



# the forgotten pioneers



celebrating the women of  
the garden city movement

## **The Forgotten Pioneers – Celebrating the Women of the Garden City Movement**



Town and Country Planning Association  
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Cover artwork: Design by Walter Crane for *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, subsequently used in the Garden City Association's journal, *Garden Cities and Town Planning*.

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This paper was researched and written by Cova Cervilla Bordiu, Projects Assistant, TCPA, and Katy Lock, Director of Communities and FJ Osborn Fellow, TCPA.

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>page 2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>1898-1914: Women in the early Garden City movement</b>	<b>page 4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>1915-1939: Planning, activism, and women's suffrage</b>	<b>page 10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>1945-1970: Women and the New Towns story</b>	<b>page 15</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>New campaigns and new opportunities</b>	<b>page 19</b>
	<b>Women in planning and housing networks</b>	<b>page 20</b>

## Section 1

# Introduction

***'Woman's influence is too often ignored. When the Garden City is built, as it shortly will be, woman's share in the work will be found to have been a large one. Women are among our most active missionaries.'***

E Howard: 'Postscript'. In *Garden Cities of To-morrow: being the Second Edition of 'To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform'*. Swann Sonnenschein, 1902

When picturing the pioneers of the Garden City movement, what usually springs to mind? An aged Ebenezer Howard? A reflective Raymond Unwin or Frederic Osborn? A bearded William Morris? These may be the famous faces of a movement that transformed the way we plan for the creation and renewal of our towns and cities, but the Garden City movement was one of collaboration and collective action which would not have been possible without countless other – and less familiar – voices. Among the least recognised are the female campaigners, practitioners and politicians who worked to make the Garden City vision a reality.

The role of women in the Garden City movement and the outcomes it sought has been significant from the outset. In the wake of the many female voices in the wider radical legacy that influenced the development of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City idea – from the Arts and Crafts movement to the Co-operative movements – the Garden City movement attracted countless forward-thinking yet sometimes seemingly invisible women. This paper is an initial historical survey – drawing on the recently digitised TCPA journal archives – of just some of those who were directly involved.

The Garden City Association (GCA) – today the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) – was formed in 1899, and by 1903 included a 'Women's League', which aimed to promote the aims of the Association as a whole and provide a forum to consider the needs of a home from the standpoint of 'wives and mothers'. Reflecting the times, women were under-represented in the governance of the GCA, but Lady Howard was on the first Council and women would later take executive roles. By 1920 a 'Women's Section' had been established to support and progress the Association's campaign and the role of women within it. Alongside these formal activities, figures such as Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn took on informal campaigning roles, joining her husband Frederic Osborn on the Association's study tours and, like countless others, making the activities and campaigns of her partner possible. Prominent female architects, landscape architects and planners and designers would play an important part in the New Towns programme that followed, although their numbers still reflected a continuing gender imbalance in the wider profession, particularly in leadership roles.



**The Edwardian TCPA (Howard right of centre – where are the women?)**

Source: D Hardy: 'Feeling a way towards women's emancipation'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1987, Vol. 56, May, 153-54

The story of women in the Garden City movement runs in parallel to the history of the planning profession, within the context of evolving gender politics and the wider women's liberation movement. The roots of town and country planning practice lie in 19th century urban reform, in art, in healthy places, and in the pursuit of a new way of living.<sup>1</sup> But in its early stages of practice the skills of the new town planning profession related to technical, design and legal matters, activities that were then mostly male dominated, with major consequences for women's subsequent participation in planning.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last 120 years, the role of women in planning has changed, thanks in part to many of the pioneering women mentioned in this paper. Today, women make up 39% of the membership of the professional body, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) – yet many women continue to lack visibility in the profession and have faced gender-related barriers.<sup>3</sup>

In *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, Ebenezer Howard explicitly sought to consider the needs of women – individually, and collectively in terms of co-habitation – in the design of homes and spaces. It was the female pioneers discussed in this paper who would ensure that this approach evolved more widely to take in the needs of women in the design of place as a whole, importantly looking beyond domestic roles. However, there continues to be a wider debate about whether the way that places and spaces are designed still favours traditional male-centric perspectives and lifestyles.<sup>4</sup>

This paper looks into the rich history of women in the Garden City movement and beyond, and celebrates some of these female pioneers and their continuing influence today. It provides a snapshot of some of the stories uncovered through an exploration of the TCPA's recently digitised journal archives. Far from an attempt to record a detailed history of women in planning, it is a celebration of some of the women that contributed directly to the Garden City movement, the New Towns programme and beyond, seen largely through the lens of the TCPA's archive.

It was beyond the scope of this paper to document the many strands of histories which it touches upon, from social reformers such as Beatrice Webb to activists such as Annie Besant, but it complements histories of female voices in the countless strands of environmentalism and urbanism that contributed to the planning and pursuit of a better way to live, from urban and landscape design and architecture to economics and community activism. We recognise that it is incomplete in its coverage, not least because the work and lives of many women were not documented, leaving many stories untold.

Today, women continue to be under-represented in many professional areas, but the TCPA is proud to show leadership in the contemporary debate on gender equality through its projects, staff, and campaigns. We hope that this paper provides the start of a renewed TCPA contribution to the wider debate on gender politics and equality in planning, and to the ongoing challenge of answering the question: 'How are we going to live?'

### Section 1 notes

1 *Planning 2020: Raynsford Review of Planning in England. Final Report.* TCPA. Nov. 2018.

