tired with work of a painful and wearing nature, and often half-sickened by the bad air of unwholesome cottages. They need to be tempted by good and varied food, well prepared, served and carved.’

Where there was a sheltered garden, tables and chairs were placed outside for tea to be served there, as ‘every hour spent in pure air is of importance to the nurses’ health.’ Excursions and entertainments suggested for probationers and young nurses included

‘a dozen miles on the top of a tram, an excursion to a neighbouring village, to listen to an outdoor band, to take a short sea trip, or even to have permission to take afternoon tea at a gaily decorated tea shop; all these are pleasures that will by no means be despised.’

Miss Loane could not have imagined that, in just a few years’ time, many of these nurses would be living in military camps and nursing gassed and wounded soldiers from the trenches of World War One.

Even in England, not all the Queen’s Nurses lived this cozy institutional life. Miss Loane’s advice was for Superintendents running a small nursing home where the Queen’s Nurses lived together – usually in the towns. Other Queen’s Nurses were not so lucky, and for them, life was not so gracious. They relied on lodgings or cottages provided and funded by local subscription, which also had to stretch to a means of travelling about their district. The records for every local District Nursing Association contained meticulous entries summarising this minimal local provision, area by area. A small parish in Lancashire, for example, funded ‘One Queen’s Nurse, two furnished rooms and a bicycle.’

One nurse wrote plaintively (and anonymously) to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine in 1909, asking that local district nursing Committees ensure that a bath was provided in all nurses’ lodgings. Currently, she
explained, they sometimes had to rely on a jug of water and a bowl left outside their rooms by the landlady *with the air of one going well beyond her duty.* Most Queen’s Nurses in 1910, an article on pension funds pointed out, were:

‘drawn from the ranks of the daughters of the poorer professional men, struggling medicos, county clergy and unknown solicitors ... many of them have been left orphans totally unprovided for, except so far as a fairly good education and robust health and strength are a provision. Very few, indeed, have any private means.’

They lived on salaries of £30-35 a year, which provided little to spend on comforts or leisure. They were, though, often given gifts of food and drink by local people, patients and their families.

In addition to managing the servants, the furnishing, laundry and maintenance of the Home, the nurses’ diets and social life, and the Home’s accounts, the Superintendent had her teaching duties. These were *generally given in the form of lectures and classes from three to four o’clock twice or three times weekly*:

‘Practical instruction is usually given in the morning, when the Superintendent accompanies each probationer on a certain number of rounds... The Superintendent must on no account find fault with the probationer publicly. In some cases this would so undermine her authority that good work in that house would henceforth be impossible; while in most cases (such is the British love of the oppressed) the severe senior will be voted “an ‘orrid tongued old varmint,” and any neglect or oversight on the part of the probationer will be sedulously concealed. I have known patients circumstantially describe visits that had never been paid, and ascribe effects to poultries that had never been mixed, to try and shield a probationer who acknowledged that she had not been within half a mile of the house.’

In addition to the clinical knowledge and skills they needed, the nurses were also taught how to develop and nurture good relationships with the patient and their family, and to mobilise the help and support of neighbours, colleagues and local networks: the essential skills that differentiate district nursing from hospital nursing. Ten ‘personal rules for district nurses’ at this time were listed by the indefatigable Miss Loane:

1. ‘Spare no pains to make the first visit to a patient a successful one. Encourage the friends to talk freely, and never ridicule or ignore their attempts to describe the course of the disease. If they hesitate for a word, supply it.
2. Never be the first to speak of religion. The nurse’s religion must be shown by acts, not words.
3. Avoid speaking of politics or any highly controversial matters.
4. Make a point of learning as soon as possible the names, addresses and occupations of all relatives of your patients who are living in the same town. This simple precaution may save many awkward complications.
5. Never repeat what you hear, or describe what you see or do, or carry information of any kind from one house to another. Even the very persons who try to cross-question you will gratefully appreciate this honourable reticence. The fear that their private affairs will become known to all their neighbours is often the reason why the self-respecting poor are unwilling to admit a district nurse.
6. If obliged to refuse a request, never do it in a peremptory manner but with a gracious
7. Always give the doctors your loyal support. When questioned by patients or their friends as to your opinion of any doctor, say that he understands the case fully and is doing all that can be done. Try to encourage the belief that for all ordinary work one doctor is quite as good as another, and that when there is anything unusual in a case, the doctor will be the first person to suggest consulting a specialist.

8. Be on friendly terms with the Ministers of every form of faith, with Church Workers, District Visitors, and all who are trying in whatever measure or degree to benefit the poor.

9. Co-operate with the Relieving Officer, the School Board Visitor, and the Sanitary Inspector.

10. Receive courteously everyone who comes to see you. Never make an enemy for yourself or the Association.’

In relation to the doctor, the Superintendent’s chief duty was to see that he had capable nurses – to encourage him to accept that one nurse was as capable as another, to avoid constantly reorganising the day’s work to give him his favourite nurse. For the public, she was to spread knowledge of the work, its methods and aims, to encourage support, and to discourage calls on the charity’s resources from those who could afford to pay for their own care. For the Committee of the Association, the Superintendent’s responsibility was to ‘keep the books, reports and accounts in such perfect order that any information required by them is instantly procurable.’ Perhaps it was watching Mabel juggling all these different responsibilities over many years that made Florence express reluctance to take on ‘management’ herself, and to successfully avoid promotion for many years.

The work of the Sunderland DNA – nursing, teaching, raising funds, assisting the doctors – continued to expand under Mabel’s and Florence’s leadership. In 1905, the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine reported that ‘Sunderland has made a great advance owing to the intense interest by the workmen in the work of the Association.’ Twenty seven local factories were regular subscribers, and had formed a committee of representatives from which they elected four members to the executive committee of the Association. The following year, it was reported that more than 30 local works were subscribing regularly to the Association, and were represented on the Executive Committee: ‘The income amounts to £769 odd, and of this £470 is contributed by the workmen. Additional premises have been bought for the purpose of enlarging the Nurses’ Home.’

By 1911, there were seven nurses working alongside Mabel and Florence, though all of the 1901 staff had moved on. The new nurses were Alexina Angus and Isabel Mackinson from Scotland; Edith McKinson, Constance Eales and Margaret Layfield who were more local, from Northumberland and Durham; and two Staffordshire women, Louisa Walker and Ellen Evans – all looked after by a cook and a housemaid. Meanwhile, Mabel’s influence also extended well beyond Sunderland: she was a member of the executive committee of the Association of Queen’s Superintendents of the Northern Counties from 1901 to 1913. She travelled to meetings in the major cities across the north of England, and sometimes to London for joint meetings with the Association for Queen’s Superintendents in the Metropolitan and Southern Counties. In 1910, she presented a paper to the Conference of Northern Superintendents on ‘The examination for the Queen’s Roll, its advantages and disadvantages.’ Amongst the latter, she noted the timeless issues that a written exam can never test practical work, common sense, tact or resourcefulness in an emergency; it may procure promotion for a nurse who can write a good paper but who may in other ways be less suitable; and it deters older and more experienced nurses, who have taken exams in the past and don’t want to take any more.
Mabel also attended the Jubilee Congress of District Nursing, held in Liverpool from 12-14 May 1909, to celebrate 50 years of district nursing. Amy Hughes, the General Superintendent of the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute at the time, reported to the Congress that there were now more than 3,500 names on the Roll of Queen’s Nurses. William Rathbone’s ‘successful experiment’ had spread rapidly across Britain and abroad: as well as Wales, Scotland and Ireland, there were representatives at the Congress from nursing associations in Canada, the United States, France, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Denmark, Australia, Bermuda, Switzerland and Africa. The Italian National Council of Women and the Bulgaria Red Cross Society both sent delegates to the Congress to learn more about this organised system of nursing in the home.

And it was not just the idea that travelled. Queen’s Nurses themselves were taking advantage of their professional status to travel abroad in a way that most unmarried women of modest means would rarely manage. They wrote letters and articles to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine describing their travels and their experiences of nursing in Jerusalem, Malta, Italy, The Bermudas, the Balkans and South Africa. Letters from Queen’s Nurses in Labrador, Canada, came via dog mail across the ice floes until the worst of the freezing conditions cut the communities off until the Spring.

The proud Lord Mayor of Liverpool was pleased to promote his City’s part in this astonishing expansion and development of a whole new part of the nursing profession, and of the Institute which led it. He announced at the Jubilee Congress that:

‘Not merely was the work started in Liverpool, but without northern energy and northern means the Queen’s Institute could not have become rapidly the great national Institute it now is.’

The audience, according to the official record, responded ‘Hear, hear.’
Chapter 16

‘A day in the life of a kingfisher’

While Florence and Mabel were helping to celebrate district nursing’s Jubilee, and Queen’s Nurses were making themselves indispensible all over the country, the first decade of the new century also brought major advances in medicine, and new discoveries in the sciences. The Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute was quick to incorporate these advances into its training, and to encourage its nurses to learn about them. The Institute arranged a lecture for all Queen’s Nurses in London, in February 1913, on the subject of ‘How living germs attack and defend us in Nature’ illustrated, according to a report in the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine, ‘by a series of excellent cinematograph pictures.’ The article records the wonder and excitement of the nursing audience at the presentation:

‘No-one, hearing the title of the speech, would dream of the fairyland into which Dr. Macleod led all those who were fortunate enough to be present. The audience sat entranced by the marvels which appeared before them. We saw blood corpuscles whirling Merrily along the stream; germs, “all alive and kicking”, in the process of being captured by “nature’s policemen”, the white corpuscles, and resenting the treatment very strongly! Fascinating as the pictures were in themselves, their instructive value was greatly emphasised by Dr. Macleod’s vivid and graphic remarks. When it is remembered that the films were actual photographs from the blood of a frog, the miracle of modern science is brought home very clearly.’

In spite of the fact that some of the Queen’s Nurses present could have been, like Florence and Mabel, veterans of the Boer War, and all of them dealt daily with the messy realities of illness and injury in the poorest of homes, the organisers felt that the lecture could not end there:

‘Lest we should carry away too creepy an impression,’ the article continues, ‘we were shown another aspect of Nature; a series of charming photographs of “A day in the life of a kingfisher”; including his toilet, capture of food and subsequent dinner, his alarms at a water-rat, and his final good-night. These, with some wonderful representations of the growth of birds in April, and the development of various flowers, concluded the entertainment.’

As the twentieth century entered its second decade, the Queen’s Nurses out and about in Britain’s towns and villages were no doubt well aware that their skills and expertise were in demand, at home and abroad. And they were filled with the confidence instilled by their Institute that they were the best trained nurses of their day. They could not have known that the two biggest tests of the resilience of district nursing, and of the nurses themselves, were now imminent: the first World War and the global flu pandemic.

For Florence, the years around the turn of the decade had brought a series of bereavements. In 1895, her great-uncle, the Reverend George Brewin, who had been an enduring presence in the lives of both Shore sisters, died at the age of 75. Her uncle Harrington Shore, who had been her father’s partner in the family’s financial disaster thirty years before, died in 1908. And in 1910, her famous godmother Florence Nightingale died at her South Street home in London, after many years of illness. Florence had idolised the nursing icon, writing to her and visiting her regularly.
Florence Nightingale’s death was met with an outpouring of grief and appreciation from the public, even though she had not been active in public for more than a decade. Her contribution was summed up in a comment from Harriet Martineau which was quoted in the editorial of Nursing Notes in September 1910: ‘She effected two great things, a mighty reform in the care of the sick and an opening for her sex into the region of serious business.’

The same issue of Nursing Notes reprinted a poem about Florence Nightingale’s death from the 16th August edition of the Evening News, which ran:

‘At Chelsea, under the lime-tree’s stir,
I read the news to a Pensioner,
That a noble lord and a judge were dead –
‘They were younger men than me’, he said.

I read again of another death;
The old man turned, and caught his breath –
‘She’s gone?’ he said; ‘she too? In camp
We called her the Lady of the Lamp.’

He would not listen to what I read,
But wanted it certain – ‘The Lady’s dead?’
I showed it to him, to remove his doubt,
And added, unthinking, ‘The Lamp is out’.

He rose – and I had to help him stand –
Then, as he saluted with trembling hand,
I was abashed to hear him say,
‘The Lamp she lit is alight to-day.’

The poem’s author is identified only by their initials at the end of the piece. The initials are ‘F.S.’, raising the interesting idea that, unless it is just a coincidence, Florence Shore herself might have written it.

Florence Nightingale left an estate worth just over £35,600 after taxes, and a very long and detailed Will with three codicils, setting out the disposal of her possessions, including her many books and papers. She made no fewer than seventeen separate monetary gifts to relatives, or the children of relatives; and sixteen monetary gifts to nurses and other colleagues from her professional life. These included the Secretary of the Army Sanitary Commission, the Reverend Mother of the Hospital Sisters in Great Ormond Street, the Matron of Paddington Infirmary, and Florence Shore’s old Superintendent at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, Miss Spencer. Seven servants received sums of money or gifts, amongst them Elizabeth Wiggins, who received £20 and Miss Nightingale’s cats, and her maid Ellen Tugby, who, if still in her service, received £205 and her parrot ‘with my best thanks for her loving service.’

‘Two little godchildren’, out of a number of such relatives, some formal and some informal, are mentioned in the Will: Ruth Verney and Kathleen Verney both received books. Florence Shore is not mentioned in her godmother’s Will.

A year later, in 1911, Florence’s father, Offley Bohun Shore, died at St Faith’s private nursing home in Ealing, West London. He was suffering from heart disease and died of ‘mitral regurgitation and infarct of the lung’. At 72, he had outlived his second wife, Annie, though she had been 28 years his junior. And in
spite of the turmoil that Offley had caused in the family’s life, Florence had kept in touch with him while he was in St Faith’s at the end of his long life, organising nursing care for him.

Florence’s 70 year old mother, Anna Maria, died at Whickham Lodge in Dawlish in Devon the following year. Coincidentally, she died on the same date that her daughter would die of her injuries eight years later: 16th January. Anna had been living in Devon with her second husband, Joseph Henry Laye, now retired from his army career with the rank of Major General. Anna left all of her estate – only £680 net – to Joseph Laye, her ‘beloved husband’.

A happier event in the Shore family had also taken place in the early years of the century. Offley Bohun Fairless Stovin Shore, Florence’s brother, had fallen in love at the age of 45. He was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian Army, and had been posted to Canada on a two year secondment to advise the Government there on its army, because his health was not good enough to allow a return to India for some time. He sailed to New York in December 1906, with letters of introduction to the Sinnickson family of Philadelphia from mutual friends in England. He fell in love with Caroline Perry Sinnickson, the eldest daughter of the family, and they were married in 1908 in Philadelphia.

Most of Offley’s family welcomed the new addition: his father and Caroline grew close and exchanged affectionate letters. On their arrival in England, just weeks after the wedding, they were met at Southampton by letters from Offley’s father, his Aunt Caroline Stovin, and from Florence and Urith. Offley Shore senior travelled to London to meet the newly-weds at Paddington Station, and Caroline Stovin arranged a lunch the next day at her house in Connaught Square so that Offley’s wife could meet the family. Offley senior and his brother Harrington Shore were there; and Florence travelled down specially from Sunderland to meet her new sister-in-law. The new bride described the reception in a letter to her uncle:

‘… the beautiful plate – the exquisite old French chandeliers filled with candles – the pretty soft light – the dear old aunt with her beautiful lace and exquisite old family diamonds – the counterpart of my own dearest Aunt, Offley’s sisters so pleased and proud of us … the dignified old servants – the beautiful plate – the most special pieces out for the occasion … and after it was all over the quiet intimate family chat – and their great pride in me – and Offley’s.’

Offley’s mother Anna Maria, however, was not amongst the party. She had made it clear in letters to Caroline that she did not approve of the match. According to a letter from one her friends, who eventually helped to reconcile her to the match, she had hoped for a royal marriage, or at least marriage to a Duke’s daughter, for her son. ‘She is delightful’, the friend wrote to Caroline of her mother-in-law, ‘but very autocratic and high tempered – but adores Offley to madness.’ The ‘Spartan Mother’ Offley had described years before was still disappointing her son. He and Caroline remained estranged for five years because of her refusal to accept his choice of wife.

Yet it was a loving and successful marriage, documented in hundreds of letters between them, and to family members, throughout Offley’s army service back in India and in Russia, and later in the first World War. When Offley had an operation in India in 1909, and Caroline went to visit him, she wrote that ‘I was allowed to go to him and found him just coming out of ether – not ill – but a little vague and big tears rolling down his cheeks which he told me afterwards were because he could not remember where I was.’

Offley’s letters also repeatedly show his devotion, affection and admiration for his wife. In one, he recounts to his father-in-law how his wife dealt with the formidable Lord Kitchener:
‘The little lady, having got into touch with the Mintos and conquered them with ridiculous ease, attached a few ‘members of Council’ (equals Ministers) to her train and a handful of Generals with scarcely an elevation of the Supercilious Eyebrow, still looked around for the most difficult old Tiger in the Jungle, to wit Lord Kitchener … Well, last night we were at the Maneater’s Den, at last!! And despite the fact of our being very little people who had just permission to breathe in a retired corner, this young daughter of yours sidled up to the Man of Cross Green Eyes and gazing up into his ugly face about four feet above her, babbled sweetly to him in French about Art and lispingly plastered him with flattery! … The little lady played it so well that Tiger-ji capitulated after some preliminary growls and suspicious glaring into the simple and childlike one’s entrancing face and finally, contrary to all prognostications, consented to be fed one day soon, in our humble abode.’

Caroline’s letters to her family record her growing acquaintance with the Shore family over the years, and her relationship with her sisters-in-law, Florence and Urith. In 1909, when they were preparing to leave England for India again, Caroline wrote that they had given up the idea of taking a maid with them, but had invited Urith to go with them as their guest (though at her own travelling expense) for six months. Urith did not take up the invitation, but relations were still cordial, and Florence and Urith were both in the party that saw Caroline off to be presented at Court in February.

While Offley and Caroline were away in India, Florence wrote regularly to Caroline, keeping her informed about old Offley Shore’s health. Offley was also still writing to his son in India, sometimes dictating his letters to his nurse. Caroline wrote that her husband was ‘so saddened by the sufferings of his ‘devoted companion and best friend’ as he calls his Father from whom, with the sad vicissitudes in their lives, he has been so much separated.’ Offley Shore’s final letter to his son, which arrived in India after news of his death had been cabled, is testimony to the warmth of their relationship. After congratulating his son on his promotion to Full Colonel, and some comments about the political situation regarding India, Offley finishes his letter:

‘Poor Ena passed away on Friday night (24th) after having been tapped in the chest 3 times in so many weeks but I believe she had pneumonia at the last. All we old ones must go and are going. I was nearly bowled over this last week by a dog – and found that my heart is as weak as possible still!’

He signs the letter ‘The very attached old Gov.’

Caroline wrote after old Offley’s death that her husband loved his father deeply, and that

‘…they were like two boys. In the last two years since his Father’s health had been broken down entirely Offley had given his father every comfort and it was out of his purse (Offley’s) and the depth of his generosity that the last few years were made peaceful and comparatively happy. He was one of the most delightful of men and devoted to me.’

After their parents’ deaths, Offley and his sisters met occasionally in England as they sorted out the estates. Florence and Offley visited the two nurses who had tended their father during his last years of illness, and visited their father’s grave. Offley went to see his Edinburgh lawyers about his and his sisters’ inheritance – while Caroline complained in her letters about the death duties to be paid. Florence wrote to Caroline’s Aunt Fanny in America to introduce herself, and added:
‘Offley told me how awfully kind you have been to him. I am so glad you like him so much – for he really is a dear boy – and he has worked so hard. It is so nice to see how devoted he and Lina [Caroline] are to each other. I do wish you did not live quite so far away for I should so much like to have the pleasure of meeting you.’

Offley was also hoping to sort out his sisters’ futures before he returned to his army duties in India, and this episode seems to have tried the patience of their sister-in-law Caroline.

‘Offley is very anxious to see his sisters settled together in a house and home above all things before we leave again for India,’ she wrote to her aunt in September 1912. ‘After we did a great deal of hunting about in town they changed their minds and elect to live in the country. I am very fond of them – but they are very trying and would altogether monopolize Offley if they could. I love Florence very dearly and she is sweet and charming and practical and would – I am sure – make a charming home; Urith is a beautiful pianist and very proud of her birth and name and all that sort of thing, and to me – this is to the exclusion of many good things she might have and attain in life if she would only come down a little. I should like her to dinner but not to live with!!!!!! …I have little or no patience with a proud old family maid of 5 and 40 always thinking in castles and family names – ‘Our good name etc etc’ on £500 or £600 a year. Well, I must not criticize them anymore. They had had sad lives and not the love and affection I have grown up with, but I find it very trying to stay clear and you can understand … this comforts me as I would not hurt Offley for the whole world – and he holds me up as a marvellous example to the sisters which is again awkward. With Offley the sun rises and sets in me and with them it rises and sets in Offley!’

What Florence felt about her brother’s attempts to find her a house to live in with her sister, when she was already living and working at the Nurses Home in Sunderland, are not recorded. But in 1913, both Florence’s and Mabel’s long service with the Sunderland District Nursing Association came to an end. Florence resigned from the Institute ‘for home duties’ – in fact, to take her ailing sister Urith abroad for treatment – and was awarded a Certificate of the Queen’s Institute to mark her service. Mabel retired from her position as Superintendent at Sunderland at the same time.

‘A presentation has been made to the late Superintendent of the Sunderland District Nursing Association, Miss Rogers, on her retirement from a post she has held for fifteen years’, the Queen’s Nurses’ Magazine reported. ‘The present and many of the former nurses joined together to show their appreciation and esteem for Miss Rogers. The presentation consisted of a silver cream jug and sugar basin, a pair of silver candlesticks, and a framed picture, by McWhirter, “Silver Beeches”.’

Mabel was not intending to retire from nursing, however: in October she took up a new post as Superintendent of the Hammersmith and Fulham District Nursing Association based in Carnforth Lodge in London. Here she took over a thriving Association, built up by her predecessor, Miss Curtis, over many years from two nurses to a staff of 10. Miss Curtis had also ‘seen the development of innumerable agencies for helping people to help themselves, and not a few of these owe some part of their utility to her vigorous interest and care’, according to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine. Minor illness treatment centres had been set up in both Hammersmith and Fulham; new interests and funds had been brought in, patrons cultivated, and the Association established as valued local agency. In fact, Miss Curtis had done
in Hammersmith what Mabel Rogers had accomplished in Sunderland; and Mabel would take the Hammersmith and Fulham Association even further forward during her tenure as Superintendent.

What plans she had for the Association were quickly put on hold, however, when war was declared in 1914. Mabel and Florence were about to become Army nurses again.
Chapter 17

‘How deeply and terribly it does concern us’

As soon as war was declared, Queen’s Nurses were determined to get involved. The Queen’s Nurses’ magazine reported enthusiastically that the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses provided

‘a large organisation of trained district nurses [giving] scope for so many and varied branches of work in connection and in cooperation with all agencies which exist for the assistance of the poor in their own homes, [as well as] actual nursing.’

By October 1914, 37 reservists had been called up, and 42 Queen’s Nurses had volunteered for Red Cross work. More than 200 District Nursing Associations up and down the country were helping with Red Cross and St John’s Ambulance work, with the Queen’s Nurse in most instances acting as Lady Superintendent and professional adviser. This work included giving classes in nursing work – bandaging, bed making, splint padding and general ward work – in temporary hospitals. These had been swiftly set up with accommodation ranging from 10 to 500 beds, ready to care for the wounded or convalescent. Their first patients were Belgian refugees and soldiers billeted in the area who fell sick. Queen’s Nurses formed more than a quarter of the staff of the Second Eastern General Hospital, established in Brighton Grammar School with 520 beds in thirty wards. Nurse Tait McKay was acting Matron of the Fourth Southern General Hospital in Plymouth when she wrote to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine:

‘The business of transforming Salisbury Road Schools and the adjacent Baptist Church into a War Hospital of 520 beds was completed on August 20th and patients were admitted from the adjacent forts… The first batch of 102 wounded warriors arrived from the Front on August 21st, forty of those were stretcher cases, and as soon as news leaked out considerable excitement prevailed … The second batch numbering all 132, including fourteen Germans, arrived on September 25th.’

Another Queen’s Nurse, L. Ethel Nazer wrote about nursing Sikh and Gurkha wounded at Netley:

‘Five out of the last twenty were hand and arm wounds and these walked in; the other fifteen were all heavy stretcher cases; some had six or eight wounds from shrapnel and three were badly frost-bitten; one has since died, another developed tetanus and several amputations have had to be done; all the wounds are horribly septic on arrival but it is surprising how quickly they clean up with regular dressing and attention…’

Other volunteer QNs were taking over district posts from those who had left for war work, or taking the strain of the war’s effect on their communities, as an editorial in the magazine reported:

‘Everywhere Queen’s Nurses are in request for special work, in addition to their own duties, heavily increased as these are and likely to be during the coming winter. For suffering through the war is not confined to our soldiers, and their families, but is felt acutely in unemployment and consequent privation, sickness, and general misery in every corner of the land.’

In fact, so enthusiastic was the response from Queen’s Nurses that the Jubilee Institute soon felt the need
to send a circular to all the nurses, reining in their enthusiasm for war work:

‘So many of the Queen’s Nurses have written to the Central Office expressing a wish to volunteer for some service in connection with the War, that the Committee think it well to point out that, in the near future, there is sure to be a great need for trained nurses in the various districts ... It is felt that the majority of Queen’s Nurses will be doing a far more useful service to the Nation by devoting themselves to this large and important sphere of work than by taking small individual posts under some Military Authority, where they would in all probability only be filling up the blanks left by those who have been sent abroad or drafted to coast hospitals.’

In spite of this admonition, many QNs did respond to the War Office’s call, and were dispatched to Europe to nurse in field hospitals, casualty stations and ambulance trains. Amongst them were Florence Shore and Mabel Rogers, who both joined the French Red Cross in 1914. The sense of adventure and excitement at the opportunity to put their nursing skills to work in such a patriotic cause is captured by another nursing sister who shared their time in France in that first year of the war. Her anonymous diary records, on 18 August 1914:

‘We had va great send-off in Sackville Street in our motor-bus, and went on board [ship] about 2pm. From then till 7 we watched the embarkation going on, on our own ship and another. We have a lot of R.E. and R.F.A. and A.S.C. and a great many horses and pontoons and ambulance waggons: the horses were very difficult to embark, poor dears. It was an exciting scene all the time. I don’t remember anything quite so thrilling as our start off from Ireland...

We and the officers and the men, severally, had the King’s proclamation read out to us about doing our duty for our country, and God blessing us, and how the King is following our every movement ....

At midday we passed a French cruiser, going the opposite way. They waved and yelled, and we waved and yelled. We are out of sight of English and French coast now. I believe we are to be in early tomorrow morning, and will have a long train journey probably, but nobody knows anything for certain except where we land – Havre.’

