

Professional Women Interior Decorators in Britain, 1871 to 1899

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Abstract

This thesis recovers the histories of the women working as professional interior decorators in the later years of the nineteenth century and, by reassessing their contribution to the field, challenges the masculinized history of British interior decoration. Examination of documentary and archival sources, including trade directories, census records, periodicals and newspapers, has revealed that at least nineteen female-run interior decoration firms were active in Britain between the years of 1871 and 1899. Scholarship on the history of British interior design, however, is dominated by the histories of men. Only one female firm is mentioned with any regularity: that of cousins Agnes (1845–1935) and Rhoda Garrett (1841–1882). Although, typically, the Garretts receive a cursory mention, their female contemporaries are consistently overlooked. This study redresses the balance, focusing on case studies of three pioneering firms: those run by the Garrett cousins (active c.1874 to 1905), Charlotte Robinson (1859–1901, active 1884 to 1901) and Caroline Crommelin (1854–1910, active 1888 to c.1903). These pioneering entrepreneurs were part of a growing network of women who, in the late nineteenth century, forged new roles in interior decoration. As a result, the thesis also considers the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin's less well-documented female competitors. Through extensive new research, it significantly enriches our knowledge of the Garretts' work and reveals, for the first time, the professional biographies of Robinson and Crommelin. The case studies are approached thematically, with chapters focusing in turn on the women's motivations and training, professional spaces, promotional activity and clients and commissions. By discussing the Garretts alongside their direct female rivals, our understanding of the cousins' contribution is substantially enhanced. Further, by positioning the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin alongside their male competitors, the significant contribution of women to nineteenth-century interior decoration is asserted for the first time.

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Introduction

This thesis uncovers the histories of the women working as professional interior decorators in the later years of the nineteenth century. Examination of documentary and archival sources, including trade directories, census records, periodicals and newspapers, has revealed that at least nineteen female-run interior decoration firms were active in Britain between the years 1871 and 1899. Scholarship on the history of British interior design, however, is dominated by the histories of men. Only one female firm is mentioned with any regularity: that of cousins Agnes (1845–1935) and Rhoda Garrett (1841–1882) [Figure 0.1]. Although, typically, the Garretts receive a cursory mention, their female contemporaries are consistently overlooked. This study redresses the balance, focusing on case studies of three pioneering firms: those run by the Garrett cousins (active c.1874 to 1905), Charlotte Robinson (1859–1901, active 1884 to 1901) [Figure 0.2] and Caroline Crommelin (1854–1910, active 1888 to c.1903) [Figure 0.3].

The Garretts founded their business in c.1874, publishing an advice manual advocating the Queen Anne revival style, *Suggestions for Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture*, in 1877.¹ They focused on private commissions and undertook work for a variety of clients acquired through their familial, personal and political networks. Rhoda died in 1882 (aged forty-one), but Agnes continued alone until her retirement in 1905. Robinson, who from 1888 wrote an interior decoration advice column for *The Queen* magazine, opened a home decorations shop in Manchester in c.1884.² A London branch followed in 1888, and she continued to trade from premises in both cities until her death in 1901. Robinson also undertook privately commissioned work, specialising in commercial and public spaces. She gained attention for her populist floral style and secured a warrant of appointment as ‘Home Art Decorator to Her Majesty the Queen’.³ Crommelin, who specialised in decorating with antiques, opened her shop, Art at Home, in London in c.1888. Like the Garretts and Robinson she undertook private commissions (often for aristocratic clients) but specialised in domestic spaces. In 1895 (at the age of forty-one) she married Robert Barton Shaw (1847–1923), but

¹ Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877).

² Charlotte Robinson’s ‘Home Decoration’ column in *The Queen* ran from 1888.

³ ‘News in Brief’, *The Times*, 20 December 1887, 9.

continued working until c.1900, shortly after which she contributed a chapter on ‘Furniture and Decoration’ to the series *Some Arts and Crafts*.⁴

Through extensive new research, this thesis significantly enriches our knowledge of the Garretts’ work and reveals, for the first time, the professional biographies of Robinson and Crommelin. By discussing the Garretts alongside their direct female rivals, our understanding of the cousins’ contribution is substantially enhanced. Further, by positioning the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin alongside their male competitors, the significant contribution of women to nineteenth-century interior decoration is asserted for the first time.

Background and boundaries

Before considering the aims and objectives of this thesis in more detail, it is pertinent to establish its background and justify its boundaries.

Background

Anne Massey’s entry on ‘Interior Design, history and development’ in the *Encyclopaedia of Interior Design* states that ‘before the twentieth century the profession of ‘interior decorator’ or ‘interior designer’ did not exist’.⁵ To an extent this is true and, until the late nineteenth century, the decoration of an interior remained a contested responsibility. The interior of a building encompasses a wide variety of constituents including, but not limited to, architectural details, textiles, wall-coverings, and furniture and a range of different professionals, including architects, upholsterers, painter-decorators and cabinet-makers, all struggled to stake their claim. During the eighteenth century, as unified interior and exterior schemes gained in importance, architects became increasingly involved in interior decoration.

William Kent (c. 1686–1748) was one of the first architects to design furniture and schemes for interiors; later examples included brothers Robert (1728–1792) and John Adam (1721–1792).⁶ Architects, however, were typically only responsible for the interiors of self-designed new buildings. If a wealthy client required a new interior, but no building work, they

⁴ May Crommelin and Caroline Shaw [née Crommelin], ‘Furniture and Decoration’ in Ethel M. McKenna (ed.) *Some Arts and Crafts* (London: E.P. Dutton, 1903): 1–138.

⁵ Anne Massey, ‘Interior Design, History and Development’ in Joanne Banham (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Interior Design*, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 611.

⁶ Susan Weber, *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2013); David King, *Complete Works of Robert and James Adam and Unbuilt Adam: Built and Unbuilt* (London: Architectural Press, 2001).

would more usually call upon an upholsterer, who would often pair professionally with a cabinet-maker, to offer a complete interior design service. For example, William Ince (1737–1804) worked in conjunction with John Mayhew (1736–1811) as ‘Ince and Mayhew’ (active 1759–1803).⁷ There were, of course, exceptions, the best-known of which was the interior decoration firm owned by the Crace family (active from c.1725 to c.1900) and responsible for a variety of prominent eighteenth-century commissions, including the Pantheon on Oxford Road, London (begun 1770) and Carlton House, London (c.1785–1795).⁸

Most scholars accept that it was not until after the Industrial Revolution, when the rapid expansion of the middle class meant that more people than ever before could afford to spend money on their homes, that interior decoration began to emerge as a distinct profession.⁹ Previously, only the wealthy could afford to employ a professional, whether an architect or an upholsterer, to design unified interior schemes for their homes. As the nineteenth century progressed, the new middle class, eager to emphasise their upward mobility by conspicuous consumption, created a boom in demand for interior decoration and decorative art.¹⁰ These new consumers required a new variety of expert, the interior decorator, to help them avoid mistakes. The serial novella ‘A Mother’s Freedom’, published in eight instalments between March and May 1889 in *The Women’s Penny Paper*, is revealing. In it, the heroine’s sister advises her to ‘Be a practical creature, and go in for house decoration and you will make plenty of money!’¹¹ The heroine objects, claiming ‘people don’t hire other people to decorate their rooms’, to which her sister replies, ‘Oh yes, they do nowadays’.¹² Clearly, by the 1880s, interior decoration was already beginning to emerge as a distinct profession and, crucially, one which could be practiced by women.

⁷ Pat Kirkham, ‘The Partnership of William Ince and John Mayhew, 1759–1804’, *Furniture History*, 10 (1974): 56–60.

⁸ Megan Aldrich (ed.), *The Craces: Royal Decorators, 1868–1899* (London: John Murray, 1990).

⁹ Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History’, *Journal of Design History*, 21:1 (January 2008): 1–18.

¹⁰ Joanna Banham, Sally MacDonald and Julia Porter, *Victorian Interior Design* (London: Cassel, 1991), 10–12.

¹¹ Mabel Collins, ‘A Mother’s Freedom: Chapter VI, Striking Out’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 11 May 1889, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*

Various scholars have considered the emergence of the professional interior decorator during the nineteenth century (and beyond), and an examination of the scholarship surrounding the subject reveals a plethora of arguments on the struggle for control.¹³ The historiography is best summarised by Grace Lees-Maffei in her introduction to a 2008 special issue of the *Journal of Design History*, ‘Professionalizing Interior Design, 1870–1970’.¹⁴ Lees-Maffei examines the key contributions to the field during the last fifty years and considers the processes of professionalisation which, during the hundred year period in question, moved interior design beyond its amateur beginnings. Lees-Maffei’s invaluable summary highlights both the diversity and the complexity of the main arguments. There remains, however, no generally accepted theory as to the chronology of the process and Peter McNeil’s 1994 assertion that ‘no extended account of the evolution of the profession of interior decorator has yet been published’ still holds considerable weight.¹⁵ The lack of an extended account does not, however, negate the supposition that, in the later years of the nineteenth century, the field of interior decoration was very much still developing.

Chronological Boundaries

This thesis considers the professional activity of women during these crucial developmental years. It was during this period of change, when the still-mutable profession lacked structure and definition, that women were first able to stake their claim. Lees-Maffei has demonstrated that 1870 is a ‘cogent starting point’ for the discussion of the professionalisation of interior decoration.¹⁶ Research undertaken for this thesis in census records, periodicals and trade directories did not uncover any significant evidence of women working in the field on a professional basis until 1871, when Agnes and Rhoda Garrett began their training with Daniel

¹³ Key examples include: Stephen Calloway, *Twentieth-Century Decoration: The Domestic Interior from 1900 to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); John Cornforth and John Fowler, *English Decoration in the 18th Century* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1974); Anne Massey, *Interior Design Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008) and Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor: The Domestic Interior 1620–1920* (London: Seven Dials, 1993), 9–10.

¹⁴ Lees-Maffei, ‘Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History’: 1–18.

¹⁵ See, for example: Bridget May, ‘Lessons in Diversity: Origins of Interior Decoration Education in the United States, 1870–1930’, *Journal of Interior Design*, 42:3 (September 2017): 5–28; Peter McNeil, ‘Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator c. 1890–1940’, *Art History*, 17:4 (December 1994): 631.

¹⁶ Lees-Maffei cites the widening influence of the design reformers of the mid-nineteenth century as the catalyst responsible for kick-starting the process. Lees-Maffei, ‘Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History’, 2.

Cottier (1838–1891).¹⁷ As a result, this thesis takes 1871 as its starting point. After this year, the number of women interior decorators listed in these types of contemporary sources steadily increases for a period of nearly thirty years.¹⁸

At the time, the press referred to these women by a variety of designations, but most frequently called them ‘house decorators’ or ‘decorators’.¹⁹ Today, a house decorator is someone with a manual remit who undertakes work such as painting and papering. Then, it was closer to our contemporary definition of an interior decorator, or a creative professional responsible for holistically planning the interior decoration and furnishings of a building.²⁰ For example, an 1887 edition of *The Young Folks Paper* advertising Agnes Garrett’s apprenticeship scheme claimed:

House decoration means planning, designing and executing the whole decorative part of a house, from the ornamental window-pane to frieze ceiling decoration; from selecting and measuring, and putting down a carpet; in fact, furnishing suitably and tastefully every compartment of a house.²¹

As a result, although the term ‘interior decorator’ was not in common use in nineteenth-century Britain, it has been used in this thesis for convenience.

Another term used frequently in this thesis is ‘professional’. This refers to an individual engaged in a specified activity (in this case, interior decoration) as their main paid occupation. In contrast, an ‘amateur’ is someone who engages in a specified activity in an unpaid or

¹⁷ Moncure Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 450–451. Although there are various earlier accounts of women within the furniture-making and upholstery industries (particularly in family-run businesses), they do not seem to have engaged with complete interior schemes. See for example, Pat Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade, 1700–1870* (London: Furniture History Society, 1989).

¹⁸ See, for example: *Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1870–1900).

¹⁹ See for example: ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 1–2; ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *Women's Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1–2; ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.

²⁰ Although today, the terms ‘interior designer’ and ‘interior decorator’ are used almost interchangeably, strictly speaking, there is a difference. Interior decoration is a less technical discipline, which does not require formal training. An interior decorator is not involved in the design of the building or the layout of the space, instead making aesthetic decisions about interior furnishing and fittings. In contrast, interior design is a profession requiring specific formal training. Interior designers are often involved with a building project from the beginning, perhaps working with the architect, and are concerned with enhancing the function of a room as well as making aesthetic decisions.

²¹ Alfred C. Harmsworth, ‘What Shall I Be?’, *Young Folks Paper*, 24 September 1887, 11.

recreational manner. These categories, while helpful, are laden with implications of class and gender, and must be used with caution. For example, the term ‘professional’ often implies that an individual has undergone some form of dedicated training. While the Garretts were able to do so [see **Chapter One**], others, including Crommelin and Robinson, were not. As interior decoration lacked a formal entry pathway, many women, excluded from the artistic or architectural education more easily accessed by their male competitors, were able to establish successful careers without undertaking training. Mindful of this, this thesis adheres to a simplified understanding of ‘professional’, free from elite signifiers, as any individual operating an enterprise through which customers and clients paid them for goods or services.

In ‘Complete House Furnishers’, Edwards argues that it was after the foundation of the Institute of British Decorators in 1899 that interior decoration finally began the process of becoming more formally established as a separate artistic profession, distinct from architecture, manufacturing and retail.²² According to Edwards, the existence of a professional organisation validated the emerging profession, as did the emphasis it placed on education and training. The issue of admitting women as members was discussed at the first meeting of the Institute but although it was decided that, if qualified, women could be admitted, in reality they were excluded until after the First World War.²³ Edwards suggests that, in the years immediately after the formation of the Institute, the number of women working professionally in the field declined.²⁴ An examination of contemporary sources reveals considerable truth in Edward’s supposition. For example, *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* lists nine women-run interior decoration firms in 1899, but only seven in 1900.²⁵ Arguably, it was not until 1922, when Syrie Maugham opened her first shop, that another woman gained the same level of fame

²² Clive Edwards, ‘Complete House Furnishers: The Retailer as Interior Designer in Nineteenth-Century London’, *Journal of Interior Design*, 38:1 (2013): 1–17. The Institute of British Decorators was founded by delegates (including John Dibblee Crace [1838–1919] and Mawer Cowtan [b.1849]) of the 1893 National Conference of Painters and Decorators, held at Painter’s Hall, London, the headquarters of the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers. In 1953 it was renamed the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators and Interior Designers and, in 1975, it again changed its name to the British Institute of Interior Design. In 1988 it merged with the Chartered Society of Designers. Elizabeth Lomas (ed.), *Guide to the Archive of Art and Design: Victoria and Albert Museum, London* (London: Routledge, 2001), 38–39.

²³ ‘Notes on Current Events’, *British Architect*, 7 April 1899, 236. Women remained as a small minority membership group of the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators well into the twentieth century. Edwards, ‘Complete House Furnishers’, 14.

²⁴ Edwards, ‘Complete House Furnishers’, 14.

²⁵ *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1899); *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1900).

in the field achieved by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett.²⁶ As a result, this thesis ends its examination of the professional activity of women in the field of interior decoration in 1899.

Geographical boundaries

While the title of this thesis indicates a focus on Britain, most of the women discussed, including two out of the three case studies, were based primarily in London. Why, then, not change the title to ‘Professional Women Interior Decorators in England’? Or, even, to ‘in London?’ There are two primary justifications for this decision. Firstly, the case study firms discussed were not themselves constrained geographically in this way. Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, although based in London, did not work solely in the capital. They undertook commissions in, for example, both Suffolk and Sussex and participated in exhibitions in Paris, Edinburgh and Bristol. Caroline Crommelin, although like the Garretts based in London, was born in Northern Ireland and worked in both County Down and Rome. Although Charlotte Robinson began her career in London, she was later based in Manchester and additionally worked in both Grimsby and Glasgow. Like the Garretts, Robinson exhibited widely, participating in exhibitions in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. All three of the women published advice on interior decoration, meaning that their work had national and, in the case of the Garretts, whose book ran to six editions in Britain and one in America, perhaps even international reach.²⁷

Secondly, the research undertaken for this thesis was likewise not geographically constrained. The catalogues of numerous national and internationally-focused exhibitions were searched for evidence of the activity of women interior decorators, as were the trade directories of major British cities. Digitised print media, for example the British Newspaper Archive and the British Periodicals Archive, was also searched extensively.²⁸ These resources include a wide range of both national and regional newspapers, as well as nationally-circulated special interest publications. Trade-specific publications dedicated to keeping their readership up to date on developments in the sphere of professional interior decoration were also manually searched. In addition, a considerable effort was made to examine evidence from the women’s

²⁶ On Syrie Maugham see: Richard Fisher, *Syrie Maugham* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1973); Gerald McKnight, *The Scandal of Syrie Maugham* (London: W.H. Allen, 1980) and Pauline Metcalf, *Syrie Maugham: Staging the Glamorous Interior* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2010).

²⁷ Emma Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior: an Interdisciplinary Study of Macmillian’s ‘Art at Home Series’, 1876–83*, unpublished PhD thesis, Kingston University, London, 2004.

²⁸ <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>; <https://search.proquest.com>.

and suffrage press. These frequently contained regular features on women's professional activity, often stridently promoting the advance of women into previously male-dominated fields.²⁹ It is reasonable to assume that, considering the breadth of historical sources searched during the course of research for this thesis, had another woman been operating successfully as an interior decorator in, for example, Cardiff or Edinburgh, it would not have escaped mention in the press.

In fact, this research did uncover occasional minor examples of women working in the field in other areas of the country. For example, Katherine Cooke (1849–1932) was based in Eastbourne [Figure 0.4] and Mrs Smout in Glasgow.³⁰ Others, such as Mrs Frank Oliver who launched her business in Brighton prior to opening her London branch [Figure 0.5], started elsewhere in the country before moving to the capital.³¹ These examples were, however, rare and the vast majority of women interior decorators operated exclusively in London. Attitudes towards professional middle-class women may have been more progressive in the capital than elsewhere in the country. This was certainly the case for women artists and, for example, women had been admitted to the Bloomsbury-based Slade School of Fine Art since it opened in 1871.³² Commenting on the early years of her mother's marriage, Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958) noted that Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) who, from 1887 to 1907 ran a shop selling items for interior decoration, had waited until her move to London before opening her business as 'In Manchester it would have been indiscreet for a barrister's wife to do such a thing. But in London it would be different'.³³

Threads of enquiry

This study traces the professional experiences of the women working as interior decorators in the later nineteenth century and the cultural, social and economic landscape in which they

²⁹ Miranda Garrett, 'Interior Decoration and Domesticity in the *Women's Penny Paper/Woman's Herald*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 51:2 (Summer 2018): 289–296.

³⁰ Advertisement for Katherine Cooke, *The House*, 1 April 1897, xx; *The Official Guide to the International Exhibition, Glasgow* (Edinburgh, T & A Constable, 1888), 233.

³¹ Advertisement for Mrs Frank Oliver, *The Era*, 8 December 1888, 24.

³² Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press, 1987), 214.

³³ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: the Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 25.

operated. It reassesses their contribution to the history of British interior design and emphasises the importance of restoring their names to the historical canon. Running throughout are three main threads of enquiry:

1. Who were these women?

As previously stated, initial research uncovered at least nineteen female-run interior decoration firms active in Britain between 1871 and 1899. Who were the women responsible for running these firms? What were their names and where did they live and work?

2. How did their businesses operate?

To gain a full understanding of how these women operated their businesses, it is necessary to ask a variety of questions. For example, what was their motivation, and what education and training did they undertake prior to launching their enterprises? What spaces did they occupy professionally? How did they use their homes, warehouses, shops and workshops? How did they market their businesses? Did they engage with the press? Did they participate in exhibitions or stage promotional events? Did they publish advice manuals and columns? What type of commissions did they undertake? Who were their clients and how did they acquire them? Gaining an understanding of the breadth and variety of their commercial operations would be crucial to the process of asserting, for the first time, the significant contribution of women to the field of professional interior decoration during the period in question.

3. How can we situate their work in the contemporary cultural landscape?

Studying these pioneering women interior decorators in isolation would not be satisfactory. It was essential to examine the social, political, cultural and economic factors that enabled, fuelled and fostered their emergence. How were these women able to assert their status as professionals, in a previously male dominated field? Did the women's rights movement inspire their decision to forge professional careers? Why did they choose interior decoration over other lines of work? How did contemporary understandings of masculine and feminine roles influence how they prepared themselves for their working lives, how they positioned themselves in the marketplace, the types of spaces they were able to occupy professionally, and the methods they used to promote their business? Did their gender affect the types of commissions the women were able to undertake? For example, were they confined to decorating rooms traditionally associated with femininity (such as morning rooms and boudoirs) or were they also able to undertake schemes for more masculine rooms (like smoking rooms and dining rooms)? Answering these questions significantly builds on existing research

into the professionalisation of women and increases knowledge of the process through which they challenged their exclusion from traditional occupational structures.

Historiographical survey

As noted, the process of the professionalisation of interior decoration remains in need of further study. However, various scholars, including Anthea Callen, Isabelle Anscombe, Pat Kirkham, Peter McNeil, Jill Seddon, Penny Sparke and Suzette Worden, have acknowledged the importance of the contribution of women to the process.³⁴ Grace Lees-Maffei's excellent study 'Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History' has already been mentioned in relation to its discussion of the wider process of the professionalisation of interior decoration. However, it is worth mentioning again, in that it has significantly consolidated our knowledge and developed our understanding of how women 'have been instrumental in the process of defining and professionalising interior design'.³⁵ More recently, Clive Edwards has followed this trend, theorising that 'the development of individual, independent, often female, consultant decorators ... not tied to a particular source of material choices or manufacturer' was a major contributing factor in laying the groundwork for the transformation of interior decoration from a trade to a profession.³⁶

To date, however, scholarship on the contribution of women to the field of interior decoration has tended to focus on the reclamation of early twentieth century women decorators. Dorothy Draper (1889–1969), Syrie Maugham (1879–1955), Candace Wheeler (1827–1923) and Elsie de Wolfe (1865–1950) have all received attention.³⁷ Penny Sparke convincingly argues that the reason nineteenth-century women active in the field have, in comparison,

³⁴ Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement, 1870–1914* (London: Astragal Books, 1979); Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago, 1984); Pat Kirkham and Penny Sparke, "'A Woman's Place...?': Women Interior Designers, 1900–1950' in Pat Kirkham (ed.) *Women Designers in the USA, 1900–2000: Diversity and Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 305–316; McNeil, 'Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator'; Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden (eds.), *Women Designing: Redefining Design in Britain Between the Wars* (Brighton: University of Brighton Press, 1994).

³⁵ Lees-Maffei, 'Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History', 21.

³⁶ Edwards, 'Complete House Furnishers', 15.

³⁷ Carleton Varney, *In the Pink: Dorothy Draper, America's Most Fabulous Decorator* (New York: Pointed Leaf Press, 2006); Fisher, *Syrie Maugham*; McKnight, *The Scandal of Syrie Maugham*; Metcalf, *Syrie Maugham*; Amelia Peck and Carol Irish, *Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Penny Sparke, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* (New York: Acanthus, 2005).

received so little attention, is that their work does not fit so easily into the ‘modernist canon’.³⁸ For example, Bridget Elliot and Janice Helland’s *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880–1935* has been invaluable in expanding our understanding of women’s contribution to decorative practice but is undoubtedly focused on modernists and modernism.³⁹ Women like Robinson and Crommelin, who worked in populist and/or revivalist styles, were not transforming contemporary design with radically progressive interiors and have received little or no mention in the scholarship on British interior design.⁴⁰

In contrast, the Garretts have been mentioned, and Elizabeth Crawford’s *Enterprising Women* provides an excellent overview of the cousins’ lives and career, and a thorough account of their known commissions.⁴¹ Crawford’s work discusses the friendships and networks supporting and sustaining the wider Garrett family circle, including Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836–1917) and Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1827–1949), and aims to discover ‘how it was possible for a small group of middle-class women to push back the boundaries that had been considered to mark a woman’s place’.⁴² Crawford convincingly argues that the cousins were able to work as interior decorators without losing their class and social status because of their continual insistence on ‘professionalising their chosen careers’.⁴³ While her research has proved helpful, this thesis will explore several avenues not considered in *Enterprising Women*. Crawford does not contemplate the various other social, economic, cultural and political factors that enabled their success in the field. Likewise, while she compares the Garrett cousins to other pioneering family members, Crawford does not position them alongside their (male or female) artistic competitors.

³⁸ Penny Sparke, ‘Introduction’ in Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke (eds.), *Women’s Places: Architecture and Design, 1860–1960*, (London: Routledge, 2003), xl.

³⁹ Bridget Elliot and Janice Helland (eds.), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880–1935: The Gender of Ornament* (London: Ashgate, 2002).

⁴⁰ Both Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin are briefly mentioned in Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 109; Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002), 205–206 and Judith Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1875–1914* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art, 2003), 95 and 197.

⁴¹ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 169–217.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

In addition to Crawford's cogent exploration of the Garretts' biographies, Jennifer Glynn (relying heavily on Crawford for source material) has included a chapter on their work in *The Pioneering Garretts*.⁴⁴ Emma Ferry has provided a comprehensive feminist analysis of the Garretts' book, *Suggestions for House Decoration*.⁴⁵ Other scholars have also considered the Garrett cousins, though always as part of a much wider narrative (most frequently relating to the wider feminist movement). Lynne Walker has considered their use of the 'feminine' Queen Anne style, and Annemarie Adams and Judith Neiswander have both explored the connection between women interior decorators and mainstream feminism.⁴⁶ However, the cousins have been poorly represented in museums and exhibitions. The Victoria and Albert Museum's 2011 exhibition *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860–1900* failed to mention them or their work.⁴⁷ Similarly, although the National Trust hold numerous examples of the Garretts' furniture at Standen House, West Sussex (the former home of the Garrett's friends and clients, the railway lawyer James [1840–1912] and his wife Margaret [1847–1936] Beale), the Trust has never drawn attention to their presence in the collection.⁴⁸

While the Garretts have received limited scholarly attention, and Robinson and Crommelin are almost universally ignored (they are never mentioned without reference to the Garretts), their male contemporaries have fared better. There is a wealth of monographs dedicated to the larger names active in the field. Scholars have paid considerable attention to designer William Morris (1834–1896) and his well-known male contemporaries: see, for example, Fiona MacCarthy's *William Morris*, Carol A. Hrvol Flores's *Owen Jones*, Sheila Kirk's *Philip Webb*, Karen Livingstone's *C. F. A. Voysey* and Andrew Saint's *Richard Norman*

⁴⁴ Jennifer Glynn, *The Pioneering Garretts* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008), 52–65.

⁴⁵ Emma Ferry, "Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork, and Furniture* (1976)", *Journal of Design History*, 16:1 (2003): 15–33; Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior*.

⁴⁶ Lynne Walker, 'Women Patron-Builders in Britain: Identity, Difference and Memory in Spatial and Material Culture', in Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland (eds.), *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century*: 121–136; Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900* (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 129–162; Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior*, 6–102.

⁴⁷ Stephen Calloway and Lynne Federle Orr (eds.), *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860–1900* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁸ Furniture attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, NT 1213939; NT 1213940.1; NT 1213940.2; NT 1213989; NT 1213992; NT 1213959; NT 1213991.1; NT 1213991.2; NT 1213969; NT 1213970; NT 1213990; NT 1214057), National Trust, Standen House and Garden, West Sussex.

Shaw.⁴⁹ The proliferation of monographs on visionary men has, problematically, led to a skewed understanding of nineteenth-century interior decoration. Discussion of formal artistic qualities and innovative excellence proliferate, to the detriment of details about production methods, retail spaces, pricing and marketing. Charles Harvey and Jon Press's *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* is one notable exception.⁵⁰ Harvey and Press provide an in-depth study of Morris' firm from the perspective of economic and business history, including comprehensive information about accounts, management strategy, human resources, production, marketing, competitors and clients.

The abundance of these monographs on visionary, modernising men has, arguably, been fostered by the late twentieth-century tendency towards publications focused on giving an overview of stylistic changes, or on providing an in-depth analysis of an aesthetic or movement. For many years, works of this type dominated the scholarship on nineteenth-century interior decoration. 'Taste' was a key word and changes to preferences in ornament, decoration, colour and design were documented and dissected, often to the exclusion of discussion of the wider social, cultural, political and economic landscape. Mario Praz, Nicholas Cooper, Mark Girouard, Charlotte Gere and Joanna Banham have all contributed to this trend in scholarship.⁵¹ Again, and unfortunately for the purposes of this study, few of these works dedicate much attention to commercial practices and, for many years, the significant contribution of those in less prominent fields, such as cabinet-making, upholstery and retail, was systematically underestimated. There were some noteworthy exceptions, including Pat Kirkham's work on the London furniture trade: *Furnishing the World* and *The London*

⁴⁹ Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Alfred A Knopf, 1995); Carol A. Hrvol Flores, *Owen Jones* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006); Sheila Kirk, *Philip Webb: Pioneer of Arts and Crafts Architecture* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2005); Karen Livingstone, *C. F. A. Voysey: Arts & Crafts Designer* (London: V&A Publications, 2016); Andrew Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw* (London: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁵⁰ Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964); Nicholas Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design* (London: Architectural Press, 1977); Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: Queen Anne Movement, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Charlotte Gere, *Nineteenth Century Decoration: the Art of the Interior* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); Banham, MacDonald and Porter, *Victorian Interior Design*.

Furniture Trade, 1700–1870, both focus on the trade, production and consumption of everyday, commonplace, functional furniture.⁵²

However, more recently, there has been a growth of interest in the less prominent fields of design. Studies of individual firms of cabinet-makers, such as Susan Stuart's monograph on Gillows and Oliver Heal's analysis of the Heal Cabinet Factory, have begun to appear increasingly frequently.⁵³ Alongside these valuable contributions on admittedly high-end firms, there has been a move towards rejecting the tendency to concentrate on exceptional personalities, firms and clients.⁵⁴ Scholars have endeavoured to provide an overview of the production, consumption and commerciality of quotidian interior decoration. Clive Edwards's 2005 *Turning Houses into Homes*, which takes a multi-disciplinary approach to address the intersection between retail history and consumption practices, is a key example.⁵⁵ Edwards aims to 'map the history, changes, development and structures of the retail home furnishing industry and to consider its role in the home-making process' over three centuries, but also examines the relationships between the retailer and the consumer, including an examination of how retailers have helped stimulate and shape the demand of their customers.⁵⁶

Like Edwards, Margaret Ponsonby has highlighted the need for historians to look beyond the tendency to reduce domestic histories to generic descriptions of high-fashion elite homes designed by prominent architects and artists. In *Stories from Home*, she demonstrates how issues such as the varying availability of goods, regional differences in taste, income, gender, the second-hand market, household hierarchies and print culture, could all also have an impact on domestic furnishing.⁵⁷ More recently Akiko Shimbo's *Furniture Makers and*

⁵² Pat Kirkham, *Furnishing the World: The East London Furniture Trade, 1830–1980* (London: Journeyman, 1987); Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade, 1700–1870*.

⁵³ Oliver S. Heal, *Sir Ambrose Heal and the Heal Cabinet Factory, 1897–1939* (London: Oblong Creative, 2014); Susan Stuart, *Gillows: of Lancaster and London, 1730–1840* (London: AAC Art Books, 2008).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Judy Attfield's *Wild Things*, in which Attfield insists on the significance of everyday design and encourages us to reconsider the high/low dichotomy of cultural analysis. Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2000).

⁵⁵ Clive Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes: A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁵⁶ Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes*, 1. Edwards 2013 article, 'Complete House Furnishers' built on this latter theme, convincingly arguing for the importance of the 'artistic retailer' as the precursor to the professional interior designer in the period from 1850 to 1920. Edwards, 'Complete House Furnishers', 1–17.

⁵⁷ Margaret Ponsonby, *Stories from Home: English Domestic Interiors, 1750–1850* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

Consumers in England analyses the relationships between the manufacturers/sellers and the consumers of furniture and interior design in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ Shimbo reveals the complexity of English material culture by centring on three key areas of interaction between producers and consumers: pattern books and their readers; how taste is made through negotiation; and everyday interactions through showrooms.

Theoretical Approach

Before discussing the methodological approach taken by this study, it is worth clarifying how the project has changed over time. It was initially intended to focus exclusively on the interior decoration firm run by cousins Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, to whom the author is distantly related.⁵⁹ The project was, perhaps naively, begun with the erroneous assumption that Garrett-family contacts would facilitate the uncovering of a wealth of previously unstudied archival material relating to the cousins' enterprise and commissioned work. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that what unstudied material still remained in the family, was of no relevance to the cousins' professional work as interior decorators (in fact, it did not discuss the cousins at all). However, during the initial period of research into the Garretts' work, references were found to a considerable number of other women working in the field. Women who, unlike the Garretts, had been entirely forgotten by history. As a result, the project changed. Instead of concentrating solely on the Garrett cousins, it assumed a much broader remit: to uncover the histories of the many women working as professional interior decorators in the later years of the nineteenth century.

The resulting thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach. Firstly, it relates to business history, in that it is concerned with the analysis of individual entrepreneurs and firms. It aims to examine and explain the behaviour of firms active in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, and to use a comparative approach to place the conclusions made in a broader framework of business structures and practices.⁶⁰ It is, of course, informed by scholarship

⁵⁸ Akiko Shimbo, *Furniture Makers and Consumers, 1754–1851: Design as Interaction* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁹ Although from different branches of the family, we are all descended from the children of Richard Garrett (1733–1787) and Elizabeth Gall (1733–1785).

⁶⁰ On business history see, for example: John Wilson, *British Business History, 1720–1994* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994); Franco Amatori and Andrea Colli (eds.), *Business History: Complexities*

addressing the business activity of women during the later nineteenth-century, much of which take the case study approach common to business history. These works combine approaches from business and gender history: key examples include Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig, Alastair Owens' *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres* and Jennifer Aston's *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy*.⁶¹

Secondly, as the individual entrepreneurs and firms under discussion are operating within the field of interior decoration, this study also relates to design history. It aims to examine the objects and decorative schemes designed by these firms through their conception, development, production and consumption and seeks to place them in their stylistic and historical context.⁶² A key example of a work operating between the fields of business and design history is Regina Blazczyk's *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning*, which examines American consumer society and culture through a business history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century ceramic and glass industry.⁶³ Harvey and Press's *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*, which has previously been mentioned as a formative influence, is another key example of a text situated at the intersection of business and design history.⁶⁴

and Comparisons (London: Routledge, 2011) and Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to Business History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶¹ Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens (eds.), *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); Jennifer Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). See also Helen Doe, *Enterprising Women and Shipping in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Boydell Press, 2009).

⁶² On design history see, for example: Kjetil Fallan, *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010); Grace Lees-Maffei and Rebecca Houze (eds.), *The Design History Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2010) and Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

⁶³ Regina Blazczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000). See also: Regina Blazczyk, *Fashionability: Abraham Moon and the Creation of British Cloth for the Global Market* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) and Regina Blazczyk, *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*.

Thirdly, because the individual entrepreneurs and firms discussed here are run by women, this thesis is inevitably concerned with gender history.⁶⁵ It seeks to recover the lost histories of the women operating as professional interior decorators in the late nineteenth century and to understand how social constructions of gender affected their commercial practices and design output. Recovering the lost histories of women has been a key concern of feminist historians for many years. Linda Nochlin's ground-breaking essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', first published in 1971, discussed the institutional barriers faced by women in the Western art world.⁶⁶ Nochlin's work served as a key impetus for subsequent scholars who aimed to recover the work of women artists and/or reassess their importance.⁶⁷ Anthea Callen's 1979 *Angel in the Studio* and Isabelle Anscombe's 1984 *A Woman's Touch* are particularly pertinent examples.⁶⁸ Callen was one of the first scholars to emphasise the importance of women to the Arts and Crafts movement, while Anscombe drew attention to women's contribution to modernist design in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Both Anscombe and Callen, however, fail to highlight the status of the women discussed as designers actively engaged in the commercial world, instead emphasising their stylistic contribution.

Nochlin's essay was followed in 1986 by a contribution from Cheryl Buckley, which focused more specifically on women and design.⁶⁹ Buckley's essay, 'Made in Patriarchy:

⁶⁵ On gender history see, for example: Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Education, 2000); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 edition) and Sonya Rose, *What is Gender History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

⁶⁶ Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power & Other Essays* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989): 1–36.

⁶⁷ Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.) *Women in the Victorian Art World*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993); Janice Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2000); Pamela Gerrish Nunn and Jan Marsh (eds.) *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, (Manchester: Manchester Art Galleries, 1997); Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*.

⁶⁸ Callen, *Angel in the Studio*; Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch*. Callan and Anscombe's works were also informed by the wider literature on the professionalisation of women's work during the nineteenth century. In the 1970s, Lee Holcombe and Martha Vicinus contributed to the debunking of the mythology surrounding the idle middle-class Victorian woman, highlighting instead the complex nature of nineteenth-century women's activity. Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850–1914* (Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1973); Martha Vicinus (ed.) *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

⁶⁹ Cheryl Buckley, 'Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design', *Design Issues*, 3: 2 (Fall 1986): 3–14, reproduced in Victor Margolin (ed.), *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989): 256–262.

Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design’, analyses the patriarchal context in which women interact with design (both as makers and consumers) and examines the methods (such as selection, classification and prioritisation) used by historians to examine this context.⁷⁰ The failure of historians to acknowledge this context, or to consider new methodologies, has meant that, according to Buckley, ‘Women’s interventions, both past and present, are consistently ignored’ in and excluded from the literature on design history.⁷¹ Buckley argues that feminist theory could provide the tools to challenge the ways in which women’s interaction with design is recorded. She highlights the importance of the second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s, who began the process of unpicking the complex and problematic nature of women to consumption and domesticity.⁷² She reminds us that women are considered to have sex-specific qualities which particularly fit them for particular types of design, including fashion and the decorative arts. She encourages us to challenge the way in which ‘inferior status is assigned to certain design activities’, to acknowledge both ‘the patriarchal basis of the sexual division of labour’ and that patriarchal societies have forced women designers to ‘occupy the space left by men’.⁷³

In her 1999 follow-up essay, ‘Theories of Women and Design – A Reworking’, Buckley notes some of the subsequent attempts to consider women’s contribution to design history.⁷⁴ Buckley summarises the works as relating to four categories: those focused exclusively on women as producers of design; theoretical works discussing the relationship of women, design

⁷⁰ Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’, 251. See also Judith Attfield, ‘FORM/female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/male: Feminist Critiques of Design’ in John Walker, *Design History and the History of Design*, (London: Pluto Press, 1989): 199–226.

