

BENEFICIARY NEWS JUNE 2022



The Royal Society for the Support of Women of Scotland

175th Anniversary

The Society celebrates its 175th Anniversary in 2022. Catriona Reynolds, the Chair of the General Committee (and the first woman to hold the post in the Society's history) said "I am delighted to be the Chair of the Society in this historic year. Since we were founded all those years ago, the Society has provided vital support to tens of thousands of women in Scotland."

"We share this celebration with our Patron, Her Majesty the Queen's own 70th Jubilee, and the Trustees are honoured to have received a warm message of support and congratulations from Her Majesty. The Trustees are also very pleased to have been able to make an additional £70 grant to all our Beneficiaries in time for the national Jubilee celebrations – we were only sorry that we could not have afforded to make this £175 each!"

The Society has had Her Majesty's greeting printed in a commemorative format and sent to everyone with a connection to the Society. Ms

Reynolds added "The Society is looking forward to the next 175 years. We want to make sure that our support adapts to help women meet the challenges of 21st century, while at the same time holding true to the values of respect and dignity for our beneficiaries which have always been so important to our work".



Message of support from Her Majesty the Queen

"As Patron of The Royal Society for the Support of Women of Scotland, I send my congratulations and warm good wishes to the Beneficiaries, Staff and Trustees on the occasion of your 175th anniversary.

In this, the year of my Platinum Jubilee, I note the longstanding link between the Royal Family and the Society, stretching back to when Queen Victoria was Patron and Prince Albert was Honorary President.

Although there have been many changes since the Society's inception in 1847, I know that the work of providing support to women in need across Scotland has continued and grown, and I wish the Society and all those who support its endeavours continued success in the future."

Trustee changes

The Society was very sorry to see **Dr Jon Cossar** step down as a Trustee in November 2021. However, we were pleased to welcome two new Trustees:

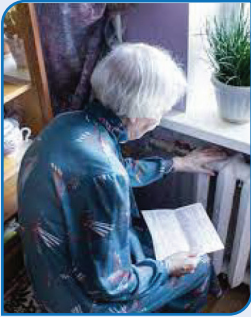
Dr Clare Stillman – Clare is a retired GP from Glasgow. The Society is the first organisation that she has become a Trustee of, so she is starting at the top! Clare commented "my years of contact with many people in different walks of life have made me aware that so many people did not have my luck in life. Things can be a continuous struggle for them to remain self-sufficient, especially for women who face particular obstacles in our world". Clare's wealth of knowledge and experience will be invaluable when the Society considers new applications for support.



Mr Gordon Young – Gordon is a retired Senior Director from the Financial Services Industry. Gordon said "I am delighted to be able to join the Society's Committee as I know just how important its work is." Gordon was previously a Director of the Merchants House in Glasgow and is currently a Trustee of the Investors Trust of the Church of Scotland, and his expertise in investment issues will help the Society to ensure that our assets are managed in a way to get the best return on them so we can maximise the support we can offer.



Spotlight on help with fuel bills



Recent steep increases in fuel bills, with further significant increases expected in October, mean all of us are likely to be worrying about keeping on top of our utility bills just now even with the summer coming. There are no easy answers to this, but we hope that the following might be useful.

Find simple ways to use less where possible

The first thing to note about energy bills is that you'll pay less if you use less. Fuel is essential to us all and it is obviously important to make sure you can stay warm when it is cold etc, but there are still some simple things everyone can do to try to reduce energy usage. While each may be relatively small, taken together they could save you a surprising amount:

- Only boil the water you need in kettles – don't overfill - £36 per year
- Limit showers to just 4 minutes - £70 per year
- Wash clothes at 30 degrees only - £28 per year
- Don't leave TVs and other appliances on "standby" – switch them off completely - £55 per year

Get personal advice and possibly help with costs

Home Energy Scotland are a network of local advice centres covering all of Scotland. Their expert advisors offer free, impartial advice on energy saving, keeping warm at home and can help to see if there are grants or other support you can access to help with any costs of works that might be needed. You can call them on 0808 808 2282 and do keep trying as their lines can be busy. The Society may also be able to help put you in touch with Home Energy Scotland if you wish.



