

Contents

Proem: No Signage, No Appointment, No Problem	1
Midwifery Was Scandalous. He Did It Anyway.....	1
When No One Funds Poor Mothers, Try Dancing	2
Debt, Daring Escape, Death	2
Fix the Air, Save the Babies. Then and Now.	2
Oldest? It's Relative.	2
Reflection: Nightingale Was Here Too.....	3

Proem: No Signage, No Appointment, No Problem

Hello. Welcome to [2026 Nurses Week](#), May 6th through 12th. I'm very proud to be a nurse. I've been a nurse for 50 years. And my grandson's going to nursing school next year. He's graduating as a senior and will attend Loyola University in Chicago for its nursing program. I'm very proud.

I want to tell you a story about one of the most significant things that happened during our trip to Ireland a couple of weeks ago. We were staying in the north-central city of Dublin, Ireland. Across the street, I saw a big white institutional facade with no signage. It looked like the side of the building. Next to it, on its right, was a dome with a more modern sign that read "Ambassador". So, I went into the hotel and asked, "So what's this building?" And they didn't know.

I looked it up, and it turned out to be the Rotunda Hospital. The Rotunda Hospital is the oldest freestanding maternity hospital in the world.

Midwifery Was Scandalous. He Did It Anyway.

Now let me see. I've got some notes here. The hospital was founded in 1745 by a man named [Bartholomew Mosse](#), M-O-S-S-E. He was a certified surgeon. His wife and child died in childbirth. After this tragedy, he left Ireland to serve as a doctor with the British Army. While he was away, he received midwifery training at a hospital in Paris and obtained his midwifery license, which was unusual. In fact, fellows of the Royal College of Physicians were even penalized if they practiced midwifery.

But Mosse wanted to change that. So, he built this small place, 10 beds, that... Let's see, when did it open? I guess it opened in 1745. Mosse's ambition was to build a dedicated maternity hospital in Dublin to provide medical care and shelter to the city's penniless mothers. This came after he encountered unspeakable conditions during his practice, particularly in the aftermath of the 1739 famine.

So he established this 10-bed hospital. It was in a small theater called the [New Booth Theatre](#). It says here that it was the first lying-in hospital of its kind in the world. It had only 10 beds, but in its first year, 190 babies were born, and just one mother died. But obviously, they couldn't meet demand with 10 beds.



<https://www.health-hats.com/pod248>

When No One Funds Poor Mothers, Try Dancing

Mosse tried to raise money to build a larger hospital, but nobody really wanted to give money to poor women. So he happened to attend the [world premiere of Handel's Messiah](#) on April 13, 1742. While he was there, he was inspired to raise money by entertaining the wealthy.

Somebody sent me a picture of the [Handel statue](#) that's in front of the theater where the premiere was, which I thought would be interesting.

According to my research, on the evening of April 13th, 1742, Handel conducted the world premiere of his Messiah on Dublin's Fishamble Street, and Mosse was present. Historians suggest that this moment crystallized Mosse's idea of using high-society entertainment to fund a hospital for the poor.

So Mosse turned the proposed hospital site [into a pleasure garden](#) with a live orchestra, theatrical performances, and dances in a coffee house, marrying philanthropy with frivolity to reach the wealthy.

Debt, Daring Escape, Death

Here's a little interesting tidbit. Lotteries nearly destroyed Dr. Mosse. Before he was able to return to Ireland, he was arrested and charged with being 200 pounds in debt, and he's thought to have been imprisoned in [Beaumaris Castle in Anglesey, Wales](#). The story was that he managed to escape through a window and hid in the Welsh mountains for three weeks before reaching Ireland. He then vindicated himself by publishing his receipts and lottery accounts, whatever. But less than a year after the hospital opened, he was taken seriously ill, exhausted, heavily in debt, and petrified about the prospect of arrest and imprisonment. He died on February 16th, 1759.

Fix the Air, Save the Babies. Then and Now.

Around 1781, when the hospital was poorly ventilated and every sixth child died within nine days of birth, they realized the problem was poor ventilation. Ventilation was improved, and mortality dropped to 1 in 20 over the following five years.

They're also planning to celebrate their millionth birth in 2026. It's just amazing. I met a saleswoman in a sweater store who asked where we went in Dublin. When I told her about the Rotunda Hospital, she said she had a difficult pregnancy and birth without insurance. She received care at the Rotunda Hospital, with her baby in neonatal intensive care for three weeks and herself as an inpatient for two weeks. Awesome care!

So, when we were there, I, an old white guy in a wheelchair, motored into the Rotunda Hospital and stopped at the registration desk to ask if I could speak with someone. I had not made an appointment. I was leaving the next day. Very nice people. I tried to get hold of people in their library, research, and marketing, but they were busy, of course.

Oldest? It's Relative.

I'm really impressed by the idea of being the world's longest-operating specialist hospital. I was trying to get some perspective on that, so I looked up the oldest continuously operating hospitals, and here's



what I learned. I learned that in the United States, the oldest continuously operating hospital is [Bellevue Hospital in New York City](#), which opened in 1736 as a six-bed infirmary.¹

So, it began as a haven for the indigent and is still a major public hospital on the East Side of Manhattan. It opened nine years before Mosse opened his first lying-in hospital. The other long-running hospital is the [Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia](#)², established in 1751 by Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Thomas Bond. It's still operational as part of the University of Pennsylvania Health System. The oldest hospital is the [Hôtel-Dieu in Paris](#)³, which officially opened in 650 AD, and that's the hospital where Mosse became a midwife. There's [St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, founded in 1123](#)⁴. And there's the Hospital de Jesús Nazareno in Mexico City, opened in 1524. But really, the Rotunda is the oldest maternity-only specialist hospital, continuously operating in the world, which is a more specific and arguably more impressive claim than the general acute care hospitals Bellevue and Hôtel-Dieu, which have both moved buildings, changed missions, and been rebuilt.

The Rotunda has been delivering babies in the same building since December 8th, 1757. That's really something.

Reflection: Nightingale Was Here Too

So, let's bring this back to Nurses Day and to Florence Nightingale. Interestingly, [Sara E. Hampson was one of the original Nightingale](#) nurses and the first lady superintendent of the Rotunda Hospital in 1891.

So yay, nursing. Yay, history. I'm really looking forward to exploring more of this amazing hospital in Dublin.

I wonder who was in charge all these years, and how it survived past Mosse and through those first decade or first few years? And then, how did the Rotunda Hospital survive war, famine, pandemics, and technological change? What research occurred there? Is there a diaspora of Rotunda alumni?

Anyway, more to come. Thanks.

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