

Nurses working internationally



This research starter highlights the collections of UK nurses who worked overseas held by the RCN archive. Many worked as part of international health organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF,) the International Red Cross movement, and the International Council of Nurses (ICN.) The archives of these nurses can provide insight into healthcare and nursing practices across the world, as well as the challenges and benefits of establishing global communities of nursing and healthcare practitioners.

The contents of these collections include personal papers, oral histories, object collections, and photographs. They have been shared online thanks to a grant award from the [RCN Foundation](#). The archive collections of nurses who worked internationally were catalogued and digitised over 2 years by the Sharing nurses' life stories through their archives project. Links to the collections which are digitised are included below. If you are interested in viewing any items that are not available online, please contact archives@rcn.org.uk to arrange a research appointment.

Instructions on viewing collections can be found here [Help \(epexio.com\)](http://epexio.com)

Mary Abbott

Mary Abbott (1920-2011) was an international nurse educator. Her early work overseas included a Matron role with the Indian Northern Medical Services. She later took a role at WHO, working initially in India. Following this she was placed in Bathurst Hospital, The Gambia and then Abadum, Nigeria. In 1970 she moved to Pahlavi University in Iran, and then on to Manila, Philippines, working at the regional headquarters of WHO. In 1976 she was re-posted to the WHO European Regional Office in Copenhagen before retiring in 1980.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Abbott; Mary Oliphant \(1920-2011\); nurse educator \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

C354 - Papers of Mary Abbott This collection contains personal papers, including diaries, photographic albums, and documentation relating to Abbott's work with the WHO. For more details, please see: [Papers of Mary Abbott \(epexio.com\)](#)

Parts of this collection, including diaries documenting Abbott's work in India and Nigeria have been digitised and you can view the collection here: [Papers of Mary Abbott | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](#)

T/129A - T/129C - Interviews with Mary Abbott Across these three interviews Abbott discusses her life and career as an international nurse educator. These interviews provide a lot of Abbott's personal insight into

her work, as well details regarding her early life. For further details see: [Interview with Mary Abbott \(epexio.com\)](#) (T/129A,) [Interview with Mary Abbott \(epexio.com\)](#) (T129/B,) and [Interview with Mary Abbott \(epexio.com\)](#) (T/129C.) You can listen to these interviews and read the transcript by visiting the RCN archive.

Marjorie Simpson

Marjorie Simpson (1914-1992) was a leading nurse researcher and Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing. Simpson was a member of the WHO expert panel on nursing and involved in various international organisations including the International Council of Nurses. As part of this international work, Simpson promoted the significance of nursing research as part of an international community.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Simpson; Hilda Marjorie \(1914-1992\); nurse leader \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

C261- Papers of Marjorie Simpson: This collection contains personal papers, including a collection of passports showing Simpson's international travels, a photographic collection, and documents relating to Simpson's work with the ICN and the WHO. For further details please see: [Papers of Marjorie Simpson \(epexio.com\)](#)

Digitised versions of selected items are available at [Papers of Marjorie Simpson | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](#)
Notable items include the expired passports and WHO vaccine passport.

Oral history interview - T/172 Simpson talks about her work as Research Nursing Officer at the at the Department of Health and Social Security and her involvement with the WHO working on an expert panel on nursing. For further details see [Interview with Marjorie Simpson \(epexio.com\)](#)

There is an Oxford Dictionary National Biography entry for Simpson at [Simpson, \(Hilda\) Marjorie \(1914-1992\), nurse and promoter of nursing research | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography \(oxforddnb.com\)](#)

Felicity Leenders

Felicity Leenders (1936-2022) had a career as a senior nurse in both Canada and England. She was responsible for nursing policy advice to the UK government and was seconded to WHO to conduct research for member states including the newly independent states of the former USSR and Central and Eastern European Countries.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Leenders; Felicity Mary \(1936-2022\); nee Noble; nurse \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

C519 - Papers of Felicity Leenders This collection contains the personal papers which relate to the career of Felicity Leenders, Nursing

Officer at the Department of Health. For further details see: [Papers of Felicity Leenders \(epexio.com\)](#)

Digitised versions of selected items are available at [Papers of Felicity Leenders | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](#)

Oral history interview -T/267 In this interview Leenders talks about her work as nursing officer for health promotion in the Department of Health and her secondment to the World Health Organisation, primarily working on country profiles for the nurses of the European region and her VSO work in Romania. For further details see: [Interview with Felicity Leenders \(nee Noble\) \(epexio.com\)](#)

Muriel Skeet

Muriel Skeet (1926-2006) was known for her international work and publications. She worked for the Red Cross and the World Health Organization, across Europe and Asia. Skeet led trauma nursing teams in disaster areas such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Ethiopia, Niger, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Punjab, and Turkey at the start of the first Gulf war. Skeet produced handbooks used in many countries, including a 1975 manual on disaster relief work which was still in use circa 2017.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Skeet; Muriel Hilda \(1926-2006\); nurse educator \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

