

6 Gower Street, but, from 1896, here lived and worked Fanny Wilkinson, landscape gardener to the Kyrle Society and the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association. Sharing the house was her sister, Louisa, soon to marry the youngest Garrett brother. The

Millicent also married - at 19, she ensured an entrance to the public world of politics by choosing as a husband Henry Fawcett, professor of political economy at Cambridge and a future Liberal MP. Agnes, considered one of the more tractable of the Garretts, was for some years left to occupy the position of the eldest 'daughter-at-home', a position from which correspondence shows she was keen to escape. In 1871 this she achieved, by joining forces with Rhoda to begin a professional training for a new career - as a 'house decorator'.

Why 'house decorating'? Well – why not? Here were two women, still young, who clearly – in the words Elizabeth Garrett once used of herself – had 'felt an increasing longing for some definite occupation, which should also bring in time a position and a moderate income'. Although, apparently, there were no other women house decorators working professionally at this time, it was a very suitable area of trade in which women might engage. Rhoda Garrett, who had already achieved a certain renown as a speaker for the suffrage cause, in 1876 remarked to the audience of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 'that 'woman's sphere and woman's mission is one of the most important problems of the present day, but here, at least, in the decoration and beautifying of the house, no one will dispute their right to work. If woman would rightly undertake this work and would study to understand the principles upon which all art – decorative art as well as the higher branches of art – is based, they would not only thereby increase their own sources of happiness, but in thus extending the gracious

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cause. It was this lever that Agnes Garrett used to prise open the door of the paternal home and escape into the world. In a similar fashion Elizabeth Garrett had neatly finessed middle-class society's expectations, by training for work that carried with it a professional status while, by ministering to the sick and poor, not transgressing too flagrantly woman's gendered role.

The 'studying' that Rhoda mentions translated itself into an apprenticeship. And the necessity of apprenticeship – of a professional training - runs as a motif through the Garrett approach to the task of reforming women's work opportunities. In 1875 Agnes made clear her views on the subject: 'I think the thing which it is most important to impress upon women is the necessity of a thorough and systematic training in any work which they intend to do. The *bete noire* of women has hitherto been the idea that they "can do anything". Upon examination this generally is proved to mean that they can do nothing well, not from natural incapacity, but from want of training.'

Rhoda and Agnes Garrett were received as apprentices by John McKean Brydon, who was to reap the benefit of the Garrett connection, becoming the architect of several Bloomsbury-based Garrett enterprises – the New Hospital for Women in the Euston Road, the London School of Medicine for Women in Handel Street, and the Ladies' Residential Chambers in Chenies Street. He ensured the women received a very practical apprenticeship and at its end, in mid 1874, 'R & A Garrett' began their fledgling business in a flat behind Baker St station, moving, in mid-1875, from there into no 2 Gower Street. By doing so they demonstrated their indepen518.28 181

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Of those of their clients whom it has been possible to identify, most were either members of the extended Garrett family or close friends. However, a business could not have been run for so long on such a basis and must have attracted a wider range of clients. It is known, for instance, that Agnes Garrett decorated the home of the eminent scientist, Lord Kelvin, but

happiness in itself. The quiet and soothing colour of the walls and decoration and the
admirable taste of

You can see how well this description accords with these pictures - used to demonstrate 'the right way to organise the room' – as set out in the Garretts' book, *Suggestions for House Decoration*. My researches have convinced me that these illustrations – and others in the book – were taken from real life – that the Garretts illustrated their book with views of rooms in 2 Gower Street. Here are the bureau, the gas globes, rugs and the china cabinet, as described by the journalist. But within the pictures there are even more specific references to Garrett designs. We can see here items of furniture known to have been designed by the Garretts. In this drawing we can see, to the left, a corner cabinet. An identical piece survives at Standen, originally part of the Beales' London house. Also at Standen are a daybed and a chair both of which appear in the illustration from *House Decoration*.

