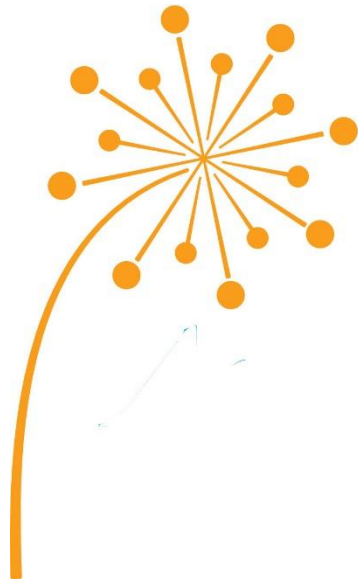


herstory
an urban pilgrimage reflecting AUC values

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to *herstory*: an urban pilgrimage produced by Augustine United Church in Edinburgh.

herstory is a way of exploring the areas around Edinburgh's George IV Bridge, home to our church congregation, and seeing the city through a new lens. It's about just a few of the women who lived, worked and made a difference in this part of Edinburgh.

You can download **our audio podcast** of *herstory* and "walk the talk" around the streets near our church building. An interactive map is available on the Augustine website: www.augustine.org.uk.

This short pilgrimage is an opportunity to ask why individual women matter to those who explore their Christian faith at Augustine; how, in their very different ways, these women say something about the progressive, inclusive beliefs held by Augustine's members and friends.

Whether you read or listen to *herstory*, or walk the pilgrimage itself, you will have the opportunity to discover stories, make connections, and reflect on your own beliefs and priorities. We offer you a time to read (or listen); time to pause; and time, if you wish, to pray.

Photo:
Simon Jones



1. WHY HERSTORY? (Augustine United Church)

<Our walk begins on George IV Bridge, which connects with the Royal Mile, and beside Augustine United Church – directly opposite the popular Elephant House café.>

Why a *herstory* pilgrimage?

Augustine United Church (AUC) has a motto: “Growing seeds of justice and joy”. It mirrors our dandelion logo. Every day we strive to develop in line with our radical and independent roots; an every-changing community growing in depth and numbers. From its inception in 1802, successive generations of AUC members have endeavoured to engage meaningfully with the communities around them.

Especially in this century, our story has been one of upholding and furthering equality and diversity, both within our church community and in wider society. This doesn’t mean we’ve always got it right. In fact, when it comes to promoting the role of women in leadership, we – like most Christian communities – have lagged behind other parts of society.

Our church contains within its heritage the first two denominations in the UK to ordain women as ministers: the Congregational Union of England and Wales (that was Constance Coltman in 1917); and the Congregational Union of Scotland (“the CUS”). In April 1929, the CUS permitted the designation ‘minister’ to apply equally to women as well as men. However, it took Augustine almost a hundred years before it got round to appointing a female minister!

It wasn’t plain sailing in 1929 either. **Vera Findlay** became Scotland’s first woman minister, ordained at Partick Congregational Church in Glasgow, which she’d begun serving the year before. But after she married Colin Kenmure four years later and then had a baby, she resigned from Partick because of opposition to the idea of having a married mother as a minister. Vera declared: “A married woman makes an ideal minister. If she is a mother, so much the better, because her gift of understanding is increased”.¹

Augustine’s own first female minister, the **Revd Fiona Bennett**, was inducted here in 2009. But we need to recognise that our values have evolved over many years, often in response to life “beyond” the church.

It is the place of some women in that “life beyond” that this pilgrimage will help us explore. We will discover their influence in the fields of
education,
medicine,
politics,
ministry,
and in the cause of Equality and Diversity.

¹ With supporters, Vera moved on to found Hillhead Congregational Church in 1936. She served at Pollockshields 1954 – 68 and became a spokeswoman and figurehead in Glasgow for woman’s equality – regarding her ministry as encompassing wider civic responsibilities. She helped to pioneer marriage counselling.

More information

Among many other remarkable women who also have connection with Augustine, we can name:

Mary Parnaby

was both a member of Augustine and the daughter of a former minister, Henry Parnaby. She became Dean of Women at Moray House, Edinburgh's teacher training college.

Anne Jane Anderson (1847 – 1935), the great grandmother of current AUC member Robert Somerville. She was actively involved with overseas mission causes, and campaigned on behalf of the "Edinburgh Seven", whose story is told below. Jane herself went on to support the training of other women doctors and medical missionaries.

At the end of this pilgrimage, we will also learn about **Jo Clifford**, playwright and actor, and a current Augustine member whose photo features in our display board in the porch.

In their different ways, the lives and concerns of these women reflect Augustine's endeavour to re-balance the world, giving voice to women who have felt marginalised, or been debarred from living to their full potential in the Church or in society at large.