In keeping with their collegiate and organised nature, Queen’s Nurses immediately began writing back to the Institute with stories of their experiences. How had these women, trained by the Institute in Victorian and Edwardian England, taught never to bring up religion or politics in conversation, and to make friends with everyone, coped with the experience of a bitter and bloody war? The Queen’s Nurses’ magazine, which in April 1914 had featured an article telling nurses how to make their own knickerbockers to wear when cycling round the district, was soon publishing stories from its readers about nursing wounded soldiers under shell fire.

Mabel Rogers spent the early part of the War in France, before being sent to work at a hospital at La Panne in Belgium. With the customary QN spirit of adventure, she wrote that she was ‘much pleased when I was sent for the remainder of my time to work in Dr Depage’s Ambulance at La Panne for ... the hospitals at La Panne lie nearer to the firing line than any institutions of a similar character.’ She also wrote a description of the hospital and her work for the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine:

‘In times of peace a favourite Belgian sea-side resort, built like Ostend amongst the sand dunes, La Panne has now become the centre of all Belgian activities, and the little sea-side villas swarm with Belgian soldiers back from the trenches for a brief respite, or recruits who are daily drilled
on the wide far-stretching sands. A number of French aeroplanes are daily scouting overhead, and from time to time English battleships bombard the German batteries at Nieuport and are responded to by German shells which burst in the sea round the ships. Each time the guns are fired the hospital’s windows rattle and the beds shake. At night time on land the firing is often continuous and the whole horizon can be seen from the hospital windows a brilliant blaze of light from Ypres to the sea coast.

The largest of the hotels forms the chief hospital building, containing nearly 200 beds, but in addition three large pavilions have been erected round the hospital capable of accommodating another 700 patients. Unfortunately the largest containing 350 beds, its own theatre, offices etc, was burnt down a fortnight after it was opened through an explosion in the department where it produced its own gas...

Every night the ambulances go out and bring in the wounded straight from the front. Some nights, when the fighting has been unusually heavy in that part, so many arrived that it was difficult to find room to lay them in the large corridors and waiting rooms, and the crowd of suffering and maimed humanity was a sight to excite pity and almost unnerve even the strongest-minded...

The nursing staff consisted of sisters and Red Cross helpers of various nationalities, Belgians trained by Dr Depage in his institute in Brussels, and Danes, English, Americans and Canadians, many sent by the different Red Cross societies as the money belonging to the Belgian Red Cross having been seized by the Germans, the Belgians themselves could not afford to pay their staff.’

Mabel Rogers returned from Belgium in May 1915, with regret for the end of her work there:

‘It was with some reluctance that I quitted this interesting sphere of work, but my leave had expired and I was obliged to return to the equally necessary though perhaps not as exciting work of nursing the sick poor in their own homes.’

Her appetite for war work must have prevailed, however. By July 1916, she was back in a military hospital. She wrote again to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine from the Hopital Temporaire, Arc en Barrois, Haute Marne, in France:

‘I have been meaning to write ever since I came out, but get very little time to write at all and am on duty every day from 7am till 9pm, and often do not get off at all. When I do I feel I must get out. The country is lovely and the woods and wild flowers most enchanting. This is my eighth week here and until today I have never had a half or whole day off, but today I am having a whole day… I am in charge of the Hospice, a building about five minutes’ walk from the Chateau. They started it for Convalescents, but none are now allowed within the war zone, so it is used as a sort of overflow from the Chateau. We have seventy patients and have from sixty to eighty dressings to do every morning. I have all the meals to serve for the seventy, as I am the only trained nurse up here and have four pros [probationers] to work under me. The work is not heavy but pretty constant, with continual evaluations and intakes which all mean extra work.’

Another of the QNs who wrote for the magazine had been sent to Belgium in September 1915 to nurse in an infectious diseases hospital there. The hospital stood between the sand dunes and the sea, four miles from the first line of trenches. Her description, published in October 1916, paints a remarkable picture of English nursing culture meeting Belgian health care for the first time. Her interest in the arrangements of
the hospital and the nursing undertaken there by nuns captures most of her attention. The dangers faced by the staff and patients are almost an afterthought.

‘We were agreeably surprised’ she wrote, ‘to find all requisites necessary for the comfort and proper nursing of infectious diseases were already fully installed, and our duties were to see that the patients were well cared for and nursed... In Belgium the sick are nursed by Nuns and there are very few ‘trained’ nurses. But the Nuns make very good nurses especially when they understand why they are told to do things which are strange to them, such as: putting away utensils which have been used for typhoid patients – clean – instead of leaving them under the beds, or, taking precautions when going from one infectious case to another, e.g. from diphtheria to typhoid wards, etc, or cleaning hands thoroughly before going to their midnight meal, and a score of other probationary instructions which we did our best to instil into them in our best broken Flemish. The Nuns would say, ‘Oh Sister – you are so difficile!’ but always with a merry laugh kept us friends, and the desired result was accomplished.

The Lazarets (or wards) were made of wood, and portable, and held twenty-four beds in each. At the entrance a small room on one side, about eight feet by six feet, was set aside for the Sisters, and held our special requisites, drugs, lotions, and Doctors’ washstand and towels. Just opposite this room on the other side was the little ward kitchen, the same size, where crockery, etc, for patients was kept, and also our famous ‘Primus’ stove on which we did our sterilising. The ward has beds on either side and a division through the centre of the doors with two glass windows (high up over the beds) connecting male and female wards; the doors are kept open, except at special times. At the end of the lazaret are two isolation rooms where we usually nursed our cerebro-spinal meningitis or other serious single cases.

Lastly came the sink room on one side with shelves all round, and stand with bucket under and two other buckets, one with lime and one with Jeyes’ disinfectant and their respective mops, and on the other side the WC – bucket and stand completes the lazaret, which was raised on blocks to keep the dampness of the sand from the floors. But I must not forget to mention the lovely white bath with which each lazaret was provided, and a zinc one with fire attached; also the stove in the centre of each lazaret from which we all found much comfort during the trying winter weather.

We also had a dressing wagon beautifully fitted with douche apparatus, jars for sterile water and lotion and necessary articles for aseptic dressings with basin and bucket underneath for scrubbing up. As far as possible each infection was nursed separately; two trained sisters and two or three Nuns by day to each lazaret, and by night two sisters in charge, and generally two Nuns to each lazaret. We wore separate gowns for each lazaret and, of course, scrupulously disinfected our hands when leaving a ward, and in that way we were able to nurse diphtheria, cerebro-spinal meningitis, scarlet fever, measles, typhoid, erysipelas, and even midwifery and general diseases without any complications.

The treatment is very different to ours in many instances, but one quickly gets used to typhoid and diphtheria patients sitting up from the first day of admission and given drugs in doses which would make one shiver to think of in England. The recoveries were truly wonderful, especially with enteric and cerebro-spinal meningitis, but we were fortunate in having the laboratory and bacteriologists at work all day in a specially equipped department.

During the day when there was any sun at all you would see beds taken out on the Dunes, and the tuberculosis patients having the sun cure; this combined with tuberculin injections produced rapid improvement.
Our patients were all refugees from the surrounding towns and villages from beyond Ypres to Newport. The Nuns working for us were all from bombarded Convents quite near. Sometimes the poor refugees were frightened to come to the hospital and hid themselves in trenches and among trees and had to be found by the Military and their faithful dogs. The dogs have played a great part in this war and are very intelligent and successful. They search out a missing patient after being given an article from their room, tearing away with their noses down and the Military police at their heels. In this way we have saved many of the very sick patients and also prevented infectious disease spreading amongst the soldiers.

The terrible racket of almost unceasing gun-fire in Belgium by land, sea and air has tried the people very much, but in spite of the terror of it all, not knowing how long they could stay in each place or how soon their houses or their bodies might be destroyed by shell or bombs, they were very bright and cheerful, and always more grateful for the cheerful aspect of the hospital and the kindness shewn to them by all the Sisters ... It is wonderful how used we all grew to the guns and bombs, going on with one’s work only looking up to see where the shells are landing, murmuring the truly beautiful prayers which the Nuns kept repeating again and again until the danger was over.

We were surrounded by sand hills and when bombs were dropped, they nearly always buried themselves in the sand, leaving big holes and scattered shrapnel, and we were thankful to find we had escaped damage (except for a few windows) every time. Once when eight bombs were dropped in our hospital area they quite encircled us and we did feel we had been wonderfully preserved, for we had about 100 small children in with diphtheria and measles etc.’

There were other risks for the Queen’s Nurses in their war work. During their travels to their posts, some of them experienced capture and imprisonment; and several wrote to the QN magazine about being on ships that were torpedoed. Meirion Evans and her companions survived such an event in 1917:

‘Our ship was torpedoed at 10am and sank in an hour. The nursing staff (66 of us) were the first to be lowered into the life boats, and were in our boat for three hours when we were picked up by an ally’s destroyer. The last hour was dreadful as the boat was full of water and we had to stand up and cling to one another or anything we could get hold of. The sea was so rough by this time that the waves were coming right over our heads at times, and two or three nurses were washed away, but a splendid sailor boy rescued them. They said the boat would have floated forever, but I am afraid in another half hour we should have been done up. We were at last landed and stayed in convents, the people were very good to us.’

As well as the work in military hospitals, Queen’s Nurses also ventured out into the community to help local people suffering after bombardments. Ethel Ubsdell was a QN with the Friends’ Expedition, Chalons-sur-Marne, who wrote about her visit to a shelled village:

‘Hearing that a certain village had been severely bombarded I started off in the car to see if help was required. We called on the Mayor of the place who told us that a certain woman was expecting her baby and gave us directions where should find her. We arrived at the place and found one wall of a house. I went in to investigate but could see nothing. I went a little further and found a sort of scullery place with a hole in the ground. Hearing a moan I went out to the Chauffeur and asked him to come and help me (the Chauffeur I may add was only a young medical
We advanced to the hole and found a sort of rope ladder. The Chauffeur went into this and I followed, feeling very brave!

We alighted in a black hole and fell over some children, three of them, ranging from 5 years of age down to 2 years. Hearing another moan from a corner we went and found the poor mother lying on straw, having given birth to a child about an hour previously. Both the poor mother and the children were covered with vermin, and the only garment the mother had on was a chemise. The Chauffeur took off his shirt and we wrapped the new born baby in it, while I took off one of my undergarments and wrapped it round the poor woman. All the food these unfortunate creatures had to eat was a little bread. We quickly attended to the mother and carried the whole family up to the car, and conveyed them off to the hospital. I am thankful to say that the mother and infant are doing well, and the children are none the worse for their experience. The husband of the poor woman we found had been taken prisoner of war.’

It was not just the demands of nursing, midwifery and the hospital arrangements that interested the Queen’s Nurses, however. Some of them enjoyed the adventure and novelty of being abroad, and were determined to experience their war to the full. W. Wells was a QN who worked in one of the Urgency Cases hospitals in France. She wrote back gleefully:

‘Last Monday I was on duty and had run up to the house for something and I heard guns, but of course thought nothing of it, but as I came from the house I saw a doctor running from the woods and pointing upwards and there was a German aeroplane being shot at, and then followed seven more flying overhead and we think one was hit. The sky was full of puffs of smoke. Then all was quiet til the afternoon fifteen more flew over. We all of us ran out into the open each time with telescopes, etc, we were very excited and not a bit frightened. Now there is a notice that in the event of future air raids all except those on duty are to go into the cellar.

Well, it was my half-day off, and in the evening we went out for a little walk to look at the starshells falling which can be seen miles away and then we came in. Then just before nine someone called out, ‘Here’s something to see!’ and we all trooped out again and saw a Zeppelin coming towards us like a silver cigar and lit up with searchlights. The guns fired and suddenly she tries to rise but was hit behind – then again in the middle, and a puff of smoke went up, followed by a burst of flame and she slowly sank, dropping a trail of fire all the way.

How we cheered and cried ‘Vive la France!’ Then we rushed in and put on our coats and tore off to see it, for we knew it must be somewhere near R____, and running and walking we arrived there and found we had another mile to go over a brook and a ploughed field. The Zeppelin had burnt out, but the bodies were still burning and we saw them.

We got souvenirs of the ‘Zep’, bits of aluminium etc. It was surrounded by a sea of mud into which we sank and had to be dragged out; it pulled our shoes off and one or two of the sisters had to tie theirs on and throw them away afterwards.

Then we turned home again and came across a ghastly sight, a dead German, who had evidently tried to save himself by jumping out. The field was pitted with huge bomb holes caused when they threw out the bombs before they fell...

We found our two motors waiting in R______, which we were very thankful for, and when we got home we had tea and biscuits, etc. Next morning Matron drove down and several of the nurses took snapshots. Oh! It was a day never to be forgotten. I do think I am lucky to be here.’
Some of the QNs’ letters were evidently a bit too high-spirited and informative, as she ends this letter plaintively:

‘I would like to tell you a lot more, but I can’t, for the wretched censor has been here and he says for some time we have been giving far too much information and our letters have had to be held up, and I’m perfectly certain that I am on the ‘black list’, for I have written a good deal that I shouldn’t, quite innocently, in fact many of us have. I can’t tell you anything much now about the hospital or anything else. Spies put two and two together, and the country round here is infested with them.’

Back in England, the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine was raising spirits by publishing some humorous stories about the war. In October 1916, it published a list of questions which, according to a note on the ward door, visitors to the East Leeds War Hospital were requested not to ask the patients:

‘Are you wounded?
Did it hurt?
Which hurt most – going in or coming out?
How did you know you were wounded?
Did the shell hit you?
Did you see any Germans?
Do you want to go back?
How many did you kill?’

But overall, the mood of the magazine was both sombre and resolute, aiming to encourage and support those nurses who were engaged on work relating to the war, at home and in Europe. The editor wrote in the same issue:

‘It used to be said that war did not concern women. There never was a grain of truth in it, and now we have learnt how deeply and terribly it does concern us.’
Chapter 18

The ‘White Queen’

Florence could not wait to get into the War either. After leaving the Queen’s Institute briefly to take her
sister Urith abroad for treatment, Florence rejoined in August 1914, the month in which Britain declared
war on Germany. In October, at the age of 49, she went to work under the French Red Cross at Fort
Mahon. By chance, Ethel Bedford Fenwick, the other former pupil of Middlethorpe Hall to become well
known in nursing, was on the British Committee of the French Red Cross that approved her appointment.

Florence’s war service took place in casualty clearing stations and hospitals, and on ambulance trains.
Unlike Mabel, she never wrote back to the Institute about it, but her wartime activities are recorded in the
Institute’s records, and the records of Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Reserve, which she
joined in 1915.

The opening campaigns of the Great War, in 1914, led to the first experience of trench warfare and
some of the most famous and horrific battles of the conflict. In October, the month that Florence arrived in
France, the Belgians were forced to abandon Antwerp, and the Germans took Ghent, Lille, Bruges and
Ostend in ‘the Race to the Sea.’ The first battle of Ypres was fought from October into November, and,
towards the end of the year, the famous Christmas truce took place in the trenches. April 1915 saw the
second battle of Ypres, and the first use of chlorine gas as a weapon of war by the Germans: mustard gas
came later, at Ypres in July 1917. By September, the British were also using gas in the Third Battle of
Artois.

Chillingly, in October 1915, Florence’s last month with the French Red Cross, another British nurse,
Edith Cavell, was executed by a German firing squad in Brussels. Edith Cavell was almost exactly the
same age as Florence, and, though she had never trained as a Queen’s Nurse, she had also been connected
with the Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses. Cavell had taken a post as a nurse for the Manchester
and Salford Sick Poor and Private Nursing Institution, which was affiliated to the Institute, when she came
back to England after a break from nursing. When the matron of the Institution fell ill, Cavell took on the
role. She wrote to her old Matron at The London Hospital, Eva Luckes, to say:

‘I feel it rather a heavy responsibility as I know so little of the ‘Queen’s’ work or the etiquette of
this branch of the work but I feel I must try to fill the days to the best of my ability.’

In this she evidently succeeded, as she left with a grant of £10 from the Good Service Fund in recognition
of her work.

Cavell’s destination, when she left Manchester, was Brussels, where she set up and directed the
Berkendael school of nursing. The school became a Red Cross hospital when Brussels came under
German control, and Cavell used her post there to help around 200 allied soldiers to escape to Holland.
She was arrested, sentenced by a German military court, and executed by firing squad on 12th October.

Local newspapers in Manchester reported the execution, and the connection to their own community:

‘There appears to be no doubt that Miss Edith Cavell, the heroic nurse, who has been infamously
executed at Brussels by the Germans, was at one time Matron of the Bradford Nursing Home,
Manchester. Those with whom she came into contact were much impressed by her work … she
left to undertake nursing work in Belgium with the good wishes of the Committee who had the highest opinion of her methods and abilities.’

They also reported the special memorial service held in Manchester Cathedral on 29 October, timed to coincide with the national memorial service taking place at St Paul’s Cathedral in London. Ideas for permanent memorials to Cavell were debated by the City, Cathedral and Institution staff, and resulted in several streets named after her, as well as the setting up of rest homes for nurses in England and several other countries.

Florence’s service from October 1915 onwards continued through the Queen Alexander’s Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve. As the war progressed, the injuries that she and other nurses in the field hospitals had to treat were far outside their usual areas of expertise. It is hard to imagine how the Queen’s Nurses, accustomed to the cradle-to-grave mix of infectious diseases, minor accidents and ailments they nursed on their rounds in Britain, coped with the overwhelming numbers of gassed, blasted and bayonetted young men who were now their patients. The ‘War Notes’ from the Harvard Graduates Magazine of September 1915 give some idea of the way casualties were handled, and the injuries they suffered, in just one hospital in Paris:

‘[The wounded soldier is] at once evacuated to a first-line ambulance just beyond artillery fire; here he is again studied, his bandage changed and he may be operated on if necessary, but if his condition warrants it he is at once evacuated to the railway and shipped south on a ‘sanitary train’. On such trains the wounded reach Paris and the great distributing centres, and are at once divided among the local hospitals. From the station they reach the hospitals by motor ambulance. It seems complex, but we often got patients in the hospital in Paris within 12 to 14 hours after they have been hit, even when coming from Arras or the line farther north toward Ypres. On arrival in the hospital patients are at once seen by the receiving officer, who, in our service, was one of the residents, and by him sent either to the ward direct, to have a bath first, or to the operating room, as each single case demanded... Of the 383 cases on which we have full records 318 received actual wounds by missiles – as follows:

Rifle ball – 128
Shrapnel ball – 31
Shell fragment – 133
Shell fragment and rifle ball – 5
Shell fragment and shrapnel – 1
Doubtful – 5
Bomb fragments – 9
Hand grenade – 3
Barbed wire – 1
Mine explosion – 1
Revolver ball – 1

Of the 65 cases in which no actual wounds were produced by missiles, a large number were due to falls, chiefly from horses or into trenches, and to men being thrown down by a mine or large shell or bomb explosion nearby. Also there were a few simple surgical conditions, such as appendicitis and hernia, demanding surgical treatment. Many of the cases presented more than one wound, there being 670 instances of medical or surgical conditions in 383 cases. A glance at the
following table shows a rough estimate of the location of wounds, but, of course, it must be kept in mind that this is not a true measure of the proportion of wounds received in battle, for most of the head and abdominal injuries are fatal at the front, and never reach the great base hospitals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skull fractures</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinal cord injuries</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superficial wounds, head and face</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fractures, upper and lower jaw</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases and injuries of the abdomen</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries of the pelvis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral nerve lesions</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint lesions without fracture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fractures of extremities (13 required amputation)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Florence adapted quickly to this work, nursing with great skill and dedication. After her death, a letter to the London newspapers soliciting donations to a memorial fund highlighted her particular affinity for work with the most vulnerable and marginalised of her patients (and reflected the colonial attitudes of the day to men of different races):

‘She took work from which many a white woman instinctively shrinks, that of tending coloured patients. But very calmly and courageously, setting a superb example to the younger nurses with her, she took charge of hundreds of the most gravely wounded of the French African troops, Turdos, Sanegalese [sic] and the rest.’

A doctor who had worked with her in France confirms this in his own tribute:

‘The death of Miss Florence Nightingale Shore under such tragic circumstances will be deplored by everyone, but more especially by the doctors and nurses with whom she worked in France during the early months of the great war, when she was attached to the French Red Cross Hospital serving the 10th French Army at Fort Mahon, Somme. Among a devoted band of workers, Miss Shore proved herself to be one of the best nurses, always calm, helpful and self-sacrificing. She cheerfully took her share of the many privations, and always tried to make the best of difficult circumstances. She had a splendid influence over the younger nurses. The patients in her special ward were French African troops, Zouaves, Turcos, Arabs and Sengalese. The ‘White Queen’, as they called her, endeared herself to them by her constant care and kindness. As one of the doctors who worked with her in France from October, 1914, onwards, it is to me a sad privilege to pay this small tribute to the memory of one of the most unselfish and self-sacrificing women I have ever met.’

There is an intriguing reference to a nurse who might have been Florence Shore in the account by Kathleen Burke of her visits to Red Cross hospitals in France. She too noted the large number of Algerian and Senegalese soldiers who had been wounded fighting for France; and she described the work of one particular Sister who was noted for her kindness to them:

‘The Senegalais and Algerians are really great children, especially when they are wounded. I have seen convalescent Senegalais and Algerians in Paris spend hours in the Champs Elysees
watching the entertainment at the open-air marionette theatre. The antics of the dolls kept them amused.

They are admitted to the enclosure free, and there is no longer any room for the children who frequented the show in happier days. These latter form a disconsolate circle on the outside, whilst the younger ones, who do not suffer from colour prejudice, scramble on to the knees of the black soldiers.

The sister in charge was a true daughter of the ‘Lady of the Lamp.’ Provided they are really ill, she sympathises with all the grumblers, but scolds them if they have reached the convalescent stage. She carries a small book in which she enters imaginary good points to those who have the tables by their beds tidy, and she pinned an invisible medal on the chest of a convalescent who was helping to carry trays of food to his comrades. She is indeed a General, saving men for France.

Not a man escaped her attention, and as we passed through the tents she gave to each of her ‘chers enfants’ – black or white – a cheering smile or a kindly word. She did, however, while talking to us omit to salute a Senegalais. Before she passed out of the tent he commenced to call after her, “Toi pas gentille aujourd’hui – moi battre toi.” (“You are not good to me today – me beat you.”) This, it appears, is his little joke – he will never beat anyone again, since he lost both arms when his trench was blown up by a land mine.’

Alongside the serious wounds and grinding hospital work of the war, Burke’s account also provides a cheering snapshot of the provision of more pedestrian healthcare cobbled together for the troops by the Red Cross:

‘It was at Triancourt that I first saw in operation the motor cars that had been sent out fitted with bath tubs for the troops, and also a very fine car fitted up by the London Committee of the French Red Cross as a moving dental hospital.

I regret to add that a ‘poilu’ nearby disrespectfuly referred to it as “another of the horrors of war”, adding that in times of peace there was some kind of personal liberty, whereas now “a man could not have toothache without being forced to have it ended, and that there was no possibility of escaping a dentist who hunted you down by motor’.’

Florence was in touch with her family by letter throughout her time in France. Early in 1915, she wrote to Caroline Shore, her sister-in-law in India, describing her work, and asking ‘Do you know anyone who will help us along – we are badly in need of funds to carry on and we should be glad of gifts – of socks, pyjamas and dressings.’ Caroline passed on the request to her aunt and uncle, saying ‘Perhaps Uncle Joe will drop a line to the right person and ask them to send to Florence’s hospital.’

Florence made a huge impact on the French Red Cross during her single year with them. Five years later, the British Committee of the French Red Cross would send a floral tribute to her funeral, and Mabel Rogers received letters ‘of sorrow and regret’ from the Matron-in-Chief, the State Matron-in-Chief in France, the French Red Cross, doctors, matrons, sisters, nurses, VADs (members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment) and orderlies who served with her in France.

After her year with the French Red Cross, Florence returned to England in 1915 – just too late to see her sister Urith before she died. Urith had been working in a camp at Woking, as part of the ‘Emergency Corps’. Caroline Shore wrote that her younger sister-in-law
‘... had been working among the soldiers in a great camp ... and I am afraid in her eagerness and energy the work has been too much for her. She seemed so very happy in her work and had reached the very pinnacle of her desire – to be at work among and for Lord K’s new army – dispensing warm clothes and comforts to them and looking after their welfare in a great camp at Woking ... when the cable came to say she was dangerously ill with meningitis at Woking Cottage Hospital – and shortly after a second cable came saying she had died that night. Poor Florence came back from France but was too late.’

Caroline describes Urith in her letters as Offley’s favourite sister, and describes how deeply her husband felt his sister’s loss.

‘Urith was a beautiful pianist’ Caroline recalls, ‘and was clever and accomplished and an excellent linguist. She was one of those very reserved very proud English natures, that it is so difficult to know and understand. Very very sensitive, and she adored and admired Offley extravagantly. She was very petite and with a marvellous quantity of brown hair, and there was always a sense of brilliance – real brilliance in this delicate little woman. Ugly – and yet not really ugly – more plain – but always with an alert eager expression that was very charming. I was very attached to her – and she to me – and yet I never felt I understood her – and I should have liked to so much.’

Urith left all her belongings, worth just over £5,600 net, to her sister. Florence herself made a Will in April, using part of her sister’s legacy to set up a trust fund for the benefit of one of her cousins, Stuart Hobkirk. He was by now a reputed St Ives artist, and living in Tonbridge with his mother, Florence’s aunt, the Baroness Farina. But Florence was not to be in England for long. By 1915 the War Office was making special appeals for nurses, and Florence and Mabel were amongst many Queen’s Nurses who joined Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve.

The ‘QAs’ had not been in existence for long. In 1897, Princess Christian, one of the daughters of Queen Victoria, had formed the Army Nursing Reserve that carried her name. One hundred of these reserve nurses, including Florence and Mabel, had been to South Africa during the Boer War and were joined by nurses from the London Hospital, organised by Princess Alexandra, wife of the future King Edward VII. When the British and Indian army nursing services were amalgamated, the now Queen Alexandra gave her name to the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service, in March 1902.

In 1908, the QAIMNS took over the reserve force and members of this force were employed on a contract basis for the duration of the war. By 1914, there were 297 regular members of QAIMNS, the numbers limited by the requirement that members be unmarried, aged over 25, and of higher social standing. These criteria were changed during the War. By the end of 1914, there were more than 2,000 regular and reserve QAs. By the time the War ended, more than 10,000 qualified nurses had worked with the QAs, including those working for the Territorial Force Nursing Reserve.

