

In the steps of Florence Nightingale by Elizabeth Pinder

We gathered at Heathrow's new terminal 5 on a bright September morning. There would be 31 of us, an eclectic mix, from nursing or academic backgrounds from all over the UK and the USA. For many of us it was a dream come true, a chance to travel – "In the Steps of Florence Nightingale."

Those of us who didn't know him already were introduced to our mustachioed tour leader, Alex Attewell, until recently director of the Florence Nightingale museum and a fount of knowledge about all things 'Nightingale'.



Alex Attewell – tour guide

A welcome from the captain of our Boeing 767 to "the party of Nightingale nurses on their way to Scutari" set the scene and the flight passed in no time, renewing old friendships and beginning new ones. As we touched down at Istanbul Airport the skyline was full of domes and minarets, which looked so exotic.

Reunited with our luggage we met our Turkish guide, Mr Alp Kaya and boarded our coach to transfer to our hotel in the heart of the old city. On the way we passed through remnants of the ancient city walls of Constantinople, Alp introducing us to this historic place with the first of his wide-ranging and informative talks. This was going to be even better than I had hoped - our guide

was an expert in Ottoman history and much else beside.

After a few hiccups sorting rooms, who was sharing, whose room was too small, we had an appointment on the rooftop terrace for a welcome meal of Turkish cuisine. This was an opportunity for each to introduce themselves with a few words and we were privileged to be welcomed to Istanbul by two Nurse Tutors from the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing in Istanbul. Alex then gave us a fascinating talk on "The Crimean War and Scutari" to prepare us for our visit to what had once been the Barrack Hospital.

Next morning saw us back in the rooftop restaurant for an early breakfast. There was a bewildering choice of meats, olives and vegetables, eggs, cereals or yogurts, pastries galore - including mince pies, as well as plenty of excellent coffee. At 08.45 prompt our coach set off to find the Selimiye Barracks across the Bosphorus in modern day Uskadar in Asia. Our second experience of Istanbul traffic and progress was slow, but we were able to get our bearings and see the many bridges crossing the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus.

Disappointment... a phone call to Alp, and we were told that a Belgian delegation was visiting the Barracks, now the Head Quarters of Turkey's First Army, and our visit would have to be postponed. Imagine our consternation; surely we hadn't come all this way only to be denied access! However, we put our trust in the resourceful Alp, and after a detour found ourselves walking through narrow streets towards the vast domes of the Sulimaniye Mosque and a rescheduled visit to the Library.

The Museum Director, a charming and cultured man, delighted us with examples of rare and ancient books, explaining some of the detail and picking out medical and herbal examples to show us. He explained how Jesus is revered as a Prophet in Islam and Mary is held as the finest model of womanhood for Muslim girls, emphasising how much our cultures have in common.

Walking out again, past the Sulimaniye Mosque to the north, unfortunately closed for renovation, we visited instead the nearby Prince's Mosque, built by the same architect, Sinan, and in a similar style, though smaller. For many it was our first visit to a mosque, removing our shoes and covering our heads, we were kept fascinated by Alp's lively explanations. Back to our coach and we were whisked off to the rather trendy suburb of Ortakoy, its cobbled streets lined with a variety of cafes, restaurants and street vendors. Here we were to find ourselves some lunch and toilet facilities, as always with a strict instruction to be ready to leave on time. Whilst sitting enjoying a beer in the sunshine, a gusty squall blew up, with a little rain, putting paid to the plan of crossing by boat to the Asian side. We were beginning to appreciate Alp's ability to adapt the programme, and so were not surprised when he announced that we would go by coach instead. We crossed over the huge Bosphorus Suspension Bridge, opened in 1975, and linking Europe with Asia, our excitement mounted as the Barracks loomed ahead. Scutari at last - this was really the place. Entry was strictly controlled and handing over our passports, leaving all possessions on the coach we transferred to a military bus and drove to the main entrance.

