

A temporary transformation - The first women students at St George's Medical School, London

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Introduction

Early Days

St George's Hospital was established in 1733 located at Hyde Park Corner in London. The Medical School was more formally established in 1851 and admitted around 30 men each year. They studied to become surgeons, physicians and apothecaries.

The Prospectus made it clear that only men could apply and most had done their pre-clinical studies at Cambridge, Kings College (London) or Oxford.

First World War brings change

In 1915, with the *First World War* gradually drawing potential students into the armed services and potentially reducing the number of male students there had also been an increase in numbers at the London Women's College of Medicine. This put pressure on the clinical training places and in 1915 five women wrote to the dean at St George's requesting a three month attachment to the hospital wards. The medical school committee agreed to this.

The student register shows their signatures. Daintree decided to return to the LWCM but the remaining four completed their clinical training at the Corner, as St George's hospital was affectionately known. Preliminary qualifying medical examinations were set by the University of London, the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons and the Society of Apothecaries.

Our first four women students

Helen Ingleby was the first woman to qualify in 1916 and was appointed House Physician and Assistant Curator of the Pathology Museum.. A few months later Ethelberta Claremont qualified and was appointed House Surgeon and also Assistant Curator of the Pathology Museum. Elizabeth O'Flynn and Marian Bostock qualified and also undertook house jobs at the Corner. A further five women medical students were admitted in 1917, seven in 1918 and two in 1919. The medical school minutes show that the senior clinical staff were divided as to whether women should be admitted but as the war progressed realized that there may be a shortage of qualified men. One of the physicians in favour was Arthur Jex-Blake, nephew of Sophia Jex-Blake, one of Britain's first female doctors and a co-founder of the LMSW.

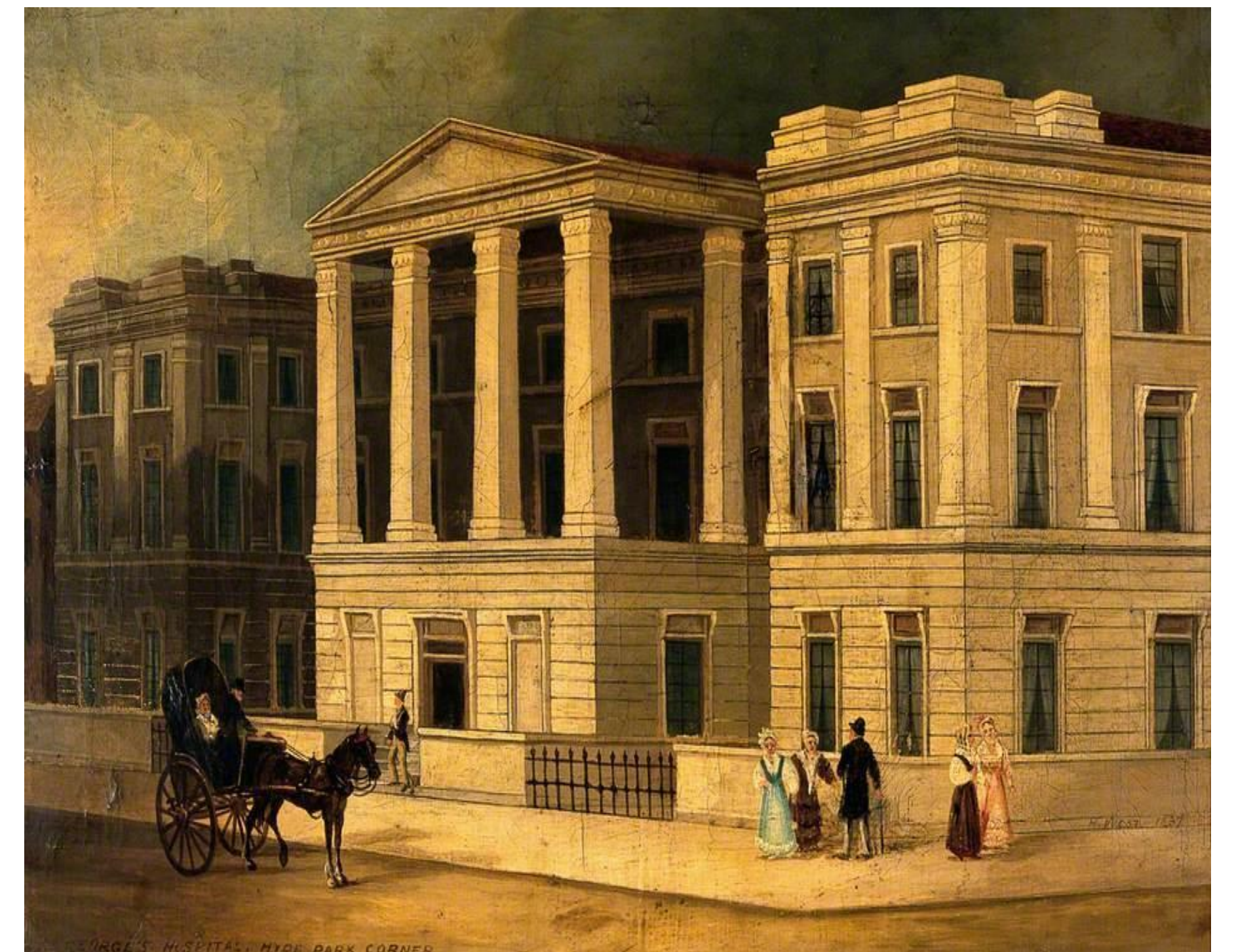
In later years Ingleby became a distinguished breast pathologist in the USA working initially at the Women's Medical School in Philadelphia. Bostock worked as a missionary surgeon in India before returning to her native Canada. O'Flynn stayed in London and was a pathologist at the Queen's Hospital for Children. Sadly, Claremont died of typhus in London in 1924, the first female Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons to pass away.

