

A Women's Section of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association

A CONFERENCE of women's organizations was called on May 19th, 1920, at 3, Gray's Inn Place, W.C.1, to discuss the formation of a Women's Section of the Association. The following organizations were represented: Women's House Property Managers' Association, Standing Joint Committee Women's Industrial Organization, Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare, Women's Village Councils' Federation, National Council of Women, Women's Local Government Society, Women's Municipal Reform Association, Women's Freedom League, Women's Sanitary Inspectors' and Health Visitors' Association, Women's International League, Conservative Women's Reform Association, Rural Housing Association, Baby Week Council, Mothers' Union.

Women's Pioneer Housing and the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association

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Etheldred Browning wrote articles on the importance of housing for single women in *The Common Cause* and *The Woman Leader* - it may have been because of this or her speaking activities that she was invited to join the Women's Section of the GCTPA in 1919. The Women's Section was created by inviting a number of women's organisations to make contributions to housing design with the woman's perspective in mind.

One source suggests Etheldred was employed to run this body, which was active until 1924. Etheldred was a speaker at the GCTPA women's conference that ran alongside the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition on 7 February 1920. Colleagues in the body shared her views about the involvement of women in the design of housing and she would have met others who were experienced and trained housing managers.

Founder members of Women's Pioneer Housing -

Etheldred rallied some of her colleagues at the GCPTA to join her in her new enterprise in October 1920, notably Sydney Bushell and Edith Charlesworth.

Sydney Bushell



Sydney was invited to the first meeting in August 1920, to which she sent her apologies. However she attended the Committee of Management (COM) regularly thereafter, proposing various measures to set up WPH as an organisation and inspected some properties, proposing a budget for the purchase of a house in Barkston Gardens.

Sydney Bushell was born in 1880, daughter of a naval engineer and architect. She was educated at North London Collegiate School and became a teacher of gym. She attended L.S.E. from 1918 gaining a Social Science Certificate in 1919 and a Diploma in Sociology in 1921. Sydney was co-opted to the GCTPA Council in April 1919 and became a member of the Executive Committee and Honorary Secretary of the GCTPA Women's Section. She published an article on labour-saving devices in 1920, an interest that continued throughout her career and on which she gave talks and wrote books and pamphlets. By February 1924 she had moved to Welwyn Garden City where she continued to live until her death in 1959.

Edith Charlesworth

Edith joined the COM at its third meeting in October 1920. In Dec 1920 she acted as chair and was a regular attender who prospected for suitable properties and joined the finance sub-committee.

She was born and educated in Islington where she lived all her life. She matriculated in Jan 1897, and also gained a certificate from the 'Islington Centre of the London Society for the extension of University Training' in physiology in

1889. Societies for the extension of university training were the forerunners of further education colleges. She worked as a clerk and/or typist in local government and the Ministry of Health, where she became a Higher Clerical Officer by her retirement in 1929 at the age of 60. She was awarded an MBE for her services in 1929. As an inside source from the Ministry, she would have had knowledge of the government's subsidy policy which would have been necessary for Women's Pioneer Housing to know.

In 1921 she wrote an article in *The Woman's Leader* on the role of Women Housing Managers, which called for them to have professional training in line with, or better than, that given to men. She was closely associated with the GCTPA from 1921 and was elected to the executive committee in 1924, though had a somewhat intermittent relationship with the association. She finally resigned in 1934 due to ill health.

Dispute on the Committee of Management

Neither Sydney nor Edith were happy with the early running of Women's Pioneer Housing. In January 1921 Edith wrote resigning membership of the Society as she did not consider the Committee sufficiently business-like or the members experienced in property management. However she reconsidered her decision and was chairing a meeting in the following month where Sydney Bushell raised the question of the Society's financial viability.

