

# An event great with possibilities

Public recognition of the professional person in the white coat or the smart suit is no longer dependent on gender and today no one questions the ability of women pharmacists to practise as competently as their male colleagues. In 1905, however, there were only 195 women pharmacists registered in Britain (1.2 per cent of the total Register) and the Association of Women Pharmacists was set up to look after the rights of this minority. In this article, **Sue Symonds** describes the inaugural and first public meeting of the association



**White chrysanthemums decorated the tables at the first public meeting in 1905 and were described by one report as “a characteristic touch indicating the predominant influence of womenfolk”**

**O**n 15 June 1905, a group of women pharmacists met at 5 Endsleigh Street, London, the home of Isabella Clarke Keer (Isabella Skinner Clarke), to form an association that was to have far reaching effects over their own lives and those of generations of women to come — the Association of Women Pharmacists. The objectives of the association were determined as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- “To bring forward and discuss questions relating to the employment of women in pharmacy, both from an ethical and practical standpoint.
- To keep a register of those members requiring assistants or locum tenens, and to put them into communication with such members as may desire employment. To this end the Association will advertise at definite intervals in the pharmaceutical and medical Press.
- To keep a register, if possible, of all qualified women and their appointments.
- For the furtherance of social intercourse.”

Membership was to be confined to women holding either of the Pharmaceutical Society’s certificates (Major or Minor) and subscription rates were set at five shillings for members of the Society and 10 shillings and sixpence for non-members. After that inaugural meeting 50 women indicated their intention of joining the new association. The office bearers elected at the meeting were women pharmacists who had already emerged as dynamic forces within the profession, often battling against odds to overcome prejudices.

## Isabella Clarke Keer

The first president was Isabella Clarke Keer, who, as Isabella Skinner Clarke, had taken the Society’s Preliminary Examination in 1874, the Minor Certificate examination in 1875 and in the same year, passed the Major Certificate, coming third out of all the candidates. Such achievements should have entitled her to full Society membership but, despite repeated applications, this was denied until 1879 when Isabella Clarke Keer became one

of the first two woman pharmacists (the other being Rose Coombes Minshull) to be admitted to the Society.

In October, the Council had been forced to concede that views had changed. *The Pharmaceutical Journal* reports one Council member, Alexander Bottle, saying he would vote for the motion “as a matter of courtesy, which he thought they had well earned by passing the examinations, and also with the view of bringing about a peaceful termination to a question which had formed a bone of contention for some years. A prolonged agitation would be infinitely worse than admitting even a dozen women into the society.”<sup>2,3</sup> It is ironic that success had come more from the Council’s exasperation with the campaigners’ persistence, rather than a realisation of what was fair and just. Council members certainly did not foresee a day when women would equal or outnumber men on the Register.

**Sue Symonds**, PhD, MRPharmS, is a member of the NAWP executive

## Margaret Buchanan

The vice-president was Margaret Buchanan, who later became the association's second president. Margaret Buchanan had a distinguished academic career. She achieved the remarkable feat, in 1892, of being the only woman student of the Society's School of Pharmacy to take double honors, certificates in class, and the Silver Medal of the Society given by the Council.

After working as a dispenser at Westminster Hospital Margaret Buchanan ran a shop in Clapham, taking in female apprentices, before turning to teaching. In 1905 she began taking private pupils in a house she purchased in Gordon Square, London, and in 1910 this became the Buchanan School of Pharmacy (renamed the Gordon Hall College of Pharmacy for Ladies in 1925).

Margaret Buchanan became the spokesperson for women in pharmacy, contributing articles and letters on their behalf to pharmacy journals and to the literature on work for women. She was the first woman to be elected (in 1918) as a member of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society. During 1922 she travelled extensively in Canada as a Council representative, submitting a comprehensive report on pharmacy practice in that country. She was also for many years Chairman of the Benevolent Fund Committee.<sup>4</sup>

## Elsie Hooper

One of the joint secretaries, Elsie Hooper, was one of the first women to undertake research in British pharmacy and was the first woman to be awarded the Redwood Scholarship and later the Burroughs Research Scholarship. She published papers on Belladonna root, Cinchona bark and other medicinal plant extracts.