No more women students were admitted until 1945.

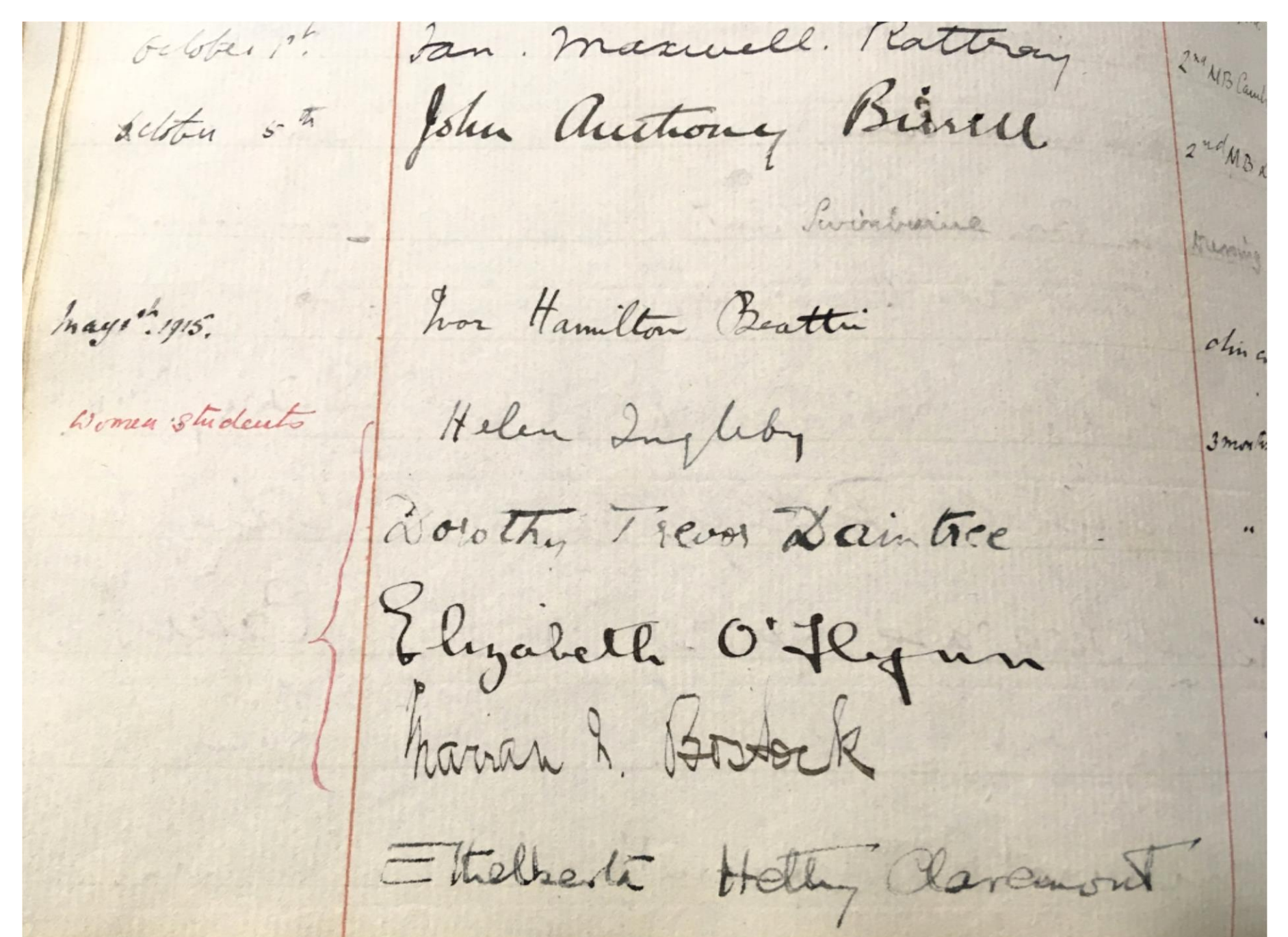
There is no real discussion about women medical students in the medical school minutes or student gazette after 1919 and until 1944. In 1945 five women were admitted and the number stayed in single figures until the late 1950s. After that the proportion slowly increased becoming around 50% in the 1990s and by 2015 reaching over 60%. In 2016 St George's appointed Dr Jenny Higham as it's first woman Principal.

Transformation took over 200 years but it came.

(This poster was presented at the British Society for the History of Medicine at Edinburgh in September, 2017)



Wellcome Collection. New St George's Hospital, Hyde Park Corner, London. Oil painting. Used under CC BY license.



Register of pupils 1837-1946 (SGHMS/B/1/18), St George's Archives & Special Collections, University of London. Used with permission.



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