

## **Women Architects**

Women have always had an influence on the way a home looks, and have long advised on schools, hospitals and gardens, but their involvement in the architectural profession was an amateur one until the end of the nineteenth century. Wealthy clients belong to a long list of patron-builders from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, beginning with Bess of Hardwick (Countess of Shrewsbury, 1521/2-1608). Letters and accounts attest to her detailed concern for building at Chatsworth and she commissioned Hardwick Hall after first extending an earlier house there to her own design. These additions, from 1587-91, are now in the care of English Heritage and open to the public.

Most dowager women builders like Bess concentrated on their own houses or on charitable works. Lady Anne Clifford (1590-1676) combined both with her improvements to her Westmorland estates. They included her castles at Appleby, Brougham, Brough and Pendragon, two new churches and two restorations, almshouses at Appleby and many monuments. She employed a director, Gabriel Vincent, but controlled the designs as well as building programme. The earliest architectural drawings known to be by a woman are those of c.1701 for the rebuilding of St Andrew's church, Weston-under-Lizard, Staffordshire, by Lady Wilbraham, who had earlier built her own house, Weston Hall.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw younger, more intellectual women take an interest in design. In 1792-8 the cousins Jane and Mary Parminster built themselves a house, A La Ronde, following a ten-year grand tour of Europe that had included the chapel of San Vitale in Ravenna that inspired the design. The house is opened by the National Trust and contains their collections and craftwork. Nearby they built a chapel and almshouses for unmarried women, and a girls' school. Many women decorated interiors and garden buildings, for example the Shell House at Goodwood designed and decorated in 1739-46 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duchess of Richmond and her daughters. Mary Townley, a cousin and pupil of Sir Joshua Reynolds, designed several houses and a barracks in Ramsgate, including her own, Townley House Mansion (1792) for her developer husband.

Perhaps the most remarkable nineteenth-century woman architect was Sara Losh, a scholar of languages and mathematics. St Mary's church at Wreay, Cumbria, was rebuilt in 1839-42 in a Romanesque style decorated with rich sculpture based on symbols from nature. Losh also built in the village and erected memorials to her sister Katherine. Further down the social scale, the builder Maria Savill and manufacturer Eleanor Coade played an important part in the building trades. Coade stone can be found on many listed buildings from the early nineteenth century, especially around London.

The nineteenth century saw women slowly becoming involved in the professions. The progressive architects Ernest George and J. M. Brydon began to take a few women pupils and supported their entry into the profession. The Institute of Architects, founded in 1834 and later the Royal Institute of British Architects, was such a male preserve that they did not think to exclude women by rule. The first woman member was Ethel Charles, who had trained with Ernest George and at the Bartlett School of University College, London. Her application was accepted in 1898 by a single vote after a debate in the RIBA council. Her sister Bessie was admitted in 1900, but both found their opportunities limited to small domestic works.

Women began attending full-time architectural courses in around 1905 in Glasgow and 1909 in Manchester, but the Architectural Association (AA) first admitted women

only in 1917. There followed a crop of remarkable students, with women consistently among its prize winners from 1923 onwards. A young graduate, Elisabeth Scott, won the high-profile competition for the rebuilding of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon (grade II\*), the first public building designed by a women. Another graduate, Hilda Mason, designed St Andrew's church in Felixstowe in 1929-30 using reinforced concrete - its style a synthesis of the local perpendicular style and Auguste Perret's modern church in Le Raincy outside Paris - with Raymond Erith and Raymond Wrinch modifying her original concept.

The 1930s saw a body of pioneering independent single women who were at least the equal of their male counterparts. Young AA graduates, Elisabeth Benjamin, Mary Crowley and (Margaret) Justin Blanco White all designed houses in the Modern Movement style that are now listed, mainly for family and friends. Norah Aiton and Betty Scott opened an office in 1930, designing offices and factories for the Aiton family firm in Derby in a radical modern style.

Other women worked in partnership with their husbands, such as Sadie Speight, trained in Manchester and who in 1934 married Leslie Martin, later architect to the London County Council and Professor of Architecture at Cambridge. All their pre-war works are jointly credited, including a house at Brampton, Cumbria, for the textile manufacturer Alistair Morton. They also wrote two books on design, *Everyday Things* in 1931 and *The Flat Book* in 1939. Speight slipped quietly out of the limelight following an illness in 1950, just as other husband and wife teams came to the fore. With more women marrying and having large families in the post-war years, husband and wife practices were an effective means of working. Alison and Peter Smithson are the best known example, and their client Derek Sugden has described discussing the drawings for his house while their baby son lay in a crib at Alison's feet. A photograph of Alison working on her own house at Upper Lawn shows a similar arrangement for her youngest daughter.

