

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8278421.stm>

19th Century widow fund expanded By Andrew Black Political reporter, BBC Scotland news website

A fund inspired by a pioneering 19th Century philanthropist to help Glasgow widows is to get a makeover, more than 100 years after it was established.

The fund, in Isabella Ure Elder's name, set up in 1906, offered an annual grant of £25 - £2,300 at 2009 prices - to widows living in Govan or Glasgow.

The trust which oversees the fund now wants to lift the payment cap and widen eligibility for payments.

Legislation is being brought to Holyrood to make the changes.

In the years since being approved by parliament, the trustees of the Ure Elder Fund now want to be able to modernise it to address poverty in a 21st Century context.

Lead trustee, Dr Joan McAlpine, told BBC Scotland that even though the name of the fund - officially still the "Ure Elder Fund for Indigent Widow Ladies of Govan and Glasgow" - would be shortened to the Ure Elder Fund, it would still retain its original ethos.

"£25 now doesn't buy very much so we want to be able to change it and give more realistic sums to those people who apply and are accepted," she said.

"Trying to keep Mrs Elder's thoughts in mind, it will still be given largely to widows or women who have children and can't support them, to people who are really in need of additional money."

Born in the Gorbals in 1828, Isabella Ure Elder became a champion for the working classes in Govan, an area which suffered from extreme poverty, where her husband John Elder's company, John Elder & Co, became one of the world's leading shipbuilders and marine engineers.

Medical school

Following his death 1869, she devoted her life to philanthropic work and improving standards of health and education among the people of Govan.

Mrs Elder went on to open a public park for local residents, on land near her husband's former Fairfield Shipyard, as well as establishing a hospital and library in the area.

Famously, she gifted North Park House in Glasgow's west end - later the home of BBC Scotland - to Queen Margaret College, and a medical school for women opened in 1890.

More than 100 years after Mrs Elder's death, in 1905, the fund's trustees are bringing the Ure Elder Transfer and Dissolution Bill to Holyrood to make the changes.

MSPs will be asked to approve the legislation in the coming months.



<http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=WH0024&type=P>

Isabella Elder, née Ure (1828-1905) was a benefactor of the University who took a particular interest in promoting opportunities for women in higher education.

In 1857 Isabella, the daughter of a Glasgow lawyer, married [John Elder](#) (1824-69), a partner in Randolph, Elder & Co, marine engineers in the city. Under John Elder's direction the business thrived, and acquired a shipbuilding yard at Govan in 1860. By 1868, when the firm became John Elder & Co and moved to the Fairfield Shipyard in Govan, it was recognised as one of the world's leading shipbuilders and marine engineers.

John Elder died in 1869. Isabella became sole owner of his business for 9 months, until it was transferred to a partnership led by her brother John Ure. Subsequently, she devoted her life to philanthropic projects in Govan and Glasgow. In 1883 Elder purchased 37 acres of ground near the Fairfield Shipyard, and had it laid out as a public park named the Elder Park in memory of her husband and her father-in-law David. The park opened to a great local fanfare in 1885, and for many years she paid for an annual fireworks display there. Also in 1885, she set up a School of Domestic Economy in Govan to teach young women how to prepare nutritious meals, darn, mend, starch, and perform other chores required in managing a household on a limited budget.

Elder also took a keen interest in higher education, and particularly in the University. In recognition of her late husband's enthusiasm for promoting the application of scientific principles in industry, she gave a supplementary endowment of £5,000 to support the chair of Engineering (in 1873) and £12,500 to endow the Elder Chair of Naval Architecture (in 1883) at the University. She also contributed to the building fund, and to provide lectures in Astronomy, at the Glasgow and West of Scotland Technical College, the forerunner of the University of Strathclyde. In 1883, Elder bought North Park House in the city's West End and donated it to the Queen Margaret College, the first college in Scotland to provide higher education for women. In 1890 she agreed to finance the first courses of study at the QMC's new School of Medicine. The QMC subsequently merged with the University, and in 1894 its medical school produced Scotland's first women graduates in Medicine.

She was described in *The Bailie*, a Glasgow periodical, as being "a true woman, a wise benefactress of the public and of learning". She was awarded the honorary degree of LLD in 1901, and her generosity is commemorated both in a memorial window in the Bute Hall together with [Isabella Elder](#) and [Janet Galloway](#) and on the Memorial Quincentennial Gates on University Avenue