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=30864427-d8dc-4b0b-88ed-c6e0f08c0edd>

2 B Taylor: 'Back to the roots of women in planning'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1987, Vol. 56, Oct., 268-269

3 A Biquelet-Lock, J Divine and B Crabb: *Women and Planning: An Analysis of Gender Related Barriers to Professional Advancement.* RTPI Research Paper. RTPI, Feb. 2020. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/4325/women-and-planning.pdf>

4 C Criado Perez: *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men.* Chatto & Windus, 2019

## Section 2

# 1898-1914

# Women in the early Garden City movement

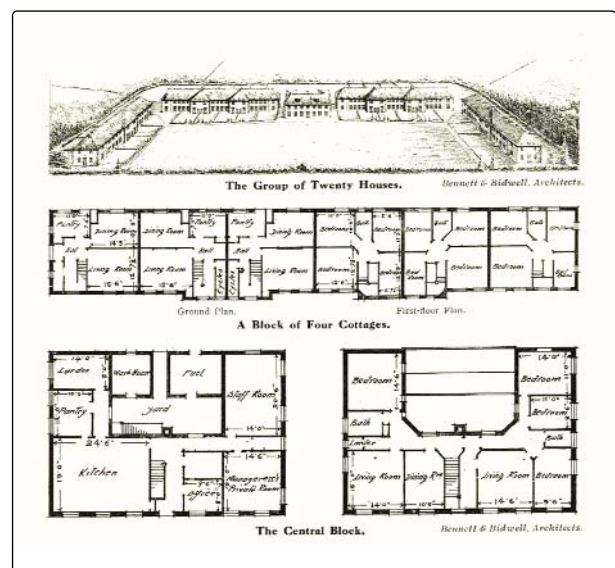
The Garden City movement emerged during a period of intense societal change. Amid the loosening of Victorian rigidity, the prominence of utopian visions of a new society and the consolidation of the women's suffrage movement, the role of women in society, although still bound to tradition, held to the promise of transformation. In his history of the TCPA, Dennis Hardy refers to an ambiguous role for women in the early Garden City movement:

*'The role of women in the early garden city movement ... reflects a mixture of a Victorian 'lady bountiful' approach, where the gentle hand of a woman is offered to lead the slum-dweller to a better land, and the promise of a more radical approach, where the traditional role of women itself is challenged.'*<sup>5</sup>

The former is perhaps reflected in the cover artwork used in the early years of the GCA's journal, *The Garden City* (which subsequently became *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, and is now *Town & Country Planning*).

The role of women in the Garden City vision was complex. Ebenezer Howard nursed the idea of experimenting with new forms of social organisation based on co-operative principles in the home. There was a nod towards this in *To-morrow*, which notes that some housing might have common gardens and co-operative kitchens.

By 1906, Howard was keen to demonstrate how co-operative living could be 'one of the central ideas of domestic life'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps inspired by an idea put forward in *The Garden City* by the artist Evacustes A Phipson,<sup>7</sup> and working with architect H Clapham Lander, Howard envisaged the Homesgarth scheme in Letchworth in which the 24 individual homes were linked by a cloister and shared a kitchen and dining facilities. Hardy notes that this sharing of the burden of home-making tasks was probably less to do with the emancipation of women from traditional roles than with reducing middle-class households' reliance on the 'tiresome servant'.<sup>8</sup> Howard's ideas were radical in the sense that they challenged the concept of a single-family household, yet they maintained the traditional division of labour between men and women in the home.<sup>9</sup> His vision of shared facilities for women may itself have been inspired by the work of Mary Coleman Stuckert, who in 1893 designed a model for a new community of 44 homes with co-operative housekeeping facilities.<sup>10</sup>



**Plans for co-operative houses at Letchworth**

Source: EB Pearsall: 'Co-operative houses at Letchworth'. *Garden Cities & Town Planning*, 1920, Vol. X, No. 8, Aug., 174-75



## ‘Women may fill all offices in municipality’

Entry in the index to E Howard: *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Swann Sonnenschein, 1889

This practical consideration of women was complemented by recognition of women’s part in the Garden City campaign itself. In *To-morrow* Howard notes that ‘men or women’ could be elected to the Board of Management for the Garden City.<sup>11</sup> This discreet reference is more radical than it appears; this degree of equality in rights for men and women was progressive at the time. It was not until 1918, 20 years after the publication of *To-morrow*, that women over 30 gained the right to a parliamentary vote, and it was 1928 before women had the

### Radical women in the first Garden City



**‘Summer school at the Cloisters’, Letchworth, 1909**

Source: © Garden City Collection (482.18), Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

Letchworth, the first Garden City, was founded in 1903, at a time of increasing political and social concerns for women’s rights – a subject on which Letchworth’s citizens tended to have advanced views. Co-operative living experiments such as that at Homesgarth reflected this wider social trend,<sup>a</sup> and cycle works were incorporated in the original Garden City plans – something that was particularly favourable for women as the bicycle, which was becoming more popular at the time, was a step towards independence for liberal women.<sup>b</sup> Letchworth was also known as a hub for suffragettes – a special place where women had the opportunity to contribute to the growing community. Many famous suffragettes and inspiring women lived and spoke at Letchworth,<sup>c</sup> and most of the town supported ‘votes for women’.<sup>d</sup>

a SV Ward: *The Peaceful Path: Building Garden Cities and New Towns*. Hertfordshire Publications, 2016

b CH Greed: *Women in Planning: Creating Gendered Realities*. Routledge, 1994

c See ‘Inspiring Letchworth women’. Webpage. Garden City Collection, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. <http://www.gardencitycollection.com/themes/inspiring-leitchworth-women>

d *Suffrage Stories: Tales from Knebworth, Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth*. Stevenage Museum, North Herts Museum, Knebworth House, and the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Garden City Collection. Stevenage Museum, 2019

**'... it is sad that although Howard's work was a vehicle through which many earlier feminist ideas were spread to the world as a whole, his prominence in the historical record as the grandfather of British town planning effectively obscured from view the existence of the female originators of many of 'his' ideas.'**

CH Greed: 'Drains feminism'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1987, Vol. 56, Oct., 279-280

right to vote on the same terms and same age as men. Membership of the GCA meant that women could be part of its Council, which provided an opportunity to have a say in the evolution and consolidation of the movement. In the early years, women were excluded from executive roles, but by 1901 three women were sitting in a Council of 21: Mrs Ashton John, Miss Jessie Currie, and Mrs Elizabeth Howard. As the land was bought and First Garden City Limited formed to develop Letchworth, GCA members were also busy creating the GCA Women's League.