⁷¹ Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’, 251, 256.

⁷² Ibid., 257–8. For example, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, both of which forcefully reject gendered concepts of domesticity and its connection to ‘feminine’ consumption. Friedan and de Beauvoir’s contributions were followed by those of feminist anthropologists like Sherry Ortner and Michelle Rosaldo, who cemented our understanding of the distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender and placed the public/male and private/female spheres in direct opposition. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: New English Library, 1966); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965). See also Joanne Hollows, ‘Second Wave Feminism and Femininity’ in *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1–18. Sherry Ortner, ‘Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?’ *Feminist Studies*, 1:2 (Autumn, 1972): 5–31; Michelle Rosaldo, ‘A Theoretical Overview’ in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974): 23–24.

⁷³ Buckley, ‘Made in Patriarchy’, 254.

⁷⁴ Cheryl Buckley, ‘Theories of Women and Design – A Reworking’ in Joan Rothschild (ed.), *Design and Feminism: ReVisioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 109–118.

and feminism; works which address women's relationship to design alongside other subjects (particularly film) and works considering gender and design rather than women and design.⁷⁵ Buckley comments particularly on the transition from 'women's design history' to 'gender design history', citing the move from Attfield and Kirkham's *A View From the Interior: Women and Design* to Kirkham's *The Gendered Object* as a key example.⁷⁶ While the former is concerned almost entirely by women and their interactions with design, the latter emphasises masculinity as much as femininity. Buckley criticises works in this vein overly preoccupied with post-modernism, arguing against their tendency to consider objects out of context: 'it is the analysis of design within its context and history which aids out understanding of its significance within women's lives'.⁷⁷

To summarise, the methodological approach taken by this thesis, which aims to reclaim the contribution of women to late nineteenth-century interior decoration, not just as artists, but as entrepreneurs and business owners, is underpinned by the complementary disciplines of business, design and gender history. It follows a post-Nochlinian approach in that it attempts to add the names of women to the conventional account of the history of interior design. It does not, however, seek to do so without an understanding of the patriarchal structures within which these women were practicing. Instead, it employs a feminist critique which assesses their work in the context of the societal structures which have consistently marginalised and/or erased both them and their work.⁷⁸ Simultaneously, it recognises the bias of the historical methods which have been used to subsequently exclude women from the scholarship on the subject.

It is informed by the more recent scholarship on the expansion of professional opportunities for middle-class women.⁷⁹ It is also influenced by recent works more specifically addressing women's intervention in the artistic world. Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi, Patricia Zakreski,

⁷⁵ Buckley, 'Theories of Women and Design', 111–112.

⁷⁶ Judith Attfield and Pat Kirkham (eds.), *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: the Women's Press, 1989); Pat Kirkham (ed.), *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ Buckley, 'Theories of Women and Design', 116.

⁷⁸ See Attfield, 'FORM/female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/male', 205.

⁷⁹ Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999); Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Lucy Ella Rose, Zoë Thomas and Tara Morton, who have all made valuable contributions to expanding our understanding of middle-class female artistic labour, in particular highlighting the complex nature of female professional identity and the flexibility inherent in the divisions between public and private space.⁸⁰ In addition, recent works engaging with theories of gender, consumption and domesticity have been extremely useful. While Edwards, Ponsonby and Shimbo have already been mentioned (see above) it is worth drawing attention to the work of Erika Rappaport and Krista Lysak, who both explicitly address gendered spheres of consumption in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

Similar ideas have also been explored in recent years in the growing body of work dedicated to examining the material culture of the nineteenth century. Deborah Cohen's *Household Gods* and Thad Logan's *The Victorian Parlour* provide an analysis of nineteenth-century interior decoration and material culture informed by studies of domesticity.⁸² Works such as Jane Hamlett's *Material Relations* and Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart's *Rethinking the Interior* have followed the example of Cohen and Logan in employing a wider sociocultural methodology, which goes beyond the stereotypes of cluttered rooms and 'greenery gallery', to provide a new, more nuanced understanding of nineteenth-century interiors.⁸³ Penny Sparke and Susie McKellar's *Interior Design and Identity* and Penny Sparke, Anne Massey and Trevor

⁸⁰ Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Patricia Zakreski (eds.), *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2013); Lucy Ella Rose, 'A Feminist Network in an Artists' Home: Mary and George Watts, George Meredith, and Josephine Butler', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 21/1 (2016): 74–91; Tara Morton, 'Changing Spaces: Art, Politics, and Identity in the Home Studios of the Suffrage Atelier', *Women's History Review*, 21/4 (2012): 623–637; Zoë Thomas, 'At Home with the Women's Guild of Arts: Gender and Professional Identity in London studios, c. 1880–1925', *Women's History Review*, 24:6 (2015): 938–964; Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁸¹ Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Krista Lysak, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008).

⁸² Cohen, *Household Gods*; Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸³ Cohen, *Household Gods*; Jane Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England, 1850–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Jason Edwards and Isobel Hart (eds.), *Rethinking the Interior, c.1867–1896: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

Keeble's *Designing the Modern Interior*, which both look at how interior design has constantly redefined itself as a manifestation of culture, have both been particularly useful.⁸⁴

Methodology

As noted above, this research follows three primary threads of enquiry. These broadly relate to three different research strategies, each informed by the methodological framework outlined above.

1. Recovering women

The critical reading of nineteenth-century published sources was the primary method used to recover the names of women interior decorators active during the period in question. Historical newspapers and periodicals have been invaluable, and this thesis has benefited from the digitisation of nineteenth-century print media sources which has taken place in the past few years. The majority of the firms recovered by this thesis were initially discovered by using a combination of different key terms to find relevant articles in the online search portals of digitised sources (such as, for example, 'lady' 'art' and 'decorator' or 'women', 'house' and 'decoration' etc.).⁸⁵ Similar terms were used to search occupations in online UK censuses.⁸⁶ Not all nineteenth-century print media sources are digitised. It was necessary to manually search trade directories and the more specific trade press (undigitized periodicals dedicated, for example, to cabinet-making and interior decoration) for discussion of women's activity. Although extremely valuable as a starting point, references to women interior decorators in these print media sources is often incomplete or unreliable, and evidence gleaned from such sources has, where possible, been substantiated by additional material.

As previously noted, this initial research phase revealed that the Garretts were certainly not the only women active in the field during the period in question. For example, in *Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory* Edith Wetton (1848–1923) is listed as an 'interior decorator' from 1885 until at least 1900.⁸⁷ She exhibited at the 1889 Arts and Crafts Exhibition

⁸⁴ Penny Sparke and Susie Mckellar (eds.), *Interior Design and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Penny Sparke, Anne Massey and Trevor Keeble (eds.), *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today* (London: Berg Publishers, 2009).

⁸⁵ See, for example, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>; <https://search.proquest.com>.

⁸⁶ Both <https://ancestry.co.uk/census> and <https://search.findmypast.co.uk/census> were used to do this.

⁸⁷ *Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1885–1900).

Society exhibition and appears in the 1891 UK census as a ‘House Decorator’.⁸⁸ In 1891, *The Queen* magazine recorded that she had enlarged her premises and was undertaking a large order for a house in Rutland Gate, London.⁸⁹ Similarly, Jessie Whyte-Walton (1861–1914) is listed in *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* as an interior decorator in London from 1894 until at least 1901.⁹⁰ She occupied prime retail space in London’s West End and was responsible for the interior decoration of The Kettledrum Tea Rooms and the International Club.⁹¹ These women were, clearly, part of a growing network of women who, in the late nineteenth century, forged new roles in interior decoration.

Time constraints, as well as a lack of available archival material relating to the commercial activity of the firms uncovered, resulted in a decision to employ a case study approach (a methodology frequently used in business histories). As noted above, three firms were chosen: those run by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin. A decision was made to compile information about the case study firms’ direct female contemporaries, including Wetton, Whyte-Walton and Pankhurst, in a survey [Appendix One]. For each additional firm, the survey attempts to record the following: associated personalities; years active; trading name/s and premises. Where possible, it also records details of notable clients and commissions, participation in exhibitions and details of any surviving designs. This thesis begins the process of reclaiming the narratives of these pioneering, but now often forgotten, women. However, countering the masculinised history of British interior decoration, and reclaiming the narratives of the women active in the field, is a work in progress. There are, presumably, more names to recover, and considerably more analysis to undertake before a full picture can be gained. Although this survey begins the process it is just the beginning.

⁸⁸ Art and Crafts Exhibition Society, *Catalogue of the Second Exhibition* (London: Chiswick Press, 1889), 163 and 255; 1891 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

⁸⁹ ‘Decorative Ideas at Miss Wetton’s’, *The Queen*, 18 July 1891, 164.

⁹⁰ *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1894–1901).

⁹¹ ‘Answers to Correspondents’, *Le Follet*, 1 June 1896, 14; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 90, 95; ‘Through the Shop Windows’, *Hearth and Home*, 10 November 1892, 862.

1. Recovering narratives

Before discussing in more detail the methods used to recover the narratives of the case study firms, it is pertinent to reveal why these particular three firms were chosen. As the project had begun with the Garretts, and as they were regularly mentioned in the scholarship on British interior design history, it was decided to retain Agnes and Rhoda's firm as a primary case study. Crommelin and Robinson soon emerged as obvious choices for comparison. Nineteenth-century sources suggested that the three firms all achieved a similar level of success. They all paid rent on retail premises in prime metropolitan locations. They participated in similar types of exhibitions. They undertook a similar scale of domestic, public and commercial decorative commission for comparable types of clients. They all published advice on interior decoration. They all achieved a similar level of coverage in the contemporary press and archival and documentary sources on their professional lives are, although not prolific, occasionally available.

Uncovering information about the businesses operations of the three chosen case study firms involved undertaking extensive additional research:

Nineteenth century print media

As above, the critical reading of nineteenth-century print media sources was crucial. While national and regional newspapers, women's periodicals, publications devoted to art and architecture, as well as the more specific trade press (periodicals dedicated, for example, to cabinet-making and interior decoration) all reported on the women's activities, coverage was sporadic. A paper's journalism was heavily influenced by its particular agendas and, as a result, asking questions about the aims, objectives and readership of these media sources is as important as examining the text of the articles themselves.⁹² For example, contemporary art and architecture journals, printed by men, for men and dominated by male artistic activity, rarely featured the women interior decorators and, when they did, the articles were often derogatory.⁹³

⁹² Various sources have been useful in informing this critical reading. See, for example: Joanne Shattock, *Journalism and the Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Andrew King, Alexis Easley and John Morton (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (London: Routledge, 2016); Laurel Brake and Marysa Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism: In Great Britain and Ireland* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2009).

⁹³ See, for example: Lewis Foreman Day, 'Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris', *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 19 July 1878, 28–29.

In contrast, the involvement of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin in a range of women's issues, and the connection of their work to feminine domesticity, meant that the women's periodical press regularly reported on their activities.⁹⁴ Considering the regularity of these reports, it would be tempting to ignore the potentially limited readership of these publications, or to over-emphasise the extent to which the women were household names. Although the women's periodical press frequently reported on shops and shopping, these articles often took the form of advertorials and must be considered as a form of marketing.⁹⁵ Similarly, periodicals (then, as now) tended towards the aspirational and we cannot assume they accurately reflected lived experience. As with the wider nineteenth-century press, a variety of sources have proved useful in aiding the critical reading of those publications particularly targeting women.⁹⁶

Some of the interviews and articles mentioning the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin have been particularly useful, and are worthy of special mention here. Agnes Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin were all interviewed in *The Women's Penny Paper*, which has been described by David Doughan as 'the most vigorous feminist paper of its time'.⁹⁷ An article by social reformer Moncure Conway (1832–1907) on 'Women as Decorative Artists' is a key source on the Garretts early years, and an interview with Robinson in journalist Edmund Yates' (1831–1894) 'Celebrities at Home' column in *The World* has been extremely informative.⁹⁸ In addition, (and perhaps somewhat oddly) two interviews in American newspapers have unveiled

⁹⁴ *Hearth and Home, The House, The Queen, Woman and The Women's Penny Paper/The Woman's Herald* have been particularly valuable sources.

⁹⁵ See, for example: Rambler, 'Out and About', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 31 May 1890, 382.

⁹⁶ Key sources on the women's periodical press include: Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994); Alexis Easley, Clare Gill and Beth Rodgers (eds.), *Women, Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s-1900s: The Victorian Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Marianne Van Remoortel, *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical: Living by the Press* (London: Palgrave, 2015); Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman, *Victorian Womens Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Women's Magazine, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁹⁷ David Doughan and Denise Sanchez (eds.), *Feminist Periodicals: Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1987), 15. See also Miranda Garrett, 'Interior Decoration and Domesticity in the *Women's Penny Paper/Woman's Herald*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 51:2 (Summer 2018): 289–296.

⁹⁸ Moncure Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1874, 17–29; Edmund Yates, 'Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', *The World*, 14 May 1890, 815–816.

fascinating new details about Crommelin and Robinson.⁹⁹ Examination of the published writings of the women themselves, including the Garretts' book *Suggestions for House Decoration*, Crommelin's chapter on 'Furniture and Decoration' and Robinson's column for *The Queen*, have also been particularly fruitful.¹⁰⁰

These, of course, must be read with caution. In relation to these works, methodological writing on domestic advice literature has been a useful guide. Of particular relevance is the work of Grace Lees-Maffei, who has written extensively on the subject.¹⁰¹ In the introduction to a special edition of the *Journal of Design History* on the subject, she elucidates the main issues to negotiate when using these sources as evidence:

the positioning of advice at an appropriate point within or between the categories of production and consumption; the extent to which prescriptive material may be taken as indicative of practice; the status of advice as a genre between fact and fiction; the similarly contested status of historical discourse and the often nebulous border between art and advertising, and the extent to which published advice has been endowed with professional or amateur status.¹⁰²

Acknowledging the problematic nature of domestic advice literature as source material has been crucial. For women interior decorators these works functioned partly as marketing tools, which they used to promote their businesses by, for example, accentuating their professional capabilities or showcasing their individual styles.

Archival research

This thesis places considerable emphasis on archival research. Research into women's histories is frequently constrained by archival silences. For centuries, women have been the victims of an oppressive patrilineal society which has denied them equality in their public and private

⁹⁹ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 29 March 1890, 7; 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Brenham Daily Banner*, 20 June 1893, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Garrett and Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*; Crommelin and Shaw, 'Furniture and Decoration'; Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, from 1888.

¹⁰¹ Grace Lees-Maffei, 'A Special Relationship: The Transatlantic Domestic Dialogue,' in Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (eds.), *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 188–210; Grace Lees-Maffei, *Design at Home: Domestic Advice Books in Britain and the USA Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2014); Grace Lees-Maffei, 'From Service to Self-service: Etiquette Writing as Design Discourse 1920–1970' in *Journal of Design History*, 14, 3 (2001): 187–206.

¹⁰² Grace Lees-Maffei, 'Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography', in *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 1 (2003), 1.

lives. Archives are filled with the histories of men. Women are missing, or present only as traces and, to uncover their histories, researchers must cast a wide net. They must examine a wide variety of archival texts and objects, adopt diverse methodologies and, often, resort to scrutinising absences themselves. In its focus on the commercial side of creative production, discussing women as entrepreneurs running artistic businesses, this study has faced additional constraints. It is unusual for records of small businesses to survive, and particularly the records of businesses run by childless women. Designer May Morris (1862–1938) dedicated much of her life to promoting the legacy of her father and, as a result, William Morris is represented in a variety of United Kingdom and international archives.¹⁰³

In contrast, neither the Garretts, Robinson or Crommelin had children who could ensure their legacies were preserved. As a result, their archival footprint is minimal. For example, a story circulates that, when a collection of Agnes Garrett's papers was offered to the British Library by her niece, mathematician and civil servant Philippa Fawcett (1868–1948), they were rejected and have subsequently been lost.¹⁰⁴ Various sources have, however, been useful. The British Library has a catalogue relating to the 1899 sale of the contents of the Garretts' Morwell Street warehouse in Bloomsbury.¹⁰⁵ Both the Women's Library at the London School of Economics and the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection at the Suffolk Archive also hold material relating to the Garretts.¹⁰⁶ Documents relating to Robinson's warrant of appointment as 'Home Art Decorator to the Queen' survive in both the Nottingham Archives and the Royal Archives, and Chetham Library holds a copy of the lease of her South King Street premises.¹⁰⁷

During the early stages of research for this project, an additional and extremely compelling reason for choosing the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin as case studies emerged. They were the only women for whom a significant number of named clients could

¹⁰³ For example, at the British Library and the Hammersmith and Fulham Archives and Local History Centre, London, the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam and at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹⁰⁴ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 319n.

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, Son & Neale, *A Catalogue of Valuable Old English and Artistic Furniture* (London: Dryden Press, 1899).

¹⁰⁶ Autograph Letter Collection, Women's Library, London School of Economics, London; Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

¹⁰⁷ Papers of Miss Emily Faithfull, Nottinghamshire Archive, Nottingham; Letter from Count Seckendorff to Charlotte Robinson, 5 April 1890, RAVIC/ADDJ/1512, Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, Windsor; Leases of Premises belonging to the Manchester Diocesan Buildings Company Ltd, Chetham's Library, Manchester.

be identified. As noted, the women working in interior decoration in the late nineteenth century did not leave extensive personal archives. The best way to uncover information about their work was to search for evidence of their commissions in the archives of their clients.

In the case of the Garrett cousins, enlightening material has been found in the diaries and letters of their client and friend, composer Sir Hubert Parry (1848–1914), and his aristocratic wife Lady Maude Parry (1851–1933) in the private Parry family archive at Shulbrede Priory, West Sussex.¹⁰⁸ The archives of the New Hospital for Women at the London Metropolitan Archives have also been useful.¹⁰⁹ For Crommelin, the estate account books and private letters of her friends and clients, Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava (1826–1902) and his wife Harriot Georgina Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood (1843–1936) in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland have provided a wealth of information.¹¹⁰ Glimpses of Robinson are found in the records of her commercial clients, the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company, held by The National Archives, and also in the archives of the Cunard Steamship Company at Liverpool University John Rylands Library.¹¹¹ Close analysis of newly-uncovered material has been given priority. However, new discoveries have also been used to reassess archival sources that have already received scholarly attention (particularly those relating to the Garrett cousins and already discussed by Elizabeth Crawford).

Visual analysis

As with archival evidence, uncovering physical evidence of the decorative schemes produced by the women has been extremely challenging. Interior decoration is ephemeral and often does not survive. As fashions, families and fortunes evolve, interiors also change: people paint over wallpaper, replace stained upholstery and update tired furniture. Frustratingly, there are no (known) intact surviving interiors by any of the women discussed in this thesis. This is unsurprising, considering it is also extremely rare for an interior scheme by a male decorator from the same period to survive in situ. As with their archives, the work of male designers is

¹⁰⁸ Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere, West Sussex.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

¹¹⁰ Dufferin and Ava Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

¹¹¹ Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company archives, The National Archives, London; Cunard Steamship Company archives, Archives and Special Collections, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

frequently represented in both public institutions and private collections. For example, although the collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects holds numerous designs for interiors by architect and designer George Aitchison (1825–1910), the only realised scheme to survive is Leighton House.¹¹² Notably, there are, for example, over a thousand individual examples of William Morris’s work in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹¹³

In contrast, there are a few verified surviving examples of the Garretts’ work. Aside from the furniture at Standen, there is a cabinet (also previously owned by the Beale family), in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹¹⁴ A fireplace designed by Agnes Garrett for the New Hospital for Women remains in situ.¹¹⁵ One of the ceilings designed by the Garretts for their home remains in situ at 2 Gower Street and another is in the Senate House Library.¹¹⁶ Wherever possible, the surviving works have been closely scrutinised but, considering their rarity (as yet, no surviving work has been found for either Robinson or Crommelin), stylistic comment in this thesis is often heavily reliant on illustrations in nineteenth-century published sources [Figure 0.6].¹¹⁷ In these instances, it is important to acknowledge that such evidence, which typically took the form of black and white line drawings, is limited. Fortunately, accompanying text, which often included rich textual descriptions, compensated for the lack of colour and detail provided by the illustration. Even so, it is important to note that makers often carefully constructed these images around a specific motivation. For example, an artist may use manipulative angles and lighting to present a domestic interior in a favourable light.

It is also important to remember that this thesis is not primarily concerned with style. As noted above, the history of nineteenth-century interior decoration has been dominated by

¹¹² <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix.html?keywords=george%20aitchison> [accessed 4/6/2018]. Artist Frederic Leighton commissioned Aitchison to build 2 Holland Park Road (now Leighton House Museum, 12 Holland Park Road) in 1864.

¹¹³ Information from the Victoria and Albert Museum’s ‘Search the Collections’ portal. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/> [Accessed 25/8/2017].

¹¹⁴ Cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, W.14-2017, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹¹⁵ The Garrett fireplace, which was rediscovered by Elizabeth Crawford prior to the renovation of the hospital building, remains in situ in what is now the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at the UNISON Centre, London (formerly the New Hospital for Women).

¹¹⁶ 2 Gower Street is now owned by University College London; Painted ceiling by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, UoL/CT/3/3/1-3, Historical Collections, Senate House Library, London.

¹¹⁷ A good source on the nineteenth-century illustrated press is: Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the histories of trailblazing artistic men. For example, the extravagant studio-homes created by nineteenth century artists, such as Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) and Laurence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), have been given considerable attention.¹¹⁸ In contrast, the interiors devised by less stylistically pioneering (and typically more moderately priced) creators, such as furniture designers and manufacturers William Wallace & Co. of Curtain Road, London, have been systematically neglected. The women discussed within this thesis fit in the latter category. Their work was, arguably, innovative. The Garrett cousins were among the first to advocate the Queen Anne style, Crommelin was an early adopter of decorating with antiques, and Robinson was well-known for her ingeniously designed furniture. Their work was not, however, ground-breaking. The visual analysis within this thesis serves to situate the women in the contemporary artistic, social, cultural and economic landscape; it does not seek to reposition their work in the art historical canon.

2. Context and comparative approach

This thesis, however, is not limited to recovering the names and narratives of the women active in the field of interior decoration during the later nineteenth century. It also examines how the women, and their work, can be situated within the cultural landscape. While secondary literature has provided background and context on the contemporary cultural outlook, to fully analyse how they, and their businesses, operated, this study has adopted a comparative methodology. It has taken a multi-faceted approach: firstly, comparing the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin with each other, secondly, comparing them with the other women active professionally within the field, and, thirdly, comparing them with their masculine rivals. However, it has not followed a rigid or prescriptive formula for doing so. Instead, contrasts, comparisons and juxtapositions are called upon as and when they are relevant. Taken together, the results of this evaluation form the basis for an interpretation of the professional activity of the women active as interior decorators during the period in question, as well as the wider cultural, social and economic trends that enabled, informed and facilitated their work.

Case studies

The most in-depth comparison has been reserved for the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin. Comparing the Garretts to two of their most successful and better-known female

¹¹⁸ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (London: Yale University Press, 1999); Giles Walkley, *Artists Houses in London, 1794–1914* (London: Scholar Press, 1994); Elizabeth Prettejohn and Peter Trippi (eds.), *Laurence Alma Tadema: At Home in Antiquity* (London: Prestel, 2016).

contemporaries has been particularly useful. As noted above, the Garretts' work has been referenced by scholars on late nineteenth-century interior decoration. Their career has also been discussed in more depth in a chapter of Elizabeth Crawford's book, *Enterprising Women*. To date, however, they have not been assessed against their direct female competitors. The Garretts were, undoubtedly, the first women to work professionally in the field. However, Robinson and Crommelin were both active, and successful, by the end of the 1880s with all three firms operated concurrently for over a decade. By discussing the careers of these four, quite different, women together, and by comparing their professional experiences, this thesis has been able to assess, for the first time, the role of professional women in nineteenth-century British interior decoration.

Other women active in the field

This thesis also calls upon the survey of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin's female contemporaries, compiled in **Appendix One**, to compare the professional experiences of the three case study firms, to those of the other women working professionally in the field. Time constraints have meant that archival research has largely been limited to material relating to the three main case study firms. As a result, knowledge about these other women has mostly been gained through critical reading of nineteenth-century published sources and, particularly, trade directories, newspapers and periodicals (see above). This survey is, as noted above, a work in progress. It is hoped that, as more archives, newspapers and periodicals are digitised, and more scholars turn their attention to this understudied field, more names and narratives will be uncovered. However, although the survey is, necessarily, limited, it has proved a useful foil. Weaving the stories of women like Edith Wetton, Jessie Whyte-Walton and Emmeline Pankhurst throughout the analysis of the case study firms, allows the professional lives of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin to be contextualised against those of their direct contemporaries.

In *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock critiqued the gendered hierarchy of art versus craft and argued that the place of women in the history of art cannot be dismissed as merely a 'a progressive struggle against great odds', as this reaffirms 'the established male standards as the appropriate norm'.¹¹⁹ In addition, there remains an urgent need for feminist histories of art and design to move away from the tendency

¹¹⁹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), xxx.

to focus on exceptional women and, instead, to draw attention to a wider range of voices. Through this comparative approach, this thesis can look at trends in the careers of women interior decorators more generally and explore the extent to which the experiences of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin were typical, or atypical, of the other women working in the field. It also ensures that male standards are not over-emphasised, contributes to a widening of our knowledge of professional activity in the field of interior decoration and promotes a greater understanding of the diversity of individuals active in the artistic and cultural landscape. Doing so will provide vital evidence to support a significant challenge to the previously male-dominated history of interior decoration.

Men active in the field

Throughout the four chapters, this study positions the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin alongside their male competitors. Asking questions about how the activity of professional women interior decorators differed from, or was similar to, that of their male contemporaries, will underpin this research and allow for the women's work to be fully situated in the contemporary artistic, economic and cultural landscape. It is important to note, however, that the male contribution to the field of British interior decoration in the later nineteenth-century is not the primary concern of this thesis. To ensure that male artistic/professional standards are not over-emphasised, this thesis has focused on original research into women. Likewise, and to reflect the fact that (as previously noted), interior decoration was still a contested responsibility, no set case studies of male firms have been selected. A variety of designers, architects, cabinet-makers, upholsterers, decorators and retailers have been called upon to provide context, comparison and juxtaposition as and when appropriate.

Some names are, admittedly, mentioned more frequently than others. For example, designers William Morris and Daniel Cottier and architects Richard Norman Shaw (1831–1912) and John McKean Brydon (1840–1901) have been discussed particularly often, because of their relevance to the work of the Garrett cousins. The work of these men, and their various contemporaries, has been used to balance the analysis of the contribution of women to the field. This comparative approach is, however, undertaken with an awareness that, while women could achieve considerable success in their field, their experiences were, necessarily, different from those of their male contemporaries. In addition, it is important to remember that, as noted above, there is still considerable work to be done on our understanding of the process of the professionalisation of interior decoration during the nineteenth century. This study, however, aims to bridge the gap. It asserts that women *were* working in the field, and on much the same

terms as their male competitors and that we cannot ignore their contribution to the development of the formalised profession in the later nineteenth century.

Structure

This thesis presents the results of this research thematically over four chapters. Each chapter centres around the three case study firms, that of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin. Although every attempt has been made to ensure the women are represented equally in each chapter, in some cases a lack of archival material has resulted in an imbalance. Chapter One, addresses their motivations and training. It considers their family backgrounds, scrutinizing why they made the decision to work, before looking in more detail at their choice of house decoration over other available lines of work and considering how they prepared themselves for commencing in business. Chapter Two looks at the professional spaces the women occupied. It questions what their homes can tell us about the styles in which they worked and about how they constructed their professional identities. It also looks at their engagement in retail trade, considering their warehouses, shops and workshops, and how they positioned themselves in the marketplace. Chapter Three considers the techniques women interior decorators used to market their businesses. It looks at their manipulation of the press, their participation in exhibitions and at the events they organised, as well as at their participation in the growing market for advice on domestic interior decoration. Finally, Chapter Four analyses the range and scope of the women's private clients and commissions, considering first their work for domestic interiors and, secondly, their designs for public and commercial buildings.

Illustrations

Figure 0.1

Photograph of Rhoda (left) and Agnes (right) Garrett in the garden of their home in Rustington (date unknown, but before Rhoda's death in 1882). Image courtesy of Margaret Young.



Figure 0.2

Reproduction of a photograph of Charlotte Robinson (date unknown, but before 1892), 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Faces and Places*, 10 April 1892, facing page 120.



Figure 0.3

Illustration of Caroline Crommelin, 1889, 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1.



MISS CAROLINE CROMMELIN.

Figure 0.4

Advertisement for Katherine Margaret Cooke, who worked in Eastbourne, *The House*, 1 April 1897, xx.



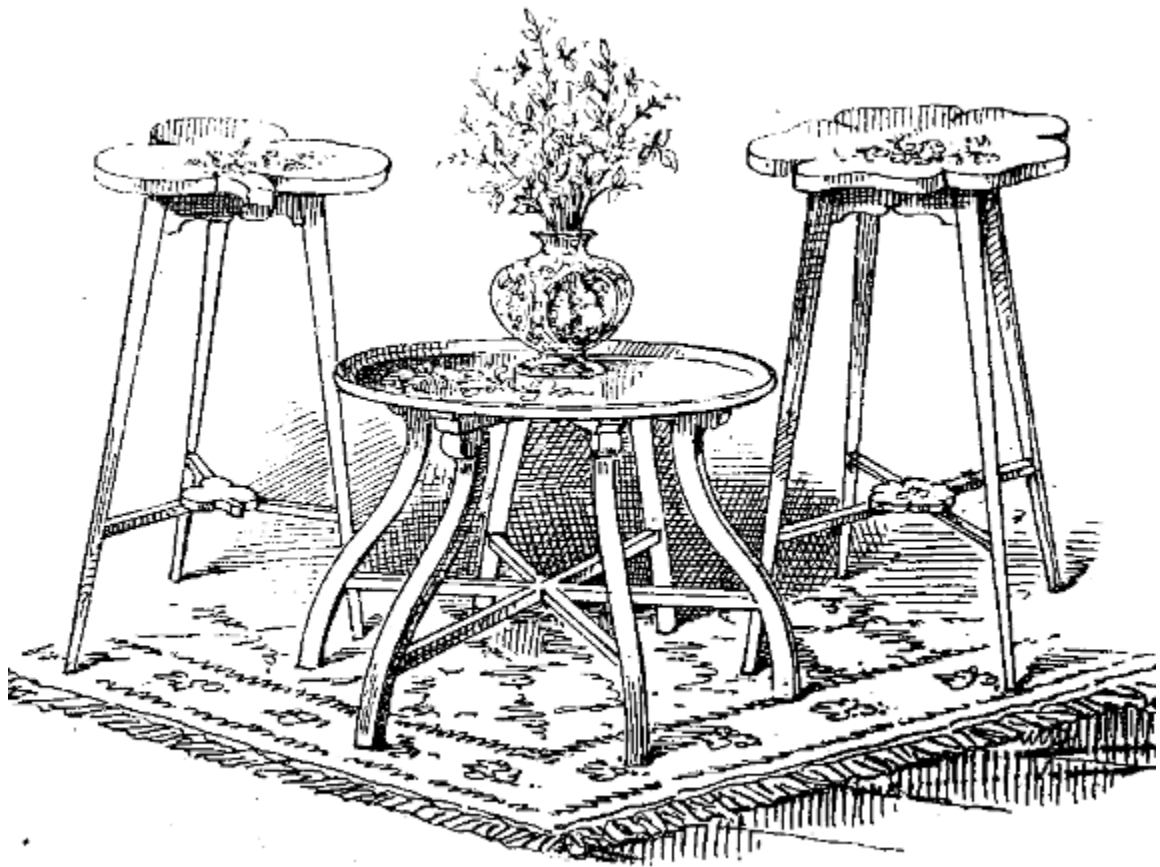
Figure 0.5

Advertisement for Mrs Frank Oliver (who worked in Brighton before opening additional premises in London), *The Era*, 8 December 1888, 24.



Figure 0.6

Black and white line illustration of furniture designed by Mrs Frank Oliver, 'Christmas Windows of the West', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher*, 1 January 1889, 174.



No. 12.--Fancy Tables, by Mrs. Frank Oliver.

1

Motivations and Training

This chapter questions what motivated Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin to take up professional work. Were they driven by financial necessity, encouraged by the influence of family and/or friends, or motivated by a desire to contribute to the reform of women's rights? It also explores why they chose the field of house decoration over other lines of work, considering a variety of contributing factors including, the contemporary increase in demand for interior decoration, the developing status of the profession, and its perceived suitability as a career for women. The chapter then considers how the women prepared themselves for their working lives. It asks whether these women were able to follow a similar trajectory to the male professionals working in the same field, or whether their gender excluded them from the training open to their male rivals. It considers their attempts to gain formal training through apprenticeships and how they justified their professional status by emphasising their travel, self-study and natural aptitude.

The early years of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin's lives, in which they decided to take up professional work, and attempted to acquire appropriate training, are the least well-documented. Although dates and details are vague, and often contradictory, biographical information about familial/financial circumstances can provide vital clues. Wills, census records and the registrations of births, marriages and deaths have all been useful and, for the Garrett cousins, the letters of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson at Suffolk Record Office have been particularly revealing. Interviews with, and articles on, the women themselves have also been invaluable. These are, however, problematic and cannot be taken at face value. The Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin gave these interviews during their working lives, with marketing in mind. For less well-known women interior decorators [see **Appendix One**], these details are even harder to find. While, without further evidence, it is impossible to come to firm conclusions about these women's motivations, by analysing the cultural landscape into which they emerged as artistic professionals, this chapter sets the scene for subsequent chapters exploring their artistic careers in more detail.

Why work?

Despite the activities of a wide range of campaigners, many middle-, professional-, and upper-class parents continued to see fashionable courtship, followed by marriage, housekeeping and

children, as the ideal trajectory for their daughters.¹²⁰ As a result, for many women, married or unmarried, embarking on a professional career involved risking both notoriety and diminished social status.¹²¹ As parents rarely prepared their daughters for working life by providing professional education or financial endowments, those who took the risk were, often, at a considerable disadvantage. In an 1872 lecture on ‘The Electoral Disabilities of Women’ Rhoda Garrett herself highlighted the problem, noting that middle-class women must ‘contend with a mass of opposition against them working at all’.¹²² What, therefore, prompted the Garrett cousins, Robinson and Crommelin, and the many other women like them, to take up professional work and risk their position in society and widespread disapprobation? Although there are no definite answers, the question is worth exploring as it aptly introduces the cultural landscape in which the women launched their careers.

Necessity

Although the most obvious motivation for starting in business is the need to support oneself financially, finding evidence to suggest that necessity prompted these women to take up work is problematic. Documents recording their economic status rarely survive. Their letters and diaries seldom openly discussed financial matters, and societal pressure meant they would be unlikely to publicly admit to fiscal hardship. It is often possible to glean evidence of their financial circumstances by examining their biographies. When they set up in business, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett (probably in 1874, aged twenty-nine and thirty-three respectively), Robinson (in 1884, aged twenty-five) and Crommelin (in 1888, aged thirty-four) were all unmarried. Considering that during this period the majority of middle-class women married in their early- to mid-twenties, all four women were edging towards the category of ‘surplus women’.¹²³ While the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin may have been looking for an alternative to spousal financial support, it does not follow that all women interior decorators were unmarried. For example, both Robinson and Crommelin worked in conjunction with married sisters.

¹²⁰ See Deborah Goring, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹²¹ Although novels Amy Levy’s, *The Romance of a Shop* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1888) and George Gissing’s, *The Odd Women* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893) both centre around the societal disapprobation faced by middle-/professional- class shop keeping.

¹²² Rhoda Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women: A Lecture* (Cheltenham: Telegraph Office, 1872), 11.

¹²³ Jennifer Phlegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2011), 36.

Robinson [Figure 1.1] started her business with her elder sister, Elspeth McClelland (1847–1912). Although Elspeth had married John McClelland (b. 1845) in 1878, by 1891 the census listed her as the head of household, living with her daughter and two servants.¹²⁴ It may be that, by 1888 when the two sisters went into business, she was already living alone. The breakdown of Elspeth's marriage (passenger ship records imply that her husband had absconded to Australia) may well have left her in financial difficulty, leading her to join her sister's venture.¹²⁵ Crommelin [Figure 1.2] launched her business with her younger sister Florence Goring-Thomas (1857–1895), who had married Rhys Goring-Thomas (b. 1864) in 1886. However, perhaps as a result of her married status, Florence seems to have taken a less public role in the business. Further to this, at least ten more women active as interior decorators between 1872 and 1899 were married: Mrs Hartley Brown, Katherine Cooke, Mrs Green, Mrs Innes, Annie Keightley, Mary Masters, Mary Monckton, Mrs Charles Muller, Mrs Frank Oliver and Emmeline Pankhurst [see **Appendix One**]. Marriage did not necessarily equate to financial stability and many married women still needed (or wanted) to work.

Considering their unmarried status, could the women rely on financial support from their families? Moncure Conway (whose 1874 article 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', in American periodical *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, provides a contemporary account of their motivation) thought that the Garretts could. He claimed they 'have by no means been driven to their undertaking by the necessity of earning a livelihood. They belong to an old family of high position'.¹²⁶ His claim was unfounded. Agnes Garrett, the daughter of a successful Suffolk maltster and brewer, admittedly came from a prosperous family. It was a family, however, with fluctuating fortunes and, as one of ten surviving children, she may well have needed to earn. Rhoda Garrett, who came from a less affluent branch of the family, needed to work.¹²⁷ It may be that the Garrett cousins denied financial motivation to help preserve their respectability and that of their families. Alternatively, Conway's statement may have been an attempt to placate the middle-class readership of the publication. Either way, it is reasonable

¹²⁴ 1891 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

¹²⁵ United Kingdom outward and incoming passenger lists, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

¹²⁶ Moncure Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1874, 26.

