

Report of the British Society for the History of Radiology 2018 Annual Lecture on 'Edith and Florence Stoney, pioneering sisters in Radiology'

By

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The 2018 annual lecture of the BSHR was held on the evening of 19 Feb 2018 in the Governor's Hall of St Thomas's Hospital. The title was 'Edith and Florence Stoney pioneering sisters in Radiology'. The talk was a double act delivered by the distinguished radiology historians Prof Francis Duck and Prof Adrian Thomas the former concentrating on Edith and the latter Florence Stoney.

The Stoney sisters were remarkable women who deserve to be better remembered and this masterly exposition of their life and achievements were a fine tribute to their important legacy.

Edith the elder sister was born in Dublin in 1869 and Florence in 1870 being members of a distinguished family whose father was an FRS and distinguished physicist and 3 further FRS's amongst the uncles and cousins.

Edith went to Cambridge and went on to become a distinguished medical physicist and became a Physics lecturer at the London School for Women. Florence who could not study medicine at Dublin as they did not admit women and was to qualify from the London School of Medicine for Women in 1895 and proceed to MD in 1898.

In 1902, Florence Stoney started the X-ray work at the Royal Free Hospital and New Hospital for Women (Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital) and was demonstrator in anatomy at the London School of Medicine for Women. In the early days facilities were primitive and Florence often took plates home to be developed. In 1907 Dr Harrison Orton was appointed to lead the department at the Royal Free over Florence and this would have been a great disappointment for Florence at the time.

At the outbreak of WW1 both Edith and Florence volunteered their services to the British Red Cross but was turned down by Sir Frederick Treeves the surgeon famous for the 'Elephant Man'. Undeterred they went on to set up a voluntary 100 bed unit with the Belgian red Cross staffed mainly by women. Later the work was continued in France at Château Turlaville near Cherbourg. By 1915 Florence was working for the War Office and running the radiology department of the 1000 bedded Fulham Military Hospital. Unfortunately her health deteriorated with dermatitis developing in her hands and after the war she settled in Bournemouth. She went on to become the founder and President of the Wessex branch of the BIR.

From November 1917 to February 1919 Edith was in charge of the X-ray Departments at the Scottish Women's Hospitals at Royaumont and Villers-Côtterets. She was one of the first to describe the radiographic aspects of gas gangrene and became highly skilled in foreign body localisation.

Following the war she returned to teaching physics and eventually retired to Bournemouth to live with her sister.

Edith died in 1938 six years after Florence who died in 1932.

The story of these two remarkable women was beautifully told and well illustrated with slides and all those who attended were able to learn about these two brilliant, inspiring women who in spite of such difficulties were to become early British pioneers of medical physics and radiology.