From a lectureship in the chemistry department at Portsmouth Municipal College, Elsie Hooper joined Margaret Buchanan at her School of Pharmacy for Women, which became the official address of the new association.

Other office bearers were Georgina E. Bartrop (joint secretary), and Hilda Caws (treasurer), who registered in 1903 and 1904, respectively.



Hilda Caws, treasurer



Isabella Clarke Keer, president

## Inaugural meeting

A report in *The Pharmaceutical Journal*<sup>5</sup> indicates that discussions at the inaugural meeting were animated, particularly concerning the issue of the difficulties encountered by women pharmacists in finding employment. There were references to the "latent power of women" and calls for "strength through union". These rallying calls were already in common use within the National Union of Women's Suffrage, which was just beginning to attract public attention.

The reporter anticipated that one of the prime objectives of the association would be to influence and remedy an existing situation whereby the directors of public institutions, where the dispensing was often done by unqualified staff, failed to recognise that it was desirable, if not essentially necessary, that the dispensing of medicines should be performed by duly qualified persons. It was hoped that the association might be able to educate medical practitioners and the public in general to appreciate the value of pharmaceutical qualifications in such situations. One might speculate that the use of feminine powers of persuasion in this way may not have been among the more important objectives of the new association.

Other situations facing the association have surprising parallels in more modern times. *The Journal* report expressed a hope that qualified women could be dissuaded from allowing their services to be exploited by unqualified persons or companies. This



Elsie Hooper, joint secretary



Margaret Buchanan, vice-president

comment was prompted by news of the establishment of a "chemists" business, the Queen Drug Co., conducted solely by women with little or no formal qualifications. Among the trades to be pursued by this new company were chemists, apothecaries, engineers, journalists, moneylenders, house agents and coal merchants. It was unfortunate that one of the named "qualified" women on the directorate was a Miss Buchanan. A statement from Margaret Buchanan disclaimed any connection with herself or the company.

## First public meeting

The first public meeting of the association was held on 17 October 1905, at the Pharmaceutical Society's headquarters in Bloomsbury Square. The *Chemist and Druggist*<sup>6</sup> reported it as an occasion "at once historical and novel", with over 100 women present and about 12 men. The meeting was chaired by the vice-president, Margaret Buchanan, who summarised the aims and objectives of the association as agreed at the inaugural meeting, and then introduced the guest speaker, Louise Creighton. The choice of Louise Creighton as guest speaker was almost certainly prompted by her prominence as the first president (1895-97) of the Union of Women Workers, later to become the National Council of Women.

Further comments on the new association appeared in the pharmaceutical press over the following weeks. There were letters to editors, both supporting and doubting the value of such an organisation. The *Chemist and Druggist* published a poem entitled "The eclipse of the male person" and its Xrayser column<sup>6</sup> described the foundation of the association as "an event great with possibilities" but went on to contemplate the "petticoat peril" that might threaten the future of pharmacy. However, Xrayser added a reassuring note: "That the ladies can beat us in the classroom has been proved many times. Nor does anyone doubt their ability to dispense medicines elegantly and accurately. Moreover it may be expected that they would make their shops look prettier and keep them neater than we do. And yet in the quarter of a century since they first asserted their right to a share of the pharmaceutical work, they have scarcely made any progress towards business rivalry".

It is doubtful that such overt paternalism would get past the copy editors today. It would appear that Xrayser did not foresee any real threat in commercial terms from the new association but did acknowledge that “if pharmacy were really a profession, or rather if there were enough of the professional part of it to distribute, the ladies would be far more formidable competitors.” He agreed with Louise Creighton’s opinion that “visible assertiveness in a woman is not attractive” and thought that was the reason why attractive women would not be likely to succeed in commercial enterprises.