2. EDUCATION (George Square)

<From Augustine, turn left down George IV Bridge towards the National Museum.

On Bristo Place, you will pass a striking red sandstone building – currently housing Checkpoint, which The Times declared to be one of the "25 coolest restaurants in Britain". This building was home to Bristo Place Church until 1941 when it joined with Augustine on George IV Bridge to create Augustine Bristo Congregational Church.

As you cross Bristo Square, facing you is Teviot Row House.

Teviot is the oldest purpose- built Student Union in the world. It opened its doors in 1889 and is nowadays also an important Fringe venue. We will hear about Teviot again towards the end of our pilgrimage.

Crossing over the cobbles at the junction with Crichton Street, enter George Square and, for many, the heart of Edinburgh's oldest university.>

In Edinburgh's George Square, we are surrounded by buildings belonging to the city's oldest university. In 2017-to-18, there were over 50 per cent more female students enrolled at the University of Edinburgh than male students.²

We take for granted that women and men have equal access to education at all levels, but this hasn't always been the case. Indeed, it's a relatively recent phenomenon – though there have always been those who have pushed the cause of education for girls and women.

In Scotland, many of us take for granted that women and men have equal access to education at all levels, but this hasn't always been the case. It's a relatively recent phenomenon – though in Edinburgh there have long been those who have pushed the cause of education for girls and women.

For example, there is the well-regarded Mary Erskine School, whose beginnings lie in a "Maiden Hospital" funded in the 17th century by **Mary Erskine**, a widow and successful businesswoman.

Mary Erskine donated money to establish a girls' school in the Cowgate (for "daughters of impoverished burgesses"), and the Merchant Maiden Hospital was founded in June 1694. Mary continued to fund the development of female education³, both in her lifetime and from bequests following her death in 1707.

At the tail-end of the 19th century, **Jessie Chrystal Macmillan** <image right> became the first female science graduate from the University of Edinburgh. She went on to become a Liberal politician, barrister, feminist and pacifist.⁴



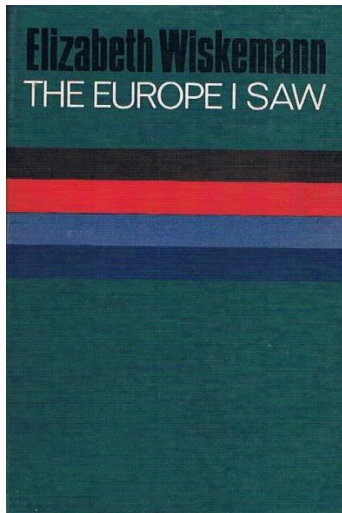
² [Annual review of student numbers](#)

³ See [Erskine Stewart's Melville Schools website](#)

⁴ In 1908, Chrystal became the first woman to plead a case before the House of Lords. She had taken the University to court because it refused to allow women graduates to exercise their right as members of the University's General Council to vote on the Member of Parliament who would represent the university seat – she was referred to as a "modern Portia". The case failed, but attracted international publicity.

But our main “education story” is that of **Elizabeth Wiskemann**, who was born in 1901 and is remembered as a journalist, academic and war hero. In 1958, she became the very first female professor at the University of Edinburgh. She became known not only for her own lectures but for inviting national and international experts to lead discussion groups on issues of the day.

As a journalist working in Berlin, Elizabeth had been one of the very first commentators to warn about the dangers of fascism and the rise of the Nazi party. She was expelled from Germany by the Gestapo in 1936, and spent most of the war working as a spy. Though she was posted as a press attaché in Switzerland, she was in fact gathering intelligence from Germany and occupied Europe.



In 1944, British Intelligence realised that Hungarian Jews were being transported to Auschwitz. Elizabeth asked that the Allies bomb railway lines in order to stop the transportations, but her request was turned down due to limited resources. So, she came up with a plan. She sent an unencrypted telegram to the Foreign Office, which deliberately included the addresses of a number of Hungarian government officials with the power to stop the exodus. Elizabeth suggested these locations be bombed.

She knew that the Hungarian authorities would read this telegram. When, coincidentally, several of the buildings listed were hit in a US raid, the Hungarian government thought Elizabeth’s suggestion was being acted upon and stopped deportation.

In her later career as a journalist and academic, Elizabeth Wiskemann, who died in 1971, wrote about the Europe she had seen and the rise of fascism, exploring the roots of European conflict. It was because of this work that she was appointed to the Montague Burton Chair of International Relations in 1958.

REFLECTION

One of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. However, in the world today, there are 796 million illiterate people, and two-thirds of them are women. Just 39 per cent of girls from rural communities attend secondary school; yet we know that access to education and opportunity changes whole ways of life.

The presence of women in Jesus’s group of early followers was both surprising and radical. The conversion of the merchant Lydia by St Paul is an important moment in the development of the early Christian communities. Yet male figures dominate our biblical narratives as they do modern society.