### **The Garden City Association Women's League**

The Garden City Association Women's League was formed in 1903, led by Muriel, Viscountess Helmsley. The group was open to members at no extra subscription cost, and promoted the aims of the Association 'more especially with regard to the claims of the home from the point of view of wives and mothers'.<sup>12</sup> The League encouraged women to spread the Garden City gospel within their networks so as to secure shareholders and new GCA members. Its activity waned when Viscountess Helmsley became ill in 1905, but was revived in 1907 with the additional efforts of Miss E Haigh Miller.

In June 1907,<sup>13</sup> a meeting held at Viscountess Helmsley's residence concluded in the election of six Women's League officers: President: Muriel, Viscountess Helmsley; Vice-Presidents:

### **The Women's League**

#### **Objects and Constitution.**

- (1) That it consist of women members of the Garden City Association ;
- (2) That it have as its aim the forwarding by every means in its power of the principles and objects of the Garden City Association, more especially with regard to the claims of the home from the standpoint of wives and mothers ;
- (3) That it be managed by a local Committee from each county, and that an advisory council be formed in London of provincial delegates together with the members of the Central Committee ;
- (4) That all members of the League should use, in the interests of the cause, whatever gifts or opportunities they may have for organising or taking part in lectures, discussions, drawing-room meetings, concerts, etc., as well for literary work, and promoting the further study of the housing question ;
- (5) That a report of the work of the League should be given to each meeting of the Executive of the Association, and incorporated in the Annual General Report of the Association ;
- (6) That no separate subscription for the Women's League or for any branch thereof be imposed ; but that all subscriptions and donations should be made direct to the Garden City Association.

Source: Viscountess Helmsley: 'The Women's League'. *The Garden City*, 1904, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct., 12



**Elizabeth ('Lizzie') Ann Howard (née Bills) (1853-1904)**

Image: © Garden City Collection (LBM41.16),  
Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

Elizabeth ('Lizzie') Ann Bills married Ebenezer Howard in August 1879 and was the mother to their four children. She was a driving force in the Garden City movement, not just in supporting Howard but also in securing a £50 gift from a wealthy supporter to assist in the publication of *To-Morrow*. She continued to raise funds, working her way through London social gatherings and giving lectures. Lizzie never lived in Letchworth, passing away in 1904, but she adored 'the beautiful estate...'.<sup>5</sup>

See: LBM41.16. Garden City Collection, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. <http://www.gardencitycollection.com/object-lbm41-16>; and U Howard 'Garden cities – a family story'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2020, Vol. 89, No. 8, Aug., 249-251

Mrs Herbert Cohen, Mrs Edward Moon, and Miss Nicholson; Honorary Treasurer: Mrs RO Moon; and Honorary Secretary: Miss E Haigh Miller. In addition to continuing their campaigning work to attract women to the movement, it was agreed that the League would set up the 'Working People's Building Fund' to raise money for the building of cottages for working people in Letchworth. By 1908, the activities of the League appear to have dwindled, possibly due to the funding challenges facing the GCA at that time, and the lack of reference to the League within the GCA journal suggests its dissolution around that time.

From 1912, the Spirella factory at Letchworth provided not only employment but active women's groups and clubs, as employers began to encourage workers to have an active social life. A prominent female voice in this early period was even closer to home for Ebenezer Howard: his wife, Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Howard, was a key figure in the Garden City mission, addressing meetings in her own right as well as providing Howard with a 'harmonious' home life, running a household on a limited budget, and enabling him to pursue his vision.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth died in 1904, and in 1907 Howard married Edith Annie Hayward. Edith would also become involved in the GCA, although to a lesser extent than Elizabeth.<sup>15</sup>

**Section 2 notes**

5 D Hardy: *From Garden Cities to New Towns*. E & FN Spon, 1991, p.83

6 *Ibid.*, p.85

7 *Ibid.*, p.84

8 *Ibid.*, p.85

9 CH Greed: 'Drains feminism'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1987, Vol. 56, Oct., 279-280

10 *Ibid.*

11 E Howard: *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Swann Sonnenschein, 1989, p.70

12 Viscountess Hemsley: 'The Women's League'. *The Garden City*, 1904, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct., 12

13 Viscountess Hemsley: 'Women's League'. *The Garden City*, 1907, Vol. 2, No. 18, Jul., 372

14 M Aldridge: 'Garden Cities: the disappearing 'woman question''. In S Zimmerman (Ed.): *Urban Space and Identity in the European City, 1890 to 1930s*. Central European University, Budapest, 1995

15 From the few records that are available, unfortunately little is known about Edith Annie Howard (née Hayward) (1864-1941) other than that she suffered with mental health issues

## Notable female voices in the early Garden City movement

### Henrietta Barnett (née Rowland) (1851-1936)



**Henrietta Barnett**

Source: Hampstead Garden Suburb Archives Trust

The founder of the Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1904, Henrietta Barnett was inspired by a visit to Elizabeth Cadbury at Bournville Village. Hampstead Garden Suburb incorporated mixed housing provision, with schools, cultural facilities, and an adult education centre. Henrietta Barnett was also greatly involved in the work of the Garden City Association, as recorded in various editions of *The Garden City*, often delivering presentations, and had great influence in the movement, both before and after the death of her husband. She sat on the Council of the GCA for several years and in 1915 she was made a Vice-President.

