

## Sister Dora



# Who was Sister Dora?

- **Sister Dora**, whose full name was **Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison** was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1832 at Hauxwell in Yorkshire .
- She was an Anglican nun and a nurse in Walsall during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.



DOROTHY WYNDLOW PATTISON.  
("SISTER DORA.")

*From a photograph by F. Brown, in the possession of Mr Kirby.*

# Early Life

- Dorothy was the eleventh of twelve children of Reverend Mark James Pattison and his wife, Jane.
- The Pattison family was not a happy one, as her father had mental health issues and could be violent and domineering.



Hauxwell Church as it is today.

# Engagement

- Everything that Dorothy wished to do, her father prevented. She had become engaged to James Tate, but her father refused his permission for them to marry. She felt angry at James for not trying to persuade her father and broke the engagement off for six months. In the meantime she met someone else called Purchas Stirke, who she preferred to James.



Dorothy aged 27 years

# Escape

- At around the same time, her mother Jane became very ill and Dorothy decided to nurse her. She sadly died in 1860, but left Dorothy £90 in her will. This meant that she could escape from her father. After many applications, Dorothy finally got a job as the teacher in a tiny village school at Little Woolston in Buckinghamshire.



*The school at Little Woolston. The classroom is on the right and the schoolmistress' cottage to the left.*

# Work

- Although Dorothy did not earn much money, she enjoyed her job. At the same time she would nurse anyone in the area who was sick. She became very popular because of her kindness.
- Dorothy's desire to be a nurse became very strong and she particularly admired Florence Nightingale, a British nurse who had set up a hospital in Russia during the Crimean War.



Florence Nightingale

# A Change...

Florence Nightingale was calling for volunteers to help her in her hospital and Dorothy asked her father if she could go. He strictly forbade it.

In September 1862 Dorothy fell very seriously ill. To recuperate, she took a holiday with her sister Frances to Coatham in Middlesborough.



Florence Nightingale at the hospital in Scutari during the Crimean War

# Sisterhood

- Whilst she was there she was able to see the life and work of the Christ Church Sisterhood. This was a group of women who devoted their lives to worshipping God and helping others.
- Dorothy joined and took the name Sister Dora. To begin with she found her training very hard as the Sisterhood was very strict.



*Members of the Sisterhood taken about 1878 in front of the Sisters' House, North Ormesby.  
Mother Theresa Newcomen, seated centre, Frances Pattison seated second from right.*

# Nursing

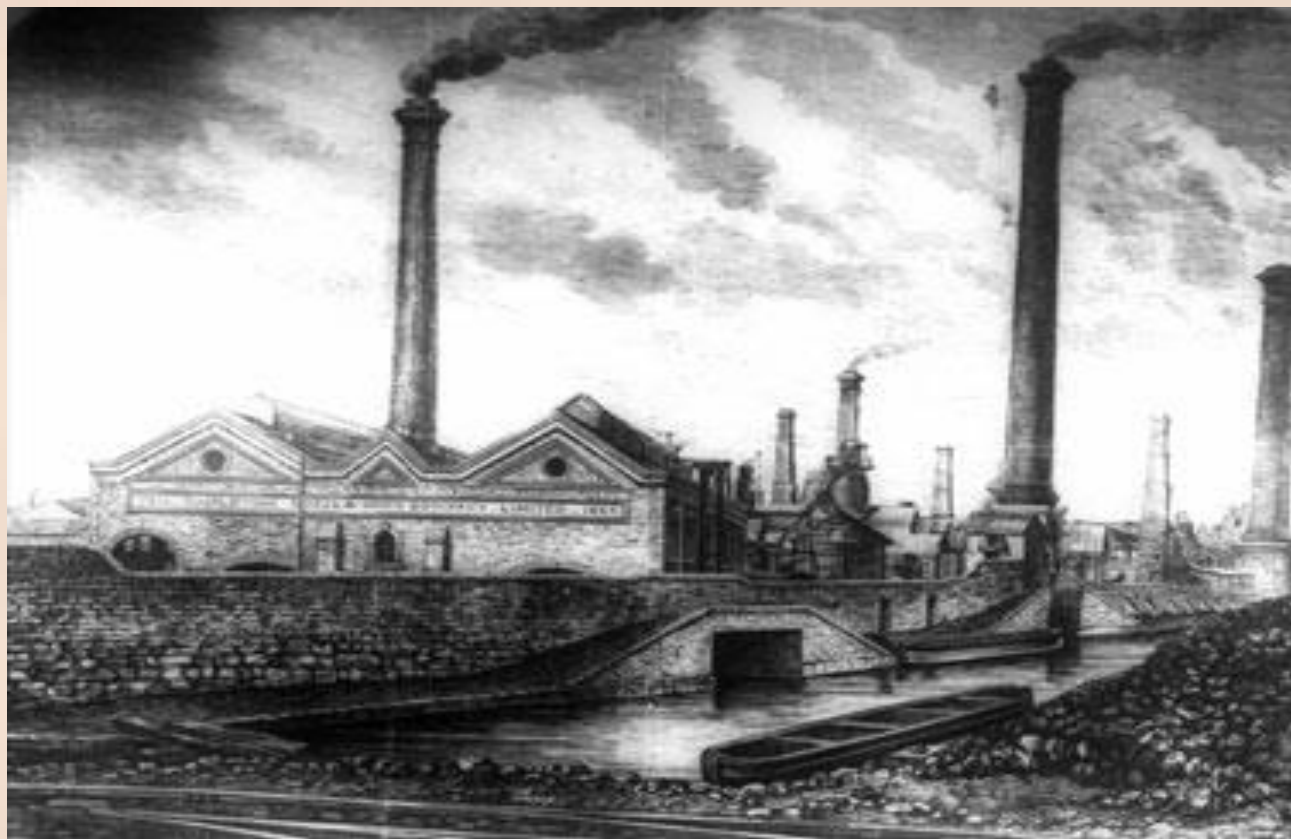
- At the time there was a great demand for nurses. The Sisterhood ran two small hospitals and a convalescent home where Sister Dora started her career as a nurse.
- After only four months in the Order, a serious outbreak of Scarlet Fever amongst the Sisters which meant that Dora was needed to nurse at the hospital in Walsall. She arrived here in November 1865.

