

## Ethel Fenwick memorial service

Many in this congregation are proud nurses, dedicated to promoting the health of society and caring for the sick. We would all probably say that we see nursing as a vocation and this was the view of the nursing world when Ethel Gordon Manson, born in Morayshire, Scotland, but brought up here in Thoroton, entered the profession aged 21, training at the Children's Hospital in Nottingham in April 1878 and after 6 mths moving to Manchester Royal Infirmary. Within 3 years she was matron at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, a meteoric rise but in 1887 she married Dr Bedford Fenwick, a surgeon, and as was customary in those days had to retire from nursing. She decided to dedicate her time to reforming the nursing profession as she had recognised that to ensure that every patient received safe care, nursing must be regulated. She had realised that it was naïve and even unsafe to rely on vocational commitment. What was needed was mandatory requirements for the training and character, and even age of nurses, so that each patient knew they could trust that any nurse they came into contact with, wasn't just well meaning but had the character, knowledge, skills and experience required to care for them.

This was not an easy battle. Florence Nightingale, a public hero, Burdett, a leading politician, medical leaders and other nursing leaders publicly disagreed with Ethel Gordon Fenwick. They were convinced that careful selection based on character, vocation and standard professional training was sufficient and that mandatory regulation was unnecessary. They also raised concerns that any requirements for registration would cause barriers for working class women wishing to enter the profession, women who they believed would not have the necessary level of literacy or education or be able to afford the cost of training and exams.

These anti-registrants and politicians repeatedly blocked progress but Ethel Gordon Fenwick stood firm, supported by her husband and stepfather, George Storer. George had been the MP for Nottinghamshire South, and his and Ethel's mother Harriette's graves lie behind Ethel's here at Thoroton, and we can see, here in church, the stained glass window dedicated to George and Harriette, by Ethel and her siblings Clara and Eric.

To help further the case for regulation of nurses, Ethel founded a number of societies, including the British Nurses Association in 1887, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1892, the Society for State Registration of Nurses in 1902 and in 1904 the National Council of Nurses. She became the driving force behind multiple Bills that were put forward for the state registration of nurses. The British Journal of Nursing retrospectively stated of Ethel Gordon Fenwick that *" her devastating fluency and her controversial genius kept her mistress of each and every situation. She worked ceaselessly by day and far into the night for the success of her precious Bill' .*

Finally on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1919 the Nurses' Registration Act was passed, and in September 1921 Ethel Gordon Fenwick became the first UK registered nurse. Today there are 670,000 registered nurses in the UK and as well as being proud to be one of them, I know that as a UK resident I and those I love can not only rely on being well cared for by UK nurses, but if they are found to be unsafe a nurse can be removed from the register and stopped from practising.

Sitting here today in this beautiful village church, with the memories of Ethel Gordon Fenwick all around us, and with her family present, it is important to recognise that this incredibly strong and visionary woman's influence has not just impacted on the UK. During her life she advocated for reforms on a global level, in 1889 bringing together Nursing Associations to become the President of the newly established International Council of Nurses.

In an ICN speech in 1899 she stated:

*'the nursing profession above all things requires organisation: nurses above all other things, require to be united. It depends upon nurses individually and collectively, to make their work of the utmost possible usefulness to the sick, and this can only be accomplished if their education is based on such broad lines that the term 'a trained nurse' shall be equivalent to that of a person who has received such an efficient training and has proved to be also so trustworthy that the responsible duties which she must undertake may be performed to the utmost benefit of those entrusted to her charge.'*

UK registration began with EGF in 1921 and it is with respect and pride that we today celebrate that regulation of nursing continues to spread to every corner of the world.

EGF passed away in 1947 and her grave is here at Thoroton. A testimonial in the Times in 1947 read *'she was essentially a reformer, dogged and uncompromising, and history will no doubt acclaim her as one of the most foremost women of her century'*. To me she was a thought leader, a visionary, a true nursing hero, and an example of a powerful female leader who persevered against the odds, to bring about change which has led to safer patient care not just in the UK but across the world.