Emergency grants for fuel costs

There are now several charities such as the Fuel Bank Foundation who provide emergency top-ups to prepaid meters or a delivery of heating oil, but most of these work through partner organisations so you are best to contact your local Food Banks or Citizen Advice Bureau. In addition, the Government has given Local Authorities money for hardship funds so you should try speaking to them about help.

The Origins and History of the Society

The Society was founded in 1847 by an Edinburgh Solicitor, Mr William Mitchell, in response to concerns about the plight of “middle class” women who had fallen on hard times. They were known as “indigent gentlewomen” and this term was incorporated into the Society’s original name as “The Indigent Gentlewomen’s Fund” or “IGF” for short.

Victorian society had very rigid class and social boundaries. While the lives of “working class” women were undoubtedly very hard, they could at least try to find work and they could ultimately access support from the “Poor Laws”, albeit that this involved accepting the very harsh conditions in “workhouses” and social stigma that this entailed.

Middle class women found themselves in a much more constrained position by social expectations. In a very male dominated society, the only role considered “proper” for them was marriage and motherhood and they were often completely dependent on men for support, be that their father, their husband or perhaps their brother.

The Society’s records from the time show many women who were left penniless after their husband died young, or who were unmarried and their father had not left them money to live on (or the funds had been lost in the frequent investment scandals of the time such as the collapse of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878). Some women found that marriage had passed them by, often because they had spent much of their younger lives caring for ageing parents or younger members of their family, leaving them alone and with no support as they grew older. Many were well-educated, but had no professional training, so they found the only work open to them was teaching or being a governess. This led to a kind of social limbo, as they were looked down upon by their employers, yet by birth and education they were unable to mix with “the servants” who were normally from working class families. They also earned very little so had no means of saving for their old age which they then had to face in both isolation and poverty.

The Society has long enjoyed Royal support for its work to help women in difficult circumstances. Only 3 years after it was founded, Queen Victoria was Patron of the Society, and this role was subsequently taken on by Queen Alexandra and Queen Mary. In 1930, the Royal connection was formalised when George V granted the Society a Royal Charter, and we continue to be honoured by the ongoing support of Her Majesty to this day.



Over the years the Society grew significantly, undoubtedly aided by its Royal connections. A number of members of the nobility and landowners became supporters, and the Society benefited from numerous generous bequests. On one occasion in 1919, the Society was left the residue of one woman's estate which turned out to be a large collection of jewellery, cloth and clothing (everything from fur coats to boots). All of this was delivered to the Society in 2 lorry loads which filled the Secretary's office until it could be sorted by volunteers and eventually sold for the sum of £1,340 (which was a very considerable sum in those days)!

While large (or unusual) bequests stand out in the Society's records, its work also benefited from the efforts of many "Lady Collectors" who raised money through subscriptions from other, more fortunate, middle-class families – a 19th Century form of crowdfunding for a cause that was seen as very relevant and important at the time and which continues to benefit women today.

The introduction of Old Age Pensions in 1909 (albeit only 5 shillings (25p) a week) for people aged over 70 was a moment of real change for both society in general and the Society in particular. While it is hard to imagine now, Old Age Pensions were first seen as a controversial extension of the Poor Laws and initially the Society felt it would be demeaning for beneficiaries to be expected to apply for a pension. However, times change and over the years pensions and other forms of support were extended and the harsh Poor Laws finally abolished after WWII when the Welfare State was created. While the post war extension of support to people who were unemployed and ill was clearly welcomed, it was accompanied by a growth in bureaucracy making accessing support more challenging for many.

