



# Nine decades, nine inspiring women in landscape architecture

Karen Fitzsimon recalls some of the phenomenal female practitioners who have contributed to the establishment, growth and reputation of the Institute over ninety years.

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**P**hoebe Waller-Bridge might be making all the right headlines at the moment with TV dramas such as *Killing Eve* representing a new wave of British female screen-writers. But in terms of giving women opportunities, the landscape profession seems, outwardly at least, to be ahead of the game. From the current membership there are only 6.84% more men than women and this differential has been reducing broadly each year over the past five.

However, as Romy Rawlings CMLI, Chair of the LI's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, observes in her response to the LI 2018 State of Landscape practice survey (21 May 2018), although there is no gender

balance inequality at entry level, the gender pay gap at higher salary widens and the number of women represented in the membership at that level diminishes.

Only four of the 42 Presidents to date have been women. Brenda Colvin CBE was our first female President in 1951, Dame Sylvia Crowe in 1957 and then 47 years later Professor Kathryn Moore followed by Sue Illman in 2012. It would certainly be great to have more visible senior female role models in the LI makeup and in practices. To inspire us, and in honour of our 90th birthday, here are some of the phenomenal women who have contributed to the establishment, growth and reputation of the Institute over ninety years.





1

**Marjory Allen,  
Lady Allen of  
Hurtwood née Gill  
(1897 – 1976)**

Born in Kent she was a social reformer, children’s rights activist and landscape architect.

Allen read horticulture at the University of Reading from 1918-20, after which she established herself as a landscape designer-gardener. During a 1921 visit to Rome to see her brother and to explore the city’s gardens, she met conscientious objector and socialist Clifford Allen. They married the same year.

In 1930 her innovative and complex Selfridges’ roof garden opened, which she developed with Richard Sudell (1892-1968). The garden attracted thousands of visitors each week and included a pergola, pools, lawn and sculpture. Throughout the 1920s and 30s she wrote articles for the national press on aspects of garden design, horticulture, roof gardens and, presciently, the importance of school gardens and the amenity and community value of allotments. In 1936 she wrote an article on landscape architecture as a career for women.

With Richard Sudell and others Allen was a founding member of the Institute of Landscape Architects in 1929 and was elected its first Fellow in 1930. In 1948 she initiated the establishment of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA).

Her activism on behalf of children started during World War II and she was one of those that advocated for

what became the Children Act 1948. Initially concerned with the welfare of displaced children, her interests expanded to include nursery provision and play. The latter was prompted by a visit to Denmark where she discovered Professor Sørensen’s ingenious junk playground at Emdrup. It was a lightbulb moment and she realised the opportunity to fuse her welfare campaigning for children with landscape architecture. She went on to champion the development of adventure playgrounds and play provision generally in Britain. With her support, Britain’s first adventure playground opened in 1948.

Her books and pamphlets included *Adventure Playgrounds* (1961). She teamed up with Susan Jellicoe to produce *The things we see: gardens* (1953), *The New Small Garden* (1956) and *Town Gardens to Live in* (1977).



2

**Brenda Colvin  
CBE PPLI  
(1897 – 1981)**

a founding member of the ILA becoming its President in 1951, the first woman to hold the office and thought to be the first female president of any built-environment body. She was also a founding member of IFLA in 1948.

Born in India, her early years exposed her to a diverse range of landscapes, plants and gardens. In 1918 he entered Swanley Horticultural College for Women and was drawn to the landscape design course taught by landscape architect Madeline Agar, who had trained in the USA. When Agar left, Colvin was unhappy with the

quality of the replacement teaching and showed her determined nature by leaving the college, taking some fellow students with her.

In 1922 she established her studio in London, later moving to Gloucestershire. Over the ensuing 53 years she worked on 675 projects. She never formally retired and, rather inspiringly, her most creative period was between the ages of 55 and 75.