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Scutari Barracks

Through the doors and turn right, “keep walking, no stopping, no photographs”, we were indisputably in the corridors where row upon row of soldiers had lain on beds 18” apart. Was the museum in the correct tower? For historians and academics this has always been an important question and there is some doubt. However, for the rest of us the fact that a museum has been kept there was enough and to see the small rooms and spiral staircase was so moving. There were many examples of letters and drawings on the walls. Simple furniture and little else were reminders of how stark the nurses had found their quarters on arrival, though of course beautifully clean now! A poem by a military man commemorating the gratitude of soldiers for the reforming work of Florence Nightingale hung on the wall (page 8), with her portrait. As we stood, gazing silently down the mile of empty corridor, we were so aware of the scenes, the lives, the stories played out there 150 years ago. It was a real spine-tingling moment, never to be forgotten.

Leaving the barracks we visited the British Cemetery, Alp explaining how the land had been given as a gift to the British. We were able to read many inscriptions chronicling the sad deaths of so many, young and not so young, men and women who succumbed to the awful conditions of that war.

In the traffic on our return to the hotel Alex kept us enthralled with his talk entitled “Florence Nightingale - the person” asking for a show of hands of who had visited various places connected with her life in England, Italy, Egypt, Germany and ending with a triumphant show from everyone when he listed “Scutari”! He pointed out how fortunate we were to have in our group Miss Nightingale’s nearest living relative, Margaret Povey, and also Sister Marion, former archivist at the Bermondsey Convent and no fewer than 8 nurses trained at the Nightingale School at St Thomas’s Hospital, London.



The Nightingale Nurses on the trip

Saturday morning, early breakfast and we were off to see the Egyptian Spice Bazaar, built in 1620 and still catering for the needs of local people. Heaps of spices and foodstuffs were displayed on the stalls and we were offered Turkish Delight to try as soon as we walked in, made with pistachios and honey it was quite unlike any I had tasted before. A chance to pick up scarves, jewellery and colourful ceramics, an hour soon passed and we reassembled for visits to the fabled Haghia Sophia, over 1400 years old and the Topkapi Palace, sumptuous home of the Ottoman Sultans until the mid 19th century. In the Haghia Sophia Alp told us that the damage to the mosaics that we saw had been caused by the Fourth Crusaders, looting and melting down anything gold.

Ironically, the fact that the rest was so well preserved was due to the Architect Sinan, employed by Suleiman the Magnificent, to alter the Byzantine church to a mosque at the beginning of the Ottoman period. This he did, being true to his own Christian past, by developing a wax paste to cover all the mosaic images. Thus in later years, when the mosque became a museum under the secular Turkish State, the wax was peeled off, revealing the preserved images for us to marvel at now.

The Topkapi Palace is now also a museum, laid out in pavilions and gardens. Decorated with 16th century Iznik tiles there is much to see to fire the imagination. Fabulous wealth of precious and semi-precious stones decorating everything from coffee cups to a baby’s cradle. We saw fur-lined Sultans kaftans of silk dating back to the 14th century, marvellously preserved and brightly coloured, collections of portraits and miniatures, vast kitchens, a library and a Turban room. Too much to take in during one short visit, some stopped for lunch whilst others just grabbed a sesame coated bread ring or bag of roasted chestnuts from the street vendors outside. As we left Alp pointed to crowds of people arriving. Two and a half thousand from a cruise ship...it was time for us to leave this part of town.

Another drive and talk on Ottoman history and our coach parked near the Grand Bazaar. Established in the 15th century this is a teeming labyrinth of streets, vaulted and lined by thousands of stalls. Florence Nightingale came here to procure essential items such as candles and blankets, and surely the atmosphere would be somewhat similar to today’s. Alex set us a challenge to try to find similar lanterns to the ones used then, and the sharp-eyed amongst us did.