Is it your experience that women still have to push hard to break through the proverbial glass ceiling, in our public and business institutions, and in our churches too? In Scotland, we have begun to understand a little better how educational opportunities and female role models such as Jessie Macmillan and Elizabeth Wiskemann have made a significant impact on the lives of women beyond their own communities. If this is true of our tiny, northern nation of Scotland, how may this realisation be shared more widely around the globe?

More information

Brenda Moon (1931 – 2011), the first woman chief librarian of a major research university (Edinburgh), worshipped at Augustine for 30 years. George Square Library, where she was based, is situated on the south side of the square. It was designed by Sir Basil Spence, who also designed the new Coventry Cathedral after World War 2, and the famous high-rise flats in the Gorbals area of Glasgow.

The letter writer **Jane Welsh Carlyle**, wife of Thomas Carlyle, is remembered with a plaque at 23 George Square.

When the original George Square was redeveloped in the 1960s, what had been **George Watson's Ladies College** on the north side was retained. (Initially Nos. 4 to 7; expanded in the 1920s to absorb Nos. 8 to 10.)

In 2002, a memorial sculpture in the gardens named "The Dreamer" was erected to the memory of **Dr (Margaret) Winifred Rushforth OBE** (1885 – 1983). Winifred was a Scottish medical practitioner and Christian missionary in India. Influenced by Hugh Crichton-Miller and his friend C.G. Jung, she became the founder of a family clinic in Scotland, a therapist, Dream Group facilitator and writer. The sculpture, by Christopher Hall, was dedicated by Prince Charles.

More about Elizabeth Wiskemann

[University of Edinburgh's Our History pages](#)

[First Woman Professor, 1958](#)

3. MEDICINE (Elsie Inglis Quadrangle, Teviot Place)



<From the cobbled junction with Crichton Street that you crossed earlier, turn left along the top edge of George Square Gardens. At the far end of the Square, you will see on your right the Chrystal Macmillan Building, which houses the University's School of Social and Political Science. Also on this side of the square, a seven-bed hospital was opened in 1899, known as the George Square Nursing Home. It was established by the Medical Women's Club, led by one of the women we will hear about shortly: Elsie Inglis.

The university's Old Medical School runs along much of the south side of Teviot Place. The entrance to the complex is announced with grand gates – if they are open, walk under the entrance arch and find yourself inside the Elsie Inglis Quadrangle <image left>

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In July 2019, seven women graduated from the University of Edinburgh. This may not sound remarkable to us; however, the graduation took place 150 years after the women had “matriculated” – begun their studies – at the university.

These women became known as “the Edinburgh Seven” – the very first women to be accepted as students at the university. Their leader and motivator was **Sophia Jex-Blake** (1840 – 1912). <image right>

There is a plaque in her honour on the east wall of the entrance archway to the Medical School Building.⁵
<image below>



Sophia had already shown her credentials as an impressive student. While studying maths at Queen's College in London she accepted a post as mathematics tutor at the College. However, her heart became set on training as a doctor. Harvard in America would not accept a woman for training, so she tried Edinburgh – which also refused at first because it was considered too difficult to make the “necessary arrangements” for just one woman to study.

So Sophia encouraged six other women to join her in her goal and in 1869 “The Edinburgh Seven”⁶ began their studies. Their path was not made easy. They were charged higher fees than their male counterparts, and had to arrange their own lectures since university staff were permitted but not required to teach women.

⁵ A round plaque is inscribed: "THE UNIVERSITY / of EDINBURGH / IN HONOUR OF / SOPHIA LOUISA / JEX-BLAKE / 1840-1912 / PHYSICIAN, PIONEER OF MEDICAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN BRITAIN / ALUMNA OF THE UNIVERSITY".

⁶ The Edinburgh Seven: Sophia Jex-Blake, Isabel Thorne, Edith Pechey, Matilda Chaplin, Helen Evans, Mary Anderson Marshall and Emily Bovell

And when they made their way to The Surgeon's Hall in November 1870 in order to sit an anatomy exam, they were met by a mob that pelted the women with mud and rubbish <image right>. The women were ushered into the building, but as they sat their exam a sheep was pushed into the room to disrupt them. The invigilating professor is said to have commented: "The sheep can stay; it is clearly more intelligent than those out there."



Nevertheless, the seven women were not allowed to sit all the exams they required, and eventually the university refused to let them graduate. A number of them travelled to Europe to complete their studies – Sophia herself qualified in Berne.

It wasn't until 1889 that an Act of Parliament sanctioned degrees for women; and the first women to graduate from University of Edinburgh did so in 1894. (Officially. . . but, as we'll learn at the end of our pilgrimage, there was at least one remarkable exception!)