Walsall Bridge with the Cannons



# Walsall

- What was once a small medieval town had grown very quickly due to the Industrial Revolution. Mines, factories and foundries worked day and night, and the safety of the workers was not considered. The town was noisy and dirty and people lived in overcrowded, unhealthy conditions. The nearest hospital was nine miles away in Birmingham, a long way to travel during those times, especially for the sick or injured. There was no health service so people had to pay or rely on charity for their care.



Darlaston Steel and Iron Company  
1873

# The Cottage Hospital

- Walsall's Cottage Hospital was then on Bridge Street. It was very small, with only twenty beds in the wards upstairs and an out-patients department downstairs. There was a dining room, a kitchen and a cellar, as well as a sitting room and a dormitory for the nurses to sleep in.
- Sister Dora was joined by another nurse called Sister Mary and they treated patients on the wards, the out-patients and made visits to peoples' homes. It was very hard work.



*Bridge Street, where the Cottage Hospital was opened on October 12, 1863.*

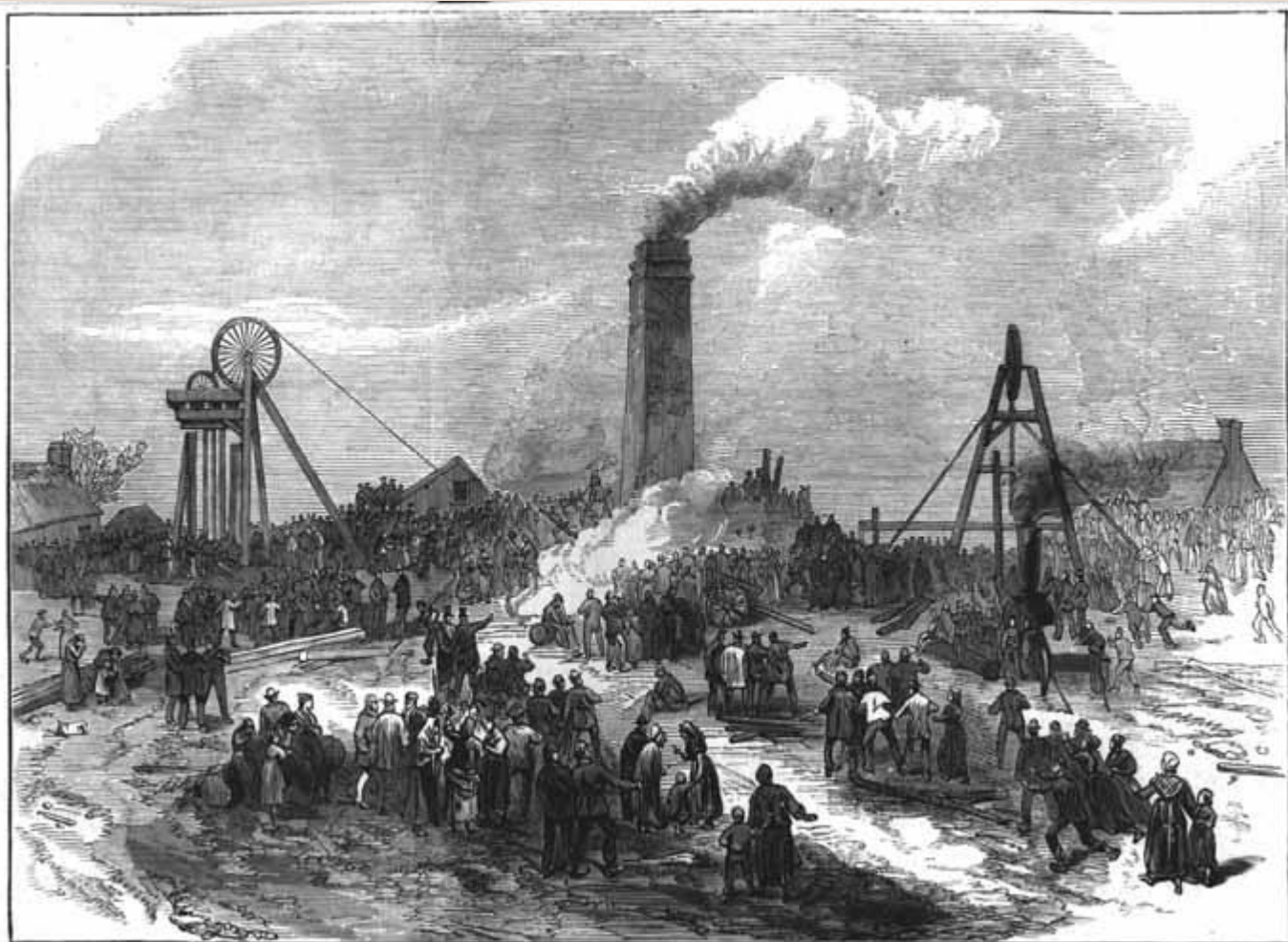
# Work

- In May 1868 the hospital relocated to what had once been a school called The Mount (at the bottom of Wednesbury Road). Sister Dora was now in charge of the hospital and ran it so well that other hospitals asked her to work for them. A surgeon she worked with tried to persuade her to train to become a doctor as she was so skilled. But nothing could tempt her away from nursing in Walsall.



# Disaster

- In November 1872 there was a terrible disaster at Pelsall Hall Colliery. This was a deep coal mine. Part of the workings had collapsed allowing water and a mixture of unbreathable gases called Chokedamp to flood the mine. In all, twenty two men and boys lost their lives as they were trapped deep below the ground. The youngest victim was Stephen Lawton, who was only thirteen when he died.