The nurse in overall charge of the British nurses in Europe during the war was (Emma) Maud McCarthy. An Australian by birth, and educated there, she had trained as a nurse in London in 1891, and was a ward sister at the London Hospital, Whitechapel by 1894. She was one of the select group of London hospital nurses chosen to go to South Africa to nurse the wounded of the second Boer war in 1900 with the Army Nursing Service Reserve, of which Florence and Mabel were both members. In 1910, Maud McCarthy was appointed Principal Matron at the War Office. As head of the British Expeditionary Force of nurses, she arrived in France in August 1914, and left in August 1919, to be awarded honours...
Florence’s service with the QAs began when she signed up on 10th August 1915 at the Hopital Militaire, Fort Mahon, Somme, France. She was 50 years old. She was sent as a staff nurse to 14 General Hospital at Wimereaux, a coastal town three miles north of Boulogne, where a Red Cross hospital had been set up very early in the war. In October that year, she went to 14 General Hospital for six months, before a fortnight’s leave in England the following April. A report in August 1916, describes her health as good, her conduct, excellent, and her character as ‘very contented and has a good influence’. Cryptically, the report notes that she is ‘considered especially suitable for duties on barges.’ (Barges were used to transport cases that would suffer most from the jolting of road transport, including ‘wounds of lung and abdomen.’) Under ‘Remarks’, it notes that ‘Miss Shore is a very capable nurse and quite fit for charge duties, but she does not wish for responsibility or promotion.’

Later, she worked at the No 32 casualty clearing station, Warlingcourt, France. The nurse who ran this station from the time it was set up in March 1917 was Sister Kathleen E Luard, also a veteran of the South Africa war. She kept a diary of her experiences, later published under the title ‘Unknown Warriors’. She describes the station where she and Florence worked, consisting of tents and huts hastily constructed by army engineers, on a ridge about six miles from the battle line. At the beginning of March, in the middle of a freezing winter, there were just seven Sisters for 700 planned beds, though more arrived, supported by orderlies, as time went on. The staff worked in conditions of great hardship, with never enough food, or space for all the wounded brought in to them, and sometimes unexpected personal danger:

‘For the Mess’, Sister Luard wrote, ‘you settle for a rice pudding, but there is no rice, and the cows have anthrax so there’s no fresh milk, and the canteen has run out of Ideal Milk. Well, have a jam tart; lots of jam in the British Army, but no flour, no suet, no tinned fruits, no eggs, no beans or dried peas, not one potato each. But there is bacon, ration bread and tinned butter (when you can get it), jam, marmalade sometimes, cheese, stew, Army biscuits, tea, some sugar, and sometimes mustard, and sometimes oatmeal and cornflour...

We’re in the middle of terrific work. All the casualties from the attack on Hainy and Croisilles came to us; we hadn’t nearly enough Sisters to go round and it never stopped all day and all night and all today until 5pm. So many die that I shan’t possibly be able to write to their mothers, and some have no trace of next of kin. I had to run a ward equipped for 14 officers and had to get 28 in, on stretchers on every inch of the floor, some badly wounded; they were all angels of patience and uncomplainingness...

A boy with his face nearly in half, who couldn’t talk, and whom I was feeding, was trying to explain that he was lying on something hard in his trouser pocket. It was a live Mills bomb! I extracted it with some care, as the pins catch easily.’

In the Spring of 1917, Florence’s brother Offley and his wife Caroline were travelling up through France, returning from India to England. They cabled Florence to see if they could meet up, but by then she was working on a hospital train based in Rouen. Instead, Offley and Caroline visited the hospital at Wimereaux:

‘… where Flo worked for so long… [the town] is a charming place, most certainly a bit of England in France … Nurses of every age and kind in all the varied costumes adopted by this war, hospitals and ambulances and motors everywhere and men and women flying around in equal
independence. Many of the nurses with military rank and in khaki and it gives one a very strange feeling and certain shock at first, and coming from the land of so much ceremonial and salaaming as I have so lately.’

Later that year, Florence visited her sister-in-law in London while she was on brief leave. Caroline was missing Offley, now on a mission in Russia, and was not entirely grateful:

‘Florence, who came home on a short leave from France is still here with me – and she is in a way a comfort – but the poor girl she does not make herself very congenial – and I am utterly lost without O.’

During another of Florence’s visits on leave, Caroline wrote to her father:

‘Poor old Florence – she is shy and difficult, though I know she adores O. and takes me into her big, kind heart with the same adoring affection – but she is entirely wrapped up in her work – a great blessing of course – but I find her so hard to understand. I go on chattering like a magpie and she says nothing but ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. I find she knows several people – I might have had to meet her – but she only tells me all too late.’

Florence’s dedication to her war work was not going unnoticed within the nursing service. In January 1918, with the war more than three years old, the Principal Matron of the QAIMNS reported about Florence:

‘I have found her a very good ward sister, and most devoted to her patients for whom she can never do enough. She is an excellent medical nurse. For a time she had charge of a unit of five wards and they were very well run. She manages her staff and orderlies well – she is always cheerful and ready to give any extra help where it is required and has been very useful to me in my work. Miss Shore is very likeable and most conscientious. Very retiring by nature, it is not until one gets to know Miss Shore that one learns how capable she is – her influence good. She is suitable for promotion.’

Florence’s promotion, and her reluctance to accept it, was soon being discussed at the highest levels of the service. A letter from the Matron in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, Maud McCarthy, to Dame Becher, Matron in Chief at the War Office, dated 11th November 1918 – the day peace was declared – says:

‘With regard to Staff Nurse F N Shore, QAIMNSR, she has always had quite good reports. She seems to be of a quiet and retiring disposition, and so far has not been promoted as some time ago she herself said she did not wish to be given responsible work. I have been making special enquiries and her present Matron says that Miss Shore seems a very sensible woman, and, I should imagine, capable of more responsible duties. A report on this lady is attached. I will now arrange for her to do a Sister’s duties. I am glad this matter was brought to my notice.’

Maud McCarthy’s letter also signals for the first time something of the impact that nearly four years of war service had had on the now 53 year old nurse:

‘Miss Shore served at a CCS [casualty clearing station] from 20.3.18 to 18.4.18, but could not
cope with the rush and strain of work in the front area, and was therefore transferred to the Base.’

Florence was moved to the 24 General Hospital at Etaples, fifteen miles south of Boulogne, in April 1918. After Florence’s death, her old Matron at the hospital wrote to Mabel Rogers:

‘She was one of my staff at 24 General Hospital, and one of the most unselfish people I have ever met, and absolutely devoted to her work. It seems terrible that one whose life was wholly given up to doing good to others should meet with such treatment.’

Florence might have struggled with the rush and strain of the casualty clearing station, but her devotion to her patients and her leadership of other nurses was undiminished. In Etaples, it was reported by the West London Observer, she was

‘one of the heroic band of nurses there who, when bombed by German aeroplanes one night in May, 1918, refused to go to the dug-outs prepared for them, but insisted on remaining to tend the patients, many of whom had been hit. As a result of their heroism, two nurses were killed and five wounded.’

Florence’s aunt, the Baroness Farina, was the source of the story. She added that, when ordered to take shelter by the commandant, Florence asked to be allowed to remain in the ward with her patients, who were unable to move. Florence’s words afterwards, according to her aunt, were: ‘I could not allow the poor fellows to be left alone’ or ‘I could not desert the boys in a moment of danger’ – her aunt gave different accounts to different journalists. Her brother Offley also knew something of the incident: he wrote to his father-in-law in June 1918 that:

‘Florence says deuced little, but I conclude came in for some of the recent Hun bombing of the hospitals tho’ she seems terrified of mentioning the occurrence! I have told her we read all about it in our newspapers.’

Sharing Florence’s experiences at 24 General Etaples around this time was the writer Vera Brittain, who arrived in August 1917 as a VAD. The hospital nursed both allied soldiers and German casualties, in separate marquees, and Vera Brittain worked first on a German acute surgical ward. The operations were mostly amputations. She reported that ‘Our own men are very good to them; they come in and see them and give them cigarettes and fetch them drinks...’ Later she moved to a medical ward, nursing men who had been gassed, which she described as ‘more wearing than anything on earth... in the end there seems nothing definite to show for it – except that one or two people are still alive who might otherwise have been dead...’

As a sister in charge of the frantically busy wards of front-line military hospitals, Florence was probably very grateful for the work of VADs like Vera Brittain. But back in England, her old school acquaintance Ethel Bedford Fenwick was vehemently opposed to them. The War had broken out 25 years into Bedford Fenwick’s personal campaign to ensure that all ‘fully trained’ nurses were listed on a national register. The aim was to end the confusion, variation in standards and risk to patients caused by anyone, with any or no training, using the title ‘nurse’ to gain employment. Nurse registration became a huge cause celebre within the profession, with rival groups of eminent nurses arguing for and against the concept – and Florence Nightingale herself in opposition. Different associations were founded to promote or oppose the measure, and even those who agreed with the idea managed to draft two different
Parliamentary Bills and tout them to different MPs in the hope of getting a debate in Parliament.

The notion that women with minimal training – such as VADs – could act as nurses in any capacity was anathema to Bedford Fenwick, and she disseminated her views in part through the pages of the British Journal of Nursing, which she edited. In an editorial in January 1915, the journal stated:

‘Members of V.A.D.’s are to be used as orderlies [as opposed to nurses] in both these hospitals, let us hope in such a minority as will not interfere with the discipline of the nursing department, and that their duties will be strictly defined in print, so that they will understand before engagement what a woman orderly’s duties are. Frankly, unless they are the duties of first year probationers we are at a loss to know what they are. Anyway, unless they help with the nursing in strictly defined positions as probationers, they have no right to wear nurses’ uniform, and if they are there for that special purpose there should be no running in and out, but they should enter into a contract to serve until the end of the War, or until these hospitals are no longer required. Thoroughly trained nurses only should be employed on foreign service. It is simply a waste of money to transport untrained women in any capacity whatever. Such service in military hospitals should be the reward of the patriotism of the professional nurse who in time of peace has qualified herself for her responsible duties.’

Towards the end of the War, the enormous contribution of VADs, in both field hospitals and the temporary hospitals set up in country houses in England, was widely recognised. A BJN editorial reported in July 1918 on a procession of women war workers to pay homage to the King and Queen on their silver wedding anniversary, which was received by the Royal Family in the quadrangle of Buckingham Palace. It must have pained Bedford Fenwick to record that:

‘V.A.D. workers took precedence of all other branches of women’s work, including the Trained Nurses of the Metropolitan Asylums Board… Referring to nurses and V.A.D. workers His Majesty said, “They have often faced cheerfully and courageously great risks, both at home and overseas, in carrying on their work, and the Women’s Army has its own Roll of Honour of those who have lost their lives in the service of their country. Of all these we think to-day with reverent pride.”’

The admiration expressed by the King (and the Red Cross, the Order of St John and the country at large) for the VADs did not change Bedford Fenwick’s view of them, or her conviction that they constituted a threat to ‘proper’ nurses.

‘Owing largely to the glorification of the semi-trained war worker by the Nurses’ Department in the Red Cross Office,’ she wrote in 1918, ‘competition with the certificated nurse has already become a serious menace to our professional ideals.’

A Bill to introduce registration for trained nurses was finally passed in 1919, with Bedford Fenwick sitting in the public gallery of the House of Commons to see it. When the Roll of Nurses was opened, she was entered onto it as Registered Nurse No 1.

With her Parliamentary connections, it is possible that Bedford Fenwick had some influence on a written Parliamentary Question put by Brigadier-General Croft, MP for Bournemouth, the following year.

‘[He] asked the Secretary of State for War whether his attention has been called to the fact that a great many trained nurses who served as nursing sisters on active service continuously from
August, 1914, onwards have now been released from service without any official expression of gratitude for their services; whether he is aware that several cases of nurses who were recommended in the strongest terms by their commanding officers for the Royal Red Cross, First Class, in recognition of exceptional services in the actual war zone, have been passed over, whilst nurses in many cases untrained, and who never left Home duty, have received this honour; and whether, in view of these facts, he will cause inquiry to be made with a view to securing justice to those who have been strongly recommended for this honour.

Mr. CHURCHILL

All trained nurses who served under the War Office as nursing sisters on active service have, on being demobilised, received an official letter conveying thanks for their services. Recommendations for the award of the Royal Red Cross, whether at home or abroad, are in all cases made by the General Officer Commanding under whom the person recommended has served, and so far as I am aware there have been no cases in which nurses serving abroad, who have been so recommended, have not been given the decoration.

Florence finished her army nursing service working on No 5 Ambulance Train in 1919, taking wounded Germans back to Cologne. Here again she shared the experience with Sister Kathleen Luard, who wrote about their work in her diary:

‘Imagine a hospital as big as King’s College Hospital all packed into a train, and having to be self-provisioned, watered, sanitised, lit, cleaned, doctored and nursed and staffed and officered, all within its own limits. No outside person can realise the difficulties, except those who try to work it…

Three trains full of wounded, numbering altogether 1,175 cases, have been dressed at the station today ... the train I was put to had 510 cases ...the platform was soon packed with stretchers with all the bad cases waiting patiently to be taken to the Hospital... The staple dressing is tincture of iodine; you don’t attempt anything but swabbing with Lysol, and then gauze dipped in iodine. They were nearly all shrapnel shell wounds – more ghastly than anything I have ever seen or smelt; the Mauser wounds of the Boer War were pin-pricks compared with them…

They were bleeding faster than we could cope with it; and the agony of getting them off the stretchers on to the top bunks is a thing to forget. We were full up by about 2am, and then were delayed by a collision up the line, which was blocked by dead horses as a result… the head cases were delirious, and trying to get out of the window, and we were giving strychnine and morphia all round. Two were put off dying at St Omer, but we kept the rest alive to Boulogne.’

Florence was awarded the Royal Red Cross medal, created by Queen Victoria in 1883, for her work during the War. The decoration, in the shape of a cross enamelled in red and gold, with a medallion in the centre bearing the head of the reigning monarch, was intended for ‘any ladies, whether subjects or foreign persons, who may be recommended by Our Secretary of State for War for special exertions in providing for the nursing of sick and wounded soldiers and sailors of Our Army and Navy’.

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Florence’s godmother, Florence Nightingale, had been the first recipient, for her work at Scutari hospital in the Crimea. Receiving the Royal Red Cross made Florence Shore automatically eligible for the French Croix de Guerre as well. But Florence never received her Red Cross medal. She was due to be presented
with it by the King at Buckingham Palace in March 1920; but by then she was dead. The decoration was sent instead to her brother Offley in California. She did receive other medals – the QA Star, British War Medal, Victory medal and her French war medal – all of which are now in the Florence Nightingale Museum.

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Florence was demobilised at the beginning of November 1919. On 27th October, she moved to the nurses’ hostel at Boulogne. She signed a form on 1st November declaring that her military service had not rendered her disabled, and received her Dispersal Certificate indicating that she would be disembarking at Folkestone on 3rd November. She would be proceeding to Hammersmith in London, and her formal date of dispersal was 11th November 1919. After five years of extreme danger, considerable privations and long exposure to all the horrors of war, Florence returned to Carnforth Lodge to be reunited with Mabel and the nurses of the Hammersmith and Fulham District Nursing Association. The Lodge would prove to be her last home: she would live there for just eight weeks.

The Army nurses had returned to a very different England. Women had replaced men in factories, on railways and in some police forces at home, while the men were away; and they had nursed, and some had died, on battlefields, trains and ships in the war zone. Girls who had grown up with the still strict protocols of Edwardian England found freedom in the wards, tents and hospitals of Europe and beyond, which could not be easily laid down. The end of the war was the beginning of new era in the development of women’s role in society: Florence and her colleagues stood at the threshold of a new phase of their personal and professional lives. But she would not go forward with them.

She had returned to find the country in the grip of a fearsome winter – one night the temperature plunged to minus 23 degrees – and ravaged not only by war, but by the world-wide pandemic of influenza. The ‘Spanish flu’ had killed tens of thousands more people than the whole four years of war; and its British death toll included some of Florence’s fellow Queen’s Nurses, who had died whilst nursing its victims.
Chapter 19

‘Part of their day’s work’

‘I have nursed most infectious and contagious illnesses mentioned in text-books,’ wrote Ellen Hancox, Superintendent of the Sheffield District Nursing Association in 1919, ‘but I have never seen anything to equal this most horrible complaint, the complications of which baffled the skill and ingenuity of the most experienced. In some instances the mental condition of the patient was not only a thing to be dreaded but was beyond all description, the language and behaviour being what one would expect to find only in the most depraved.

In some cases the eyes swelled and burst, and the patient died after acute suffering. In others there would be an acute form of stomatitis [inflammation in the mouth], the tongue, uvulae and soft parts sloughing away, in spite of most constant and careful treatment.’

What Miss Hancox was describing was the deadly influenza epidemic that swept around the world between 1918 and 1920. It became known at the time as the ‘Spanish flu’: not because it originated in Spain, but because the Spanish press, unconstrained by wartime censorship as other countries were, reported it more thoroughly. As it coincided with the final year of the First World War, many people were suspicious of the sudden arrival of such a virulent killer disease. In the United States, where the flu broke out first in huge military training camps, there were rumours that plague germs had been inserted into aspirin tablets made by a German pharmaceutical firm; that it had been brought into Boston harbour on a German ship; or that the Germans had released vials of the germs in American theatres.

In fact, the Germans were suffering just as badly, with what they called ‘Flanders fever’. It had started in Spring 1918 with a more normal flu outbreak. The British army called it ‘three day fever’, and treated the sufferers alongside the wounded in their hospitals. But the second wave of the epidemic was different. It was much more virulent, infecting a large percentage of the population. In the US, 28% of the population became ill, with 40% of the navy personnel and 36% of the army succumbing. While the first wave of the flu had mostly bypassed Africa, South America and Canada, the second did not. By August it had affected India, South East Asia, Japan, China and Southern and Central America. It peaked in England in June. Worldwide, it is estimated that up to one third of people caught the disease.

The second wave also killed a much higher proportion of its victims: it is estimated that this flu killed 10-20% of the people who caught it. The toll of world-wide deaths is reported very variably, at figures from 20 million to 100 million – in comparison, total deaths in the First World War (military and civilian) were around 15 million.

There were no antibiotics or effective flu vaccines to help the sufferers or protect the population. Vaccination was tried using bodily fluids from sufferers injected into healthy people, but did not work. The only way to try to contain the spread of the flu was through public health and control measures. Many countries banned public meetings and closed theatres. Others introduced byelaws against spitting and coughing in public, or enforced the wearing of gauze masks by anyone out in public. There is a famous picture of an American baseball game in progress with every player and everyone in the crowd wearing masks. While the number of sufferers climbed exponentially, the most important tasks were the nursing of the sick, and the removal and burial of the dead: and there were barely enough well people to do this.
‘As several of the nurses were away for their holidays’, Ellen Hancox wrote, ‘we were short of staff, and it was with greatest difficulty that we were able to cope with the rush of work. In many instances every member of the household would be ill in bed, and often the doctor who should have been in attendance was incapacitated as well. Some of our experiences at this time were tragic to a degree, but bad as they were they were nothing to what we were to experience later. No one who had anything to do with nursing or visiting the sick will ever forget the closing weeks of September and the months of October and November, with one special time which marred Victory week for so many Sheffield people! For it was not possible to enter into the spirit of such rejoicing when those one loved were either dying or lying dead in the house. At one time it was only on very rare occasions that we entered a house which had not been visited by the Angel of Death, and we frequently had to superintend the removal of the dead from the bed before we could start nursing the living.’

Superintendent Hancox also noticed the different and alarming nature of this flu pandemic:

‘All three epidemics proved disastrous for expectant and young mothers. Old people and young children generally recovered, while young working people from about 18 to 30 years of age died in most extraordinary numbers. In Sheffield a peculiar fact was noticeable, namely that districts in the highest parts of the City (and Sheffield is very hilly!) suffered more acutely than those on the lower areas.’

The speed with which the illness developed and often killed its victims was also apparent, and astonishing, to this experienced nurse:

‘Although we always visited every patient as soon as possible after the case was sent in (we have a reputation for being extremely prompt) we often found them dead when we arrived. One of the big firms asked for a nurse to visit the wife of one of their workmen. The case came in rather late in the morning, so I went myself, early in the afternoon, and found the father, mother, husband and four children had all died in about a week, the wife and her sister being the only two of the family left. This woman was a widow for a second time, her first husband having been killed some months previously. When I saw her, she was in a state of profound coma, with a temperature of 106. However, she ultimately recovered.’

Miss Hancox finished her article with ‘great praise’ for the people who had come forward voluntarily to help the over-stretched district nurses and doctors. She reports that the wives of some of the prisoners of war did ‘most valuable nursing work in looking after the families of the stricken sick people’. And in November, the Committee of the Sheffield District Nursing Association passed a vote of thanks to the nurses ‘congratulating them on the splendid way they had risen to the occasion.’

Similar reliance on volunteers and heroic efforts from health professionals was taking place in Leicester. Miss M Knox Mearns described how her nurses ‘struggled along for the first fortnight in October without any extra help, all the staff working from nine to eleven hours a day’, until the local Medical Officer of Health closed the schools, and the school nurses and health visitors swelled the ranks of the district nurses. He also appealed in the local newspapers for help in the homes of the sick, and the response was ‘fairly good.’

‘It was a great boon to be able to send help to those very sad cases where all in the house were
ill, some dead and others dying’, Miss Knox Mearns wrote to the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine. ‘The majority of helpers were just splendid. They did not mind what they did – scrubbing floors, washing clothes, cooking food etc – was all one to them... Fortunately only four of my own nurses had influenza, and that very lightly, but I was not so fortunate in those sent to help; every day or two one dropped out, until at the end of a fortnight only two were left.

All the organisation was done from the Home, and it entailed a great deal of hard work, as new cases were always coming in and more help had to be arranged. We had more offers for day than for night work, consequently we had to move our night staff about, giving the staff a rest where it was most needed. We had a few men for nights also, and we were very glad of them for the delirious male patients.’

The Leicester District Nursing Association may have been relatively unscathed by influenza amongst its staff; but elsewhere the epidemic did claim victims amongst the Queen’s Nurses, who were the mainstay of care for affected families. Early in 1919, the Council of Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Institute for Nurses passed a unanimous resolution in appreciation of the ‘self-sacrificing and devoted services’ done by Queen’s Inspectors, Superintendents and Nurses during the epidemic. The Queen’s Nurses’ magazine reported the resolution, and a statement from the Council, under the heading ‘Our Roll of Honour’:

‘The call came to them at a time when staffs were depleted, when no help could be had and when the workers were almost at breaking point, but they responded nobly. They had already struggled through four weary years, taking the places of those gone for ‘war work’, comforting the sad and sorrowing, tending the wives and children left behind and caring for the mothers and babies of the nation. Yet without hesitation, serenely, and as part of their day’s work, they met the hourly increasing demands on their services and, putting aside their own weariness, fought against fearful odds, often with the doctor unable to visit except at rare intervals, often in overcrowded houses and insanitary surroundings, the dying and the dead together, and often until they themselves went down as victims to the fell disease. Death took a heavy toll, as will be seen below, and sadly will they be missed by many.’

The Roll of Honour starts with Margaret Carroll, a district nurse at Lawrencetown, Co. Galway for five years, who died of flu on 20th November 1918. ‘She did excellent work in the district, where she was beloved by all for her unselfish and untiring devotion to duty,’ the magazine records.

Alice Corns, who died of flu on 23rd November, had only just started at her district at Sale. ‘All those districts where she had worked will mourn her loss.’

Margaret Elliott died on 27th November from heart failure following influenza. ‘She was a capable unsparing worker, whose loss will long be felt amongst her patients in Willington.’

Mary Jones, who died at Worthing on 30th October of pneumonia following influenza, ‘was very much beloved by all her patients and friends, and her loss to the Association is a very great one, for she gave of her best at all times.’

Sarah Lake was Superintendent of the Hulme Home in Manchester before she died on 9th December, ‘and a most successful and useful career in the nursing profession is thus brought to a close. She will be a great loss to the community and is deeply mourned.’

Dorothy Pond, who was on military nursing service, died on 30th October, after three days’ illness, of pneumonia. ‘Her loss is much deplored.’
Ann Sowerbutts passed away on 14th November, at Hayward’s Heath, where, with the exception of a year on military nursing service, she had worked as a Queen’s Nurse since 1913. ‘She won the hearts of all classes by her devotion to duty and her kindly bearing, and deep expressions of regret were heard on every hand when her death became known, while many eyes were dimmed with tears as she was borne to her last resting place.’

Mary Welch died on 27th November from pneumonia following influenza. ‘She was a faithful and devoted nurse who will be greatly missed at Woolwich, where she was working as a Senior at the time of her illness and death.’

Two former Queen’s Nurses, Charlotte Brooks and Annie Wood, who had recently returned to work on the staff of the Kensington District Nursing Association, were taken ill and both died on 8th November, from the effects of influenza. ‘A short funeral service was held at St Mary Abbotts’ Church, and this was attended by Members of the Committee and by friends of the Nursing Association as well as the Nurses in the Home.’

By the end of 1919, when Florence returned to England, the worst of the pandemic was over, though it officially ended in mid-1920. Mabel and Florence, and the nurses of the Hammersmith and Fulham District Nursing Association, had survived unscathed. With their education in germ theory and hygiene, and experience of nursing infectious diseases over many years, they may even have been able to laugh at an item reported in the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine in 1919 under the heading ‘Sugar and Influenza’:

‘In view of the gloomy anticipation of another influenza epidemic, prevalent in some quarters, it is interesting and cheering to see that Dr Soltau Fenwick, speaking in London on the subject the other day, gave it as his opinion that “the people who died last year from pneumonia following influenza, did so largely from heart failure due to insufficient sugar. Sugar and fat were essentials, and people were underfed especially in these two articles. This year there was no earthly reason why any influenza epidemic should find us ready to collapse.”’

But for Florence, there was little time left to enjoy the peace. She celebrated her 55th birthday on 10th January 1920. On 12th January, she stepped onto the train at Victoria Station for the journey to St Leonards and a holiday with friends, and was found barely conscious in her compartment two hours later. Less than three weeks into the new decade, Florence would be dead.
Chapter 20

‘A woman we could ill afford to lose’

Mabel had nursed enough seriously injured patients to know that Florence’s death was inevitable. Her friend had remained deeply unconscious from the first evening after the attack. The open head wounds left areas of her brain exposed, and pieces of bone had been driven into the brain itself. She was terribly vulnerable to infection; and, as she was unable to move herself, her lungs began to succumb to pneumonia, making her breathing more and more difficult.

The senior surgeon of the East Sussex Hospital, Dr Cecil Christopherson, visited Florence twice a day. He was an experienced doctor who had qualified in London more than 30 years before. But for all the expert care that he and his colleagues could provide, and all the advances in diagnostics and treatment, he did not believe that Florence could survive her injuries.

On Tuesday 13th January, the Hospital Secretary notified the Matron in Chief of Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Reserve of Florence’s condition. A note was made in her service record: ‘News received of dangerous condition of Miss F N Shore in East Sussex Hospital Hastings, owing to violent assault in train’. A further telegram of enquiry from the War Office received a graver report on Thursday 14th: ‘Very much regret to inform you that Miss Shore in weaker condition practically lifeless.’