Meanwhile, Sophia became instrumental in setting up the London School of Medicine for Women, and later returned to Edinburgh to found the Edinburgh Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children. One of her students was **Elsie Inglis** (1864 – 1917).



Elsie <image left> was an innovative Scottish doctor and suffragist. In 1904 she opened "The Hospice", a hospital for women and children, on the Royal Mile.⁷ Then, in 1914, Elsie volunteered her services as a surgeon to the War Office only to be told, "Go home, dear lady and sit still." She didn't!

Instead, she established the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service, which went out to France as well as to Serbia to help the soldiers there. The hospitals provided nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers, cooks and orderlies. By the end of the war, 14 medical units had been outfitted and sent to serve in Corsica, France, Malta,

Romania, Russia, Salonika and Serbia. In 1916, Inglis became the first woman to receive the Order of the White Eagle, the highest honour Serbia could bestow.

REFLECTION

Elizabeth Blackwell, a colleague of Sophia Jex-Blake and another pioneer of women in medicine (both in the United States and in England), described Sophia as a "dangerous woman" because of her steely determination to break down closed doors. By breaking down closed doors, Sophia

⁷ "In November 1899, at the same time as [Sophia Jex-Blake's] Edinburgh Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children moved to Bruntsfield Lodge, the Medical Women's Club led by Elsie Inglis opened a seven-bed hospital, known as the George Square Nursing Home, at 11 George Square. In 1904 the Home moved to 219 High Street and was renamed the Hospice: its main aim was to provide assistance to the poorer women of Edinburgh during pregnancy and confinement. In 1910 this Hospice amalgamated with the Bruntsfield Hospital." ([Lothian Health Services Archive](#))

encouraged her peers and was a mentor to those who, like Elsie Inglis <image right>, followed in her path.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the story of a judge who is repeatedly approached by a poor widow seeking justice. He keeps knocking her back until, eventually, her persistence wins out. Nevertheless, the fact that the judge appears only to relent for the sake of a quiet life is unsettling. The task of seeking real and consistent justice is an ongoing one. So is the need to tell the stories of those who have spoken truth to power.

It's all very well for us to speak of justice and Christian values in Sunday worship – but if we can't take our voices beyond our church doors, what good are our good intentions?



More about Sophia Jex-Blake

[Curious Edinburgh](#) (also for Elsie Inglis)

[BBC News 4 April 2019](#)

[BBC News 16 November 2018](#)

More about Elsie Inglis

[“Plaque unveiled in Central Library”](#) (The Edinburgh Reporter)

Chris Holmes [“The legacy of Elsie Inglis – Edinburgh’s shame”](#)

[Lothian Health Services Archive](#)



Elsie with her hat: Great Tapestry of Scotland www.scotlandstapestry.com



The Hospice, 219 High Street



Plaque in Elsie Inglis Quadrangle Old Medical School

4. POLITICS (Friends Meeting House, Victoria Terrace)



*<As you approach George IV Bridge, you will cross the junction with Candlemaker Row and pass the statue of Greyfriars's Bobby. On your left is the gated entrance to Greyfriars Kirk. Among the memorials and gravestones in the kirkyard is a commemorative stone dedicated to **Mary Erskine**. Greyfriars is also the home congregation of **Dr Alison Elliott**, a Church of Scotland elder. In 2004, Alison became the first female Moderator of the Church of Scotland – and also the first person not ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament to hold the post since the middle of the 16th century.*

Further along George IV Bridge, Edinburgh Central Library houses a plaque honouring Elsie Inglis, unveiled in 2017. (It's on the first floor landing if you want to see it.)

Shortly after passing the library, cross over the top of Victoria Street (don't walk down the street itself) and on to Victoria Terrace, which begins next to Pizza Express. A few metres along on the right, on the corner of Upper Bow, you will arrive at the central Edinburgh Friends Meeting House.>

The Society of Friends <image above> – popularly known as the Quakers – is a religious organisation with pacifism and a desire for social justice at the heart of its foundation. Quakers in Britain campaign for equality through three specific areas of social justice: migrant and refugee rights, housing conditions, and a more compassionate criminal justice system. For Quakers, and also for the members of Augustine, politics is about making lives better, especially for those who live on society's margins or who are without power in their relationships. And there are different ways of doing politics.

We first meet **Ethel Moorhead** <image right> in December 1910. Dubbed "Dundee's Rowdiest Suffragette", Ethel threw an egg at Winston Churchill, the city's MP.

She missed.

Churchill was the Liberal government's Home Secretary at the time. He was addressing a women's political meeting in Dundee, and extolling the merits of the "gallant Liberal Party". Though Churchill was seen by his party as a social reformer, according to one report, "Miss Moorhead rose and reminded him that the said gallant party was forcibly feeding women in prison, and to express her indignation she threw an egg at the Home Secretary who had ordered this brutal treatment."

