

B/N Seacole Mary

Mary Seacole portrait goes on show

LONDON (Reuters):

THE ONLY known oil painting of nurse Mary Seacole, known as the black 'Florence Nightingale', went on show at London's National Portrait Gallery yesterday after being lost for years.

Seacole, born in Kingston in 1805 of a white Scottish father and a mixed race mother, not only overcame the treatment

of women as inferiors but also the open racism of the era to make her way to Crimea and nurse wounded soldiers.

The oil portrait dated 1869 by little-known artist, Albert Challen, shows

Seacole in profile wearing a dark blue dress and red scarf with three medals pinned to her chest. It was discovered by chance, being used as the backing for a framed print.

Unlike her contemporary, Florence Nightingale, deemed to be the founder of modern nursing, Seacole was shunned by the British government when she offered her services as a nurse during the

Crimean War. Undaunted, Seacole, who learned her basic nursing from her mother and added to her knowledge through extensive travelling, paid her own way to the Crimea in 1854. There she established the 'British Hotel' near Balaclava to nurse sick and wounded soldiers, earning herself the affectionate title of 'Mother Seacole' in the process.