On the same day, the Daily Telegraph reported the attack and Florence’s grave condition; but also added that, on the evening of her admission to the hospital, she could ‘make a few incoherent sounds and move her arm when asked to do so.’ On Friday 15th January, the West London Observer had the full story of the attack, and some background information about Florence. Her aunt, Baroness Farina, who had visited the hospital and talked to Mabel Rogers, was quoted as saying that she could not think of any motive for the attack other than robbery:

‘She was wearing a valuable diamond ring, and a gold necklet, but had very little money with her. A box containing other jewels had been broken open and all the valuables were stolen, the ring having been torn off her finger.’ The report concluded: ‘Up to the time of going to press, Miss Shore remains unconscious. Miss Rogers, superintendent of the Hammersmith Nursing Association, is watching by her bedside.’

The Baroness talked to several different newspaper reporters, telling them about her niece’s childhood, her nursing career and her heroic conduct during the war:

‘My niece, as a child, was the sweetest girl I have ever known’, she told the Daily Mirror. ‘And she preserved that sweetness throughout life. As she grew up and understood the glorious story of Florence Nightingale, ‘The Lady of the Lamp’, after whom she was named … Florence was inspired with its romance. She felt that destiny called her along the same path.’

Pneumonia, the old enemy of the bedridden patient, was taking its toll on Florence. As the long Friday wore on, the War Office contacted the hospital again, asking about her condition. The reply, sent that night by the Hospital Secretary, stated simply: ‘Very much regret to inform you that Miss Nightingale Shore
passed away this evening.’ She had died at five to eight in the evening, with Mabel Rogers beside her.

Miss Smith, from the QAs, wrote a letter of condolence on behalf of the nursing services to Florence’s formal next of kin: her brother, Brigadier General Offley Shore, now living in California. Then Florence’s QA file was stamped ‘Closed’, on 17th January.

On Monday 19th January, Florence’s body was taken from the East Sussex Hospital to Christ Church, St Leonards – the town where she had planned to spend her week’s holiday with friends. Her coffin was placed at the entrance to the chancel, between rows of lighted candles, and remained there overnight. The next day, a hearse would take the coffin to London for burial. But before Mabel could accompany her friend on her final journey, she had a grimmer and more challenging role to fulfil: she was the first witness at the opening of the inquest into Florence’s death.

‘Hastings Train Mystery’ ran the headline in the local paper. ‘Borough Coroner Opens Inquest, and Pays his Tribute to the Dead Nurse. Miss Rogers gives Interesting Narrative. How the Fatal Coach came to be Selected. Friend’s Motor Ride at 3a.m.’

The inquest opened at five o’clock on Monday 19th January, less than 72 hours since Mabel had watched Florence die. In a gesture of professional kindness and solidarity, one of the hospital nurses sat beside Mabel throughout the proceedings. The papers described ‘Nurse Shore’s friend’ as a ‘pathetic figure’, tall, grey-haired and pale-faced, being helped in and out of the court by the nurse.

The Hastings Borough Coroner, Mr W J Glenister, was accompanied at the hearing by his deputy, Mr H Davenport Jones, and the Coroner’s officer, Detective Inspector Ruse. In fact, the room was full of uniforms. As well as the hospital nurse, police officers from the three investigating forces were also there: Superintendent Vine from the East Sussex Constabulary in Bexhill, where Florence’s injuries had been discovered; Detective Inspector Haigh and Detective Sergeant Sharpe who had been called in from Scotland Yard by the local police; and Superintendent J J Jarvis and Detective Sergeant Vickers from the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway police force. The LB&SCR also had its own solicitor present, Mr E Capel Rutherford.

A jury of eleven men (as inquests require one fewer jurors than criminal trials) was sworn in. The jurors – Arthur Perry, George Farmer, William Baker, William Latter, Walter Budd, Norman Jepson, Horace Walker, Sidney Mont, Frank Cruttenden, Douglas Mastin and Frederick Wicks – chose Wicks as their Foreman. They had earlier viewed Florence’s body in the mortuary, and they expressed their sympathy at the hearing. The LB&SCR solicitor was also quick to make a statement, assuring everyone that the Company was making every effort to assist the Coroner, and expressing ‘deep regret and sincere sympathy’ on behalf of the Company to the relatives and friends of the deceased ‘unfortunate lady.’

Then the Coroner addressed the jury, with an extraordinary and apparently unrehearsed speech of praise for Florence and regret about her death:

‘She was a lady of philanthropic disposition, a nurse of many years’ standing and had devoted herself to tending the sick and people wounded in the War,’ he began. ‘She had been on service abroad for some four or five years, and was one of that band of noble women which it was left to the War to disclose to us. She had been brought up in philanthropic surroundings, and had devoted her life with self-abnegation to those suffering from illness or in any other cause in which she could assist them. She was a noble woman, a woman we could ill afford to lose. She was, I believe, well known to officers of the Army, and was highly respected and esteemed by everybody who came into contact with her.
It seems exceedingly hard that a lady of this character, whose life had been devoted to others, should lose her life under these distressing circumstances. We can express our sympathy with her relatives and friends, but it is exceedingly difficult to know what to say. It may assuage their grief to know that, not only we here, but the whole country, mourns with them in their loss. I should like on your behalf, and on my own behalf, to express our deep sympathy. I am speaking from the bottom of my heart. I am not using any set phrases or form of words, but say what I feel. We deeply regret this calamity that has happened.’

Glenister went on to instruct the jury about what would happen in that particular hearing, aiming to protect Mabel Rogers, and to limit her ordeal.

‘I need not ask you’ he said to the jurors, ‘whether you join in this expression of sympathy to the devoted lady who has been in assiduous attention upon this poor woman from the time she came to the Hospital until the end ... it is your right to ask questions, questions that are material, but I suggest that you should confine any questions simply to elucidating anything which may occur to you in some way tending to the identification of the deceased. The lady who will give evidence before you will be called upon a future occasion, and then you will be able to put any questions or points that are not quite clear.’

With that, Mabel was sworn in, and the Coroner began his questioning to establish the identity of the deceased. He asked Mabel to confirm her own address, at Carnforth Lodge, Queen Street, Hammersmith, and that she was the matron in charge of the nurses’ home. ‘And you have known the deceased for many years?’ he asked. ‘Yes,’ Mabel replied simply. ‘How long?’ asked the Coroner. ‘Nearly 26’ was the response.

The Coroner established Florence’s full name, her profession as a nurse, and her age: 55. To the question ‘Where did she reside?’ Mabel explained that Florence had lived at Carnforth Lodge since her demobilisation from active service in the QAs in November the previous year, barely two months before the fatal journey to Hastings. Florence’s relatives were named by Mabel as her brother in California, and an aunt and cousins in England. Then the questions turned to Florence as a person.

‘What was her disposition?’ asked the Coroner. ‘Was she reserved?’
‘She was very reserved and very quiet, but cheerful.’
‘As far as you know she had no enemies?’
‘No, none at all.’
‘As to her physique, was she strong?’
‘No, I should not say she was, but she had been stronger in recent years,’ Mabel told him: an interesting answer, referring to a woman who had done five consecutive years’ front line work as a war nurse. Next the Coroner focused on the events of the days leading up to Florence’s death.

‘Did she spend Sunday 11th inst. with you?’
‘She was with me, but she came down to Tonbridge for the day and returned the same evening to me.’
‘She went to Tonbridge on Sunday 11th inst. and returned in the evening to Carnforth Lodge?’
‘Yes.’
‘Did you know that she had arranged to pay a visit to St Leonards on the 12th inst, a week ago today?’
‘Yes.’
‘And did you go with her to Victoria Station? The South Coast Victoria Station?’
‘Yes.’
‘She was going to catch the 3.15 train?’
‘The 3.20.’
‘To St Leonards?’
‘To Warrior Square.’
‘What time did you get to the station?’
‘I think it was two minutes after 3 o’clock.’
‘Did you look out a carriage for her?’
‘I selected one of the back coaches. There was only one seat back to the engine and a lady said that was taken, so I went to the next one. I put her into the first compartment of the next carriage – the last coach. The train pulled into the station while we were there.’
‘Was it a smoking compartment?’
‘No.’
‘Was the compartment empty at that moment?’
‘Yes.’
‘What luggage had she?’
‘A suit case, a large dispatch box and a small bag hanging on her arm.’
‘Did you put the larger case under the seat?’
‘Yes.’
‘Then did she get into the carriage?’
‘Yes.’
‘And you put the other case beside her on the seat?’
‘Yes.’
‘The seat was facing the engine and it was the first seat on the right hand side? Right hand side down the line?’
‘Yes.’
‘Did she have anything else with her?’
‘Yes, an umbrella.’
‘Did you get into the compartment as well?’
‘Yes.’
‘Did you sit there and talk to her for a little while?’
‘I am not sure whether I sat or stood, but I got in.’
‘About how long were you there?’
‘About ten minutes past three we got in.’
‘After you got in did a man get in?’
‘Yes.’
‘How long had he been in?’
‘About three minutes before the train started.’
‘Then I suppose you stopped there until the train was just about to start?’
'I got out almost immediately after the man got in. He closed the door and I opened it and got out. I stood looking into the window.'

'When the train started, there was nobody else in the compartment but Miss Shore and the man?'

'No.'

'Your friend was in her usual state of health?'

'She was very well.'

'Was the window closed when the train started?'

'No.'

Having established the sequence of events at the start of the journey, the Coroner turned to Mabel’s part in the events that followed the attack, taking her through the most painful and difficult part of her testimony.

'In consequence of a message that came to Carnforth Lodge you came down here?'

'Yes. I did not get it directly as I was at the Theatre. I caught the 11.20 train but found I could only get as far as Tonbridge and motored on.'

'You stayed there the night, I suppose?'

'No, I motored on.'

'What time did you get here?'

'About 3 o’clock.'

'Did you see the deceased when you arrived?'

'Yes.'

'I suppose she was in bed?'

'Yes.'

'Did you stay in the Hospital until she died?'

'Yes.'

'Did she regain consciousness during that time?'

'No.'

'When did she die?'

'On Friday at five minutes to eight.'

'Was the man who got into the carriage a stranger to you?'

'Yes.'

'And to the deceased?'

'Yes.'

'As far as you know, you had never seen him before?'

'No.'

'So far as you know the deceased had never seen him?'

'No.'

At this point, the Coroner decided to close the proceedings for the day. He invited questions from the jury, but the Foreman assured him they had none. Setting the next hearing for 3 o’clock on 4th February at the Hastings Town Hall, the Coroner reminded the jury that it was important they all attend. A post-mortem had been carried out, he said, by Dr Bernard Spilsbury, and ‘several local gentlemen’ had been present. He hoped the jury would be satisfied if Dr Spilsbury and just one local medical gentleman were
called. Wicks, the jury Foreman, offered no objection. He again expressed the jurors’ sympathy to the deceased’s friends, and called the assault ‘a cowardly and dastardly act.’

The Coroner offered the jury the chance to inspect the railway carriage in which Florence had been attacked, if they felt they needed to see it. Again Wicks declined on behalf of his fellow jurors, saying they did not think this was necessary. Capel Rutherford, the railway company solicitor, stepped in to ask if the carriage – which had been kept at Hastings station with its door sealed – could now be moved. But the Coroner was not ready to release the scene of the crime, however inconvenient it was for the Company. He told the solicitor, ‘I think you had better leave it for the moment. You will have notice from the police.’

With that, the first inquest hearing was over. Mabel could leave the hospital for the last time to attend the next morning’s Requiem Mass for her friend before the funeral cortege left for London. When the inquest reconvened, it would hear details of the journey, the man who got off at the first stop, Lewes, and what the railway workers found when they joined Florence in her compartment at Polegate Junction.
Chapter 21

‘With sorrowing love’

At a quarter to eight the next morning, a Requiem Mass for Florence was celebrated at Christ Church, St Leonards. As well as Mabel, the congregation included Alderman R W Mitchell JP and Councillor W Meads, representing the town, and Mr W G Kemsley, Secretary of the East Sussex Hospital. Some VAD nurses were present, and Commandant Moyse and Quartermaster Green represented the British Red Cross. Florence’s aunt, the 74 year old Baroness Farina from Tonbridge, was not present. There were wreaths on the coffin from the Matron and Staff of the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service, and the Matron and Nursing Staff of the East Sussex Hospital. After the service, the coffin was transferred to a motor hearse, for the journey back to London.

Mabel Rogers travelled back to London by train, and made her way to St. Saviour’s Church in Ealing for her friend’s funeral. The hearse carrying Florence’s coffin arrived shortly before two o’clock in the afternoon. It was taken into the church and placed on a catafalque in front of the high altar, with a Union Jack for a pall, and three lighted candles on either side. More wreaths were brought to the church from St Faith’s Nursing Home in Ealing, where Florence’s father had died nine years earlier, having been collected there. They were laid at the foot of the catafalque and along the altar rails. Mabel’s wreath bore the simple message: ‘With sorrowing love to my dear, kind friend.’ Other wreaths came from Commander Orme-Webb of the Royal Navy; the Matron and members of the QAIMNS; and the London Centre of the College of Nurses of the British Committee of the French Red Cross ‘In remembrance of work done in France’. The nurses of Carnforth Lodge, where Florence had been living, sent a wreath of arum lilies and white hyacinths ‘In loving remembrance’; others came from St Faith’s Nursing Home and from individual friends.

Every seat in the church was occupied for the funeral service, and many people stood in the aisles. The mourners inside the church included representatives from the British and French Red Cross, the London School of Nursing, the YMCA, the QAs and St Faith’s Nursing Home. As well as Mabel Rogers, several members of Florence’s family were present – her cousin Harrington Offley Shore from her father’s side of the family, now an ordained priest; and Clarence Hobkirk, her cousin from her mother’s side, a Brigadier General in the Army. The service was conducted by the Reverend A C Bucknall, the vicar of St Saviour’s. The choir sang ‘Praise to the Holiest in the Height’, and ‘Now the labourer’s task is o’er.’ And as Florence’s coffin was carried from the church, the organ played ‘O Rest in the Lord.’

Outside, large crowds lined the streets for some distance from the church during the funeral service; foot and mounted police had to clear a passage for the procession which took the coffin to the City of Westminster cemetery in Hanwell for interment. The hearse containing the flag-draped coffin was followed by five other cars of mourners, and hundreds of people waited at the cemetery to witness the interment. The cortege passed through the massive wrought iron gates of the cemetery, and Florence’s coffin was lowered into a family grave, amongst the trees between the entrance gates and the chapel, alongside her sister.

Florence’s brother Offley and his wife Caroline, now living in California, and could not attend the funeral. Offley wrote back to the QAs from his home, the San Ysidro Ranch in Santa Barbara, to thank them for the letter of condolence he had received:
Dear Miss Smith
I just want to tell you how much my wife and I appreciate your very kind & charmingly expressed letter of condolence on my sister’s death: and to see that the people under whom, and with whom, she was serving appreciated her sterling worth.
We were endeavouring to get her to come out here and enjoy some rest in this near [unreadable] climate, after a long life of ceaseless devotion to her profession, when this happened.
She was a good soldier, and I am glad the end came suddenly.
With kind regard, very sincerely, Offley Shore.’

After Florence’s funeral, Mabel returned to Carnforth Lodge and her post as Superintendent of the Hammersmith and Fulham DNA. The shock of the attack, the midnight journey to Hastings, the four long days spent at Florence’s bedside, and the roles of first witness at the inquest and chief mourner for her friend of nearly 26 years, must all have taken their toll on her. But she still had final duties to perform. On 27th January, she wrote to thank the Matron in Chief and members of the QAs for the wreath sent to Florence’s funeral, and ‘much sympathy shown at her tragic death.’ And shortly afterwards, she took the lead in raising funds to create a memorial to her friend. But her actions were not universally appreciated: Mabel’s role in the aftermath of Florence’s death was the subject of angry letters between Florence’s brother Offley Shore and her cousin Clarence Hobkirk.

Offley had never liked Mabel. He believed that she had deliberately tried to isolate Florence from her family. His wife Caroline, according to her own letters, had tried to mediate in the matter:

‘Aunt Mellie and I will feel it [Florence’s death] most deeply and miss her and so will her great friend who wrote a most piteous letter to Offley – and alas, Offley feels as did Urith and Aunt Caroline – that Miss Rogers – Flo’s friend – alienated her from her family. I suppose she did, but I begged Offley not to try – in seeing more of his sister – to separate the two friends at their age – Florence was 56 – and of a most determined and pugnacious disposition – in fact these traits made her great character and worth – and I think I brought about a very much happier relationship between her and Aunt C. and also Offley – who never let go of her or lost sight of her – in spite of all her determination to lose herself among the people she worked for and cared for – and at least I flatter myself this was so.’

In spite of Caroline’s efforts, Offley’s dislike of Mabel, and his anger at her role following Florence’s death, was not tempered. On 27th February, he wrote to his cousin, Clarence Hobkirk, who was co-trustee of Florence’s estate, and administering it in London. After suggesting how Florence’s jewellery, clothing, letters and other belongings should be dispersed among the family, Offley says:

‘Re Miss Rogers’ suggested gift to the Hastings Hospital. I think £20 would be suitable but I do consider it an impertinence for Miss R. to have suggested it. I have no use for the woman, never had, and neither had Urith. Since Florence was so much attached to her, it is fortunate perhaps that she was on the spot to look after Flo. But I do not wish to be beholden to Miss R. or to have anything to do with her. I have formally thanked her for her last services to my sister. So has Lina [his wife, Caroline].’

This was followed by another letter on 3rd March:
‘I told you in my last of Urith’s and my abhorrence of that vulgarious [sic] woman’s influence over Flo and how she monopolised her to our exclusion. I now enclose you Miss Roger’s last in which, to my mind, the assured proprietorship stands out fairly clearly. She appears to forget that F. was my sister who I at least had known for 52 years.

However, I have merely told the woman that you are my sister’s executor at home & that information as to the disposal of such things as she may have at Carnforth Lodge will come through you.

What the devil she means by assuming that I should let her know if I were coming home, or hinting that (she thought) I ought to come home on such an occasion – I don’t know. But I think the vulgariance [sic] has got a bit above herself! & wants putting in her place. (You will see that I am not a Democrat).

Urith and Flo would, I think, have worked out a combined establishment somewhere if it had not been for F.’s attachment to Miss Rogers, whom Urith, at the time, did not wish to have constantly in the house.’

By May, the tone of his letters was even more furious:

‘My dear Clarence – I enclose that poisonous woman’s last to me. You really might think that she was Florence’s mother-in-law – the way she calmly appropriates her and exploits poor F’s “adventures” for her own advantage. I had thought of writing to the female and telling her what I think of her – but being of the mud and muddy she would never understand, and I think I shall leave her alone in silence.’

‘Of the mud and muddy’ is an interesting phrase: as there is nothing to suggest that there was any basis for a racial slur against Mabel, it may simply indicate Offley’s view that Mabel was socially far inferior to the Shore family. A poem by Percy Shelley called ‘England in 1819’ starts with the lines:

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring,—

If Offley knew this poem, maybe he considered Mabel to be ‘the dregs of their dull race’.

The letter continues:

‘She should however send F.’s S.A. war medal and the silver she mentions in her letter to you (or as you may direct). I think a reminder to the effect that all personal property goes to the casualty’s next of kin, or to the Executor, might be useful. She has no manner of rights in keeping anything (unless she can prove that F. gave her certain things). The whole tone of the article in the Nursing magazine makes me furious! Evidently F. had no family or relations, and made her home at Carnforth Lodge!!! Ye Gods!

Whether F. ever gave those F. Nightingale letters to Miss Rogers or not I know nothing of but I should doubt it. You may bet your bottom dollar, if I were going to take a hand in any kind of memorial to F. Miss R. & her crowd wouldn’t play any kind of a part in it.

If that backboneless and [unreadable] cousin of mine: the Rev. Harrington O.S. had asserted himself at the funeral & subsequently, Miss R. would now be taking a very low seat & a silent
Why Offley should be so angry with Mabel is difficult to fathom. Clearly he resented the implication that Mabel was closer to Florence than her family was; but then, Florence and Mabel had lived together in the Nurses Home for many years, while Offley and Caroline had been living abroad and only occasionally visiting England. Offley blamed Mabel for separating Florence from her family. Yet when Offley and his wife were in London, Florence came down from Sunderland to spend time with them; and when she had leave from the QAs during the War, Caroline’s letters show that Florence often spent it with her sister-in-law. The possibility that Mabel was keeping, and using, items that had belonged to Florence seemed to be a major concern for Offley, although in another letter to Clarence, he suggests that some of his sister’s belongings are sold or destroyed. Only specific items and letters are identified to be passed on to family members.

Whatever the reason for this bitter feud between family and friend, it could hardly have distracted any of the parties from the most shocking and important question at the time: who had killed Florence?
Chapter 22

The man who got off at Lewes

From the beginning of the investigation, the police had a prime suspect. After all, they had a variation of a ‘locked room’ mystery on their hands: two people had been in the compartment when the train left Victoria; one was found alone and fatally injured when the next set of passengers entered the carriage at Polegate Junction. The question was less who had committed the crime, but what his name was, and when and how he had got away from the scene. The Sussex police, the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway police, and Scotland Yard, which was also taking an interest, all focused their attention on the man who had joined Florence in her compartment at Victoria.

Mabel Rogers was the only person, apart from Florence, to have seen the man in daylight. She had only had a few moments to observe him, as he had joined the train shortly before departure time, just before Mabel herself got out of the carriage to wave her friend off. Mabel thought he was aged about 28 or 30, of medium height and slight build, clean-shaven, and respectable looking. His hair was medium brown. He had been wearing a brown tweed suit, ‘of rather mixed and light material’, with no overcoat – though he might have had one over his arm. He appeared to have no luggage, and no stick or umbrella – perhaps oddly, for a train heading for the coast, with its first stop scheduled for late on a January afternoon.

Since the prime suspect was not in the carriage when the platelayers joined it at Polegate, the police believed that he must have got off the train at its first stop, Lewes, at around half past four. He could not, they believed, have abandoned his journey any earlier. Although the train had slowed down passing through Gatwick and Three Bridges, it was still travelling at 30 miles per hour, too fast to allow anyone to leap out and close the door and raise the window behind them. The guard on the train, Henry Duck, had seen a man alight from the back of the train at Lewes. In fact, his manner of leaving the train had caught the guard’s attention.

The platform at Lewes station was short, and the Eastbourne and Hastings train – not yet divided to serve both destinations – was twelve carriages long, with the engine and guard’s van. The usual practice was for the front of the train to stop at the platform, then, if any passengers from the back of the train wanted to alight, they would tell the guard, and the train would move up to bring the final two carriages alongside the platform. The passenger leaving the train that Monday afternoon did not wait for this to happen. Instead, he opened the compartment door and stepped out onto the footboard, closing the door behind him before stretching along to the next compartment and then dropping around four feet down to the ground. He turned towards the front of the train and climbed up the ramp onto the platform. As the man walked past him, the guard spoke to him, asking ‘Didn’t they tell you at Victoria to get into the front portion of the train?’ He received no reply.

Having gained the platform, the passenger had several options. He could have left the station in the normal way through the ticket barrier – providing he had a London to Lewes ticket to show to the station staff, this would not attract any attention. Or, it was suggested at one point, he could have climbed the railings that divided the station from the town: though this theory was soon ridiculed by the Lewes station-master, Mr Marchant, as it would have drawn just the attention the man presumably hoped to avoid. Similarly, Mr Marchant pointed out, if he had tried to exit on the ‘offside’ of the train – onto the tracks rather than the platform side – he would have been seen by the signalman in his box immediately opposite
the train. Other options were not to leave the station at all, but to rejoin the train in a different carriage to go on to Eastbourne; or to change platforms and join a train going back to London, or to a different destination entirely. Whichever option he chose, the man succeeded in evading attention: none of the station staff, questioned by the police the next day, could remember anything out of the ordinary about a departing passenger. ‘The man who got off at Lewes’ remained the chief suspect. The police hoped that either he would come forward himself, or a friend or relative would name him.

Tempting as he was as a suspect, though, there were some inconsistencies in this theory. Henry Duck, the guard, had seen him by the light of his guard’s lamp, and had even spoken to him. Yet Duck’s description of the man differs from that of Mabel Rogers. Duck saw the man wearing a ‘dark, drab mackintosh’ and a cap. He also thought that the man was of ‘athletic build’. And Duck stated that it was not unusual for people to exit the train in that hasty way; this alone did not constitute suspicious behaviour. However much the staff might wish that people would get into the right portion of the train at Victoria, or wait for the train to move up to the platform, the guard testified that they often did not do so.

While the hunt for the man who got off at Lewes continued, the local paper, the Hastings and St Leonards Observer, reported an odd incident that had occurred that same night, at Hayward’s Heath railway station on the Brighton line. The train going in the opposite direction to Florence’s, from Eastbourne to Victoria, stopped at Hayward’s Heath just after nine o’clock. The driver of an engine pulling just a brake van, passing in the southerly direction, saw a man jump onto the line from the train and lie down on the tracks. The engine and van passed over him, but without injuring him – and the young man then jumped up and re-entered the train. Having given everyone a fright, he was spoken to by the Head Porter at the station, and had his name and address taken, but he would not explain himself. He was allowed to proceed on his journey. Whether this incident was related to the attack on Florence, no-one could determine. Was it a failed suicide attempt from someone appalled by his crime and its possible consequences, or just an unrelated stunt? It seems a very odd thing for a man to do on a dark and freezing January night, with no audience, just for fun.

Alongside the search for the missing passenger, the various police forces were also pursuing the question of a motive for the attack. Mabel reported that Florence had been wearing a new fur coat and hat, which could have given the impression that she was well off. However, she had only been carrying three pound notes in cash, which were missing when she was found. Some of the jewellery she had been wearing when she left London, including her gold necklace and diamond ring, was also missing, and presumed to have been taken by the assailant. So it was initially assumed that the most likely motive for the attack was robbery.

Yet the three blows that inflicted the fatal head wounds had been struck with tremendous force, far more than might be required to overpower a small woman in order to steal from her. The day after Florence died, the newspapers were reporting speculation that the motive could have been even uglier. Under the headline ‘Fierce fight in defence of her honour?’ the Daily Mirror’s special correspondent reported from Hastings, where the compartment that Florence had travelled in was still in a siding at the station with its doors sealed by police tape.

‘The drama of that terrible struggle is eloquently revealed by the bloodmarks in the carriage, which remains sealed at the station here. They suggest the frenzied attack of a temporarily demented man, and point to assault rather than robbery as the predominant motive. One large smear, as well as a smaller trace of blood, has been found at the opposite end of the compartment to that at which Nurse Shore was seated, indicating that after one of the three wounds was inflicted, the man and his victim swayed in fierce encounter before the quietus was administered.’
The police urgently needed to find the weapon that had inflicted the blows, to see if that could shed light on the crime, and lead them to the person who had committed it.