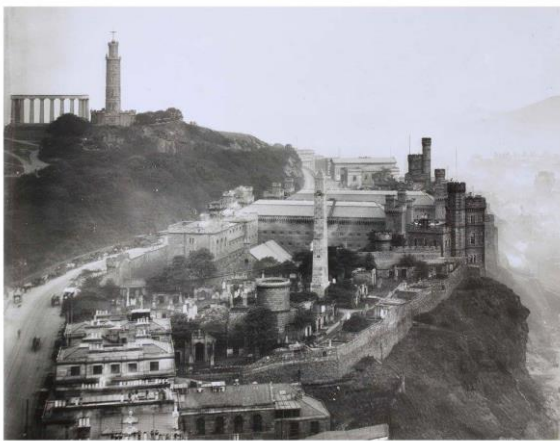


Until this point, Ethel (born in 1869, so now in her 40s) was best known as a painter of portraits <image right>, and in later life she'd return to Paris, where she co-edited *The Quarter*, an arts journal that featured some of the most famous poets and writers of the day.

But the 1910 incident marked her emergence as an activist of the first order. She was arrested for attempted arson at Traquair House in the Borders; and she was probably the woman who escaped capture when Lord Kitchener's niece, Fanny Parker, tried to blow up the Burns Cottage in Alloway. Ethel was imprisoned for her actions on several occasions, and became known for smashing cell windows, throwing buckets of water over guards and flooding passageways. But in 1913, while imprisoned in Calton Jail <image below>,⁸ she became first Scottish suffragette to be forcibly fed – the very policy over which she had vented her anger at Churchill.



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“Force feeding” was a brutal undertaking which had an awful physical impact on women’s bodies.⁹ Ethel’s case aroused considerable public outrage in Scotland and women protested and waved flags outside the jail each day. When Ethel was eventually released, suffering from double pneumonia, the Liberal MP for Leith lost his seat as a consequence after people saw Ethel being stretchered into a local doctor’s house.

Nearer to our own time, another woman who made a lasting impact on the lives of others was **Ruth Adler** <image right>, who died aged only 49 in 1994. Ruth did politics through organisations and by embodying the fundamental Jewish ethic of justice.

According to her close friend, Fran Wasoff, “family history informed so much of what Ruth would do.” Her parents, who were lawyers in Germany, had both just qualified as judges in the year that Nazi legislation banned Jews from that role. Deprived of their livelihoods, they came to Britain as refugees in the 1930s. Later, three cousins who survived the Holocaust were taken in by her family in London. Just as championing the underdog was a hallmark of Ruth’s adult life, so was hospitality. At her funeral it was said: “Ruth cared and she had room.”



⁸ On the side of Calton Hill, overlooking Waverly Station

⁹ Mary Henderson’s [online biography of Ethel](#) includes a detailed and upsetting account of the treatment Ethel and others like her suffered. This is a helpful document to read, as the simple phrase “force feeding”, alone, doesn’t express the brutality of what was involved and the awful physical impact on the women’s bodies.

Ruth moved to Scotland with her husband Michael Adler in 1971. Here, in her short but incredibly active life, she put her beliefs into action in countless ways: as an enthusiast for Jewish culture, a feminist, a human rights campaigner and a child welfare advocate. For Ruth, it was important that there were organisations to underpin justice.

She was one of the founders of Scottish Women's Aid in 1974, which set up the first women's refuge in Scotland. She saw this as a feminist initiative; a practical response to violence against women in marriage or partnerships. She sat as a member of Lothian Region Children's Panel for nine years; and in 1983 she helped establish the Scottish Child Law Centre. In 1991, Ruth became the first Development Officer for Amnesty International in Scotland, with offices in the Student Centre in Bristo Square, passed earlier in this pilgrimage.

All this work drew on her formidable academic skills (she had gained a PhD from Edinburgh University's Law School in double quick time, while parenting young children). It was also informed by her belief that what she stood for should be translated into practical action, particularly to support those who are vulnerable.

She loved organising and "wanted to get on with the job" – but at the same time family and friends alike say she was always there for you. *Individuals* were important to Ruth Adler; not just organisations or movements.

REFLECTION

The lives of both Ethel Moorhead and Ruth Adler are two very different demonstrations that politics isn't just for "politicians". For Ethel Moorhead, protest-by-action became the only way forward. She said: "How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed." On the other hand, as one obituary put it, Ruth Adler believed that "for rights to be protected and justice achieved sound theory and individual commitment are not enough; organisations are needed".