A fortnight later there was more friction as it was asked why the 10% of the purchase price of the first house, 67 Holland Park Avenue had not been paid. Etheldred explained that Edith Charlesworth had wished the cheque held over. The Chairman, Helen Archdale, ruled that no member of the COM had the right to give orders to the Secretary contrary to the decisions of a

COM. Things did not settle down – in March the COM received a letter signed by Sydney Bushell, Edith Charlesworth and two other COM members asking for a special meeting to consider the financial position and referring to ‘dissatisfied members’. Together with Sydney Bushell, Edith Charlesworth proposed ‘that the financial position does not warrant any further expenditure on the scheme’. The proposal was lost, largely because Captain Reiss spoke in favour of its continuance. The four dissatisfied members including Sydney and Edith resigned from the COM.

Evelyn Waley

Born 8th May 1891, Evelyn was a member of a large and active Jewish family. One grandfather Jacob Waley was a prominent member of the Jewish community, instrumental in the creation of the United Synagogue, her maternal grandfather Sir Samuel Montagu, first Baron of Swaythling, a merchant banker who served as Liberal MP for Whitechapel and then became a peer. Among her aunts were Julia Matilda Cohen nee Waley, President of the Union of Jewish Women and Henrietta Franklin who was also supporter of Women’s Pioneer Housing.

Evelyn became a secretary to the Women’s Housing Sub Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1918. The Sub-Committee, which reported on the need to include women’s perspectives on the design of social housing included Dorothy Peel. 1919, Evelyn lectured on behalf of the GCTPA at a housing and town planning exhibition in Whitechapel and spoke at a conference in Cardiff on ‘housing from a woman’s point of view’. She referred to many of the recommendations in the reports of the Women’s Housing Sub Committee appointed by the Minister of Reconstruction, The views of women, particularly working women, were only just beginning to

carry weight, and it was very desirable that their ideas should be incorporated in the planning of new houses.

Evelyn asked to join the committee of Women's Pioneer Housing as she had practical knowledge of the working of public utility societies attended meetings from 22nd October 1920. She played an active role, supporting many proposals and as a member of the finance subcommittee offering to go with Etheldred to meet the bank manager and arrange an overdraft in December 1920. During the financial crisis in May 1921, unlike her other GCTPA colleagues, she supported the motion to ask Ray Strachey to find alternative sources of finance. Evelyn stayed when other women from the GCTPA resigned and only left the COM in April 1923 for marriage.

In 1924 Evelyn married journalist David Archer Peat, and they had moved to Ditchling in Sussex by 1927.

Captain Richard Reiss

Another key contact Etheldred made at the GCPTA, Captain Reiss served as its Chairman from 1918 to 1929.

Conventionally educated at Marlborough School and Oxford, he spent time at the Oxford Medical Mission in Bermondsey in his vacations where he became aware of the tradition of social service established by Toynbee. Called to the Bar in 1907, he also began to work with the National Land and Home League, and was appointed Chair of the Housing subcommittee in 1911. In 1912, Reiss was employed as Head Organiser of the Rural Land Inquiry. After a military career during the First World War, in 1917 he was seconded to the Ministry of Reconstruction for the purpose of working out the problems of post war housing. At some point he joined the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society. In March 1918 he read his housing paper to the Town Planning Institute and in the years following spoke on

housing at meetings all over the country and internationally.

From 1922 onwards he and his family lived in Welwyn Garden City and were actively involved in many aspects of life there - education, social and cultural activities and health. His formal involvement continued until 1955. In March 1921 Captain Reiss was invited to speak to a special meeting of Women's Pioneer Housing considering serious financial issues. He spoke strongly in favour of the continuance of the scheme and was asked to join the Committee of Management (COM) as a special adviser. He was at most of the meetings in early 1921 discussing the financial crisis. He also helped with advice on building work on 67 Holland Park Avenue and offered to lend £250 to top up the finance for this house.

He chaired a COM meeting in December 1921, but attended only once in 1922, and not at all in 1923. He agreed to speak at the fundraising dinner in Jan 1924 but resigned in March 1924. However he sent congratulations to the AGM in 1925 for the progress that Women's Pioneer had made.