The Society's work changed with the times over the years and aspects of our original Royal Charter (which, amongst other aspects, required women to be "sponsored" in order to apply for support) were increasingly less appropriate. Accordingly, the Society started the lengthy (and expensive) process of changing our Royal Charter which was eventually granted on 5th November 2014 which included the change of the Society's name to what it is now – the Royal Society for the Support of Women of Scotland.

1847

What else happened the year the Society was founded?

The world was a very different place for women when the Society was founded. Here are a few examples of other events that took place in 1847:

- A legal limit of 10 hours per day in for working in factories was established for women and children aged between 13 and 18. There was no limit for men however.
- Chloroform was used for the first time as an anaesthetic. This was during a difficult childbirth and when the mother was brought round after the birth, she initially refused to believe that she had done so!
- The 3 Bronte sisters each published a novel. These included *Wuthering Heights* by Emily and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte
- Millicent Fawcett was born in London. As well as being the most important leader of the suffragette movement, she also cared for her husband who had been blinded in an accident.
- The first civic public park in the world was opened in Birkenhead near Liverpool giving families, and women in particular, a pleasant, reasonably safe and free place for recreation. Over 10,000 people visited on the opening day.
- Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to go to medical school in the USA. She was only admitted because all the male professors and students assumed her application was a hoax! She was later the first women on the General Medical Council's medical register in the UK.
- Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, was born in Edinburgh. He was also the person who first said "when one door closes, another one opens".



“When one door closes, another one opens” – Changes in the staff team

Farewell to Helen

It is with great sadness that we say farewell to Helen Dalley who will be leaving the Society at the end of May 2022. Helen joined the Society’s Team in March 2018, initially as the Caseworker for the East of Scotland, but she later became the Grants Eligibility Assessor and in that role she reviewed all the new applications to the Society (and so she will have met virtually all the beneficiaries who have joined the Society since that date). Helen became the Society’s Welfare Manager in 2020, a new role created after Anne Metcalfe retired. Andrew Tweedy, the Society’s Chief Executive said “I have had the privilege of working with Helen both within RSSWS and in a different job, and you could not ask for a more committed and hardworking colleague. Helen has brought so much to the Society over the past 4 years and she will be sorely missed”.



Welcome to Dermot

At the same time, the Society is delighted to welcome Dermot Dooley to the Staff Team in the new post of “Financial Resilience” Caseworker. Andrew Tweedy said “the Society knows that some of the people who apply to the Society, and some of our beneficiaries, struggle to get on top of their finances. Many women apply to the Society because they have been forced to give up work, or cut their hours, due to ill health or redundancy or on their retirement. This can lead to a real drop in income and bills which were once affordable may soon turn into debts with all the challenges and costs those entail. Other beneficiaries may have had to rely on benefits for years and it may feel impossible to make ends meet. We hope that Dermot will be able to provide beneficiaries in these circumstances with a bit of extra support or advice which, in combination with the Society’s monthly payments, may help them become a bit more secure financially”.



Dermot was born in London but has slowly been migrating his way around Britain after studying in Swansea and now living in Glasgow! His wife is a psychiatrist, and their two toddlers ensure that they are both constantly exhausted. Dermot has many years of experience within the third sector, including roles as a welfare rights advisor, family support worker and even a part-time circus leader!

New Role for Pam

Andrew went on “I am, however, delighted that Pam Samson (the current Caseworker for the West of Scotland) will be stepping into the Welfare Manager’s role. Helen will be a tough act to follow, but if anyone can do it, I am sure Pam can”!



Do you know someone the Society could support?

The Society is always open to new women applying for our support. They must be aged 50 or over, have lived in Scotland for at least 2 years and they must be single (meaning they can't be living with a partner and, if they were married in the past, they must now be divorced, formally separated or a widow) – so if all of this applies to them and they are struggling to get by financially suggest that they get in touch with us!

SPREAD THE WORD

Contact Us...

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Our office is normally open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 2pm