¹²⁷ Letters from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to Emily Davies recording the Garrett sisters attempts to find her cousin work, 1860–1867, HA436/1/1/2–4, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

to assume that financial need at least partly motivated the decision of both Rhoda and Agnes Garrett to embark upon professional work.

Crommelin, whose family were members of the Northern Irish gentry, was surprisingly open about the circumstances that led her to take up professional work. In the *Weekly Wisconsin* she commented ‘On my father’s death my family, crippled by the past land troubles of recent years, had to leave Carrowdore Castle [the family seat in County Down, Northern Ireland] ... On coming to London I cast about for a vocation’.¹²⁸ It may be that, as the Irish troubles were so well known, the Crommelins felt they were unable to hide their financial problems. In contrast, Robinson, the daughter of successful Yorkshire lawyer Henry Robinson (1816–1870), was financially secure. Orphaned at sixteen, she had inherited a substantial legacy (around £2,860, or roughly £251,100 today) from her father.¹²⁹ After leaving school, although still under the guardianship of her brothers, Robinson had the financial freedom to dedicate several years to amateur theatricals and American travel.¹³⁰ *Manchester Faces and Places* commented that, on her return from America, she ‘resolved on investing her money in a business she could control herself’.¹³¹ Robinson, who would have reached her maturity in 1880, was aware that the sum left to her by her father, though a substantial amount, would not last forever. In her own words, she was obliged to decide between earning her own living or ‘sitting with folded hands living on a little’.¹³²

By investing her capital in a business that would sustain her for the rest of her life, Robinson demonstrated considerable financial shrewdness. Her experience, however, highlights one of the major obstacles faced by women who wanted, or needed, to work. When

¹²⁸ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work’, *Weekly Wisconsin*, 29 March 1890, 7.

¹²⁹ Henry Robinson’s divided his fortune, estimated at just under £20,000, equally between his seven surviving children. Each child was left a sum of around £2,860 in trust until their marriage or twenty-first birthday. Last Will and Testament of Henry Robinson of Settle, 28 March 1871, United Kingdom Wills and Probate; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 15/08/2017].

¹³⁰ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.

¹³¹ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *Manchester Faces and Places*, 10 April 1892, 120.

¹³² F. M. Strutt Cavell, ‘Business Women of Today: No. 1 Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Pioneer of Fashion*, 1 March 1893, 50.

starting as a decorator, as Mary Masters claimed, ‘connection and capital’ were essential.¹³³ Rhoda Garrett outlined the problem:

though parents thus recognise the necessity of providing capital for their sons, it never seems to enter their head that the same should be *offered* to their daughters. Girls never have any capital; they hardly know what it means; yet without it the very first move is impossible; they may enter a shop, but they cannot *own* one.¹³⁴

Like Robinson, although Crommelin and the Garretts needed to provide themselves with long-term income, they cannot have been entirely without financial support. To launch themselves in business they required capital. This may be the reason so many of the women-run interior decoration firms active during this period began as partnerships [see **Appendix One**]. An 1883 article on house decoration as a career commented ‘A girl who has served her apprenticeship ought to be able to start in business for herself, if she has sufficient capital. Two friends starting in partnership would be much more likely to succeed than a lady alone.’¹³⁵ By combining resources, the women would find it easier to raise capital.

Influence

Notably, each of the women had a close, older, female family member or friend who had already made headway in the professional sphere. Although it is impossible to prove whether their decisions to launch professional careers were a direct result of their relationship with these influential figures, we should not underestimate the importance of these female role models. *The Women’s Penny Paper* claimed that ‘probably the successful medical career of Mrs. Garrett Anderson, her sister, first suggested the idea to Agnes of adopting a profession herself’.¹³⁶ By the time Agnes and Rhoda began to look for professional training, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson [**Figure 1.3**] had already achieved a medical education and set up a practice in Upper Berkeley Street, London.¹³⁷ Garrett Anderson, a member of the Langham Place circle (a network of politically active middle-class women associated with the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women and the *English Woman’s Journal*) was deeply committed to her

¹³³ ‘Employment Notes: Women as House Decorators’, *Hearth and Home*, 28 June 1900, 26.

¹³⁴ Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, 14 [Italics in original text].

¹³⁵ ‘Work for All’, *The Girl’s Own Paper*, 22 December 1883, 3.

¹³⁶ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 1.

¹³⁷ Jo Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson: England’s First Woman Physician* (London: Methuen, 1965), 221.

medical career. She was also, as her personal letters attest, eager to extol the benefits of professional employment to female family members and friends, including both Agnes and Rhoda.¹³⁸ In 1861, she wrote to suffragist Emily Davies (1830–1921) detailing her attempts to find Rhoda work: ‘I am so anxious just now to get Rose [Rhoda] Garrett away from home. She can do nothing there, & her parents are willing to let her go’.¹³⁹

Garrett Anderson herself acknowledged her influence over her sister. In a letter to her mother about Agnes’ desire to find work she wrote: ‘I know you will be ready to think I am in some way at the bottom of it, and as far as the silent example of my happy solution of the same puzzle goes I dare say I do influence Agnes’.¹⁴⁰ Like Agnes, Crommelin had the advantage of the ‘silent example’ of a working elder sister. By the time Caroline started in business, May Crommelin (1849–1930) [**Figure 1.2**] had published fifteen novels and gained considerable financial success. May had embarked on her literary career against her father’s wishes: he ‘was somewhat of a disciplinarian, and had rigid ideas on feminine dependence and subordination, and though he did not actually forbid her writing, he never encouraged it’.¹⁴¹ By the time her father died in 1885, May had made enough money to enable her escape to London with Caroline, a time described by May as ‘by far the happiest period of her life’.¹⁴² Caroline, who presumably had very little money of her own, must have found the support of her sister invaluable. While, without documentary evidence, we cannot assume that May was able to give Caroline the capital she needed to start her interior decoration venture, we can safely assume that being able, at the very least, to share living costs with her sister was a significant help.

In the 1870s, whilst a student at the progressive Queen’s College in London, Robinson met publisher, writer and women’s rights activist Emily Faithfull (1835–1895).¹⁴³ Faithfull,

¹³⁸ Letters from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to her father and husband, 1870, HA336/1/2/4, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

¹³⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to Emily Davies, 30 November 1861, HA436/1/1/2, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to her mother, 1861, HA436/1/2/3/2, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

¹⁴¹ Helen C. Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches* (Glasgow: David Bryce and Sons, 1893), 219.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁴³ Edmund Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, *The World*, 14 May 1890, 815.

twenty-four years Robinson's senior, became a significant, and possibly romantic, figure in her life.¹⁴⁴ They travelled to America together and, on their return, set up home in Manchester where they cohabited until Faithfull's death in 1895.¹⁴⁵ Like Garrett Anderson, Faithfull was a member of the Langham Place circle and known for her efforts in the campaign for women's employment.¹⁴⁶ Robinson and Faithfull are often discussed side-by-side in the press, with Robinson positioned as the exemplar of Faithfull's efforts in promoting the status of working women.¹⁴⁷ It is not unreasonable to assume that Faithfull's influence had an impact on Robinson's desire to take up professional work and, although Robinson's inheritance meant she would not have needed Faithfull's support to raise capital, sharing a home must have lightened her financial burden during the initial years of her business.

Faithfull was not the only potential influencer in Robinson's life. An article in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, written by Faithfull, positioned Robinson as one of the first successful 'lady' shopkeepers in London.¹⁴⁸ This garnered a caustic response from a 'Miss Kate Thornbury', who wrote:

To my great astonishment I find no mention whatever of Miss Robinson's elder sister Mrs Atherton, who, as Miss Faithfull is well aware, had started a large business under her own superintendence in New Bond-street, London under the title of the Society of Artists, for the sale of all kinds of artistic work, house decoration, &c., in the year 1883 ... the great success

¹⁴⁴ Alexis Easley, 'Women Writers and Celebrity News at the *Fin-de-Siecle*' in Maura Ives and Ann R. Hawkins (eds.), *Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2012), 141–143; Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 313n.

¹⁴⁵ On her death, Faithfull left her entire estate, valued at £850, entirely to Robinson. Last Will and Testament of Emily Faithfull, United Kingdom Wills and Probate; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 15/08/2017].

¹⁴⁶ In 1860, under the aegis of the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women, Faithfull started the Victoria Press, which aimed to open the skilled trade of print composition to women. Commercially the venture was a success and, in 1861, Queen Victoria granted it a royal warrant as 'Printer and Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty'. Faithfull started the *Victoria Magazine* in 1863 and, in 1868, published her only novel, *Change upon Change*, a romance with an underlying moralising theme about the need for reform in women's education, training and employment. Subsequently, Faithfull embarked on a prolific journalistic career. See Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928* (London: Routledge, 2000), 213; James S. Stone, *Emily Faithfull: Victorian Champion on Women's Rights* (Ontario: P. D. Meany Publishers, 1994).

¹⁴⁷ Easley, 'Women Writers and Celebrity News at the Fin de Siècle', 142.

¹⁴⁸ Emily Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 December 1887, 11–12.

which attended (and still attends) her venture induced Miss Robinson twelve months afterwards to open a similar business in Manchester, under the same name.¹⁴⁹

Robinson's sister, Anne (1849–1913) [Figure 1.1], had married Francis Atherton (1840–1927) in 1870. The newlyweds emigrated to Australia together, but the marriage does not seem to have been a success and, after an 1873 visit to England, Francis returned to Australia without Anne.¹⁵⁰ By 1881, Anne was living with her sister Elspeth McClelland [Figure 1.1] (who later became Robinson's business partner) in Paddington, with both women giving their occupation as 'Artist (Painting)'.¹⁵¹ Although few further details can be found about the Society of Artists [see Appendix One], this tantalising detail again attests that, without the formative influence and support of family and friends, the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin may not have been inspired to set up in business at this time.¹⁵²

Choice

It may be, however, that the Garretts worked (at least partly) because they wanted to. Moncure Conway, who so profusely denied financial motivation for the cousins, instead endowed them with a loftier object. He claimed the cousins 'are thinkers, and they have arrived at conclusions concerning the duties and rights of their sex which forbid them to emulate the butterflies'.¹⁵³ His implication was that the Garretts' views on women's rights were a significant factor in their decision to reject the idle and frivolous life of their non-professional female peers. The Garretts were certainly active in the women's movement at the time they were starting their career. Both women supported the campaign for women's suffrage, were active in the London branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and, in 1871, joined the executive

¹⁴⁹ Kate Thornbury, 'Mrs Atherton's Artistic Shop in Bond Street', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 December 1887, 11.

¹⁵⁰ United Kingdom outward and incoming passenger lists, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

¹⁵¹ Kate Thornbury was present as a 'visitor'. 1881 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

¹⁵² A further layer of complexity is added by the fact that Kate Thornbury's sister, Clara Thornbury Garrett, had married Agnes Garrett's brother, Samuel Garrett in 1881, suggesting that the example of Agnes and Rhoda Garrett may have inspired Thornbury and Atherton to start in business. Anonymous, *The Garrett Family, 1812–1903* (Toronto: W. H. Apter, 1903).

¹⁵³ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 25.

committee of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Rhoda was a prolific speaker and gained recognition as a suffrage orator in the early 1870s. A full-page illustration of her speaking at a suffrage meeting [Figure 1.4], included in *The Graphic* in 1872, demonstrates the extent of her political celebrity. Considering the extent of their involvement in the campaign for women's rights it is reasonable to assert that demonstrating that women were capable of success in the professional world added impetus to the Garretts' decision to take up work.

Were Robinson and Crommelin also encouraged towards a professional life by their belief in social reform? Crommelin was less outspoken in her support for the women's movement than the Garretts. Her interviewer in *The Women's Penny Paper*, claimed 'both the sisters [Crommelin and Goring-Thomas] are in favour of the Extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to women who are householders, but have a horror of women in Parliament'.¹⁵⁵ Although Crommelin does not otherwise speak out on her political views, that she was interviewed in this periodical, which was known for its uncompromising views on women's rights, is revealing. The aim of the paper was, in the words of its editor, 'to further the emancipation of women in every direction and in every land'.¹⁵⁶ Although agreeing to an interview in the publication was likely a shrewd business decision, it was also tantamount to an admission of support for its aims. Robinson also agreed to an interview in *The Women's Penny Paper*, again implying her support for the women's movement.¹⁵⁷ However, unlike Garrett and Crommelin, Robinson did not vocalise her support for women's suffrage in her interview or elsewhere.

Emily Faithfull, herself a vocal advocate for working women, claimed Robinson 'determined on a career of honourable work rather than a life of dull inactivity or intermittent charitable enterprises, and casting off the shackles which imprison weaker women, she dared to be herself—not the reflection of a mere class'.¹⁵⁸ Faithfull paints Robinson as an exceptional

¹⁵⁴ Members of the Manchester branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage formed The Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage to work in London to pressure MPs. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 101–103.

¹⁵⁵ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 2.

¹⁵⁶ 'Miss Henrietta F. Muller', *The Woman's Herald*, 28 November 1891, 2.

¹⁵⁷ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', 11.

woman who, dissatisfied with the idea of the traditional trajectory for a middle-class woman, instead chose a professional life. Notably, Robinson herself was quick to emphasise that she was not undertaking a charitable venture. When, in 1887, she was appointed 'Home Art Decorator' to Queen Victoria, *The Illustrated London News* reported that 'Miss Robinson had at first some difficulty in making people understand that her work was commercial, not charitable; but she feels that until a healthy public sentiment is created, the false pride which keeps ladies afraid of entering on industrial pursuits will never be overcome'.¹⁵⁹ Robinson, who was passionate about her professional status and clearly aware of the obstacles faced by her peers, was interested in defusing the stigma encountered by middle-class women engaged in trade and this may well have added impetus to her decision to take up professional work.

The Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin were all interested (if not all actively involved) in the women's movement, and this is likely to have been a significant factor in motivating them to take up professional work. They were not, however, the only women interior decorators active in the campaign for women's rights. Suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, a close contemporary of Robinson and Crommelin, also sought to establish herself as a professional in the field. Pankhurst, a prolific orator, founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903 and campaigned for women's suffrage throughout her life. Arrested on numerous occasions, Pankhurst was infamous for her advocacy of militant, law-defying tactics. A clue as to her motivation for launching her interior decoration enterprise (Emerson & Co.) is given by her daughter, political activist, writer and artist Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) who, some years later, claimed her mother had wanted to use the profits from her business to 'emancipate her husband from professional work to concentrate on politics'.¹⁶⁰ However, the idea that Pankhurst sought employment solely for the benefit of her husband is contentious in respect of her views regarding women's rights and the fact that, by this stage, she was already an active campaigner for suffrage in her own right.

Emmeline's eldest daughter, suffragette Christabel Pankhurst, gave a different explanation, claiming that her mother's plan was to 'lay the financial foundation of a great movement of social and industrial reform and, of course, the enfranchisement of women'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ 'The Queen's Home Art Decorator', *The Illustrated London News*, 31 December 1887, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst: The Suffragette Struggle for Women's Citizenship* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1935), 22.

¹⁶¹ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 25–26.

Her suggestion that women's rights were central to the foundation of Emerson & Co. aligns with Pankhurst's own claims regarding her motivation. When asked, in an 1891 interview, whether she began her career in interior decoration after leaving school, Emmeline Pankhurst replied:

No. I was always anxious to have outside work; as a girl I felt strongly the necessity of women being trained to some profession or business which should enable them to be self-supporting. It is important that they should avoid the degradation of forced dependence on husbands and male relatives, not only for subsistence, but for every private call. Women are the better and the happier for occupation; it raises them socially and intellectually.¹⁶²

With Emerson & Co., Pankhurst could, like the Garrett cousins, Robinson and Crommelin, stand as an example to other women. For these women, the Women's Social and Political Union motto of 'Deeds not Words' typified their professional motivation. Not content merely to bemoan the lack of occupational opportunities for women, they both strove to position their own professional standing as demonstrative of the potential of their peers.

Why interior decoration?

Why, however, did the Garretts choose interior decoration over other lines of work? The field of interior decoration was, at the time, dominated by men and male-run firms. It would, surely, have been easier to choose an occupation already established as suitable for practice by women. An examination of Rhoda Garrett's experience reveals that this was not necessarily the case. One problem facing middle-class women who wanted, or needed, to work, was that very few professions were open to them.¹⁶³ In her autobiography, Millicent Garrett Fawcett commented on the problem of finding work for her cousin: 'it became a question what should Rhoda do? At that time governessing was practically the only professional career open to a woman'.¹⁶⁴ However, while Rhoda's family made considerable efforts to encourage her career as a governess, they were unsuccessful. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson wrote to her sister Alice Garrett (1843–1925) [Figure 1.3]: 'I am sure I don't know about Rose [Rhoda]. I have not much hope

¹⁶² 'Mrs Pankhurst', *The Woman's Herald*, 7 February 1891, 1.

¹⁶³ Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–15.

¹⁶⁴ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), 48.

of her ever being a first or even second class governess'.¹⁶⁵ Rhoda's experience exemplified the significant problem of the lack of professional opportunities for women. While governessing, needlework and paid companionship were deemed respectable, with so many women in need of employment, work in these areas was hard to find and not all had the necessary skills.¹⁶⁶

As previously established, the Garretts, Crommelin and Robinson were all interested in the campaign for the reform of women's rights and in demonstrating that middle-class women were capable of professional success. Rhoda, who had experienced the problems engendered by the lack of opportunities for women, forcefully expounded the injustice of their 'exclusion from nearly all lucrative and honourable employments'.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps, then, an awareness of the need to expand occupational prospects for women inspired the decision to forge careers in this previously male-dominated field. Millicent Vince (b.1868) claimed that the Garretts were 'determined to find a new profession for women in the decoration of houses' and aimed to convince the public that 'in their *womanly* hands' house decoration 'could be a business and a sound business, as well'.¹⁶⁸ The fact that, when the Garretts had established themselves in their career, they went on to offer professional training to other aspiring women house decorators (including, of course, Vince herself) supports her assertion.

The *Illustrated London News* imbued Robinson with a similar aim to the Garretts when they reported that she 'has now won the recognition of Her Majesty, who has always been ready to show a kindly interest in ladies who are trying to open out new paths for the remunerative employment of women in appropriate directions'.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Christabel Pankhurst noted that Emmeline Pankhurst, also aware of the need to expand professional opportunities for women, believed the foundation of Emerson & Co. would be 'propitious, for women were not trained to careers in those days, and if they had been, there were so few careers

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to Alice Garrett, 1861, HA436/1/4/7, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

¹⁶⁶ Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), 64–7.

¹⁶⁷ Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Millicent Vince, 'Agnes Garrett: Pioneer of Women House Decorators', *The Woman's Leader*, 11 September 1925, 259 [Italics in original text].

¹⁶⁹ 'The Queen's Home Art Decorator', *Illustrated London News*, 4.

to be trained for!’¹⁷⁰ Clearly, for many of the women working as interior decorators, the field was attractive precisely because it was *not*, at that time, typically practised by women. Interior decoration was not the only field from which women, at this time, were barred: for example, they were also unable to practise as lawyers, architects, accountants and stockbrokers. Why then, did the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin chose interior decoration as their focus? And what factors enabled their success?

Increased demand

Various historians, including Lee Holcombe, have claimed economic determinism as responsible for the expansion of middle-class women’s employment options in the nineteenth century, arguing that the growing range of socially acceptable work was symptomatic of the needs of employers.¹⁷¹ Where interior decoration is concerned, this argument is persuasive. The middle-class expanded considerably during the latter part of the nineteenth-century, from 12.5% in 1851 to 25% by 1901.¹⁷² Incomes also increased: average income per head doubled between 1851 and 1901 and, simultaneously, the cost of necessities plunged.¹⁷³ An expanded population had more money to spend on their homes, and a keen desire to assert their newly gained middle-class status with furniture and decoration, resulting in a significant increase in demand for interior decoration.¹⁷⁴

This growing market needed new suppliers, something Moncure Conway argued was responsible for the development of interior decoration as a female profession. He claimed that ‘it has been one particularly gratifying incident of the passion for decoration in this country that it has been the means of opening to women beautiful and congenial employments’.¹⁷⁵ Women, like the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin, keen to gain a foothold within the developing career of interior decoration were, arguably, able to exploit the shortage of professionals equipped to meet the boom in demand. However, there were plenty of men also

¹⁷⁰ Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, 26.

¹⁷¹ Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850–1914* (Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1973), 18.

¹⁷² John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880–1990* (London: Longman, 1994), 13.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 25

¹⁷⁴ Joanna Banham, Sally MacDonald and Julia Porter, *Victorian Interior Design* (London: Cassel, 1991), 10–12.

¹⁷⁵ Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, 18.

willing to fill this supply: see, for example, the contemporary development of vast house decorating emporiums, such as Maples, Heals, Liberty, Shoolbred, Morris & Co. and Watts & Co. all run by men, so this alone cannot explain the emergence of professional women house decorators.¹⁷⁶

Unclaimed area

Various press sources hint that Rhoda Garrett had initially aimed to train as an architect. For example, her obituary in *The English Woman's Review* claimed that 'determining on the profession of an architect, she came to London about 1868, but had much difficulty in finding an office open to a lady pupil'.¹⁷⁷ Although the veracity of statements such as this cannot be confirmed, the Royal Institute of British Architects did not admit women until 1898 and, without financial support, Rhoda would have found it difficult to practise on an amateur basis.¹⁷⁸ In contrast to the established profession of architecture, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, interior decoration was what Martha Vicinus has termed an 'unclaimed area'.¹⁷⁹ The profession remained a contested responsibility, in which a variety of male professionals, including architects, upholsterers, cabinet-makers, painter decorators and decorative artists, struggled for control.¹⁸⁰ As the profession lacked both an established educational pathway and a professional regulatory body, women could, arguably, begin to act in the field without encountering male censure. Did awareness of this motivate the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin to adopt their chosen career?

In her 1872 speech on the 'The Electoral Disabilities of Women', Rhoda Garrett fervently proclaimed:

Let us now note the difficulties a woman is likely to encounter, if she seeks to enter a trade. Here there are no charters, it is true, as in the professions, to prevent her entrance at the very threshold. But there are lions in the way quite as formidable; blind prejudice, on the one hand;

¹⁷⁶ Clive Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes: A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (London: Routledge, 2005), 119–134.

¹⁷⁷ 'Art IV: Miss Rhoda Garrett', *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, 547.

¹⁷⁸ For a summary of women architects in the nineteenth century see Lynne Walker, 'Women Architects', in Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (eds.), *The View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 90–105.

¹⁷⁹ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Independent Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁸⁰ See introduction.

and a fear of injuring established interests on the other ... I know women who have tried to do so, and whose difficulties lay, not in their want of power to gain the requisite, but in the almost overwhelming prejudice of those already in possession of the vantage ground which stops them at every turn.¹⁸¹

Rhoda was clearly aware that while she and Agnes would face the disapprobation of established male rivals, they were not barred from ‘the very threshold’, as they would be in a more established profession. Millicent Vince echoed this speech when she acknowledged that the Garretts ‘adventure was as novel, though not as difficult’ as that of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson as, although ‘they had not to force their way into medical school’, they did still ‘have to find men to train them’.¹⁸² Neither Crommelin or Robinson seem to have acknowledged an awareness of the advantages of the unclaimed nature of interior decoration and it may be that, as they were following the precedent set by the Garrett cousins, they faced less professional opposition.

Suitability for women

Another reason for choosing interior decoration was that it could, arguably, be easily positioned as a profession inherently suitable for women. Moncure Conway claimed that, for the Garretts, ‘when the decorative work of Morris & Co. began to attract attention, it appeared to them that it offered opportunities for employment suitable for women’.¹⁸³ Shortly after founding Morris & Co. William Morris began to employ his daughters, wife and female friends to undertake the designing and, in the case of needlework, making of a variety of craftworks.¹⁸⁴ The fact that women were already working successfully in the field of art decoration would have gone some way to ameliorate the risks involved in setting up in a similar business. Agnes Garrett’s interview in *The Women’s Penny Paper* also credits the influence of Morris & Co., but goes further, claiming that ‘about the year 1874, it first entered her head that she should like much to become a house decorator. It was about the commencement of Morris’s well-known reign, and Miss Garrett rightly considered that the artistic decoration of our homes was more in a

¹⁸¹ Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, 11–13.

¹⁸² Vince, ‘Agnes Garrett’, 259.

¹⁸³ Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, 18.

¹⁸⁴ Irene Cockroft, *New Dawn Women: Women in the Arts & Crafts and Suffrage Movements at the Dawn of the 20th Century* (Compton, Guildford: Watts Gallery, 2005), 5.

lady's line'.¹⁸⁵ Conway's last comment, 'more in a lady's line', is crucial in that it implies that there was something in the actual business of house decoration that made it more suitable for women than for men. Why was this the case?

Education

In *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, Rhoda Garrett railed against the deficiencies she perceived in female middle-class education: 'the most important subjects ... are generally considered to be accomplishments—a little bad French and music, and worse drawing, with a great deal of fancy needlework'.¹⁸⁶ Typically, middle- and professional-class girls were taught at home by a governess or in small, privately-owned, schools. Their education concentrated on polite social accomplishments, rather than on the academic or practical skills prioritised for boys.¹⁸⁷ The intention was to prepare girls for marriage, domesticity and home-making. However, many of the skills acquired were transferable to a career as an interior decorator. Girls were expected to have mastered a range of amateur artistic accomplishments, such as drawing, watercolours and needlework, all of which would have formed a good basis for acquiring the skills required by a house decorator. Agnes Garrett's interview in *The Women's Penny Paper* devotes several paragraphs to detailing her education at home, in Aldeburgh, by 'a governess of the good old type'.¹⁸⁸ Considering the focus of the interview is Garrett's professional life, we must assume that she considered her education had prepared her well for her career.

Domesticity

In the American magazine *The Decorator and Furnisher*, Agnes Garrett expounded on why she thought house decoration was 'a suitable employment for women'. She claimed that 'homeliness is one of the charms we most prize, and this air of homeliness and comfort a woman is, generally speaking, particularly well calculated to give'.¹⁸⁹ The use of the word 'homeliness' is particularly telling. Traditionally, scholarship on Victorian women has concentrated on the concept of 'separate spheres', by which men acted in the public realm of

¹⁸⁵ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, 5.

¹⁸⁷ Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760–1914: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 174–187.

¹⁸⁸ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Agnes Garrett, 'House Decoration for Women', *The Decorator and Furnisher*, 1 December 1891, 92.

business and politics, and women in the private sphere of home and family.¹⁹⁰ Both Amanda Vickery and Anne Digby demonstrate that, in lived experience, these distinctions had limited purchase and lacked clear-cut demarcations.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, the connection between femininity and domesticity, and the ideal of the ‘Angel in the House’, had considerable weight in the Victorian public imagination.¹⁹² Middle- and professional-class women, excluded from much of the working world, were necessarily associated with the home.

In her first ‘Home Decoration’ column for *The Queen* Robinson, like Garrett, demonstrated her awareness of the connection between domesticity and the ‘feminine’ sphere:

as “The Home” is acknowledged as a “woman’s Kingdom,” it is not surprising that ladies have begun to make the decoration and furnishing of houses their special study. Few employments are more in keeping with what is popularly known as “woman’s sphere,” than well-directed efforts to bring within the household the beautiful in form and colour, and to mingle its subtle influence with family and social life.’¹⁹³

Likewise, in her interview in *The World* she acknowledged that ‘to bring within “the home” the beautiful in form and colour, and to brighten by every available influence the prosaic details of ordinary existence, is distinctly feminine work’.¹⁹⁴ Crommelin agreed and, in her interview in *The Women’s Penny Paper*, professed that ‘men so often forget the comforts of life when

¹⁹⁰ For a summary of Victorian separate sphere ideology see Ben Griffins, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women’s Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 28–33, 38–51 and Jordan, *The Women’s Movement and Women’s Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 42–46.

¹⁹¹ Anne Digby, ‘Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private’ in T. C. Smout (ed.) *Victorian Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 195–215; Amanda Vickery ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres’ in *The Historical Journal*, 32:2 (1993): 382–414. See also: Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens (eds.), *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). For works more specifically addressing separate sphere ideology in relation to professional artistic practice see: Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Patricia Zakreski (eds.), *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2013); Lucy Ella Rose, ‘A Feminist Network in an Artists’ Home: Mary and George Watts, George Meredith, and Josephine Butler’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 21/1 (2016): 74–91; Tara Morton, ‘Changing Spaces: Art, Politics, and Identity in the Home Studios of the Suffrage Atelier’, *Women’s History Review*, 21/4 (2012): 623–637; Zoë Thomas, ‘At Home with the Women’s Guild of Arts: Gender and Professional Identity in London studios, c. 1880–1925’, *Women’s History Review*, 24:6 (2015): 938–964; Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848–1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁹² Jordan, *The Women’s Movement and Women’s Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 48–56.

¹⁹³ Charlotte Robinson, ‘Home Decoration’, *The Queen*, 27 October 1888, 489.

¹⁹⁴ Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, 12.

designing a house, and did not understand decorating, and there was always a want about a room in which the womanly touch was lacking'.¹⁹⁵

The idea that house decoration was particularly appropriate for women was one that gained in currency through the nineteenth-century. In 1893, *The Spinning Wheel*, 'A Magazine for English Wives, Mothers and Daughters', placed home decoration on a list of suitable occupations for women, claiming 'there is no occupation to which woman is more adapted than anything which has for its basis the decoration of the home'.¹⁹⁶ By the 1890s the suitability of house decoration as a profession for women had been firmly established. Penny Sparke convincingly argues that the growing number of women seeking employment in the nineteenth century were encouraged to take jobs, such as teaching and nursing, that were extensions of their domestic responsibilities.¹⁹⁷ Sparke argues that interior decoration occupied a 'middle ground', maintaining cultural links between femininity and domesticity, but also operating outside the home.¹⁹⁸ Women were able to subvert the connection between the home, domesticity and femininity to define interior decoration as a profession particularly suitable for women.¹⁹⁹

Philanthropy

Anne Digby posits the idea of 'social borderlands', such as philanthropy and social activism, in which women could act in the public sphere without drawing attention to themselves.²⁰⁰ In the mid-nineteenth century, following the influence of Henry Cole (1808–1882) and the design reform movement, considerable importance was placed on the need to improve both design standards and public taste.²⁰¹ As Deborah Cohen argues, by the 1870s the idea that domestic

¹⁹⁵ Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ 'Fields of Employment Open to Women: Furniture and Wallpaper Designing', *The Spinning Wheel*, 26 April 1893, 403.

¹⁹⁷ Penny Sparke, 'Elsie de Wolfe and her Female Clients, 1905–15: Gender, Class and the Professional Interior Decorator' in Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke (eds.), *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860–1960* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹⁹ Simultaneously, the suitability on interior decoration as an amateur interest for men began to be questioned, particularly after Oscar Wilde's fall from grace in the mid-1890s. Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 100–101.

²⁰⁰ Digby, 'Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private': 195–215.

²⁰¹ Banham, MacDonald and Porter, *Victorian Interior Design*, 63–79.

goods helped shape character was well-established and, at a time when middle-class standards of living were rising and materialism was gaining foothold, emphasising the moral and improving value of possessions reconciled spiritual good with material abundance.²⁰² For example, William Morris' social theory of art aimed for 'An art made by the people, for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user'.²⁰³ Perhaps house decoration, then, could be a philanthropic 'social borderland' in which women were able to act professionally without censure?

The Garrett cousins advertised that they allied their belief in social reform to their professional work by keeping retail costs low. For example, Moncure Conway claimed that they 'believe that with care they are able to make beautiful interiors which shall not be too costly for persons of moderate means'.²⁰⁴ Pankhurst was also keen to combine her beliefs in social reform with her business strategy, by ensuring her stock was low priced. *The Woman's Herald* claimed that she had 'placed cheap artistic furniture within the reach of the large number of those English people who, possessed only of a small means, have hitherto been unable to beautify their houses'.²⁰⁵ Clearly, many of the women active as interior decorators in the late nineteenth century claimed to be motivated by a desire to engender social reform by increasing the access of a wider range of people to beautiful interiors. Significantly, Crommelin's enterprise had a more overtly charitable arm. *The Women's Penny Paper* noted that she gave 'employment to ladies and gentlemen in reduced circumstances, more especially among the distressed Irish'.²⁰⁶ It may be that Crommelin's aristocratic status foregrounded her need to justify her presence in the commercial world.

Art

Scholars have variously posited the genesis of both the Aesthetic and the Arts and Crafts movement as key in enabling middle-class women to progress from amateur craft-hobbyists to professional women craftworkers. For example, S. K. Tillyard argues that the Arts and Crafts movement expanded the repertoire of 'feminine' pursuits to include crafts such as metalwork

²⁰² Ibid., 15–31.

²⁰³ William Morris, 'The Art of the People' (1879) in May Morris (ed.), *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans, 1905–1910) Vol. XXII, 47.

²⁰⁴ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 18.

²⁰⁵ 'Mrs Pankhurst', *The Woman's Herald*, 1.

²⁰⁶ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

and woodwork. Distinctions between amateurs and professionals began to blur and the at-home female dabbler could claim the status of 'artworker', and the objects she produced were no longer 'fancy work', but 'art objects'.²⁰⁷ Similarly, Isabelle Anscombe claims that the Aesthetic movement, and its emphasis on the 'social cachet of good taste', was responsible for the rise of the woman decorative artist. She argues that the tenet of 'art for art's sake' allowed the boundaries of decorative work to shift. Furniture became 'art furniture', pottery became 'art pottery' and, as a result, areas of artistic activity previously considered manual/masculine became appropriate for practice by women.²⁰⁸ Clearly both movements, and their respective ideologies, contributed to a shift, from the 1860s, in the public perception of the status of both the decorative arts and decorative artists. With this shift, decorative art and, by extension, house decoration, became a respectable occupation, suitable for practice by middle-class women.

Agnes Garrett herself acknowledged this shift. She claimed that 'in a humble way, house decoration is one of the fine arts; and each room that is turned out by any house decorator is, or ought to be interesting as an expression of his or her individuality'.²⁰⁹ For Garrett, the artistic importance of the decorator's personality particularly fitted the profession to women. She argued that house decoration is 'a business that should never be too large ... Keeping the business small, and as it were personal, will always prevent large fortunes being made at it, and it will, in consequence, I think be entrusted to more and more women'. She also asserted that women were suited to the profession as the necessary 'sense of proportion and of fitness a woman seems instinctively to feel more quickly than a man. A woman has been trained from childhood to notice the effect of small and apparently trivial details, and to note how and in what position they assume the most importance'.²¹⁰ Her theory reflects art critic John Ruskin's (1819–1900) *Sesame and Lilies* (often regarded as epitomising the Victorian ideology of separate spheres), which argued that a woman's 'intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision'.²¹¹ Crucially, Garrett subverted Ruskin's advocacy of women's domestic role to justify female professional activity.

²⁰⁷ S. K. Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 9.

²⁰⁸ Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago, 1984), 27.

²⁰⁹ Garrett, 'House Decoration for Women', 91.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

²¹¹ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865), 147.

Female agency

Positioning a career as only/more suitable for a designated gender is, to contemporary ears, extremely problematic. By feminising house decoration in this way its practitioners were, by default, acknowledging some of the gender differences they were trying to fight against. However, it is important to recognise the extent of the limitations society placed on middle- and professional-class women. It is also vital to acknowledge that, by promoting house decoration as a career for women, these women were participating in a movement that encouraged their peers to take control of their domestic environments. Emma Ferry, Deborah Cohen, Judith Neiswander and Annmarie Adams have all highlighted how, during the later nineteenth century, a surge of interest in interior decoration encouraged, sustained and supported female agency.²¹² As previously noted, before the 1870s, control of the decoration of the home was a male reserve; in contrast, by the end of the century, women were more traditionally associated with interior decoration than men.

By contributing to the promotion of interior decoration as a career for women, and by encouraging other women to exercise a degree of autonomy over their own domestic environments (for example, by dispensing advice in women's magazines), women like the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin contributed to the more widespread acceptance of feminist ideals. A speech given by Rhoda Garrett, at the 1876 meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, demonstrates the extent to which interior decoration was an impassioned issue for feminists:

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 the right to work. If women would rightly undertake this work, and would study to understand the principles upon which all art – decorative as well as the higher branches of art – is based, they would not only thereby increase own sources of happiness, but in this extending the gracious

²¹² Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900* (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 131–163; Cohen, *Household Gods*, 104–114; Emma Ferry, “Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors”: An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's "Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture (1876)”, *Journal of Design History*, 16:1 (2003): 15–33; Judith Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870–1914* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008), 83–113.

influence of the home, they would help to raise the position of household art, and thus render a service to the nation.²¹³

Rhoda's plea reveals her fervent belief that her career as a house decorator was compatible with her feminist beliefs. For her, it was inherently linked to issues surrounding female education, separate sphere ideology, philanthropy, and the hierarchical structure of the arts.

Training

Having made the decision to embark upon careers in house decoration, how did the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin prepare themselves for their professional lives? The Garrett cousins founded their business in c.1874, at least ten years before either Robinson or Crommelin. At the time, there were very few women working in the industry whom they could look up to. As a result, when the cousins were considering how best to prepare themselves for their work, they must have looked to men for inspiration. However, as interior decoration was, during this period, an emerging profession, there was no established educational trajectory. Their male contemporaries seem to have largely gone to Oxford (where they acquired cultural capital and gained access to artistic networks), or come from an architectural background, before making the move to concentrate on the burgeoning market for interior decoration. The Garretts were evidently keen to follow a similar path, although gaining training comparable to that of their male contemporaries was not straightforward. In contrast, neither Crommelin or Robinson appear to have undertaken formal training, instead asserting their professional status by emphasising their extensive self-study and natural aptitude for the subject. For these women, their professional education and training (or lack thereof) was a contentious issue. Examining the ways in which they, later, discussed their experiences in this area reveals that they were acutely aware of their professional disadvantages.