See: C Hartley: *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*. Second Edition. Routledge, 2003

### Dame Elizabeth Mary Cadbury (née Taylor) (1858-1951)

A philanthropist and wife of George Cadbury, Elizabeth Cadbury was influential in the development of Bournville. In 1924 she led the work of a Public Utility Society, Residential Flats Ltd., which erected a residential club 'designed to meet the needs of business and professional women who are enabled to have 'a home of their own', with the additional advantages of the communal services of a club'.



**'Mr and Mrs Cadbury leaving the new Rest House at Bournville'**

Source: *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1914, Vol. 4 (New Series), No. 6, Jul., 140

A convinced but non-militant suffragist, she campaigned for the education and welfare of women throughout her life. She was awarded the OBE in 1918 and made a Dame of the British Empire in 1934.

See: 'Public Utilities Societies at Bournville' *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1925, Vol. 15. No. 7, Jul., 162; and 'Elizabeth Mary Cadbury'. Webpage. Quakers in the World.

<http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/277/Elizabeth-Mary-Cadbury->

### Muriel Frances Louisa Duncombe (née Talbot), Viscountess Helmsley (1859-1925)

Muriel, Viscountess Helmsley was an active Conservative local politician in Islington and a believer in the Garden City idea. She led the GCA Women's League, and also chaired the National Society of Day Nurseries and was Honorary Secretary of the Women's Institute Training College Branch for Nursing.

See: D Hardy: *From Garden Cities to New Towns*. E & FN Spon, 1991; and 'Muriel Frances Louisa Duncombe (née Talbot), Viscountess Helmsley (later Mrs Owen)'. National Portrait Gallery. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw121443/Muriel-Frances-Louisa-Duncombe-ne-Talbot-Viscountess-Helmsley-later-Mrs-Owen?LinkID=mp85944&role=sit&rNo=0>

### Sybella Gurney (1870-1926)

Sybella Gurney was active in the housing co-partnership movement, and was founding Secretary of the Rural Co-partnership Housing Association. She was active in the Garden City movement through her involvement in Hampstead Garden Suburb and the Ruskian Arts and Crafts movement. Her paper 'Civic reconstruction and the Garden City movement', presented to the Sociological Society in October 1909, was published in the *Sociological Review*. She promoted co-operative housing initiatives, had a specific interest in rural housing, and frequently wrote in the Garden City Association/Garden Cities and Town Planning Association journal.

See: S Gurney: 'Civic reconstruction and the Garden City movement'. *Sociological Review*, 1910, Vol. a3, No. 1, Jan., 35-43

### Octavia Hill (1838-1912)



**Octavia Hill**

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octavia\\_Hill#/media/File:Octavia\\_hill.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octavia_Hill#/media/File:Octavia_hill.jpg) (Public domain)

Octavia Hill is known worldwide for her work to improve housing conditions and for her advocacy of publicly accessible open spaces. Her work as the first female housing property manager and in training other women was widely celebrated by

the Garden City Association – 'the consideration of the personal, human factor as an integral part of the business'. She was deeply disturbed by housing conditions in Victorian London and campaigned vigorously for clean and safe properties. By the time of her death, she managed 2,000 tenancies for private landlords, with women operating her housing management system both in the UK and abroad.

See: G Darley: *Octavia Hill: A Life*. Constable, 1990; C Hartley: *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*. Europa Publications, 2003; and *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1921, Vol. 11, No. 4, Apr., 100-102

### Mary Esther Nicholson (1848-1938)



**Members of the Letchworth Residents Union, with Mary Esther Nicholson seated, centre**

Source: © Garden City Collection (LBM1522), Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

<http://www.gardencitycollection.com/object-lbm1522>

An avid supporter of the movement, Mary Esther Nicholson moved to Letchworth from Hampstead in 1906. She founded and was the first president of the Letchworth Residents Union, which acted as the local branch of the Garden City Association, with a committee elected on full adult suffrage – progressive at time as women did not have the parliamentary vote. The Residents Union was very active in welcoming newcomers and helping them to settle in. She was also one of the founders of the Letchworth Guild of Help and supported the hospital in the town.

See: LBM3000.845. Garden City Collection. Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

<http://www.gardencitycollection.com/object-lbm3000-845>



## Section 3

1915-1939

# Planning, activism, and women's suffrage



**Housing at Meadow Way Green, Letchworth: unlike the archetypal cottage-house of the English Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn, the three co-operative residences built there – Homesgarth (1910-13), Meadow Way Green (1914-16 and 1924), and Guessens Court (1924-5) – were enclaves of special forms of social relations, providing residents with shared domestic, recreational, and dining arrangements**

By the end of the First World War in 1918, Britain's major cities were severely overcrowded, and there was a huge need for 'working-class' housing. With attitudes to women's role in society changing (in part as a result of new employment opportunities within the war effort), in the same year an Act of Parliament enfranchised women over the age of 30 who were either a member of, or married to a member of, the Local Government Register. The 1919 Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act marked the introduction of state subsidy for council-built

### Women's Pioneer Housing

In 1920, a group of suffrage campaigners – including two key members of the GCTPA Women's Section, Etheldred Browning and Sydney Bushell – set up Women's Pioneer Housing, aimed at providing homes at moderate rates for professional and other women who wanted to live independently. The women-only housing association was successful from the outset and now owns 1,000 properties in London. The group celebrated its centenary in October 2020.

See: The Women's Pioneer Housing website, at <https://www.womenspioneer.co.uk/our-story/>

housing, often in the form of large estates, and the Housing Act of 1930 encouraged local councils to clear all remaining slum housing and provided subsidies to re-house inhabitants.

The increasing involvement of local authorities in supplying housing led, in turn, to an increase in partnership working with the voluntary housing sector, which was dominated by women's organisations and provided a new avenue for increased participation.<sup>16</sup> A range of women-led organisation emerged in the post-war era, including groups formed within the Garden City movement. For example, May 1919 saw the founding of the Bristol and District Branch of what was now, after a change of name from the Garden City Association in 1909, the Garden City and Town Planning Association (GCTPA). It was chaired by Miss Hilda Cashmore, with Mrs R Burman and Mrs GA Falk as Honorary Secretaries, all of whom were also members of the Bristol Women's Advisory Housing Committee.<sup>17</sup> It was the only local branch of the GCTPA to be chaired by a woman.

