

Women on the Move at Oxford



‘OBLIViate!’

In a single swish of his wand, the dark wizard annihilated all memories of what women had achieved. Henceforth, no matter what they did, women and their efforts would be relegated to Oblivion.

Professor McGonagall, *Minerva: Goddess of Wisdom Revisited*

(OUP, an uncertain date)

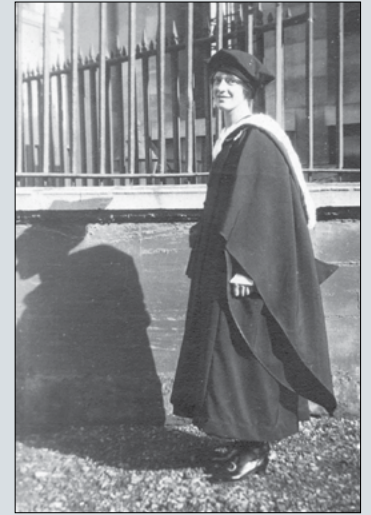
The struggle for women to gain full membership in Oxford’s academic community has been a long one, with many achievements, like those throughout broader society, born of adversity.

Indeed, the very first Women’s Liberation conference in Britain was held in Oxford. Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville, the first women’s colleges at Oxford, opened in 1879, followed by St Hugh’s (1886), St Hilda’s (1893), and St Anne’s (1952). But, these women’s “societies” were not granted full collegiate status until 1959. Five all-male colleges—Brasenose, Jesus, Wadham, Hertford, and St Catherine’s—first admitted women only in 1974.

Ida Mann was appointed Reader in Ophthalmology in 1941 and Titular Professor (in name only) in 1945 while the first woman appointed to a full professorship was Agnes Headlam-Morley, who became Montague Burton Professor of International Relations in 1948, centuries after the University’s founding.

Balliol was the first of the traditional all-male colleges to elect a woman as a Fellow and Tutor in 1973. In 1993, Professor Marilyn Butler became the first female head of a formerly all-male college at either Oxford or Cambridge. Today, among the University’s 39 colleges, Oxford counts eleven female Heads of House. And, in 2016 Professor Louise Richardson became the first female Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Men had enjoyed an eight-century-long run in that post.

As women gained ground within the academic and administrative structures of the University, they also made advances across Oxford’s political and intellectual landscape. One of the first landmarks of women’s historical writing, *Hidden from History* (1973), was written by Sheila Rowbotham because of her dissatisfaction with the emphasis on male-dominated politics in the Oxford curriculum. In 1957, a thoughtful ally for the advancement of women, Sir Keith Thomas, gave a ground-breaking set of lectures entitled *The relations between the sexes in England from the Reformation to the First World War*.



Right: One of Oxford's first female graduates, Cicely Delphine Williams of Somerville College, Oxford, 1920. She became a world-renowned physician.

Left: Oxford's first African American female graduate, Merze Tate, St Anne's College, Oxford, 1932. She became a pioneering scholar and expert on United States diplomacy.

Oxford's History Faculty is currently housed in a building on George Street, colloquially known as the "Old Boys' School"—founded as a boys-only high school in 1881 for the purpose of "completing the city's 'ladder of learning' from elementary school to university."

It was in the Common Room of this Old Boys' School, that the newly formed Women's Studies Committee convened in the 1980s. With so few women in university posts at that time, the modest space proved more than adequate. The Committee grew steadily over the years. Many feminist intellectuals were formed there and many friendships as well.

In 2011, one of those women, Lyndal Roper, became both the first woman Regius Professor and the first woman Statutory Professor in History at Oxford. Only three of Oxford's twelve statutory chairs in history are currently held by women: Lyndal Roper, Regius Professor of History; Julia Smith, Chichele Professor of Medieval History; and most recently, Catherine Schenk, Professor of Economic and Social History.

Much history has been written as if women, even women of power and influence, did not exist.

Over the last fifty years, the rise of women's and gender history has been one of the most important transformations in the discipline, accompanied by increasing numbers of women students, academic staff, and professors. Gender and women's history are now a vital part of what is taught in Oxford's History Faculty. Every exam paper is likely to have at least one question on these areas and there are no fewer than eight courses in which women's history is central. Many internationally renowned historians of women currently work at Oxford, and together they constitute one of the strongest concentrations of expertise in the field.

Yet, despite leading the academic world for over 800 years, Oxford does not have a dedicated chair in women's history. It is only by chance that the current holder of Oxford's Regius Chair engages in women's history: the next incumbent may have a completely different profile.

When women's history does not have a permanent seat at the table, valuable contributions to this field lack enduring power and women's history evaporates leaving the next academic generation to start the task anew. The impacts of women on society and the world must be, and deserve to be, studied by scholars who will shatter age-old constraints. Women have always played vital roles throughout human history, but their contributions have been poorly recorded or simply not recognised at all. Much history has been written as if women, even women of power and influence, did not exist. The achievements of women are all but obliterated.

Oxford can play a powerful, transformative role in changing the narrative.

We can stop women vanishing from the pages of history by creating a dedicated position in Women's History to last in perpetuity, held at the highest academic level at one of the world's premier universities.

Oxford is the largest institution for the study of history in the United Kingdom with more than 100 permanent post-holders and between 90 and 100 Early Career Researchers. The Faculty speaks to the historical experience of all global regions and represents all the most important intellectual currents in the discipline. Many of the leaders of tomorrow, and many historians who will go on to hold posts all over the world, pass through the University of Oxford.

The Hillary Rodham Clinton Chair in Women's History at the University of Oxford will signal to the world that women matter. Women's leadership matters. Women change the world. It will promote scholarship that reconstructs the lives of women as leaders or activists, regents or slaves, workers or managers, farmers or shopkeepers, married or single, documenting the many ways in which women have shaped societies, governments, and the economies they inhabit.

We cannot understand the past or the present without recognising the contribution of women. We need a new mainstream history in which women are fully present.



Celebrating 100 Years of Women Graduates

In 2020, Oxford celebrates 100 years of women receiving their degrees. With your support, the first woman Vice-Chancellor, Louise Richardson, will mark this milestone with the announcement of a significant and enduring contribution to the history of women: The Hillary Rodham Clinton Chair in Women's History.

A Chair in Women's History at Oxford signals to the academy and the wider world that women count. What they do with their lives on the grandest of international stages, or the smallest of domestic hearths; how they learn, work, love, raise their children, shape future generations; how they remember; how they think of the future—all of it matters; it is half of history. This is not a new claim, but it is a claim that must be restated, re-invented.

We are now on the cusp of real progress. The building blocks of a more complete, more truthful history are there, but we must put them together. When we have done that, we shall understand what the world made by women as well as men was really like. From there, we can face the future together.

Endowing The Hillary Rodham Clinton Chair in Women's History at the University of Oxford honours Hillary Rodham Clinton's intellectual leadership. It recognises her contribution as a woman leader; it elevates the field of women's history; it celebrates the achievements of women; and it does so forever. Please help to make this happen.



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