

100 years of women members: The Society's centenary of women's admission

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The Society's admission of women

The Society was famously founded in 1876 as a dining society, and although women contributed to *The Journal of Physiology* and The Society's meetings, there was a reluctance to invite them to join as members. Even after a formal resolution to admit women, accepted at the 1915 Annual General Meeting, the prevailing opinion was to not invite them to the dinners, which at the time included live demonstrations. Ernest Starling, when considering women as possible members, stated that 'it would be improper to dine with ladies smelling of dog – the men smelling of dog that is'.

Florence Buchanan, the first woman member



Florence Buchanan's grave in Oxfordshire

John Scott Haldane proposed Florence Buchanan, the former research assistant of his uncle, John Scott Burdon Sanderson, the late Professor of Physiology at Oxford, for membership of The Society in 1912, which is thought to be the call to action for The Society to consider the admission of women. The two were family friends. Florence was the first woman to attend a Society Meeting in 1896, although she did not attend the dinner.

She was also the author of the first article in the first issue of what is today *Experimental Physiology*.

Florence was eventually admitted in 1915 with five other women physiologists: Winifred C. Cullis, Ruth C. Skelton, Sarah C. M. Sowton, Constance Leetham Terry and Enid M. Tribe. As candidates were voted into The Society alphabetically she is the first female member of The Society. Florence remained friends with the Haldanes, frequently joining them for lunch, and apart from a brother, Sir George S. Buchanan of the Ministry of Health, had no immediate family.

Woman bequeaths her eyes

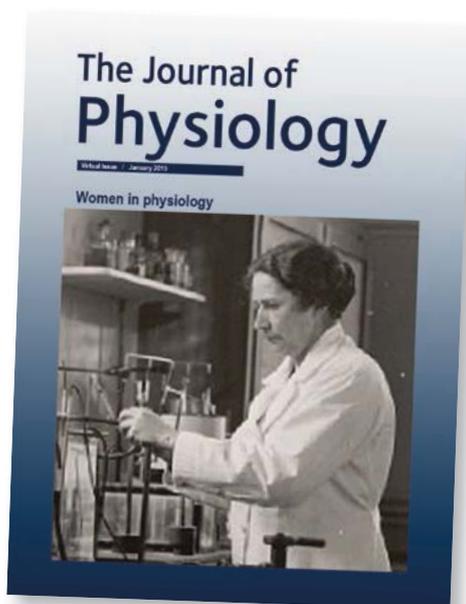
During our research on Florence Buchanan for the preparations for the centenary year; we came across a short and intriguing sentence on the internet; 'Woman bequeaths her eyes'. It turned out to be from an online transcript of a short article in the Dundee Courier from 20 June 1931. Florence herself died on 13 March 1931.

It was known that Florence suffered from poor eyesight during the final years. She actually had a detached retina, according to Naomi Mitchison (née Haldane). The Dundee Courier article tells us that Florence gave directions in her will that her eyes be removed and preserved so they could be examined. She gave £250 out of her estate, valued at £11,729, for 'the histological examination of her eyes, and publication of the findings, together with her own account of phenomena, which she had herself observed since 1922, and the preparation for publication of any other MSS she might leave concerning vision.' So far I have been unable to find anything published about the findings.

