

**Minutes of the Derby Medical Society, Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024**  
**Derby Medical School Lecture Theatre**

**Florence Nightingale and the Water Cure**  
*Cora Weaver, Malvern Historical Society*

**Apologies:** None Received

Dr Sally Archer, President, welcomed everyone to this, the fifth meeting of the 2024-2025 season.

Minutes of previous meeting given by Dr McIntyre

Dr Archer introduced Cora Weaver who she met while researching her own family history. Cora Weaver, who now lives in Malvern, is a historian at the Malvern Family History Society.

Cora Weaver explained that Florence Nightingale had visited Malvern many times during her life and this has sparked her interest in her time in Malvern. Florence Nightingale used the spa treatments and accessed the water cures

Florence Nightingale was born in Italy in 1820 into an extremely wealthy family. She had a sister called Parthenope. During childhood she was a shy and retiring girl in contrast to her sister who was very much more outgoing

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the wealthy, in contrast to the majority of the population, could get medical treatments. They had access to doctors and/or could go into spas. During this period spas became hugely popular not only in England but throughout Europe. It resulted in large numbers of people travelling across Europe to access treatments. A doctor was a necessary part of the interventions in spa treatments. A doctor might recommend ingesting spa waters and would prescribe how many glasses per day were required. They might recommend external water treatment that often involved regular bathing and wrapping and would make recommendations and prescribe a regime to be carried out by the bath attendants

Early records indicate Florence Nightingale becoming aware of spas as early as eight years of age. However, it was the period between 1848 and 1868, during which Florence Nightingale visited the Spa town of Malvern 10 times and spent a total of 44 weeks there receiving treatments. It is these visits and treatments that have become of particular interest to Cora. Of interest is that the time at Malvern overlapped with that of Lord Alfred Tennyson.

Cora explained some of the principles that would underpin a visit to the spa. A doctor would be involved in taking a detailed medical history of the symptoms and would carefully select those who they thought might benefit. This was clearly important to maintain their prestige and they would not accept all patients for spa treatments. The Nightingale family were able to secure one of the most famous hydropathic doctors of the time, Doctor Gully. A doctor would prescribe what sort of therapy was required and this would often involve a complete change of daily routine. Patients were expected to follow the prescribed regime that would often involve change of lifestyle such as going to bed early, regular walks and exercise, modifications of diet interspersed with water treatments. Cora explained in detail how the

wrapping therapies, which usually meant being tightly wrapped in a cold sheet, could work. Some of the benefits of being tightly wrapped were that for long periods of time patients were free of any distractions or interruptions. Although initially wrapped in the cold water the sheet would gradually warm up this would enable patients to relax and achieve a state of calm

Florence Nightingales contribution to nursing is well documented. She was particularly influenced by her experience in the Crimean war returning in 1856. When she returned from Crimean war she went to Lea Hurst in Derbyshire, a family home often used for the summer retreats. Florence Nightingale reported on the horrific conditions that soldiers were experiencing in Crimea and was influential in getting an inquiry into the dire disasters the Crimean war to be set up. Florence Nightingale started writing notes Commission

It's clear from correspondence of this time that Florence Nightingales is really quite ill. She went to Malvern on 8 occasions between 1856 and 1868 receiving water treatment as directed by doctors. For many years she was bedbound and frail. People have looked back at some of the challenges that she had with her health at this time. There have been many suggestions to explain her varied symptoms and behaviours including stress, shell shock, PTSD and brucellosis.

There was an engaging question and answer session.

22 members and guests signed the register.