Apprenticeships

Agnes Garrett claimed to have been inspired by the example of Morris & Co. to take up interior decoration as a profession.²¹⁴ William Morris, the son of a City financier, took his degree at Exeter College, Oxford. Afterwards, instead of entering the church as he had originally intended, Morris decided to train as an architect, articling himself to George Edmund Street

²¹³ Rhoda Garrett, 'How to Improve the Interior of Modern Houses, with Special Reference to their Furniture and Decorations', in Charles Wagner Ryalls (ed.), *Transactions of The National Association for The Promotion of Social Science* (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1876): 864–865.

²¹⁴ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 18.

(1824–1881), one of the leading architects of the Gothic revival. Although Morris spent only nine months as an apprentice and never formally qualified as an architect, his experience with Street had a significant impact on his later work. Street believed that architects should have a thorough knowledge of the crafts contributing to interior design, including stained glass, metalwork and embroidery and Morris's later gravitation towards these areas may well have been a result of Street's influence.²¹⁵ The time Morris spent as a student at Oxford and, subsequently, as an architectural apprentice, as well as the artistic networks he gained access to during these years, strongly influenced his later career in the field of interior decoration. Notably, Morris's experience reflects those of the (male) professionals working in interior design at the time. For example, George Aitchison, Edward William Godwin (1883–1886), Owen Jones (1809–1874), Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928), Philip Webb (1831–1915) and Charles Annesley Voysey (1857–1941) all trained (and worked) as architects, but also undertook interior decoration commissions.

As previously noted, various sources hint that Rhoda Garrett initially aimed to become an architect but could not find an office willing to accept a female pupil. An alternative explanation is that, having examined the educational experience of the men active in the field of interior decoration, the Garrett cousins recognised that gaining some architectural training would be beneficial. Agnes Garrett's interview in *The Women's Penny Paper* suggests that her original intention was always house decoration, but that she was advised that a degree of architectural training would be helpful in achieving this. The article recounts that 'a friend to whom she [Agnes] had confided her ideas, strongly advised her to go in regularly for the whole business, if she attempted it at all and to be apprenticed to an architect for at least three years'.²¹⁶ Regardless of their original intention, various sources comment that the Garretts did not find it easy to find an architect willing to apprentice them. For example, Lady Maude Parry commented on their 'weary and fruitless' search.²¹⁷ Rhoda Garrett's obituary in *The Athenaeum* claimed that Rhoda 'had much difficulty in finding an office open to a lady pupil'.²¹⁸ The

²¹⁵ Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 28–30.

²¹⁶ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²¹⁷ Maude Parry, 'Pen and Ink Sketches: Rhoda Garrett': 302–306, in Alice A. Leith (ed.), *Routledge's Every Girl's Annual* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1882), 302.

²¹⁸ 'Miss Rhoda Garrett', *The Athenaeum*, 9 December 1882, 772.

difficulty faced by the Garrett cousins in gaining professional training is indicative of the wider masculine opposition to middle-class women's intrusion into the professional world.

According to Moncure Conway, the Garretts eventually found 'One gentleman [who] allowed them to occupy a room in his offices, where they might pick up what knowledge they could in the art of glass-painting, and here they awaited further opportunity'.²¹⁹ Conway's autobiography elaborates:

They went to the chief firm in London, whose manager was obliged to make fun of their proposal to become apprentices. Finding them skilful as designers, he said that if they were not women he could give them positions as subordinate directors in certain kinds of work. "But," he said, "young women could n't [sic] get along with work-men. How could you swear at them? And think of nice young ladies running up ladders!" One of them said, "As for swearing at the workmen, they would not need that if it were ladies who made requests; and as for ladders, bring one here and see whether we can climb it or not!"²²⁰

Conway's anecdote demonstrates the extent of masculine opposition to middle-class women working, as well as the societal reasons given for this opposition. The manager was, presumably, Glasgow-born designer and glass-painter Daniel Cottier, who had opened Cottier & Co., Art Furniture Makers, Glass and Tile Painters from a studio at 2 Langham Place (a short walk from the Garretts apartment at 3 Cornwall Terrace Mews) in 1869.²²¹ The '& Co.' included three fellow Scotsmen: architect and furniture designer Bruce James Talbert, who also worked for cabinet makers Holland & Sons and Gillows & Co, and architects John McKean Brydon and William Wallace (d.1909).²²²

²¹⁹ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 18.

²²⁰ Moncure Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 450–451.

²²¹ The Garretts were connected to Cottier through Scottish architect John James Stevenson (1831–1908), with whom he had shared an office with in Edinburgh. Stevenson was related to Elizabeth Garrett Anderson through marriage and it may be that she had something to do with the Garrett cousins' introduction to Cottier, who had decorated the Anderson's home at 20 Upper Berkeley Street. Although exactly when the Garretts started their training with Cottier, it is likely to have been in the first half of 1871. Max Donnelly, 'Cottier and Company, Art Furniture Makers', *Antiques*, 159: 6 (June 2001):916–925; Juliet Kinchin, 'Daniel Cottier' in Joanna Banham (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Interior Design* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 324–325; Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: J. Murray, 1931), 58.

²²² The Garretts were also connected Brydon through Stevenson, who had worked with him in Glasgow. http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200799 [accessed 28 November 2017] and http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200523 [accessed 28 November 2017].

The cousins did not, however, remain with Cottier for the duration of their training. Millicent Vince provides an explanation, claiming that Cottier ‘took them as his pupils, accepted their fees—and taught them nothing. They left him, after a rather hectic time, and went to Mr. J. M. Brydon ... There they began their training’.²²³ Moncure Conway did not apportion blame, but claimed that ‘The architect [Brydon] who had been connected with this glass-staining firm [Cottier & Co.] separated from it, and, having begun a business of his own, accepted the application of the Misses Garrett to become his apprentices’.²²⁴ Brydon left Cottier and Co. in 1871 to set up in independent practice at 39 Great Marlborough Street, sharing an office with architect and author Basil Champneys (1842–1935).²²⁵ Conway was quick to emphasise the formal nature of the Garretts’ apprenticeship with Brydon. He wrote ‘They were formally articed for eighteen months, during which they punctually fulfilled their engagement, working from ten to five each day’.²²⁶ Conway highlighted the practical experience the cousins gained, recounting an anecdote about how a friend called upon the Garretts, finding them ‘flat on their backs close to a ceiling which they were painting. From that invisible region, their voices descended to carry on the conversation.’²²⁷

An article profiling the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin in *Woman’s World* described the Garretts’ training: ‘in 1871 they entered an architect’s office, and went through the complete course of three year’s training in all the mysteries of drawing to scale, of designing as applied to houses, and even into the uninteresting *minutiae* of the construction of a drain, or the laying of a gaspipe’.²²⁸ Agnes Garrett’s interview in *The Women’s Penny Paper* provides further details:

the Misses Garrett thoroughly studied every branch of the profession they had taken up, learning even the mechanical parts, from the mixing of paint, upwards. This thorough practical knowledge has been of great use on more than one occasion, for the cleverest workman will occasionally prove stupid, and nothing impresses a man more than the fact of his employer

²²³ Vince, ‘Agnes Garrett’, 259.

²²⁴ Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, 18.

²²⁵ http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200523 [accessed 28 November 2017].

²²⁶ Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, 18.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Mary Billington, ‘Some Practical Women’ in Oscar Wilde (ed.), *Woman’s World* (London: Cassels and Sons, 1890), 194.

being able to actually set to work and do the thing needed. There was plenty of hard work and drudgery to be gone through during those three years of apprenticeship, and there were days where the difficulties seemed almost insurmountable, but the cousins persevered.²²⁹

It is notable that contemporary press sources on the Garretts frequently emphasised that the women went through a formal architectural apprenticeship, following much the same trajectory as their male contemporaries. Clearly, they wanted to ensure that they were on an equal footing to their masculine rivals, as well as to assert their status as professionals and to emphasise that their gender would not be an obstacle to their success.

In a further attempt to emphasise her own professional training, in her 1891 article 'House Decoration for Women', Agnes Garrett affirmed that:

too many young ladies think that the main business of house decoration consists in painting *Gloire de Dijon* roses upon the panels of a door. ... so far as I know there is no way of learning the business in all its branches except by going through a term of apprenticeship in a house of business.²³⁰

Garrett's statement is critical of women, such as Robinson and Crommelin, who failed to undertake an apprenticeship. This may, of course, also have served to promote her own apprenticeship scheme (started at some point after Rhoda's death in 1882). An 1886 article entitled 'What Shall I Be?' in the *Young Folks Paper* advertised:

Miss Agnes Garrett, of 2 Gower Street W.C., house decorator, cabinet-maker, and designer of household furniture and upholstery trains pupils for the business in which she herself has been very successful. The training extends over a period of three years and the premium is three hundred pounds. The hours of work are from ten until four.²³¹

As well as providing labour and acting as a signifier of her professional success, the apprenticeship scheme presumably provided a steady source of income for the business.

However, it is important to remember that a desire to participate actively in increasing occupational opportunities for women was central to Agnes Garrett's professional motivation. Not only was she leading by example, she was also engendering tangible change in this area by ensuring that other women could benefit from their own hard-won training with Daniel

²²⁹ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 145.

²³⁰ Agnes Garrett, 'House Decoration for Women', 93.

²³¹ Alfred C. Harmsworth, 'What Shall I Be?', *Young Folks Paper: Literary Olympic and Tournament*, 24 September 1887, 203.

Cottier and John Brydon. For Garrett, this was central to the campaign for women's rights. Mary Billington (1862–1925) commented that she:

holds that unless women go thoroughly through a course of technical training they merely touch the fringe of the question of women's labour, and do nothing towards real advance. This can only be made when the real difficulties that handicap women so heavily in the start of life have been met and are overcome by education as specialised as that of the doctor or lawyer.²³²

One of Agnes' pupils was her niece, Theodora Garrett (b.1880), the daughter of Edmund Garrett (1840–1990).²³³ However the dates of her apprenticeship are unknown, and she does not seem to have continued in the profession. In contrast, Millicent Vince, née Cohen, who dedicated her 1923 decorative advice manual *Decoration and Care of the Home* to Agnes, and to whom Garrett allowed the use of her designs after her retirement, had a successful career in the early twentieth century.²³⁴ Millicent clearly saw her apprenticeship with the Garretts as a badge of honour, mentioning it in advertisements for her work [Figure 1.5].²³⁵

There is no documentary evidence to explain the failure of Crommelin and Robinson to undertake apprenticeships, but it may have been a financial decision. As Rhoda Garrett highlighted, a boy's father would ask "how can I provide him the capital, first to article my boy to a respectable firm in the trade he has chosen, and afterwards to establish himself in a business of his own?", he would not do the same for a daughter.²³⁶ Neither woman was explicit about her lack of formal training, although both referred to non-specific artistic training. *The Women's Penny Paper* informed readers that Crommelin used her 'practical knowledge and trained eye for colour and effect' to advise clients'.²³⁷ The same publication claimed that, Robinson, on her return to England from America, began 'seriously to supplement previous

²³² Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 194.

²³³ Letter to Gladys Wood from Sir Colin Anderson, 9 June 1952, HA436/1/4/14, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

²³⁴ Millicent Vince, *Decoration and Care of the Home* (London: W. Collins, 1923); 'Art in the Home', *The Expert*, May 1909, 176.

²³⁵ Advertisement for Mrs M. Vince, *Medical Women's Federation Newsletter*, December 1921, SAMWF/B/2/1/1, Medical Women's Federation Collection, Wellcome Collection Archives and Manuscripts, London.

²³⁶ Garrett, *The Electoral Disabilities of Women*, 14.

²³⁷ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

artistic study' to prepare herself for her work as a house decorator.²³⁸ Similarly, *Manchester Faces and Places* claimed that Robinson 'went through the necessary course of study', and Emily Faithfull mentions that her friend 'went through a course of training, studied house decoration from hearth tiles to frieze painting'.²³⁹ While there is no detailed mention of what this artistic study involved, it is not unreasonable to assume that it was undertaken informally at The Society of Artists [see **Appendix One**], the decoration firm founded by Robinson's sister, Anne Atherton.

Robinson and Crommelin's evasive approach to discussing their professional training demonstrates that they were acutely aware that it placed them at a disadvantage, compared to their male competitors. Neither woman seems to have offered apprenticeships to other women, perhaps because their own untrained status meant they did not feel qualified to undertake this. Awareness of the disadvantages of her lack of formal training apparently prompted Crommelin to later emphasise the importance of apprenticeships. In 'Furniture and Decoration', she claimed that 'the first thing she [an aspiring house decorator] should do is apprentice herself to a good firm where she will have ample opportunity of being grounded in the various branches of necessary knowledge'.²⁴⁰ Crommelin did not, of course, mention that she did not do so herself. However, the Garretts were not alone in their dedication to ensure that training in the art of house decoration was open to women. Various other women also ran apprenticeship schemes [see **Appendix One**]. For example, in 1887, the *Young Folks Paper* noted that Mrs Avant 'receives articled pupils'.²⁴¹ Interestingly, it was not just the more genteel aspects of house decoration in which that women offered training. In 1898 Mrs Innes was reported to be running a 'scheme for the training and employment of women in the actual labour of papering, whitewashing, and painting house interiors'.²⁴²

Travel

Travel and, more specifically, a sketching tour, was a method of preparation for an artistic career which women could undertake more easily. A sketching tour was considered valuable

²³⁸ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²³⁹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Faces and Places*, 120; Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', 11.

²⁴⁰ Shaw and Crommelin, 'Furniture and Decoration', 131.

²⁴¹ Harmsworth, 'What Shall I Be?', 11.

²⁴² 'Women and Domestic Art', *The House*, 1 March 1898, 36.

preparation for artists, as well as an essential part of an architect's professional preparation.²⁴³ For example, William Morris, credited with inspiring the Garretts' choice of career, had undertaken a three-month sketching tour in France and Belgium in 1854.²⁴⁴ Other architecturally-trained men, active in the field of interior decoration, to have undertaken a continental sketching tour included George Aitchison, Daniel Cottier, Owen Jones and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It was not only architecturally-trained male professionals who undertook sketching tours. Decorators John Gregory Crace (1809–1889) or John Dibblee Crace (1838–1919) were unable to complete a sustained period of professional training. Both, however, undertook study tours abroad and Dibblee Crace continued to study continental decorative art by means of study tours for the rest of his life.²⁴⁵ During the nineteenth century, women were, increasingly, travelling abroad, where they often had greater social freedom than they did at home.²⁴⁶ Artistic women, including Barbara Bodichon (1827–1891), Marianne North (1830–1890) and Florence (1834–1920) and Adelaide Claxton (1841–1920), denied the training opportunities available to their male rivals, were able to use travel to assert their professional status.²⁴⁷

Did women interior decorators also use travel to prepare themselves for their careers? The Garretts certainly travelled prior to launching their business. Moncure Conway wrote that, during their apprenticeship, they went on a tour of England 'sketching the interiors and furniture of the best houses, which were freely thrown open to them'.²⁴⁸ With this assertion,

²⁴³ George Edmund Street, with whom William Morris underwent his architectural training, was a tireless traveller who filled countless sketchbooks with drawings from his tours and strongly advocated the method to his pupils. In 1881, Street, then the first Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, told his students that the sketching tour remained the most important part of their education and that they should set aside several weeks each year to travel and draw, just as he had done throughout his career. Arthur Edmund Street, *Memoir of George Edmund Street* (London: John Murray, 1888), 236–237.

²⁴⁴ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 23.

²⁴⁵ Megan Aldrich, 'The Victorian Craces, c.1830–1899' in Megan Aldrich (ed.) *The Craces: Royal Decorators, 1868–1899* (London: John Murray, 1990), 53–57.

²⁴⁶ For more information on nineteenth century women and travel see Emma Robinson-Tomsett, *Women, Travel and Identity: Journeys by Rail and Sea, 1870–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

²⁴⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Introduction: Women's Artistic Passages' in Jordana Pomeroy (ed.), *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2; Jo Devereaux, *The Making of Women Artists in Victorian England: The Education and Careers of Six Professionals* (London: McFarland & Co., 2016), 47.

²⁴⁸ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 18.

Conway reassured readers of both the Garretts' respectability and their qualifications for their work. Maude Parry also commented on the Garretts' tour:

by way of assisting themselves in their profession they spent a great deal of time travelling over England studying the interior fittings of old houses both in the country and in the town. Thus they imbibed as much as possible of the spirit of the fine old works of art which have descended to us, and translated in into their own work. Their mantelpieces and wall-papers are especially characteristic, some of them being really beautiful.²⁴⁹

Parry directly connects the Garretts' own work to that found in the stately homes they visited and hints at their aristocratic connections. Notably, the Garretts' tour was restricted to England, and it may be that their limited finances prevented them from travelling abroad. However, although the tours of male architects were often taken on the continent, home-based ventures were also common. For example, Charles Annesley Voysey deplored foreign influences on design and distrusted foreign travel for the same reason.²⁵⁰ Others, including novelist and architect Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) and architect William Lethaby (1857–1951), had a strong interest in English vernacular architecture.²⁵¹

Sources on Crommelin frequently commented on her extensive, antique-hunting, tours of England. The *Weekly Wisconsin* went so far as to commission an illustration of 'Miss Crommelin Buying an Old Chair' on one of these trips [**Figure 1.6**]. However, in 'Furniture and Decoration', Crommelin argued that, for an aspiring house decorator, 'a course of study on the Continent is not necessary; it might rather be termed a luxury of education in decoration and furniture'.²⁵² With this statement, Crommelin may be attempting to defend her own limited experience (which was perhaps a result of her family's financial trouble). In contrast to Crommelin, Robinson apparently did undertake foreign travel in preparation for her career. Press reports, however, were often vague. The *Leicester Chronicle* commented that she began

²⁴⁹ Parry, 'Pen and Ink Sketches: Rhoda Garrett', 302.

²⁵⁰ John Brandon-Jones, *C.F.A. Voysey: Architect and Designer, 1857–1941*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1979), 100.

²⁵¹ See, for example, Kester Rattenbury, *The Wessex Project: Thomas Hardy, Architect* (London: Lund Humphries, 2017) and Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work, 1857-1931* (London: John Wiley & Son, 1986).

²⁵² Shaw and Crommelin, 'Furniture and Decoration', 133.

her artistic study ‘after travelling abroad and becoming well acquainted with developments of foreign decorative art.’²⁵³

Robinson’s obituary in ‘Ladies’ Pages’ of the *Illustrated London News* was unusually specific, claiming that, before going into business, she ‘spent some years in Paris and Italy, in deliberate preparation for her artistic work.’²⁵⁴ There is no further record of Robinson’s European travel but, in a time when Britain was looking to the continent for its decorative art, emphasising her experiences abroad may have been a shrewd move. Robinson travelled to America with Emily Faithfull in 1883, an experience she clearly considered to be formative to her professional life.²⁵⁵ In *The Women’s Penny Paper*, she said ‘The idea of house decoration as a profession came to me whilst travelling though America, I was very much struck with the interiors of some of the magnificent houses to which I was invited’.²⁵⁶ Again, with this reference, Robinson emphasises her social standing and allies her own work to that undertaken in these magnificent houses.

Self-study

Self-study was another way to prepare for an artistic career. Architect and designer Edward William Godwin, for example, frustrated with the deficiencies of his architectural training, ‘realised the most speedy way to fill the gaps in his knowledge must be recourse to books.’²⁵⁷ There is some indication that Agnes Garrett studied in the South Kensington Museum prior to commencing her apprenticeship, although this is not mentioned by her personally.²⁵⁸ In contrast, perhaps in awareness of their lack of formal education, both Robinson and Crommelin place considerable emphasis on their dedication to self-study. For example, Crommelin claimed to have developed her professional knowledge by ‘diligently’ studying ‘the rare books of Chippendale and Sheraton upon furniture and cabinet making’.²⁵⁹ Crommelin specialised in

²⁵³ ‘Our Ladies Column’, *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 16 September 1893, 9.

²⁵⁴ ‘Ladies’ Pages’, *Illustrated London News*, 2 November 1901, 29.

²⁵⁵ Emily Faithfull, *Three Visits to America* (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1884).

²⁵⁶ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁵⁷ Dudley Harbron, *The Conscious Stone: The Life of Edward William Godwin* (London: Latimer House Limited, 1949), 9.

²⁵⁸ Letters from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to her father and husband, HA336/1/2/4, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

²⁵⁹ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work’, *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

decorating with antiques, and her amateur status is often described as a strength rather than a weakness. In *Woman's World*, she is credited with 'the keen *flair* of the born collector'.²⁶⁰ Likewise, an article in *The House*, detailing the array of antiques available for sale in her shop, described Crommelin as 'a connoisseur and amateur of no common order'.²⁶¹

Through descriptions such as these, Crommelin created a persona as a gentlewoman-amateur, removing the stigma of commercialism and endowing her patrons with a similar aristocratic taste. Robinson placed similar emphasis on the importance of self-study, and descriptions of her home office in the contemporary press frequently referred to her library. For example, *The World* commented on how 'modern poets stand side by side with Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, standard works on architecture, decorative design, Oriental art, and an assortment of English and foreign magazines'.²⁶² Their lack of formal training clearly left both Robinson and Crommelin anxious to assert their academic knowledge of their subject. By emphasising their self-study, they could attempt to negate their professional disadvantage. Simultaneously, by referring to their study of iconic figures, such as cabinet-maker and designer Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779), furniture designer and author Thomas Sheraton (1751–1806) and author and art critic John Ruskin, Crommelin and Robinson positioned themselves as their successors.

Both women also emphasised the importance of expert knowledge gained through ongoing practical experience. Crommelin claimed that 'By continually seeing and handling old furniture' a house decorator 'will acquire an aptitude in discerning between genuine antique and sham, which only practice can bestow'.²⁶³ In *The Women's Penny Paper*, Robinson emphasised that:

it is impossible to keep pace with the improvements in decorative work, wallpaper, furniture, etc. without devoting your life to the study; you cannot be certain of the best places to find what you really want unless you are in what I may call 'the swim' of this special work. At first I found it no easy task to keep properly posted in English and foreign inventions and manufactures, and to discover any of the antique furniture for which some of my clients are

²⁶⁰ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 195 [Italics in original text].

²⁶¹ 'In Search of the Latest', *The House*, 1 December 1897, 178.

²⁶² Yates, 'No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', 815.

²⁶³ Shaw and Crommelin, 'Furniture and Decoration', 131.

so eager ... I have to follow every new departure in grates, chimney pieces and lighting; in carved woodwork and embroidery as well as carpets, curtains, etc.²⁶⁴

Likewise, her interview in *The World* claimed that ‘as you listen to her methods of work you realise the value of the expert’s counsel. Those who do not devote their lives to the task cannot possibly keep pace with the new designs’.²⁶⁵ With statements like this Robinson underlined the quality of, and need for, her professional skills. While ‘few women know much about decorative designs’, she had ‘the technical knowledge and experience which is the natural result of constant occupation in this direction’.²⁶⁶ Both Robinson and Crommelin validated their professional status by emphasising their continued self-study, implying that they were aware their lack of professional training placed them at a disadvantage to their male rivals, and demonstrating that asserting their professional status was of crucial importance.

Natural aptitude

The Garretts, who followed a more traditional training pathway than Robinson and Crommelin, were quick to emphasise their business acumen and practical knowledge in interviews. Agnes Garrett’s interviewer in *The Women’s Penny Paper* asserted that, to follow her example and succeed in the field of house decoration a girl would need ‘business-like habits and business-like determination with a thorough practical knowledge of the profession’.²⁶⁷ Agnes Garrett herself echoed these sentiments when she advised aspiring house decorators to acquire ‘a knowledge of drawing, a sense of proportion, and of the fitness of things, a cultivated eye for colour, a knowledge of materials, and last but not least a large stock of patience. Now these are qualities which can only be acquired gradually, but most of them *can* be acquired by a woman of fair average ability’.²⁶⁸ In contrast, Robinson and Crommelin, who did not follow the Garretts in undertaking an apprenticeship, place considerably more importance on natural aptitude and innate artistic ability.

In ‘Furniture and Decoration’, Crommelin claimed that ‘the girl who thinks of making decoration and house furnishing her life profession ought to possess a certain mental equipment

²⁶⁴ Yates, ‘No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, 815.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁶⁷ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁶⁸ Garrett, ‘House Decoration for Women’, 90.

before undertaking the task. To begin with, she *must* have some artistic taste. This is absolutely necessary'.²⁶⁹ Crommelin is keen to emphasise the innate artistic taste of both herself and her sister. Apparently, both were blessed with 'a strong natural taste for the occupation' and a passion for the work as well as 'a natural capacity for business, inventive and originating power, and the courage to carry out an idea'.²⁷⁰ Similarly, in the *Weekly Wisconsin*, Crommelin claims she was gifted with 'a love of the decorative, and an appreciation for the artistic'.²⁷¹ Robinson is likewise quick to emphasise her innate talent. In *The Women's Penny Paper*, she is said to have a 'perfect genius for the work'.²⁷² In *Manchester Faces and Places*, she is described as 'an artist in every sense of the word' and credited with the 'special gifts' of 'marvellous deftness of touch and infallible sense of colour' and 'unquestionable artistic gifts'.²⁷³

It is through this kind of rhetoric that Crommelin and Robinson frame their gender, and lack of appropriate formal professional training, as irrelevant. Crucially, Crommelin was also able to position her upper-class background as a professional advantage, and one directly relating to her artistic taste. It seems Crommelin and her sister developed this taste in childhood:

as children, the decoration of a room was their delight, and when their father Mr. S. de la Cherois Crommelin, gave them a room in Carrowdore Castle, County Down, to do what they liked with, what they most wished was to paper and paint'. He little thought that in gratifying their childish fancy a taste and aptitude were being cultivated which in after years ... would stand his daughters in such excellent stead.²⁷⁴

By recounting this childhood story, Crommelin shrewdly emphasised that, although she gained her decorative skills through hands-on experience, it was not through anything as menial as an apprenticeship. In this way, she positioned her aristocratic status as a professional advantage.

²⁶⁹ Shaw and Crommelin, 'Furniture and Decoration', 131 [Italics in original text].

²⁷⁰ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁷¹ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

²⁷² 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁷³ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Faces and Places*, 120.

²⁷⁴ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

By using a variety of sources to explore the social and familial backgrounds of Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Caroline Crommelin and Charlotte Robinson, this chapter has examined the motivations behind their decision to take up professional work. It has used biographical evidence to establish that, in most cases, the women active as interior decorators during the period in question needed to support themselves financially. This, however, was not their only motivation. They were often influenced by the other pioneering women in their social and familial circles and, crucially, were committed to reforming the rights of women by expanding the occupational opportunities available to them. This chapter has also questioned why the women chose interior decoration over other lines of work. It has asserted that, while the desire to expand employment opportunities for women was a factor, they may also have been attracted by the contemporary boom in demand for interior decoration. In addition, they were aware that the developing status of the profession meant that, in contrast to architecture, there was no established training trajectory for the career from which their gender might bar them.

The chapter has also asked why interior decoration was considered particularly suitable for women, considering its relationship to traditional female education, to domesticity, to philanthropy, and to the contemporary hierarchies of art. This examination has expanded knowledge about how, and why, interior decoration began to be seen by many as a profession suitable for practice by women. Now, their feminisation of the profession seems problematic. However, the chapter has also established that, for these women, their professional lives were inherently tied to their commitment to reforming the lives of women. In addition, their choice of profession allowed them to actively participate in a movement encouraging other women to take control of their domestic environments. Finally, the chapter has considered how the women prepared themselves for their careers and fought to distinguish themselves from their (arguably) better-qualified male competitors. Many of the men working in the field of interior decoration had undergone architectural training, from which women were excluded. While this may have put them at a disadvantage, they found ways to circumnavigate this and to assert their professional status. They were also able, by offering apprenticeships themselves, to redress the balance and encourage more women into the field. The chapter has foregrounded the idea that, for these women, the desire to be positioned on an equal footing to their male competitors sustained and motivated them throughout their careers.

Illustrations

Figure 1.1

Charlotte Robinson's family tree, showing her relationship to Elspeth McClelland and Anne Atherton.

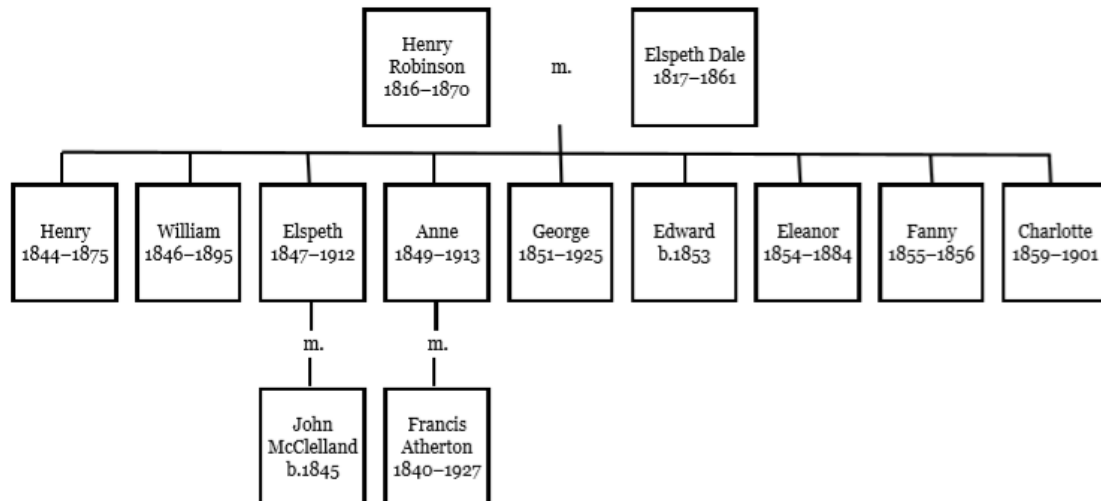


Figure 1.2

Caroline Crommelin's family tree, showing her relationship to Florence Goring-Thomas and May Crommelin.

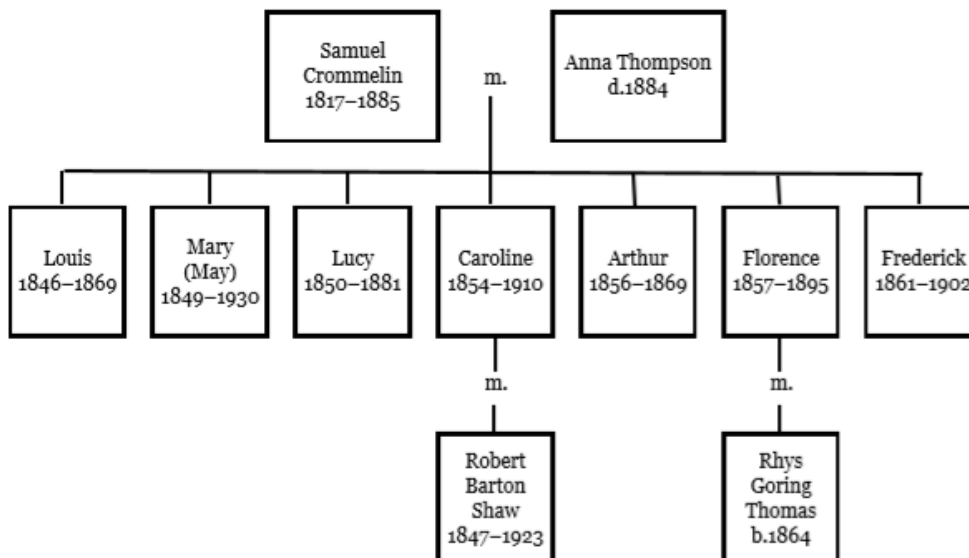


Figure 1.3

Agnes Garrett's family tree.

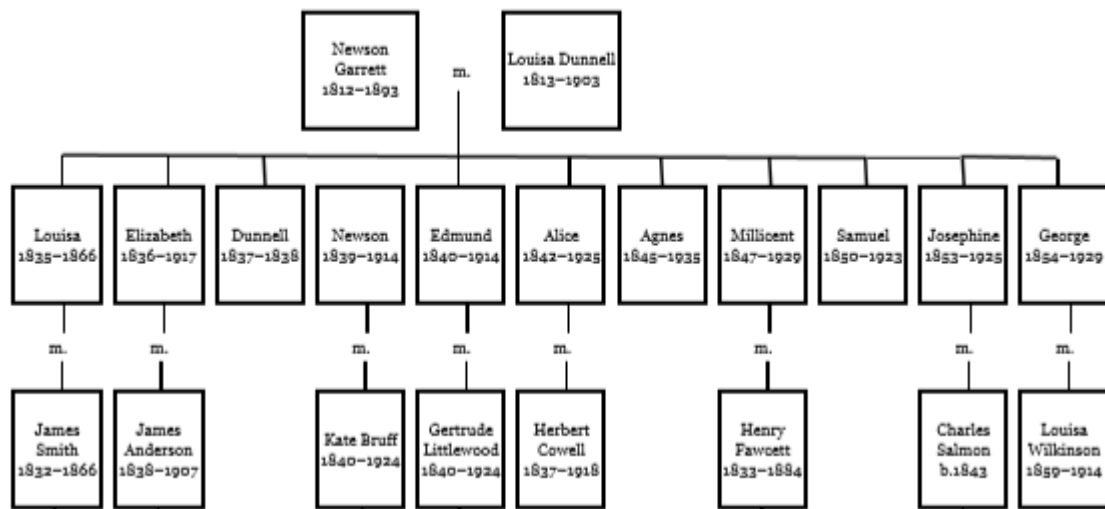


Figure 1.4

Rhoda Garrett (right, standing) speaking at a woman's suffrage meeting in the Hanover Square Rooms, 'Women's Rights, a Meeting at The Hanover Square Rooms', *The Graphic*, 25 May 1872, 8.



Figure 1.5

Advertisement for Mrs M. Vince. From *Medical Women's Federation Newsletter*, December 1921, SAMWF/B/2/1/1, Medical Women's Federation Collection, Wellcome Collection Archives and Manuscripts, London.

MRS. M. VINCE, late Secretary of the Medical Women's Federation, and formerly pupil of the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, has taken up her work again as Decorator and Designer of Houses. All the interior work, decorative and structural, carried out. Mantel-pieces, curtains, carpets, wall-papers, furniture, lighting, plumbing, outside painting, etc. Estimates free. Advice given in London and in the country. Pupils trained. Interviews by appointment only. 42, Brunswick Gardens (Church Street), Kensington, W.8. Telephone, Park 409.

Figure 1.6

Illustration of Caroline Crommelin buying an old chair on a tour of the English countryside, 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 29 March 1890, 7.



MIS^S CROMMELIN BUYING AN OLD CHAIR.

2

Professional Spaces

This chapter examines the professional spaces occupied by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin: their homes, warehouses, shops and workshops. Firstly, it examines how they used their homes to construct professional identities. Often shared with other household members, these flexible spaces were sites of both production and commerce and could function as offices in which clients were received. The home also had significant value as a marketing tool. It functioned as a studio-showroom, displaying their distinctive styles to potential new clients and, via the press, the public. The chapter also considers how the changing nature of the spaces occupied by women interior decorators were, during the period in question, a key indicator of changing attitudes to women in business more generally. While the Garrett cousins focused on undertaking private decorative commissions for private clients, their successors were able to engage actively in retail. Both Robinson and Crommelin rented dedicated commercial spaces from which they conducted a flourishing trade. Finally, the chapter considers whether these women, like their male competitors, manufactured the stock they sold in their retail premises in workshops.

This chapter has been difficult to balance. The Garretts, who did not operate a shop, are largely absent from the second half. Tracing the commercial side of women's artistic creativity is complex. It is unusual for records of small businesses to survive and particularly rare for those businesses established and managed by childless or unmarried women. Unearthing concrete evidence to demonstrate the scale and success, or otherwise, of such enterprises is almost impossible. Their account books, correspondence, and other commercial ephemera do not appear to have survived and, in most cases, the objects, art works and material culture produced and sold by these enterprises is lost. As a result, this chapter relies heavily on contemporary newspapers and periodicals for evidence. For details of the women's homes and warehouses interviews with, and articles on, the women themselves have been particularly useful. These, however, must be read as promotional material and cannot be accepted at face value. While shops and shopping were frequently reported in periodicals, and particularly the women's press, they often took the form of advertorials and must be considered in the context of marketing.

Homes

Alison Kay has described how, by working from home, middle-class women could obscure the visibility of their commercial activity and operate professionally whilst maintaining their feminine respectability.²⁷⁵ Doing so was convenient and practical. It reduced start-up costs by removing the need to outlay income on additional premises, negated the need to commute, and was more compatible with domestic responsibilities than work outside the home. Interior decoration, which was concerned with the home, was well-suited to home-based practice and this contributed to its perceived suitability for women. We know that Agnes and Rhoda Garrett started their business from home in c.1874 by, according to Moncure Conway, working from their ‘small flat’ at No. 3 Cornwall Residences, Regent’s Park [Figure 2.1].²⁷⁶ When the cousins relocated (in mid-1875) to a larger home at 2 Gower Street [Figure 2.1], their business remained home-based. In comparison, both Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin, who launched their businesses in the 1880s, operated primarily from retail spaces, though they may have worked from home prior to this.²⁷⁷ For example, Emily Faithfull cryptically claimed that, prior to opening her Manchester shop in 1884, Robinson ‘had a great success in London, where she furnished houses from roof to basement’.²⁷⁸

There is considerable evidence to suggest that, for many artistic professionals active in the nineteenth century, homes played an integral part in the construction of professional identity. Caroline Dakers has demonstrated how the male artists, architects and designers who established studios in the fashionable Holland Park area used their homes both to construct and

²⁷⁵ Alison Kay, *The Foundations of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London, c.1800–1870* (London: Routledge, 2009), 6.