### GCTPA Women's Section

The Women's Section of the GCTPA was founded on 19 May 1920, as a direct outcome of a 'Conference of Women's Organisations' organised by the Association, in which 16 women's groups were represented – including the Women's House Property Managers' Association, the Women's Village Councils' Federation, the National Council of Women, the National League for Health, and Baby Week Council. The Women's Section received support from Lady Astor MP, and the meetings were presided over by Lady Emmott. The Women's Section focused on matters of 'managing the home'. In the Conference of Women's Organisations, the subjects discussed included 'the planning of the home', 'the laboursaving kitchen', 'central hot water supply and central heating', 'communal arrangements', and 'women on housing committees'.

The Women's Section also campaigned on a variety of matters, such as (working with the Women's Village Councils) the improvement of sanitary conditions in rural areas, focusing on the proper disposal of refuse, and women as housing property managers, especially working-class property management. The Women's Section published a report on the experiences of – and advocating – women as property managers, following in the footsteps of the first female housing property manager, Octavia Hill.

In 1923, it published a report<sup>18</sup> on the best kind of fittings and labour-saving devices available for the home. The aim was to present 'unbiased information as to the effectiveness of the

**'If it be true that the passionate, conscious love of liberty is 'a prison flower', it may well be that the words never meant so much to so many families, – millions of them alas! garden-less, – as they do to-day. Looking back, on the threshold of seventy years, for the reasons that fill me with eager gratitude for the work and hope of The Garden Cities and Town Planning Association I am constrained to put the thought first. 'In a garden city all the children will start their lives in a garden home, with open country in reach of a vigorous walk.' Perhaps only those who have enjoyed this human right can fully understand its countless values, or realise the meaning of its loss, or with what terrible suddenness, even the possibility of its enjoyment can be destroyed.'**

Katharine Bruce Glasier, in 'Famous women demand planning for health and beauty'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1937, Vol. 5, No. 20, Sept., 132-35

many devices now upon the market for reducing the drudgery of housewifery', and to determine how homes could be designed so as 'to leave the housewife both leisure and money for recreation'.

Alongside research, reporting and campaigning on these issues, the Women's Section delivered a variety of lectures on its work. It is believed that the group was dissolved in March 1924.

During this period the Garden City movement was itself going through a period of change. While mass public sector housebuilding referenced the Garden City model in design and layout, there had been less success in the wider place-making project, and the municipalised development model had not been widely taken up. Having bought the land for the second Garden City at Welwyn in 1919, by the mid-1930s the GCTPA was frustrated by the lack of progress in realising the Garden City vision, and Frederic Osborn (FJO) was leading the call for a more strategic approach, including the promotion of a programme of satellite towns around London, and was making the case for state involvement in realising the Garden City idea.

While FJO led the charge, female members of the GCTPA were also actively campaigning for the cause. The September 1937 edition of *Town & Country Planning*<sup>19</sup> featured a collection of short pieces, written by women, giving their views on, among other things, the need for planning, planning and health, the needs of children, and decentralisation from London and the building of satellite towns. Contributors included Margaret Cole and Katharine Bruce Glasier, both writers and politicians, and Ellen Wilkinson MP, who later became Minister of Education, who wrote:

*'Town planning must be made a reality. There is a great deal of legislation and a great many paper schemes, but the result has been almost if not quite negligible. Town planning is not individual; we must have national planning and then regional planning and finally, town planning.'*



**‘Lack of planning has resulted in the present chaotic condition of our cities and the threatened desecration of our countryside. But excessive regimentation of life is equally deplorable. The location of industrial sites and the economic distribution of population is a problem so complex that the multitude of apparent solutions appear to counterbalance each other.’**

Caroline Haslett, in ‘Famous women demand planning for health and beauty’. *Town & Country Planning*, 1937, Vol. 5, No. 20, Sept., 132-35

Meanwhile in Glasgow, the Scottish Branch of the GCTPA was established in the same year, with Scotland’s ‘First Lady Town Planner’, Elizabeth Mitchell, taking a leading role, managing correspondence and reporting back to the London office, as well as organising study tours and becoming Chair of the Scottish Branch Executive, a role she recounted in her 1967 book *The Plan that Pleased*.<sup>20</sup>

FJO, like Ebenezer Howard, was family-oriented and committed to women’s civil rights. His wife, Margaret Paterson Osborn, supported him throughout his professional career and shared his interests. She was a great advocate for the GCTPA. FJO’s biographer records that he made few major decisions without consulting her, and she regularly read his memoranda and helped to finalise them.<sup>21</sup> Lady Margaret was a valued contributor to the Association’s journal, travelled on TCPA study tours, and attended many of the congresses of the International Federation for Housing and Planning. She was known and respected by planners all over the world.

