

Ethel Gordon Fenwick and the campaign to make nursing a registered profession

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A name that has become synonymous with the introduction of the nursing register is Ethel Gordon Fenwick (pictured, right), who campaigned tirelessly for it with her supporters for more than 30 years.

She believed a register would allow nurses to develop a professional identity, improve patient care and protect nurses from being exploited via low pay and poor working conditions.

She was born in 1857 in Elgin in Scotland and moved to Nottinghamshire in 1860. She began her nursing career in 1878 when she was aged 21 at the Nottingham Children's Hospital, before continuing her training for a further year at the Manchester Royal Infirmary.

Having completed her training, Ms Gordon Fenwick moved south to London where she worked in several hospitals before being appointed matron at St Bartholomew's Hospital in 1881 at the age of 24. Six years later, she stopped nursing following her marriage and focused entirely on her political

campaign for the introduction of a nursing register.

Serious discussions about the formation of a nursing register began in 1887 at a meeting held by the Hospitals Association, a body representing of hospitals. Ms Gordon Fenwick disagreed with the HA due to its support for a non-compulsory register, and formed a breakaway group, which became the British Nurses' Association, to fight for the introduction of a compulsory register.

Ms Gordon Fenwick was a formidable campaigner and frequently clashed with those who were against registration. They were often members of hospital authorities, which feared state registered nurses would be more costly than non-registered hospital workers. They were also concerned about the level of independence and autonomy it would grant hospital nurses.

However, opponents also included high-profile nurses such as Florence Nightingale and Eva Luckes. The campaign for registration was also fraught with infighting

and conflict, because different societies and campaign groups fought for different kinds of nursing registration.

The period had also seen various disputes emerging between doctors and nurses over the position of the nurse within the hospital hierarchy. This opposition, combined with the infighting, was the main reason for the length of the campaign for registration.

Two initial bills, which sought to introduce a register, were presented to parliament in 1903 and 1904, but both were unsuccessful, as were several more attempts over the following decade. It was a bill introduced to parliament by the then health minister, Dr Christopher Addison, which was ultimately passed in December 1919.

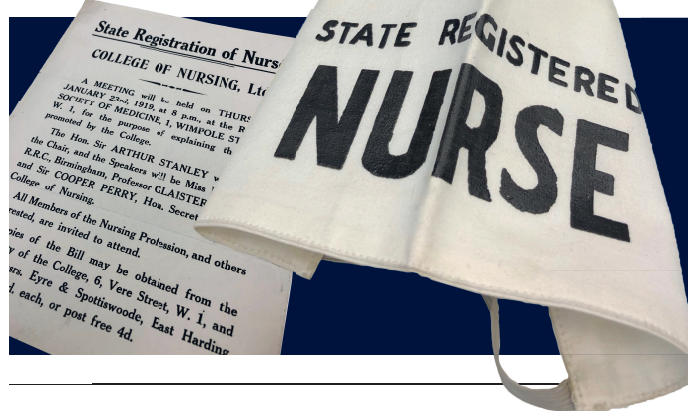
The register opened two years after the Nurses Registration Act came into being, with Ms Gordon Fenwick the first to sign it in 1921 – becoming the first state registered nurse.

Alongside her commitments to UK nursing, Ms Gordon Fenwick also campaigned on the international stage to improve standards of nursing. In 1899



she was instrumental in the founding of the International Council of Nurses and served as its first president until 1904.

She sympathised with the non-militant arm of the suffragette movement and in 1910 was elected President of the Society of Women Journalists. She died on 13 March 1947.



Exhibition shows registration's journey

The Royal College of Nursing has opened a new exhibition to showcase the journey from the Nurses Registration Act 1919 through to the modern day.

The exhibition explores the arguments around the official registration of nurses and features archived letters and documents from the RCN and loaned collections.

It will remain open at RCN headquarters in Cavendish Square, London, until 20 March 2020 before it will be relocated to Scotland for another six months.