²⁷⁶ Moncure Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, November 1874, 18. Cornwall Residences was a large block of flats on the corner of Marylebone Road and Baker Street. While the exact dates of the cousins’ occupancy here are unknown, it seems likely that they were resident at the address from their move to London in c.1868.

²⁷⁷ The lack of information surrounding the early years of the women’s professional lives may, or may not, be demonstrative of the success of home-working practices in concealing the visibility of paid work. They are also, however, symptomatic of the problems inherent in researching the professional lives of unmarried women. The earlier years of these women’s careers, before they gained public recognition, will likely remain obscure.

²⁷⁸ Emily Faithfull, ‘Ladies as Shopkeepers’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 December 1887, 12. Faithfull and Robinson returned from travelling together in America in May 1884 but did not move to Manchester until December 1884. They may have spent the between intervening months in London. James S. Stone, *Emily Faithfull: Victorian Champion of Women’s Rights* (Toronto: P. D. Meany, 1994), 231n.

to promote their artistic status.²⁷⁹ More recently, Zoë Thomas has analysed the importance women artists in the Women's Guild of Arts placed on using their studios to build their professional and creative identities.²⁸⁰ Additionally, Elizabeth Prettejohn has considered the role of painter Laura Alma Tadema (1852–1909) in fashioning the studio-homes she shared with her artist husband Laurence Alma Tadema.²⁸¹ This chapter demonstrates how, for the women interior decorators active in the late nineteenth century, homes played an integral part in professional life. They were used as sites of artistic production, as offices in which to meet clients, and as showrooms.

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett

Although neither Daniel Cottier or John Brydon, with whom the Garretts trained, operated home-based businesses, there was a strong precedent for the cousins' choice to work from their Marylebone home. William Morris, who inspired their decision to work in the field, launched Morris & Co. at 8 Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury [**Figure 2.1**] in 1861.²⁸² By 1865 the company had outgrown the address and moved to larger premises at 26 Queen Square [**Figure 2.1**]. Morris and his family, who had been living in Bexleyheath in the Red House (co-designed by Morris and the architect Philip Webb), moved to live above.²⁸³ The Garretts' decision to launch their business from their home may have been inspired, or justified (if we consider that financial restrictions may also have been a consideration), by the example of Morris & Co. While no information survives regarding the earliest years of their enterprise, the small scale of their Marylebone residence must have limited their business.

In mid-1875, they moved to a larger home, indicating that, like Morris, their business was successful from the outset. It may not be a coincidence that, when the Garretts relocated, they moved to 2 Gower Street, a four-storey house on the corner of Bedford Square, a ten-

²⁷⁹ Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (London: Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁸⁰ Zoë Thomas, 'At Home with the Women's Guild of Arts: Gender and Professional Identity in London Studios, c.1880–1925', *Women's History Review*, 24:6 (2015): 938–964.

²⁸¹ Elizabeth Prettejohn and Peter Trippe (eds.), *Laurence Alma Tadema: At Home in Antiquity* (London: Prestel, 2016).

²⁸² Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 43.

²⁸³ Although the family moved out of the Queen Square address in December 1872, Morris continued to spend time residing above the offices. *Ibid.*, 54–55, 84–85.

minute walk from Queen Square. The area was already well-known for female artistic industry. In 1852 the Female School of Design (later the Female School of Art), founded ‘to enable young women of the middle class to obtain an honourable and profitable employment’ in ornamental art, had moved to premises in Gower Street. The school moved to Queen Square in 1860. In addition, the Slade School of Art, open to both male and female students, had opened in Gower Street in 1871.²⁸⁴ Also nearby, with premises at 27 Charlotte Street (now Bloomsbury Street), Bedford Square [Figure 2.1], was designer John Aldam Heaton (1830–1897), who collaborated with Richard Norman Shaw and who, from 1888, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* recommended, along with the Garretts, as the furniture and decoration workers ‘whose name seems to us most nearly to accord with the chief aim of this magazine’.²⁸⁵

Agnes Garrett’s 1890 interview in *The Women’s Penny Paper* noted that ‘a neat brass plate on the door of No. 2, Gower Street, informs the public that here is the residence of A. and R. Garrett’, revealing that the cousins were careful to externally distinguish their home as a professional space.²⁸⁶ Further evidence that their home was their primary place of business is provided by *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory*, which listed their professional address as 2 Gower Street from 1879 until 1900.²⁸⁷ Bloomsbury was primarily a residential area, although an increasing number of homes had become dedicated to light industry.²⁸⁸ Like 26 Queen Square [Figure 2.2], which contained workshops, offices and a showroom but no dedicated retail space, 2 Gower Street [Figure 2.3] lacked a shopfront.²⁸⁹ In contrast to later women decorators, such as Robinson and Crommelin, who placed considerable emphasis on their retail trade, the Garretts concentrated on private decorative commissions. How then did they use their home as a professional space?

Examining the building itself, alongside interviews with the Garretts, can provide clues. We know there was a dining room on the ground floor and that this, along with the other ground

²⁸⁴ Rosemary Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 238–243.

²⁸⁵ ‘The Century Guild Work’, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, January 1888, 83.

²⁸⁶ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 1.

²⁸⁷ *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1879–1900).

²⁸⁸ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 54.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 54–55, 71.

floor reception room, was probably reserved for the use of the household.²⁹⁰ Floor plans of similar contemporary houses suggest that the remainder of this was taken up with kitchens, pantries etc., and that the upper floors were reserved for family bedrooms and servants' quarters.²⁹¹ It is likely to have been the two reception rooms on the first floor that were used professionally. Agnes Garrett's interview in *The Women's Penny Paper* takes place upstairs in the 'particular inner sanctum' where 'Miss Garrett designs all her own plans, first drawing them in an inch scale and afterwards enlarging them to full size, finally tracing them for the men to work from. Order is certainly the first law in all her arrangements, and every drawer and cupboard was neatly labelled with its own special name'.²⁹² Notably, although the focus of the interview was Agnes Garrett's working life, this is the only reference explicitly marking 2 Gower Street as a place of business. However even here, the room is described as a sanctum, rather than an office. This implies it was a private space, veiling the commercial nature of the room's function (though a sanctum can also refer to a holy place or shrine, perhaps elevating the work produced within in it).

An article in *Women's World*, also published in 1890, is more explicit about Agnes Garrett's use of 2 Gower Street. The article, which does not mention that Garrett also lived at the address, comments that 'in her offices at No. 2, Gower Street, she has a trained band of workmen and women upon whose labour she can implicitly rely'.²⁹³ This description firmly situates the address as a place of work and implies that the scale of the business was considerable. Unfortunately, aside from apprentices, the only employee of the Garretts' decorative business that can be named is Charles Essam (c. 1859–1896) who lived at 2 Gower Street and is recorded in census records as an 'assistant decorator'.²⁹⁴ The idea that the Garrett enterprise had plural employees on site is interesting in that it implies that, as well as the Garretts' design work, production was taking place at 2 Gower Street. Morris & Co.'s headquarters at 26 Queen Square were used as a workshop and it is not unreasonable to suggest

²⁹⁰ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁹¹ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Death* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), li–lii.

²⁹² 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

²⁹³ Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women' in Oscar Wilde (ed.), *Woman's World* (London: Cassels and Sons, 1890), 194.

²⁹⁴ 1881 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

that the Garretts followed this example.²⁹⁵ Alternatively, both *The Women's Penny Paper* interview, which obliquely references 'the men' who work from Agnes Garrett's designs, and the *Women's World's* reference to her employees, could be read as attempts to distance Garrett from any manual labour taking place, thus maintaining her respectability.

The Garretts certainly used the address to receive clients. In 1881, Hubert Parry described a visit to London in which he went 'to the Garretts after breakfast and spent the morning with Maude choosing carpets there' for the decoration of Knightscroft.²⁹⁶ If the Parrys could choose carpets at 2 Gower Street, the Garretts must have kept stock and/or samples and pattern books there. Notably, Parry, who involved the cousins in the decoration of at least two homes, knew the Garretts socially for at least two years before he commissioned them as house decorators [see **Chapter Four**]. Elizabeth Crawford has drawn on Parry's diaries to demonstrate that they were aware of the currency their home afforded as a showroom for their work.²⁹⁷ Parry's glowing account of the Garretts' décor after his April 1876 stay at 2 Gower Street is particularly striking: 'The quiet and soothing colour of the walls and decoration and the admirable taste of all things acts upon the mind in the most comforting manner. I was quite excised of the vulgar idea that everything ought to be bright and gaudy, and covered with plenty of gilt'.²⁹⁸ Presumably other social visitors to 2 Gower Street were encouraged, like Parry, to commission the Garrett cousins to undertake decorative work: many of the Garretts' known commissions were for family, friends, or political acquaintances.

Lynne Walker has described how, in the nineteenth century, many women artists/designers had studios based in their homes. Walker claimed that, by doing so, they were 'redefining the home to advance social, political and artistic projects and to promote cultural change'.²⁹⁹ By using their home as a showroom, and as a professional space in which they

²⁹⁵ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 84–85.

²⁹⁶ Hubert Parry, diary for 14 May 1881 to 30 November 1881, entry on 2 April 1881, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002), 192–201.

²⁹⁸ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry in April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

²⁹⁹ Lynne Walker 'Women Patron Builders in Britain' in Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland (eds.), *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 131. See also Lynne Walker, 'Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London' in Ian

received male clients (like Parry) and employed male assistants (like Essam), the Garretts were contributing to the erosion of the gendered distinction between public/masculine and private/feminine spaces.³⁰⁰ However, they were not doing so without masculine precedent. William Morris was also aware of the value his home held as a showroom for his work. Harvey and Press note that Morris spent large sums of money on the living quarters and showrooms at Queen Square.³⁰¹ George Wardle (1836–1910), Morris & Co.’s general manager between 1870 and 1890, wrote that ‘the decoration of the drawing rooms in Queen Square in which both [William] Morris and [Philip] Webb had part was original and though extremely simple, very beautiful. No doubt this was talked about & a desire created to have the same methods of decoration applied elsewhere’.³⁰²

Wardle was correct and, for example, author Henry James (1843–1916), who recorded a visit to Morris at Queen Square, noted that ‘everything that he has and does is superb and beautiful’ and described ‘all the picturesque bric-a-brac of the apartment (every article of the furniture literally a ‘specimen’ of something or other)’.³⁰³ An awareness of the success of Morris’s manipulation of his living quarters as a promotional tool may have influenced the Garretts’ decision to site their business at home. They followed his example by paying special attention to the decoration of their first-floor reception rooms. Both rooms were decorated, presumably by the Garretts, with elaborate hand-painted ceilings. Moncure Conway records how ‘some friend, calling upon them [at 2 Gower Street], 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 the ceiling which they were painting’.³⁰⁴ The ceiling of the reception room at the back of the house [**Figure 2.4**] remains in situ, although it was restored by University College London (who now own the building) in 1974–1975. The ceiling of the front reception

Borden, John Kerr and Jane Rendell (eds.), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (London: MIT Press, 2002): 296–311.

³⁰⁰ See Ellen Jordan, *The Women’s Movement and Women’s Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), 42–62.

³⁰¹ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 55.

³⁰² George Wardle, ‘Memorial of William Morris’, MS 45350, William Morris Papers, Western Manuscripts, British Library, London.

³⁰³ Henry James, ‘A Novelist’s View of the Morrisises, March 1869’ in Peter Faulkner (ed.), *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 77–78.

³⁰⁴ Moncure Conway, *Travels in South Kensington: With Notes on Decorative Art and Architecture in England* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 169.

room, which was in poor condition, was removed (also in 1974–1975) and is preserved in Senate House Library [Figures 2.5 and 2.6].³⁰⁵

Both ceilings feature rich ornamentation and neo-classical designs in the style of architect brothers Robert (1728–1792) and James (1732–1794) Adam. Both display foliate scrollwork, picked out in a pale Aesthetic green, set against an ivory yellow background and contrasted with additional painted ornament in a rich red-pink. While the ceiling now in Senate House is overtly floral, with heavier colouration and richly painted birds, that still at 2 Gower Street is more reserved and employs a simpler colour scheme. Both ceilings contain several portrait roundels, including Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo and Rubens in the back room; Keats, Shakespeare and Cowper in the front.³⁰⁶ Considering it is likely that the Garretts' home and office was, like Morris's at 26 Queen Square, not open to the public without appointment, the promotional value of these ornate hand-painted ceilings could not have extended beyond the cousins' friends, family and social visitors, or clients with appointments.³⁰⁷

However, a photograph of Millicent Fawcett Garrett outside 2 Gower Street [Figure 2.7] intriguingly implies a level of public transgression into the Garrett's private/professional space.³⁰⁸ The photograph (which also depicts the plaque mentioned by *The Women's Penny Paper*) reveals that the front door had glass panels, ensuring that interested passers-by were able to glimpse through the portière into the hallway. Agnes Garrett provided the public with a more substantial view of her décor by receiving the journalist responsible for *The Women's Penny Paper* interview at 2 Gower Street.³⁰⁹ The next chapter discusses the use of such interviews as a marketing tool in more detail, but it is worth noting here that her decision to do so yet again, demonstrates her awareness of the value of 2 Gower Street as a showroom for her work. The resultant interview tacitly ensured that a detailed description of one of her interior schemes was available to the public. The journalist describes the reception room in which the interview takes place, claiming 'one cannot help being struck by the air of restful quietness and homely comfort everywhere apparent ... the furniture, though quaint, is picturesque and

³⁰⁵ Garrett ceiling from 2 Gower Street, UoL/CT/3/3/1-3, Special Collections, Senate House Library, University College London, London.

³⁰⁶ Elizabeth Crawford has identified the portrait roundels. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 195.

³⁰⁷ James, 'A Novelist's View of the Morrisises', March 1869', 77.

³⁰⁸ Elsie M. Lang, *British Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1929), 90.

³⁰⁹ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1–2.

thoroughly luxurious, the colours are harmonious in tone, there is nothing gaudy, no attempt at over-decoration, the pictures are all genuine and good'.³¹⁰ Such glowing accounts of the Garretts' style would surely have encouraged the publication's readership to consider them for prospective decorative commissions.

The Garretts also included images of 2 Gower Street in their 1876 publication *Suggestions for House Decoration*.³¹¹ The book, published as part of antiquarian and editor Rev. William John Loftie's (1839–1911) 'Art at Home' series for Macmillan, included seven illustrations. Six of these [Figures 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12 and 2.13] are, as Elizabeth Crawford demonstrates, likely to be illustrations of 2 Gower Street.³¹² While the book's value as a promotional tool will be examined in the next chapter, it is worth discussing the illustrations here in relation to what they reveal about the style in which the Garretts worked. They depict several items of furniture known as Garrett designs, including an elegant day bed [Figure 2.11] and mahogany corner cupboard [Figure 2.12].³¹³ James and Margaret Beale also owned examples of these designs, both of which survive at Standen [Figures 2.14 and 2.15].³¹⁴ Presumably, much of the other furniture depicted in *Suggestions for House Decoration* was also Garrett-designed, although without documentary evidence this is impossible to prove. The footstools depicted in the drawing room illustrations [Figures 2.8 and 2.11] employ the Sheraton-influenced tapered legs common to many known Garrett designs, including the examples at Standen. As Crawford has demonstrated, the back-room chimneypiece [Figure 2.8] and dining room chimneypiece [Figure 2.10] were almost certainly also Garrett-designed.³¹⁵

The illustrations of 2 Gower Street show that the Garretts' style was characterised by simplicity, delicacy and subtle eclecticism. They happily combined their designs with those of

³¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

³¹¹ Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1876).

³¹² Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 178.

³¹³ The Garretts exhibited the day bed at the 1878 Paris exhibition and the 1888 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition (see **Chapter Three**). 'Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Exhibition', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furniture*, 1 December 1888, 143–144.

³¹⁴ Garrett day bed, NT1214057, and corner cupboard, NT1213990, National Trust, Standen House and Garden, West Sussex.

³¹⁵ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 196–197.

others, using Morris's Trellis wallpaper in the dining room [Figure 2.10] and a Morris-style upholstered bobbin-turned armchair [Figure 2.11] in the drawing room. The painted ceilings, chimneypieces and cornicing reference Georgian neoclassicism, while the cousins' penchant for the Queen Anne style is evident in the cabriole-legged chairs in the drawing room [Figure 2.12]. The influence of the Aesthetic movement, and particularly of Anglo-Japanese design, also pervades throughout, as evidenced by the fan [Figure 2.10] and the Godwin-inspired ebonised mahogany table in the drawing room [Figure 2.8].³¹⁶ The illustrations are notable for their depiction of craft works, such as the embroidered and tasselled mantelpiece cover and the floral folding screen (and hand-painted ceiling), also in the drawing room [Figures 2.11 and 2.12]. The illustrations depict a very liveable home, but also hint to the use of 2 Gower Street as a professional space. The drawing room [Figure 2.12] shows a table, on which a variety of books are piled, perhaps including catalogues and books of designs ready to show clients. A later photograph of Agnes Garrett in the same room [Figure 2.16] similarly implies the dual use of the address. While the setting is domestic, Garrett's contrived pose, as she adjusts the hands of a longcase clock, hints at her role as a professional decorator.

Charlotte Robinson

Little is known about Robinson's domestic life prior to her move (with Emily Faithfull) to Manchester in December 1884. After this, Faithfull and Robinson cohabited at 10 Plymouth Grove, in a middle-class suburb, until Faithfull's death in 1895, after which Robinson remained at the address alone until her death in 1901.³¹⁷ There is convincing evidence to suggest that, despite having dedicated retail spaces in Manchester and, from 1888, London, Robinson maintained an office space in her Manchester home. Like Agnes Garrett, Robinson gave an interview to *The Women's Penny Paper* though, perhaps because she was living in Manchester, this was given in her London shop.³¹⁸ In contrast, the interview Robinson gave to *The World*

³¹⁶ Architect and designer Edward William Godwin complained that the Garretts had included an unauthorised copy of his table design. E.W. Godwin and William Watt, *Art Furniture from Designs by E.W. Godwin and Others: With Hints and Suggestions on Domestic Furniture and Decoration by William Watt* (London: T. Batsford, 1877).

³¹⁷ 'Ladies Pages', *Illustrated London News*, 2 November 1901, 29. The house was a ten-minute carriage drive from Robinson's shop in the centre of town. Although now destroyed, we can gauge an idea of the size of the house by reference to 42 Plymouth Grove (subsequently 84, now Elizabeth Gaskell's House), the twenty-room neoclassical villa inhabited by novelist Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865) and her family.

³¹⁸ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.

took place in her Manchester home.³¹⁹ It describes ‘the modest house which she has skilfully adapted to their [Robinson and Faithfull’s] mutual literary and artistic avocations’.³²⁰ For professional women, sharing a combined domestic/professional space with a friend, relative or life partner of the same gender was both financially sensible and more socially acceptable than working/living alone; that so many were obliged to do so is indicative of the extent to which their professional experience was different to that of their male rivals.³²¹

Robinson’s interview in *The World* describes her office at 10 Plymouth Grove as a ‘sanctum’, ‘little den’ and ‘boudoir workshop’.³²² Although, as with descriptions of Agnes Garrett’s ‘sanctum’, the diminutives mask the commercial nature of her work, the office is recognisably a place of business. Here, ‘free from the claims of the public which cannot be escaped elsewhere’, ironic considering the journalistic intrusion, ‘Miss Robinson designs the dainty furniture which has made her famous’, drawing inspiration from the bookcase where ‘modern poets stand side by side with Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*, standard works on architecture, decorative design, Ornamental art, and a varied assortment of English and foreign magazines’.³²³ The interview reveals that, as at 2 Gower Street, Robinson had staff dedicated to her professional work present (at least some of the time), at her personal address. The office contains an array of scrapbooks ‘all carefully pasted up to date by Miss Robinson’s amanuensis’.³²⁴ Robinson also uses the office to answer ‘the letters which come from the uttermost part of the earth’ and there is shelving ‘dedicated to the thousand and one patterns

³¹⁹ Edmund Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, *The World*, 14 May 1890, 815–816.

³²⁰ Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, 815–816. See also Alexis Easley, ‘Women Writers and Celebrity News in the Fin de Siècle’ in Maura Ives and Ann R. Hawkins, *Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2012), 137–143.

³²¹ Here, we can make a direct comparison with the Garretts’ arrangement at 2 Gower Street. Shortly after the death of her husband in 1884, Millicent Garrett Fawcett moved in with her sister Agnes, who had lived alone since Rhoda’s death in 1882, and began to use the Gower Street address as a base for her own political activity. Fawcett’s gave her own interview to *The Women’s Penny Paper*, published only a month before that of her sister, in one of the reception rooms at 2 Gower Street. ‘Mrs Millicent Fawcett Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 3 November 1888, 4–5.

³²² Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, 815.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Unfortunately, there is no surviving evidence regarding the identity of Robinson’s ‘amanuensis’. *Ibid.*

needed in her capacity as an art advisor'.³²⁵ It is here, then, that Robinson carries out her work as art advisor to *The Queen* magazine and so, as at 2 Gower Street, where the Garretts wrote *Suggestions for House Decoration*, 10 Plymouth Grove functions as a site of literary, as well as artistic, production.³²⁶

Although Robinson's home was not her primary business address, it is reasonable to assume that, like the Garretts at 2 Gower Street, she used the office at 10 Plymouth Grove to receive clients. Supporting this, *The World* describes Robinson's office as filled with sample and pattern books, which would have been useful when discussing commissions with prospective clients:

in a recess beyond the writing-table stand some huge volumes ... all the latest specimen-books of English and foreign wall-paper makers, reference scrapbooks ... [one] volume contains the special drawings made for clients whose homes she has furnished and decorated; a third is filled with the designs of furniture exhibited at the Liverpool, Glasgow, Saltaire, and Manchester exhibitions'.³²⁷

The article continues to describe how, as well as keeping her own designs on hand in bound volumes, Robinson openly displayed them:

on the easel were the original studies of Watteau and Louis Seize screens and the eight wall-panels for her Edinburgh exhibit, which has taken the form of a charming little boudoir; two of the panels representing classical female figures and the rest devoted to the floral subjects in the style which Miss Robinson has made so peculiarly her own.³²⁸

Robinson's overt exhibition of her own designs in the office further demonstrates that women interior decorators were quick to acknowledge that they could manipulate their homes as showrooms for their work.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ By referencing Robinson's journalistic career, *The World* article, and Agnes Garrett's interview in *The Women's Penny Paper*, participates in the contemporary wider trend of 'at home' interviews with literary figures in which the home became a domain of revelatory signs expressing the essence of the subject's personality. See Richard Salmon, 'Signs of Intimacy: The Literary Celebrity in the "Age of Interviewing"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25:1 (1997): 159-177.

³²⁷ Yates, 'Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', 815-816.

³²⁸ Ibid., 816.

By receiving *The World* interviewer at home Robinson, like Agnes Garrett, ensured that the article displayed her home/showroom to the wider public as (although not illustrated) it gave a rich textual description of the interior. The article's reference to 'the style which Miss Robinson has made so peculiarly her own' reminds us that, to ensure their success, women interior decorators, like their male rivals, placed considerable emphasis on distinguishing themselves from their competitors. As with the Garretts, whose home at 2 Gower Street displayed their tasteful Queen Anne-inspired style, Robinson's home reflected her more populist floral, heavily-decorated style. Her interviewer enthused:

There lurks in most of the decorative objects to be found in No. 10 Plymouth Grove, an ingenious combination of use and beauty ... all the decorations display taste, feeling, intention, and harmony of colour. Miss Robinson has evidently not bowed to the knee of "the cult" which suppresses individuality, despises comfort and convenience, and has a passion for dados and dirty yellow draperies, converting homes which should reflect the personal characteristics into mere cheap bric-a-brac museums, full of peacock feathers, old clocks, and pottery.³²⁹

In fact, the Aesthetic style of house decoration, with its tenet of 'Art for Art's sake' appears to have influenced many of Robinson's lavishly ornamented designs. The article acknowledged this claiming that, although the library's 'cosy aspect is not the result of the "high-art craze"', 'while waiting in the easy lounge by the fire you naturally fall into a pleasant vein of thought in which Morris papers, Walter Crane designs, and modern aesthetic departures play prominent parts'.³³⁰

Interviews with Faithfull describe this room as dedicated to her own literary career. For example, in her interview for *The Women's Penny Paper*, Faithfull comments that 'my library was Miss Robinson's special care, she planned everything there to ensure my comfort, and the room is quite charming. It has a cosy tiled fireplace and cream-coloured overmantle, cleverly contrived bookcases and racks for my books and papers, &c., and in it I spend the greater part of my day'.³³¹ The article in *The World* is unillustrated, but Robinson's 'Suggestion for the Arrangement of a Library', drawn by her to illustrate one of her advice columns for *The Queen*

³²⁹ Ibid., 815.

³³⁰ Ibid., 815.

³³¹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

[Figure 2.17] may give some indication as to its appearance.³³² The furniture is severe, and the walls lined with heavy wooden bookcases, but the foliate wallpaper, sumptuous drapery and ornamental porcelain provide lightness and relief.

Another of Robinson's illustrations from *The Queen*, described as the 'Arrangement of a General Morning Room' [Figure 2.18], seems to provide clues as to the organisation of her own working space at 10 Plymouth Grove.³³³ The description of Robinson's 'boudoir workshop', as given by the journalist for *The World*, is strikingly like that of the morning room illustrated in *The Queen*. *The World* describes how 'the conventional wall-paper acts as a pleasant background to the engravings', the room is 'ornamented with blue Nankin china', and notes:

a cunningly devised cabinet which fits into the angle of the wall by the fireplace opposite the door, and with laudable pride its designer points out its various mysteries and contents; the rare bits of china which stand in the well-constructed niches have each and all a history ... through the bevelled glass doors enclosing a little centre cabinet lined with Japanese leather gleam the fantastic Chinese visiting-cards received during Miss Robinson's sojourn in the Pacific.³³⁴

A similar cabinet is visible to the right of the fireplace in *The Queen* illustration. Like Robinson's office, *The Queen* illustration shows a writing desk and easel. The caption notes that the 'angles [are] filled with bookcases, cupboards, shelves for bric-a-brac, & c.' and advises that 'any spaces of wall to be seen [are] covered with a red paper of an almost imperceptible pattern'.³³⁵ *The World* describes 'an elaborate but dainty fitment which occupies one side of the room' with 'various shelves of all sizes divided into different sized compartments'.³³⁶ Again, a similar fitment is visible to the right of the window in *The Queen* illustration. It is apparent that, like the Garretts, Robinson drew on her own home to illustrate her literary output.

³³² Charlotte Robinson, 'Suggestion for Arrangement of Library', *The Queen*, 29 December 1888, 897.

³³³ Charlotte Robinson, 'Arrangement of a General Morning Room', *The Queen*, 14 December 1889, 841.

³³⁴ Robinson is not known to have visited China, so presumably these were received during her American travels. Yates, 'Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', 815.

³³⁵ Robinson, 'Arrangement of a General Morning Room', 841.

³³⁶ Yates, 'Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', 815.

In many ways, Robinson's populist decorative style, as seen at 10 Plymouth Grove, rejects categorisation. It borrows heavily from Aestheticism and floral motifs are a trademark: *The World* comments that 'flowers always play an important part in Miss Robinson's surroundings'.³³⁷ However, Robinson's awareness of the need to create an identifiable style to distinguish her work from that of her competitors is tempered by a consciousness that an unwavering dedication to a set of stylistic rules could alienate potential clients. Instead, she emphasises personal expression, comfort and practicality: 'Rosa Bonheur looks down complacently from an exalted position above the long narrow overmantle' and 'Landseer's pictures as well as 'The Disgrace of the Family', and the plaintiff portrait of the mastiff puppy in a huge muzzle 'For the Safety of the Public' betrays the owners devotion to dogs and country sport'.³³⁸ Her interviewer for *The Women's Penny Paper* asked 'Do you find people in general like to have their own homes arranged according to your taste rather than their own?', to which Robinson replied 'That is not the exact object of my mission ... I do not wish to direct as much as to advise; the more individuality my clients possess the better I like it'.³³⁹ Robinson's flexible, personality-driven approach to decoration seems to have been designed intentionally with the aim of attracting the broadest possible range of clients.

Caroline Crommelin

In 1888, when Crommelin launched her career as an interior decorator, she was probably living in London with her sister, May Crommelin, at Edinburgh Mansions, Victoria Street [**Figure 2.19**].³⁴⁰ Edinburgh Mansions, now destroyed, was a newly-built apartment building a ten-minute walk from Crommelin's shop on Buckingham Palace Road. The Crommelins were still living there in 1893, but by 1901 Caroline had moved to nearby Morpeth Mansions [**Figure 2.19**] with Robert Barton Shaw, whom she had married in 1895.³⁴¹ Research has not uncovered any at home interviews with Crommelin and there is limited evidence elucidating whether she used her home professionally. Likewise, Crommelin did not use her own home to illustrate 'Furniture and Decoration', the interior decoration manual she wrote in conjunction with her

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

³⁴⁰ 1881 and 1891 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

³⁴¹ 1901 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

sister.³⁴² It may be that her aristocratic background meant she was reluctant to accept public intrusion into her home or, later, that her husband objected. The former, at least, seems unlikely, considering May Crommelin herself was to conduct an interview in the home she shared with her sister.³⁴³

It is likely that, like the Garretts and Robinson, Crommelin was aware of her home's potential as a showroom for her work. As a result, it is worth examining the description of the Crommelins' home and considering what it reveals about Caroline's decorative style. The interview describes 'a pretty little flat' and notes that:

a well-filled bookcase ... greets the eye as the hall door opens and admits you into a long carpeted passage, lined with a high dado of blue-and-white Indian matting, above which, on art paper of the same colours, hang several framed photographs ... A little way down on the left is Miss Crommelin's writing-room, which is laid down with Indian matting, and contains an unusually large, workmanlike-looking writing-table, replete with little drawers, big drawers, and raised desk. The principal feature of this room is a carved oak fireplace, reaching nearly to the ceiling, and which is quite original in design and execution. There is a handsome old oak dower chest standing near the window, here an antique 'ball-and-claw' footed table, and there a few good Chippendale chairs.³⁴⁴

The oak fireplace may be similar to that described by the *Belfast News-Letter* as 'an oak mantel piece and over mantel with little cupboards and a centre mirror has been designed by Miss Crommelin for a smoking room'.³⁴⁵ Later, the article describes the Crommelins' 'pretty little drawing room':

the curtains are made of some blue art fabric, the walls are pale yellow with a lighter frieze above, and are encrusted with memories of the last three or four years ... All the woodwork is of dark walnut, as are the overmantle and *étagère*, the doors are panelled with Japanese raised paper, a long carved bracket has an excellent background of choice photographs, and there is a delightful little 'cosy corner', draped with dark terra-cotta and blue tapestry, over which is a carved rail and shelf filled with odds and ends of china, pet bits of blue Dutch Delft, and quaint little old brasses and bronzes from Munich and Florence. There is an Innocenza

³⁴² May Crommelin and Caroline Shaw [née Crommelin], 'Furniture and Decoration' in Ethel Mckenna (ed.), *Some Arts and Crafts* (London: E.P. Dutton, 1903): 1–138.

³⁴³ Helen C. Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day: Biographical Sketches* (Glasgow: David Bryce and Sons, 1893), 210–222.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 211–212.

³⁴⁵ 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 March 1891, 8.

framed in box-wood, and on the small tables yonder are some little carved wooden *stovi* such as are used in Holland, an old-fashioned brass Lucernina, and many more little souvenirs, all of which she has gathered together on foreign excursions.³⁴⁶

The use of Indian matting, Japanese panel paper, ceramics, art papers and fabrics, and blue and white with pale yellow, firmly situate the interior as typical of the Aesthetic movement. The souvenirs, photographs and other *objets d'art* complement the eclecticism of the Aesthetic style, but also serve to publicise May Crommelin's career as travel journalist.

Most interesting, however, is the furniture and woodwork. Crommelin may have designed the 'unusual' writing-table, 'original' carved fireplace, as well as the dark walnut overmantle, étagère, cosy corner, and carved rail, shelf and brackets. The proliferation of antiques, including an oak chest, a claw-footed table and Chippendale chair, is also notable. Crommelin, who advised prospective house decorators to study antique furniture, gained considerable renown for her specialism as an antique dealer and a designer of reproduction pieces.³⁴⁷ By displaying such pieces within her home, she could advertise her connoisseurship to visiting friends and family. We know that the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin were not the only women interior decorators to employ this technique. Sylvia Pankhurst records that her mother decorated the Pankhurst family's London home in 'brilliant hues' and 'equipped from the stock of Emerson's'.³⁴⁸ Pankhurst, who with her husband frequently entertained political acquaintances at her London address, 8 Russell Square, would have been aware that displaying her stock to advantage in her tastefully decorated home would not have hurt sales at Emerson & Co. Lynne Walker has used contemporary images of meetings of the Women's Franchise League at Pankhurst's home [Figure 2.20] to demonstrate how, by joining the artistic and the domestic, she transformed the domestic sphere into a public/professional arena.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day*, 212–213.

³⁴⁷ Crommelin and Shaw, 'Furniture and Decoration', 131.

³⁴⁸ Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Myself When Young' in Margot Asquith (ed.), *Myself When Young, by Famous Women of Today* (London: F. Muller, 1936), 263; Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst: The Suffragette Struggle for Women's Citizenship* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1935), 23.

³⁴⁹ Lynne Walker, 'Locating the Global/Rethinking the Local: Suffrage Politics, Architecture and Space', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 34:1/2 (Summer 2006), 180; 'Conference of the Women's Franchise League in Russel Square', *The Graphic*, 12 December 1891, 688.

Warehouses

Unlike Robinson and Crommelin, who both listed their shops as their primary business premises, the Garrett cousins listed their home.³⁵⁰ It was not, however, the only professional space they occupied. Between mid-1879 and 1899 the cousins rented a warehouse at 4 Morwell Street [**Figure 2.1**].³⁵¹ Again, they were following Morris' example. Morris' general manager George Wardle wrote that, in around 1877, 'the growth of the business prompted us ... to take premises in Oxford Street for show rooms and warehouse of the furnishing goods'.³⁵² As a result, Morris & Co took a 21-year lease on at 264 Oxford Street, later renumbered 449, in the heart of the West End [**Figures 2.21 and 2.22**].³⁵³ This showroom, which had two dedicated members of staff, also functioned as a retail outlet for the sale of Morris & Co.'s goods and was, presumably, open daily to the general public.³⁵⁴

In contrast to Morris's West End premises, the Garretts' warehouse was just behind Tottenham Court Road, only a three-minute walk from their home at 2 Gower Street. Tottenham Court Road, long favoured by cabinetmakers and upholsterers was, by the 1860s the centre for middle-class retail furnishing (Maple & Co., Shoolbred & Co. and Oetzmann & Co. all had shops in the area [**Figure 2.1**]).³⁵⁵ Whether 4 Morwell Street functioned as a retail space in the same way is uncertain. The use of the term 'warehouse' implies it did have a retail function. While now the term designates a large storage facility, then, it could apply to any retail establishment housing wares.³⁵⁶ While Morwell Street was by no means as busy a shopping thoroughfare as Tottenham Court Road, it was home to a range of other retailers. Next door to the Garretts was the shop of George Buck, file and tool makers and down the road at 19–21 Morwell Street, 'F. Moeder' would 'furnish your houses throughout on Moeder's hire

³⁵⁰ See *Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1879–1900).

³⁵¹ The warehouse on Morwell Street, formerly Tavistock Mews, was newly built and the Garrett cousins were the first tenants of the building. They may also have rented part of 3 Morwell Street. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 185 and 185n.

³⁵² Wardle, 'Memorial of William Morris', 13.

³⁵³ Wardle, 'Memorial of William Morris', 20; Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 142.

³⁵⁴ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 123; Hilary and Ricahrd Myers, *William Morris Tiles: The Tiles Designs of William Morris and his Fellow-workers* (Ilminster: Richard Dennis, 1996), 123.

³⁵⁵ Clive Edwards, 'Tottenham Court Road: The Changing Fortunes of London's Furniture Street, 1850–1950' *The London Journal*, 36, 2 (July 2011): 140–160.

³⁵⁶ Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800–1914* (London: Harper Collins, 1985), 14.

system'.³⁵⁷ However, Morwell Street was not home to the variety of establishments likely to attract the type of upmarket clients targeted by the Garretts. In addition, as Charles Essam is the only proven Garrett employee, it is doubtful whether the cousins had enough staff to keep the warehouse open daily.

An 1896 notice in the Women's Library collection for a 'Christmas Sale of Furniture by the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett' at the 4 Morwell Street warehouse [Figure 2.24], implies that the space was, at least on occasion, open to the public.³⁵⁸ However, the notice, which advertised that the warehouse was open for the sale, 10am until 4pm, from 30 November to 5 December 1896, is unpublished and appears to be in the form of a private invitation, implying that the public opening was an exceptional event. Further evidence as to how the Garretts used the warehouse is provided by Hubert Parry's diaries. In April 1881 he mentioned choosing carpets, first at 2 Gower Street (see above) and then 'in a warehouse in Holborn'.³⁵⁹ In July of the same year, he described another visit to 2 Gower Street: 'I found the Garretts all right & went with them to their warehouse where I saw lots of nice furniture & chose some good things for the house'.³⁶⁰ Examining the evidence, it seems probable that, while clients were able to visit the warehouse by appointment, it was not open to the public daily. Instead, the Garretts used the space to hold special sales and exhibitions [see Chapter Three] and to store their stock. Crommelin had a similar storage 'depot', in the Vauxhall Bridge Road [Figure 2.19], which she never advertised as open to the public, but used to store larger furniture, tapestries and carpets.³⁶¹

In 1899 the lease on the warehouse expired and, perhaps as Agnes Garrett was close to retirement, the contents were sold at auction. Research has uncovered a previously unknown, annotated, Phillips Son, and Neale catalogue for the sale [Appendix Two], which took place

³⁵⁷ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 185n; Advertisement for F. Moeder, *Notes and Queries*, 6 July 1882, 280.

