

ELISABETH SCOTT, 1898-1972

FRIBA

Elisabeth Scott was born in the seaside town of Bournemouth, in an era when educating girls beyond the rudiments was still considered an unnecessary exercise. Home taught until 14 she persuaded her father to send her to Redmoor School in Canford Cliffs as a boarder. A first in her family. Here she passed her Higher Certificates and left with ambitions to train as an architect.

By 1917, The Architectural Association had begun to admit women to its courses and two years later Elisabeth was offered a place. Females were very much in the minority but she succeeded, obtained her Diploma in 1924, then gained valuable work experience with several different architectural practices.

In January 1928 Elisabeth was announced as the winner of a prestigious International Competition to design the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon. She was the first woman to succeed at this level.

Still too young to vote, Elisabeth quickly formed her own partnership, and began the long task of bringing the theatre into being. The franchise for all women arrived later that year. For a brief period, Elisabeth became a reluctant celebrity. The press and public commented on her design, sometimes harshly. Much was made of her youth, sex, parentage and personal appearance.

By then she had joined the National Society for Women's Service (later to become the Fawcett Society) and found support from her friends there, who were campaigning for equal rights and improved employment opportunities for women. On 23rd April 1932, the theatre was officially opened by the then Prince of Wales, in the presence of a vast crowd.

Elisabeth's career continued during the 1930's and several of her projects reflected her support for women's progress. These included the Fawcett Building at Newnham Cambridge, to allow for an increasing number of female students, and the Marie Curie Hospital in Swiss Cottage, which was to be run for and by women.

The Second World War had an adverse impact on her work. She and her husband, George Richards, returned to Dorset where she remained for the rest of her life. At first she worked with other local architects, then for Bournemouth Borough Council. Here she designed the Pier Theatre, which was opened in 1960.

Well before then Elisabeth had joined Soroptimist International of Bournemouth, giving advice on the conversion of a property which the Club had purchased for housing retired women. Once again she had found a supportive group to counteract the effects of being a woman working in a man's world.

Elisabeth continued working well into her late 60s. Her professionalism and example to other women moving into areas of work previously undertaken by men, and her early fame, made her a role model for all who followed.

During her career Elisabeth always credited her partners for their input, gave opportunities to women whenever she could, and encouraged young people to progress.....She was the very best of sisters.

