

# LGBT+ History Month 2024

## Medicine – #UnderTheScope

The 2024 theme celebrates LGBT+ peoples' contribution to the field of Medicine and Healthcare both historically and today.

The aim is to showcase the amazing work of LGBT+ staff across the NHS and in other healthcare settings, in providing healthcare, especially during the pandemic. Whilst still shining a light on the history of the LGBT+ community's experience of receiving healthcare which has been extremely complicated leaving LGBT+ people still facing health inequalities even today.

At a time when the LGBT+ community is experiencing a rise in hate crime and hate instances we also encourage you to look 'Under the Scope' and listen to LGBT+ peoples' lived experiences from LGBT+ people.

# LGBT+ Historical Figures

## Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake



Sophie Jex-Blake (21 January 1840 – 07 January 1912) was an English physician, teacher, and feminist. She led the campaign to secure women access to a university education, when six other women and she, collectively known as the Edinburgh Seven, began studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh in 1869. She was the first practising female doctor in Scotland, and one of the first in the wider United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; a leading campaigner for medical education for women, she was involved in founding two medical schools for women, in London and Edinburgh, at a time when no other medical schools were training women.

In 1865, once the Civil War was over, Sophia Jex-Blake travelled to the United States to learn more about women's education. She visited various schools, was strongly influenced by developments in co-education in the US, and later published *A Visit to Some American Schools and Colleges*. At the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston, she met one of the country's pioneer female physicians, Dr Lucy Ellen Sewall, who became an important and lifelong friend, and she worked there for a time as an assistant. This was a turning point for Jex-Blake, as she realised, during this visit, that to become a doctor was her life's vocation.

In 1867, along with Susan Dimock, a trainee from the New England hospital, she wrote directly to the president and fellows of Harvard University, requesting admission to the university's medical school. She and Dimock received their reply a month later, in a letter which stated: "There is no provision for the education of women in any department of this university". The following year, she hoped to attend a new medical college being established by Elizabeth Blackwell in New York, but her father died, so she returned to England to be with her mother.

Sophia Jex-Blake was determined to seek medical training in the UK, and due to Scotland's more enlightened attitudes towards education, felt that if any university would allow women to study, it would be a Scottish one. She applied to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh in March 1869, and although the medical faculty and the Senatus Academicus voted in favour of allowing her to study medicine, the university court rejected her application on the grounds that the university could not make the necessary arrangements "in the interest of one lady".

She then advertised in *The Scotsman* and other national newspapers for more women to join her. A second application was submitted in 1869 on behalf of the group of five women initially (with two more added later in the year to make the Edinburgh Seven - the group is Mary Anderson, Emily Bovell, Matilda Chaplin, Helen Evans, Sophia Jex-Blake, Edith Pechey, and Isabel Thorne). It requested the right to attend all the classes and examinations required for a degree in medicine. This second application was approved by the university court and the University of Edinburgh became the first British university to admit women.

## Surgeons' Hall riot

As the women began to demonstrate that they could compete on equal terms with the male students, hostility towards them grew. They received obscene letters, were followed home, had fireworks attached to their front door, and had mud thrown at them. This culminated in the Surgeons' Hall riot on 18 November 1870, when the women arrived to sit an anatomy examination at Surgeons' Hall, and an angry mob of over 200 gathered outside throwing mud, rubbish, and insults at the women.

The events made national headlines and won the women many new supporters, but influential members of the medical faculty eventually persuaded the university to refuse graduation to the women by appealing decisions to higher courts. The courts eventually ruled that the women who had been awarded degrees should never have been allowed to enter the course. Their degrees were withdrawn and the campaign in Edinburgh failed in 1873. Many of the women went to European universities that were already allowing women to graduate and completed their studies there.



## **The time for a reform has come**

Women were eventually admitted onto degree programmes at other British Universities in 1877. James Stansfeld, who had been closely associated with the London campaign (following the failure of the Edinburgh campaign) wrote, in his brief history of the events:

Dr Sophia Jex-Blake has made the greatest of all contributions to the end attained. I do not say that she has been the ultimate cause of success. The ultimate cause has been simply this, that the time was at hand. It is one of the lessons of the history of progress that when the time for reform has come you cannot resist it, though if you make the attempt, what you may do is to widen its character or precipitate its advent. Opponents, when the time has come, are not merely dragged at the chariot wheels of progress - they help to turn them. The strongest forces, whichever way it seems to work, does most to aid. The forces of greatest concentration here have been, in my view, on the one hand the Edinburgh University led by Sir Robert Christison, on the other the women claimants led by Dr Sophia Jex-Blake.

## Qualification as a physician

In 1874, Sophia Jex-Blake helped establish the London School of Medicine for Women, which became the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine for Women, but also continued campaigning and studying. The Medical Act (39 and 40 Vict, Ch. 41) soon followed, which was an act to repeal the previous statute, while also permitting medical authorities to license all qualified applicants whatever their gender. The first organisation to take advantage of this new legislation was the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, but before Jex-Blake applied to them, she passed the medical exams at the University of Berne, where she was awarded a medical doctorate in January 1877. Four months later, she had further success in Dublin and qualified as licentiate of the King and Queen's College of Physicians of Ireland, meaning she could at last be registered with the General Medical Council, the third registered woman doctor in the UK.