Although the details of the plaster work on the frieze and of the pattern of the painted ceiling are only hinted at in the Garretts' book illustrations, the frieze and the ceiling of the first-floor back room of 2 Gower Street are still in place, conserved by the University of London, which owns the building. The ceiling was the work of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett and a writer records that, 'Some friend, calling upon them, reported that, though the interview was interesting, the ladies could not be seen, as they were up on a scaffolding, lying flat on their backs close to a ceiling which they were painting'. The ceiling of the back room is painted with, in the centre, a delicate pattern of flowers, with portraits of poets around the edges. At first sight the ceiling decoration might appear at odds with one's idea of the Aesthetic home of the period. However the Queen Anne revival was nothing if not eclectic and what might, very loosely, be termed the 'Adam style' of ceiling decoration fitted well with the Sheraton-influenced furniture that the

Garretts were then designing and which conformed to their idea of what best exemplified the values of the bourgeois ascendancy.

One of Agnes Garrett's specialities was the design of chimney pieces and panelling, probably the largest single items approximating to 'architecture' that a woman at that time was likely to design. No identifiable trace of panelling remains but by chance it has been possible to uncover (literally) one chimney piece that can be proved to have been designed by Agnes Garrett, having been presented by her in April 1890 to the newly-built New Hospital for Women, the fiefdom of her sister Elizabeth. Investigation in the photographic records reveals that, as originally designed and installed, its 10-foot width was balanced by a high overmantle. The room in which it was placed was, in its original incarnation, lined with bookcases designed by Agnes Garrett to complement the fireplace. The aim here, and in her domestic interiors, was to recreate the effect of a late 17th or early 18th century panelled room. One of her pupils, Millicent Vince, wrote much later of Agnes Garrett: 'her most beautiful work was, I think, in her panelled rooms. When you look at one of her rooms – its mantelpiece, its cupboards, its panelling and its mouldings – you see at once how a room should be, and become, a single work of art; and then, when you live in it you discover that each thing within that work of art has been made also to serve exactly its own purpose and use. A decorator's work, like an architect's is unsigned, but I should always know a Garrett room as soon as I went into it'.

Of the range of artefacts designed by the firm of 'R & A Garrett', it has been possible to trace only one example of a wallpaper – 'Garrett Laburnum' - reproduced by Millicent Vince in her book on interior design as a sliver

this tiny piece of evidence, a wallpaper artist has created a length which is included in the

giving notice of the formation of the Ladies' Residential Chambers Ltd, of which the directors included Agnes Garrett and James Beale, stated

which had now been brought back across the Atlantic, was bought by the Chambers Company and erected over the two fireplaces and in the intervening alcoves of the new dining room. 'Hope' remains, over a fireplace, with 'Charity' in the alcove. Quite recently a change of ownership of this flat, which is one of two which, with an intervening passageway, now comprise what was the dining room, revealed the dado of tiles that was part of the original decoration. The dining room was maintained until at least the 1930s, causing those in charge endless trouble.

Among those with shares in the Ladies' Residential Chambers Ltd was Fanny Wilkinson who, from 1885 conducted her business as a landscape architect, first, from 15 Bloomsbury St (later renamed as 241 Shaftesbury Avenue) and then, from 1896, from 6 Gower Street. The daughter of a socially-concerned Manchester doctor, she and her sisters had been close friends of the Garretts since at least the early 1880s. They were also well acquainted with Bloomsbury; in 1881 Fanny's sister, Louisa, an art student, was lodging in the Gordon Street home of the clerk to All Saints Church. There is no doubt that Fanny Wilkinson could have remained comfortably at home, living in Middlethorpe Hall, the family's lovely early-18th century house on the outskirts of York, but instead she chose to forge for herself an independent career. For, after inveigling herself onto a course at the Crystal Palace School of Landscape Gardening, a course intended for male artisans rather than an upper-middle-class woman, Fanny Wilkinson became Britain's first female professional landscape gardener, acquiring employment with both Octavia Hill's Kyrle Society and the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association. Both bodies were intent on reclaiming London's overgrown burial grounds – bringing dead ground back to life to provide pleasure and rational recreation for the living.

In the course of a practical career lasting 20 years, Fanny Wilkinson was responsible for laying out over 75 public gardens for the MPGA, spanning London from Wandsworth to Plaistow and from Camberwell to Haverstock Hill. The gardens ranged in size from large parks, such as Vauxhall Park, Myatt's Field in Camberwell and Meath Gardens in Bethnal Green, to small spaces such as the garden of the Ironmongers' Almshouses, Hackney (now the Geffrye Museum). Because the Bedford Estate administered most