

Did you notice?

A column for the curious stroller

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10. Plaque commemorating Margaret Huggins



Several Monkstown residents played an important role in the history of astronomy. Among them was Margaret Huggins (née Murray) who lived at number 23 Longford Terrace. Margaret's childhood interest in the stars was encouraged by her grandfather who first taught her to recognise the constellations. She began to study the heavens with her own home-made instruments. Her interest in spectroscopy led her to the work of one of the premier astronomers of the day, William Huggins, whom she met on a visit he paid to Dublin in 1870. The purpose of his visit was to inspect a special telescope made for him by Howard Grubb, another Monkstown resident, who in fact introduced them.

It was a happy encounter and the couple were married in Monkstown in 1875, when William Huggins was 51 and Margaret was 27. Thus began a highly productive professional partnership that significantly advanced the science of astronomy. They pioneered the use of photography in astronomical observation, and published their researches jointly. When William was created a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1897, his citation read "for the great contributions which, with the collaboration of his gifted wife, he had made to the new science of astrophysics". Those honoured were all men; this reference to the now Lady Huggins made her the only woman even remotely mentioned in that honours list.

Margaret contributed to the *Observatory* magazine and to *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Together they published the *Photographic Atlas of Representative Stellar Spectra*. Margaret was elected to membership of the British Astronomical Association. She became an honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1892, and was admitted to fellowship on the same terms as men in 1915. She donated her scientific and artistic treasures to Wellesley Women's College in the United States. She had always taken an interest in the cause of women's education and admired the achievements of American women in the academic world. William and Margaret Huggins are commemorated in St Paul's Cathedral.

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