

Sculpture recalls Florence Nightingale's role as pioneering writer

A mattress made of furlled pages recognises the books written by the founder of modern nursing while she was bedridden

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Bedtime story ... Susan Stockwell's work in the Florence Nightingale Museum. Photograph: Linda Nylind

For many people Florence Nightingale glides into history by the light of her lamp during the Crimean war then vanishes back into the shadows.

But when the [Florence Nightingale museum](#) in London reopens after a £1.4m rebuild on her birthday next month, an [installation](#) by artist [Susan Stockwell](#) will remind visitors that the pioneering nurse actually lived on for another half century until 1910 – and spent most of that time in her bed.

For the [sculpture](#), funded by the Guy's and St Thomas's hospital charity as a gift to the museum, Stockwell has taken a Victorian brass bed and made a ghostly mattress pressed down by the weight of an invisible figure out of thousands of furlled pages from books.

The pages convey the fact that though Nightingale was in bed, she was not inactive. She wrote more than 200 books, pamphlets and articles, including pioneering work on hospital planning, and her 1860 [Notes on Nursing](#), regarded as the foundation of modern nursing.

Nightingale was born on 12 May 1820 to a wealthy family, who were horrified when she turned down a proposal of marriage and announced she was to become a nurse. She arrived at Scutari in 1854, aged 34.

The disasters of the Crimea were covered by William Howard Russell. He sent back reports of Nightingale bringing solace to the wounded. The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow coined the phrase "the lady with the lamp", and by the time she returned to England in 1856 she had become a celebrity.

The museum is located beneath St Thomas's hospital, where Nightingale founded her nursing school, across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament.

The collection includes her medicine chest, stern dresses, and the genuine lamp, more like a paper party lantern than the familiar images.

There is a final joke hidden in the bed which may not have amused Nightingale, a

woman of sharp wit but apparently without a frivolous bone in her body. Stockwell had hoped to make the mattress from old copies of Nightingale's books, but the idea proved too expensive. Instead, while the outer layers are from Notes on Nursing and Cecil Woodham Smith's classic biography, the core is made from 700 copies of Mills & Boon romances Stockwell bought on eBay, including hospital romances in which fragile nurses are eventually crushed against the manly chests of handsome doctors – as Nightingale certainly never was. Photograph: Linda Ny Lind

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