Despite these and other disparaging comments from the press, male pharmacists and, one suspects, from some women, the new association was well and truly established. Meetings were held monthly, with a wide range of topics being discussed. At first these were held in the Society’s headquarters in Bloomsbury Square, but it soon became apparent that interest had spread beyond London. In 1918 the association became the National Association of Women Pharmacists (NAWP) in order to “extend the function of the association as a national organisation for

all qualified women pharmacists and to facilitate the formation of local groups in any part of Great Britain where women pharmacists feel the need of such development in their district.”<sup>7</sup> A meeting held on 20 November drew up a constitution and laid down the rules of formation and affiliation of local groups. Subsequently, branches were established in Manchester, Nottingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Newcastle, Blackpool, Portsmouth, Exeter and Cardiff, as well as in London.

### Conclusion

The NAWP has been active for 100 years, changing its aims and objectives as circumstances and times dictated. The “event great with possibilities” has, indeed, led to the realisation of more possibilities than can ever have been imagined. The NAWP celebrates its centenary confident in the knowledge that it still has an important role to play both within pharmacy and in the wider sphere of women’s health. Although there is no longer the need to fight for employment opportunities and conditions, the association has a significant voice in many public arenas.

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### References

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## A story told in an old pharmacopoeia

Pharmacist Robert Mead found a British Pharmacopoeia from 1914 on a second hand book stall some years ago. Inside the front and back covers are stuck eight cuttings that give a snapshot of the life of one woman pharmacist, J. T. (Lizzie) Hughes, of Penmaenmawr, North Wales. Some of the cuttings are in Welsh.

After she lost her husband in 1914, Mrs Hughes carried on his business. She attended the Liverpool School of Pharmacy and qualified by passing the Society’s minor examination in eight months.

This was no small undertaking for a woman at that time. As one cutting states: “Every credit is due to her for her plucky resolve.”

The pharmacopoeia also contains the list of successful minor examination candidates and a photograph of what is probably Mrs Hughes’s class at Liverpool. Touchingly, inside the pharmacopoeia was also tucked a telegram sent from Southampton Row, London, to Hughes Chemist Penmaenmawr on 7 July 1916. It simply states: “Qualified, Lizzie”. — *Contributed by Briony Hudson.*



**A LADY CHEMIST.**—Hearty congratulations are extended to Mrs. T. J. Hughes, widow of the late Mr. T. J. Hughes, chemist, and daughter of Mrs. Bailey, Bryn Awel, who has successfully passed her final examination, and has become a qualified chemist. Mrs. Hughes lost her husband a little over two years ago, and with an assistant she has been able to carry on the business. In October last she attended the Liverpool School of Pharmacy, and after a little over eight months' study she successfully qualified as a member of the Pharmaceutical Society. Her sister, Miss Annie Bailey, B.A., is head-

**North Wales Second Lady Pharmacist in Business.**—A matter of much congratulation to North Wales in general is the fact of Mrs. Hughes, Penmaenmawr, having passed her Minor at the first attempt. On the death of her husband in 1914 she engaged a qualified assistant, and courageously settled down to study for the Minor, her labour being rewarded by her recent success. Every credit is due to her for her plucky resolve. North Wales can now boast of two qualified lady pharmacists in business for themselves.

# Reliving the first public meeting



**Back row, left to right: Barbara Maude (treasurer), Sue Symonds, Veronica Pearson, Virginia Watson. Front row, left to right: Brenda Ecclestone (secretary), Hazel Baker, Vela Burden (vice-president), Monica Rose (president), Christine Heading, Judy Maconochie.**

*The lecture theatre of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain was on October 17 the scene of a meeting at once historical and novel. The occasion was the first public meeting of the Association of Women Pharmacists.*

With these words the *Chemist and Druggist* (21 October 1905, pp645–6) began an account of the meeting at which the Association of Women Pharmacists was formally launched, declaring its aims to be the improvement of employment opportunities and working conditions for women pharmacists. A hundred years later, guests attending the centenary dinner of the National Association of Women Pharmacists (NAWP) were aware of a potent sense of history as they participated in a re-enactment of that first public meeting. Edwardian costumes were worn and the gracious surroundings of the Hill Education and Conference Centre, Abergavenny, much of which dates from the early 20th century, provided a fitting backdrop. The exact nature of the evening's proceedings was not revealed until the formal business of the dinner had been concluded, and the presence of an unfamiliar face at the top table, named as "Mrs Creighton" on the printed programme, caused much speculation.