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A traditional Turkish lantern

A talk that evening, by Karen Holyoak, gave us an insight into life in modern Turkey. Now married to a Turk she was able to give us a comparison with her former life in London. On our way home that night some of us spent an hour or so sitting on cushions enjoying the mild night air and surrounded by the night life and hubble bubble pipes. Another unforgettable day and back at the hotel I for one fell asleep in an instant.

Our last full day and we started by visiting the Basilica Cistern, a vast underground water storage chamber laid out in 532AD and thought to be one of 6 in total. The roof is supported by 336 columns brought here from destroyed pagan temples and each over 8m high. There is still some water in the bottom, and clever lighting, makes it a most atmospheric setting. Next by coach to the incredible Chora church, begun outside the city walls in the 5th century and described to us as the first ever cathedral. Now a museum, it has a wonderful collection of mosaics around the walls and ceilings showing the whole of the New Testament beautifully preserved. The afternoon was spent walking through Galata, across the Golden Horn stretch of water, exploring the British Crimean Church which was built after the war and paid for by subscription. It still serves the resident Anglican population, now mainly African and Korean. Nearby

we saw the old British Seamen's Hospital and one-time prison.

At 6pm we filed in to meet Professor Yesim Ulman who gave a clear and stimulating presentation on Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu, wife of the British Ambassador in 18th century Istanbul. Lady Montagu pioneered Smallpox vaccination and led the way by having her own children vaccinated, helping to encourage others in Britain to do the same. Professor Ulman was so charming, answering our many interested questions and providing us with food for thought on the successful eradication programme that rid the world of Smallpox. We were ushered out to catch an early evening sailing; our cruise delayed from Friday. The sun shone on us as we sailed down the Golden Horn and into the Bosphorus. Alp describing everything we saw over the p.a.! We passed the opulent Dolmabahce Palace, built in 1856 by Sultan Abdul Mecit who had wearied of the oriental style Topkapi Palace but whose extravagance of European style caused bankruptcy and preceded the foundation of the modern State of Turkey.

As we sailed up the coast Alp showed us modern sports clubs, expensive villas and explained to us why so many houses have remained empty: there was no mortgage scheme until very recently, so purchase/sale was outright or not at all. We saw a Boutique Hotel owned by a daughter of the former Sultan's family, having been allowed to return she was a successful businesswoman. The family apparently went into exile having lost all their money but having kept their jewels! Turning near the Bosphorus bridge, we came back down the Asian side, where we saw the Military Academy complete with an armed waterside guard, then a Hunting Lodge belonging to the Palace Gardens, villas in a different style, and the building used as the

Koulali hospital during the Crimean war, now a school. Building work was visible on a tunnel being built under the Bosphorus, which might ease the traffic a little. As we returned to port fishermen were casting their rods from the Galata Bridge, an old tradition in Istanbul, catching fish for their supper.

Back to our hotel for a half an hour turn round and our next stop was the enchantingly pink and picturesque railway station where once the Orient Express arrived. Pam told us how she and her husband had arrived there by train 40 years ago, just 6 months after their marriage. While her husband was photographing railway carriages Pam took herself off to visit Scutari, only to be very politely arrested and returned with military escort to her hotel. At least she made it this time!



View of Istanbul

The previous evening Alp had given us a detailed explanation of the life of a Dervish and the basics of Sufiism in preparation for our visit to a performance by the Medlevi Whirling Dervishes in the Station Hall.

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First came the musicians playing traditional instruments, strings percussion and wind, accompanied by 4 singers. Then came the Whirlers, moving very slowly and rhythmically at first, and then starting to whirl faster and faster in formation. It was a remarkable sight and the more so for being able to understand a little of the meaning, it was a form of meditation and a mystical experience.



