



In memory of Dr Helen S. Dunsmore

Helen Simpson Dunsmore was born in Greenock, Scotland on fifteenth November 1926, the elder of 2 girls. She was educated in Greenock schools and still has friends from school, and her sister, in Greenock. Before the war she was a keen member of the Girl Guides. During the war Guiders were serving in the forces and the patrol leaders (including Helen) ran things for the younger members. The District Commissioner discovered this and tests for badges were continued. Helen joined the Sea Rangers and completed the Gold Cord Award – the only Guide in Renfrewshire to do this as it was superseded by the Queen's Guide Award. At Greenock High School she was sports champion 2 years running and Dux Girl.

It was assumed that she would return to school for a sixth year but Helen sat the Glasgow University Bursary Exam, just to see what it was like! She came 75th equal from more than 400 and, despite strong pressure from the Headmaster to return to school for another year, she took her place at Glasgow University in 1944 to study for a BSc in Chemistry. In her final year, searching for funding for her PhD, Helen applied for a fellowship from the British Federation of University Women. She received a reply saying that the fellowship was for people needing help later on, not for someone starting a PhD but they enclosed an application for membership. The Glasgow Association of University Women sent a postcard inviting her to a meeting in the Women's Union on a Saturday afternoon. Helen attended, dressed in her blazer and a summer dress to discover everyone else in hat and gloves! She felt like a fish out of water and left quickly at the end of the meeting. But someone had taken her details and in the autumn she received a letter saying that she had been co-opted on to the GAUW committee. At that time there were about 30 people on the committee and a membership of over 400. Each member received a postcard reminder for each meeting so teams were required to address these post cards. It was a good way to get to know other members of the committee. Later they got an addressograph and Helen became Assistant Secretary.

Meantime she had started her PhD in Physical Chemistry under J C Speakman, studying solutions, purifying hydrogen and hydrochloric acid. She had to learn to blow her own glass for the glass electrodes required! She got no money from BFUW but did get a grant from DSIR of £180 pa for 2 years and then an Assistantship in the Chemistry Department worth £350. At first she travelled from home each day but this was very time consuming so she organised digs for £2-10-0 (£2.50) per week for bed, breakfast and evening meal, going home at weekends to play hockey.

While studying for her PhD she took up Guiding again and became Captain. She trained as a teacher of Scottish Country Dancing so that she could train guides to compete in the Renfrewshire Musical Festival – and her Guides won the trophy! The Ladies Hockey Club also entered, and, despite having time for only 2 rehearsals, won their class.

Following her PhD she received a fellowship from the National Research Council of Canada in Ottawa. This is an independent institution with its own laboratories.

After the 1953 IFUW Conference in London, a 14 day tour visit to Scotland was offered. Fifty-five people wanted to do this but food was still rationed so there was a search for home



hospitality. Two buses were arranged and Dr Elsie Conway asked Helen to be the courier. The tour started in Edinburgh, went on to Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness and Glasgow. On this tour was a Canadian from Ottawa who offered Helen hospitality when she arrived in Ottawa. She became a Guest member of the Ottawa branch of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Helen spent almost 3 years in Ottawa. She came home in February 1956 and went to Jordanhill Training College to train as a teacher. While there she was invited to do research at Stockholm Royal Technical University, and, if she would agree to stay for one year they would pay her fare! At the end of summer she set off for Stockholm.

She became a Guest Member of UW of Sweden and has lifelong friends from this period. The one year stretched to three, she learned to speak colloquial Swedish and founded a Scottish Country Dance branch in Stockholm.

Having decided that she wanted to work in the UK she wrote to Glasgow University to ask about available jobs in Britain. She was offered an Assistantship in the Chemistry Department which would 'keep the wolf from the door' while she looked for something else. She came back in September 1959. A few days before term was due to start a lectureship became available due to an unexpected death in the department. She applied and got the lectureship. Dr Conway offered her the post of house tutor in the Women's Hall of Residence. She refused, as she wanted to stay at home, but 3 hours travel a day soon proved too much so she took up the offer. She stayed in Hall for 17 years, becoming Deputy Warden in charge of Women and the first woman to become a Governor of male student residences. She gave this up in 1976 because she was Chair of the Arrangements Committee for the 1977 IFUW Conference.

In the Chemistry Department she became a Senior Lecturer, a Senior Adviser of Studies and supervised research students. She served on the Faculty Committee, was elected to the Senate and then the University Court, which she found very interesting. She was the first woman president of the Glasgow Association of University Teachers.

It was while she was in Canada that she became interested in the international side of University Women and started attending IFUW conferences – she attended Paris in 1956, Mexico in 1962 and has been at every international conference since then. She was elected to the International Committee of BFUW. In 1965 in Australia she was an Alternate Delegate and continued either as Alternate or Delegate. In 1968 she was elected a member of the IFUW Standards Committee, which became the Membership Committee, and became Convener of this committee in 1974. She was chairman of the Local Arrangements Committee for the International Conference in Stirling in 1977 and at that conference she was elected Second Vice President.

In 1980 she became First Vice President and from 1983-1986 she was President. She greatly enjoyed all of this, especially being President, and made many lifelong friends. She founded the Inverclyde Association in 1988 and was President of UWE from 1988-1994.

Meantime in 1977 she became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and a Chartered Chemist.

She officially retired from Glasgow University in 1983, but was offered part time employment for three years and has been fully retired since 1986.



In 1986 she received the honorary degree of LLD from The Queen's University, Belfast, in recognition of her work for women's education internationally.

Paisley College of Technology co-opted her as a Governor in December 1984 as many more women were enrolling as students there. Helen was appointed a Governor in 1989 by the Secretary of State. She became Convener of the Student Affairs Committee in 1991 and, when the College became a University in 1993, she became a member of Court. She continued as a member of Court until 1996.

In recognition of her services she became a Doctor of Paisley University in 1997.
In 1997 she also received the OBE for services to Education.

She was secretary of the Inverclyde Association, an Honorary President of the Glasgow Association and is associated with the Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund for Women. She also acted as Constitutional advisor to the Scottish Association of University Women until 2010. In 2007 she was the recipient of the Jans Gremmee Award for services to UWE. She became a voluntary car ambulance driver for the Ardgowan Hospice in 1987. In 1988 she was appointed to the Inverclyde Children's Panel Advisory Committee and chaired it from 1991-95. She was elected to the Congregational Board of the Old West Kirk in 1993, has been Chairman since 1995, and convener of the free-will offering scheme since 1996. And she was also an active member of a local Bowling Club.

Helen will be missed first of all by her family and her friends, but we know she will be remembered by many more. May she rest in peace.

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