## **Personal Life**

Sophia Jex-Blake is assumed to have been in a romantic relationship with Dr Margaret Todd. On Jex-Blake's retirement in 1899, they moved to Windydene, Mark Cross, Rotherfield, where Dr Todd wrote *The Way of Escape* in 1902 and *Growth* in 1906. Her home became a meeting place for former students and colleagues, and she welcomed writers and acquaintances from the world over.

## **Medical career**

Jex-Blake returned to Edinburgh, as its first woman doctor. Three months later, she opened an outpatient clinic in Fountainbridge, where poor women could receive medical attention for a few pence. After her mother's death in 1881, Sophia Jex-Blake had a period of depressed reclusiveness. The dispensary expanded by 1885 was moved to larger premises, where a five-bed ward was added. The little outpatient clinic thus became the Edinburgh Hospital and Dispensary for Women. This was Scotland's first hospital for women staffed entirely by women.



Jex-Blake lived and conducted her practice for 16 years in the house known as Bruntsfield Lodge on Whitehouse Loan. When she retired in 1889, the Edinburgh Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children moved to this site, and became known as Bruntsfield Hospital, where it continued to function until 1989.

Sophia Jex-Blake died at Windydene on 7 January 1912, two weeks before her 72nd birthday, and is buried at St Denys Rotherfield. Todd subsequently wrote *The Life of Dr Sophia Jex-Blake*. The University of Edinburgh commemorated Jex-Blake with a plaque near the entrance to its medical school, honouring her as "Physician, pioneer of medical education for women in Britain, alumna of the University".

The Edinburgh Seven were awarded the posthumous honorary MBChB degrees at the University of Edinburgh's McEwan Hall on 6 July 2019. The degrees were collected on their behalf by a group of current students at Edinburgh Medical School. Medical student Simran Piya collected an honorary degree on behalf of Sophia Jex-Blake. The graduation was the first of a series of events planned by the University of Edinburgh to commemorate the achievements and significance of the Edinburgh Seven.

## Margaret Stacey

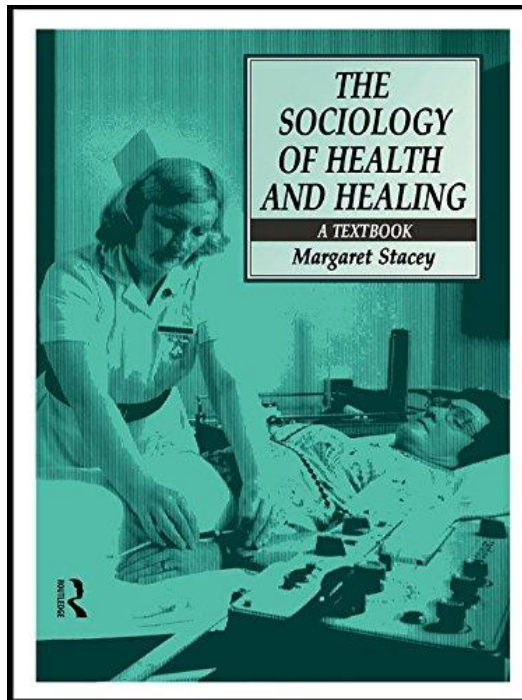
She was born Margaret Petrie, in London on 27 March 1922. She studied at the City of London School for Girls. She graduated from the London School of Economics in 1943 with a first-class honours degree in Sociology.



Margaret Stacey was a leading figure in establishing sociology as an academic discipline, helping shape British empirical sociology. She was one of the creators of medical sociology as a distinct academic field. She was a key contributor to the reconceptualisation of medicine as a healing system in a wider societal context, rather than simply concerned with the interactions in the clinic; a 'sociology of health and healing', rather than 'medical sociology'. Her work in the sociology of health and healing has influenced policy and medical education.

After graduating from LSE in 1943, she worked in a war factory in Scotland. At this time, she campaigned against the imprisonment of immigrants from enemy nations, influenced by her encounters with her fellow student at LSE, Claus Moser. She left this job after a year, to work as an extramural lecturer in Oxford.

After ten years without a secure position in a university, during which time she nevertheless continued to work, she started working at Swansea University in 1961, and was appointed a lecturer in 1963. In the 1960s, Stacey led the influential research project Children in Hospital, funded by the Ministry of Health. At the time, when a child was admitted to hospital, the sole objective was to treat the illness, leading some children to be separated from their families, friends and schools for many months and ignoring the wider wellbeing of the child.



She moved to the University of Warwick in 1974; the first woman to be appointed to a professorship at the university. She held this role until her retirement in 1989. During this time, she published 14 books, and served as chair of the sociology department and the graduate school of Women's Studies.

Her first book, Tradition and Change (1960) was the first British study of social change to have a follow-up study. It examined social change in Banbury, Oxfordshire in the 1940s, and was pioneering for its use of team research.

From 1968 to 1970 Stacey served as Secretary of the British Sociological Association. She was elected President of the British Sociological Association in 1982, and her presidential address criticised the male-dominated field and its influence on the primarily male subjects of study. She was appointed to the Welsh Hospital Board in 1970, and she was a member-observer of the General Medical Council from 1973 to 1983.

She was a feminist and actively worked to improve gender balance in academia, often mentoring and supporting younger women colleagues.

### **Personal life**

She married political scientist Frank Stacey in 1945, and the couple had four children and a foster child. Stacey completed her husband's book, *Ombudsmen Compared*, which was unfinished when he died in 1977. She lived with her partner Jennifer Lorch for many years. Stacey enjoyed gardening, and in later life became interested in Buddhism. She died in Warwick on 10 February 2004.