Following the war her projects shifted from private garden design, in the UK and abroad, to larger scale industrial and civic landscapes, such as Aldershot Military Town, where she was landscape consultant for 15 years; Trimpley Reservoir, Rugeley Power Station and the University of East Anglia. Colvin was a skilled plantswoman and had a deep understanding of ecology and landform. She expressed these ideas in her book *Land and Landscape* (1948), which considered how landscape design can be used to support the British environment in its response to an expanding population and economy. She communicated her vast tree knowledge through her 1947 book *Trees for Town and Country* which became a standard text.

Planning for succession, she invited Hal Moggridge into partnership and in 1969 Colvin Moggridge was born. Colvin bequeathed her Gloucestershire home and studio, Little Peacocks, to the practice ensuring that Colvin’s legacy endures both physically and in spirit.

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2. © MERL/Landscape Institute Collection



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## Dame Sylvia Crowe, PPLI (1901-1997)

was born in Banbury and attended Swanley Horticultural College from 1920-22. She intended joining her father's fruit farm business in Sussex. However, after a period travelling in Europe, she reverted to a childhood dream of designing gardens and in 1926 apprenticed herself with Milner White. Thirteen years as in-house designer for landscape contractor William Cutbush in Highgate followed, designing mostly private gardens.

The company had an almost annual presence at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and Crowe was responsible for the design of a number of their entries, including a 1937 gold medal winning contoured garden with a bluebell wood, stream and pond. In another garden she designed a summerhouse in concrete. It was unpopular with the more conservative RHS crowd, but Geoffrey Jellicoe admired it and encouraged her career.

Crowe joined the fledgling ILA in 1934 becoming a Fellow in 1945. Following Colvin's footsteps she was the second female President, 1957-59, and served on the ILA's Examination and Education Committees for many years. She too was a founding member of IFLA and held numerous offices from 1949, including President in 1969. Crowe was the recipient of many honours including AJ Woman of the Year 1960; Hon FRIBA 1969, LI Gold Medal 1986 and RHS Victoria Medal 1990.

After the war, Crowe established

her own practice which existed from 1945-74. Commissions varied hugely in scale, from intimate gardens to large infrastructure projects for power, including Bradwell station; new towns including Basildon; transport and reservoirs, such as Bewl Water. She thought that such jobs made an important contribution to society.

In 1964 Crowe started a 12-year appointment with the Forestry Commission as their first landscape consultant. Using ecological and aesthetic principles she provided advice on views, pattern of landform, vegetation, recreational land use and the visual impact of forestry management techniques. She considered it her best and most satisfying type of work. She was also Tree Council Chairman 1974-79. Crowe was an early advocate for projects now taken for granted, such as a Thames path, which she suggested in 1941, or the creative use of demolition spoil, which she used at Harlow new town to create hills between the housing and industrial zones.

Crowe was a prolific author and it is through her publications that we best understand her practice. In *Tomorrow's Landscape* (1956) she shows how, with sensitivity and good design, large scale projects can be accommodated in the landscape without ruining it. At the opposite end of the scale, *Garden Design* 1958 reinforces the importance of historical studies and relates them to contemporary design issues for private and public gardens and parks.

*The Dame Sylvia Crowe Award for Outstanding International Contribution to People, Place and Nature* was inaugurated by the LI in 2018.



4

## Lady Susan Jellicoe née Pares (1907 -1986)

is not always acknowledged for her contribution to the profession. She was a linguist, writer, editor, photographer and plants person. Born in Liverpool to an intellectual family, she went to school in London and afterwards spent time in Italy and Austria. This was followed by further studying of languages at the Sorbonne, Paris.

In the early 1930s she went to work as a secretary in the London office of Jellicoe, Page and Wilson and married Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1936. From that point she collaborated with Geoffrey on every project, including the establishment of the IFLA. She helped build bridges and mutual understanding by acting as interpreter at its first, post-war gathering. With the guiding hand of Colvin, who was a friend, she developed great skill in planting design, complementing Geoffrey's lack of interest in that aspect of landscape architecture. Her planting designs include those for Sutton Place, Cliveden, Hemel Hempstead Water Gardens and the Kennedy Memorial in Runnymede.

