

# “WOMEN WERE INVOLVED WITH THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY LONG BEFORE THEIR ADMISSION AS FELLOWS”

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:

## A Moment in Time

**F**arewell to Raising Horizons, the exhibition of photographs representing women in geology and archaeology which has adorned the Lower Library at Burlington House since May this year. A collaboration between artist Leonora Saunders and TrowelBlazers, who exist to celebrate trowel wielding female scientists throughout history, the photographs feature current researchers posing as their historical counterparts. Professor Jane Francis in full academic dress as Marie Stopes (yes, she was a geologist first!) buttons a cuff, whilst Professor Cynthia Burek as Catherine Raisin glances up briefly from a map, and Dr Lorna Steel reaches a hand to Trey, Mary Anning's faithful companion in fossil hunting. Each, the project website tells us, represents a moment in time.

As I packed the exhibition away into layers of tissue paper, bubble wrap and foam padding (one of my final acts in my former Head of Outreach guise), I couldn't help feeling sad to be sending them away. This year, the Geological Society has marked (the word 'celebrate' feels inapt) its centenary of the admission of women as Fellows, but given the nature of nineteenth century portraiture, the diversity of the paintings on display at Burlington House doesn't come close to reflecting our current Fellowship. Janet Watson, of course, is prominent in the lecture theatre which bears her name, and Mary Anning stands in our entrance hall above one of her many finds, but they are exceptions.

Women were involved with the Geological Society long before their admission as Fellows. The first to be published was Maria

Graham (1785-1842) in an 1824 issue of *Transactions*, and in 1893 Catherine Raisin (1855-1945) became the first female recipient of one of the Society's awards, the Lyell Fund. Many others, of course, were not so publically recognised; unacknowledged colleagues, field assistants, proof readers, artists and collaborators whose names do not appear in the official records.

Many have remarked, on a visit to the building, how nice it has been to see so many women, past and present, celebrated in portraiture – a sort of alternative history of what might have been, had those early female geologists had an equal standing as Fellows. In the end, the moment in time which signified their victory in 1919 was curiously mundane – a simple amendment to the bye laws read:

*'Article XXIII. Interpretation – In the interpretation of these Bye-Laws words in the masculine gender only, shall include the feminine gender also.'*

Every milestone highlights how far is still to go - all of the first twelve women to join the Society in 1919 were white, and the majority came from backgrounds which afforded them opportunities for education and travel not available to many. To use the word 'celebration' of our 2019 anniversary felt out of place not only because such a barrier should not have needed to be lifted, but because so many still remain. If we are to continue to make progress in ensuring geology is a science for everyone, this year's centenary of our female Fellows cannot be simply a moment in time – it must be part of a wider movement for change.



L-R: Mary Anning, Catherine Raisin and Marie Stopes from the Raising Horizons exhibition (c. Leonora Saunders)