THE FELLSALL HALL COLLIERY, NEAR WALSHALL, THE SCENE OF THE FLOODING.

# Comfort

- Although Sister Dora could do nothing for the trapped men, she visited the pit head and treated what wounds she could. She also comforted the families of those men and boys who had died. This made her even more popular with the people of Walsall and in 1873, railway workers contributed money to buy her a pony and carriage so that she could travel about the area more quickly and easily.



Panel at the base of sister Dora's statue showing her comforting families of trapped miners.





Sister Dora receiving a pony and carriage from Walsall railway workers

# Smallpox

- In February 1875 a major epidemic of Smallpox broke out in Walsall. It is a highly contagious disease that causes death by infecting the blood. People with Smallpox had extremely high temperatures and were covered in blisters. There was no cure for it at the time. People that managed to survive were left with severe scars, especially on their face.



A young boy with smallpox.

# Epidemic

- A special epidemic hospital was opened on Deadman's Lane (now Hospital Street in Pleck). All the sufferers were taken there and Sister Dora nursed them on her own, even though there was a high risk that she could catch the disease herself.
- By June the outbreak came to an end and Sister Dora survived. But the Sisterhood wanted to move her to another hospital. She refused to leave Walsall and left the Sisterhood.



*Sister Dora.*

# Explosion

- In October 1875 a boiler exploded at an ironworks on Green Lane. Twelve men were horrifically injured. Burns were extremely hard to treat in those days and they became easily infected. Antibiotics had not yet been discovered. Despite dedicated nursing by Sister Dora, all but two of the men died. Even worse, the infection in their wounds had been spread to other patients. The hospital had to be closed and new one built.