A whirling Dervish

From there the coach took us to the Sandal restaurant in Kumkapi on the shore of the Sea of Marmara, an area specializing in local fish. "The Turks are very slow to start their meal" Alp told us "it's the Mediterranean in us" A cold starter of stuffed anchovies, vegetables, mezzes and tzatziki and Alp warned us to eat the bread sparingly "I am like your mother" he laughed. "There is a lot more food to

come!". Next a hot starter, spicy prawns, kalamari, salad, and then a grilled Black Sea Bream each. Dessert was huge piles of fresh fruit and a semolina and cinnamon pudding by which time musicians had arrived. 'Romanian street musicians' we were told, except the man playing the zither – like instrument, who was a serious musician trained at the Istanbul Conservatoire and with a music degree. He played a lively solo, and we were delighted when Pat led Emily and Sarah in a dance round the tables, much appreciated by the musicians and other diners and a wonderful last evening for us all.

And so our last muezzin call, last breakfast and view out over the Golden Horn and we walked down to the Egyptian Spice Bazaar to buy spices and Turkish Delight, mementoes to take home. After lunch of lentil soup in a terrace café, we loaded up our luggage and set off again on our coach, Alp managing to squeeze in a visit to the unmissable Blue Mosque en route to the Airport. Uniquely having 6 minarets showing its Royal Commission, the Blue Mosque takes its name from the mainly blue Iznik tiles which decorate the interior. Built in the early 17th century, it is the iconic silhouette of the Istanbul skyline. To reach the mosque we crossed the remains of the 3rd century Hippodrome laid out by Emperor Septimus Severus. The road follows what was the chariot racing track, though some 40' below the present level. Constantine then brought obelisks and columns from Ancient Egypt and Rome to give a sense of historical importance to his new capital. The Egyptian Obelisk stands on a marble base carved on 4

sides showing the Emperor Theodosius I and his family, chariot racing, and a detailed description of how the obelisk, already 700 years old when brought to Istanbul, was raised into position, using a mound of sand, wooden scaffolding and rope.

Entering the mosque itself, we were free to wander around and marvel at the vast space and the tile decoration designed to look like Persian carpets hanging on the walls. The overall effect was light and pretty, and surprisingly contemporary to our eyes. With the intonations of Koranic verses still in our ears we made our way back down the steps to our waiting coach.



Local architecture

Time to leave for the short drive to the Airport and to say our goodbyes. Our trip had been packed with information and unforgettable sights until the very last minute. The inaugural tour "In the Steps of Florence Nightingale" had proved to be very special and surely would never be forgotten by any of us. *EP*

*With thanks to Jon Baines Tours Ltd,
1A Salcott Rd London SW11 6DQ*

And finally

The poem in the Florence Nightingale Museum in the Barracks at Scutari

Hey Devoted, Faithful, Beloved Nurse, You,
You symbolise Virtue, you are honourable, you are exalted,
In the history of humanity, you are as glorious as the sun,
Maybe there are no flowers now on your grave, no roses,
Yet, all hearts are full of your holy statue,
Sleep well in your grave, you devoted nurse,
Each year, we commemorate you with more and more respect,
Appreciation to you from the peoples, my people always admire you
Our endless gratitude to you
We are endlessly indebted to you.

Colonel Tatim Alper

Florence Nightingale: The Woman and her Legend by Mark Bostridge

This newly published biography has received excellent reviews and is available in the Museum shop and from the Museum website, don't forget to quote the discount code **FNMFriends** to receive your 10% discount.

"Neither heroine nor harridan, Florence Nightingale emerges from a fine biography as a fully rounded yet remarkable woman" *Lucy Lethbridge, The Observer, Sunday October 19 2008*

"Bostridge sifts the fact from fiction, and, drawing on a wealth of previously unpublished material and unseen family papers, paints a vivid and immensely readable account of one of the most iconic figures in British history". *Guardian Bookshop Guardian.co.uk 2008*

Erratum

We apologise for an error in the last edition of *The Lamp*. The article 'Honorary Freedom of the City of London' included a reference to Edward VII bestowing the Order of Merit on Miss Nightingale. This should of course have read Edward VII, apologies.