The Garden Cities and Town Planning Association started its wartime campaign under economic difficulty, with only one paid staff member, Miss Baldwin, the Assistant Secretary. FJO was centrally involved in the Association’s activities as President, but even his role was part time during that period. As the pace of activity increased, especially through campaigning for New Towns, Miss Baldwin was joined on staff by Mrs McAllister, who dealt with public relations as well as editing the journal. In 1942 they were joined by a new Organising Secretary, Miss Clarke. Meanwhile, the Association relied on a team of volunteers who assisted the full-time staff.<sup>22</sup>

### Section 3 notes

16 ‘Women’s Housing Association’. Webpage. Historic England. <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/womens-history/visible-in-stone/womens-housing-assoc/>

17 ‘Report of the Bristol and District Branch’. (In *Garden Cities and Town Planning Association: Twenty-first Annual Report*) *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1920, Vol. 10, No. 2, Feb., 42

18 See ‘Labour saving in small houses’. *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1923, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Feb., Supplement (1-12); ‘Labour saving in small houses – continued’. *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1923, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Mar., Supplement (13-27); and ‘Editorial comments: Light on labour saving’. *Garden Cities and Town Planning*, 1923, Vol. XIII, No. 1, Jan., 3

19 ‘Famous women demand planning for health and beauty’. *Town & Country Planning*, 1937, Vol. 5, No. 20, Sept., 132-35 – featuring pieces by Sybil Thorndike, Margaret Cole, Cicely Hamilton, Naomi Mitchison, Ellen Wilkinson, Margaret Yates, Pearl Binder, Caroline Haslett, Marjorie Gullan, Lady Pentland, Elizabeth Cadbury, and Katharine Bruce Glasier

20 EB Mitchell: *The Plan that Pleased*. TCPA, 1967

21 A Whittick: *F.J.O. – Practical Idealist: A Biography of Sir Frederic Osborn*. TCPA, 1987

22 D Hardy: *From Garden Cities to New Towns*. E & FN Spon, 1991

## Notable female voices in the period

### Jocelyn Adburgham (1900-1979)

A renowned architect and town planner, Jocelyn Adburgham became the first female member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, in 1928. She was a member of the Garden Cities and Town Association Council for many years and was frequently mentioned in the Association's journal in her capacity as a member of the Education and Membership Committees. She was active in the voluntary housing sector and was part of a feminist movement that was concerned with improving society through architecture.

See: 'J Adburgham becomes first woman member'. RTPI Centenary Timeline. Royal Town Planning Institute. <https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/165046/RTPI-Centenary-Timeline/#vars!panel=1844749!>; and CH Greed: *Women in Planning: Creating Gendered Realities*. Routledge, 1994

### Etheldred Browning

Etheldred Browning, an Irish suffragist, was founder and the first Secretary of Women's Pioneer Housing. She was the Secretary of the Women's Section of the Garden Cities and Town Association Council, and the representative of Women's Pioneer Housing at the Association's AGMs.

See: 'Our Story'. Webpage. Women's Pioneer Housing. <https://www.womenspioneer.co.uk/our-story/>

### Sydney Mary Bushell (1880-1959)

A member of the Executive of the Garden Cities and Town Association Council and Honorary Secretary of the Association's Women's Section during the 1920s, Sydney Bushell made major contributions to women's housing. She lived for many years in Welwyn Garden City and hosted educational tours and tea parties on behalf of the Association and was still contributing to the Association's journal in the 1930s.

See: L Dixon: 'Sydney Mary Bushell, 1880-1959'. LSE Blog entry. London School of Economics and Political Science, Aug. 2017. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2017/08/30/sydney-mary-bushell-1880-1959/>

### Lady Mary Gertrude Emmott (née Lees) (1866-1954)

A British political activist involved in a variety of women's movements, Lady Mary Gertrude Emmott was Vice-Chair of the Women's Liberal Federation (part of the Liberal Party), served on the Executive of the London Society of Women's Suffrage, and chaired the Parliamentary and Legislation Committee of the National Union of Women Workers.

See: 'Emmott, Lady Mary Gertrude (Mrs Alfred Emmott, Baroness Emmott of Oldham) (née Lees) OBE, JP'. In C Law: *Women: A Modern Political Dictionary*. IB Tauris, 2000, pp.58-59

### Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn (née Robb) (1890-1970)



**Margaret Paterson Robb in graduation gown**

Source: A Whittick: *F.J.O. - Practical Idealist: A Biography of Sir Frederic Osborn*. TCPA, 1987

In 1916, Margaret Paterson Robb married Frederic James Osborn, whom she had met at a summer school of the Fabian Society, and she had a major, beneficial influence on his subsequent life. They lived first in Letchworth, and in 1920 became pioneer residents in Welwyn Garden City, where for 50 years she devoted herself to its social welfare and educational and cultural interests. Her obituary in *Town & Country Planning* called her 'A quiet warrior but a warrior none the less', and Lewis Mumford wrote fondly of her as 'the epitome of courage, clear-sightedness and magnanimity'.

See: C Cervilla Bordiu: 'Lady Margaret Paterson Osborn 'A quiet warrior but a warrior none the less''. TCPA Blog entry. TCPA, Jul. 2020. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/blog/blog-lady-margaret-paterson-osborn>; and H Evans: 'Obituary: Lady Osborn MA JP'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1970, Vol. 38, No. 8, Sept., 381

## Section 4

# 1945-1970

# Women and the New Towns story

The wartime experience of strategic planning and wider political imperatives to sustain the morale of what was a 'citizens' army' and the need for large-scale post-war reconstruction combined to give rise to the 1947 planning system. In this special political context there was acknowledgment of a legitimate role for the state in the development of land – in a consensus that today has not applied for 40 years.<sup>23</sup> Born of the same wave of commitment to state-led reconstruction, the Reith Committee on New Towns gave rise to the New Towns Act 1946.

Alongside radical changes in the planning system, the post-war era was a time of changing perspectives on women and employment, as the reconstruction effort made the need for an expanded labour force urgent. Women played a role delivering New Towns built under the New Towns Act, but in general appear to be under-represented in leadership roles during this period. Monica Felton, a renowned town planner, feminist and social activist, is perhaps the most well known. She was the only woman on the Reith Committee and was the first Chair of the Development Corporation for the first designated New Town, Stevenage.

Elizabeth Mitchell, whose work at the Scottish Branch of the GCTPA was influential in the planning for the Scottish New Towns, was one of eight people initially serving on the Development Corporation for East Kilbride New Town, established in 1947. Dame Evelyn Sharp also played a crucial role during this period, reaching hitherto unprecedented seniority for a woman in the central government department responsible delivering the New Towns. A number of women occupied key positions in the post-war New Towns programme, serving on executive boards and contributing the management of the towns at the local level.

