



Ida Smedley, Lister Institute staff photograph, 1933.

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The feminist academic

A close-up of Ida Smedley from a Lister Institute staff photograph, 1933. The year before this photograph was taken, Smedley had secured tenure at the Institute – a rare feat for a woman at this date.

Perhaps more notable than Smedley's own achievements are the efforts she made to promote the prospects of other women. As a Lecturer in Chemistry at Manchester University from 1906, she fought for women's admittance to the Chemical Society, including a petition that she jointly led in 1908. In 1913 she became one of the first three women to obtain membership of the Biochemical Society. Only in 1920 did the Chemical Society follow suit; fittingly, Smedley became its first female member. A recipient of many 'firsts', in 1927 Ida also became the first woman chair of the Biochemical Society.¹

Smedley contributed to women's participation in intellectual debate as Chair of the International Board of the Lyceum Club in the 1920s, and President of the British Federation of University Women after 1919.²

While some women biochemists confined their labours primarily to the laboratory, Smedley was vocal in her advocacy for feminist causes at home and abroad. In 1933, she acted as signatory for a petition in favour of women's suffrage in India. So too, in 1935 she petitioned the British government for equality in welfare payments made to women and men.³ Participation in these campaigns reflects Ida Smedley's commitment to social fairness and in particular, to a greater voice for women.

¹ T.W. Goodwin, *History of the Biochemical Society, 1911-1986* (London: Biochemical Society, 1987), p. 15.

² Mary R.S. Creese, 'British Women in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries who Contributed to Research in the Chemical Sciences', *British Journal for the History of Science* **24** (1991), p. 283; 'Near and Far', *Sydney Morning Herald* (3 March 1924), p. 4.

³ 'Indian Women's Franchise', *The Times* (Saturday 25 March 1933), p. 8; Women and Unemployment Assistance', *The Times* (Tuesday 12 February 1935), p. 10.