Mary Crowley married late, and she and her husband David Medd worked together in public service for the Ministry of Education, Mary providing much of the research and design initiative while David was hands-on with materials and furniture. Other husband and wife partnerships to produce listed buildings have included Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, Richard and Su Rogers, and Norman and Wendy Foster. The Fosters' large office has been a nurturing ground for many younger women architects who have gone on to independent careers, and who may one day also have their buildings listed, including Joanna van Heyningen and Julia Barfield, while Amanda Levete is among the many successful women architects who have worked with the Richard Rogers Partnership.

Listed buildings by women architects, with grade, include:

Hardwick Old Hall	extensions 1587-91	Bess of Hardwick	I
Appleby Castle	restored 1651-3	Lady Anne Clifford	I
Stable block, Appleby Castle	1652	Lady Anne Clifford	I
St Michael, Appleby	1659	Lady Anne Clifford	II*
Almshouses, Appleby	1651	Lady Anne Clifford	I
Weston Hall, Weston-under-Lizard	1670s	Lady Wilbraham	I
St Andrew, Weston-under-Lizard	1701	Lady Wilbraham	I
A La Ronde, Exmouth, Devon	1798	J & M Parminter	I
The Point in View, Exmouth, Devon	1811	J & M Parminter	I
Manse, Point in View, Exmouth, Devon	1825	J & M Parminter	I
Royal Road, Ramsgate	1814	Mary Townley	II
The Paragon, Ramsgate	1816	Mary Townley	II
1-5 Chatham Place, Ramsgate	1780s	Mary Townley	II
Spencer Square, Ramsgate	1802	Mary Townley	II
Townley House Mansion, Ramsgate	1792	Mary Townley	II
St Mary, Wreay, Cumbria	1840-2	Sara Losh	II*
St Ninian's Well, Wreay, Cumbria	c.1840	Sara Losh	II
Sexton's Cottage, Wreay, Cumbria	c.1835	Sara Losh	II
Mortuary Chapel, Wreay, Cumbria	c.1835	Sara Losh	II
Churchyard memorials, Wreay	c.1835	Sara Losh	II
Losh Mausoleum, Wreay	1850	Sara Losh	II
Pompeian Cottage, Wreay, Cumbria	1830	Sara Losh	II
St John the Baptist, Holme E Waver	extensions 1844	Sara Losh	I
Langarth, Brisco, Cumbria	1830s	Sara Losh	II
St Andrew's, Felixstowe	1929-31	Hilda Mason and Raymond Erith	II*
Shakespeare Memorial Theatre	1929-32	Elisabeth Scott	II*
Former Aiton works, Derby	1931	Aiton and Scott	II
East Wall, Hedgerley Lane, Gerrards Cross	1936	Elisabeth Benjamin	II

Shawms, Conduit Head Road, Cambridge	1938	M J Blanco White	II*
Brackenfell, Brampton, Cumbria	1938	Martin and Speight	II
102-106 even, Orchard Rd, Tewin	1936	Mary Crowley	II
Burleigh Primary School, Cheshunt	1946-7	Mary Crowley, David Medd and Bruce Martin	II
St Crispin's School, Wokingham	1950-3	Mary and David Medd	II
5 Pennyfathers Lane, N Welwyn	1953-4	Mary and David Medd	II
Woodside School, Amersham	1956-7	Mary and David Medd	II
Eveline Lowe School, Peckham	1966	Mary and David Medd	II
Passfields, Bromley Rd, Catford	1949-50	Fry, Drew and Partners	II
Smithdon School and gym, Hunstanton	1950-3	Alison and Peter Smithson	II*
2 Farm Field, Watford	1955-6	Alison and Peter Smithson	II
Economist Group, Westminster	1960-4	Alison and Peter Smithson	II*
Upper Lawn, West Tisbury, Wilts	1961-2	Alison and Peter Smithson	II
Garden Building, St Hilda's, Oxford	1968-70	Alison and Peter Smithson	II
Blendworth, Cadnam, Dunhill, Eashing, Grayswood, Hilsea, Hindhead, Longmoor, Westmark and Witley Points, Alton East, Wandsworth	1952-5	Rosemary Stjernstedt et al LCC	II
2 Avenue Road, Leicester	1953-4	F Atkinson and Brenda Walker	II
Granelli House, Alvechurch, Warks	1955-7	Remo and Mary Granelli	II
3 Church Walk, Aldeburgh, Suffolk	1963-4	H. T. and Elizabeth Cadbury-Brown	II
Creekvean, Feock, Cornwall	1964-7	Team 4	II
The Studio, Ulting, Essex	1967-9	Richard and Su Rogers	II
22 Parkside, Wimbledon	1968-70	Richard and Su Rogers	II
Willis Building, Ipswich	1972-5	Foster Associates	I
Sainsbury Centre, UEA, Norwich	1975-7	Foster Associates	II*
IBM Technical Park, Greenford	1975-80	Foster Associates	II
Spectrum Building (Renault) Swindon	1979-82	Foster Associates	II*

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### **Sources**

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National Heritage List for England: <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/results.aspx>

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