Born: Ethel Gordon Mason in 1857

Daughter of a Member of Parliament, gifted, rich and articulate. Ethel Gordon Mason trained as a nurse at Nottingham Children’s Hospital and at the age of 24 (1881) was Matron of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital (London) before resigning in 1887 on marrying Dr Bedford Fenwick. With her husband Bedford Fenwick she began a campaign to procure a nationally recognised certificate for nursing, to safeguard the title Nurse. As part of this campaign she also campaigned for Registration, and lobbied Parliament to introduce a law to control nursing and limit it to ‘registered’ nurses only.

She was supported by the newly formed British Nurses Association, but not everyone agreed with her views. Nightingale and many doctors were against the ‘professionalisation’ of nursing through registration.

She founded the British Journal of Nursing in 1893, and remained its editor until 1946, primarily as a vehicle for her polemics on professional status.

Mrs Bedford Fenwick argued for three main components to mark how nurse training should be organized:

- A three year training
- A standardized national curriculum
- A final examination

She also advocated the notion of a General Council to regulate the profession.

In 1899 she was instrumental in setting up the International Council of Nurses (ICN) saying at the opening conference “I venture to contend that the work of nursing is one of humanity all the world over”

Eventually in 1919 the British Government set up the General Nursing Council with Mrs Bedford Fenwick becoming the first name on the worlds first Nursing Register.

On 25 June 1999, a plaque was unveiled at 20 Upper Wimpole Street, to commemorate Fenwick, who lived there from 1887 to 1947. The Fenwick commemoration on Wimpole Street is just a few steps from the Blue Plaque marking Florence Nightingale’s departure, with her team of 38 nurses, for the Crimean battlefields in 1854.

See more full biography of Mrs Bedford-Fenwick.

Ethel Bedford Fenwick died in 1947