C350 - Papers of Muriel Skeet This collection contains the personal papers of nurse Muriel Skeet. This includes a resume and articles and reports written by Skeet. For further details see: [Papers of Muriel Skeet \(epexio.com\)](#)

Digitised versions of selected items are available at [Papers of Muriel Skeet | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](#)

Other: [Articles about and correspondence with Muriel Skeet \(epexio.com\)](#)

Skeet donated a small badge collection containing international variants of red cross/crescent and blood donation badges which she had collected. For further details see: [Badges of Muriel Skeet \(epexio.com\)](#)

Images of badges are available at [Badges | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](#)

Elizabeth Cockayne

Dame Elizabeth Cockayne (1894-1988) was a nurse leader known for her work as Chief Nursing Officer at the Ministry of Health. She was part of milestone nursing committees including the working party on Recruitment and Training of Nurses (Wood report) and the Nursing Reconstruction Committee (Horder Report) and was an Honorary Advisor on Nursing to the Ministry of Supply during the Second World War.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Cockayne; Dame; Elizabeth \(1894-1988\); nurse leader \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

C150 - Papers of Elizabeth Cockayne. The highlight of this collection is an autobiographical text regarding Cockayne's career as a professional nurse. For further details see: [Papers of Elizabeth Cockayne \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/c150-papers-of-elizabeth-cockayne)

Digitised versions are available at [Papers of Elizabeth Cockayne | Royal College of Nursing Digital Archive \(preservica.com\)](https://preservica.com/collections/papers-of-elizabeth-cockayne)

Oral history interviews with Elizabeth Cockayne. The WHO interview and general interviews are of particular note. For further details see: T/10A [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne: WHO \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t10a-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne-who) , T/10B [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne: Early Years \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t10b-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne-early-years) , T/10C [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne: Wood Report \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t10c-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne-wood-report) , T/10D [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne: Psychiatric hospitals \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t10d-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne-psychiatric-hospitals) , T/170 [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t170-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne) , T/254 [Interview with Elizabeth Cockayne \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t254-interview-with-elizabeth-cockayne)

There is an Oxford Dictionary National Biography entry for Cockayne at [Cockayne, Dame Elizabeth \(1894-1988\), nursing administrator and teacher | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography \(oxforddnb.com\)](https://oxforddnb.com/entry/10.1093/oxforddnb/9780199553413.013.0001)

Sheila Quinn

Dame Sheila Quinn (1920-2016) was appointed Dame Commander for her distinguished nursing career in clinical nursing, teaching and management both in Britain and internationally. She worked extensively with the International Council of Nurses in staff and honorary roles and acted as a consultant to the World Health Organisation.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Quinn; Dame; Sheila Margaret Imelda \(1920-2016\); nurse leader \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/quinn-dame-sheila-margaret-imelda-1920-2016-nurse-leader)

Collections of interest include:

Papers of Sheila Quinn - C377. These include thesis material: nursing reports on Italy, France, Belgium, Portugal, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Germany and Greece. European Nursing Students Group meetings papers and RCN papers. For further details see: [Papers of Sheila Quinn \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/c377-papers-of-sheila-quinn)

Oral history interview - T/21. Describes in great detail her work with the International Council of Nurses, Royal College of Nursing and trade unionism. For further details see: [Interview with Sheila Quinn \(epexio.com\)](https://epexio.com/collections/t21-interview-with-sheila-quinn)

Publication: The autobiographical *A Dame Abroad* by Sheila Quinn, Memoir Club (1 Jan 2004) ISBN 978-1841040776

Barbara Fawkes

Early in her nursing career Barbara Fawkes (1914-2002) studied in Australia, Zealand and America. Fawkes became actively involved in the International Council of Nurses and worked on assignments for the World Health Organisation. Fawkes was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing New South Wales as well as a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing.

A more detailed version of this biography can be found at: [Fawkes; Barbara Noel \(1914-2002\); nurse educator \(epexio.com\)](#)

Collections of interest include:

Papers of Barbara Fawkes - C467 These personal papers include an account of a year of post-graduate study in New York, scrapbooks compiled whilst in the USA and Japan, curriculum vitae in her own handwriting, a typed summary of her work in the UK and internationally; "Nursing - an International Perspective", a handwritten account of her work from 1977, which includes her ICN work, and articles written by Barbara Fawkes. For further details see: [Papers of Barbara Noel Fawkes \(epexio.com\)](#)

Oral history interview - T/216. This interview covers Fawkes' International Council of Nurses work, starting in London in 1937, leading to Executive director from 1977-1979. Fawkes' tells of travelling to various countries through her ICN work, for example lecturing in Australia. For further details see: [Interview with Barbara N Fawkes \(epexio.com\)](#)