

Mary Seacole



Mary Seacole was a nurse, made famous for her work during the Crimean War. Mary wrote about her adventures in her autobiography "The wonderful adventures of Mrs Seacole in many lands". She was born in Jamaica in 1805, the daughter of a Scottish officer and a free Jamaican Creole woman. She learned her nursing skills and traditional Caribbean and African herbal remedies from her mother, who was a "doctress". In 1850 Mary Seacole visited her half brother, who ran a boarding house in Panama. Soon after Mary arrived there was an outbreak of cholera and her nursing skills were very much in demand. She went on to establish her own hotel and continued to treat the sick.

When news of the start of the Crimean war reached Mary in 1854, she decided to travel to England, bringing with her letters of recommendation from doctors in Panama and Jamaica, in order to offer her skills as an army nurse. She approached the war office but they refused to see her, so she determined to travel to the Crimean peninsula at her own expense. Mary also offered her help to Florence Nightingale at Scutari hospital but her offer was refused.

Mary built her own "British hotel" on the main route between Balaklava and Sevastopol. It opened in March 1855. Her hotel sold provisions, and provided hot meals to the soldiers and she tended to their medical complaints. She also rode to nearby battlefields to tend to the injured soldiers. At the end of the war Mary was forced to auction off her surplus stock and she returned to England with little money and in poor health. After she was declared bankrupt many of her grateful ex- patients contributed to a charitable fund to provide her with a pension. She died in London in 1881.

