



*Left:* the imposing main entrance to King Edward VI High School for Girls, complete with its grand coat of arms, c.1890s; *Right:* Headmistress Miss Creak and her staff, 1884.

King Edward's Foundation Archive, Birmingham.

### King Edward VI High School for Girls

King Edward VI High School for Girls opened in 1883 and quickly established a strong reputation for science. School inspectors in October 1885 commended the 'extremely good' instruction provided to girls in chemistry and botany.<sup>1</sup> The school boasted both excellent facilities – including among the first chemistry laboratories in a girls' school – and teaching staff drawn from the first cohort of graduates from the women's colleges at Cambridge.<sup>2</sup>

These were subjects that helped prepare a generation of scientists, including biochemists. **Ida Smedley** (biochemist of fat metabolism, 1877-1944) entered King Edward's in December 1885, just two months after the inspectors visited. Others to attend the school included fellow biochemists **Muriel Wheldale** (1880-1932) and **Annie Homer** (1882-1953), physiologist and educationalist **Winifred Cullis** (1875-1956) and future President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, **Hilda Rose** (1891-1982).

The Rayner-Canhams have identified King Edward VI as the most successful English school for producing professional women chemists between 1880 and 1949 – nearly twice as many (20:11) as its nearest rival.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> King Edward VI High School for Girls, School Governor's Minutes, 25 October 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Mary R.S. Creese, 'British Women of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries who Contributed to Research in the Chemical Sciences', *British Journal for the History of Science* **24** (1991), p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Marlene F. Rayner-Canham and Geoffrey Rayner-Canham, *Chemistry was their Life: Pioneering British Women Chemists, 1880-1949* (London: Imperial College Press, 2008), p. 28.