In the Gospel of John, Jesus finds himself questioned by a Samaritan woman at the village well. Jews considered Samaritans to be a second-class people, and presumably the women were even more so. Yet this woman enters into debate with Jesus, confidently and thoughtfully. She is claiming the right to share in the experience of justice and joy that Jesus speaks about. Is she also, in fact, a model for political engagement? In what ways are we – or could we be – "political"? Can we identify situations in which we, as individuals, might bring faith to bear in the realm of politics, sowing (as the Augustine motto has it) "seeds of justice and joy for people and planet"?

More information

Reporting on the 2016 Holyrood election campaign, Meryl Kenny wrote: After a campaign during which it certainly felt like women's representation was firmly on the agenda, the new [Scottish] parliament offers a meagre 35% or 45 women MSPs [out of 129], the same tally as 2011, and again lower than the bar set at the time of the parliament's inception in 1999, of 37% and 48 women."

On the occasion of the centenary of the 1909 Suffragette march in Edinburgh, Fiona Hyslop, then Scottish Education Secretary, commented: "[Edinburgh] saw the first suffragette to be force-fed in a Scottish prison, Ethel Moorhead, imprisoned in Calton Jail. . . I think she would have found it hard to

believe that one day offices of the Scottish government would stand on that very spot, a government not only elected by women voters, but including women ministers.”

More about Ethel Moorhead

I. Mary Henderson, “Ethel Moorhead: Dundee’s rowdiest suffragette”

<<https://ethelmoorhead.org.uk/>>

More about Ruth Adler

Obituary in the *Independent*, February 1994

<<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-ruth-adler-1396592.html>>



1909 Suffragette march along Princes Street



Winston Churchill, Home Secretary, with Lloyd George



Ethel Moorhead in older age

5. MINISTRY (New College Quad)

<Either return to George IV Bridge and turn left, crossing over the Royal Mile and on to The Mound. Follow road to the left, on to Mound Place. Past the traffic lights, keep to your left, onto the cobbled street that takes you to the entrance of New College, the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity. Walk into the Quadrangle.

Alternatively:

Walk up Upper Bow (which is a bit of a pull) to the Royal Mile and cross the Lawn Market to the back entrance of the Church of Scotland General Assembly Hall. Just below the entrance, turn into Milne's Court Close and walk down the steps to Mound Place, overlooking Princes Street. Turn left, and it's just a few yards before you enter the Quadrangle of New College.

Stand in the shadow of John Knox, his hand raised, in full preaching mode.>

John Knox was the dominant founding figure of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. He is not remembered for his love of women. While still in exile in Europe, he wrote a powerful polemic directed at women in authority: *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. He was thinking of Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I.¹⁰



Though this put Knox (right, admonishing Queen Mary and her courtiers) on a collision course with the most powerful women of his day (and it's a wonder he died in his bed and not headless!), this doesn't mean Knox didn't like women! It was hinted that the twice-married father of five children was also something of a "ladies' man".

Still, Knox would have been as equally opposed to the idea of women standing in a pulpit as sitting on a throne. Yet over the years, many pioneering women have, quite literally, changed the face of Church in Scotland. We have already heard about **Vera Kenmure**, the first woman ordained in a Scottish mainstream denomination. Within the Church of Scotland, Scotland's national denomination, things took a little longer.

¹⁰ The women in question were the queens of his time, including Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I. He used the words "monstrous" and "regiment" in an archaic sense to mean "unnatural" and "rule," arguing that female dominion over men was against God and nature. He lamented that the future of the Protestant faith lay solely in the hands of a female monarchy largely hostile to its precepts. Unlike John Calvin, for instance, he opposed the rule of women even in cases when there was no male heir to the throne.



Elizabeth Hewat (1895 – 1968) was among the first woman to study theology at New College, and the first to graduate, in 1926, with a Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Born in Ayr, Elizabeth (pictured left, in the centre) had already proved herself to be a woman of considerable intellectual ability, graduating with an MA from Edinburgh and taking up a post as assistant lecturer in history at the University of St Andrews. She moved to the progressive United Free Church Women's Missionary College in Edinburgh from 1921, and while teaching there completed her BD at New College.

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Elizabeth's ambition was to work as a missionary, like her sister. But she also believed that to fulfil this role properly she should be ordained. Her case was brought to the 1926 United Free Church General Assembly, which was told that Elizabeth had come top of her class at New College, "making it difficult to argue that she could not be put on the same level as men".¹¹ But the motion to ordain Elizabeth failed. Three years later, in 1929, it would be a much smaller Scottish denomination, the Congregational Union of Scotland, that would allow women to be recognised as ministers in the same way as men.

Elizabeth herself went to join her sister in China. She continued her academic work, achieving a PhD in 1933, also from New College. Moving to become Professor of History at Wilson College in Bombay, she was ordained as an elder in the United Church of North India and so frequently conducted worship in the Scots Kirk and elsewhere. Though never ordained into the Church of Scotland ministry herself, she helped lay the path for those who would be – led by another pioneer of ministry, **Mary Lusk** (later "Levison").

