By 7 o'clock the morning coffee would be ready. From that time until 9 o'clock, officers on duty in the neighbourhood or passing by would look in for breakfast. About half past nine my sick patients began to show themselves. In the following hour they came thickly and sometimes it was past twelve before I had got through this duty. They came with every variety of suffering and disease; the cases I most disliked were the frostbitten fingers and feet in winter.

She did not spare herself if she could do any good to the suffering soldiers. In rain and snow, day after day, she was at her post. With her stove and kettle, in any shelter she could find, she brewed tea for all who wanted it - and there were many.

She gave her aid to all in need
To hungry, sick and cold
Open hand and heart, ready to give
Kind words, and acts, and gold
And now the good soul is "in a hole"
What soldier in all -the land
To set her on her feet again
Won't give a helping hand?

In March 1856, the war ended suddenly. Mrs Seacole returned to England without any money. She tried to set up her business again selling her wares to soldiers. By November her business had failed and she was in the London Bankruptcy Court. The Times newspaper published letters from people who wanted to set up a fund to repay her for the money she had spent in the Crimea.

In 1867 another committee was set up to help her. This time Queen Victoria supported it. She thanked Mary Seacole for her work in the Crimea.
Florence Nightingale was born in Florence, Italy on 12th May 1820. As Florence grew up she developed an interest in helping others. She made visits to the homes of the sick in the local villages and began to investigate hospitals and nursing. At first her parents refused to allow her to become a nurse because, at that time, it was not thought to be a suitable profession for a well educated woman. But Florence did not give up. Eventually in 1851 her father gave his permission and Florence, now aged thirty-one, went to Germany where she trained to become a nurse.

As a result of Florence Nightingale’s work in the Crimean War, wounded soldiers received much better treatment. This led to a dramatic fall in the death rate of her patients. The use of female nurses was seen as a great success. In 1856 when Florence returned to England she was a national heroine. She had been deeply shocked by the lack of hygiene and care that the wounded soldiers were given by the British Army. She began a campaign to improve the quality of nursing in military hospitals.

In 1859, to spread her opinions on nursing, Florence published a book called ‘Notes on Nursing’. This laid down the principles of nursing, careful observation and sensitivity to the patient’s needs. In 1860 with money from the public, Florence founded the Nightingale School & Home for Nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. Florence had learned that employing the right sort of women and training them was essential if they were to become good nurses. From then until her death Florence lived in London and encouraged the development of nursing, both in Britain and abroad. Her greatest achievement, and the reason why we remember her, is that she made nursing a respectable profession for women.

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1805. Her father was a Scottish army officer and her mother a free black woman who ran a boarding house in Kingston. Mary's mother also treated people who become ill. She was a great believer in the herbal medicines.

Although Mary Seacole was an expert at dealing with cholera, her application to join Florence Nightingale's team was rejected. Mary, who had become a successful business woman in Jamaica, decided to travel to the Crimea at her own expense. She visited Florence Nightingale at her hospital at Scutari but once again Mary's offer of help was refused.

Unwilling to accept defeat, Mary started up a business called the British Hotel, a few miles from the battlefront. Here she sold food and drink to the British soldiers. With the money she earned from her business Mary was able to finance the medical treatment she gave to the soldiers. Whereas Florence Nightingale and her nurses were based in a hospital several miles from the front, Mary Seacole treated her patients on the battlefield.

After the war ended in 1856 Mary Seacole returned to England. She hoped to work as a nurse in India but she was unable to raise the necessary funds. Unlike Nightingale, Mary Seacole was not very well known and did not get the same publicity and funding. She died in poverty in London on May 14, 1881.
In March 1854 Britain, France and Turkey declared war on Russia. The allies defeated the Russians at the battle of the Alma in September but reports in The Times criticised the British medical facilities for the wounded. In response, Sidney Herbert, the Minister at War, who knew Florence Nightingale socially and through her work at Harley Street, appointed her to oversee the introduction of female nurses into the military hospitals in Turkey. On 4 November 1854, Florence Nightingale arrived at the Barrack Hospital in Scutari, a suburb on the Asian side of Constantinople, with the party of 38 nurses. Initially the doctors did not want the nurses there and did not ask for their help, but within ten days fresh casualties arrived from the battle of Inkermann and the nurses were fully stretched. Within six months she had transformed the place, slashing the death rate from about 40% to 2%.

Nightingale did not think it proper for female nurses to come into close contact with male patients. She did not allow her nurses in the wards after 8.30 pm and she thought it was only acceptable for certain parts of the men’s bodies to be washed by the nurses. One of her nurses, Elizabeth Davies, wanted a more practical role. The only way of doing this was to leave Scutari against Nightingale’s wished and go nearer the front line.