Jellicoe possessed a critical eye and understanding of design which enabled her to photograph landscapes, including those of her husband, with insight. Her collection of over 6000 images of designed, natural and historic landscapes forms a substantial part of the LI Archive at MERL. The scale of the collection and the fact that she took time to mount and catalogue them has made them an invaluable resource to this day for the profession

and historians, especially for those sites where restoration is contemplated.

Jellicoe was an honorary associate of the LI and edited and contributed articles to the journal for 20 years from 1955. She also edited the gardening section for the *Observer* from 1961-65. She co-authored the previously listed books with Marjory Allen, as well as a number of titles with Geoffrey: *Modern Private Gardens* (1968), *Water: Use of water in Landscape Architecture* (1971) and *The Landscape of Man : Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day* (1975), illustrating them with many of her own photographs. Likewise, her images formed the majority of those in the collaborative book, *The Gardens of Mughal India: a history and a guide* (1972). Her final publication was the indispensable: *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (1986) which she edited with Geoffrey, Michael Lancaster and Dr Patrick Goode. In 1985 she was awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature from University of Sheffield.



5

**Sheila Haywood**  
**FLI née Cooper**  
(1911-1993)

was born in India. After a childhood abroad, she returned to the UK to study at Architectural Association, graduating in 1934. She was immediately drawn to landscape and completed a number of garden design commissions before WWII. Her training in landscape architecture continued while working as Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe's assistant from 1939-49. The position provided

experience on all aspects of the modern practice including town plans, housing schemes, quarry sites and heritage landscapes.

Haywood established her own practice in 1949 and became consultant landscape architect for Bracknell new town. Like Crowe and Colvin, she worked on large infrastructure projects such as Maple Lodge Disposal Works (1949), Earle's Cement Works and Thorpe Marsh Power Station. At Westbury Chalk Quarry she skilfully designed the huge quarry's setting so that it was unobtrusive from the neighbouring heritage site of Bratton Camp and White Horse. She was one of the early identifiers of the recreational potential of extractive industry sites and expressed her theories and practice in a number of publications, including *Quarries and the Landscape* (1974) and through lectures. She was landscape consultant for Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridgeshire and also for nearby Churchill College.

Haywood continued with some architectural work and in the 1950s she co-designed housing schemes in London and Somerset. In 1956 she was one of seven female architects whose work was featured by Ideal Home in their book of plans. Identifying as a modern woman, she designed a house that was for 'the professional woman who is also a wife and mother.' In 1967, working with architects Frank Briggs and Peter de Souza, she was landscape architect for award winning and now Grade II listed housing development at Oaklands, Reading. Her 1972 book *The Gardens of Mughal India*, co-authored with Crowe in collaboration with Susan Jellicoe and Gordon Patterson, was based on their extended field trip to the region.



6

**Nan Fairbrother**  
(1913-1971)

was a landscape architect who broke conventions. She was born into poverty in Coventry, but her bright and curious mind secured her a place at Leeds Grammar School from where she went on to read English literature, with a scholarship, at Royal Holloway. She subsequently trained as a physiotherapist, lived unmarried with her future husband, surgeon William McKenzie and retained her maiden name when she eventually married him in 1939. She studied landscape design while her children were young and although she did develop a two-acre garden around her modernist house in Buckinghamshire, designed by her brother Rex Fairbrother, she is mostly known for her contribution to landscape literature.

As a child Fairbrother explored the countryside around Leeds and developed an interest in botany. Her first book *Children in the House* (1954) described her countryside life during the Second World War and enabled her to expand on this knowledge, fusing it with seasonal observations, thoughts on motherhood and children's response to their environment.

