



The Royal Society *for*
the Support *of*
Women *of* Scotland

Snapshots and milestones from the Society's past

The Society has passed many milestones in our long history:

- **1847** – “The Indigent Gentlewomen’s Fund” (IGF) was founded by William P. Mitchell, a solicitor living at No. 12 Rutland Square, Edinburgh. He persuaded titled ladies and gentlemen, professionals, and members of the clergy to support the cause and organised a Committee of Management and teams of local directors and collectors. Funding was raised by subscriptions (2s 6d), donations and legacies - all by word of mouth “within society” rather than door to door collections.
- **1848** - The first grant distribution took place totalling £848 paid to 154 ladies, each receiving either £5, £8 or £12 (to calculate today’s equivalent value see [Inflation calculator | Bank of England](#)). Applicants had to be spinster ladies of 50 years and over, of professional parentage and impoverished through no fault of their own. They could not be in receipt of, or ever have received, Poor Relief from the Church.
- **1848-50** - Various sales of ladies’ work raised a total of £3,897. This income was used to create a “Sinking Fund” from which cash could be withdrawn if needed to sustain annuities. This was invested in property and subsequently became the Society’s General Fund.
- **1850** - The Society’s first Annual Report shows Queen Victoria as Patron and Prince Albert as Honorary President.
- **1865** - The first Constitution for the Society was approved - ten years after the need for one was first identified to protect its assets!
- **1860’s** - A Gentlemen’s Committee was formed in Glasgow as gentle-born ladies were unwilling to visit merchants and manufacturers to raise funds.
- **1870’s** - Spinsters living in homes or institutions were admitted for the first time. Higher rate annuities were introduced for the older beneficiaries.
- **1898** - Widows admitted for the first time but, fearing a large increase in applications, there were only a limited number of widow’s annuities provided for.
- **1906** - The first Ladies’ Committee was formed in Edinburgh and then in Glasgow. More than just groups of collectors, they elected Lady Presidents and a year later the members started visiting beneficiaries in their own homes.
- **1908** - The Government introduced non-contributory pensions of 5s per week for the over 70’s. Receipt of pension meant a reduction in the IGF annuity, but no pressure was

placed on ladies to apply for pensions as many saw them as “state charity suitable only to the working class”.

- **1909** - The Society moved to 14 Rutland Square, partly because the steps of its offices in Queen Street were too steep for visiting beneficiaries and directors.
- **1865-1914** - No applicant who met the Society’s criteria was ever turned away for lack of funding.
- **1917** - Annuities were paid half-yearly and the minimum was raised to £15.
- **1919** - A bequest of clothing and jewellery involved the Ladies’ Committee in sorting and selling items, raising funds for the Society. This was a precursor to the Ladies’ Committee running a “Clothing Department” for beneficiaries.
- **1920’s** - The Ladies’ Committees finally gained voting rights to determine admission of applicants. Prior to this “the ladies did all the work; the gentlemen took all the decisions”!
- **1920’s** - The Society received numerous generous legacies, many of which set rigid criteria for their use and some of these were too onerous for the Society to accept.
- **1927** - Widows over 70 years of age were admitted routinely.
- **1930** - The Society was incorporated by grant of a Royal Charter by King George V and from then on it was entitled to use “Royal” in its name.
- **1930’s** - The depression hit both donors and beneficiaries. There was a large increase in applications and enrolments, but by 1934 the charity had to freeze the minimum annuity at £25 and delay admissions because of demand.
- **1936** - As a result of numerous individual bequests over the years, 40 different categories of annuities were being operated by the Society’s staff and all done manually!
- **1939** - The Roll of Beneficiaries peaked at 1406 ladies. The restriction of never having received Poor Relief was lifted provided the applicant was no longer in receipt. For the first time, all beneficiaries were required to give full details of their income.
- **1940’s** - Following the outbreak of World War II more women are engaged in war work and the number on the Roll fell.
- **1950’s** - The minimum annuity was raised to £40 in 1951, then £50, £60 by 1954 and £70 by 1957.
- **1960’s** - The first ‘Lady Visitor’ employed to visit ladies in their homes, instead of this being done by members of Ladies’ Committees. The role was subsequently renamed ‘Almoner’ and from 1993 the role became known as ‘Caseworker’. The need for an ‘Annual Certificate’ from a professional person who knew the beneficiary confirming that their circumstances had not changed was discontinued.
- **1960’s** - The Ladies’ Committees began to decline as fewer ladies were willing to collect and the need to do so was less important as the Society’s funds continued to grow from legacies.
- **1970’s** – The Society’s forms of support and income ceilings were under constant review because of changing State Benefits. New grants were introduced for heating, holidays, TV and telephones and “Christmas parcels” were introduced. These were discontinued in 1990 due to Department for Social Security rules.
- **1982-83** – Divorcees admitted for the first time and admission could be on their own status, even if the applicant did not have professional parents.
- **1987** - Miss Peggy Wilson joined the General Committee becoming the first woman to join the Committee in the Society’s 140-year history. By the mid-90’s there were three women on the Committee.

- **1988** – The use of computers was introduced to the Society’s offices, and the Society won The Scotsman’s “Scottish Computer User of the Year” Award.
- **1994** - Grants to beneficiaries began to be paid directly into their bank accounts and by 1996 these were being paid quarterly.
- **1997** - The Society celebrated its 150th Anniversary with all beneficiaries invited to a Royal Garden Party at Holyrood Palace, attended by HRH Princess Margaret.
- **2013** – Ms. Catriona Reynolds became the first woman to be Chair of the General Committee.
- **2014** - The Society was granted a Supplementary Royal Charter by Her Majesty The Queen. This ushered a new beginning for the Society and amongst many things changed the Society’s name to The Royal Society for the Support of Women of Scotland.