As the crime had taken place on a moving train, the field for the search – both for the perpetrator and the weapon – was enormous. It also involved three different police forces. The Sussex police were involved because the crime had been discovered when the train arrived at Bexhill. The Metropolitan Police, in the form of Scotland Yard, were invited in to assist by the Sussex police because of the high profile of the case and the baffling nature of the suspect’s disappearance. The Met had no right to take over a murder case, however high-profile, complex or shocking: the principle of local police autonomy was sacrosanct. But they could be called in at the discretion of the local chief constable, if their special expertise was thought more likely to lead to a result. In a circular to Chief Constables in 1906, the Home Office had specifically advised that Scotland Yard should be called in immediately in cases of murders committed on trains passing through several police jurisdictions – largely as a result of the murder of Maria Money in the Merstham Tunnel the previous year.

That Scotland Yard could produce a result where local police had failed was not however guaranteed: a report to Parliament about local cases in which the Met had assisted between 1919 and 1920 showed that a conviction was secured in just over half of cases.

The third police force involved in the Nightingale Shore murder was the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway company’s own police. They had their own interests in the incident: the location of the crime scene, on one of their trains, and the potential for damage to their company’s reputation. Neither LB&SCR nor its police officers can have been pleased with the Hastings and St Leonards Observer’s article about Florence’s death, in the 17th January issue, which said in its first paragraph:

‘Recalling some of the most famous railway mysteries of modern times, in which lonely passengers were savagely attacked by persons who were successful in eluding capture, this outrage on the Brighton line presents a number of remarkable features, and if the full story is ever revealed it will probably be found to be of the most repulsive kind.’

Words like ‘lonely passengers’, ‘savagely attacked’, ‘outrage’ and ‘most repulsive kind’ were hardly likely to attract custom to the railway.

There had been police specifically employed on the railways since the 1830s. Recognition of the need for railway police is often attributed to the very first fatality on a railway line, in 1830, at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. One of the distinguished guests disobeyed instructions, stepped onto the tracks and was killed by a passing engine. His death, and other problems with controlling the enthusiastic crowd, suggested that some form of official control was needed in this dangerous new area of transport. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway had its own police force in place by the end of that year. They also had ‘station houses’ at one mile intervals along the track, from where the police could control the road, deal with obstructions on the track, communicate up and down the line, and assist if any accidents occurred. The station houses became the hubs for both people and goods coming to and from the railway: and they are the reason that police buildings are called ‘stations’ today.

The first railway police were principally concerned with looking after signals and stations, rather than preventing or detecting crime. They wore uniforms and hats that were deliberately very similar to those of the Metropolitan Police – which had been formed at almost the same time as the first railway police – and carried truncheons, watches, flags and lamps. Having originally been set up voluntarily by the railway companies, in 1838 an Act of Parliament required the railway companies to employ constables to look
after areas around railway workings, where the huge gangs of ‘navigators’, or ‘navvies’, were said to be frequently out of control, fighting with each other and terrorising the local inhabitants. The constables often had to be assisted by the reading of the Riot Act, and the arrival infantry troops, in their quest to keep order.

Once advances in engineering brought mechanical signals and more efficient communications, the role of the railway police became less about looking after the railway, and more about dealing with crime. Criminals leaving the scene of their crimes by train needed to be caught and returned; trespassers on the railway line had to be removed; and the regular thefts of luggage and freight items from railway goods yards also occupied the police’s time. But as the county police forces developed and organised during the 19th century, the privately-employed railway police were more and more restricted in their duties. They began once again to focus on work of importance to the company that employed them rather than policing in the public interest. The talents of railway officers were not entirely over-looked because of their limited sphere of operations, however: the captain of the North Eastern Railway police made the transition to become commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Given that his had been the first police force in the world to use dog patrols (Airedale terriers at the docks in Hull), perhaps he was an innovator and always destined for the top.

In 1920, it was Superintendent J J Jarvis and Detective Sergeant Vickers from the LB&SCR police who worked on the case of the assault on the Brighton line. With colleagues from the other forces, they searched alongside the railway line all the way back to London, looking for a weapon that could have been used to inflict such horrific head wounds. They knew that it had a broad striking surface, and it was very heavy; but there were no other indications of what they were looking for. The train compartments had windows that opened on each side by means of a leather strap, operated from inside the carriage: the weapon could have been thrown out – if it was discarded at all – at any point after the attack. And the train had travelled nearly 60 miles between London’s Victoria station and Lewes, passing through at least three significant tunnels, at Merstham, Clayton and Oxley, and over a long viaduct across the North Downs. Their search for a weapon was perhaps more in hope than expectation; and they did not find anything that seemed likely to have been used in the commission of the crime.

One potential clue that caught the public’s attention was the discovery of a bloodstained khaki handkerchief, found lying beside the railway line north of Wivelsfield. But its importance was soon down-played by the police, who pointed out that these were very common items amongst ex-servicemen, and so unlikely to be useful for identification purposes.

There was a brief burst of excitement at the end of January when the Press Association reported that a soldier returning to his barracks in London had made a statement confessing to having murdered a woman in a train. Scotland Yard interviewed him, but quickly issued a statement saying that officers were satisfied that he had had nothing to do with Florence Shore’s murder. He was handed over to the military as a deserter.

With no witnesses, no weapon and no sign of the main suspect, the case appeared to be unsolvable, in spite of the bravado of the Eastbourne newspaper on behalf of the local constabulary:

‘Eastbourne police have taken a very active part in the man hunt’, reported the Eastbourne Gazette (‘Largest circulation. Largest paper. Oldest established.’) ‘Many criminals have had cause to rue the smartness and ingenuity of Chief Detective Wells, Detective Sergeant Curtis or Detectives Cockerall and Sawkins. Few strangers to the town since the crime have escaped the searching scrutiny of one or more of the local sleuth-hounds and many respectable residents would experience considerable indignation did they know of the penetrating glances of suspicion which
have been bestowed upon them.
The closest watch has been set upon all places where men gather together, and few of those who left theatres, music halls and picture houses have been aware of the man of law who, standing unobserved in the shadows, has watched them as they passed. Had the wanted man been in Eastbourne and attempted to leave by rail he would, probably, have been apprehended at the railway station.’

In spite of all this effort, Offley Shore, in America, had no confidence that his sister’s killer would be brought to justice. He wrote to his cousin Clarence that

‘I never thought for a single moment that our flat-footed ‘purliss’ would ever discover the murderer. How could they? But if the incident leads to better railway accommodation and adequate protection for women travelling alone on British Railways, it will be something gained in return for this sacrifice.’

Then, at the end of January, a new crime put the spotlight back onto the case. It brought a possible murder weapon to light, and required the expertise of one of the most eminent men of the day: Dr Bernard Spilsbury.
Chapter 23

The Arlington Road affair

Sir Bernard Spilsbury is known as the ‘father of forensic science’. He is credited with giving scientific respectability to what had formerly been a rather random and undervalued contribution to justice. After graduating from Magdalen College Oxford, he finished his medical training at St Mary’s Hospital in London, and almost immediately chose pathology as his specialism. Recognised for his potential by his mentors and colleagues at St Mary’s – the leading institution for forensic expertise – he was appointed resident assistant pathologist at the hospital in 1905.

The case that brought him to public attention was that of Dr Crippen in 1910. Spilsbury identified the decaying human remains buried in the cellar as that of Crippen’s wife, by finding a distinctive operation scar on a piece of skin. He went on to deduce how the ‘brides in the bath’ murderer, George Joseph Smith, had made three wives’ deaths from drowning each look like an accident.

The Scotland Yard detective in charge of that case, Inspector Arthur Neil, tested Spilsbury’s theory himself. By removing the baths from the scenes of the deaths, bringing them to London and conducting experiments using women in swimming costumes, he showed that pulling a person suddenly under the water by lifting their legs up caused water to rush into the nose and led to death by sudden inhibition of the vagal reflex. This did away with the need to hold the victim under the water, and meant there were none of the marks of struggle on the body or in the scene, to rouse the suspicion of deliberate drowning. (Only one of the volunteers came to harm in the experiments, and she was successfully revived.)

In 1920, Spilsbury was at the height of his fame, testifying in the trials of many notorious murderers. He would be knighted in 1923, but at the time of Florence’s death he was still simply Dr Bernard Spilsbury, Home Office Pathologist. He carried out the post mortem examination of Florence’s body, and would later testify at her inquest. Before that, he was asked to give his professional opinion as a forensic scientist on the only tangible piece of evidence possibly related to the attack ever to come to light.

The new crime which provided the evidence was an attempted burglary which took place in Eastbourne on Thursday 22\textsuperscript{nd} January, and which the papers called ‘the Arlington Road affair’. The household at 31 Arlington Road was preparing for bed at about half past ten when Edith Williams, the parlourmaid, rushed screaming into the kitchen from the coal-house. She had gone out to fetch some wood, and was reaching up to take some from a shelf when she heard the noise of something falling, and saw ‘something black’ moving towards her. The other servants in the kitchen – the cook Mrs Carter and Elsie Brooks the nursery maid – took little notice at first, assuming she had been frightened by a mouse. When Mrs Carter looked outside, however, she realised that the situation was much more serious.

‘When I got out there’, she told the reporter from the Eastbourne Gazette, ‘I saw a man standing in the coal-house doorway, pointing a revolver at me. I struggled with him and I managed to wrench the weapon from his grasp. The supper things were still on the table and Elsie (the nursery maid) lifted a vegetable dish, a knife and a clothes brush and threw them at him.’

This was probably not the way the would-be burglar had envisaged the crime taking place. Clearly deciding that the onslaught was too much for him, he attempted to get away from the house.
While I was struggling with him, he was endeavouring to open the back door,’ the cook’s story continued, ‘but as it was impossible to unlock the door without the aid of both hands, he failed in his attempt. When he saw that I meant to be equal with him he knocked me back against the gas stove and hit me in the jaw. My shoulder was hurt and I also got these cuts and scratches. Finding that he could not unlock the back door, the man rushed through the kitchen to the front. He seemed as though he was going upstairs then he tried the lavatory door, and finally got away.’

The burglar did not get far. The Arlington Road household had phoned for the police, and Inspector Cunnington responded. Cunnington called up Chief Detective Inspector Wells, and the two officers searched the local streets. They found a man on Orchard Road who looked as if he had been running, and was hatless. When questioned he gave his name as Billy Enyon, and said he had been to a ball at St George’s Hall – a venue that was in Brighton, not Eastbourne. He produced a card with the name Billy Enyon, and ‘boxer’ on it. The two detectives handed the man over to a constable for transfer to the Central Police Station, and went into the house at 31 Arlington Road to hear from the witnesses. There they were given the revolver that the cook had taken from the man, as well as a dented bowler hat found in the scullery.

The next day, Friday, the man was charged with housebreaking at 31 Arlington Road. But the police were already suspicious that he might be guilty of much worse: the attack on Florence Shore on the Hastings train.

William Ernest Clements – which, the police soon established, was the man’s real name – matched the descriptions given by Mabel Rogers and Henry Duck of the man who had shared Florence’s carriage, and left the train at Lewes. He was aged about 28, around 5ft 7ins in height, slimly built and ‘well set-up and bearing signs of Army training’, according to the newspaper report. He had been carrying a large Webley service revolver which could have caused Florence’s injuries, and which was bloodstained. When he was interrogated about his movements in the previous week, he could not give satisfactory replies, and he refused to say anything about his whereabouts on the day that Florence was attacked. On Saturday 24th January, police recovered a bloodstained suit from a house in Brighton where Clements was said to have lodged.

Instead of appearing before magistrates on the Monday to face the housebreaking charge, Clements was to be subjected to a different form of scrutiny. Mabel Rogers was asked to see if she could identify him as the man who entered Florence’s carriage at Victoria.

Meanwhile, the bloodstained revolver was sent to Bernard Spilsbury for his forensic opinion. The details of Spilsbury’s examination of the revolver are recorded on the hand-written index cards which Spilsbury used to document his cases. More than 4,000 of these cards remain, stored in the Wellcome Library in London, covering cases from 1905 to 1932. It is thought that the pathologist intended them for a textbook on forensic medicine; but he never wrote one. In fact, his career began to decline from the mid-1920s. In later years he was perceived as arrogant and inflexible, and some of his conclusions – even on cases that had led to hangings – were questioned. The deaths of two of his sons, failing health and a declining career were all thought to have contributed to his suicide: he poisoned himself with gas from the Bunsen burners in his rooms at the hospital in December 1947.

But in 1920, Spilsbury was still recording the key points of all his cases on index cards for posterity. The cards that relate to Florence’s death include information on the attempted burglary:

‘A few days later [after the attack] a young man was arrested in Hastings district whilst attempting
a burglary. Unloaded revolver found on him, butt end of which could have procured the injuries – see above [where he described the head injuries Florence suffered in the attack]. The man would give no account of his movements or of possession of revolver or presence of blood in it. Wearing new shirt purchased day before arrest and he had destroyed the clothes he wore previously.’

What the police needed was a match between Florence’s blood and that on the gun, to prove that this was indeed the likely murder weapon. Then, they hoped, a positive identification of Clements by Mabel as the man who had been on the train would make an even firmer connection between him and the crime.

On the second point, they had already been frustrated by the station staff. Spilsbury’s notes add tantalisingly that ‘Station officials said he closely resembled man seen to leave that part of that train at a station some distance from Hastings. He could not be positively identified …’ The police had to hope that Mabel would more positive when she saw Clements.

Then Spilsbury examined the gun itself. It was a revolver with six chambers, and contained several blank cartridges. There was a small red stain on the back of the revolving barrel, and similar stains on the lower surface of the gun facing the back of the barrel. One of the cartridges also bore a small stain. The differentiation of human from animal blood had been possible since the turn of the century, when a German scientist, Paul Uhlenhuth, had invented a method of doing so using rabbit serums. So Spilsbury undertook tests to determine whether the red stains were in fact blood; and whether it was human blood that contaminated the suspect revolver.

The first results were encouraging for the police: all the stains reacted positively to preliminary chemical tests for blood. Spilsbury proceeded to examine the stains under his microscope. He recorded that all of the red cells were mammalian, and of a size corresponding with human blood. But was it Florence’s blood – or at least the right group to be potentially hers? On that crucial point for the police, there was no help from the evidence. The pathologist’s notes end with the words: ‘Spectroscope and biological tests could not be used.’

Whether it was the size or quality of the sample, the time elapsed since the blood was fresh, or some other cause is unknown. But Spilsbury was unable to confirm or rule out the possibility that this was Florence’s blood, and that the likely murder weapon had been found. There was no forensic evidence to link the gun to the crime.

The other potential link in the circumstantial chain did not hold either. Mabel could not positively identify Clements as the man on the train. On the following Wednesday, six days after the burglary, the local paper reported cryptically that:

‘In two London daily papers it was reported yesterday that this man had given a satisfactory explanation of his movements and had supplied further information which convinced the police of his innocence. The local police, however, did not receive any information to this effect.’

Perhaps the local police continued to believe that Clements, who had a number of previous convictions, was in fact guilty, though they couldn’t prove it. But he had said enough to convince Scotland Yard of his innocence. The Arlington Road burglar was never charged with murder. Nor did he ever explain how human blood came to be on his revolver, or from whom.
Chapter 24

‘There appears to be something doing up there.’

The Sessions Court in the Town Hall at Hastings was again full of uniforms when the inquest resumed on 4th February. In front of the Coroner, W J Glenister, and Deputy Coroner H Davenport Jones, was an array of officials. The Coroner’s officer Detective Inspector Ruse was present, along with the Scotland Yard detective Haigh, Superintendent Vine from the East Sussex Constabulary, and the Chief Constable, Mr F James. The Chief of Police for the railway company, J J Jarvis, was also there, with Sergeant Conlon, and the LB&SCR solicitor, E Capel Rutherford. Also from the Company this time was Mr T A Dryden, the assistant to the Chief Engineer of the Company, Sir James Ball. Two of the train guards, Henry Duck and George Walters, were in place as witnesses, alongside the three railway workmen who had got into the carriage with Florence. And with them sat Mabel Rogers, once again the first witness to the inquiry.

With the eleven men of the jury sworn in, the evidence that Mabel had given at the first hearing, establishing Florence’s identity, was read over and confirmed. Then the Coroner questioned Mabel again about the brief encounter she had had with the man who joined Florence in the compartment while the train was at Victoria station. Mabel reiterated that she had not seen the man since that moment. She described how he had entered the compartment, and first sat down alongside Florence, but then got up again. When Mabel was getting out of the carriage, the man stood up and offered to help, saying ‘Allow me.’ But Mabel, already leaning out of the window to open the door from the outside, declined, saying ‘It’s alright.’ She described the man again: medium height, about 28 to 30 years old, of slight build, with brownish hair. He wore a brown suit, and was not wearing an overcoat, though he might have had one over his arm.

‘Did he have a stick or umbrella?’ the Coroner pressed.

‘I did not see one,’ Mabel replied, ‘and I did not notice anything in his hand. He passed quite easily between us, and I did not notice. He had no luggage.’

‘In what class of life would you suppose him to be?’ the Coroner asked next. Mabel answered ‘A clerk, or something like that.’ It was a question and answer that would become much more important later in the investigation.

In answer to questions about how much money Florence had with her on the journey, Mabel described how she had stood by while Florence queued to buy her ticket, and thought Florence had about three pounds with her, in a purse in her vanity bag. They had been shopping together that morning, and Florence had remarked that she ‘must not spend any more or she would not have enough for the journey’. Mabel also described Florence’s jewellery: when she left Carnforth Lodge, she had been wearing a platinum ring with six diamonds and a sapphire, and a gold ring with turquoise and small diamonds; a gold, expanding wristlet watch; and a gold necklace with an amethyst pendant. The very last piece of information Mabel could give about Florence’s fateful departure from London was poignant. The man in the brown suit, Mabel said, had been standing at the window of the carriage when the train started to move. So Mabel, waiting on the platform to see Florence off, found her view blocked. ‘I could not see her face,’ she testified simply.

Thomas Dryden, assistant to the chief engineer, was the next witness. He produced a plan of Lewes
station, showing how the long train would overlap the platform, so that people too impatient to wait for the train to move up would need to descend from the rear two coaches directly onto the tracks, rather than onto the platform. The plans were handed to the jury for them to inspect. Then the Coroner called the first of the platelayers, the railway workers who had discovered Florence injured in the carriage.

George Cloutt was a local man from Bexhill. On that Monday, 12th January, he had been working at Hampden Park Railway, and left at 4.30pm, joining the two other platelayers on the 5 o’clock train from Polegate Junction to Bexhill. This was the 3.20 train from London’s Victoria station. He testified that he had got into the train near the back, in the next to last carriage, with his two colleagues, Ransom and Thomas. He and Thomas sat down with their backs to the engine; Ransom sat on the same side as Florence, facing the engine.

‘Did you notice a lady there?’ the Coroner asked Cloutt.
‘I saw someone there in the further right hand corner facing the engine.’
‘Was it dark when you got into the carriage?’
‘Nearly.’
‘How was the carriage lighted?’
‘Poorly lighted.’
‘Incandescent gas, I suppose?’
‘Yes.’
‘After you sat down you saw somebody?’ the Coroner prompted.
‘After about ten minutes, after we had gone about a mile, I noticed the person was a lady.’
‘How was she sitting?’
‘Leaning back in the carriage with her head on the padded back.’
‘Did you notice her hands?’
‘I could not see her hands, they were under the corner of her coat.’
‘Were her feet on the floor?’
‘Yes.’
‘When did you next look at her?’
‘About half-way between Polegate and Pevensey.’
‘What did you see?’
‘I saw there was something wrong with her.’
‘Why?’
‘From the position in which she was.’
‘What next?’
‘I could see blood on her face.’
‘Fresh blood?’
‘I could not say.’
‘Was there much?’
‘There was a lot.’
‘Was it running down?’
‘I could not say.’
‘What did you do?’
‘I said to Ransom that something is wrong with that lady in the corner. I think I said “She has had a nasty knock of some kind”. He did not seem to hear what I said. He had a cold.’

‘Did you speak to Thomas?’

‘No.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘I did not say anything further about it until we got to Bexhill.’

‘Did you do anything?’

‘No, sir. Not until we got to Bexhill.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

‘I did not think it was so serious.’

‘Did you notice whether the lady was breathing?’

‘Yes, she was, and appeared to be reading.’

‘Were her eyes open?’

‘They kept opening and closing.’

‘Spasmodically?’

‘Yes.’

The train ran non-stop between Polegate and Bexhill, a journey of about fifteen minutes. At Bexhill, the platelayer could at last act on his concerns. ‘I said to a porter’, he explained, ‘“There appears to be something doing up there.” I stayed at the carriage door to prevent anyone else getting in. Ransom went to the rear of the train and another man went to the guard in front.’

Still apparently mystified that the workmen had not been more alarmed, the Coroner returned to the state of the carriage when the men had joined it. ‘You told me you noticed blood on the lady’s face. Did you see any about the carriage?’

‘I did not.’

‘Did you notice any luggage?’

‘There was a small portmanteau on the side of the seat by the lady and a lady’s hat on it.’

‘When you got in at Polegate were the windows closed?’

‘Both windows and both doors were closed.’

‘There was the usual communication cord?’

‘Yes.’

‘You did not pull it?’

‘I never thought about it.’

‘Were the blinds down?’

‘They were not.’

‘Did there seem to you to be any sign of disturbance?’

‘No.’

‘What sort of an evening was it?’

‘I could not say; it had been a rough, dirty day.’

The jury spoke up at this point, through their Foreman, Frederick Wicks, to confirm that the carriage door could not be opened from the inside. One of the jurors raised the question of the windows being closed: it was not usual for anybody to get out and then shut the window, he suggested. So it was strange
that the windows were shut after someone had allegedly left the train hurriedly at Lewes, if there was only an injured and helpless woman inside. The Coroner was not impressed.

‘This witness knows nothing about that’, he stated firmly. ‘I have travelled a good deal on various railways, and it is quite a common occurrence. I quite appreciate what you mean, but that is just what a man who wanted to hide his actions would do.’ Returning to the witness, George Cloutt, the Coroner resumed his questioning about the state that they had found ‘the lady’ in.

‘Did the lady make any noise?’
‘I did not hear any.’
‘She did not mutter?’
‘No.’

The next two witnesses were Ernest Thomas and William Ransom, the other two platelayers, who corroborated everything George Cloutt had said. They had all got into the train at Polegate, and had noticed the lady in the corner seat but had not realised anything was seriously wrong. None thought to pull the communication cord to alert the train guard. Thomas did have more details to add about Florence’s position; he thought she looked as if she was slipping down in her seat, and there were marks on the back of the seat behind her. With regard to Florence’s injuries, he told the inquest that he had thought at first that the lady was wearing a veil over her face. Later he realised that it was dried blood that covered her features. Ransom added that the lady’s eyes were moving.

When the train stopped at Bexhill station, the workmen took the initiative and went to fetch someone to look at Florence. Ransom went to look for the stationmaster, and, not finding him, called on the guard instead. Here, the next witness and a future witness would give different stories.

George Walters, in his smart dark railway uniform, with a peaked cap bearing the Company’s badge and a watch chain across his jacket, was sworn in. He was another local man, from St Leonards, and had been working as a guard on the 3.20 train from Victoria. According to his evidence, it was he who was called on by Ransom at Bexhill, and he who was first into the compartment where Florence was sitting. His description of what he found was more graphic than that of the workmen, and more distressing.

‘She was sitting in a sloping position facing the engine,’ Walters told the inquest. ‘Her head was back on the padding, and her legs were pushed forward and showing to the knees, because of her having slipped down. Her hands were in front of her, and her fingers kept moving. She put one hand up several times, her fingers moved, and she appeared to be looking at her hands.’

The scene that Walters described was a shocking one. Rather than having been found unconscious, as the papers had originally reported, it was now being suggested that Florence might have had some awareness of what had happened to her. Unable to speak, and with her face covered in blood, was she aware that the men travelling with her had not noticed her plight? Was she looking at her hands because she knew her rings had been taken off her fingers? After just a few more questions, the Coroner postponed the inquiry.

Throughout the weeks since the attack, national and local newspapers had been following the story. There was great interest in the heroic ‘war nurse’, and great indignation that she should suffer such a fate. Local papers reported the inquest hearings in detail, reproducing the witnesses’ statements verbatim. Meanwhile the national papers were following the police investigation, and seemed to find no difficulty in getting statements, and stories of variable accuracy, from a variety of witnesses. On Thursday 15th January, while Florence was still in a coma in the East Sussex Hospital, the Daily Mail was speculating on her journey and the likely scene of the attack:
At what part of the route was the attack on Miss Shore made? It is believed it was between Victoria and Lewes, the non-stop part of the train’s journey. The 3.20pm train is made up in two parts, the front for Eastbourne and the rear for Hastings.

It is improbable that the attack was made during the first half-hour of the journey, for during that period the train passes through many suburban stations and there are a great number of houses on each side of the line. After leaving Croydon district the train runs for about five minutes through a deep cutting, and then passes through Merstham Tunnel. It is probable that the attack was made in Merstham Tunnel, the assailant relying on the noise of the train to deaden the woman’s cries for help.

If this deduction is correct, the assailant would have half an hour to attack and rob her and arrange the unconscious women in the corner where she was found to convey the suggestion that she was asleep. How carefully he carried out this idea is demonstrated by the placing of the open book in her lap. This move was so effective that the platelayers apparently noticed nothing wrong when they travelled with her from Polegate.’

The next day, Friday 16th January, the same paper was berating the police for not giving them the story earlier, which would have allowed them to help by publicising the hunt for the attacker. Under the bold headline ‘Where the police fail’, the paper stated:

‘Nurse Shore was murderously attacked in a train from London to Hastings last Monday evening, and up to last night her assailant was still at large. The two facts emphasise the need for more effective police organisation for detecting train crimes – the list of which is punctuated with “unsolved mysteries” – and especially for a much prompter adoption of publicity, through the Press, in order that the co-operation of the public be enlisted to the greatest possible extent and with the least possible delay.

The public learned of this crime from The Daily Mail on Wednesday. It was committed on Monday evening. Meantime the Press had been kept in the dark. Only on Wednesday was the description of the suspected man circulated. By that time Miss Shore’s assailant had got a long start.

Do the police realise that express trains on non-stop runs afford an opportunity for criminal violence only equalled by the facility with which a clever criminal can leave a train at a wayside station on a dark winter evening unobserved? If they do they must also be asked to realise that all their efforts to cope with such crime may be wasted while officialdom hesitates to bring the facts and the wanted man’s description under the searchlight of public print.’

The paper’s ‘own correspondent’ was also carrying out his own interviews with witnesses who thought they might have encountered the man who had left the train at Lewes: or ‘the man in the brown suit’, as the paper called him. On the day the inquest opened, the Daily Mail reported that Scotland Yard detectives were following up ‘many clues’. One of particular interest was the appearance of a blood-stained one pound note, which had been used at the Royal Oak Hotel in Station Road in Lewes – just five minutes’ walk from the railway station – on the evening following the assault. According to the paper, it had been tendered by a man fitting the description of the man in the brown suit who had left the train at Lewes. The writer reminded readers that Mabel Rogers had said that her friend had had three one pound notes with her on her journey, and that this money was missing, together with her jewellery. ‘The note is said to
bear a brown stain resembling a blood mark’ the paper reported. Even more promisingly, ‘It is thought that a fingerprint may be on the blood stain.’