A relief panel at the base of Sister Dora's statue showing her helping the injured.

# Unsuitable

- A temporary hospital on Bridgeman Street was opened but it was noisy and cramped. The beds were spread out over four floors and patients, alive or dead, had to be carried up the stairs, often by Sister Dora herself, because there was not enough space for a stretcher. By 1877 she had treated 15,000 patients at this hospital.



# Cancer

- During this difficult time, Sister Dora began to feel unwell. She was diagnosed with breast cancer but decided against having an operation. She also wanted to keep her illness a secret. She took a short holiday and returned in September 1878. She got to the Queen's Hotel in Birmingham and collapsed. She could no longer hide how near to death she was.

# Final Journey

- Sister Dora refused all offers of help in Birmingham and demanded to return to Walsall saying 'Let me die amongst my own people.' She was taken to a house on Wednesbury Road. During this time the new hospital was opened, although she was too ill to attend the opening ceremony. She died at 2pm on Christmas Eve 1878. She was only forty six years old.



Walsall General Hospital at the bottom of  
Wednesbury Road. The building is now a block  
of flats on Vicarage Place.

# Funeral

- Although she wanted a simple funeral, the people of Walsall had been so grateful for her help over the fourteen years she had been to them that they gave her a special funeral with a procession through the town. Eighteen railway workers carried her coffin to the Queen Street Cemetery.

## FUNERAL OF SISTER DORA.

**T**HE Executive Committee of the Committee of the Cottage Hospital respectfully invite the members of the General Committee, the clergymen and ministers of the town and neighbourhood, the members of the medical profession, and the various public bodies and friendly societies to take part in the Procession of the Funeral of Sister Dora, which will start from the Hospital at two o'clock to-day (Saturday).

All public bodies intending to take part in the procession, and who have not yet intimated their intention to do so, are requested to communicate their intention not later than 10 o'clock on Saturday (to-day). All communications to be addressed to the Secretary, at the Hospital.

Parties intending to take part in the Procession are requested to wear a crape or black cloth upon the left arm.

By order,

S. WELSH,

Secretary.

Walsall Cottage Hospital,

December 27th, 1878.

ST. MATTHEW'S PARISH CHURCH,  
WALSALL.

*TO-MORROW (SUNDAY),  
December 29, 1878,*

## TWO SERMONS

Will (p.v.) be preached in reference to the  
LIFE AND CHARACTER OF  
SISTER DORA,

In the Morning, at half-past Ten, by the  
RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF LICHFIELD;  
And in the Evening, at half-past Six,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM ALLEN, M.A., VICAR,  
Title of Sermon:

"A PRINCESS AMONG NURSES."

**Order of Ceremonial**  
FOR THE  
Funeral of the late Sister Dora,  
IN THE  
CEMETERY, WALSALL,  
ON  
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28th, 1878,  
AT TWO O'CLOCK.

ORDER OF PROCESSION FROM THE COTTAGE HOSPITAL.

*Silently and Slowly, in Fours.*

Police.

Choristers and Senior Members of Choirs.

Physicians and Surgeons.

Clergy and Ministers.

Officiating Clergy, viz.:

Rev. W. Allen, Rev. E. M. FitzGerald, Rev. A. C. Irvine,

Right Rev. Bishop Abraham

and Right Rev. Bishop John Selwyn.

Bearers. **THE BODY** Bearers.

The Members and the Executor (Mr. James Slater).

The Executive Committee and the Member for the Borough.

*Representatives of the Press*  
The Mayor, Magistrates, and Corporation.

The Governors of Queen Mary's School.

The Guardians and the School Board.

Representatives of the Walsall Young Men's Christian  
Association.

Sunday School Teachers.

The Firemen, and other Friendly Societies.

Old Patients, and others.

Police.

# Memorial

- As a mark of remembrance, a stained glass window was placed in St. Matthew's church. Also the people of Walsall contributed money for a statue to be placed in the town. It was unveiled in 1886 and still stands today. Every year there is a special service to remember her and flowers are still placed at the base of her statue on her birthday, January 16<sup>th</sup>. She was the first woman to have a statue erected to her who was not a member of Royalty.



Sister Dora's headstone at Queen Street  
Cemetery



The unveiling of sister Dora's statue in 1886



The statue as it is today.



SISTER DORA.

In this cemetery is the  
grave of  
Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison  
or "Sister Dora,"  
1832-1878,  
who worked tirelessly  
to improve the health  
of the people of  
Walsall.



WALSALL M.B.C

1989