

The Philippa Fawcett Collection

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The annual Women in Mathematics Day was augmented this year by a reception to mark the launch of the 'Philippa Fawcett Collection'. The Collection was launched by Professor Lisa Jardine CBE to an audience including representatives of British Society for the History of Mathematics, the Royal Astronomical Society, the Mathematical Association and many others keen to view the displays and find out more about the Collection and the Society's work in this area. The Philippa Fawcett Collection comprises almost 200 books which were written by or about female mathematicians working before 1940, including some dating from before 1868, when no women were able to attend a university or to obtain any formal mathematical training. The books were donated to the Society by Dr A.E.L. Davis, a historian of mathematics who has been a lecturer at the Open University. She said "The Collection is a testament to the dedication and talent of these women who were not permitted to undertake proper training simply because of their sex. They often worked in isolation, without the support of a mathematical community. Their contribution has been vital to opening opportunities in mathematics to women today, although there is still a great deal to be done." Today, women are quite well represented in the mathematical sciences at undergraduate level, comprising close to 40% of the student body in UK universities, but just 15 of the 520 professors of mathematics in the UK are female (2.8%). (Caucus for Women in Statistics Newsletter, Volume 38, No. 2, Spring 2008, Newsbriefs)