

Rare Photograph of Mary Seacole on Display

A photograph, thought to be only the second original picture of Mary Seacole, was displayed at a panel discussion on May 14, hosted by the High Commission in London, to commemorate the life of the Jamaican-born Crimean War Heroine.

The photograph is contained in a scrap book, which was found in one of the libraries of the prestigious Winchester College in England. It was compiled by a former student, Ely Duodecimus Wigram, who was a British army officer in the 1800s. It was found by the College's Fellows and Eccles Librarian, Dr. George Day. The panel discussion, which was held on the eve of the anniversary of Mary Seacole's death on May 14, 1881, was told that the statue that is to be erected in her honour could be unveiled in 2015, as the fund-raising effort has now passed the £400,000 mark. Chair of the Trustees of the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal, Lord Soley, who was one of the panellists, said the statue would be the first to honour a named black woman in the United Kingdom. Lord Soley also said that it was unfair that Mary Seacole was "whitewashed" from the history of the Crimean War and was not recognized when a special memorial to the war was erected. The panel discussion was chaired by Dr. Simon Woolley, Chair of Operation Black Vote, who initiated a campaign to stop the British education authorities from removing Mary Seacole from the curriculum of British Schools. The other panellists were Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Regional Director, Bernell Bussue, and Senior Research Fellow in North East London Mental Health Trust and the Faculty of Health at South Bank University, Professor Tony Leiba. All spoke of the tremendous impact of Mary Seacole on British society and the nursing profession. They called for more formal and in-depth research into Britain's black history and for more of this history to be integrated into the school's curriculum. The panel discussion began with High Commissioner, Her Excellency, Aloun N'dombet-Assamba, highlighting the work of Mary Seacole. "You cannot exaggerate what a pioneer she really was, as a healer, as an entrepreneur and as an individual. She was well aware that there were many obstacles in her path, but she had no intention of letting other people's limits stand in her way. Mary Seacole was an excellent example of the long tradition of Jamaican women, who had forged ahead in the face of adversity to make their own way in the world," she said. One of the highlights of the evening was the showing of "The Doctress", a dramatisation of the life of Mary Seacole, which was produced by Videos for Change in Jamaica.