The man who had used the note in the Royal Oak was described by the landlady of the hotel as ‘wearing a brown overcoat – it looked like a new one – a white cashmere muffler and a light grey cap. He seemed to answer the description of the wanted man.’ The man had come into the hotel’s bar between 7 and 8pm on the Tuesday evening and ordered a beer, paying with a one pound Treasury note. When she cashed up the money later that night, the landlady found the note folded in two, and stuck together. ‘I opened it,’ she said, ‘and there was a small brown stain on it which was sticky.’ Since the note had been paid into the Lewes branch of the London and Provincial Bank on the Thursday, the police were left to try to trace its onward journey in order to follow up this lead.

But that was not all the Daily Mail’s reporter had found out in Lewes. He had another witness who thought he had seen the wanted man; and a new person claiming to have been the first into the carriage to see Florence when the train stopped at Bexhill.

Edward Harvey was a hairdresser, whose business, like the Royal Oak Hotel, was situated in Station Road, Lewes. He had had a customer on the Monday afternoon, 12th January, at about a quarter to five – ten minutes after the Victoria to Hastings train had made its stop at the town. ‘The man asked me for a haircut and shave,’ Harvey told the newspaper. ‘His hair was well groomed and not very long, and only about one man in 200 would want his hair cut when it was that length.’

This man was described as being smart, slim and athletic looking, with a pale, thin face and pointed chin. ‘He was wearing a brown jacket and a cap,’ the hairdresser said. ‘He had no overcoat, and I thought that strange. He told me he was waiting for a train to East Grinstead.’ There was in fact a train for East Grinstead that left Lewes for London at five thirty, so logistically this was a plausible story. It is not clear though why anyone would think that having already short hair trimmed shorter should be an effective disguise for a wanted man; or why the man would draw attention to himself in this way, if he was a fugitive preparing to flee the scene of the crime.

Meanwhile, the Mail’s reporter had a third new lead for his story, and a very exciting one: an eyewitness on the platform at Bexhill. Mr J D Smith – John Smith – who gave his address as Lauriston Road, Brighton, claimed that he had discovered Florence in the compartment whilst he was looking for a seat on the train.

‘The door of the compartment was open, and anyone could see at once that something was wrong’, he told the reporter. ‘I asked the woman where she was going and where was her ticket. Of course she did not answer. She was all huddled up – in a semi-lying position. Her left hand was waving up and down and her eyes were blinking. Her face was partly turned towards the opposite side of the carriage and the blood was running down the right side of her face. Beside her on the seat was an attaché case upside down and some of the contents were partly out. I saw a small bottle like a smelling salts bottle, and another bottle with a red top.’

This is a very curious story. John Smith was not called to be a witness at the inquest into Florence’s death. Neither of the guards, George Walters and Henry Duck, who would each describe later, under oath, how they had been called to the carriage by the platelayers at the Bexhill stop, mentioned any other passenger getting in to the compartment. Nor did any of the three platelayers mention a man on the platform at Bexhill, or in the carriage. In fact, George Cloutt specifically testified at the inquest that, having called a porter’s attention to the problem in Florence’s compartment, he stayed by the carriage door to prevent anyone else getting in. Yet Smith’s account of Florence’s position, the blood on the side
of her face, her semi-consciousness, and her rifled attaché case, are accurate, and precede these details being made public at the inquest in February. Maybe Smith was on the platform and looked in to the carriage while the guards were tending to Florence and organising the movement of the train to Hastings to meet the ambulance there. Perhaps the notion that he was the first to find her, he spoke to her, and he saw the blood running down her face, was just embroidery for the reporter’s benefit. Certainly, he does not appear to have attracted the attention of the police or the Coroner for his extraordinary claims.

The next day’s coverage in the Mail returned to the issue of murder on the railways and the failings of the police. Under the heading ‘Unsolved Crimes’, it listed three cases:

‘1897 – unsolved murder of Miss Camp in a London and South Western train between Putney and Wandsworth.
1903 – unsolved mystery of Miss Money’s death in the Merstham Tunnel.
1914 – Willie Starchfield strangled in a tunnel on North London line.’

More reassuringly for the police, if not the travelling public, the list continued with some of the railway murders that the police had cleared up:

‘1864 – murder of Mr Briggs on North London Railway at Hackney by a German named Muller, who was arrested in New York and hanged for the crime.
1881 – murder of Mr P.J. Gold in a London to Brighton train, for which the notorious Lefroy was hanged
1900 – little boy murdered in North London train at Dalston by his mother Louisa Massett
1910 – shooting and robbery of Mr J.F. Nisbet in a train near Newcastle, man named Dickman convicted.’

Throughout the inquest, investigations into the latest atrocity on the railway were continuing. Mabel Rogers, Tuesday’s paper claimed, was to be asked to go to Dover to identify a man detained by police there as he was about to board a steamer to Ostend. Whether she made the trip to the coast is not reported; but no arrest was made relating to Florence’s murder as a result.

The bloodstained one pound note also proved to be a dead end for the police. It was eventually traced after being paid into another bank in Lewes; but it was discovered to have recently been through the hands of a butcher. The blood on it was not, after all, human blood.

By the beginning of March 1920, the case was going cold. The man who got off the train at Lewes had not been found, whatever vague sightings might have been logged. The bloodstained pound note was a red herring. And no murder weapon had been found, despite extensive searches by three police forces up and down the line between London and Lewes. The third and final inquest hearing would take place on 2nd March, when it would hear again from the man in charge of the train, Henry Duck; and the famous pathologist Dr Bernard Spilsbury, who had carried out the post-mortem examination on Florence’s body. In the meantime, the police could only pursue their increasingly frustrating enquiries.
Dr Bernard Spilsbury, pathologist to the Home Office, was renowned as a smart dresser. He was photographed at the height of his fame wearing a high Edwardian collar and tie beneath his white laboratory coat. He had a high forehead, with short hair combed neatly back, a bony nose, thin lips in a slightly down-turned mouth, and a prominent chin. For appearances in the criminal courts, he usually wore a flower in his button-hole. Whether he did so for inquest hearings is not known. At the resumed inquest into Florence’s death at Hastings, Dr Spilsbury was due to report on his findings at the post-mortem examination: but he had to wait while the inquest heard from a new witness, the train guard Henry Duck.

Duck had been in charge of the train from Victoria and he confirmed under oath the key details of the journey. The train had stopped nowhere before arriving at Lewes, two minutes late. It had slowed down to pass through Gatwick and Three Bridges, but only to around 30 miles per hour – not slow enough to allow a passenger to disembark onto the railway. At Lewes, because of the length of the train, two and a half carriages had stopped beyond the platform. It was, Duck said, ‘A dark and dirty night’, and there were no lamps at the station. So he had walked along the length of the platform towards the rear of the train using his own hand-held lamp.

‘When you walked down did you see anybody get out of the train?’ the Coroner asked.
‘Yes,’ Duck confirmed, ‘a man got out of the second compartment from my van.’
‘What did he do?’
‘Got out on the foot-board, shut the door, stretched along to the next compartment and swung off.’
‘Was your light towards his face?’
‘My light was directed to him but I did not see his face.’
‘After he got down what did he do?’
‘Turned round and walked up to the platform. His back was towards the engine when he got down.’
‘Did he pass you?’
Yes, sir. He got down just as I got to him.’
‘Did you see his face then?’
‘Just momentary.’
‘Did you speak to him?’
‘I said “Didn’t they tell you at Victoria to get into the front portion of the train?”’
‘Did he answer you?’
‘No.’
‘Did he appear to be in a hurry?’
‘No, not specially.’
‘Can you say how he was dressed?’
‘He had a dark, drab mackintosh coat on and I think he wore a cap, but I am not certain.’
‘Had he a stick or umbrella?’
'He had both hands in his overcoat pocket when he walked away, and I don’t think he had either a stick or an umbrella.'

'Do you know his build?'

'I should describe him as of athletic build.'

'What age man?'

'About 26 or 30 I should think. I only saw him for a moment and could not say definitely.'

'It is pretty usual for people to get out like that? There was nothing to call special attention to him?'

'Nothing at all.'

'He had to drop a considerable distance to the metals, how much would it be?'

'About four feet.'

'For all you know he may have got out at Lewes and got on to the other section of the train?'

'He might have done.'

'Trains run from Lewes to all parts of the South Coast?'

'All round. There would be a good many trains about that time, being market day too.'

'As far as you know you have not seen this man since?'

'Not so far as I know.'

'A man was put up for identification but you could not identify him?'

'No, I was not able to swear to him.'

'You have heard Miss Rogers’ description of the man. Has it struck you that your description does not match hers?'

'Yes.'

'The man you saw got out of the carriage in which the deceased lady was afterwards found?'

'Yes.'

'The train was not there many minutes?'

'About five minutes.'

'Did you look along the carriage and see that the doors were all shut?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Were the windows all shut?'

'I did not notice that they were.'

'You saw the man shut the door as he got out?'

'Yes.'

In spite of the best efforts of the Coroner and the witness, they were no further forward. Mabel Rogers had seen a man get on at Victoria in the last minutes before the train left; he was alone in the compartment with Florence as the train pulled away. Henry Duck had seen a man get out of the same compartment at the first stop the train made – but he gave a different description of the man. The train travelled on to Polegate Junction, where the platelayers got into the compartment. And at Bexhill, they called Duck’s attention to the lady in the compartment with them.

'Did you get out of the train at Bexhill at once?’ the Coroner asked.

'Yes, sir’, Duck replied.

'Was your attention called to something then?’

'Yes.'
‘By whom?’
‘A man said to me, “Have you seen that woman back there? She is in a deplorable state”. He was standing on the platform.’
‘You looked into the carriage?’
‘Yes, sir.’
‘Did you see the deceased lady?’
‘Yes, sir.’
‘Alone in the carriage?’
‘Yes, sir. She was sitting with her face to the engine in the off-side corner as described by the platelayers.’
‘You got into the carriage?’
‘Yes.’
‘Could you then see that this poor lady had been badly hurt?’
‘Yes, sir.’
‘Tell us what you know.’
‘Her head was badly damaged.’
‘Did you speak to her?’
‘I said “However did you come by these injuries?” but she made no reply. She appeared to hear because she turned her eyes round.’
‘There was a suit case on the seat by her?’
‘Yes.’
‘Was it open?’
‘The lid was down but not fastened. I saw another case on the floor.’
‘And a book?’
‘A magazine in her lap.’
‘And her glasses?’
‘They were on the floor.’
‘Did you examine the carriage?’
‘I made a hurried examination.’
‘Was there any sign of a struggle?’
‘None at all.’
‘Was there blood on the floor?’
‘I noticed it at Hastings but not at Bexhill.’

Duck went on to explain that he had decided to convey Florence to the nearest hospital, in Hastings, on the train. A telephone message from Bexhill ensured that an ambulance would be waiting there to take her to the hospital. Once she had been taken to the ambulance, he had the opportunity to examine the compartment more closely.
‘I saw some blood but there was no sign of a struggle.’
‘What was the communication?’
‘A chain running through a tube and it was intact.’
‘It would be difficult if a struggle was going on for anybody to pull that cord.’
‘Yes.’
‘Was there any communication by the cord?’
‘None whatever, except between the driver and myself.’

The Coroner’s frustration was evident. He checked again whether Duck could add to his description of the man who got off the train at Lewes, and the guard said he thought he was about five feet eight inches tall. Duck confirmed that he had not noticed Florence Shore or Mabel Rogers getting on at Victoria; and that it was not unusual for people to get out of the train at Lewes by walking along the footboard. All in all, Duck’s evidence suggested that nothing at all untoward had happened in his train until the discovery of a badly-injured woman, alone in a carriage with no signs of struggle, at Bexhill.

Finally, it was time for the medical witnesses, and the most brutal evidence for Mabel to hear. There was no way to avoid it. The details of what had been done to Florence, the injuries that had resulted, and her protracted dying, had to be rehearsed at the inquest so that a proper verdict could be reached. The Home Office pathologist, Dr Spilsbury, was called first.

Spilsbury had first seen Florence’s body on the Sunday, two days after her death, with the other local medical men. He had carried out a full post-mortem examination and autopsy. He told the inquest that Florence had been five feet three inches in height, and well nourished. Then he listed the external injuries he had found, with the emotionless precision required of a medical report.

There was a contused (bruised) lacerated wound on the top of the head, in the shape of the letter H. The outside marks were about two inches and one and a half inches long, and about two thirds of an inch apart. The wound passed completely through the scalp. The second wound was behind the first on the left side at the top of the head, an inch and a half to the left of the mid-line, and triangular in shape. A third wound lay behind this one: it was curved and one and a quarter inches in length. The damage beneath these wounds was massive. There was, Spilsbury reported, a large area of fracture on the left side of the top of the head, corresponding in position to the second and third wounds. Pieces of bone were bent inwards, but were not completely separated from the skull, which, he said, was ‘rather thin’ at the top of the head. Three separate pieces of bone were found attached to the covering of the brain and, placed together, almost filled the gap in the skull. There was a large tear in the brain covering. The membrane was separated from the skull in the margin of the first fracture, with the gap filled with blood.

In his index card on the case, Spilsbury describes extensive bleeding all over the brain: ‘Haemorrhage over whole of top and down sides to left ear and behind it and almost to right ear. At back it extends to upper part back of neck.’

At the inquest, Spilsbury continued by describing the state of the brain itself, which was pulped beneath the fracture in a circular area about four inches in diameter. The pulping extended deep into the substance of the brain, so that the cavity of the left ventricle contained both blood and brain matter. There was no doubt that Florence’s injuries were inflicted with enormous force, and caused catastrophic damage: it is astonishing that she retained any consciousness at all in the first hours after the attack.

Turning to Florence’s general health, Spilsbury reported that her brain and spinal cord were otherwise healthy. The heart cavities were slightly enlarged, and there was old thickening of the mitral valve in the heart – which might suggest that Florence had suffered from rheumatic fever at some time in her life. She also had signs of chronic tuberculosis in her lungs and old adhesions in the pleura – the lining of the lungs. TB was not unusual at the time: in 1920, there were 55,000 cases in the UK, and a vaccine against it would not be used in humans until the following year. There was acute bronchial pneumonia in both lungs, a common infection in patients who have been lying in bed and unable to move freely or breathe deeply. Thick pus filled the airways.
'Cause of death?' the Coroner asked, needing formal confirmation. 'Coma due to the fracture of the skull and injury to the brain,' was the inevitable reply. 'What do you consider the cause?' 'They were caused by very severe blows by a heavy instrument having a fairly large striking surface.' 'Would a revolver cause it?' 'Yes, the butt end of a revolver of an ordinary size.' 'Can you form any idea how many blows were struck?' 'At least three, there might have been more.' 'Would either cause unconsciousness?' 'Yes.' 'Do you think after one of these blows, the lady could have seated herself in the position she was found?' 'No. She must have been struck sitting down or placed in the position by her assailant. She could not have placed herself in that position had she been standing up.' 'Do you consider the weapon penetrated the brain?' 'Yes.' 'Do you think that the injuries could have been caused by an ordinary walking-stick?' 'Oh no.' 'Could the lady have been so injured by being struck while leaning out of the window?' 'No.' 'Did you see the railway carriage?' 'Yes, in my opinion she was struck while sitting down.'

Spilsbury also confirmed that he saw no signs of a struggle amongst Florence’s injuries, though the tip of her tongue was bruised.

This led to the even more painful question of whether Florence had suffered a sexual assault of any kind before or after the blows to her head. Miss Bertha Beattie, the house surgeon who admitted Florence to the East Sussex Hospital in Hastings, had noticed that Florence’s tweed skirt was torn, and there was a tear on the left leg of her underclothes, as well as on her scarf. The tears were not the kind of damage that could have been caused by her removal from the carriage, and Miss Beattie was at a loss to explain them. Her senior colleague, Dr Cecil Christopherson, could not explain the torn clothing either. If it had been torn in an assault, he would have expected to see bruises on the body. But he was also stoutly defensive of the hospital staff, saying he was confident that the damage had not occurred after Florence was admitted: he said ‘the staff was quite alive to the possibilities of the case’ – meaning that they knew that all the injured woman’s belongings would be of interest to the police as potential evidence, and should be carefully handled accordingly.

Mindful of the damaged clothing, and of the earlier press speculation, the Coroner asked Dr Spilsbury sombly if there was any indication of ‘an attempt to ravish.’ Mabel must have taken some shred of comfort from the pathologist’s emphatic ‘No, sir.’

Miss Beattie, also called as a witness, described how Florence had been brought into the hospital on the Monday evening semi-conscious. She had spoken to Florence, but received no reply; and by that evening, the woman was deeply unconscious. Dr Christopherson confirmed that he had been present at the post-mortem and agreed that coma was the cause of death; and that he had seen no evidence of a sexual
assault.

With that, the evidence to the inquest was over. The Coroner summed up the position: the man who had been in the train with Florence could not be found, in spite of great efforts by the police, and the descriptions of him given by different witnesses varied.

‘All we can hope’, the Coroner continued grimly, ‘is that the hand of justice will fall heavily upon the culprit, and I might say that anybody who is helping him puts himself in a very dangerous position. There must be somebody acquainted with the man and his deed, and I wish to offer them a warning.’

He also had reassuring words for the platelayers who had taken so long to notice Florence’s injured state, saying that it was easy to be wise after the event. Under all the circumstances, he thought that ‘*the best thing that could be done was done at the time.*’

The jury took only a few minutes to return their verdict: that Florence had been murdered by a person unknown. They were ‘fully satisfied that every means had been taken to find this person, and everything was done for Miss Shore after she was found.’

The inquest into her death had taken, in all, a little under three hours. When it closed, on 2nd March, the case appeared to be hanging on the faint hope that someone would come forward to name the chief suspect: the man who got off the train at Lewes. That did not happen. But before the year was out, the police had both a new high-profile (though posthumous) suspect; and, from another source altogether, a confession.
Chapter 26

‘Martha and Mary’

While the inquest and the investigation focused on Florence’s death through the early months of 1920, her colleagues were determined that she should be remembered for her extraordinary life.

‘A shock to the nursing world’ was the headline in The British Journal of Nursing a week after Florence’s death.

‘The murder of Miss Florence Nightingale Shore’, the article went on, ‘a nurse, trained at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, and a connection and godchild of Florence Nightingale, in the train between London and Bexhill, by an unknown assailant, has shocked the nursing world, and the world in general. Warm sympathy is extended to her close friend, Miss Rogers, the Superintendent of Carnforth Lodge Nurses’ Home, Hammersmith, who saw her off on her fatal journey, to be summoned a few hours later to her deathbed, and who remained with her until, still unconscious, she passed away on Friday evening, January 16th, at the East Sussex Hospital.’

A nursing sister who had worked with Florence for the French Red Cross in 1914 wrote:

‘The news of the tragedy which ended in her death last Friday came to me with additional shock and horror.

We were together in a Military Hospital attached to the Xth [tenth] French Corps D’Armee on the Somme. The Hospital was in a commandeered hotel, and had as clearing station a chateau close to Arras. We were a Red Cross unit of British doctors and nurses. Some of us had been nursing our British wounded from the Battle of the Aisne during September and October, and being then sent to the Somme, were joined by other nurses, amongst whom was Sister Shore. Here, in November 1914, our patients, with the exception of a few British, were for the most part French soldiers, with whom were many Colonials (Senegalese and Arabs), nearly all ‘grands blesses’, requiring the most careful nursing. Sister Shore threw herself heart and soul into this work, and I can recall not only her energy in preparation as we equipped our improvised hospital – in preparation for the first wounded – but also her absolute devotion to them once under her care.

She was in charge of a ward, which, like all our wards, consisted entirely of very serious cases. That which fell to my charge was adjoining, and I well remember our meeting in some dismay in the endeavour to count our dirty ward linen in the primitive and very limited space allotted as its common receptacle; for in those early days contrivance was our watchword. Everything had to be made to ‘do’, and pressed into the service. No duty came amiss to any of us. Nor when convoys of wounded arrived could anyone be off duty, sometimes either day or night. Indeed ordinary off duty time, brief at the best, was in those days more honoured in the breach than the observance by many of us, especially those trusted with most responsibility, and amongst those none was more entirely self-forgetting than Sister Shore. She lived for her patients, whose grateful affection was her well earned and best reward, and we all felt deep admiration for her devotion and high sense of duty, and her consistent goodness of character... She was very proud of her baptismal names ‘Florence Nightingale’, linking her as they did to her great relative and namesake, in whose footsteps she was, indeed, a worthy follower’.
Like her godmother Florence Nightingale ten years before, Florence left a detailed Will disposing of her assets and possessions. It had been written in March 1915, just after her sister’s death, and named her brother Offley and cousin Clarence Hobkirk as executors. Clarence was the younger son of Florence’s maternal aunt, now the Baroness Farina: he was four years younger than Florence, and six years younger than Offley, whom he had followed to Sandhurst Military Academy before embarking on his own very successful army career. With Offley Shore living in California at the time of Florence’s death, it was Clarence Hobkirk who was granted probate and administered the estate.

The first and largest individual bequest in Florence’s Will was the gift of £1,000 to Mabel Rogers. There were bequests of £500 and £25 to the children of a Scottish pastor from Kinross, probably an old friend of the family from Edinburgh days; and £100 to Florence’s god-daughter Margaret Dru Drury in Grahamstown, South Africa. Margaret was the youngest of six children of Dr Edward Guy Dru Drury, a distant relative of Florence’s, whose life was spent in Grahamstown. Two former servants, Lily Lowes and Kate Eagling were remembered with gifts of £50 and £30.

Then there were more personal bequests. ‘I give my diamond pendant (the one given to me by my sister) to my cousin Stuart Tatton Hobkirk and I request (but without imposing any obligation upon him) that if he does not marry he will leave it to Elspeth Hobkirk the daughter of his brother Clarence Hobkirk.’

Stuart Hobkirk never did marry; and Elspeth, inheritor of the necklace, was another member of the family to pursue a military career, rising to the rank of Colonel. Elspeth Hobkirk was also bequeathed the carriage clock which Florence had been given by her godmother at the very beginning of her nursing career.

With £3,600, part of her own inheritance from her sister Urith, Florence instructed her executors to set up a trust and invest the sum in securities, with the income being paid to her cousin Stuart Hobkirk, the St Ives artist, during his life, and after his death, to her brother Offley. Following his death, the income was to go to any children of Offley, and if he had none, to any children of Stuart. The rest of her estate was left to her brother. The net value of the estate was just over £13,000, so with less than £5,500 allocated to pecuniary bequests and the trust fund, Offley would have received a sum of around £7,500. He and Clarence Hobkirk, as co-trustees of Florence’s estate, agreed the disposal of the rest of Florence’s effects.

The dispersal of Florence’s estate was not to be final act in the story of her life, however. The idea of a memorial to commemorate her was suggested within weeks of her death, and it was Mabel Rogers who led the fundraising and planning efforts for it.

‘It is felt on all sides,’ reported The British Journal of Nursing in February 1920, ‘that some permanent memorial should be raised to perpetuate the memory of Florence Nightingale Shore ... The present Home of the Hammersmith District Nurses, Carnforth Lodge, at which Miss Shore lived, the Matron of which, Miss Rogers, was her close friend, has been sold, and the nurses will have to find other quarters. It is proposed that the new building should be called after Florence Nightingale Shore, and should combine with the nurses’ home a children’s treatment centre and a clinic for disabled soldiers, which would be a memorial to Sister Shore’s work during the war. In addition, one of the rooms in the Home would be set apart as a guest room for Queen’s nurses, so that any member of the QVJI [Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses] might feel that she could come there at any time for a night or two. Miss Shore was a Queen’s Nurse, having been enrolled in 1898, and in forming this project her friends are carrying out what they know would have been
Miss Shore’s own wish, as she was conversant with the impending change, and had expressed her intention to help personally in carrying it through.

The money needed for the building will be raised by means of a shilling fund, thus enabling the general public to contribute to it, but any number of shillings may be given by any individual.’

Mabel started the appeal for funds for the new centre with a letter to the Matron in Chief of the Queen Alexandra’s Military Nursing Service Reserve, with whom Florence had served for four years:

‘I am enclosing a copy of the memorial to Miss Shore which we hope to get inserted in some of the papers’ she wrote. ‘Would it be asking too much that your name might be placed at the end with others as approving of the project.

I am hoping to send the papers to the press tomorrow and so should be very grateful if you could let me have an answer by telephone. Dame McCarthy hoped to have mentioned the matter to you on Friday but had not the opportunity.

Apologising for troubling you, Yrs faithfully, M Rogers.

The enclosed letter for the newspapers began by rehearsing Florence’s nursing career, before continuing:

‘Yet in all these crowded & perilous hours, she still had thoughts for those on district work. The memorial she would have most have desire [sic] for herself would have been something in connection with that.

Hence it has been decided to appeal for contributions of 1/- & upwards to allow even the poorest to participate in it, to extend & develop the usefulness of the Hammersmith District Nursing Association. Carnforth Lodge, its headquarters, where Miss Shore often stayed, has been sold. With £5000 that is asked for [sic] it is proposed to find a new home, in which Queen’s nurses will live & to provide a Childrens Treatment Centre & a clinic for men still needing treatment in their disablement.

One room would be set apart in which to keep tangible mementoes of her life’s work, & it would be available as a Guest room for Queen’s nurses passing through London. In spirit & in realisation this chamber would express the idea beautifully conceived of the French Abbe attached to the Hospital where she first worked, who wrote in her autograph book ‘I name you Martha of the Gospel because you are busy without rest in aid of our dear French soldiers, & Mary because your heart is always lovely bending over their beds. You are an honour to English nurses. God bless you and give you the best part.

Will you kindly assist by sending a contribution to –

The Hon Treasurer FNS memorial

Councillor Marshall Hays
22 St Peters Square
Hammersmith W.6

This appeal has the approval of the Patron the Bishop of London.’

Over the next two years, donations arrived from individual Queen’s Nurses, from District Nursing Associations, and from others who had known Florence in her work: two QNs in France sent 20 francs. Florence’s sister-in-law’s family in America sent £10, her brother Offley donated furniture for the memorial room, and his wife Caroline sent a donation ‘asking that flowers might always be kept in the
visiting sister’s room as Florence and Aunt Florence were always so fond of them.’ An anonymous donation of £200 early in 1922 meant that the fund amounted to £1,050 by February that year, and the purchase of a new home for the Hammersmith District Nursing Association – a detached building called Clifton House at 10 Mall Road, Hammersmith – was underway. Alterations were in hand to adapt it to its new purpose, and the memorial bedroom had been identified. The final total for the memorial fund reached £1,100.

