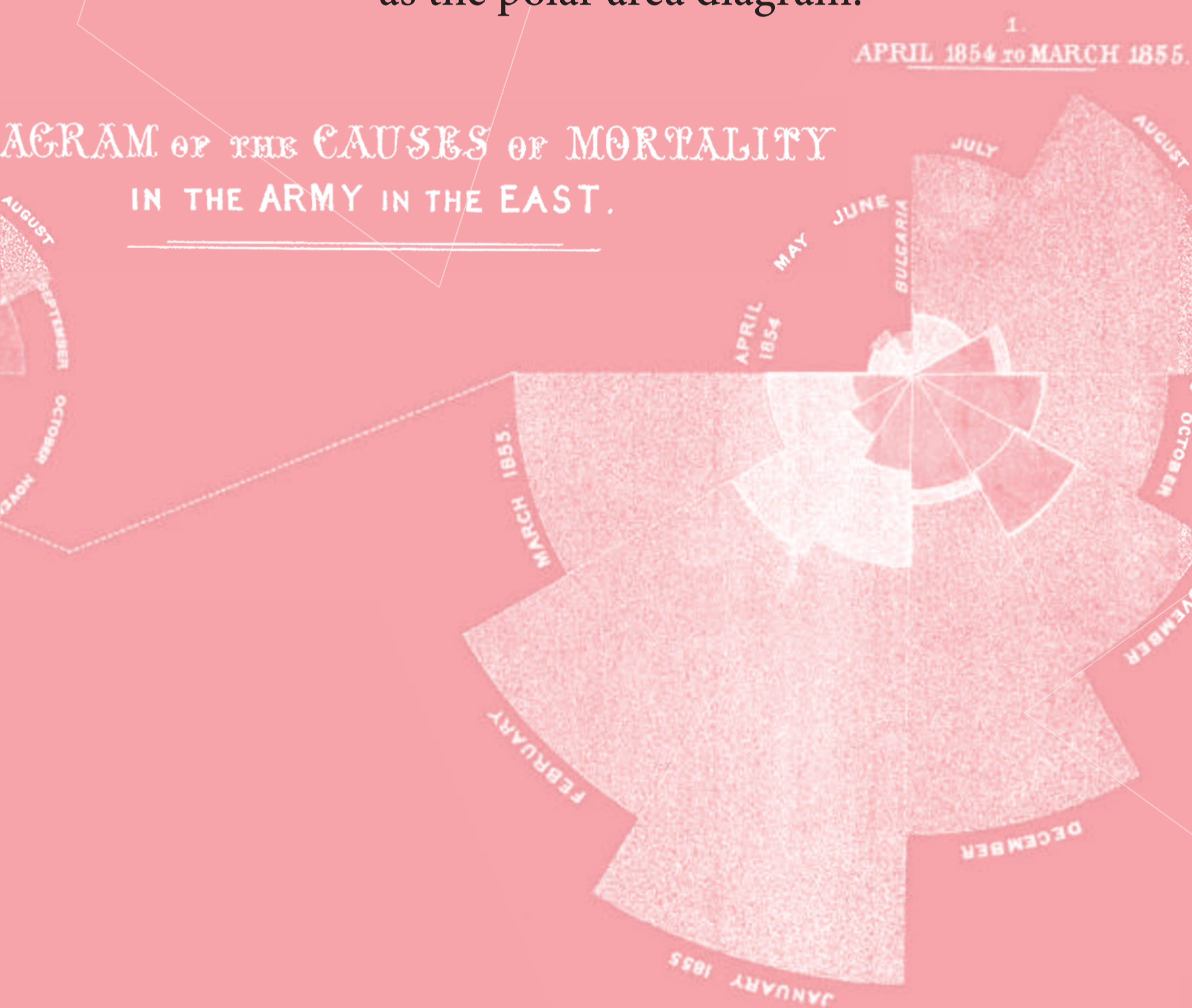# Florence Nightingale and Oxford Statistics

Florence Nightingale's influence on nursing is well known but her influence on the development and use of statistics is less familiar. Taught by her father, Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) showed a gift for mathematics from an early age, and studied the pioneering works on statistics by Adolphe Quetelet, one of the founders of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS).

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) & The Royal Statistical Society

The RSS was founded in 1834 as the Statistical Society of London, and Florence Nightingale became its first female member in 1858. She used statistical methods to analyse the mortality and medical data she had collected while nursing during the Crimean War (1853–6) and was a pioneer in the visual presentation of information and statistical graphics. She is credited with developing a form of the pie chart now known as the polar area diagram.

DIAGRAM of the CAUSES of MORTALITY IN THE ARMY in the EAST.

Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893)

After returning as an invalid from the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale met the reforming Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, and continued a long correspondence with him until he died in 1893. In 1874 after the death of Quetelet she suggested that 'the only fitting memorial to Q' would be to 'introduce his science in the studies of Oxford'. Though no mathematician, Jowett believed strongly in the use of statistics in medicine and developed a plan for their joint endowment, supplemented by 'begging of the rich people of the world', of a Professorship of Statistics at Oxford.

The Department of Statistics

Sadly Jowett's plan came to nothing, although a highly distinguished statistician, Francis Edgeworth, held the post of Professor of Political Economy in Oxford from 1891 to 1922. Oxford's first Professor of Statistics was appointed in 1948 within Social Studies, and in 1988 the Department of Statistics was established within the Faculty of Mathematics.

Oxford Mathematics