

Editorial

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Editorial - Issue 10

With a nod to the centenary of 1918 legislation allowing (some) women to vote, this issue of the *Science Museum Group Journal* contains a group of articles exploring the role of women in STEM. This is an area where we are gradually discovering more, at a time when encouraging diversity in STEM is a key priority for the UK. The group of papers collected here (amongst further articles exploring key issues in the collections and practice of science museums) contribute to a wider understanding of those women who were able to work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics at a pivotal time: while it was more difficult for women to enter the STEM space, things were opening up, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Let us start with the positives. From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, UK institutions were becoming more diverse. In this small selection of papers, we see the first women elected to the Institution of Electrical Engineers (now the IET) and the Institution of Naval Architects (now RINA). We also see research organisations such as the Burden Neurological Institute employing increasing numbers of women in technical roles. Other institutions were more reluctant to make use of women's labour in traditionally male roles, such as the railways, but women are visible in these spaces too, especially in wartime. The research detailed in these papers shows that women are appearing: in membership lists; in photographs; in family accounts; and in the archival record.

However, gaps remain. The paper on the BNI describes how the women who were employed by the institution are either absent from the record, or present in problematic ways, marginalised and passive in photographs. Women are missing from the history of STEM: those of us who have conducted any research on early women scientists or engineers know the difficulty in finding any photographs, portraits, or official records. Research on the representation of women engineers in Wikipedia suggest that the digital arena does not necessarily redress the balance.

The papers in this mini-collection draw attention to the gaps in research and help to locate and reinstate those missing women. However, we need to find more: in family collections perhaps, or in archives which need to be re-catalogued and researched to bring out new stories. New records are coming to light, and cultural institutions are committed to making their collections more diverse. The good news is that there is much interesting work ahead.



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- [Engineering](#)

- [Women in science and engineering](#)

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