

Mary Seacole Trust - Chair's introduction to the Annual Report

This was the year that the Mary Seacole Trust (MST) formally took on the baton from the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal (MSMSA) at a celebratory launch event on 29 June 2017 at the Black Cultural Archives. I am proud the MST is building on the solid foundation of the work of MSMSA to promote fairness and equality. I am also very pleased that MST achieved recognition of that work by being shortlisted in the "Community Organisation Award for Race, Religion and Faith" category of the National Diversity Awards 2017 in September and the award of a Certificate of Appreciation.

Our beautiful statue has become a popular London landmark, admired by staff and patients at St Thomas' hospital as well as visitors from far and wide. That Mary Seacole is an inspiration to many is evidenced by the numerous photographs taken of families and their children in front of the statue and the degree of social media interest. It is also gratifying that Martin Jennings' iconic artwork was shortlisted for the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) Marsh Awards in November 2017, a prestigious award that recognises "originality, aesthetic quality and sensitivity to its site" in public sculpture.

The statue was complemented this year by the unveiling, on 8 December 2018, of a memorial plaque, commissioned and funded by MST, honouring healthcare workers who have put themselves at risk to care for people caught up in conflict and natural disasters. I am delighted that the memorial has its home in the Millennium Gardens of St Thomas' Hospital, close to Mary Seacole's statue and in a place where there is such a strong connection to Florence Nightingale. Health workers like Nightingale and Seacole have, throughout history, provided the care people need in times of conflict and disaster.

A major success of the year has been the collaborative partnership with the Florence Nightingale Museum (FNM) to create a new Mary Seacole exhibit at the museum, which was launched on 28 October 2017. It shows Mary in her British Hotel and is used as a backdrop for interpretive story-telling with school parties. This is proving to be a valuable educational resource and gives black, Asian and minority ethnic children visiting the museum an opportunity to see themselves reflected and to value difference. We were also delighted to host a visit by the Jamaican High Commission to the exhibit on 14 November 2017, and be commended.

The Young Seacole Ambassadors (YSA) initiative was also launched at the FNM on 28 October 2017 and began in January 2018, as a competition for local school pupils. A key objective of the competition is to show that Mary's contribution is still relevant today, and by identifying her qualities in themselves and others the children will feel a greater connection to this historical figure. In line with our aim to increase our appeal to a younger age group, we have closely involved a young person in the project's development, thereby supporting his involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme.

A revamped website was up and running in time for the launch of MST at the end of June 2017. Work is now ongoing to upgrade the basic website to one which is well placed to promote the Trust's aims and attract more visitors, particularly young people.

We remain mindful of our responsibility to ensure the repair and maintenance of the statue and we are pleased that we have been able to bring this work within Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust's (GSTT) existing arrangements. We are most grateful for the unstinting work of GSTT in maintaining the statue's surroundings including the beautiful and tranquil Caribbean themed garden.

Our substantive work during 2017, including the delivery of MST's education programme, has been made possible by a grant awarded by Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, and the generosity of Moore Blatch LLP and "baton holders" Bush and Company, Partners in Costs Ltd and Photofile Ltd, to whom we are very grateful.

We intend to build on the successes of this productive year to ensure that Mary continues to inspire people of all ages to embody her qualities: hard work, compassion, entrepreneurialism and caring.

Trevor Sterling, Chair of the Mary Seacole Trust