The deprivation of her childhood gave Fairbrother a lifelong social conscience and nudged her to consider how inevitable human industrial activity can better embrace landscape. She developed her observations and theories in the seminal text *New Lives, New Landscapes*. Published in 1970 and written while she was undergoing cancer treatment, it is still a relevant land-use planning guide on how to

5. © Paula Laycock.  
An extraordinary woman:  
A biography of Sheila Haywood,  
Landscape Architect, ARIBA,  
FLA.  
6. © Rebecca Rose Cepeda,  
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me/2013/08/](https://genusrosa.me/2013/08/)

7. © Courtesy of the Estate of Margaret Maxwell  
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create landscapes that sustainably fit a new society into an older setting. The text was illustrated with many of her own photographs and were often of sites demonstrating the best practice of her landscape architectural peers. The book won the 1971 W H Smith Award, which was indicative of its success, influence and popularity beyond the profession. She was a gifted author who wrote in a free-flowing engaging style, with clarity and often with humour.

Other publications included *Men and Gardens* (1956) an eloquent treatise on the history and meaning of gardens, using only literary sources, and *The Nature of Landscape Design* (1974) published posthumously following her early death. It continues where *New Lives, New Landscapes* stopped and turns her focus on how to design, build and manage a landscape. While it did not have the popular appeal of *New Lives*, it has equally engaging prose with much to offer contemporary landscape practitioners.



7

## Margaret Maxwell MBE née Howell (1924 -2006)

architect, town planner and landscape architect, was born in Kent and orphaned by the age of 14. She had a quiet but important presence in twentieth century landscape architecture.

In 1942 she started working as map maker in the newly established Ministry of Town and Country Planning in London. She was inspired by her

architect colleagues, such as Hugh Casson, Patrick Abercrombie and Peter Shephard, to study architecture by night at Regent Street Polytechnic. In 1945 she secured a scholarship to study full time at Liverpool School of Architecture and where she also completed a diploma in civic design. She worked briefly with architect and town planner Professor William Holford, who was largely responsible for the drafting of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947.

Maxwell met her first husband, Robert Maxwell, also an architect, in Liverpool and by the time she returned with him to London she had an exemplary reputation as a fine draftsman. She started at Bridgewater Shephard as architectural assistant in 1950 and further continued her studies by attending night school at University of London to read landscape architecture under Peter Youngman. She worked closely with Shephard for 17 years, contributing to his major works including at the Festival of Britain, Bunhill Fields, Goldsmiths' Garden, Cheyne Walk Garden and the now Grade II\* listed Snowdon Aviary at London Zoo.

In 1966, with Shephard's patronage, she launched her own practice, supported by a small team of mostly female assistants. She secured landscape work throughout the UK including at Newcastle Airport, Whipsnade Zoo, the Burrell Collection in Glasgow, Milton Keynes, the Giant Steps and Viewing Platform at Greenwich and Warwick University. She also lectured on landscape design at the Royal College of Art with her former colleague, Casson. During this period, she returned to architecture, particularly the conservation and adaptation of historic buildings such as the now demolished, Michael Sobell Pavilion for Apes at London Zoo, which secured a 1973 Civic Trust Award.



8

## Sue Illman née Carter

is a Chartered Landscape Architect based in Gloucestershire. She practiced first as a Certified Accountant then retrained in landscape architecture at Cheltenham College of Art and Design, having discovered the profession by chance at a careers guidance office. She later studied Historic Landscape Conservation at the Architectural Association under Ted Fawcett and in 1991 was a founding member of the Gloucestershire Gardens and Landscape Trust. Illman was the fourth and most recent female President of the Landscape Institute, 2012-14.