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On Saturday 1 July 1922, the Nightingale Shore Home was opened by Princess Louise, the Duchess of Argyll, in the presence of Councillor Marshall Hays, the Mayor of Hammersmith, who had been Treasurer of the memorial fund; Dr Walter Fry, the Chair and Honorary Secretary of the Committee of the Hammersmith DNA; and the Bishop of Lichfield, the Right Reverend J A Kempthorne. The new Home at Mall Road was described by the British Journal of Nursing as ‘quite near a busy main thoroughfare (King Street), and not far from the Hammersmith Broadway’, but the surroundings were ‘quiet and restful’. The Home itself was

‘quite charming, giving an impression first of adequate fundamentals such as the space, air, and sunlight essential for good health, and then of comfort, harmonious colouring, beautiful pictures, which rest the eyes, and the spirit to which they are the windows, when busy nurses return from their day’s work to gather fresh strength for work to come…

One of the delights of the house is that it has a quite large garden, a greenhouse, space for a chicken run, and, in addition, possesses accommodation for six horses, by letting of which the Committee hope to reduce the interest still due to the bank on £2,000 of the purchase money.

The dining room, with office beyond, is on the right as one enters, and the kitchen behind … On the left is the nurses’ sitting room, with restful green walls, and behind, the sitting room of the Superintendent, Miss Rogers, a charming room with self-coloured walls, blue carpet, blue and brown chair covers, delightful pictures, a big window at the farther end, and at the side a French window opening into the garden. The general impression of brightness was heightened by the profusion of red and white fuschias, and pink and white carnations and ferns, which decorated the mantelpiece and tables.

Upstairs there are two floors with a bath room on each, and arrangements for shampooing the hair have not been forgotten. Each nurse has a comfortably-furnished bedroom, the colour of the papers being green for the most part, but that of the Superintendent’s room is self-colour, and the guest room – the memorial to Miss Nightingale Shore – a restful blue. Deep interest centres of course in this room.

In this room the carpet like the walls is blue, and any guest must, we think, be permeated by its restfulness and charm. The black satin eiderdown, with a bright blue and pink border, on the spotless bedding of the brown bedstead promises warmth and comfort. Over the bed hangs a picture of the lovely Madonna and Child from Raphael’s “Madonna di San Sisto”, and amongst other well-known pictures are that of “Gethsemane”, “Peace”, a Good Shepherd, and a picture of Miss Florence Nightingale, with, near by, that of her namesake and godchild, to whose memory the room is dedicated, Miss Florence Nightingale Shore. There is a bureau where letters may be penned, books for the literary-minded, and near the pictures of No.24 General Hospital, to which Miss Nightingale Shore was attached, a little glass case suspended on the wall containing her medals and other decorations.’
The Bishop of Lichfield concluded the opening of the Home with dedicatory prayers, ending: ‘To the glory of God and the good of the people of this place, we bless and dedicate this house.’

The Guest Room was to prove very popular. Visiting Queen’s Nurses could stay from one to three nights free of charge for bed and breakfast, contributing only one shilling to laundry expenses, and paying a moderate charge for any other meals taken in the Home. For the next four years, until her retirement in 1926, Mabel Rogers presided over the Nightingale Shore Home. One of her nurses wrote an appreciation of the long-serving Superintendent on her retirement, her account adding more telling detail about the immense burden that Mabel had carried as Superintendent in setting up, financing and maintaining the new Home:

‘I think that all Queen’s Nurses will wish Miss Rogers every possible happiness in her new life in her Devonshire cottage, after twenty years of loyal and devoted service in connection with the Institute’, the article begins. ‘Many nurses have received their district training under Miss Rogers, and many others have been welcomed by her to enjoy the Florence Nightingale Shore Memorial Guest Room at the Hammersmith Home. The welfare of her patients and nurses has ever been uppermost in her mind, and her great practical ability has enabled her to carry out her plans for their comfort...

In 1913, she became Superintendent at Hammersmith [before undertaking war service with the Red Cross and QAs]. The lease of Carnforth, which had been the Home of the Hammersmith nurses for so many years, having terminated, it was necessary to find new accommodation. This was no easy task, but eventually a house was secured and adapted to its new purpose; room were divided, a cupboard was turned into an office, and doors and windows were added “to taste”. Every detail was thought out and supervised by Miss Rogers. When the move took place the nurses were able to carry their choicest treasures of the old home to their new resting place – including the hens and canaries!

Having obtained the house, the next thing was to pay for it, and then Miss Rogers’ labours began in earnest. A ballot was organised, the prize being a six-roomed house. This involved an enormous amount of work for Miss Rogers and her devoted assistant, Miss Mary Cumming. Every spare moment was taken up in checking receipts and selling tickets. Ultimately, however, the sum was raised, and the Association cleared of debt.’

This description adds a different dimension to the account of the formal opening of the Home, once the flowers and pictures and dainty bedrooms were in place. There was another side to Mabel that was capable of managing the architects and planners, builders and decorators, and accountants and bankers necessary to deliver the project. Perhaps she was helped by her many years’ experience of working with the factories and employers of Sunderland.

The nurse’s appreciation goes on:

‘It was a real pleasure to work for Miss Rogers because of the trust she placed in her nurses. A candidate always felt that Miss Rogers would support and help her in every way possible. At the daily reports she was ever ready to give real practical advice and encouragement, and on the periodic inspection visits the nurse was shown how to solve district problems. The absence of written rules in the Home spoke for the friendly, happy atmosphere prevailing, and testified to Miss Rogers’ belief in self-government by the nurses.

Miss Rogers is a member of the Council of the College of Nursing, a branch of work which she
hopes to continue, and Queen’s Nurses should feel proud to have so able a representative upon this important body.’

An editor’s note in the same issue of Queen’s Nurses adds that Mabel Rogers had also agreed to remain on the Committee of the magazine.

So ended the formal part of Mabel’s long career as a nurse, six years after Florence’s death. Together they had trained as hospital nurses and district nurses, worked in the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital in South African War, and spent twelve years building up a thriving district nursing association in Sunderland. They had returned to London together, and both served with the French Red Cross and the QAs during the War. After Florence’s death, Mabel had led a huge relocation project, as well as organising the memorial for her friend. In retirement, she continued to contribute to the profession through her work with the College and the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine. Mabel died in 1944, in her cottage in Devon, at the age of eighty.

The Nightingale Shore Home was extended in 1936, with the new section opened by Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone. But less than five years later, on 17 April 1941, it was badly damaged by bombing. ‘Owing to enemy action’, the Hammersmith District Nursing Association annual report says, ‘the Nurses’ Home was so badly damaged as to be uninhabitable, and although the whole of the staff was in the Home at the time of the raid, providentially no loss of life was sustained.’ Florence’s personal mementoes, including those of her medals and photographs which had been displayed in the special memorial bedroom, were now lost in the rubble.

The staff was transferred to a clinic at 103 Shepherds Bush Road, while an application was made to rebuild the Home at 10 Mall Road. The application was refused – that part of the road was later covered by the Great West Road and the Hammersmith Flyover – and the Hammersmith DNA remained at Shepherd’s Bush Road until 1958, when they moved to 141 Uxbridge Road in Shepherd’s Bush. The building there was named Nightingale Shore House, preserving Florence’s memory, and officially opened on 24 September 1958. This remained the centre for home nursing services in the Borough until it was demolished in the late 1960s, to enable the building of a telephone exchange. With the loss of this building, the tangible memorial to Florence Shore was gone forever.

Florence’s brother Offley did not survive his sister by long. In 1922, he and Caroline came to England again, arriving as first class passengers on the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company’s ship the Orbita. They disembarked in Southampton on 23rd May, but were not present at the opening of the Nightingale Shore Home in London in July. After visiting ‘Shore country’ near Sheffield, and seeing the old Norton Hall that had been the family’s home for so long, they stayed in Harrogate for a while before moving up to Scotland. It was there in October that Offley was taken ill. He died of pneumonia and heart failure, at the age of just 59. The Courier newspaper, under the headline ‘Noted General dies at Pitlochry – Brilliant career in many campaigns’, reported that his health had been severely damaged by his army service, and had broken down completely after the first World War, at which time he went to live in the warmer climate of California.

His widow, Caroline, continued to travel between England and the United States throughout the 1920s and 1930s. She died in 1957, in England, where she had been living in a ‘grace and favour’ apartment in the Clock Tower at Hampton Court Palace.

Neither Offley and Caroline, nor Florence or Urith, had children, so the Shore family line continued through Florence’s cousin, the Reverend Harrington Shore. On her mother’s side were her cousin Clarence Hobkirk’s children, Elspeth and Ian. These two lines continue the family that descended from
Samuel Shore and his acquisition by marriage of the lordship of the Manor of Norton.
Who Killed Florence Nightingale Shore?

It should have been a straightforward matter for the police to answer the question ‘Who Killed Nurse Shore?’ They knew who had done it – but not who he was.

It was obvious (or so it was thought at the time) that the killer was the man who joined Florence in her compartment in the train at Victoria, and left it hastily at Lewes an hour and a quarter later, leaving a dying woman behind. That much was simple. The difficulty was that, once the man had successfully slipped away from the train, the police had only two rather general descriptions to help them find him again and name him.

Although the Coroner had drawn attention to the differences in Mabel Rogers’ and Henry Duck’s descriptions, they are not incompatible. The ages overlap, and a slight build could look more ‘athletic’ if an overcoat formerly carried over the arm was then put on, possibly with a cap from the pocket. And both witnesses were at pains to stress that they had only had very brief glimpses of the man.

The vague descriptions of the suspect, reported in the papers, naturally led to many supposed sightings of the wanted man. The police themselves questioned hundreds of people, and brought at least one person in front of the guard, Henry Duck, in a fruitless attempt to get a positive identification. But did they ever have their hands on the right man? A review of the minimal evidence and doubtful witnesses they had to deal with shows just how difficult their task really was.

The man in the hairdressers in Station Road, Lewes on the afternoon of the murder does not quite measure up to either description of the suspect. He was smart, slim and athletic looking, with a pale, thin face and pointed chin. He was wearing the requisite brown jacket and a cap, but no overcoat. And it seems improbable that a murderer would draw attention to himself minutes after making his escape from the scene of the crime by getting his already-short hair cut just a few hundred yards away. This man was most likely the innocent victim of the wave of ‘brown suit spotting’ that went on in the town that afternoon.

The man in the bar of the Royal Oak was another. He had the brown overcoat, if not the brown suit, with the addition of a white cashmere muffler and a light grey cap. ‘He seemed to answer the description of the wanted man’ was the landlady’s rather hopeful opinion. Since his bloodstained pound note turned out to have been used at a butcher’s, he is also unlikely to have been the murderer passing the time with a pint of beer close to the scene of the crime.

Was the murderer also the young Eastbourne burglar, arrested a few days later after brandishing a blood-stained revolver at a group of women servants? He is a much more serious suspect. He was carrying a gun with no live bullets, but with bloodstains on it that proved to be human blood. Such a weapon could have been used to inflict the injuries that Florence had received, according to Dr Spilsbury; and without bullets, using the butt end as a club would be the obvious way to subdue a victim for a robbery. The man was wearing a new shirt, and claimed to have destroyed his former clothing. It would make sense for a man to dispose of clothes that might have had blood on them: and according to the witnesses to the scene in the train carriage, Florence’s hat was beside her on the seat, presumably dislodged by the blows to her head, so blood spatter must have been likely. The man’s refusal to explain any of this behaviour must have reinforced the police’s suspicions. The fact that the pathologist was
unable to take his tests on the bloodstains further and prove the blood type, for comparison with Florence’s, must have been hugely frustrating. No witness could pick out the burglar as being the man who left the train at Lewes. He did not confess, or offer implausible explanations that could be used against him. He said just enough to convince at least the Scotland Yard police of his innocence. And there was no forensic evidence to connect him to the crime. It was not possible to prove that he was anything other than a random burglar who happened to be operating in the same area around the same time, and happened to have with him the type of weapon that had ultimately killed Florence Shore. William Clements, the Eastbourne burglar, could not be charged with murder.

There was one other interesting character apparently present at the scene of the assault who does not appear to have come to the attention of the police. John Smith, from Brighton, spoke to the Daily Mail’s reporter on either Saturday 17th or Sunday 18th January, the weekend after Florence had died on the Friday evening, and five or six days after the attack. He claimed that he had found Florence when he entered her compartment at Bexhill looking for a seat. He said that he spoke to her, though she didn’t reply, and described how she was half-lying in her seat, with blood running down her face; and that she was moving her left hand, and blinking her eyes. He mentioned her rifled attaché case beside her on the seat. None of these details had yet been made public through reporting on the inquest, which did not start until the Monday, and did not hear such details for another fortnight. Nor were they in the initial reports in the newspapers, which said that she had been found ‘unconscious’ and mentioned only that jewellery and money was missing. Yet no-one who was at the scene of the incident, from the time the platelayers opened the carriage door to call attention to Florence at Bexhill station to her removal into an ambulance at Hastings, mentioned any other passenger being present on the platform, much less in the carriage. In fact, George Cloutt had testified at the inquest that he had stood guard over the door of the compartment, so that no-one could enter. So how had this man known so much about the scene in the carriage? And if he was a witness – and especially if he was the first to enter the compartment and find the victim – why was he not called to give evidence at the inquest?

There is the possibility that he was in the shadows of the platform and observed the scene through the open door, without being noticed himself – though it would have been very difficult to do so past the figures of the guard and platelayers inside the cramped compartment. Or he may have talked to one of the real witnesses – the platelayers or the guard – later, and heard all the details from them, before passing them off as his own experience for the benefit of the Daily Mail reporter. This assumes that those witnesses would be willing to describe the whole tragic scene in graphic detail to an inquisitive stranger; and that Smith himself, who lived in Brighton, would find a way to link up with the reporter in Hastings, nearly a week later.

There is another possible explanation. If he didn’t get into the carriage at Bexhill unseen, or watch unnoticed from the platform, or winkle the details out of the guards – could John Smith have been the man who got off the train at Lewes after attacking Florence? Did he then return to Hastings and talk to reporters, as criminals sometimes do in order to feature in their own crime story? The Hastings and St Leonards Observer, and the West London Observer, reported initially that Florence was found by a passenger rather than by the workmen who joined her in the compartment at Polegate Junction, as the inquest heard later. Smith may have talked to them both with his story of discovering the victim at Bexhill, or one paper may simply have taken the details from the other. Not until he spoke to the Daily Mail’s reporter, though, did he add the details about Florence’s position in the seat, her state of consciousness, and the state of her belongings. By doing so, he was taking a risk that the reporter would ask later why no-one else remembered him being there, and why he never subsequently appeared at the inquest.
However odd Smith’s account may be, he was telling the truth about some things: his name was not an alibi. Electoral records show that John Davey Smith did live at 15 Lauriston Road, Brighton, in January 1920, as he told the reporter. He was 43 years of age, and lived with his wife Martha and three children. He worked as an inspector of shops for a dairy company. But whether he was really there on the platform, how he knew so much about the scene in the carriage, and why he did not feature as a key witness at the inquest, remains a mystery. No-one asked these questions at the time.

Both the Eastbourne burglar and John Smith of Brighton are tantalising unfinished business in the investigation into Florence’s death. For the police at the time, the trail had gone cold very rapidly after the inquest concluded in March. But there was no shortage of sensational crime and murder to occupy both the police and the public in 1920, and in April the newspapers were following the story of another fugitive murderer, who would eventually be named as a possible suspect in Florence’s death.
Chapter 28

‘I am Toplis’

Percy Toplis’ life was full of confusion, controversy and crime until the end, when he was shot dead by police at the age of 23.

Born Francis Percy Toplis, son of Herbert and Rejoice Toplis, he started his run-ins with the law when he was birched at age eleven for obtaining two suits of clothing by false pretences. As he was beyond the control of his parents and grandparents, he moved on to the care of an aunt. He left school at thirteen, and lost his first job, as a blacksmith, a short time later. In 1912, following several previous convictions for theft and fraud, he was sent to prison for two years for the attempted rape of a fifteen year old girl.

Then the first World War intervened. Toplis joined the Royal Army Medical Corps; he may have been peculiarly suited to this outfit, since it was known to some regular soldiers as ‘Rob All My Comrades’. In the Corps, Toplis served as a stretcher bearer in Gallipoli, Salonika and Egypt, being wounded and catching dysentery along the way. He went with his unit to Bombay in 1917, before finally returning to England. This last posting was significant, since it casts some doubt on the mythology that later grew up around Toplis.

His nickname, the Monocled Mutineer, refers to the story that he led a riot amongst British troops near Etaples in France – where Florence did some of her war nursing – in September 1917. There are different views about this: some see him as a hero of the uprising against overly harsh authority in the army; others point to his service record which shows he was not even in France at the time, but on the troop ship Orantes, bound for Bombay. However, the mutiny, together with the gold monocle he used in deceptions after the War, have become part of the Toplis legend.

Back in England at the end of the War, Toplis deserted from the RAMC at Blackpool, and was soon sentenced to another two year prison term for fraud. On his release in 1920, he joined the Royal Army Service Corps at No 2 Depot at Bulford, which gave him the opportunity to operate a black market in rationed petrol. He also adopted an officer’s uniform and manners, and the famous gold monocle, when he went into the City to impress society women in smart hotels.

His freedom did not last long. Late at night on Saturday 24th April, a young taxi driver called Sidney Spicer was shot through the head by his fare, on the London to Exeter road at Thruxton Down near Andover. His body was thrown into a hedge, and the murderer drove away in the car. The car was later found abandoned on the outskirts of Swansea; and two soldiers were reported to have been seen in the car at various points in its journey to Wales.

There were military units all over Salisbury Plain, close to the site of the murder, and the General Officer Commanding ordered a full parade of all units, which resulted in the detention of one private soldier at Bulford Camp, and a full-scale police search for another: Percy Toplis.

The detained soldier, Private Fallows, matched the description of the second, younger person in the stolen grey car, when it called for repairs at Cirencester en route to Swansea at 8am on the Sunday morning. The soldier convinced the police that he had not been in the car at the time of the murder of the driver, Sidney Spicer, but admitted that he had shared a lift to Swansea. According to his story, Toplis had arrived at Bulford Camp in the grey car at around 11pm, and asked Fallows to come for a ride with him, promising to pay his fare back. This was corroborated by the Provost Sergeant, who saw Fallows in
Fallows was in the car with Toplis for the journey to Swansea, from where he had returned to his unit by train. It was he who identified the driver of the car at that time as Percy Toplis. His cooperation did not exonerate him entirely from blame, however; Fallows was later charged with being an accessory after the fact of the murder. The inquest on Sidney Spicer named Percy Toplis as the murderer, and a full police hue and cry was raised to find the wanted man.

The police issued a description of Private Percy Toplis, number E.M.T. 54262, M.T., R.A.S.C., at Bulford Camp: ‘Height 5ft 8in or 5ft 9in. Medium build. Fair complexion. Slight fair ginger moustache. Fair eyebrows and hair. Smart appearance. Had posed as an officer of the Royal Air Force and is believed to be a deserter from the RAF. Was in possession of a Mark VI Webley revolver.’

The police warned that Toplis was quite likely to use the revolver. He was also in possession of a casualty pay book, the dead taxi driver’s driving licence, and another licence which was endorsed ‘for driving to common danger.’ He also had a passport, and the police believed he was planning to flee the country. He was thought to be wearing a blue suit, a fawn soft felt hat, and a gold monocle.

On 29th April, the Daily Mail printed a photograph of the wanted man, said by the Andover police to be a good likeness. It shows a young man with a square chin, a rather grim, down-turned mouth and his eyes shadowed by a peaked cap. The picture had been taken at the end of 1918 when Toplis was arrested in London and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for being a suspected person. At the time of his arrest he was calling himself Williams; he was caught loitering at a London railway station, with a loaded revolver in his possession.

Toplis’s breathtaking audacity – or reckless disregard for risk – was evident throughout the period of the crime and investigation. It became apparent that, although he was technically a deserter from the RASC, he had recently joined the RAF at Wendover as an air mechanic, and was posted to Uxbridge. To even greater astonishment – and embarrassment – it transpired that the deserter had spent the four days prior to the murder of Sidney Spicer in and around Bulford Camp. And three days after the murder, he wrote a letter to Private Fallows from the Union Jack Club in London, asking how things were going, and suggesting Fallows reply to the Club. He was even reported to have been seen in London, asking a hairdresser to provide him with a false moustache. The Daily Mail called Toplis ‘a master of disguise’ and said that he had used aliases including Edmondson, Robinson, Wilson P. Grant ‘of the Strand Palace Hotel’, and Thompson. His disguises included the uniforms of a 2nd lieutenant in the RASC, a sergeant major in the same Corps with the addition of a Distinguished Conduct Medal ribbon, and an RAF officer.

Early in May, Toplis was being spotted regularly in London. The police mounted two abortive arrest attempts, after reported sightings in Westminster Bridge Road and Vauxhall Bridge Road, to their frustration and the public’s. By 10th May, the Daily Mail was again complaining about the diligence and competence of the police at Scotland Yard:

‘Percy Toplis, wanted for the murder of the taxicab-driver Sidney Spicer, is still free, although it is fifteen days since the crime. This reflects no credit on the alertness of New Scotland Yard. When there was every reason to believe that he was in London, the metropolis was not promptly and thoroughly searched, work that could have been accomplished in a day and night. The organisation is there; the men are there; but the machinery was not set in motion. Three days after the murder, thanks to the activity of the provincial police, two very useful photographs of Toplis reached the Daily Mail office, and a third was on its way. His antecedents and character were well known; yet not one of these photographs was officially circulated among the police until
three or four days later.
Extremely able detective work has lately been done in various parts of London, but in this hunt for Toplis there has been no display of that initiative, energy and resource usually associated with our premier detective department. The Home Secretary and the Commissioner of Police will be expected to look for a remedy.’

Meanwhile, the suspicion that Toplis had driven to Swansea after the murder with the intention of leaving Britain by ship led the police there to mount a constant watch on the port. Thinking he might be hiding in the mountains within reach of Swansea, police stopped motorists and cyclists, and kept watch on railway stations, in case he made a dash for the port. At one point they set up a cordon around the North Dock in Llanelly, ordered all seamen ashore and lined them up for examination on the dock. But Toplis was not in Wales; he was in Scotland.

On 1st June, smoke from a fire in a remote gamekeeper’s ‘bothy’ in North East Scotland drew the attention of a farmer, who investigated with a gamekeeper and a police constable, George Greig. Toplis, who had been hiding out in the building, fired his revolver at the men, wounding both the policeman and the farmer, before escaping on a bicycle. He hitched a lift from a clergyman en route to Aberdeen, from where he caught a train and arrived in Carlisle, in the North West of England, four days later.

On Sunday 6th June, Police Constable Alfred Fulton encountered Toplis in the village of High Hesket, near Penrith, whilst on his way home at half past four in the afternoon. Amazingly, he survived not one but three meetings with the fugitive that afternoon, in spite of his incredible lack of caution in dealing with the armed and desperate man. PC Fulton later described the events of Toplis’s last hours in detail to the ubiquitous reporter from the Daily Mail.

‘I saw a soldier in RAF uniform lying on a grassy bank by the roadway’, he said. ‘He was reading intently the Weekly Dispatch. He looked up quickly as I approached, stretched himself, then stood up. As I always do in passing a soldier, I passed some remark, but then something about him made me suspicious. He seemed so far from anywhere that I asked him where he was making for and how he came to be walking the road. He said he was on duty warrant. I asked him if he could show me anything to identify himself and he produced a railway ticket from Aberdeen dated June 2. I asked him if he had not got a pass and he said “No; a duty warrant serves that purpose.” I then asked him what he had in his kit bag and he replied “Nothing but clothes. I am going to Penrith. I missed my train to London and I am going to pick one up there.” I then asked him something else, which I forget, and he said “I admit I am a few days over my leave, and I suppose I am really an absentee, but I am making my way back to barracks.” I said “Let me look in your kit bag.” To my astonishment he threw it on the ground and stepped back a few paces. I then felt certain of my man but knowing what a dangerous ruffian he was, and as we were quite alone, I said in a tone suggestive of a joke “You might be the likes of Toplis.” He smiled grimly and replied “I am not that fellow.”

By this time I had made up my mind that this man before me was Toplis but desiring to make sure, I bade him a hasty adieu and hurried home. Over my tea, I studied again the description of the wanted man, and, mending a puncture in my bicycle, I pedalled hurriedly after the soldier. Just beyond Thiel’s Side, and near to Old Town, nine miles from Penrith, I saw some women, and in answer to a question, they told me that a soldier had gone down a lane close by. The lane on either side was fringed with thick bushes and as I left the women, I heard a cracking of twigs. I searched all down the lane in vain and made enquiries at the only house in the district.
Then I retraced my steps and examined the bushes with greater care. I was surprised to see the soldier hidden completely away. “Hello, old boy” I said and rattled the bush with my staff. “Is this all the distance you have got yet?” In a twinkling the man was on his feet and I found myself looking down the barrel of a big Webley revolver. He said: “You are a smart man. I am the man you are looking for. I am Toplis”, stepped back two paces and again said “I am Toplis, and I shot a farmer and a policeman in Banffshire. If there is any hanky panky, you go. Up with your hands!” I put up my hands and remarked “I have no chance against a chap like you.” He kept me covered with the revolver for what seemed hours, but it was only a few seconds and we were both lost for words. At last he said “Throw down your handcuffs and your staff.” I did so, and at that moment, the church bells rang out. “You have got to promise”, said Toplis, “That you will never come my way again” and having given him this assurance, he stepped one pace forward and ordered me away. I proceeded to my station, and from an eminence I saw a khaki figure leave the line and enter the Carlisle-Edinburgh road and suddenly break off and turn down Lazenby road.

I hastened to my station, changed into breeches, sporting jacket and cap. I got out my motorcycle, and, pulling my cap down over my eyes, I went ‘hell for leather’ to Penrith, calling at Plumpton station, where I gave the first alarm. Throughout the whole of that mad ride I never saw the soldier, but if I had and he had recognised me, he would have shot me down. I reported the occurrence to my superiors and requisitioned a motor car. Inspector Ritchie, Sergeant Bertram and myself left for Thiel’s Side. Ahead of us rode Mr Charles de Courcy Parry, son of the Chief Constable of Cumberland and Westmoreland, on a motorcycle. We were travelling at nearly 40 miles an hour, when on a lonely stretch, where the banks come down to the macadam, I saw a civilian carrying a brown paper parcel under his arm. His military gait and his brown shoes led me at once that this was the man disguised. I shouted “That’s him. That’s Toplis.” In a bend in the road we stopped and turned round, and as I stood up in the car I saw Toplis stop and watch us.

We gave chase, and drove ahead of our man round another bend leading direct to Penrith. Then the struggle began. We got out of the car and as we did so Toplis changed the parcel from his right hand to the left, and I shouted “Look out, he’s getting his revolver.” Inspector Ritchie and Sergeant Bertram, who had armed themselves with revolvers, rushed at Toplis, who retreated rapidly, fumbling with his revolver. He fired three shots then halted to steady himself for accurate aim. He was a second too late, for two revolver shots rang out, and Toplis reeled and fell dead, shot through the heart. We picked up his body and, placing it in the motor we brought it to the police station. It was a dreadful experience all through.’