³⁵⁸ 'Christmas Sale of Furniture by the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett', LSE9/02/105, Autograph Letter Collection, Women's Library, London School of Economics, London.

³⁵⁹ Hubert Parry, Diary for 14 May 1881 to 30 November 1881, entry on 2 April 1881, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, entry on 8 July 1881.

³⁶¹ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 193.

on 27 July 1899.³⁶² The catalogue provides a tantalising snapshot of the quantity and range of goods stocked by the Garretts. It contained 177 lots, often of multiple items, of ‘valuable old English and artistic furniture’. The lot descriptions are frustratingly vague, and, for most, it is impossible to discern whether the furniture described is ‘valuable old English’ or modern ‘artistic furniture’. While the catalogue described two of the lots as Sheraton and eight as Chippendale, most of the descriptions give little or no indication of the age or appearance of the item. For example, Lord Kelvin [see **Chapter Four**] bought three lots: a ‘3 ft. 6 ditto [mahogany banded with satin-wood] chest of 5 drawers’ for five pounds, a set of three mahogany tables for two pounds five shillings and ‘a mahogany 2 tier stand, and ditto a jardinière stand’ for one pound eleven shillings.³⁶³ It would be tempting to assume that all the furniture not specifically listed as antique was designed by the Garretts themselves but, although further research may lead to the identification of some of the items as Garrett-designed, it is likely that they also stocked work by other contemporary designers.

The catalogue does, however, reveal several details about the Garrett business. The large quantity of stock held in the 4 Morwell Street warehouse intimates that their enterprise, like Morris & Co., was substantial. The value of the stock, as sold at the auction, was five hundred and thirty-five pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence (approximately £55,330 in today’s money).³⁶⁴ The lots were mostly furniture, largely mahogany, but with walnut also common. The furniture varied in size, but much of it was large (over three feet high) meaning a warehouse would have been essential for storage. Small items, including chairs, jardinières, trays, mirrors, barometers, Persian carpets, Japanese panels, four Persian rugs and Wedgwood china, were also well-represented.³⁶⁵ Based on the range of items available for sale in the auction, the Garretts would have been able to furnish a house from top to bottom. The catalogue’s annotations are particularly interesting, but frustratingly hard to decipher. Some of the names of purchasers, aside from Lord Kelvin, can be identified as people known to have a connection to the Garretts. For example, ‘Mrs Loftie’ is presumably author Martha Loftie, the

³⁶² Phillips, Son & Neal, *A Catalogue of Valuable Old English and Artistic Furniture* (London: Dryden Press, 1899).

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/ [accessed 24/01/2018].

³⁶⁵ Billington, ‘Some Practical Women’, 193.

³⁶⁶ Phillips, Son & Neal, *A Catalogue of Valuable Old English and Artistic Furniture*.

wife of W. J. Loftie, who commissioned the Garretts' book. Hopefully, further analysis of the catalogue's annotations will lead to the identification of more surviving Garrett pieces.

Shops

In 1895, the popular monthly magazine *The Idler* claimed that an 'ever-increasing army of lady shopkeepers' had invaded the fashionable business quarters of London, positioning house decorators, a 'very successful class of lady shopkeepers', at the vanguard of the army.³⁶⁶ The first women interior decorators, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, without dedicated retail premises, were not part of this army. This may, at least in part, have been a result of contemporary societal codes for gentlewomen. Undertaking private commissions was permissible, but to blatantly engage in commerce by opening a retail establishment on the high street was not.³⁶⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, however, this societal disapprobation began to break down, and women from an increasingly wide range of social classes began to engage in retail.³⁶⁸ As a result, the changing nature of the professional spaces occupied by women interior decorators during the period in question are a key indicator of changing attitudes to women in business more generally. Robinson, whose father was a barrister, was a member of the professional class. Crommelin was a member of the Northern Irish gentry. As both women opened their shops in the 1880s they were amongst the vanguard of female shopkeepers as positioned by *The Idler*.

The women, however, clearly faced opposition. In 1888, Emily Faithfull wrote to the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* to correct their previous mistaken assertion that Robinson was a 'saleswoman', asserting that she was a 'house decorator'.³⁶⁹ This implies that Robinson was keen to emphasise that her work was a profession, rather than a trade. Several sources

³⁶⁶ Ignota, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', *The Idler*, November 1895, 478–481.

³⁶⁷ There has been a considerable amount of work done on lower middle-class white-collar shop-girls in the nineteenth century, including Lisa Shapiro Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure, and the London Shopgirl, 1880–1920*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006) and Pamela Cox and AnnabelHobley, *Shopgirls: The True Story of Life Beyond the Counter* (London: Hutchison, 2014). However, frustratingly, scholarship has not, as yet, devoted attention to upper-middle-class shop owners. Contemporary novels, such as George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893) and Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1888), reveal the extent of societal disapprobation of shop-keeping as a profession for middle-class women.

³⁶⁸ Jennifer Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999); Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1998).

³⁶⁹ 'London Letter', *Sheffield and Rotherham Gazette*, 7 January 1888, 3.

imply that Robinson's venture was not initially successful. Frances Willard (1839–1898) revealed that 'after opening her rooms of artistic furniture, failure seemed imminent; few orders and no sales resulted from the venture'.³⁷⁰ Similarly, a Texan newspaper commented that 'there ensued many days of trial and discouragement, when no sales were made, when stock accumulated and became 'out of date' on her hands'.³⁷¹ Despite these initial problems Robinson persevered and, as evidence suggests, was ultimately successful: she was able to rent premises in various prominent urban locations for a total of seventeen years. While male decorators were also likely to struggle in the initial years of business, this is not something emphasised in similar press reports.

Crommelin was similarly successful, remaining in business from 1888 to at least 1903. *The Idler* claimed an 'army' followed the Robinson/Crommelin vanguard and, as **Appendix One** demonstrates, the growing number of women, including Fanny and Louisa Frith and Edith Wetton, who subsequently launched careers in interior decoration, typically operated from retail premises. Like Robinson and Crommelin, they used their shops to sell their own designs, or those of others, for furniture, textiles, wallpaper, decorative art objects etc. As well as providing a valuable additional income stream, these shops increased visibility of the women's work, publicised their style and attracted private clients for decorative work. Clive Edwards has demonstrated the importance, in the second half of the nineteenth century, of the artistic retailer as a precursor to the modern professional interior decorator.³⁷² By supplying as well, as advising, Robinson and Crommelin, and their later successors, were, like their main competitors, fully participating in the contemporary market for interior decoration.

Location

Notably, Robinson, the first women decorator to operate retail premises, did so from Manchester and not London. Although she grew up in Yorkshire, immediately prior to opening her first shop in 1884, Robinson had (probably) been living in London with Emily Faithfull. Faithfull commented on her decision: 'Miss Charlotte Robinson came to Manchester and, regardless of that bugbear which terrifies most women, the loss of social status, she put up her

³⁷⁰ Frances Willard, *Occupations for Women: A Book of Practical Suggestions for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women* (New York: The Success Company, 1897), 250.

³⁷¹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Brenham Daily Banner*, 20 June 1893, 2.

³⁷² Clive Edwards, 'Complete House Furnishers: The Retailer as Interior Designer in Nineteenth-Century London', *Journal of Interior Design*, 38:1 (2013): 1–17.

own name over the door and without the least self-assertion entered into competition with the sterner sex'.³⁷³ Considering Christabel Pankhurst's claim that her mother Emmeline had waited until her move to London in 1887 before opening Emerson & Co. as 'In Manchester it would have been indiscreet for a barrister's wife to do such a thing ... in London it would be different', Robinson's decision is remarkable.³⁷⁴ She may have been inspired by William Morris who, hoping to find new customers in the northern artistic circles, had, also in 1884, opened a showroom in Manchester at 35 John Dalton Street [Figure 2.24].³⁷⁵ Around the corner, Robinson took a ten-year lease for £250 a year on the ground floor and basement of 64 King Street [Figures 2.24 and 2.25].³⁷⁶ An idea of the considerable scale of the premises can be gained by an examination of surviving floor plan [Figure 2.26].

Robinson's Manchester enterprise was a success and, though she moved to 4 King Street in 1887 [Figure 2.24], she maintained premises in the city until at least 1900.³⁷⁷ Interestingly, when the Pankhurst family returned to Manchester at the turn of the century, Emmeline closed her London branch of Emerson & Co., reopening in Manchester around the corner from Robinson [Figure 2.24].³⁷⁸ In contrast, in October 1888, Robinson expanded her empire, opening a London branch at 20 Brook Street in the fashionable West End shopping district [Figure 2.21].³⁷⁹ The choice of location is significant: most, though not all, of the women interior decorators to open retail establishments in the later nineteenth century did so in Mayfair or the surrounding area. Helen and Isabel Woollan were also on Brook Street;

³⁷³ Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', 11–12. Despite Faithfull's protestations that Robinson traded under her own name, evidence implies that Robinson originally operated under the aegis of her sister, Anne Atherton. Atherton had been running a shop called the Society of Artists in New Bond Street, London from 1883 [see **Appendix One**].

³⁷⁴ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 25.

³⁷⁵ Morris & Co. later moved to a more permanent Manchester home at 106 Albert Square. Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for our Time* (London: Alfred A Knopf, 1995), 452; Nicholas Salmon and David Taylor, 'Morris & Co. in Manchester', *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 12:3 (August 1997), 17.

³⁷⁶ 64 King Street lease, MDBC/6/1, Manchester Diocesan Buildings Company Archives, Chethams Library Manchester.

³⁷⁷ *Slater's Directory of Manchester, Salford and Suburban Directory* (London: Kelly's Directories, 1886–1900).

³⁷⁸ Manchester was not the only city outside London that laid claim to the shop of a female decorator. Miss Clifford launched her career in Bristol and, from the late 1880s, Mrs Frank Oliver had a shop on East Street in Brighton, though, like Robinson, she later opened second premises in Mayfair [see **Appendix One**].

³⁷⁹ 'Yesterday's Telegrams', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 21 October 1888, 1.

Emerson & Co. had premises on Regents Street; Mrs Innes was based on Hanover Square; and Jessie Whyte-Walton, the Society of Artists, Steadman and Rayment, Mrs Frank Oliver and Miss E. Scott all had shops based on New Bond Street and/or Old Bond Street [Figure 2.21] [see Appendix One].

In contrast to the larger furniture warehouses, such as Maple & Co., Shoolbred & Co. and Oetzmann & Co., of Tottenham Court Road, shops in Mayfair were then, as now, often ‘small, and very dear’.³⁸⁰ Mayfair was home to the upmarket covered shopping promenade Burlington Arcade, and close to new shopping destination Liberty on Regents Street.³⁸¹ There were furniture retailers in the area, including Morant & Co. on Woodstock Street, Smee and Cobay on New Bond Street; William Snell on Albemarle Street; and Holland & Sons on Mount Street. These, however, tended to be smaller establishments catering to a more elite clientele.³⁸² It may be that the nineteenth century public was more comfortable with ‘lady shopkeepers’ keeping smaller, boutique premises in a genteel area, than vast warehouses full of furniture in a district associated as much with manufacturing as it was with retail.³⁸³ Alternatively, their choice of Mayfair may reflect their awareness of the growing female market for interior decoration. As Judith Walkowitz, Bill Lancaster and Erica Rappaport have demonstrated, gender was central to the commercialization of London and, during the late nineteenth century, shopping in the West End became increasingly defined as a pleasurable and appropriate leisure activity for middle- and upper-class women.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Charles Dickens Jnr., *Dickens's Dictionary of London: An Unconventional Handbook* (London: Charles Dickens, 1879), 141.

³⁸¹ Arthur Lasenby Liberty (1843–1917) opened Liberty on Regent Street in 1875. By the 1880s the shop had become a fashionable shopping destination and occupied increasingly large premises. Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's – A Biography of a Shop* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975).

³⁸² Clive Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes: A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 23–24.

³⁸³ Lady Granville Gordon, ‘Lady Shopkeepers’, *Woman*, 17 May 1890, 3.

³⁸⁴ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Lynne Walker, ‘Vistas of Pleasure: Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West End of London, 1850–1900’ in Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995): 70–85.

However, Crommelin chose the Victoria area of London when, in 1888, she opened the ‘Art at Home Depot’ in a suite of rooms at 12 Buckingham Palace Road [Figure 2.19].³⁸⁵ The choice of location was clearly a success as, a year later, Crommelin extended her retail space by taking on two extra floors in the same house.³⁸⁶ The area was not known for furniture or upholstery, although Frederick Gorringe, who later developed his drapers shop into a thriving department store, was based on the same road.³⁸⁷ In 1891, Crommelin’s business was able to expand again, this time moving to larger premises at 167a Victoria Street [Figure 2.19].³⁸⁸ Crommelin, who lived in the area, may have chosen Victoria for convenience. She may also have been influenced by the gravitas provided by the proximity of Buckingham Palace or the opportunity to attract shoppers arriving at Victoria Station on London day-trips. However, Crommelin was not alone in rejecting the Mayfair area. Others to do so included Marion Murray and Fanny and Isabel Frith (both Fulham Road), Edith Wetton (Kensington High Street), Mrs Muller (Sloane Street) and Mrs Masters (Hanover Square) [see Appendix One].

Clientele

While Lynne Walker has suggested that although Agnes and Rhoda Garretts’ favoured style, Queen Anne, was associated with femininity, many of the cousins’ known furniture designs [Figures 2.15 and 2.27], often in made in heavy wood, are substantial, architectural and aesthetically in a style identified by Juliet Kinchin as typically masculine.³⁸⁹ In comparison, their more retail-focused successors, such as Robinson and Crommelin, were careful to ensure their goods targeted the female market. This was a canny decision because, as historians such as Deborah Cohen and Judith Neiswander have highlighted, during the nineteenth century the

³⁸⁵ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1.

³⁸⁶ From this date, the press often gives the firm’s address as 143 Victoria Street: it is not known if this is an error, or if Art at Home encompassed two buildings on the same street. ‘Metropolitan Gossip’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 September 1888, 8.

³⁸⁷ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 77.

³⁸⁸ ‘Metropolitan Gossip’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 March 1891, 8. Mrs Avant was later to also to base her enterprise on Victoria Street [see Appendix One].

³⁸⁹ Lynne Walker, ‘Locating the Global/Rethinking the Local: Suffrage Politics, Architecture and Space’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 34:1/2 (Summer 2006), 180; Juliet Kinchin, ‘Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the ‘Masculine’ and the ‘Feminine’ Room’ in Pat Kirkham (ed.), *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 12–29.

responsibility for the decoration of the home shifted from men to women.³⁹⁰ Partly, this was the result of the calls of prominent feminists, such as the Garretts, for women to take control of their domestic environments [see **Chapter One**]. In turn, this bolstered the businesses of the women interior decorators themselves as the resultant female market for interior decoration required new methods of consuming. Shopping habits had changed, and, as a result, shops had to change, and who better to supply these new female consumers than other women? Robinson and Crommelin both ensured that their shops, and the stock they sold in them, were attractive to women.

The glowing description of Robinson's Brook Street shop in *The Woman's World* highlights the extent to which the decorator was targeting women:

Miss Robinson's pretty store is in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, and here she shows all sorts of things that make existence and our boudoirs pleasant. There are the ingenious *billet-doux* writing tables—useful to fill either a corner or an impracticable window—with their flaps, and their queer unexpected resources for concealing the paraphernalia of the modern lady's "aids to composition". Then there are the cleverly designed music-stands, named after Mme. Marie Roze, which enable even the most careless musician to keep her "sheet music" in good order...³⁹¹

The article directly positions the consumer as 'a lady' and 'her' and describes the shop in feminine terms as 'pretty'. Likewise, Robinson sells smaller articles of furniture such as small writing tables for scribing love notes and a music stand named after a female celebrity.³⁹² While this description is, of course, contained in a publication directly targeting women, it nonetheless demonstrates that Robinson did not intend her shop to be a masculine space.

Other descriptions of Robinson's various retail outlets are heavy with similarly feminine terminology. *The Northern Echo* noted Robinson's 'dainty drawing room'; *The Sheffield Daily Gazette* described her 'pretty little shop in Brook Street' as 'like a dove among ravens'; *Le Follet* recommended 'Miss Charlotte Robinson's charming little salon'; and *The Sheffield Evening Telegraph* extolled the 'pretty things', including 'a very delicious little fan-

³⁹⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: the British and their Possessions* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 89–122; Judith Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870–1914* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008), 83–191.

³⁹¹ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 194; Kinchin, 'Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' Room', 12–29.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 12–29. Marie Roze (1846–1926) was a popular French operatic soprano.

shaped screen', a writing table 'no one could help falling in love with' and an 'uncommonly pretty cushion', to be found at her 'dainty little shop'.³⁹³ Depictions of Robinson's stock from, for example, *The Queen* and *The Woman's World* [Figures 2.28 and 2.29] illustrate some of the small, delicate, feminine articles of furniture for which Robinson's emporia became known.³⁹⁴ The majority are small, with delicate embellishments and decorative carving. While descriptions of Crommelin's two Victoria shops are typically less overtly feminine, they still reveal that, like Robinson, she was aware of the buying power of women.

The Belfast News-Letter noted that, at her shop, 'the decorative details of a house can all be procured in the newest, prettiest and most perfect designs. All the airy and tasteful designs that mark a cultured woman's house can be seen and purchased'.³⁹⁵ Again, the consumer is positioned as female and the stock described, in feminine terms, as pretty and airy. Crommelin also attracted female consumers by holding events such as the 1891 opening of her new Victoria Street premises, at which 'hundreds of ladies availed themselves of Miss Crommelin's hospitality and inspected the antique furniture, old and new brocades, old silver, brasswork, with all the beautiful examples of carving, inlaying and engraving. Mingling tea and conversation, gossip and criticism, exactly as the nursery rhyme puts it "upstairs downstairs and in my lady's chamber"'.³⁹⁶ Emmeline Pankhurst was, later, to employ a similar tactic. *The Women's Penny Paper* noted that, at a seasonal show at Emerson & Co.:

Mrs Pankhurst, in her capacity as hostess, had thoughtfully provided her guests with tea before inspection of her many artistic novelties. The provision of five o'clock tea is a welcome introduction and I fancy ladies will be inclined to linger over their shopping in this pleasant abode if able to obtain a cup of tea out of the dainty Japanese china which adorns Mrs Pankhurst's tea table.³⁹⁷

³⁹³ 'Notes on Fashion', *The Northern Echo*, 13 November 1890, 3; 'Girls Gossip', *The Sheilds Daily Gazette*, 21 April 1890, 4; 'Answers of Home Decoration', *Le Follet*, 1 April 1893, 15; 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 28 May 1891, 4.

³⁹⁴ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 194; Charlotte Robinson, Charlotte Robinson, 'Artistic Furniture Designed by Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Queen*, 20 December 1888, 896.

³⁹⁵ 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 September 1888, 8.

³⁹⁶ 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 March 1891, 8.

³⁹⁷ 'At Messrs Emerson's Season Show', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 15 November 1890, 61.

Here, we see Crommelin and Pankhurst cannily attracting custom by mimicking the new feminine social spaces, such as clubs, department stores and tea rooms, opening in the West End.³⁹⁸

Specialisation

Harvey and Press have demonstrated that, by creating a range of products unified by style, William Morris was moving towards an innovative concept of design and that ‘the Morris “look” was perhaps the first to become instantly identifiable by a broad spectrum of the population’.³⁹⁹ While this creation of a house style is a feature of the world of interior decoration and design today, then it was a new departure. The Garretts, known for their harmonious Queen Anne style, were early adopters of this method.⁴⁰⁰ Their successors, including Robinson and Crommelin, followed their example by ensuring that the range of goods on sale in their retail premises was reflective of their stylistic specialisation.

Robinson became well known for her highly decorative approach to design. All the descriptions of her stock and shop comment on her specialisation in floral painting. Among the floral items described by the *Northern Echo*, were a table, paper cutters, panels, a music stand, bags and a banjo.⁴⁰¹ The *Shields Daily Gazette* enthused that ‘The mimosa which stood in the jardinière among the screens looked no more floral than the painted flowers that were grouped about it, so true to nature were the latter. They give all the effect of real flowers scattered through the rooms’.⁴⁰² The proliferation of floral decoration in Robinson’s work is evident in the illustrations of her stock published in the contemporary press [**Figures 2.28** and **2.29**]. She presumably designed her floral-decorated furniture to appeal to the female market for interior design. The press, however, did not always admire her populist style and her penchant for flower painting occasionally attracted condemnation.

The Woman’s World complained about her ‘too great fondness for floral painting on furniture’, claiming that ‘it is largely due to her that the truly terrible painted mirrors, so false

³⁹⁸ Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Walker, ‘Vistas of Pleasure’; Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

³⁹⁹ Harvey and Press, *William Morris*, 81–82.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁰¹ ‘Notes on Fashion’, *Northern Echo*, 13 November 1890, 3.

⁴⁰² ‘Girls Gossip’, *The Shields Daily Gazette*, 4.

to all canons of art, enjoyed their happily brief run of fashionable favour'.⁴⁰³ Though disparaging, this reference hints at the widely reaching fame of Robinson's floral style. More universally admired by the press were Robinson's designs for smaller items of furniture. The press admired the billet-doux table [Figures 2.28 and 2.29], which Robinson had patented in 1889, particularly frequently. Patenting was rare for nineteenth-century women: the highest annual percentage of patents registered by women before 1900 was 2.4% in 1898, most of which were in the clothing, cycling and cooking categories.⁴⁰⁴ By patenting, Robinson may have been attempting to assert her professional status in the face of her lack of professional training.

Arguably, this paid off, as trade journal *The Cabinet-Maker and Art Furnisher* (which carried a weekly list of applications for patents and patents issued) was amongst the publications to extol the tables' virtues:

The "Billet-Doux Table" (registered) ... formed the principal feature of interest in the window of Miss Charlotte Robinson, or Brook Street New Bond Street. The novelty of invention consists in the fact that it can either be used as a square or a corner table. The latter is its normal condition, while it is easily converted into a square by simply opening the two angular flaps, which, when open, are supported by the swing brackets shutting flat against the side when not in use. The little boxes in the underframing are, I presume, intended for the reception of papers, manuscripts, drawings & c.⁴⁰⁵

That the leading journal for the furniture and furnishing trade in Britain in the late Victorian period lauded Robinson's work in an article, written by the journal's editor, also referencing an array of the most popular (male) furniture retailers, including Oetzmann & Co., Maple & Co., Shoolbred & Co., Collinson & Lock, Heal & Sons, William Whitely, Liberty and Graham & Biddle, is remarkable.⁴⁰⁶ Clearly, Robinson's enterprise was operating on much the same scale as those of her male competitors.

While Crommelin recognised the importance of the growing female market for interior decoration, her shop was less overtly feminine than Robinson's. Examining the items

⁴⁰³ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 194.

⁴⁰⁴ Stephen van Dulken, *Inventing the 19th Century: 100 Inventions That Shaped the Victorian Age* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 10.

⁴⁰⁵ 'The Christmas Windows of the West', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher*, 1 January 1889, 174.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 169–174.

recommended to 1891 correspondents of *Woman* magazine's interior decoration advice column, provides a snapshot of the range of her stock [Figure 2.30].⁴⁰⁷ The smoking overmantle, pipe racks and cupboards for cigarettes were all items associated with masculinity.⁴⁰⁸ Several of the items recorded, including the two screens, were antique. The *Belfast News-Letter* noted that Crommelin's specialism lay in this area:

She has a genius for collecting antique furniture from every period of which artists approve – the old oak of Cromwell's time, the mahogany of Sheraton and Chippendale, the French inlaying of the First Empire days, or the earlier magnificence of Louis Quinze and Quatorze. Whether it be an old buffet, an oak chest, a bureau, an antique cradle, an ingenious writing table, or any other piece of rare furniture which is wanted to complete a room, it can be seen or heard of at Buckingham Palace Road.⁴⁰⁹ Illustrations of Crommelin's shop accompanying articles describing her stock depict some of the antique furniture she specialised in.

An 1897 edition of *The House* noted that 'practically no period in the furniture of English furniture' is not represented at Crommelin's 'delightful treasure-house'.⁴¹⁰ The article illustrated [Figure 2.31] a:

Chippendale chair, dating from the best period of that great master's operations. We have placed it by an eighteenth-century china cabinet of uncommon type, as the tracery in the doors is of brass, and an extremely pretty Sheraton "pillar-and-claw" pedestal'.⁴¹¹

Clearly, Crommelin was stocking quality antiques that could rival her male competitors in Wardour Street (the centre of the contemporary antiques trade) and, increasingly, Mayfair.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 5 February 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 19 February 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 12 March 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 19 March 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 26 March 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 15 April 1891, 20; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 24 June 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 15 July 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 22 July 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 5 August 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 2 September 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 7 October 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 14 October 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 4 November 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 2 December 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 9 December 1891, 22; Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 16 December 1891, 22.

⁴⁰⁸ Kinchin, 'Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' Room', 12–29.

⁴⁰⁹ 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 8.

⁴¹⁰ 'In Search of the Latest', *The House*, 1 December 1897, 178–9.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Mark Westgarth, *A Biographical Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Antique and Curiosity Dealers* (London: Regional Furniture Society, 2009), 14.

Articles and interviews provide tantalising glimpses as to how Crommelin acquired this antique furniture. *The Women's Penny Paper* claimed that she had 'communication with dealers all over the country, and choice bits of Chippendale, Sheraton and Old Oak furniture are constantly being conveyed' to her premises, before asking whether she found any difficulty in doing business with the dealers.⁴¹³ Crommelin replied negatively, but that the interviewer felt the need to ask implies that, at the time, women were not common in the antiques market. This was true but, as Heidi Egginton has demonstrated, while scholarship has tended to overlook the importance of middle-class women's involvement in professionalizing the field of antiques in Britain, by the turn of the century there was a noticeable female presence in the antiques world.⁴¹⁴ While Egginton's work focuses on later women dealers, Crommelin, who was collecting, selling and writing about antiques from the 1880s, was clearly instrumental in engendering this change. The *Belfast News-Letter* claimed that Crommelin's success 'brought to the front a host of imitators', citing *The Spinning Wheel*, the antiques and interior décor shop run by Lady Mary Monckton and Fanny and Louisa Frith as a key example.⁴¹⁵ Later women interior decorators with a special interest in antiques included Mrs Innes, Mary Masters and Helen and Isabel Woollan [see **Appendix One**].

Crommelin, however, seems to have been particularly innovative. Not only did she sell antiques, she also repurposed them and designed and sold reproductions. *Woman* magazine advised a correspondent to buy Crommelin's design for an 'antique reproduction bureau', and Robinson recommended her antique reproduction light fittings in the 'Home Decoration' column she wrote for *The Queen* magazine [**Figure 2.32**].⁴¹⁶ In the *Wisconsin Weekly* Crommelin herself professed:

I pride myself upon some ingenuity in turning to new uses discarded articles of other times. Old Chippendale wine coolers are transformed into *jardinière*, knife boxes of that same period into writing paper cases, letter boxes and spirit cabinets. Quaint tea caddies of the good old

⁴¹³ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴¹⁴ Heidi Egginton, "'The Amateur Trader': Women in the Market for Antiques, c. 1880–1940' [Paper given at the Women's History Network Annual Conference 2016].

⁴¹⁵ 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 November 1890, 3.

⁴¹⁶ Millicent, 'Furniture', *The Woman*, 13 May 1891, 22; Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 23 January 1892, 144.

times become excellent depositories for tobacco and cigars, while the humble bed-post, with its mahogany carvings, looks very handsome as a plant stand.⁴¹⁷

By dealing in antiques, using them in her decorative schemes, finding modern purposes for them and designing and selling reproductions, Crommelin was able to carve out a niche for herself as a specialist in the area, and supplement the income she gained from private decorative commissions.

Display

The types of goods women interior decorators chose to retail, and the methods they used to display them, reveal how they positioned themselves in the marketplace. Clive Edwards notes that from the mid-1870s, higher-grade artistic retailers focused on displaying goods in room settings or ‘vignettes’.⁴¹⁸ As evinced by illustrations of their stock in the contemporary press [Figures 2.29 and 2.31], this was something done by both Robinson and Crommelin. This implies that both women were attempting to compete in the luxury end of the market for interior decoration. Edwards has used an 1875 article, originally published in the *Furniture Gazette*, to indicate the hierarchy of nineteenth-century London furnishing trades:

First we have the high class houses, represented by such firms as those of Gillows, Morant, Dowbiggin & c., whose reputation is such for the superiority of their products that it is not necessary for them to make any display whatsoever. Secondly there are firms famous for the production of articles of high artistic order, of whom Jackson and Graham are a fair representative house. Their windows are never crowded with goods, but exhibit frequently only one article only, rarely more than two or three, but these always distinguished by some rare excellence of design or colouring. A third and distinct class deal only in old furniture which realises high prices leaving a goodly residuum of profit ... their windows look as if they had migrated thither from the South Kensington Museum. A fourth class represented by such firms as Shoolbred & Co. Marshall and Snelgrove and Maple, make magnificent displays, in their large well-arranged windows of resplendent carpets, rich curtain fabrics, and inlaid cabinet work. A fifth class makes good displays of useful ordinary goods judiciously ticketed with a view of attracting by price more than by pattern of texture. The houses of Meeking, Tarn, Oetzmann, Whitely and Venables are representative of this class.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work’, *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

⁴¹⁸ Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes*, 112.

⁴¹⁹ ‘On Window Dressing in the Furniture Trade’, *Furniture Gazette*, 2 October 1875, 193 in Clive Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes*, 110–111.

As Edwards notes, these classes are as recognisable today as they were in 1875.⁴²⁰

Research has not uncovered any images of the women's window displays. However, we can use this description to analyse where Robinson and Crommelin fit in the contemporary retail hierarchy. Robinson had some similarities with the second category. *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* commented that her billet-doux table was the only item displayed in her window for Christmas 1889.⁴²¹ Descriptions of Crommelin's shop, such as those given by *House* magazine, place her into the third category.⁴²² Conversely, we know that, as well as artistic furniture, Robinson stocked smaller low-priced items, which were populist in design rather than examples of 'rare excellence of design'.⁴²³ Likewise, Crommelin did not deal only in antique furniture, but also stocked antique reproduction, textiles and wallpaper. Both women seem to have stocked a range of items varying in price from high end to low end.

However, what is clear from mentions of both Robinson and Crommelin in the contemporary press, is that both women traded heavily on their personalities. Their male competitors were artistic retailers known as much, if not more, for their stock, than for the decoration commissions they undertook. In contrast, Robinson and Crommelin were using the fame accrued through their decorative commissions to support a retail trade which bolstered their income. For example, when discussing Robinson's retail establishment, *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* notes that 'if the ladies are at present denied a voice in the government of the country, they, at any rate, have established themselves in its furnishing counsels'.⁴²⁴ Notably, none of the male retailers mentioned in the article are credited with the status of 'furnishing counsel'.

Workshops

As the Garrett cousins participated in the 1888 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition, we can name some of the manufacturers who executed their designs. The catalogue lists the Garrett exhibits as including a carpet by Gates and Marshall, furniture by W. A. & S. Smee, a

⁴²⁰ Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes*, 111.

⁴²¹ 'The Christmas Windows of the West', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher*, 174.

⁴²² 'In Search of the Latest', *The House*, 178–9.

⁴²³ Charlotte Robinson, 'Artistic Furniture Designed by Miss Charlotte Robinson', 896.

⁴²⁴ 'The Christmas Windows of the West', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher*, 174.

panel paper by W. M. Woollams & Co. and a candle and wall sconce executed by metalworker Alfred Shirley.⁴²⁵ As we have seen, in contrast to the Garretts, who never expanded into commerce, Robinson and Crommelin were both operating retail premises from the mid/late 1880s onwards. Again, frustratingly there is no evidence as to who manufactured the goods Crommelin sold, many of which, as the *Woman* demonstrates [Figure 2.30] were not antique. One name survives regarding Charlotte Robinson: the *Leamington Spa Courier* reported that she exhibited a ‘Borrowdale’ rug, designed by her and manufactured by ‘Messrs Wilson, as displayed at the 1894 industrial exhibition in Leamington Spa.’⁴²⁶ There is some evidence to suggest that Robinson initially ran her business, in conjunction with, or as a branch of, her sister Anne Atherton’s Society of Artists [see Appendix One]. It may be that the Society of Artists, who had been selling ‘all kinds of artistic work’ from her New Bond Street premises since 1883, were assisting with the supply of stock.⁴²⁷

There is evidence to suggest that Robinson produced some of the items sold in her shops herself.⁴²⁸ An article on her retail trade, in *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, mentioned that artists in Robinson’s ‘Manchester studios’ stocked her shop.⁴²⁹ As the floorplan of 64 King Street [Figure 2.26] shows, Robinson’s first premises included not only the ground floor retail space, but an equally-sized basement below. It is reasonable to assume that these studios were situated in this basement and that it was here that Robinson produced her floral-painted stock. Notably, Emmeline Pankhurst followed this example with her own Manchester shop. She rented a studio above her own King Street shop which her daughter Sylvia was to use to undertake design work for the business. Christabel Pankhurst wrote of how, after she ceased working at Emerson & Co and began to concentrate on her law degree, twenty-one-year-old Sylvia took over the role: ‘Sylvia’s artistic gift might adapt her better than me to some phases of the undertaking,

⁴²⁵ Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society, *Catalogue of the First Exhibition* (London: Chiswick Press, 1888), 148–9.

⁴²⁶ ‘Industrial Exhibition’, *Leamington Spa Courier*, 15 December 1894, 3.

⁴²⁷ Kate Thornbury, ‘Mrs Atherton’s Artistic Shop in Bond Street’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 December 1887, 11.

⁴²⁸ Although Charlotte Robinson had grand ambitions, it is probable that the women artists in her studios were restricted to the hand-decoration of ready-made items. There is no evidence to suggest they manufactured any furniture herself and sources describing Robinson’s workshops concentrate on feminine floral painting and decoration, not carpentry.

⁴²⁹ ‘Yesterday’s Telegrams’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 1.

especially as her task was mainly to design and paint in a studio'.⁴³⁰ Supporting this, many of the designs Sylvia Pankhurst produced for sale in her mother's shop can be seen in her sketchbooks, which survive in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam [Figure 2.31].⁴³¹

Further sources suggest that, on moving to London, Robinson opened another workshop, this time in Paddington and run by her eldest sister Elspeth McClelland.⁴³² Notably, Robinson staffed her workshops with women. In 1890, the *Manchester Times* wrote that Robinson's stock was decorated by women in her workshops and that she 'believes that, with proper training, all the work could be done by women'.⁴³³ The *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* noted:

I asked Miss Robinson where she gets all these dainty and tasteful little articles turned out, adding that I fervently hoped it was in England. She told me that her sister, Mrs McClelland, does them all in the studio at Warwick Road, Paddington, over which she presides, employing a number of young ladies in painting friezes, panels and all kind of decorative work, painting on glass being a speciality.⁴³⁴

The work of the women employed by Robinson garnered considerable praise. For example, in their review of Charlotte Robinson's exhibit at the 1890 Edinburgh Exhibition, *The Women's Penny Paper* commented that 'the painting of the many screens, tables, and other artistic furniture, was not only highly finished but bore minute inspection, and showed the high standard of excellence which has been reached by the lady artists who study in Miss Robinson's studios'.⁴³⁵

Robinson was clearly aware that these women were highly skilled and valued them appropriately. The press refers to them to as 'assistants' or 'artists' and Robinson paid them well. *Myra's Journal* commented in 1889 that 'Miss Robinson not only gives us real art, she pays her artists properly, and her assistants can earn anything from five to twenty shillings a

⁴³⁰ Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, 43.

⁴³¹ Sketchbook, Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

⁴³² 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴³³ 'Society and the Stage', *Manchester Times*, 12 April 1890, 6.

⁴³⁴ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 28 May 1891, 4.

⁴³⁵ Rambler, 'Out and About', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 31 May 1890, 382.

day, working from ten to five'.⁴³⁶ This was not unusual: male run firms in the decorative arts, including ceramics manufacturers Mintons and Doulton, had been employing women for several years.⁴³⁷ While, unfortunately, research has not uncovered any names of Robinson's Manchester employees, her keenness to employ women, and care to publicise the fact that she did, highlights her commitment to improving the lives of women and to defusing the stigma associated with their paid work [see **Chapter One**].

Robinson gained royal recognition for her efforts in this area. In December 1887, the *Manchester Courier* reported that:

Miss Charlotte Robinson of King Street, Manchester, has had the honour of submitting to her Majesty some art decorative work ... The Queen not only purchased the specimens but graciously expressed a warm interest in Miss Robinson's spirited efforts to increase in this appropriate direction the remunerative sphere of trained lady artists.⁴³⁸

Solidifying this royal support, later that month the Queen granted Robinson the considerable accolade of 'a warrant of appointment as home art decorator to her Majesty'.⁴³⁹ The existence of Robinson's workshops also demonstrates that she was operating on a similar scale to her male competitors who, as Clive Edwards has demonstrated, continued to have small metropolitan workshops supplying their retail premises throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁴⁰

This chapter has considered the professional spaces occupied by women interior decorators during the late nineteenth century: their homes. It has demonstrated that for the Garretts, basing their business at 2 Gower Street was a tactically sound decision and has considered the numerous ways in which they used the space professionally. It has shown that, although Robinson and Crommelin both rented dedicated business premises, their homes remained essential to the construction of their professional identities. For all the women decorators discussed here, homes were spaces in which artistic and literary production could take place

⁴³⁶ 'The Ladies' Gallery', *Myra's Journal*, 1 April 1889, 24.

⁴³⁷ Moira Vincentelli, *Women and Ceramics: Gendered Vessels* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 90.

⁴³⁸ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 2 December 1887, 8.

⁴³⁹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 20 December 1887, 6.

⁴⁴⁰ Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes*, 107.