Members of the association's executive committee had been asked to re-enact the roles of the association's first elected officers. They followed a script based on the detailed report published in the *Chemist and Druggist*. White chrysanthemums and autumn-tinted leaves decorated the tables, exactly as at the 1905 meeting (described in the report as "a characteristic touch indicating the predominant influence of womenfolk").

Margaret Buchanan, vice-president, (Monica Rose, NAWP president) chaired the meeting and welcomed the 100 or so women pharmacists and about 12 men who were present — a gratifying attendance given that there were only 195 women pharmacists on the 1905 Register. The association's

officers were introduced and apologies from the president, Isabella Clarke Keer, who was unable to attend, were made. The vice-president welcomed the president of the Pharmaceutical Society, Richard Robinson, (played by Nicholas Wood, immediate past president of the Society) and its treasurer, Walter Hills (Michael Burden), and noted the presence of representatives from the pharmaceutical press. After briefly outlining the aims and objectives of the new association Margaret Buchanan called upon the guest speaker, Mrs Louise Creighton (actress Lydia Bateman, Everyman Theatre Cardiff), a founder member of the Union of Women Workers, to address the meeting on "The present responsibilities of women".

**Key note address** At the outset, Louise Creighton declared that she had no knowledge of pharmacy, but wanted to address the general question of women's responsibilities. Women had made great progress since the beginning of the 19th century, but could the improved education for women that had occurred over the past 100 years be maintained and carried forward? There had been warnings that such improvement might result in the neglect of the family and home. She stated there was no evidence to support this claim, but believed that "women should show by their conduct that such suspicion is not justified." The steady work of pioneers in the movement for the education of women was to be commended. She continued, "I believe that the hope of the future consists in getting women to work with men, and their conduct must not be such as to damage the position of other workers."

Mrs Creighton stressed the need for proper education and training, and for women to only accept such payment as was appropriate to that training. Mrs Creighton warned her audience not to be careless about trifles. Women workers, she said, should be especially careful in dressing daintily and neatly, and not so as to attract attention. They must learn to use their new independence wisely. "Visible assertiveness in a woman is not attractive," she

declared. She regretted that one result of the education of women was to throw them apart from men and she referred in complimentary terms to the comradeship existing between men and women in Russian revolutionary circles. As regards working women and marriage, she believed that any woman who has trained for higher work could easily and readily take up the work of a married woman. Finally, Mrs Creighton appealed for broadmindedness in women, "who are apt to become too intense and personal".

Mr Hills proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs Creighton and reminded the audience that 25 years previously he had been one of a minority who had consistently voted for the admission of women to the Pharmaceutical Society. He noted that the advances in women's education were illustrated by the award of the Salter's Research Scholarship to a woman, Nora Renouf (Christine Heading), who seconded the motion for the vote of thanks.

Further thanks to the Pharmaceutical Society for the use of the lecture theatre were proposed and seconded by the association's joint secretaries, Elsie Hooper and Georgina Barltrop (Brenda Ecclestone and Hazel Baker, respectively). The chairman then adjourned the meeting for refreshments.

How Louise Creighton's speech was received by her audience is not recorded. The majority had, presumably, expected to hear more about the opportunities the new association might provide for women to practise pharmacy independently of male patronage. Now that there are more women than men on the Register, some of her words have an awkward resonance. We might speculate that the reporter was selective in his account of the proceedings and may have extracted from Louise Creighton's address such statements as would appeal to his predominantly male readership. However, his assessment of the historical significance of the meeting cannot be denied. — *Contributed by Sue Symonds.*