Mary petitioned the Church of Scotland General Assembly of 1963 "to test her call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament". Mary was already a deaconess and formidably well educated. She had represented the Church of Scotland at the World Council of Churches 4th Assembly and, in 1957, had become the first woman in the Church of Scotland to be licensed to preach. But this wasn't yet enough for the General Assembly, which rejected her petition.

The tide had turned, however, and the debate led inexorably to a decision in 1968 for Scotland's national church to open ordained ministry to women on the same terms as men. *The Herald* newspaper likened what Mary had achieved for women in ministry to what Sophia Jex-Blake had achieved for women in medicine.

Mary herself had married by this time and (by her own choice) wasn't ordained until 1978, by which time she was already an assistant minister at what was then St Andrew's and St George's Church on George Street. From there, Mary Levison, as she now was, worked as a chaplain to the city centre's shops. In 1991, she was appointed a Queen's Chaplain – the first woman to hold the position. We have to ask ourselves what John Knox would have made of that!

¹¹ From Lesley Orr's entry into *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* p.198

REFLECTION

Elizabeth Hewat expressed her conviction that it was “not Christ barring the way” for women in ministry. And Mary Levison, in her autobiography, described herself as “wrestling with the church”.

How often do those on the “outside looking in” at the Christian Church ask themselves, “Why is the Church struggling to keep up with the times?” Richard Holloway, the former Bishop of Edinburgh, said some years ago that the Church was slow to campaign against slavery; it was slow to campaign for the ordination of women; and where LGBTQ rights were concerned it hadn’t even got started. Even today, Holloway’s basic argument still stands: Given the radical nature of Jesus’ ministry, why does the Church have such a marked tendency towards conservatism, with a small ‘c’?

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More information

Theology has been taught at the University of Edinburgh since its foundation in 1583. New College was founded as the theological college of the Free Church of Scotland, following “The Disruption” of 1843. In 1935, New College was merged with the Faculty (now the School) of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh.

Other significant “firsts” for women in New College:

In 1996, **Ruth Page** became the first female principal of New College.

Marcella Althaus Reid was the first woman to hold a professorial chair.

Elizabeth Templeton was the first woman to hold a full-time lectureship in the university’s Faculty of Divinity.

In 2018, for the first time, the roles of Principal of New College and Head of the School of Divinity are both held by women – **Professor Susan Hardman Moore** and **Professor Helen Bond**.

More about Elizabeth Hewat

[Edinburgh University alumni pages](#)

More about Mary Levison (née Lusk)

Mary Levison *Wrestling with the Church* (1992: Arthur James Ltd)

6. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY (The Scotsman Hotel – former Scotsman offices)

< From the entrance of New College Quad, you can look across to George Street and make out the spire of the church where Mary Levison was a minister. This is the historic St Andrews & St Georges Church (now St Andrew's and St George's West).

Now you have a choice.

Either cross the road at the traffic lights and follow the Googlemaps route down Market Street and on past the rear entrance to the Waverley Station. Turn right into the enclosed Scotsman Steps (104 of them!) and climb up to North Bridge and the Scotsman Hotel at the top.

Alternatively – for a step-free route:

Follow North Bank Street, passing the Museum on the Mound and what was the HQ of the Bank of Scotland. Stay on the left-hand pavement. This will lead you into St. Giles' Street and round the corner, back on to the Royal Mile. Turn left and walk down the hill, crossing over the top of Cockburn Street, to the junction with North Bridge and turn left. (On the way, you will pass 219 High Street, with plaques marking it as the location of Elsie Inglis' Hospice. <image right>)

Just 100 meters down North Bridge, on the left, is The Scotsman Hotel. For almost the entirety of the 20th Century, The Scotsman newspaper had its offices here. Past the main entrance, you can stand away from the pavement at the top of the Scotsman Steps.>



Our pilgrimage has focused on the contributions of women to the city of Edinburgh over the centuries; but, in a broader sense, we have also been exploring the drive towards equality and diversity, to which Augustine brings its own Christian commitment.

Campaigns for equality and diversity have taken many forms over the years. In 1974, for example, The Scotsman offices were a stopping point for a march organised by the International Gay Rights Congress. The gathering had drawn around 2,000 people from all over the world to the city that year, and the march set off from Teviot Row House, which we walked past right at the beginning of our pilgrimage. In a way, this was a Pride march 21 years before the first *actual* Pride march.



One of the people who worked inside this building for a time was **Sue Innes** (1948 – 2005). <image left> Sue was many things: a journalist, writer, historian, researcher, teacher, artist and feminist campaigner. One of her lasting gifts to us is the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, which she co-edited.