Despite women's increasing involvement in the New Towns programme during this period, their representation on governing and executive boards was piecemeal. Women were scarce on the Boards of the New Town Development Corporations, which rarely had more than one female member at a given time.<sup>24</sup> Women remained at the edges of the New Towns movement and in the 1950s and 1960s it was unusual for women to be involved in the wider planning profession – as illustrated by a 1968 special edition of *Town & Country Planning*<sup>25</sup> on New Towns which included an article titled 'The ladies join in'. The article highlighted the roles of Elizabeth Mitchell and Evelyn Denington as authoritative figures within the movement and mentioned the experience of two female residents, but, as the title suggests, the role of women was treated as separate to the wider debate on the delivery of the New Towns project.

### Section 4 notes

23 *Planning 2020: Raynsford Review of Planning in England. Final Report*. TCPA. Nov. 2018.

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=30864427-d8dc-4b0b-88ed-c6e0f08c0edd>

24 M Aldridge: 'Garden Cities: the disappearing 'woman question''. In S Zimmerman (Ed.): *Urban Space and Identity in the European City, 1890 to 1930s*. Central European University, Budapest, 1995

25 'The ladies join in'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1968, Vol. 36, No 1-2, Jan-Feb, 92-99 – pieces by Elizabeth Mitchell, Evelyn Denington and Gillian Pitt

## Notable female voices in the period

### Evelyn Denington (née Bursill), Baroness Denington (1907-1998)



**Evelyn Denington, on the occasion of becoming a life peer in 1978**

Source: Stevenage Museum

Evelyn Denington, Baroness Denington was elected to St Pancras Brough Council in 1945, serving until 1959, and was elected to the London County Council (LCC) in 1946. She was regarded as a crucial contributor to the New Towns movement. She was a long-serving member of LCC's New and Expanding Town's Committee (including five years as Chair), and she was a member of the Board of Stevenage Development Corporation from 1950 and its Chair from 1966 until its dissolution in 1980. She was also a member of the TCPA Council during the 1970s and frequently contributed to *Town & Country Planning*. Anecdotal evidence suggests she left a legacy to the TCPA in her will.

See: D Sutherland: 'Denington [née Bursill], Evelyn Joyce, Baroness Denington'. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press.  
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-70683> [Behind paywall]

### Jane Drew (1911-1996)

Jane Drew was an architect and town planner who had her own practice employing women during the Second World War. She worked on the 1943 'Rebuilding Britain' exhibition and in 1949 designed the Chantry and Tanys Dell estates in Harlow New Town.

See: 'Postwar impact' in the Women's History section of the Historic England website.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/womens-history/visible-in-stone/post-war-impact/>

### Monica Felton (1906-1970)

A renowned town planner, feminist and social activist, Monica Felton was elected in 1937 to the London County Council as a Labour Party councillor, holding her seat in 1946. She played a major role in the New Towns programme and was the only woman on the Reith Committee which established its basic features. She chaired Peterlee Development Corporation for 18 months from 1948, and then chaired Stevenage Development Corporation until 1951. In 1951, she visited North Korea as part of the Women's International Democratic Federation and started campaigning against British and US involvement in the Korean War, losing her position at Stevenage Development Corporation as a result.

See: 'Felton, Mrs Monica'. In *Who's Who 2021 and Who Was Who*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

<https://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/10.1093/ww/9780199540891.001.0001/www-9780199540884-e-53853;jsessionid=5DEDF3B97D60E39FA77CD37D0E372260>

[Behind paywall]; A Alexander: *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*. Routledge, 2009, p.110; and SV Ward: *The Peaceful Path: Building Garden Cities and New Towns*. Hertfordshire Publications, 2016, pp.194-95

### Lady Patricia Gibberd (née Fox-Edwards) (1926-2006)

The driving force behind Harlow Arts Trust for over 50 years, Lady Patricia Gibberd helped to make Harlow the site of one of the finest collections of 20th-century sculpture in Britain, with over 70 sculptures in publicly open sites across the town.

Married to Sir Frederick Gibberd (1904-1984), architect and masterplanner of Harlow New Town, she had great influence on her husband's work and was a Vice-President of the TCPA until her death in 2006.

*See:* J Rea: 'A major contribution to public sculpture in Britain: Patricia, Lady Gibberd (1926-2006), and the Harlow Sculpture Collection'. *Sculpture Journal*, 2007, Vol. 16, No. 2, 89-90; and *Interview with Patricia Gibberd*. Essex Record Office, Sept. 1987. [https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/Result\\_Details.aspx?DocID=278340](https://www.essexarchivesonline.co.uk/Result_Details.aspx?DocID=278340)

### **Jean Mann (née Stewart) (1889-1964)**

A Scottish Labour politician and housing reformer, Jean Mann played a key role in the Scottish Branch of the GCTPA/TCPA, alongside Elizabeth Mitchell. She was a vocal campaigner in support of Ebenezer Howard's and Patrick Abercrombie's ideas, and in the 1930s was influential in effecting the change in Glasgow's housing policy from tenement construction to low-rise, cottage-style housing, and she attempted to raise the standards in new housing estates in general.

*See:* G McAllister: 'Jean Mann'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1964, Vol. 32, No. 4, Apr., 194; and I Maver: 'Mann [née Stewart], Jean [Janet]'. Webpage. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50056>

### **Elizabeth Mitchell (1880-1980)**

Born in Edinburgh, Elizabeth Mitchell was interested in the Garden City movement from a young age. She was involved in a wide range of activities, including teaching, setting up the Women's Agricultural Committee, and being elected to various posts in local authorities.