Timeline: the road to regulation

1874 President of the General Medical Council, Dr Henry Acland, suggested the introduction of a nurses' register in his foreword to *Handbook for Ward Sisters* by Florence Lee

1887 The Hospitals Association held a meeting to discuss a register for nurses. A breakaway group formed after the meeting due to disagreements over the style of the register. The association advocated a non-compulsory register



1887 The new breakaway group held its first meeting on 21 November at the London home of Ethel Gordon Fenwick

1887 The British Nurses' Association was formed, gaining a royal charter in 1893. It opened a register in 1889 but it was not legally binding and nurses had no obligation to join it

1889 The British Medical Association passed a resolution calling for the opening of a nurse register

1894 Ethel Gordon Fenwick formed the Matrons' Council of Great Britain with her supporters to continue the campaign for mandatory registration

1902 The Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses was established

1903-04 Both the Royal British Nurses' Association and the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses presented bills to parliament on the introduction of a nursing register, but both failed

1905 A House of Commons select committee was set up to debate nurse registration and concluded in favour of the introduction of the state registration of nurses

1905-10 Several bills for registration were presented to parliament during this period but were all blocked by 'anti-registrationists'

1910 Ethel Gordon Fenwick united seven organisations, including the Royal British Nurses' Association, Matrons' Council and Irish Nurses' Association, to form the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses

1919 Both the central committee and the Royal College of Nursing presented bills to parliament but were asked to withdraw them. Instead, the government itself presented a bill on 6 November, which was passed as the Nurses' Registration Act on 23 December

1920 The first General Nursing Council for England and Wales was appointed, with similar councils established for Scotland and Ireland. They agreed standard requirements to be admitted to the register: aspiring nurses had to be aged 21 or over, able to give three references of good character, and able to demonstrate they had at least one year's training and two years' subsequent practice. The council also decided on disciplinary procedures

1921 The nursing register opened in September. Ethel Gordon Fenwick was the first to sign the register, becoming 'state registered nurse number one'

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3947	Fennessy, Rosetta Mary (née Watson)	c/o Mrs. E. Watson, 18, Clapton Passage, Clapton, London, E.5	May 19, 1922, London	Cert. bor
I	Fenwick, Ethel Gordon (née Manson)	20, Upper Wimpole Street, London, W.1	Sept. 30, 1921, London	Tr. I
	Margaret	1239, Pearl Street, Ala-	Feb. 3, 1922, London	

Winner of NMC's badge contest revealed

A nurse who left the Philippines to land her dream job in England has been announced as the winner of a competition to design a commemorative badge for the centenary of the nursing register.

Judges singled out the submission from Karen May Mojica (below), who works in the critical care unit at the Lister Hospital in Stevenage, out of more than 100 entries from across the profession.

The competition was held by the Nursing and Midwifery Council, in partnership with *Nursing Times*, as part of its Always Caring, Always Nursing initiative to celebrate 100 years of regulation.

Ms Mojica's design features two hands, an electrocardiogram rhythm and a heart in the centre to portray the invaluable skills and expert knowledge – together with the relentless care and compassion – that nurses demonstrate day in, day out.

The 29-year-old was inspired to enter the contest by Ethel Gordon Fenwick, who was the driving force behind creating a professional register of nurses. Ms Mojica said: "Ethel gave her entire life trying to establish regulation and I wanted to do something in return. This country and the community have welcomed me with open arms and this is my way of saying thank you."

On behalf of the four UK chief nursing officers, England's CNO Ruth May announced the winning badge entry at a special event on 25 November. The NMC brought together more than 200 frontline nurses and key partners to officially mark the centenary, which falls on 23 December 2019.

Andrea Sutcliffe, NMC chief executive and registrar, said: "We had some truly amazing entries... but sadly, we could only pick one. Karen's design represents a tangible, lasting legacy that professionals on our register can wear with pride." Gemma Mitchell

"This country and the community have welcomed me with open arms and this is my way of saying thank you"