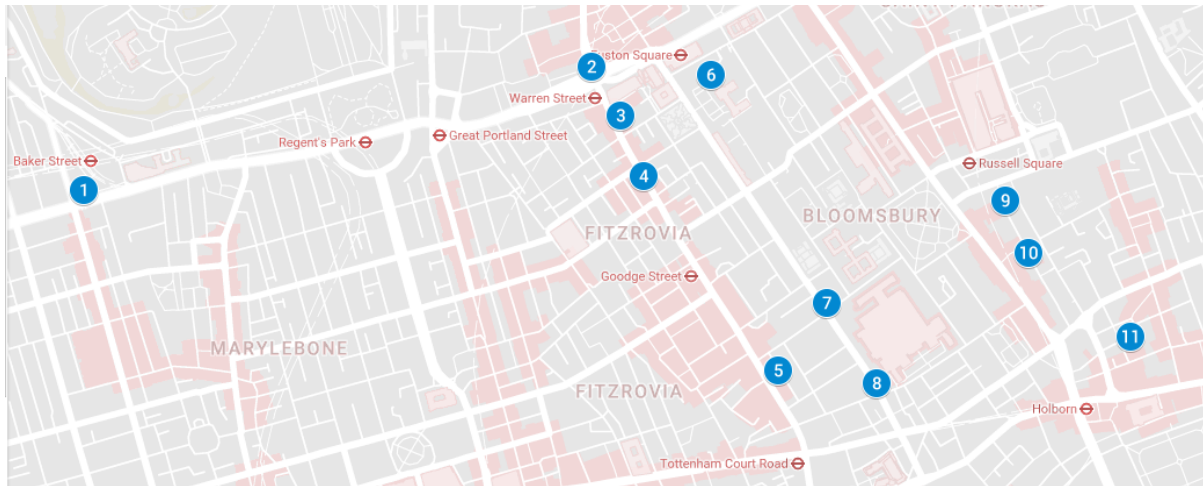
and in which they could receive clients. Most importantly, they used their homes to demonstrate their distinctive style and as showrooms through which they could display their artistry to their friends, family and, importantly, to potential clients. By inviting the press into their homes, these women ensured that a detailed description of at least one of their interiors was available for public consumption. Crucially, by using their private homes professionally the women were able to ease their expansion into the public world.

The chapter has subsequently demonstrated that some women interior decorators were able to bolster their incomes by operating retail shops. It has considered the respective locations of these shops and what variety of clients they targeted. It has argued that both Robinson and Crommelin were acutely aware that, during the nineteenth century, the responsibility for the decoration of the home shifted from men to women. They carefully ensured their goods targeted the feminine market and capitalised on the calls of prominent feminists (such as the Garretts) for women to take control of their domestic environments. The chapter has also examined the ways in which women such as Robinson and Crommelin followed the example of both William Morris, and the Garrett cousins, by creating a range of products unified by style. Throughout, the chapter has compared the women to their male competitors and has demonstrated that they were able to fully participate in the contemporary market for interior decoration.

Illustrations

Figure 2.1

Contemporary map showing the area around Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's home at 2 Gower Street, London.



Key:

1. Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's 'small flat' at No. 3 Cornwall Residences, Regent's Park.
2. Oetzmann & Co.
3. Maple & Co.
4. Shoolbred & Co.
5. Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's warehouse at 4 Morwell Street.
6. The Slade School of Fine Art.
7. Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's home at 2 Gower Street.
8. John Aldam Heaton & Co.
9. Morris & Co. at 26 Queen Square.
10. Female School of Art.
11. Morris & Co. at 8 Red Lion Square.

Figure 2.2

Amédée Forestier, illustration of the premises of Morris & Co. at 26 Queen Square, Frances Evelyn Maynard Greville Warwick, *William Morris: His Homes and Haunts* (London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1912), 21.



Figure 2.3

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's former home at 2 Gower Street.



Figure 2.4

Hand-painted ceiling of back first floor reception room at 2 Gower Street.



Figure 2.5

Fragment of hand-painted ceiling of front first floor reception room at 2 Gower Street, UoL/CT/3/3/1-3, Special Collections, Senate House Library, University College London, London.



Figure 2.6

Design of painted ceiling in front first floor reception room at 2 Gower Street, produced by conservators in 1974–1975, UoL/CT/3/3/1-3, Special Collections, Senate House Library, University College London, London.

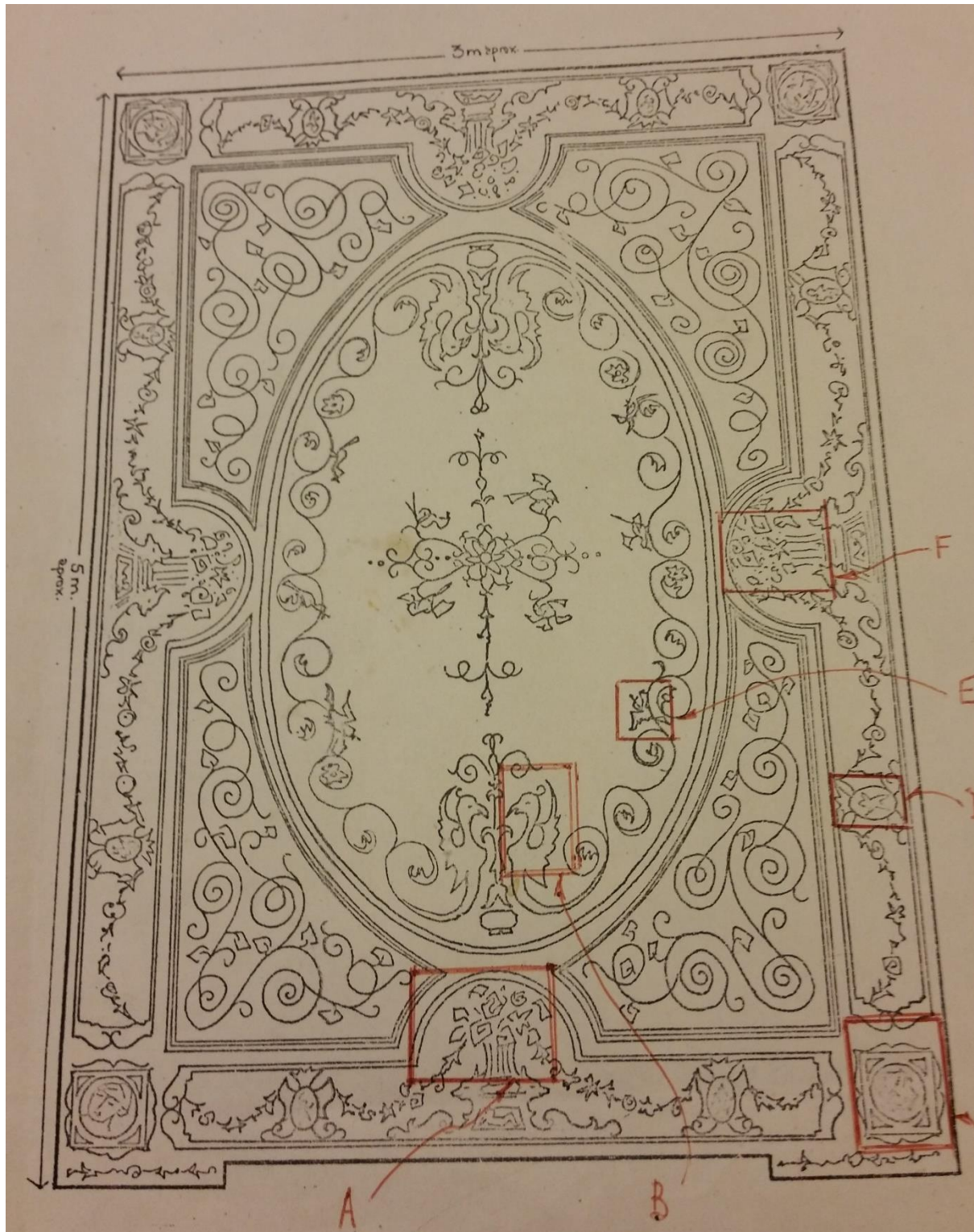


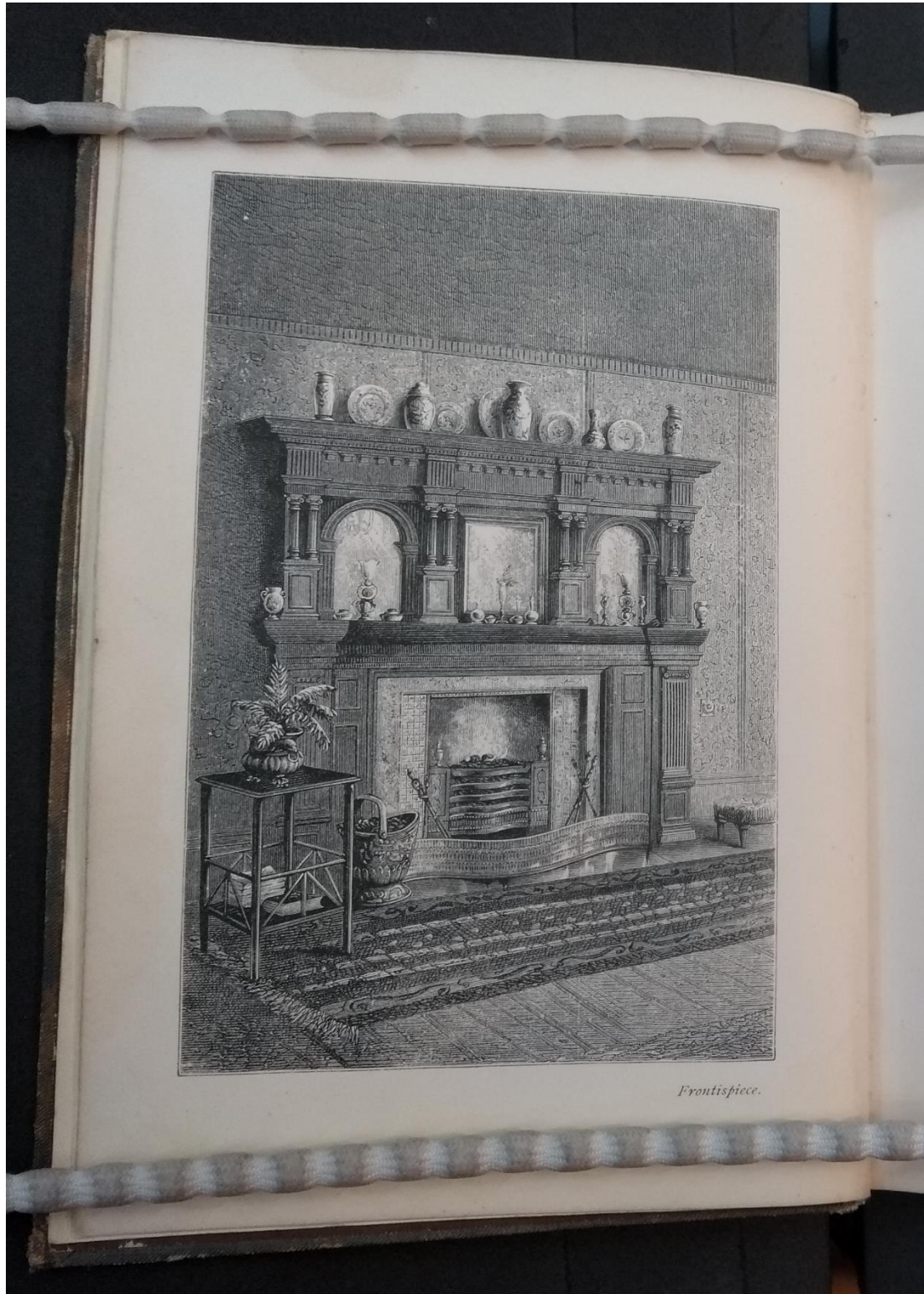
Figure 2.7

Photograph of Millicent Fawcett outside 2 Gower Street, Elsie M. Lang, *British Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1929), 90.



Figure 2.8

Illustration of the back drawing room chimneypiece at 2 Gower Street, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), frontispiece.



Frontispiece.

Figure 2.9

Illustration of a hall table and chair, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 40.



HALL TABLE AND CHAIR. To face p. 40.

Figure 2.10

Illustration of the dining room at 2 Gower Street, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 46.



Figure 2.11

Illustration of the front drawing room chimneypiece at 2 Gower Street, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 61.

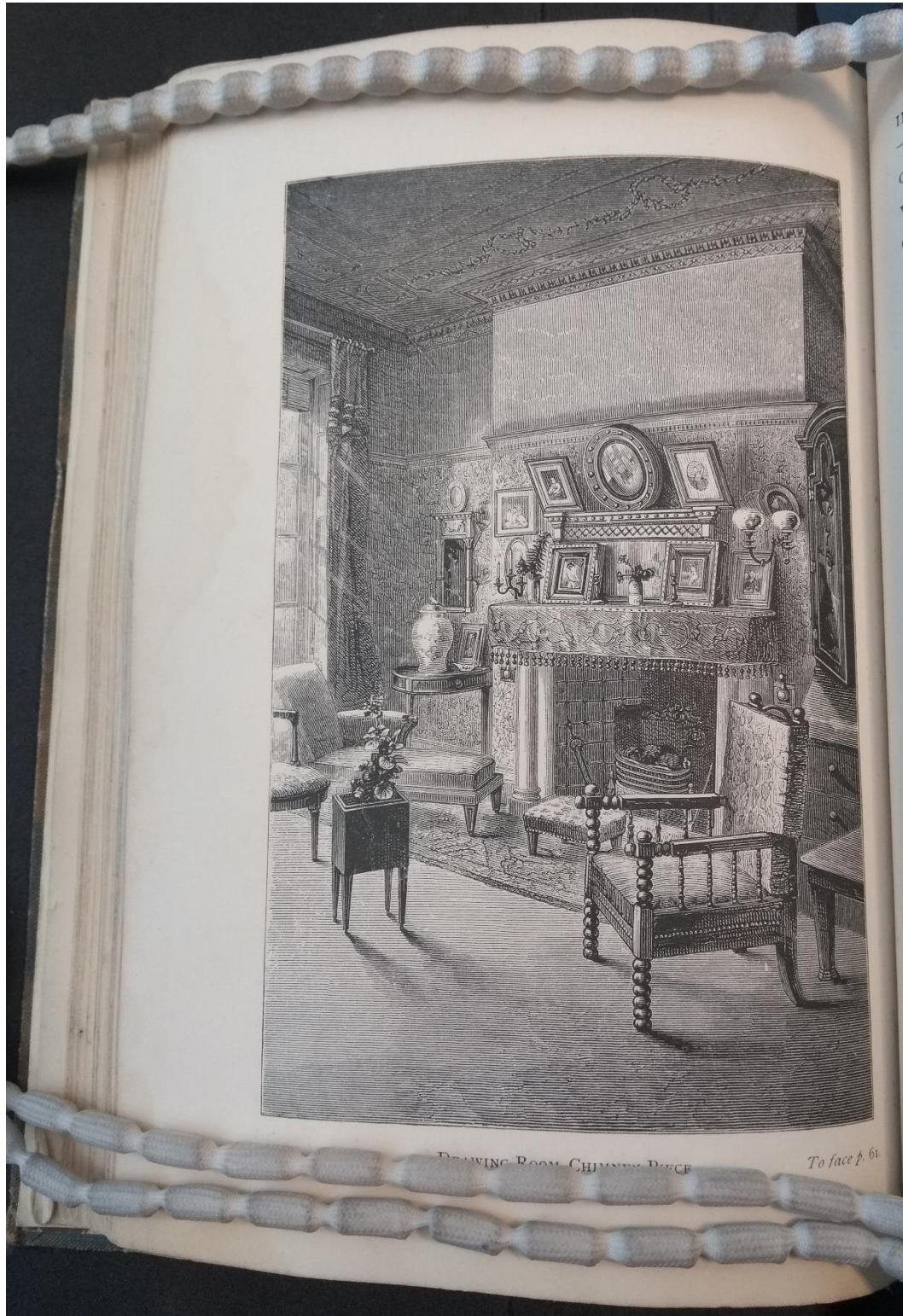


Figure 2.12

Illustration of drawing room at 2 Gower Street, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 60.

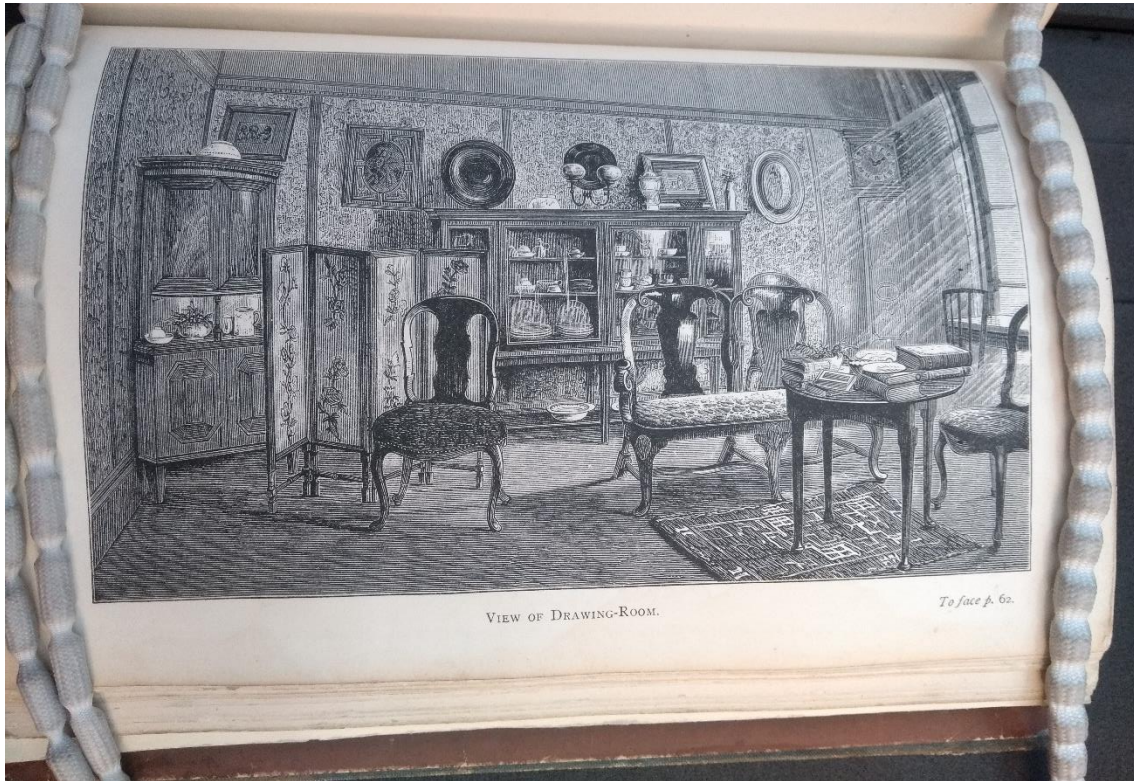


Figure 2.13

Illustration of a dressing table and glass, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 72.



DRESSING-TABLE AND GLASS. To face p. 72.

Figure 2.14

Day bed designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1214057> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 2.15

Corner cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213990> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 2.16

Photograph of Agnes Garrett at 2 Gower Street, c.1900. From [https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw162108/Agnes Garrett?LinkID=mp102221&role=sit&rNo=0](https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw162108/Agnes%20Garrett?LinkID=mp102221&role=sit&rNo=0) [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 2.17

Charlotte Robinson, 'Suggestion for Arrangement of Library', *The Queen*, 29 December 1888, 897.



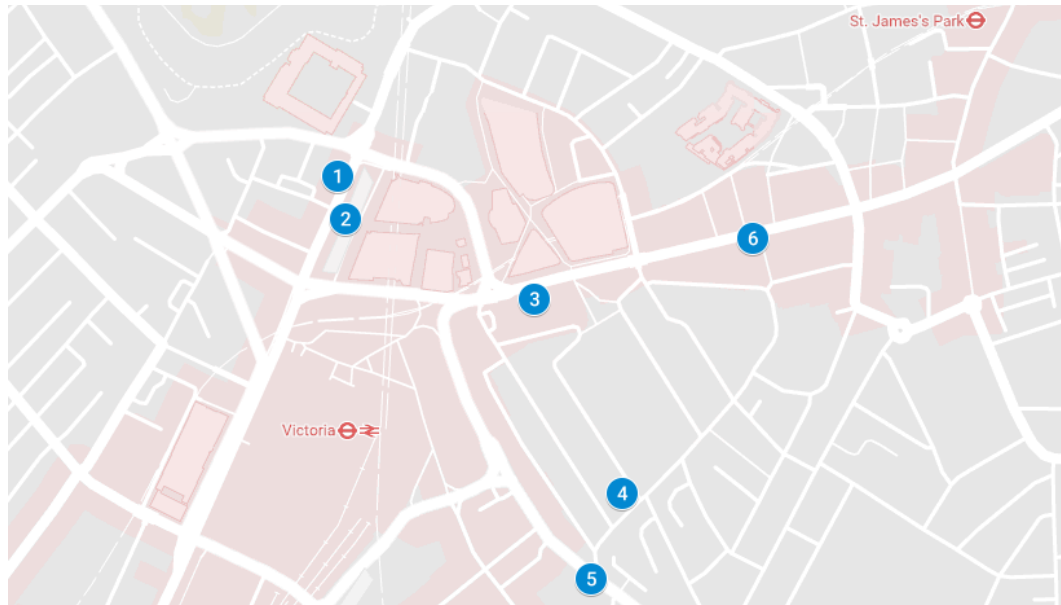
Figure 2.18

Charlotte Robinson, 'Arrangement of a General Morning Room', *The Queen*, 14 December 1889, 841.



Figure 2.19

Contemporary map showing the area around Caroline Crommelin's homes and shops in London.



Key:

1. Caroline Crommelin's shop at 12 Buckingham Palace Road.
2. Goringes department store.
3. Caroline Crommelin's shop at 167 Victoria Street.
4. Caroline Crommelin's home at Morpeth Mansions.
5. Caroline Crommelin's warehouse on Vauxhall Bridge Road.
6. Caroline Crommelin's home at Edinburgh Mansions.

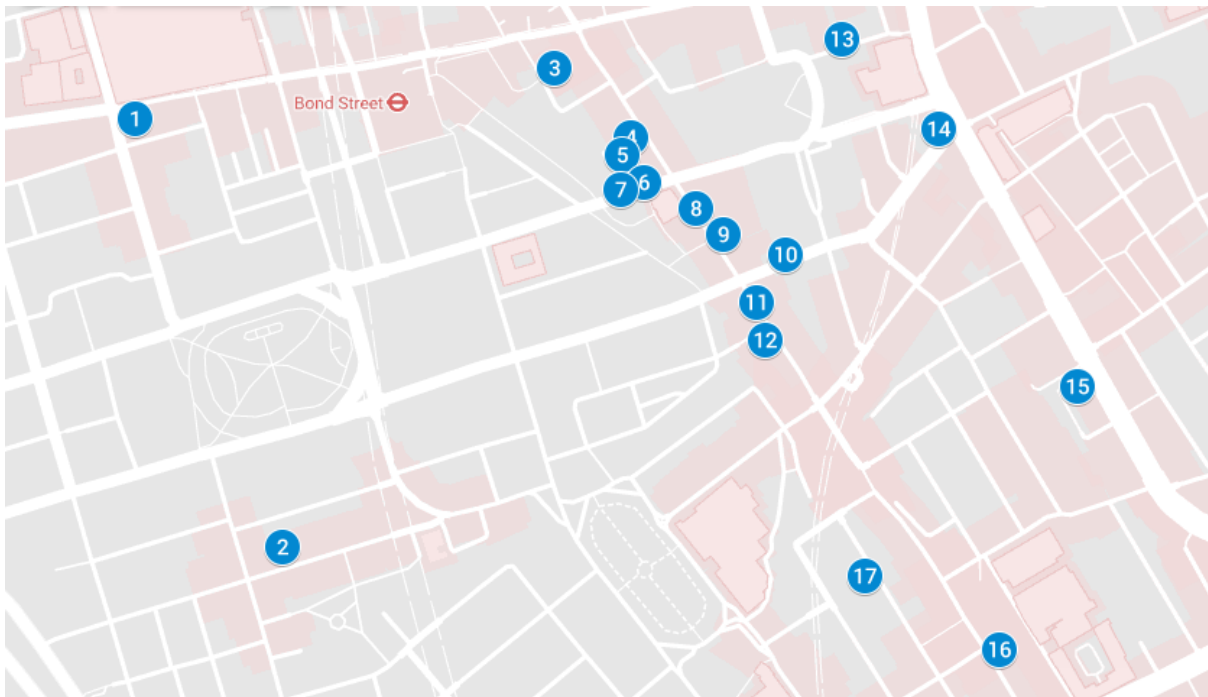
Figure 2.20

Illustration of a meeting of the Women's Franchise League at Emmeline Pankhurst's home, 'Conference of the Women's Franchise League in Russel Square', *The Graphic*, 12 December 1891, 688.



Figure 2.21

Contemporary map showing the area around Mayfair and Bond Street in London.



Key:

1. Morris & Co. showroom at 449 Oxford Street
2. Holland & Sons.
3. Morant & Co.
4. Miss E. Scott.
5. Mrs Frank Oliver.
6. Charlotte Robinson's shop at 20 Brook Street.
7. Helen and Isabel Woollan.
8. Ellen Steadman and Katherine Rayment.
9. Society of Artists
10. Jessie Whyte Walton at 48 Maddox Street.
11. Jessie Whyte Walton at 43 New Bond Street.
12. Sme & Cobay.
13. Mrs Innes.
14. Emerson & Co.
15. Liberty.
16. Jessie Whyte Walton at 14 Old Bond Street.
17. William Snell.

Figure 2.22

Morris & Co. shopfront at 449 Oxford Street c.1911,

Brief Sketch of the Morris Movement and of the Firm founded by William Morris to carry out his designs and the industries revived or started by him. Written to commemorate the firm's fiftieth anniversary in June 1911 (London: Privately printed by Charles Whittingham & Co., 1911), facing page 58.



Plate 44 No. 449 Oxford Street, London

Figure 2.23

Notice for 'Christmas Sale of Furniture by the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett', LSE9/02/105, Autograph Letter Collection, Women's Library, London School of Economics, London.

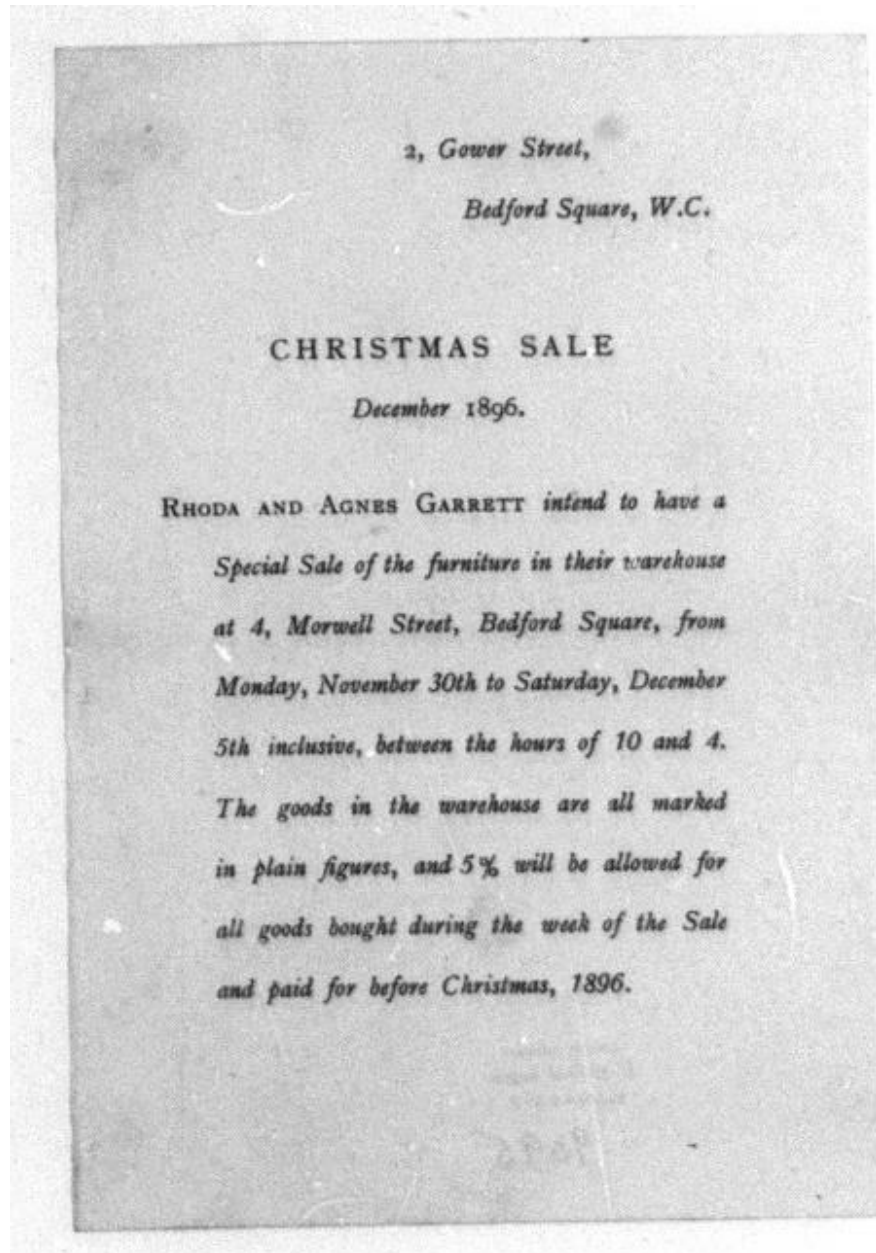
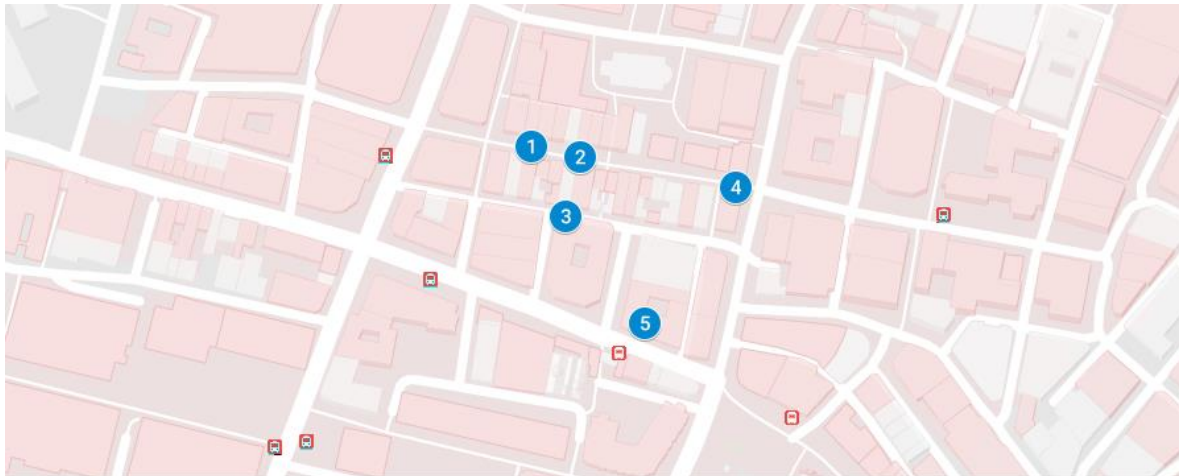


Figure 2.24

Contemporary map showing the area Charlotte Robinson's central Manchester premises.



Key:

1. Emerson & Co at 43 King Street.
2. Emerson & Co. at 30 King Street
3. Emerson & Co. at 33 South King Street.
4. Charlotte Robinson's shop at 64 King Street.
5. William Morris's showroom.

Figure 2.25

Former site of Charlotte Robinson's shop at 64 King Street, Manchester.



Figure 2.26

Floor plan of Charlotte Robinson's 64 King Street shop in Manchester, included with her 1884 lease of the premises. From 64 King Street lease, MDBC/6/1, Manchester Diocesan Buildings Company Archives, Chethams Library Manchester.

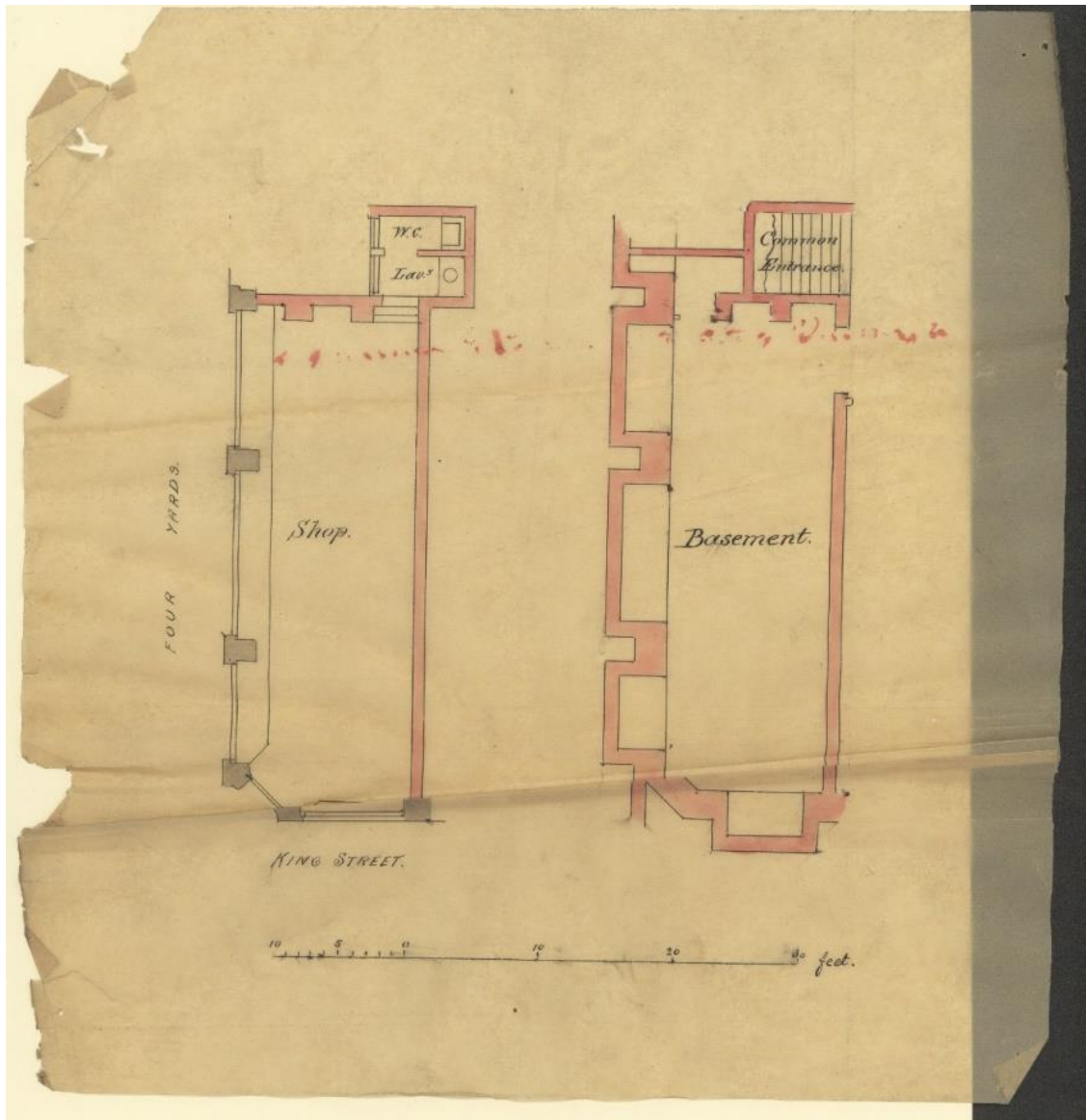


Figure 2.27

Cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. From <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1389784/cabinet-garrett-rhoda/> [accessed 16/05/2018].



Figure 2.28

Charlotte Robinson, 'Artistic Furniture Designed by Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Queen*, 29 December 1888, 896.



Figure 2.29

Feminine furniture designs by Charlotte Robinson, Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women' in Oscar Wilde (ed.), *Woman's World* (London: Cassels and Sons, 1890), 194.



Figure 2.30

Items stocked by Caroline Crommelin and recommended to correspondents to *Woman* magazine's interior decoration advice column 'Furniture' in the year 1891.

Date (1891)	Item Recommended	Price (if given)
5 February	various tapestries	2s 11d to 6s 8d
12 March	smoking overmantle in old oak	£6 10s 6d
	pipe racks	
	cupboards for cigarettes	
	letter rack	
19 March	'Daisy' carpet	1s 6d
26 March	Moorish arch	
15 April	Eastern tapestry	3s a yard
13 May	antique reproduction bureau	£4 10s 6d
24 June	Chippendale screen	
	'art green' carpet	
15 July	custom made bookcase	£2
22 July	rose covered chintz	
	jute	
	brocade	
5 August	patent parquet flooring	1s 6d a square foot
	custom stained/stencilled floorboard boarder	3s 6d a square yard
2 September	custom 'cosy corner'	£8 to £10
7 October	dark blue floral brocade	4s 6d
14 October	floral wallpaper	3s 6d a yard
	blue arras cloth	9d a yard
	blue coconut matting	2s 6d a yard
4 November	old French mirrors	£2
2 December	mahogany and gold louis xv screen	£2
9 December	'shrimp pink' tapestry	2s 11d
16 December	French floral wallpaper	7s

Figure 2.31

Chippendale chair, eighteenth-century china cabinet and Sheraton pedestal in Crommelin's shop, 'In Search of the Latest', *The House*, 1 December 1897, 178–9.

