

## Obituary of Isabella Mears – British Medical Journal – November 21, 1936

**Dr. ISABELLA MEARS**, who died at Whitehouse, Inveresk, Midlothian, on November 11th, was one of the early pioneer medical women. She was born on December 20th, 1853, the daughter of James Bartholomew, farmer, West Lothian. After training as a teacher she desired to undertake mission work abroad. Having this end in view she was advised by Dr. Colin Valentine to obtain such medical education as was at that time available to women.

With her father's whole-hearted approval she went to London in 1875 and entered the newly formed School of Medicine for Women, which had been opened by Dr. Sophia Jex-Blake six months previously. The number of students was small, and she had to fit into the curriculum of classes already in existence, as best she could. Opportunities for clinical work there were almost none. A few beds in Dr. Garrett Anderson's hospital in Marylebone Road were available, and she seized the opportunity also of dispensary work in Seven Dials. Later, however, the Royal Free Hospital was opened to women-a great boon. Her midwifery experience was obtained in Dublin, where she had to take out her course along with the midwives.

Among the lecturers at the School was the late Professor Sir Edward Sharpey-Schafer, who taught physiology, and whom she had the opportunity of meeting two weeks before his death and of exchanging reminiscences. Another lecturer was Dr. William Pope Mears of London Hospital, who taught anatomy. In 1879 she married Dr. Mears. At that time no British qualification was open to women. Mrs. Mears went with her husband to Newcastle, where he had been appointed to the Durham School of Medicine as anatomist. In 1881 she obtained the qualification ,L.K.Q.C.P.I., now L.R.C.P.I., the Royal College of Physicians- of Ireland having opened its qualifying examinations to women.

Her name was that of the twenty-fifth woman on the *Medical Register*. She engaged in general practice in Tynemouth for nine years, when she and her husband decided to carry out their early intention of mission work abroad. They were in Foochow, China, under the Church Missionary Society from 1890 to 1893, when they had to- return on account of Dr. W. P. Mears's ill-health. In 1895 she and her husband settled in Edinburgh for the education of their children. As has been noted lately in a letter to the *British Medical Journal* (October 31st), in 1899 they opened at Woodburn, Edinburgh, one of the earliest sanatoria in Britain for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis after visiting Dr. Walther at Nordrach.

Dr. W. P. Mears died in 1901, and his wife continued her work at Woodburn till 1922, when she retired. In addition to her medical work she was deeply interested in Chinese religion and philosophy. She translated the *Tao Teh King*, which was published in 1916, and after she retired she studied and made a tentative translation of one of the most difficult and ancient of the Chinese classics, the Yih King, embodied in her book *Creative Energy* in 1931. She is survived by two sons and two daughters, of whom two are in the medical profession.