

# HISTORICAL ARTICLE

## Helen Wingate: Pioneering a Woman's Role in Urology

*S Ramsey, M Aitchison*

*Department of Urology, Gartnavel General Hospital, Glasgow, UK*

**Correspondence to:**

Email: sara\_l\_ramsey@ntlworld.com

### ABSTRACT

When the British Association of Urological Surgeons was founded in 1945, 2 female founder members registered. One of these was Helen Wingate, Associate Specialist in Urology at Glasgow Royal Infirmary and Consultant Urologist and General Surgeon at Redlands Hospital for Women, and a pioneer of women in urology. The early days of urology as a specialty at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and the pioneering role played by Dr Wingate as a female consultant in a new surgical speciality are described in this article.

In the 61 years since its foundation, the British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) has yet to see a female president. At present, only 1 of the 24 BAUS council members are female, and women hold only 12% of the national training numbers in the UK,<sup>1</sup> despite female undergraduates making up 65% of medical students. The representation of women seems to have changed little since the founding of BAUS in 1945, with 2 female founder members registered out of 66. One of these was Helen Wingate, Assistant Specialist in Urology at Glasgow Royal Infirmary and Consultant Urologist and General Surgeon at Redlands Hospital for Women, and surely a pioneering woman in urology.

Helen Frances Wingate was born in 1895 in Greenock, a coastal town 25 miles from Glasgow. She was educated at



Greenock Academy and entered Queen Margaret College, the ladies' medical school attached to Glasgow University. At this time, medical

education was segregated, and the first female doctor had graduated in 1894. Helen Wingate graduated with commendation in 1920 and was part of a pioneering group of women who entered the stern world of the Glasgow teaching hospitals.

Helen Wingate undertook house jobs at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and subsequently worked as an assistant in the University Department of Pathology under Professor John Teacher, who held the St Mungo-Notman Chair. Professor Teacher, along with Thomas Bryce, had

discovered the Teacher-Bryce ovum No 1 in 1908, which was the youngest known human ovum to exhibit the three germ cell layers of endoderm, mesoderm and ectoderm. During a routine post-mortem examination of a young woman in 1924, Dr Wingate discovered a well-developed corpus luteum and informed Prof Teacher, who diagnosed an early pregnancy, the Teacher-Bryce ovum No2.<sup>2</sup>

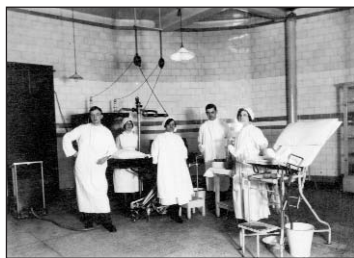
At this time in the Royal Infirmary, Mr Arthur Jacobs, originally trained as a general surgeon, had developed an interest in urology, and was appointed as Consultant Urologist in 1930. His pioneering interest in urology included genito-urinary tuberculosis and he was one of the first to report hyperchloraemic acidosis in patients lucky enough to be among the early survivors of operations for urinary diversion. He held the presidency of BAUS from 1957 to 1959, and he was awarded the St Peter's Medal by BAUS in 1965. Helen Wingate joined the staff of Arthur Jacobs' unit in 1933, along with William "Willy" Mack, a fellow founder member of BAUS and its President in 1969. Under Mr Jacobs' guidance, she was sent for postgraduate training in urology in the Poliklinik Hospital in Vienna with Hans Rubritius, internationally renowned for his skills in transurethral resection of bladder tumours.<sup>3</sup>

In 1936 the managers of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary congratulated Mr Jacobs on his good work developing a urological practice. As a result he was able to a



new department with modern equipment for urological surgery. Prior to this, the urologists had relied on four courtesy beds in Wards 22 and 24 provided by a general surgeon colleague. Professor John Blandy has recently suggested certain criteria to define the first modern urological department in Britain.<sup>4</sup> The criteria are that a department must continue its urological practice even after the founder retires, and that a department requires more than one interested party performing urological

surgery. These criteria discount both the urological departments at Guys (founded in 1910) and at Kings (founded in 1920) but there is a strong case to consider Glasgow Royal Infirmary as the first Department of Urology in the UK, as this department survived the retirement of Arthur Jacobs, and from the start it had more than one practising urologist.



Helen Wingate became a Fellow of the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1937. In the same year she was appointed specialist assistant surgeon in urology at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. At this time Arthur Jacobs was demonstrating his newly purchased American resectoscope to visiting parties. Dr Wingate was also appointed Consultant General and Urological Surgeon at Redlands Hospital for Women in 1940, which unusually, was staffed completely by women from its opening in 1902 until 1955, when men were allowed onto the payroll. At a time when married women were not expected to work unless on the poverty line, and nurses faced dismissal if



they became engaged to be married, Helen Wingate was unusual for marrying in 1943 and continuing to work. Her husband was Alfred George Lochhead who was an architect by profession, but who was serving as a Captain in the Army at the time of their marriage.

Whilst Dr Wingate had no children, she led a full and active life. She was a board member of Glasgow Maternity and Women's Hospitals Committee, and member of the Marriage Guidance Council, as well as being Medical Women's Federation representative on the board of Redlands Hospital. She enjoyed nature studies, gardening, and through her husband developed a love of architecture. She was President of the Scotland South division of the Soroptimist Society in 1937 and President of the Glasgow Central Soroptimist club in 1946. She remained an active member of the society in her later days. When the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow became the Royal College in 1962, she became a surgical Fellow of the College, and she retired from clinical work in the same year. She died in 1985 at the age of 90.

Helen Wingate was truly a pioneer in two senses, through achieving consultant status in an era when few women did and through her founder membership of BAUS when the surgical specialty of urology was in its infancy.

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