

# Dining out for Mary Seacole

Stuart Filton

Flights to Jamaica, a luxury holiday on the island and signed West Indies cricket and Chelsea football team shirts will be up for auction at a fundraising dinner to erect a memorial to Mary Seacole, the Jamaican Crimean War nurse. The event, at London's Living Room on the top floor of City Hall near Tower Bridge on February 21, is hoped to raise at least £5,000 for the appeal.

Other lots will include a signed picture of the Chelsea and England midfielder Frank Lampard, a menu signed by the West Indies cricket legend Sir Garfield Sobers and a picture of Big Ben signed by the Speakers of both Houses of Parliament.

The dinner, which will include a performance by the actress Cleo Sylvestre as Seacole and a Caribbean meal provided by Burrell Catering, is part of a big fundraising drive this year that Lord Soley, the chairman of the Mary Seacole Memorial Statue Appeal, hopes will ensure that the memorial is built by the end of next year. "It's a tight deadline, but it is possible," he said.

The fundraising will be further boosted by tens of thousands of pounds later this year from one or more music shows at the Brixton Academy or the Shepherds Bush Empire. The company that owns both London venues has agreed that all proceeds from the special events will go to the appeal.

Another key part of the effort to raise about £450,000 is that the artist who will design the memorial is to be named by the end of this year. The selection panel, chaired by Baroness Amos, Leader of the House of Lords, and organised by Philomena Davidson, the former presi-



Seacole: a self-taught nurse

dent of the Royal Society of British Sculptors who successfully performed the same role for the David Lloyd George statue in Parliament Square, is drawing up a brief that will invite interested artists to submit examples of their work. The memorial is intended to represent Seacole and also reflect the breadth of her life. It will be sit-

## Seacole came back to London a heroine

ed at St Thomas's Hospital, Westminster Bridge, across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament and home of the Florence Nightingale Museum, and will be built at cost price by the construction company Sir Robert McAlpine.

Lord Soley said that, once the artist had been selected, detailed plans of the design, hopefully including a scale model, would be available to show to potential large donors. Wedgwood, which is giving a piece of its china for the auction at City

Hall later this month, has pledged to make a unique item for each significant contributor to the appeal.

"It will be easier for the big donors to get involved once they see precisely what the money is for and the message that it will send, not just to the black community, but to all people in Britain."

It is also hoped that the effort will be supported by a member of the Royal Family, echoing the help given by Queen Victoria when London high society rallied around Seacole after she returned from the Crimea in poverty.

"It would be good to have the Royal Family back on board in support of Mary Seacole", Lord Soley said.

The self-taught nurse, herbalist and businesswoman had made her own way to the battlefield near Sebastopol in 1854 and ran a rest, refreshment and nursing post for troops, as well tending the wounded of both sides on the battlefields.

Having reportedly bought a large consignment of supplies just before the sudden end of the war, Seacole came back to London a heroine among the soldiers she had helped, but penniless. *The Times* led an appeal, backed by royalty, dukes and generals, that put her back on her feet. This newspaper's legendary Crimea correspondent, William Howard Russell, had reported on her work and, during the appeal, wrote a letter referring to Seacole's "courage, devotion, goodness of heart and public services".

*Tickets for the fundraising dinner, at £70 each or £650 for tables of ten, can be bought from Zoe Jammeh at the Royal College of Nursing on 020-7927 7230 or zoejammeh@rcn.org.uk.*