She played a key role in setting up the GCTPA Scottish Section, in which she served as Chair of the Executive. She was a member of the Board of the Development Corporation for East Kilbride, the first New Town to be designated in Scotland in May 1947, and argued hard for designation of the Scottish New Town at Cumbernauld. Her personal memoirs record her pleasure in being part of the movement, yet she dryly observed (on page 28): 'I was appointed as 'the woman' ... I confess I



**Elizabeth Mitchell**

*Source:* EB Mitchell: *The Plan that Pleased*. TCPA, 1967

thought I was an inadequate representative of womanhood as a whole, never having been a housewife.' In 1955 the TCPA awarded her the Howard Memorial Medal for her 'consistent adherence and distinguished service to the garden city movement'.

*See:* J Keys: 'Elizabeth Mitchell – A woman before her time'. Webpage. Biggar & District Community Heritage. July 2006. <http://www.biggarheritage.co.uk/history/>; EB Mitchell: *The Plan that Pleased*. TCPA, 1967; 'Miss Elizabeth Mitchell'. In 'Planning Commentary'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1955, Vol. 23, No. 139, Nov., 515; and 'The Howard Memorial Dinner'. *Town & Country Planning*, 1956, Vol. 24, No. 141, Jan., 46

### **Evelyn Adelaide Sharp, Baroness Sharp (1903-1985)**

Evelyn Sharp was the first woman to hold the position of Permanent Secretary, as the most senior departmental position in the Civil Service, serving in that role in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government from 1955 to her retirement in 1966. Her obituary in *The Times* said that she 'did more than anyone else in this country to bring local and central government closely together. In local government circles, she earned a personal trust that was unique.' She was instrumental in



framing the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and was a champion of the construction of New Towns.

See: 'Evelyn Sharp'. Webpage. Understanding the Civil Service website. [https://civilservant.org.uk/women-evelyn\\_sharp.html](https://civilservant.org.uk/women-evelyn_sharp.html); and 'The Rt Hon The Baroness Sharp GBE'. Webpage. The Inner Temple. <https://www.innertemple.org.uk/women-in-law/our-women/evelyn-sharp/>

## Mary Tabor



**Mary Tabor**

Source: Stevenage Museum

Mary Tabor was appointed as the first Housing Officer in Stevenage New Town in 1951. In the New Town's early years, incomers had to have worked in a job in Stevenage for at least six months if they were to be offered a rented home. Mary Tabor was the first point of contact for those wanting to rent, and she was a widely respected figure in the development of the Stevenage community. She was awarded an MBE for her service. Her key role in Stevenage is mentioned in various books on the New Towns movement.

See: 'Meeting Mary Tabor'. Webpage. Stevenage Museum, Jun. 2014. <https://stevenagemuseum.com/2014/06/13/meeting-mary-tabor/>; A Alexander: *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*. Routledge, 2009, p.110; M Clapson: *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Postwar England*. Manchester University Press, 1998; and SV Ward: *The Peaceful Path: Building Garden Cities and New Towns* Hertfordshire Publications, 2016



## Section 5

# New campaigns and new opportunities

This short paper has highlighted the work and contribution of some of the many female contributors to the history of the Garden Cities movement. These figures emerged from an initial exploration of the TCPA's digitised journal archive and selected writings on the subject – from which three obvious yet important points are apparent. First, in the pursuit of better understanding of how we might improve how we live, women brought a distinctive contribution and perspective, not only from the position of their traditional roles in the family but in their understanding of some of the less tangible aspects of place-making, such as how design and planning affect how we feel – a fundamental aspect of the Garden City ethos. Secondly, it is apparent that our explorations only scratched the surface in revealing the many female architects, planners, designers, activists and social reformers who made an important technical and creative contribution to the work to realise the Garden City idea. Thirdly, these women played an extraordinary role in leading the way for women in the profession today.

In the 123 years since *To-morrow* was published, the town profession has seen significant change, with more women now in the profession, and especially in senior roles. The paper strays into the New Towns story that followed on from the Garden City movement but stops short of continuing the story and highlighting the many extraordinary women who have driven the Garden City ethos and the wider effort within and in support of planning to the present day – including the many female voices leading the renewed Garden City debate.

At the time of going to print, the TCPA has a female CEO (although, despite the TCPA's progressive intentions, it was not until 2010 that the Association was first a female-led organisation), a female chair, two female directors, and five female Trustees. The RTPI has a female CEO and has elected six female presidents in the last 13 years, and in June 2020 the first female Chief Planner was appointed, while many other related organisations, from Shelter to the National Housing Federation, are also led by women. Despite this progress, there continues to be fewer women than men in leadership roles in the industry, with clearly some way to go to redress this imbalance.

The female pioneers of the Garden City movement inspired a better planning system, energising the role of women in planning despite, on the whole, being prevented from taking decision-making roles.

The TCPA is committed to continuing both to explore these voices from the past and to amplify diverse voices working on making the Garden City ethos a reality today. This historical paper provides a foundational resource from which we hope the TCPA and others can add detail and responses as part of the wider debate on gender politics and equality in planning and the role of women in creating homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive.

# Women in planning and housing networks

## **Real Estate Balance**

<https://www.realestatebalance.org/>

Association engaged in addressing the gender imbalance in the sector.

## **Urbanistas**

<https://www.urbanistas.org.uk/>

Collaborative women-led network amplifying women's voices and ideas to make cities better for everyone.

## **Women in Planning**

<https://www.womeninplanning.org/>

Network – women-led but not exclusively for women – championing gender equality in the planning sector.

## **Women's Pioneer Housing**

<https://www.womenspioneer.co.uk/>

London's largest specialist housing association for women.

Is your network missing from this list? If so, please email [cova.cervilla@tcpa.org.uk](mailto:cova.cervilla@tcpa.org.uk)



**Lady Patricia Gibberd with husband Sir Frederick in Harlow**  
*Source: Harlow Museum & Walled Gardens*

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