As well as his good fortune in having several face-to-face conversations with the desperate fugitive murderer without himself being so much as wounded, PC Fulton was able to add some telling information about how Toplis had operated whilst on the run.

‘But note the cunning of the man’ he continued in his story to the journalist. ‘When I first saw him as a soldier he had not been shaved for a week or two, yet when we challenged him in the civilian clothes he was shaven and dressed in a smart brown suit with a clean collar and a superb light trilby hat. He was as spick and span as any person in the town.

This morning I have learned that two young women saw him doff the khaki and put on the civilian clothes and later I found a bucket containing the water that he had used for washing and shaving. He took the bucket from a farm close by, filled it with water from a horse trough, then made his way over a big fence and sheltered in a thickly wooded part of an old estate. He left behind a box
that had contained shirts, collars and ties. The box bore the name of a well-known Scottish firm who specialise in haggis. Although a most careful search has been made, the kit that Toplis was carrying has not been found.

After the shooting, Inspector Ritchie expressed his ‘profound regret’ that Toplis had not been taken alive; the police had fired in self-defence, he said, and hoped only to ‘wing’ the suspect, not to kill him. The post-mortem on Toplis’ body showed that a bullet had entered the left side of his chest, passed through the upper part of his chest and exited through his left shoulder blade. At his inquest, the Coroner noted that it was not normal practice for police in England to carry revolvers as part of their equipment, and he asked Superintendent Oldcorn why he had authorised the arming of the three officers who went to arrest Toplis. ‘Owing to the dangerous character of Toplis and his threatening to shoot Fulton,’ was the reply. ‘I considered from a common sense point of view that these officers should be in a position to protect themselves.’ The revolvers were produced at the inquest; and the Superintendent explained that they were not Government issue but some in the possession of the Chief Constable. The Coroner instructed the jury that ‘Where an arrest is resisted with such force that is necessary in self-defence to kill, it becomes justifiable homicide’. The jury’s verdict, after very short deliberation, was justifiable homicide, by a police officer in the execution of his duty.

There was some debate later as to who actually fired the shot that killed Toplis; and in particular whether it had been the Chief Constable’s son, Charles de Courcy Parry. He, as a civilian, was not entitled to the defence of justifiable homicide of someone resisting arrest. But there was no clear proof that this was the case, and the matter was not pursued.

After a secret funeral, Toplis was buried in an unmarked grave in Beacon Edge cemetery at Penrith. But his death did not clear up all the confusion of his criminal career. The Andover police followed up clues from the dead man’s possessions suggesting that he had been in contact with someone throughout his six weeks on the run: they were particularly interested in a letter from ‘Dorothy’. Toplis had also had a diary in his possession when he died. Though mostly cryptic and undecipherable, the diary entries suggested that he had been in Chepstow at the time of another attack on a taxi driver, when the car had been driven off. He also had in his possession a gold ring set with three diamonds, and a pawn ticket for a wristlet watch.

It was the Daily Mail that first speculated on a link between Percy Toplis and the murder of Florence Shore. Under the headline ‘Unsolved crimes – was Toplis responsible?’ on Tuesday 8th June 1920, the paper listed three crimes which had taken place since the beginning of the year, and with which no-one had yet been charged. There was the murder of Police Constable Kelly in Acton on 11th February; a double murder at a lonely Cornish farm, at Skinner’s Bottom, near Truro, of Joseph Hoare and his housekeeper, Laura Sara, on 25th January; and the attack on Florence on 12th January, which ultimately proved to be murder. In each case, according to the paper, ‘the description given was that of a soldier.’

In fact, no-one had mentioned a soldier in Florence’s case. Mabel Rogers was clear in her description of a man in a brown tweed suit – civilian clothes – and, when asked to suggest what class of man he was, she suggested a clerk, not a soldier. The train guard described the man he saw leaving Florence’s compartment as ‘athletic’ but did not suggest military. The description of Toplis did not entirely match that of the man in the brown suit given by Mabel or the train guard – he was in any case younger than they described at only 23 – though he was known to use false moustaches as part of his many disguises, making any description unreliable.

Percy Toplis did possess a brown suit – but so would thousands of men. More interestingly, he had
been picked up previously by the police for loitering at a London railway station with a revolver. He had a history of theft, and previous convictions for violent crimes, including, in at least one case, against a woman. When he died, he had in his pockets a gold ring with diamonds, like Florence’s, and a pawn ticket for the kind of watch Florence had been wearing – a gold wristlet watch. But these are not rare items, he had never before obtained items through straightforward violent theft, preferring deception and cunning; the parallels could be just tantalising coincidence.

According to his diary entries, Toplis had been in Bristol on 12th January, the day that Florence was attacked, in Cardiff the next day, and Swansea on 14th. If his entries are true – and later entries charting his life on the run from the West Country, to Wales, Scotland and North West England are all accurate – then he hardly had time to get from Bristol to London to share a train carriage with Florence for two hours towards the South coast, before fleeing back into Wales. It is most likely that the link between the Monocled Mutineer and Florence Nightingale Shore was mere newspaper speculation; another blind alley for the police.

There was to be one more hopeful development in the case that year. In November 1920, a man named George Leonard Cockle was admitted to Shirley Warren Infirmary, a Poor Law institution in Southampton. He said he was an actor, and an ex-Service man, and lived in Camberwell, in South East London. Though aged about 30, he looked much older, and his health was very poor. He asked to make a statement to the police; and in it, he claimed that he had murdered Florence Shore in the Victoria to Lewes train in January. For the second time since the crime was committed, the police had a real hope of bringing someone to justice for it – they had a confession.

They immediately isolated the man from the other inmates of the Infirmary, and placed a guard on his room. Together with the Sussex police and Scotland Yard, they began to investigate Cockle’s story. They found that some aspects of his statement matched the details of the crime; and they planned to ask Mabel Rogers and Henry Duck the train guard to come and try to identify him as the man seen on the train, as soon as Cockle was well enough to leave his bed.

It only took a week to dash their hopes again. By 17th November, Scotland Yard was able to rule the man out as a possible suspect. All the details that he claimed to know had been made public in newspaper coverage of the inquest into Florence’s death. And on 12th January, George Cockle had been a patient in a London military hospital. He was either mentally ill, or one of those strange people who feel compelled to confess to crimes they did not commit; whichever was the case, he was not the murderer, and he sank rapidly into obscurity again.

There were no more suspects, or would-be confessors, that year, or in the decades that followed. The Coroner’s records on the case were destroyed; and the police records consigned to inaccessible archives. The case was all but forgotten. Until, nearly ninety years later, a new and bizarre theory surfaced about who killed Florence Nightingale Shore.
Chapter 29

‘Someone who knew her best’

‘Someone struck Florence Nightingale Shore with three heavy blows to the head aboard the London to Hastings train in 1920. No one was ever arrested for the murder of the decorated army nurse and god daughter of Florence Nightingale, who had just returned from five years in France. There was never one to point a finger at for the crime, until now. The murderess was someone who knew her best.’

This is the description, on an internet site which details some of the genealogy of the Shore family, of an unpublished book called ‘Who murdered Nurse Florence Nightingale Shore?’ It was written by Patrick Paskiewicz, a distant relative of the Shore family by marriage. After detailed research into newspaper reports of the crime and the investigation, he came to the conclusion that the police had been incompetent in their investigations. They had failed to spot the killer, who was in front of them all the time: Mabel Rogers.

The Paskiewicz book suggests that Mabel never in fact left the train in London. Instead, she travelled with Florence and, in a fit of rage, struck her three sharp blows to the head during the journey, before leaving the train at Lewes to catch a return to London, using Florence’s ticket. The murder, he believes, was the result of a jealous rage.

Jeremy Stone, a great-grandson of Florence’s cousin Clarence Hobkirk, and a former Detective Chief Inspector of the Royal Hong Kong police, builds on this theory. He speculates that Mabel and Florence had once been engaged in a long-term homosexual relationship, with Mabel being the dominant partner. When it dawned on her that she could not resurrect her relationship, long suspended during the war years, with the now independently-minded Florence, she attacked her in a rage. The taking of the banknotes and Florence’s jewellery (if those items existed and were not a fabrication) was to make the scene look like one of robbery. Similarly, Mabel ripped Florence’s clothing and her hat to suggest an attempted sexual assault, or to indicate a violent struggle, either of which would have encouraged the police to look for a male suspect.

Mabel also took Florence’s umbrella because its handle was used as the instrument to strike the three blows to Florence’s head while she was seated in the carriage. The shape of the umbrella handle, according to this theory, could have produced the marks and indentations on the victim’s head, being consistent with the shape of a revolver butt, the weapon suggested by the pathologist Bernard Spilsbury.

As a former detective, Stone questions why the police did not focus more closely on the last person to see Florence alive, and why they did not press Mabel harder on her vague description of the man she said she saw in the railway carriage at Victoria. He speculates that the status and royal connections of the Queen’s Nurses could have blinded the police to the possibility that such a woman could have committed such a crime – particularly as the details of the crime scene pointed to a male assailant.

‘Nevertheless’, he writes, ‘if the police had thought more carefully about the torn clothing, the large gash in the fur hat (totally inconsistent with the blows inflicted to the victim’s head); the fact that there were no physical signs of struggle, no defensive injuries, no blood spatter, and that only scant items of value were apparently stolen from Florence, whereas in fact there were so many
other valuables that were not taken, the police should have been drawn to the conclusion that the assailant was likely known to the victim. This in turn should have led them to the ‘star witness’, Miss Rogers, who quite clearly was inconsistent in her evidence, on matters which she should reasonably have been expected to remain consistent.

If the police had focused their investigation on Miss Rogers and without a full confession, the evidence might not have produced a murder conviction; although a manslaughter conviction could have been sustained on well-constructed circumstantial evidence (e.g. if there had been the recovery of blood-stained clothing, the umbrella with hairs attached, etc.)

So ‘the Mabel theory’ warrants serious examination – though reconstructing this proposed sequence of events raises some difficult logistical questions.

If Mabel travelled with Florence as far as Lewes, beat her almost to death with her umbrella on the way, set the scene to look like a robbery, then returned to London using Florence’s ticket – why didn’t Harry Duck, the train guard, notice Mabel getting off at Lewes from Florence’s carriage? He did notice the man in the brown suit, so he was looking that way. Surely he would have noticed a woman in a long dress jumping down onto the tracks then climbing up onto the platform, which is what the man in the brown suit had to do, because the train was too long for the last two carriages to draw up alongside the platform. And, given that Duck was sure he had seen a man getting out of one of the last carriages, why didn’t that man also see Mabel, and come forward as a witness? (He would have to have travelled in the last carriage, not Florence’s as in Mabel’s account, or he would have actually witnessed the murder.)

If Mabel did manage to get out of the carriage and onto the platform unseen, surely someone at the station or on the return journey would have noticed blood-stained clothing or signs of agitation when she joined a return train to London. And if Mabel used Florence’s return ticket, as suggested, why didn’t the guard on the return train question the use of a St Leonards ticket – with a return date a week hence – being used on the same day on a journey from Lewes to London?

This scenario has Mabel using Florence’s umbrella as the weapon to deliver the three blows to her head. However, it is questionable whether it would have been strong enough to cause the severe injuries that Florence suffered. Bernard Spilsbury was specifically asked at the inquest whether a cane or walking stick could have caused the injuries, and he said no. He insisted it was something like the butt of a revolver, which would be a much heavier weapon. This was in spite of him noting that Florence’s skull was ‘rather thin’ on top: at no point did the experienced pathologist suggest that the thinness of her skull meant that less force, or a lighter weapon, would have been required. If Mabel did manage to use the umbrella to such deadly effect, what did she then do with it? She must have carried the blood-stained umbrella with her all the way back to London, since the police search of the trackside between Lewes and London didn’t find any such object.

The timing of the crime is also something of a problem for the Mabel theory. The first stop for the train after leaving London Victoria was Lewes. The train arrived there just after four thirty in the afternoon: a journey time of an hour and 10 minutes. Even if Mabel had been able to catch a train back to London within 30 minutes, she could not have reached Victoria before six thirty. Then she had to travel out to Hammersmith to change her clothes and make her way back to Covent Garden to get to the theatre in time for the evening performance, where she later received the news about Florence. It seems likely that someone at the Hammersmith Home would have mentioned it if Mabel had returned unexpectedly from a planned trip with her friend, and instead rushed off to the theatre that night; and Mabel must have called at the Home, or they would not have known where to send the message from Hastings when it arrived.
Since the logistics of Mabel making the journey to Lewes are so difficult, could the attack have been carried out in London? Perhaps the argument broke out while they sat in the stationary carriage together. Then Mabel hit her friend over the head three times, with sufficient force to break open her skull. To cover up what she had done, she rifled through Florence’s jewellery case, tore her friend’s clothes and removed money from her purse to simulate a robbery. Leaving the train at the last moment before departure, she closed the door and shut the window, to ensure that no-one else entered that compartment. She then waved off the train carrying the semi-conscious body of her friend, before returning to Carnforth Lodge and her trip to the theatre that evening, waiting for someone to give her the news that Florence had been found at one of the stops en route to Hastings.

Leaving aside for a moment the question of probability, did Mabel Rogers have the means, motive or opportunity to do this?

The means to procure the injuries that killed Florence was a heavy blunt instrument with a fairly broad striking surface, according to the pathologist Bernard Spilsbury. In his opinion, it could not have been an umbrella or a cane, he stated at the inquest: it was most likely the butt of a revolver. The blows were delivered with Florence in a seated position, and were delivered with great force. So the theory requires Mabel to be carrying a revolver concealed on her person when she saw Florence onto the train at Victoria; and to wield it ruthlessly and repeatedly on her unsuspecting friend in the few minutes in the carriage when she would be unobserved. How the Superintendent of the Hammersmith Nurses Home would know how to obtain a revolver, and dispose of it afterwards, and why she would carry one on a routine trip to the station, adds to the implausibility of this part of the story.

The proposed motive for an assault by Mabel is jealous rage on the part of a rejected former lover. Yet there is nothing tangible, such as letters or mementoes, to suggest that Florence and Mabel were in fact lovers as well as friends. Certainly, they must have made conscious efforts to stay together throughout their training, war service in South Africa, and long years in Sunderland. And Florence did choose to return to Mabel in Carnforth Lodge after her war service in 1919, rather than to her aunt’s house or her cousin, or to independent lodgings. It is clear that the two women were extremely close. At the inquest, Mabel told the Coroner that Florence had returned on the Sunday night ‘to me’ – not ‘to London’ or ‘to Carnforth Lodge’. Her choice of words may have been telling.

But it is important not to judge these women living in the first decades of the 20th century by the norms of today. Close, even intense, female friendships were not at all uncommon, when women lived and worked together, including in war service. At that time, Queen’s Nurses were not allowed to be married (if they wanted to marry, they had to resign their post), and in most towns, the QNs routinely lived together in a Nurses’ Home, relying on each other for social company in their brief time off, as well as for professional companionship. So the fact that Florence and Mabel lived together as unmarried women does not imply anything unusual. Nor were they living together in a two person household in either Sunderland and Hammersmith: they were part of a household of nursing staff and domestic staff. The only other clue suggestive of a closer relationship is Offley Shore’s intense dislike of Mabel – perhaps he was so virulently opposed to Mabel because he had reason to believe the two were more than close friends and colleagues? After all this time, it is impossible to judge. But a bitter argument between former lovers could have been a motive for a furious attack.

Or maybe it wasn’t an unpremeditated crime of passion at all. There is an even more bizarre twist to this theory, which was suggested to archivist and author Dr Jonathan Oates, whilst giving a talk on train murders. This claims that Mabel Rogers was secretly married to Florence’s cousin, Brigadier Clarence Hobkirk, who was also a beneficiary of Florence’s Will. Mabel killed Florence so that they could inherit
her money. The Hammersmith nurses’ home was to be sold, and the nurses needed new premises – was Mabel desperate to find money to re-house herself and her colleagues? If so, and presuming she could contemplate murdering her best friend of 25 years just to buy a new building, almost any other place, time and method would have been simpler than attacking Florence on a train in the middle of the afternoon in a busy London railway station.

There is no documentary evidence of such a marriage (unsurprisingly, since Clarence Hobkirk was married to someone else). Nor is it easy to believe such an unnecessarily complicated scenario in which two people are involved in a murder conspiracy, with the physically weaker and emotionally more vulnerable partner carrying out the brutal attack.

Mabel did have the opportunity to carry out the attack on Florence, while they sat in the carriage together before the train left. But it was only by chance that she was not discovered. Another passenger could have joined them at any moment. And this scenario requires Mabel, after the sudden, deadly loss of control (or audaciously pre-meditated assault), and the rapid actions to set the ‘robbery’ scene, to leave the carriage in the middle of the afternoon, in full view of station staff and the travelling public, trusting that neither her demeanour nor the state of her clothes would give away the strenuous and bloody attack she had just undertaken.

The most obvious difficulty with the Mabel theory – whether the attack happened in London or on the way to Lewes – is the need for Mabel to be emotionally capable of carrying it off. Could she hide the emotions of either the rage-filled, impulsive murder, or the calculated assassination, of her close friend of 25 years, throughout the four days that Florence took to die, as well as the inquest, the funeral and memorials that lasted for years? That presumes an almost psychopathic degree of detachment and deceit at odds with her upbringing and her impeccable professional life.

Whatever the truth of the relationship between them, there is nothing convincingly to suggest that Mabel murdered Florence, by impulse or design. And there are many circumstantial details that make it highly unlikely, if not impossible, that she could have done so. The theory is merely a diversion from the fact that no-one was ever charged with the crime.

The most likely scenario seems to be that the man in the brown suit – the man who got off at Lewes – attacked Florence on the journey from Victoria. It is feasible that either he was one and the same man as the Eastbourne burglar, William Clements (if he managed to hoodwink the police over his movements on that day) or that he sold on the gun he used on Florence to Clements, in order to rid himself of the evidence. Today, DNA testing would be able determine whether the blood on the revolver was Florence’s, and so whether the revolver was the murder weapon. If they had been able to prove that it was used in the crime, the police would have had much stronger grounds to question the man found with the weapon.

Jeremy Stone, the former detective chief inspector, summarises the frustrations of the case:

‘Our reconstruction of the case is based purely on matters reported by the press, which can report facts selectively, introduce speculation, sensationalise events and misquote sources. On the other hand, the inquest reportage in the Brighton Gazette [and other papers] seems quite reliable as it seems to be quoting verbatim the evidence and discourse presented in court. It’s a great pity that the original inquest records were destroyed.

It’s important to note that the inquest was conducted at a very early stage of the investigation and that the function of the coroner’s court was to establish the place, time and cause of death as opposed to identifying suspects and apportioning criminal liability. [These] are the function of the
police, the crown prosecutor’s office and the courts. Not all evidence and information in the hands of the police would have been aired at the inquest.

It’s a pity too that we’re unable to get our hands on the original police investigation file … Most likely the police file would have been kept open or kept under review for at least 10 years after all conceivable lines of enquiry were completed i.e. at least until January 1930. The case exhibits (e.g. blood samples, broken glasses, Florence’s clothing) would then have been destroyed (or returned to her estate) and the investigation file would have been filed away for a period before being microfilmed and the original documents destroyed. If the case had been of particular public interest (and quite possibly this case was), the file may have been preserved intact.

A homicide case like this should have prompted the police to explore all feasible lines of investigation and should have caused them to look with an open mind at all possible suspects. Certainly Mabel Rogers should have been treated as a possible suspect, since she was the last known person to have seen the victim unharmed at Victoria Station. Her version should not have been treated at face value and at the very least, her alibi should have been investigated to exclude her from suspicion. Perhaps the police did investigate her story: but if they didn’t, that would have been a serious omission, tantamount to incompetence. We’ll only get the answer to this question if we can get our hands on what remains of the police file.

Whether or not police incompetence came into play, it is important to place matters into context. In January 1920, England was recovering from the effects of the Great War and from the devastating effects of the Spanish Flu pandemic. England’s young male population had been devastated by four years of trench warfare. Economic times were harsh and there was a great deal of unemployment with industry in recession; with thousands of de-mobbed soldiers on the streets with scant chance of gainful work. It also seems—as widely reported in the contemporary media—that England was experiencing a crime wave: several high profile murders had occurred as well as many violent robberies. Contemporary pundits opined that this was a product of so many unemployed soldiers roaming society, who were accustomed to violence and death and to whom life was cheap. Police forces would have had their hands full. Moreover, there may well have been a shortage of experienced and able-bodied men, capable of filling the ranks of police forces. Consider too that the police forces of those times did not have the benefit of modern day forensic resources and the professional training associated with our current police.

While it seems from the available information that Mabel Rogers might have had motive, opportunity and the means to attack Florence during a fit of rage or jealousy, it also seems that the [Eastbourne] burglar was also a good suspect.’

Unfortunately, the police file on the case is almost certainly lost. There is no record of it at the National Archives, which holds the historic files of the Metropolitan Police. Nor can records from the East Sussex police or the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Company be found in any of the relevant archives.

Without access to more contemporary information, we are left with just suspicion and circumstantial evidence; and the unsolved case leaves only a series of painful unanswered questions behind.

One of these is why Florence returned to London on the Sunday night, after visiting her aunt and cousin in Tonbridge. It would have been easier to get a train from Tonbridge to Hastings than to make the trip back up to London and out again the next day. Maybe she was not sufficiently comfortable with her aunt to want to stay there; or her aunt could not accommodate her. Or was there a special reason for going back to
Carnforth Lodge on the Sunday night? The question was never asked at the inquest, so the only living person who could shed any light on this – Mabel Rogers – did not do so. It is simply what happened: a decision that put Florence on the train with her murderer.

Another difficult question is how much Florence was aware of her condition in the hour or so between the attack and the time the platelayers called the guard at Bexhill. Were the movements of her eyes and hands just semi-conscious reflexes; or was she trying to convey information and attract the help she needed? The latter is a horrifying possibility: that she should be aware of her attacker taking her money and jewellery, then awaiting his chance to alight at Lewes; that she should be alone between Lewes and Polegate, not knowing when or if someone would enter the carriage and find her; and then to have the three workmen sitting in the carriage with her but seemingly unaware of her terrible injuries. Better that Florence was not conscious of any of this, and her movements were simply remnants of the body’s reflexes in the twilight between life and death.

The final unanswered questions are about her attacker. Who was the man who attacked Florence so viciously, and left the train at Lewes, leaving her to die? Was he fooled by her fur coat and hat into thinking that she would be carrying a lot of money and valuables, and then disappointed that his audacious and risky assault resulted in just three pounds and some jewellery? Did he really mean to kill the woman with the three heavy blows to the head, or was his intention just to stun her enough for the robbery?

And afterwards, when the local and national newspapers were full of the story of the decorated war nurse who took four days to die of her wounds; when it became clear that the anonymous woman on the train was a skilled and dedicated servant of the sick and wounded, related to the famous Florence Nightingale; did he feel any degree of remorse at the brutal way he had ended this life?

It is a tragic irony that the woman who had travelled across half the globe and served in two war zones should meet her death on a suburban train in southern England.

Florence had emerged from her eventful and sometimes stressful childhood to forge an adventurous life and a distinguished career in the profession that her godmother had transformed into one of respectability and opportunity. She was one of the ‘many honourable women’ that Kipling paid tribute to in his poem about nurses in South Africa. Florence herself might have preferred her brother’s simple epitaph: ‘She was a good soldier.’
Epilogue

It is a sad fact that, had Florence Shore not been murdered, no-one beyond her family would have heard of her. She was a dedicated and heroic army nurse; but so were thousands of others, as the writings of Sister Luard and Vera Brittain, amongst many others, demonstrate. Even the recognition of her exceptional service by the award of the Royal Red Cross would not have made much impact outside of her profession. But because of the brutal nature of her death, her life and work came to the public’s attention, and, for a few months at least, there was public indignation and sorrow at the terrible end to such a worthy life.

The contemporary newspaper coverage of the crime provided the clues to start uncovering more about this particular nurse, by naming her father and aunt, her family connection to Florence Nightingale, and some notable moments in her career – like her trip to China. After that, Florence was rescued from anonymity by the meticulous record-keeping of the 19th century, and in particular, of the then Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute for Nurses – now the Queen’s Nursing Institute. Quarter by quarter, the Institute recorded who was training or working for them, and where they were deployed, in its own magazine. The Queen’s Nurses ‘belonged’ to the Institute for the rest of their careers, until their names appear on the ‘resigned from the Institute’ list (because of marriage or illness or ‘family duties’), or under the deaths. The magazine also encouraged the Queen’s Nurses to write letters and articles, descriptions of practice and notes about their district, for publication in its pages. These are a rich source of background and context, and since every element of the nurses’ lives was prescribed by the Institute and its Superintendents, we can deduce a lot about Florence’s working life from the generality of her colleagues’ experience. Periodically, and luckily, there are articles written personally by Mabel Rogers, which bring us even closer to Florence’s life. With regard to her death, we benefit from the insatiable interest of the early 20th century in death and scandal, which meant that inquest proceedings were published verbatim in the newspapers. On this at least we have plenty of first-hand accounts from those involved in the drama.

Tantalisingly, a religious Abbe from France refers to Florence’s ‘autograph book’, in which he had written an appreciation of Florence’s work. This suggests a document filled with comments that would have built up a fuller picture of Florence from the people who knew her. But the likelihood is that this was lost in the bombing of the Nightingale Shore home which destroyed the memorial bedroom in which Florence’s belongings were displayed.

From Florence herself, there is only scant evidence on which to build a picture of her personality and her feelings. There are some brief letters, preserved in the family, to her father, her god-mother and her sister-in-law; but Florence didn’t write for the Queen’s Nurses’ magazine, as Mabel did, so there is no word from her there. Caroline Shore, her sister in law, had her views – but she admitted her own bias, because of her love for Offley, and her jealousy of his relationship with his sisters. She also saw Florence differently at different times: sometimes she was ‘shy and difficult’; sometimes ‘sweet’ and big-hearted, sometimes ‘determined and pugnacious’.

So there are gaps in the story of Florence’s life which remain unexplored. The formative years of her childhood, from six years old in Derbyshire to 16 at school in Yorkshire are largely unrecorded, apart from her trips abroad. The Middlethorpe Hall school records are nowhere to be found: a lot of historical material was lost when the building was first converted into flats, then transformed into a nightclub, before being allowed to fall derelict. Now it is a country house hotel, and you can walk up the beautiful
wooden cantilevered staircase that Florence would have used. But there is no record beyond the simple census list of Florence’s time there.

The other blank in Florence’s life story is her young adulthood, from 18 to 28, when she started her nurse training. Early in this period she was offered a position at £40 a year, according to her brother’s letter, but we don’t know what this position was. We can only guess why she went to China, and with whom, and what she thought of it. And what was she doing before she went to China, in the years following her parents’ divorce and remarriages? Which parent, if either, did she live with? And what did she do to occupy her time and energy? To these intriguing questions we have, so far, no answers.

Florence slips quietly through her own story, telling us very little herself. But at least now, however imperfectly, her life’s achievements are remembered, as well as her death.
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