Society centenary events

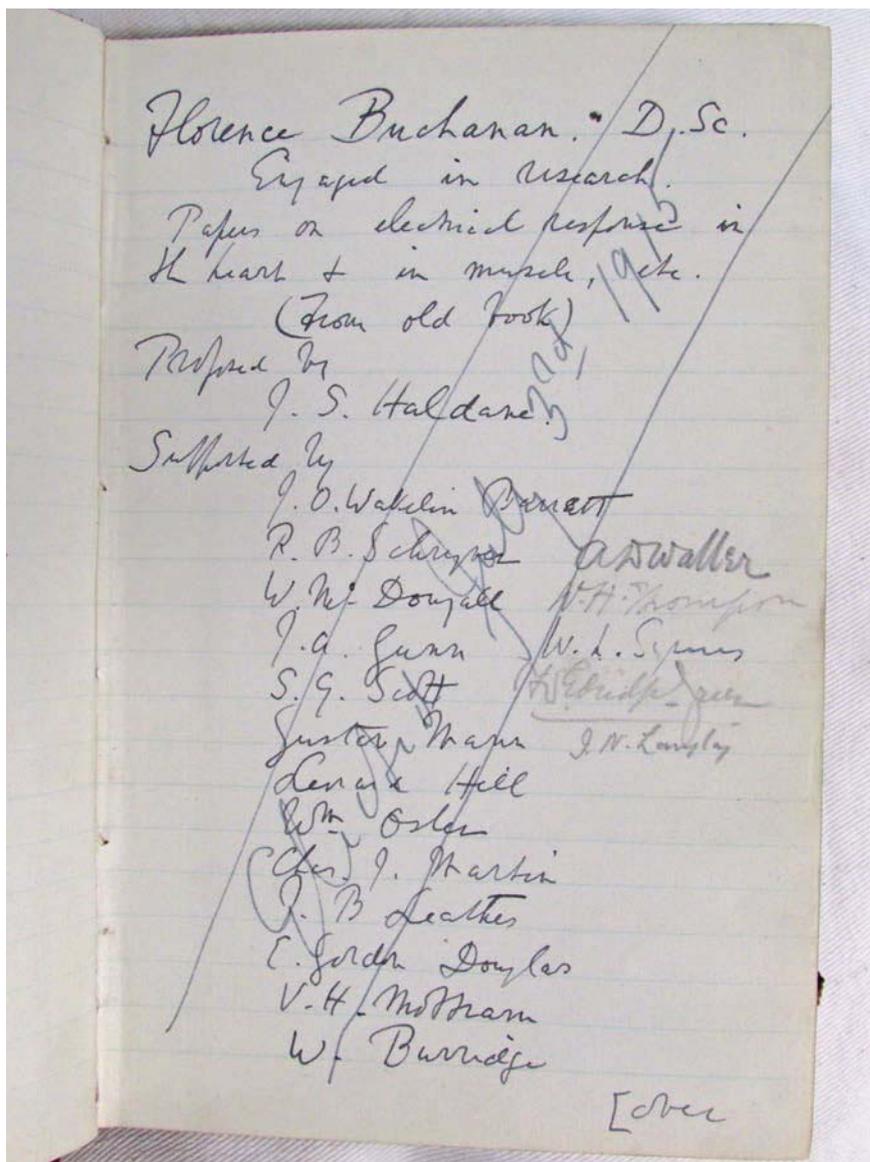
In 2015, The Society will be celebrating the first women's admittance with a series of events. These will include a symposium at Hodgkin Huxley House on the research done by The Society's first six female members in September and a National Schools Competition which was launched in March.

The Journal of Physiology celebrates centenary with virtual issue



To celebrate the centenary we have compiled a virtual issue that highlights some of the most influential and important papers authored by women and published in *The Journal of Physiology* since it was first published in 1878. This issue features papers published by four of the first female members as well as other notable female physiologists during the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. We hope you enjoy having a look back at our history and celebrating the impact that female physiologists have had since *The Journal* was first published.

The cover image of the virtual issue shows Marie Krogh in her laboratory, courtesy of The Royal Library, Denmark, The Collection of Prints and Photographs.



The entry for Florence Buchanan in The Society's Candidates' Book

Further reading

The first women members of The Physiological Society www.physoc.org/history-physiological-society-and-its-journals-information-sheets

Tansey T (2015). Women and the early *Journal of Physiology*. *J Physiol* **593**, 347–350.

Bindman L, Brading A & Tansey T (eds) (1993). *Women Physiologists*. Portland Press Ltd, London.