Illman Young Environmental Planning and Landscape Consultancy was established in 1987. Yvonne Young was an experienced architect and fellow student on the landscape course at Cheltenham. Young passed away in 2015, but the practice continues. Significant projects include at Silverstone Circuit and Cheltenham Racecourse. What sets Illman Young apart is their specialist knowledge in Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems: Illman is a SuDS Champion for the Construction Industry Council. Mindful of the 2014 floods, a key objective for her LI presidential role was that the LI embed SuDS in practice by offering training and advocacy at all levels of industry and Government. Illman has delivered much of that training, produced or contributed to various CIRIA guidance manuals and created a fun short animation to explain the concepts behind SuDS, called *Let's Get Nibbling*.

Passionate about professional standards and a former Professional Practice examiner, Illman was instrumental in setting up the Pathway to Chartership introduced in 2006 and previously served on the CPD and Education Committees.

She is a dedicated communicator and networker, believing that reaching out across the built environment industry is crucial for the advancement of landscape architecture and for the best environmental solutions. In 2013 she was appointed an Honorary Fellow of the Society of the Environment and has been an Honorary Fellow of the University of Gloucestershire since 2014. Sue became an expert advisor to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Excellence in The Built Environment report *Living with Water*, March 2015. And in 2019 she was installed as the Master of the Company at The Worshipful Company of Paviers, the first female to occupy the office since its earliest records from 1276.



9

## Professor Kathryn Moore

is an academic whose teaching and research is grounded by senior experience in practice. As Professor of Landscape Architecture at Birmingham City University, she has actively influenced many generations of UK based landscape architects. As Immediate Past President of IFLA (2014-18) and through her academic research, her influence has been global. Actively involved in the LI, she became

its third female President in 2006.

Born in Birmingham she grew up near the coast of South Wales and developed a love for the big picture offered by seascape, horizons and the natural landscape. Following an art Foundation year, she studied geography at University of Manchester. In her second year she stumbled across a well-placed careers leaflet, suggesting that landscape architecture was a suitable subject for someone who loved geography, art and design. She subsequently undertook Manchester's Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture. Moore started as a landscape designer with the Derelict Land Reclamation Team at Salford City Council. Within a few years she was Senior Landscape Architect and by 1986 was Group Leader with a team of 26 and generous budgets.

Moore's persuasive, political and diplomatic skills were honed at Salford as she argued to improve the quality of development and ensure that what had been promised was delivered by the local authority and developers. From early on she advocated for interdisciplinary and non-silo practice. Allied with this was the belief that landscape thought should be at the centre of all development, rather than an afterthought, in order to achieve the best results. Together with Peter Bradford, a planner at SCC they secured the 1986 RTPI Strategic Planning Award for *Salford City Environmental Strategy*.

In 1988 she joined the teaching team at Birmingham City University where her research, which underpins all of her teaching, challenges the theory of perception that has been with designers since the seventeenth century. She offers a way to understand the nature of artistic practice, how to teach design more effectively and how to link strategic ideas and policies to real places. Utilising this approach, she is currently developing a programme for regional transformation through the proposal for a West Midlands National Park. Her theories are expanded in her book *Overlooking the Visual: Demystifying the Art of Design* (2010). In the ilk

of Fairbrother's *New Lives, New Landscapes* or Colvin's *Land and Landscape*, Moore's book has become a standard text.

Landscape architecture provided women in the early and mid-twentieth century the possibility of leading independent professional lives. It is somewhat anomalous then that when Colvin established her practice in 1922, it preceded equal votes for all women.

What characteristics do these pioneering women share? A determined, energetic nature and a passion for landscape. A forward, internationalist outlook with a desire for team work, including beyond their own profession. An ability to communicate about their work and advancing theories in the written, spoken or audio form. An optimism for the potential of landscape architecture to foster sustainable development. There is one other factor, apart from good clients, that might have assisted their trajectory. Nearly all have had autonomy by running their own practices rather than being employed.

My hope is that at the 180th celebrations the LI will have at least 100 times more names in a line-up such as this. Happy Birthday to our LI!

The Brenda Colvin, Sylvia Crowe and Susan Jellicoe collections are held as part of the LI Archive at the MERL.

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