A consultant surgeon, mother-of-four, and author – Margaret Ghilchik is a remarkable woman. She overcame prejudice to become one of a handful of female surgeons more than 50 years ago, and, aged 77, she is still performing operations today.

Not content to work only with a scalpel, Ghilchik – a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) since 1967 – has also taken up the pen to document the lives of other female pioneers in the medical profession. Her book *The Fellowship of Women: Two Hundred Surgical Lives* (2011) was published to mark the centenary of Eleanor Davies-Colley becoming the first female member of the RCS.

Ghilchik is now writing a novel, and her literary interests and skill can be linked to a Creative Writing course at Birkbeck.

Ghilchik was born in China, where her father was a Methodist missionary. After her schooling in Australia and England, she completed her medical training at St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London. All types of surgery soon followed, from circumcisions to thoracic operations, during the ‘cutting years’ at Harold Wood Hospital in Essex.

Ghilchik says: “In those days you got very good experience early on. At the end of two years I had hardly left the hospital. It was a tremendous experience and very enjoyable.” She became a consultant surgeon in 1971 and worked until 2000 at St Charles’ Hospital in London. Other posts followed and she now works at St George’s Hospital in London.

One of Ghilchik’s proudest achievements has been her ability to combine her successful career with family life. She adds: “I worked until the day my children were born and then I took my six weeks’ holiday. That way one tried to diffuse any criticism from male colleagues.”

The pursuit of literary ambitions followed with a Certificate in Creative Writing at Birkbeck in 2003. Ghilchik was inspired by her classmates, her tutor Shelley Weiner, and a visit by double Man Booker winner Hilary Mantel. She says: “I was trying to move away from scientific and medical writing to write in a more literary and creative way. When you start it is quite daunting, but Birkbeck certainly transforms you.”

Her new departure succeeded, and she wrote *The Fellowship of Women*, which recounts the struggle of women to be accepted as Fellows of the RCS. The book details the professional and personal lives of the first 200 women, including herself, to join the RCS.

For more information about *The Fellowship of Women*, visit: http://ow.ly/fQvn2

By Guy Collender