Sue was committed to helping other women tell their stories. She was a founding member of Women's History Scotland and her book *Making It Work* described the way life changed for women in the 1990s. In 1995, she was also warning that the newly emerged World Wide Web was not, even then, a safe space for women. Sue described it as "a new medium with an old message: keep out."

With **Jo Clifford**, Sue formed a lifelong partnership and an unconventional nuclear family. As “John” Clifford, Jo became one of Scotland’s most prolific leading playwrights. From childhood, however, she had known she wanted to be a woman and she, like Sue, overcame much to escape the expectations of her upbringing as a boy. (Sue had been raised amongst the strict Christian sect of Plymouth Brethren in Peterhead.)

Since 2009, Jo – who is a member of Augustine’s congregation – has become especially well-known for performances of her play *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen Of Heaven*: “a kind of communion service” which imagines Jesus as a trans woman. *The Scotsman*’s theatre critic, Joyce Macmillan has written that “though the play is the gentlest of shows, driven by Christian values of love, tolerance, and reverence for creation, it has outraged those who take a traditional patriarchal view of Christianity.”

There are many other women that we could have spoken about on our pilgrimage. Women like **James Miranda Barry**: to all appearances, a man who trained first at Edinburgh, and went on to become an outstanding military surgeon, working in South Africa. It seems likely, though, that Barry was in fact a woman – graduating from Edinburgh University long before its first official female graduates.

How Barry thought of her own gender identity is still debated, but one thing we can be sure of: that by living as a man, James Barry achieved what at the time it would have been impossible for her to do as a woman. We who pride ourselves on advances in equality and diversity in Scotland have to ask ourselves — to what extent is this still the case?

REFLECTION

In 2015, Jo Clifford went with her daughters to the Glasgow Women’s Library and dedicated a section of it to the memory of Sue Innes. On that occasion, Jo recalled something Sue had taught her: that “‘the personal is political’. That it was important to live according to our beliefs and bear public witness to our values and that would change the world in more ways than we could imagine.”

Sue Innes described the Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women as a project that sought to move beyond just the well-known figures of history and include “women who were never eminent, but whose lives illuminate the world of ordinary Scotswomen of their time and place, bondagers and bookbinders, fishwives and housewives”.

Who are the women who have illuminated our lives? Have they inspired us from their public position – perhaps their position of fame – or have they been the quiet saints among us? As we walk from this pilgrimage back into our different lives and different places of work or play, whose “herstory” would we like to tell to others? Whose life as a woman still needs to be told?

More information

The [Glasgow Women’s Library](#) was opened in September 1991. It remains the only accredited museum dedicated to women’s history in the whole of the UK and is a designated ‘Recognised Collection of National Significance’.

More about Sue Innes

[Obituary the *Independent*, March 2005](#)

[A tribute by Jo Clifford](#)

[Engender](#)

More about Jo Clifford

["Jo Clifford, Jesus, Queen Of Heaven, and fighting bigotry in Brazil"](#) (*The Scotsman*, December 2018)

Want to know more?

Here are some places to start.

History and short biographies

Ewan, Elizabeth et al (eds) *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (2018: Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press (“NBDSW”))

Galford, Ellen and Ken Wilson *Rainbow City: stories from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Edinburgh* (2006: Edinburgh, Word Power Books)

Golemba, Beverley E. *Lesser-known Women: a biographical dictionary* (1992: Boulder, Colorado and London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.)

Law, Cheryl *Women, a Modern Political Dictionary* (2000: London and New York, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd)

Sheridan, Sara *Where are the women? A guide to an imagined Scotland* (2019: Edinburgh, Historic Environment Scotland)

[Edinburgh University Equality and Diversity web pages](#)

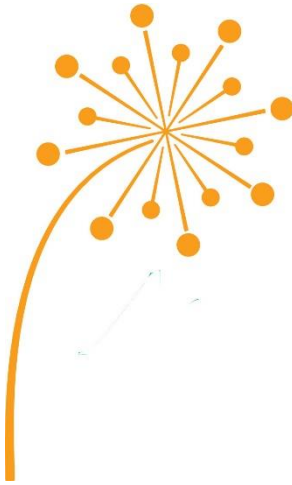
Women – contemporary situation

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

[UN Facts and Figures about women](#)

Meryl Kenny [“The Scottish Parliament’s record on women’s representation is in the balance”](#)

Conclusion



We hope you have found this pilgrimage informative and thought-provoking. This is a prototype resource and we'd love to hear about your experience of it. Let us know at

communications@augustine.org.uk. Thankyou.

Herstory is an Augustine United Church production.

Writing and research

Caro Penney, Fiona Bennett, Laurence Wareing

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Production

Denis Mallon, Thomas, McPolin, Laurence Wareing, and the Augustine Visitor Ministry Team