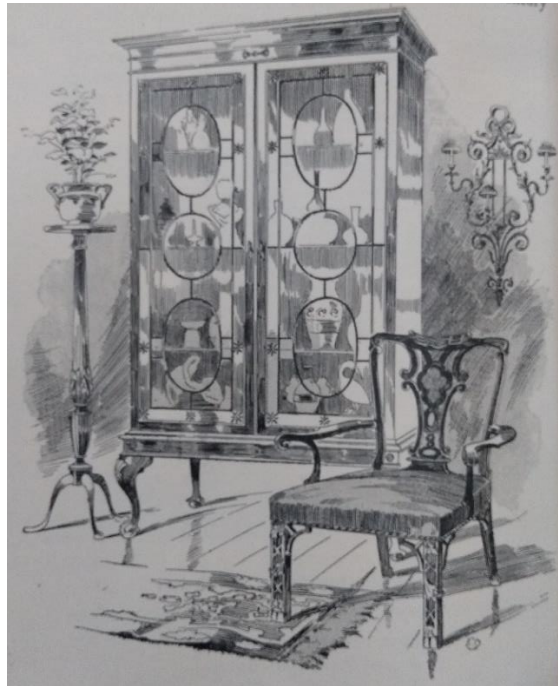


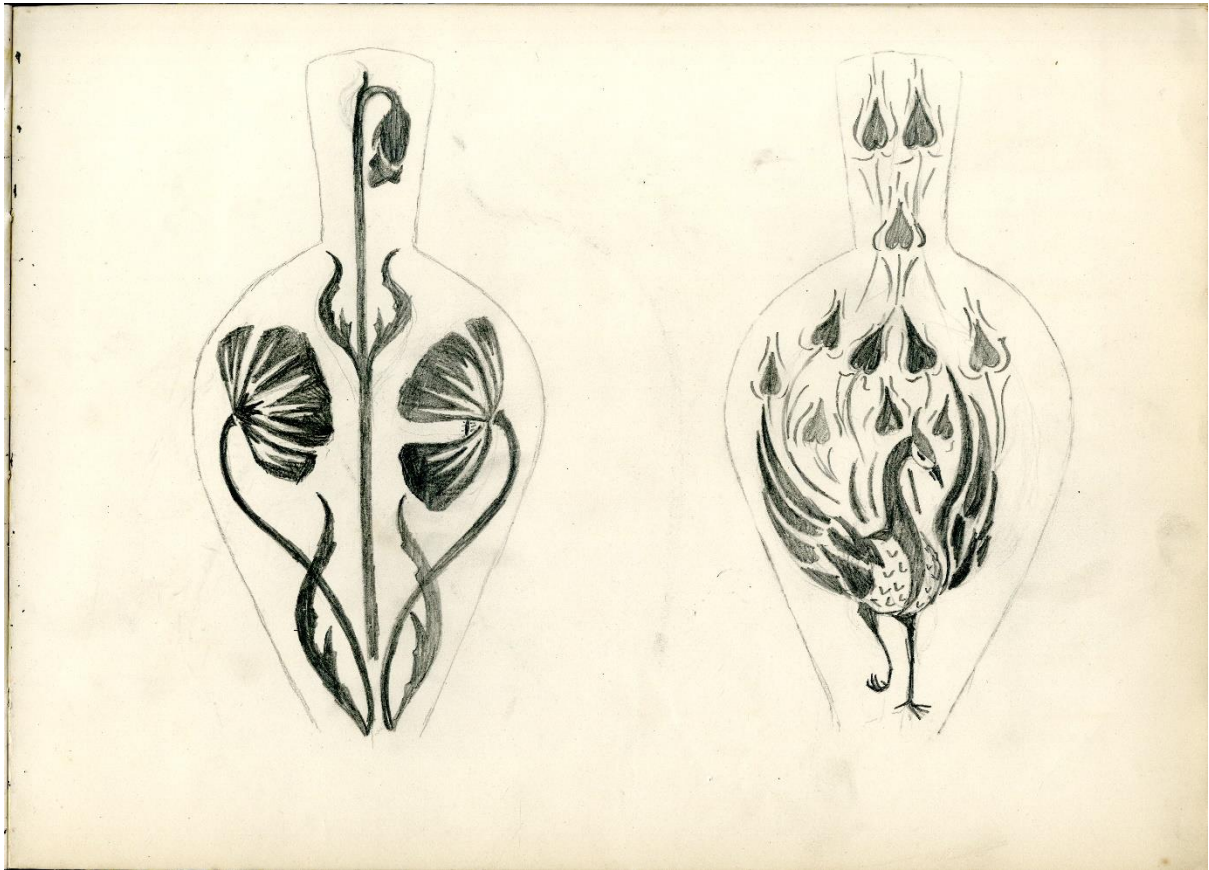
Figure 2.32

Louise Seize reproduction light fitting by Caroline Crommelin, recommended in Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 23 January 1892, 144.



Figure 2.33

A page from Sylvia Pankhurst's sketchbook, showing designs for Emerson & Co, Estelle
Sylvia Pankhurst Collection, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.



3

Promotional Activity

This chapter considers the methods women interior decorators used to promote their businesses. Neither the Garretts, Crommelin nor Robinson paid for advertising space in the print media. Instead, they used a variety of other strategic methods to attract clients, generate publicity and ensure their continued presence in the press. Agnes Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin each gave interviews in *The Women's Penny Paper* which, considered together, provide valuable insight into how they manipulated the press to market their businesses. In addition, the women all used a variety of other methods to promote themselves: they participated in national and international exhibitions, held a range of events in their business premises, and publicly dispensed interior decoration advice through publishing advice manuals and by writing columns for popular periodicals. By doing so, they were able to increase public exposure to their work and assert their status as professionals in a male dominated field. They were also able to differentiate themselves from their competitors by publicising and propagating their own unique decorative styles, and by responding to the emerging female market for interior decoration. As this exercise in branding was vital to their success, this chapter devotes considerable attention to style.

The chapter is indebted to Emma Ferry's research into the Garrett's book, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture*.⁴⁴¹ However, it builds on Ferry's research by considering the book principally in relation to the Garretts' promotional activity. It has also benefited greatly from recent developments in the digitisation of nineteenth century newspapers and journals, which have facilitated a depth of research that allows the breadth and scope of the women's promotional activity to be fully considered for the first time. As the catalogues of the exhibitions at which the women participated were not illustrated and often only give brief details of works shown, reports in newspapers and periodicals have been

⁴⁴¹ Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1876); Emma Ferry, "'Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's 'Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture (1876)'" , *Journal of Design History*, 16:1 (2003): 15–33; Emma Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior: An Interdisciplinary Study Of Macmillan's 'Art at Home Series, 1876–83*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Kingston University, London, 2004.

particularly useful. However, it is important to remember that these are unlikely to be the only types of print media the women used to promote their businesses. We know that their male rivals utilised a variety of other methods, including printed catalogues, handbills and trade cards [Figure 3.1]. Although there are almost no surviving examples of this type of ephemera for the women active in the field (the advertisement for the Garrett cousin's Christmas sale [Figure 3.2] is a rare exception), it is likely that they also used this type of promotional material.

Press

The nineteenth century saw a massive boom in print culture.⁴⁴² New titles included trade journals such as *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher* (from 1880), art and design magazines such as *The Studio* (from 1893) and Britain's first interiors magazine, *The House* (from 1897). By the twentieth century, the press was firmly established as a location for the discussion of interior decoration, art and taste. Also during this period, women began to forge successful careers in journalism, publishing, editing and printing.⁴⁴³ The press became a platform for the campaign for women's rights, primarily in feminist periodicals such as *The Women's Penny Paper*, the *English Woman's Review* and in suffrage periodicals like *Votes for Women*, but also in newly established women's magazines such as *The Queen* (from 1861) and *Hearth and Home* (from 1891). This chapter will explore how women interior decorators used the contemporary press to promote their businesses.

Advertising

In 1898 Crommelin wrote a letter to her friend and client Lord Dufferin, asking him to recommend her for a private commission. In the letter, she noted 'Of course, they may have their own people & arranged everything but as I never advertise, they may never have heard of

⁴⁴² Technological developments in printing, and the advent of the railway, meant that producing and distributing newspapers, periodicals and magazines became cheaper and easier than ever before. Alongside this, rising literacy rates created a new mass market that drastically increased the demand for the printed word. New titles, new genres and new formats were developed to meet the demand and, as a result, in the second half of the nineteenth-century, the press was characterised by an unprecedented richness and heterogeneity. See Joanne Shattock (ed.), *Journalism and the Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5–6.

⁴⁴³ F. Elizabeth Grey (ed.), *Women in Journalism at the Fin de Siècle: Making a Name for Herself* (London: Palgrave, 2012); Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

me'.⁴⁴⁴ This reveals the importance of personal recommendations to Crommelin's business strategy, but also demonstrates that, although she recognised the disadvantages, she consciously chose not to pay for advertising space in the print media. Crommelin was not alone in this. Neither the Garretts nor Robinson ever directly advertised their businesses and, in 1900, decorator Mary Masters claimed that she believed 'very little in advertisement, but altogether in diligently working up a connection'.⁴⁴⁵ While none of the women publicly explained this decision, it is possible that nineteenth-century societal codes of respectability for middle- and upper-class women prohibited such an overt display of commerciality.

In contrast, advertising in the press was a promotional method employed by many of the male professionals active in the industry, and particularly by larger furniture retailers. An 1893 edition of *Hearth and Home* contained adverts for Hewetsons [Figure 3.3] and James Shoolbred & Co. [Figure 3.4], both large furniture retailers based on Tottenham Court Road, and for Newson & Co. [Figure 3.5], a furniture retailer based at Finsbury Square and on Worship Street.⁴⁴⁶ Furniture retailers and art decorators Godfrey Giles & Co. [Figure 3.6] on Old Cavendish Street and William Wallace & Co. [Figure 3.7] also had adverts in the issue.⁴⁴⁷ Department stores, including Liberty & Co. [Figure 3.8], were frequent advertisers, as were furniture retailers Oetzmann & Co. [Figure 3.9] and Maple & Co. [Figure 3.10], who both bought space in a range of publications including the *Illustrated London News*, *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion* and *Le Follet*.⁴⁴⁸

However, while larger artistic retailers did advertise, firms offering a more bespoke service seem to have done so much less frequently. Scanning the contemporary print media reveals that firms at the luxury end of the market (such as the Crace family and Morant & Co.) typically did not buy advertisements. This indicates that the Garretts, Robinson and

⁴⁴⁴ Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 16 December 1898, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office Northern of Ireland, Belfast.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Employment Notes. Women as House Decorators', *Hearth and Home*, 28 June 1900, 26.

⁴⁴⁶ Advertisement for Hewetsons, Shoolbred & Co., and Newson & Co., *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 3, 4 and 27.

⁴⁴⁷ Advertisements for Godfrey Giles & Co. and William Wallace & Co. in *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 28 and 29.

⁴⁴⁸ Advertisement for Liberty & Co., *The Country Gentleman*, 10 April 1897, 66; Advertisement for Oetzmann & Co., *Illustrated London News*, 20 June 1881, 50; Advertisement for Maple & Co., *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion*, 1 July 1877, 51.

Crommelin's decision not to advertise in the press may have been motivated by a desire to position themselves at the higher end of the market for interior decoration. In addition, Morris & Co., who Moncure Conway professed the Garretts modelled their business on, did not advertise. Instead, the firm emphasised the artistic nature of their work and relied on the distribution of brochures and catalogues, or on gaining business from existing social and familial networks.⁴⁴⁹ Artists did not use paid advertisements, neither did architects or, in general, members of any of the other professions.⁴⁵⁰ Perhaps, by following this example the women were asserting the status of interior decoration as an art and/or a profession (rather than a trade) and, by result, ensuring that their feminine respectability was not compromised.

However, from the 1890s onwards, some of the women active in the field did advertise, particularly in periodicals targeting women or dedicated to interior decoration. For example, Emerson & Co., placed 61 advertisements in *The Women's Penny Paper* between 1890 and 1891 [Figure 3.11 and 3.12].⁴⁵¹ Mrs Charles Muller advertised in *Hearth and Home* in 1898 [Figure 3.13], Katherine Cooke in *The House* magazine in 1897 [Figure 3.14]; Mrs Innes advertised in *The House* [Figure 3.15], as well as in *The Morning Post* [Figure 3.16].⁴⁵² The disparity in size between Innes' adverts in *The House* and *The Morning Post*, may reflect a difference in cost between taking an advertisement in the niche press and in a national paper. It is reasonable to assume that the growing number of women interior decorators advertising in print media in the 1890s was a result of greater acceptance of female activity in the commercial world. Of course, by this point the Garretts, Crommelin and Robinson were all well-established in their careers.

Interviews

Paying for advertising was not the only way to gain publicity in the press; giving interviews could also significantly enhance exposure. Agnes Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin all gave interviews to *The Women's Penny Paper* which, considered together, provide valuable insight

⁴⁴⁹ Charles Harvey, Jon Press, Mairi Maclean, 'William Morris, Cultural Leadership and the Dynamics of Taste', *Business History Review* (June 2011), 262–265.

⁴⁵⁰ Laurel Brake and Marysa Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent, Belgium: Academia Press, 2009), 5–7.

⁴⁵¹ See issues of *The Women's Penny Paper*, 4 January 1890 to 27 December 1890.

⁴⁵² Advertisement for Mrs Charles Muller, *Hearth and Home*, 14 December 1899, 41; Advertisement for Katherine Cooke *The House*, 1 April 1897, xx; Advertisement for Mrs Innes, *The House*, 1 May 1898, iv; Advertisement for Mrs Innes, *The Morning Post*, 10 November 1897, 1.

into how they used the press to market their businesses.⁴⁵³ Described as ‘the most vigorous feminist paper of its time’, the paper aimed to further ‘the emancipation of women in every direction and in every land’ and was the first to dedicate a column to profiles of prominent women.⁴⁵⁴ These profiles were illustrated with a head-and-shoulders portrait of the subject [Figure 3.17, 3.18 and 3.19], often took up as much as two of each edition’s eight pages, and were an integral part of the paper.

Promoting themselves within this paper, which had a mostly female readership, may have been a canny business decision. As **Chapter Two** has demonstrated, by the later nineteenth century, control of the decoration of the domestic interior had shifted from male to female. Both Robinson and Crommelin were quick to manipulate this in their interviews. Robinson commented that some ‘ladies have no imagination whatever; when they see a finished room they know it pleases them, but they are quite unable without artistic guidance ... to make a perfect whole’.⁴⁵⁵ Crommelin noted ‘it is not infrequently the case that ladies have good ideas as to the decoration of their homes, but lack the capacity to carry them out’.⁴⁵⁶ These references are clearly intended as a form of advertisement, encouraging these unimaginative ‘ladies’ to hire a decorator.

The paper used the column to promote middle-class women’s engagement in paid work. For example, Garrett’s profile argued ‘What one woman has done others can, and the success of the Misses Garrett should act as encouragement to the hundreds of women now seeking employment’.⁴⁵⁷ The publication’s views on the issue agreed with the decorators own. Robinson enthused ‘my work affords me an immense amount of satisfaction’ and Crommelin

⁴⁵³ Founded by women’s rights activist Henrietta Müller (1845/6–1906), this ran as *The Women’s Penny Paper* from 27 October 1888 to 27 December 1890, after which it was renamed *The Woman’s Herald*. The paper continued under this title from 3 January 1891 until 4 January 1894, when it was incorporated with *The Woman’s Signal*. Figures for paper’s distribution and reach do not survive, but as the interviews were such an integral part the paper they may have had a significant impact on the women’s businesses.

⁴⁵⁴ ‘Our Policy’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 27 October 1888, 1; David Doughan and Denise Sanchez (eds.), *Feminist Periodicals: Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1987), 15; F. Elizabeth Grey, ‘Promoting Women: Profiles and Feminism in *The Women’s Penny Paper/The Woman’s Herald*’ in Sue Joseph and Richard Keeble (eds.) *Profile Pieces: Journalism and the Human Interest Bias* (London: Routledge, 2015): 151–163.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.

⁴⁵⁶ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 2.

‘I believe everybody is happier for working’.⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, Garrett claimed ‘every girl should, like her brothers, be brought up to some profession or business, she will be better in every respect with a definite occupation which will prevent the empty life so many now lead’.⁴⁵⁹ Publicly promoting female engagement in the professional world was not, for Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin, done without self-interest. By stating their commitment to this cause, and allying their professional activity to a philanthropic motive, they justified their own engagement in the public sphere. In turn, the paper’s attempts to assert the respectability of professional women would have a positive effect on the women’s own public image.

For example, the paper took pains to emphasise that, despite their professional status, the women retained their femininity. Although Robinson is ‘one of the youngest and most talented of the pioneers of light and leading’ she also has a ‘sweet womanliness of nature’; while Garrett has ‘business-like habits and business-like determination’, she is also ‘a sympathetic woman in every sense of the word’.⁴⁶⁰ The paper was also quick to assert that interior decoration itself was a fitting profession for women. For example, the interviews carefully emphasise that the women did not undertake any manual work themselves. The designs Garrett draws are not realized by Garrett herself, but given to ‘the men to work from’ and, although Crommelin undertakes the decoration of entire houses, ‘when painters and paperers are called in she engages them from some reliable firm’ rather than labouring herself.⁴⁶¹ Of course, this separation cannot entirely be taken at face value: in other sources, Garrett is described as involved with the distinctly unfeminine work of drain maintenance.⁴⁶²

The Women’s Penny Paper also asserted the respectability of interior decoration by emphasising its connection to philanthropy, positioning it as an area in which women could act outside the home without censure. The charitable, philanthropic and transformative aspect of the profession is something emphasised by the interviews. Robinson describes her work as her

⁴⁵⁸ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1; ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 2.

⁴⁶⁰ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1; ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁶¹ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 2; ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁶² Hubert Parry, Diary for 1877, entry on 18 October 1877, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

‘mission’ and is described as someone ‘whose genius it is to transform into harmony and beauty whatever is harsh or discordant’.⁴⁶³ The paper called Garrett’s work her ‘vocation’ and quoted her claim that ‘I try to make all my rooms restful to the eye’.⁴⁶⁴ In addition, Crommelin and Garrett are both described as engaged in more overtly philanthropic work. Garrett’s connection to Ladies Dwellings Company, founded to provide homes for single professional London women [see **Chapter Four**], is mentioned, as is Crommelin’s aim of ‘giving of employment to ladies and gentlemen in reduced circumstances’.⁴⁶⁵ We could explain this emphasis by reference to the paper’s feminist aim of transforming the lives of women (many of the other women the paper interviewed were also involved in philanthropy), but it would also have served to increase public goodwill towards the women’s work.

Chapter Two has considered how, by receiving the journalist from *The Women’s Penny Paper* at 2 Gower Street, Garrett ensured that a description of the interior was available to the public, extending her home’s value as a showroom. It also noted the paper’s attempt to veil the address’s function as a place of business by emphasising its domestic function and, in addition, the interview places substantial emphasis on Garrett’s own domesticity throughout. It is full of signifiers of feminine homeliness, such as ‘good old fashioned servants’, ‘a handsome Dandie Dinmont’, ‘restful quiet and homely comfort’, ‘a cosy chat by the fire’ and ‘a cheering cup of five o’ clock tea’.⁴⁶⁶ These exaggerated references are intended to demonstrate that, despite her precarious societal status as businesswomen, political activist and supporter of the women’s movement, Garrett was not transgressing societal codes for middle-class women. They also position her as an accomplished home-maker, qualified to intervene in the homes of others. They may, however, have contributed to her absence from the scholarship on the history of interior design, by leading scholars to dismiss her contribution and underplay the considerable scope of her businesses.

⁴⁶³ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1; ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1–2; ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 1; ‘Mrs Pankhurst’, *The Woman’s Herald*, 1.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 2.

In contrast, Robinson and Crommelin both chose to be interviewed in their London shops.⁴⁶⁷ Considering that the low cost of the paper positioned its readership as middle- and lower-class women, presumably unable to afford the services of a house decorator, this was a shrewd business decision. The profiles would promote their shops existence and whereabouts to readers, as well as providing a glimpse of their stock. Robinson's interviewer commented on the 'lovely shop' at 20 Brook Street, where they 'noticed on entering the exquisite friezes, painted in Miss Robinson's *atelier*, and the cream coloured music racks, dainty *billet-doux* tables, *Louise Seize* screens, etc. which provide an artistic public with useful as well as beautiful wedding and birthday gifts'.⁴⁶⁸ Crommelin's interviewer described her shop, at 12 Buckingham Palace Road, as somewhere that 'lovers of the antique are able to "pick up" beautiful articles at moderate prices' and noted that 'two articles that one does not often see in old oak caught my eye ... these were a couple of cradles ... Miss Crommelin proposes to adapt them as flower stands for halls ... Chippendale and Sheraton are equally well-represented, the latter by some beautiful cabinets, cunningly placed in corners, while of Chippendale there are some chairs of exquisite design and a fairy-like tea table'.⁴⁶⁹

Chapter One has suggested that the changing status of interior decoration in the hierarchy of art was a factor that enabled women to practice professionally in the field. The interviews with Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin in *The Women's Penny Paper* all positioned their occupation as an 'art', with the terms 'art' and 'artistic' frequently mentioned throughout. In addition, Robinson was credited with a 'perfect genius' for decoration and Crommelin with 'strong natural taste'.⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, Garrett was said to be possessed with 'much artistic taste' and Emmeline Pankhurst, who featured in a slightly later profile in the same publication, was dubbed an 'authority on decoration'.⁴⁷¹ Crucially, the paper's profile column was reflective of the growing public interest in celebrity culture and participated in the flourishing late nineteenth-century craze for interviews with artistic personalities. This included series such as

⁴⁶⁷ Though as Robinson was living in Manchester and the paper was London-based, this may also have been a decision based on logistics.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1; 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1

⁴⁷¹ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 2; 'Mrs Pankhurst', *The Woman's Herald*, 1.

‘Illustrated Interviews’ in *Strand Magazine* and the ‘Celebrities at Home’ series in *The World*.
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The subjects of these character sketches were, typically, celebrated authors, actors and artists. *The World* featured Frederic Leighton, as well as authors Victor Hugo (1802–1885), Mark Twain (1835–1910) and Wilkie Collins (1824–1889), composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883) and statesman Spencer Cavendish (1833–1908), 8th Duke of Devonshire.⁴⁷³ *The Strand* also featured Frederic Leighton, as well as artists Harry Furniss (1854–1925) and Henry Stacy Marks (1829–1898), author Rider Haggard (1856–1929) and actor Henry Irving (1828–1905).⁴⁷⁴ Women were rarely featured and, although interviews with prominent artists were common, architects and other professionals involved in the field of interior decoration (such as cabinet makers, upholsterers, furniture retailers and the owners of department stores) were not. William Morris was the exception, giving so many of these interviews that, in 2005, the William Morris Society gathered them together to form an edited book.⁴⁷⁵

By featuring Agnes Garrett, Robinson and Crommelin in their column, *The Women’s Penny Paper* was, arguably, contributing to raising the artistic status of interior decoration. Strikingly, only a year after her interview in *The Women’s Penny Paper*, *The World* interviewed Robinson, cementing her importance as a cultural figure.⁴⁷⁶ By including Robinson in the series, the paper was imbuing her (and, by extension, interior decoration in general) with a significance equivalent to that of the many other celebrated male artists whom they interviewed. **Chapter Two** has examined the interview in relation to the appearance of Robinson’s home and has noted that, by choosing her home as the interview site, she ensured a description of her work was made available to the public.

However, in addition, the article is filled with enthusiasm for Robinson’s work. For example, it claimed that ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson thoroughly deserves the Royal recognition

⁴⁷² Brake and Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, 308.

⁴⁷³ A selection of these were reprinted in Edmund Yates, *Celebrities at Home, Reprinted from The World* (London: Office of The World, 1879).

⁴⁷⁴ A selection of these were reprinted in Harry How, *Illustrated Interviews* (London: George Newnes, 1893).

⁴⁷⁵ Tony Pinkney (ed.), *We Met Morris: interviews with William Morris, 1885-96* (Reading: Spire Books in association with the William Morris Society, 2005).

⁴⁷⁶ Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, *The World*, 14 May 1890, 815–816.

she received as the reward of special talent’ and that ‘her Majesty’s “Home Art Decorator” at least possesses the true secret of decorative art as applied to nineteenth-century homes, and can produce charming effects even while exercising, as she expresses it, “a vigorous self-restraint in limiting her ideals to the available bank balance”’.⁴⁷⁷ Considering the wide readership of the publication, praise such as this cannot have failed to significantly increase the decorator’s business.⁴⁷⁸ However, it is worth noting that Robinson’s home is, like Garrett’s in *The Women’s Penny Paper*, described by *The World* as filled with the cosy and domestic, including ‘a bright intelligent maid, in the snowiest of caps and aprons’, ‘an ever watchful dachshund’ and a ‘glowing fire’.⁴⁷⁹ Details of this type were not typical in interviews with men: clearly, the paper was keen to demonstrate that Robinson’s artistic talent did not negate her feminine respectability.

Exhibitions

Directly engaging with the press was not the only way to gain publicity. The success of the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (held in a specially built ‘Crystal Palace’ in Hyde Park and attended by roughly six million people), prompted a boom in exhibition culture in Europe and, as a result, exhibitions, expositions and trade fairs dominated the cultural scene in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸⁰ These provided a platform for the display of manufactured goods demonstrating artistic, technical or scientific innovation. For the public, they were an educative and entertaining day out; for the manufacturers, they were a valuable exercise in marketing. Participating in exhibitions could encourage awareness of the exhibitors’ work and brand with the event’s visitors, as well as generating publicity through the event’s press coverage. Paul Greenhalgh has demonstrated that, for female entrepreneurs, exhibitions were particularly useful as, because of their claims to encyclopaedic coverage of culture, ‘they could not easily exclude women in the way other institutions

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Brake and Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, 690.

⁴⁷⁹ Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, 815–816.

⁴⁸⁰ Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling: How the Great Exhibition of 1851 Shaped a Nation*, (London: Headline Books, 2001); Anthony Edwards, *The Role of International Exhibitions in Britain, 1850–1910: Perceptions of Economic Decline and the Technical Education Issue* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008).

continually did'.⁴⁸¹ Notably, press sources on women interior decorators frequently credit exhibitions with cementing their success. Unfortunately, reconstructing these exhibits is challenging, as catalogues contained only scant details [**Figure 3.20**] and press reports were rarely illustrated.

Exhibitions abroad

Exhibitions required considerable financial outlay and often only larger firms, or those at the higher end of the market, could afford to participate. Although they could generate lucrative overseas orders and significantly enhance the status of a firm, this was particularly true of exhibitions abroad, such as the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, at which furniture retailers Shoolbred & Co. and Collinson and Lock both exhibited.⁴⁸² Perhaps because of the costs involved, neither Robinson nor Crommelin were to participate in international exhibitions during their careers. However, in 1878, only two years after launching their business, the Garretts exhibited in the British Section of the Exposition Universelle in Paris. This would have been an expensive undertaking and it is perhaps not a coincidence that Richard Garrett & Sons (the firm of agricultural engineers run by Agnes Garrett's uncle) also showed at the exhibition.⁴⁸³ It may be that the Garretts were able to ease the financial burden of participating in the exhibition by, for example, sharing shipping costs with the larger firm.

The exhibition, which was intended to demonstrate that France had recovered from the Franco-Prussian war, ran from 7 May to 10 November and had sixteen million visitors.⁴⁸⁴ There were more than one thousand five hundred exhibitors in the British section of the exhibition, including 244 from the furniture trade.⁴⁸⁵ There was no dedicated women's section and the Garretts were the only women in their category, 'Furniture and Accessories, Class 17 – all kinds of furniture, cheap and costly', which also included work by established firms such as Gillow & Co., Jackson & Graham, William Smee & Son, William Watt and Shoolbred & Co.,

⁴⁸¹ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 174.

⁴⁸² Joanna Banham, Sally Macdonald and Julia Porter, *Victorian Interior Design* (London: Cassel, 1991), 20–22. *Official Catalogue of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition* (Philadelphia: J.R. Nagle and Co., 1876), 150.

⁴⁸³ Royal Commission for the Paris Exposition, *Official Catalogue of the British Section of the Paris Universal Exposition* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1878), 29.

⁴⁸⁴ Edwards, *The Role of International Exhibitions in Britain*, 86–95.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

as well as a variety of less well-known names.⁴⁸⁶ By exhibiting at such a high profile international exhibition, directly alongside the main contenders in the British furniture trade, the Garretts were making a bold statement about their position in the field.

Not all commentators, however, admired their contribution. A review of the Garretts' exhibit, by decorative artist and industrial designer Lewis Foreman Day (1845–1910), which appeared in architectural trade journal the *British Architect* was strikingly critical. Day wrote:

The Misses Garrett exemplify, in the ample space allotted to them, how little is enough to satisfy the ambitions of lady-decorators. The bedroom which they have fitted up is on the whole inoffensive. The chairs, indeed and the sofa, are clumsy and tasteless, and it is difficult to imagine on what grounds such a candlestick should be thought worthy of its prominent position; but the mantelpiece is plain and good – the little waste paper basket (copied from an old 'Chippendale' example) is very light and pretty, and there are several other little reproductions, such as a fire screen, &c., that were perhaps worth copying. The utmost that can be said of the decoration is, that it has the merit of looking fresh and clean. The general air of the whole is that of an ordinary bedroom of two or three generations ago – commonplace enough, but with a commonplaceness that is not quite of to-day. There is no trace of art in it and no particular evidence of taste. Everything is plain and unpretending, so plain and unpretending that one wonders at its temerity in venturing so far from home. Seriously, as a room it is passable – as an exhibition it is rather ridiculous.⁴⁸⁷

Emma Ferry uses Day's vitriolic review to highlight the level of resistance the Garretts faced from the artistic establishment.⁴⁸⁸ However, it is worth noting that Day was equally critical of the male entries to the exhibition. He claimed that Shoolbred & Co. showed a tapestry with a 'hot and heavy appearance' and a settee that was 'not exactly beautiful in form', and that

⁴⁸⁶ The Garretts were not, however, the only women in the Third Group: artist and goldsmith Charlotte Newman (1836–1920) exhibited 'Two Decorative Panels of Furniture' in 'Class Eighteen – upholsterers and decorators work', and jewellery case manufacturer Margaret Dixie showed her work in 'Class Twenty-Nine – leather work, fancy articles and basket work'. Royal Commission for the Paris Exposition, *Official Catalogue of the British Section of the Paris Universal Exposition*, 73–78, 80, 104.

⁴⁸⁷ Lewis Foreman Day, 'Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris' in *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 19 July 1878, 29. Although Day denigrated the Garretts' exhibit for its plainness, in a later article he criticised amateur women decorators for over-indulging in 'fuss, flimsiness, and fashion'. Lewis Foreman Day, 'The Woman's Part in Domestic Decoration', *The Magazine of Art* (1881), 458.

⁴⁸⁸ Emma Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior: An Inter-Disciplinary Study of Macmillan's "Art at Home series" 1876–83* (PhD. Diss. Kingston University), 99–100.

Cappell and Brimstead exhibited a ‘not very good’ wallpaper and a cabinet that Day described as both a ‘nightmare’ and a ‘joke’.⁴⁸⁹

Judith Neiswander theorises that Day believed his mission to elevate the status of design in the hierarchy of arts would have been undermined by professional equality with women.⁴⁹⁰ This is plausible and, supporting her hypothesis, two previously unstudied reviews of the Garretts’ entry in a trade report of the exhibition were similarly critical. Cabinet maker Thomas Paterson (1835–1882), reported that while ‘the general effect’ of their exhibit was ‘extremely attractive’, it had ‘the defect of want of adaptation to the present time’.⁴⁹¹ Cabinet maker Henry R. Paul was more damning, noting that ‘Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett exhibit a room of rosewood and black furniture, that furnishes a specimen of the poor stuff our grandmothers delighted in. Certainly, the most peevish of old ladies could not find fault with the ease with which the things work. The table tops that are made to turn over to form a writing shelf, have their joints about half an inch apart’.⁴⁹² Day, Paterson and Paul’s criticism reflects art critic John Ruskin’s declaration that a woman’s ‘intellect is not for invention or creation’.⁴⁹³ While the cousins could produce passable copies of antique furniture, they failed to update them sufficiently for modern taste.

What, then, did the exhibit consist of? We know the Garretts styled their display as a bedroom, a room traditionally associated with femininity and the private sphere.⁴⁹⁴ By choosing to exhibit a feminine-type room, the Garretts may have been attempting to appease critics who disapproved of their presence in the masculine public/commercial sphere. Day noted that their bedroom display contained chairs, a sofa, a candlestick, mantelpiece, waste-paper basket and fire screen.⁴⁹⁵ Further to this, Paul mentions a table and notes that the furniture

⁴⁸⁹ Day, ‘Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris’, 28–29.

⁴⁹⁰ Judith Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870–1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 102.

⁴⁹¹ Thomas Paterson, ‘Report on Furniture’ in *The Society of Arts Artisan Reports on the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington), 394.

⁴⁹² Henry R. Paul, ‘A Report on Cabinet Work’ in *The Society of Arts Artisan Reports on the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington), 421.

⁴⁹³ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865), 147.

⁴⁹⁴ Juliet Kinchin, ‘Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the ‘Masculine’ and the ‘Feminine’ Room’ in Pat Kirkham (ed.), *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 12–29.

⁴⁹⁵ Day, ‘Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris’, 29.

was ‘rosewood and black’, and all sources comment on the exhibit’s antique-revival style.⁴⁹⁶ While it has proved impossible to identify the exact items of furniture exhibited, a dressing table [Figure 3.21], wardrobe [Figure 3.22] and cabinet [Figure 3.23] at Standen, attributed by the National Trust to the Garretts, provide an example of a similar set of Regency-style bedroom furniture. Although in satinwood rather than rosewood, like those exhibited in Paris they have darker wood banding (in this case kingwood or mahogany), elegant tapered legs and are notable for their simplicity.

Other commentators admired the Garretts’ antique-style furniture. A regional newspaper commented that ‘The French have not yet adopted the revival of old furniture and decoration in their houses to any extent ... But I hear that a room full of this modern imitation of old furniture, with straight back and spindle legs, which was exhibited by the Misses Garrett, well-known as house decorators and furnishers of the artistic school in London, was sold for a high price, far beyond its real value, to a French gentleman who was taken with its novelty’.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, *The Women’s Penny Paper* noted that ‘The quiet harmony and genuine English look of comfort were particularly admired by foreigners’.⁴⁹⁸ These statements suggest that the Garretts’ decision to exhibit was not a failure and, supporting this, their contribution was awarded an honourable mention by the exhibition’s International Jury and received the compliments of the Princess of Wales.⁴⁹⁹ This must have gone some way to counteract the effect of the more negative reviews and must have had a positive effect on the cousins’ business. As Elizabeth Crawford notes, various contemporary sources, including the *Athenaeum* and the *Englishwoman’s Review*, credit the Garretts’ Paris exhibit as responsible for launching their career.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Day, ‘Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris’, 29; Paterson, ‘Report on Furniture’, 394; Paul, ‘A Report on Cabinet Work’, 421.

⁴⁹⁷ Penelope, ‘The Ladies Column’, *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 2 November 1878, 10.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 145.

⁴⁹⁹ *Report of her Majesty’s Commissioners for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878 to the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1880), 433; ‘The Paris Exhibition’, *Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*, 22 October 1878, 5; ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*; 145; Royal Commission for the Paris Exposition, *Official Catalogue of the British Section of the Paris Universal Exposition*, 73.

⁵⁰⁰ Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002), 183.

Exhibitions at home

Perhaps because of the criticism they attracted in Paris, the Garrett firm waited seven years before participating in another exhibition. In 1885, one year after the death of her cousin Rhoda, Agnes Garrett exhibited at the Bristol Exhibition of Women's Industries, held from 26 February to 28 April 1885 in the Clifton suburb of Bristol.⁵⁰¹ Organised by women's rights campaigner Helen Blackburn (1842–1903), the exhibition was the first of its kind in Britain, displaying 'the production of women following some line of work as a serious pursuit, amateur work cannot be accepted'.⁵⁰² It received 18,000 visitors and would have been a good opportunity for Garrett to display her work to an audience interested in supporting woman-run businesses.⁵⁰³ The proceeds went to the National Society for the Promotion of the Franchise of Women, demonstrating a connection between Garrett's professional career and her commitment to the campaign for women's franchise.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, *The Englishwoman's Review* described her motivation for exhibiting as 'to show how women are now employed as house decorators'.⁵⁰⁵ Reverend Alan Greenwell, chairman of the exhibition's committee, agreed, commenting that her contribution 'had been the means of interesting others in an occupation which might be remunerative'.⁵⁰⁶ Garrett's participation in this exhibition, nine years after the launch of her firm, reveals that a desire to expand professional opportunities for women continued to bolster her throughout her professional life.

There are, unfortunately, no surviving photographs of the exhibition. However, while it gained only a small amount of press nationally, a local Bristol newspaper provided a description of Garrett's contribution, which consisted of 'a ladies' model boudoir – gold and orange and tinges of yellow predominating'.⁵⁰⁷ It was papered with a 'narcissus wallpaper'

⁵⁰¹ A woman, but not an exhibitor, 'A Novelty in Exhibitions', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 February 1885, 4.

⁵⁰² Emma Ferry, 'A novelty among exhibitions': The Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries, Bristol, 1885', in Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (eds.), *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870–1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited), 51; *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Women's Industries, Bristol* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1885), 5.

⁵⁰³ Ferry, 'A novelty among exhibitions': The Loan Exhibition of Women's Industries, Bristol, 1885', 51–66.

⁵⁰⁴ 'Exhibition of Women's Industries Opening Conversation', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 27 February 1885, 3.

⁵⁰⁵ 'Art I. – Women's Industries Exhibition', *Englishwoman's Review*, 14 March 1885, 5.

⁵⁰⁶ 'Closing Soiree at the Women's Exhibition', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 29 April 1885, 8.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Exhibition of Women's Industries', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 26 February 1885, 3.

which ‘has commanded the unqualified admiration of connoisseurs, both for the elegance of the drawing and the tone and harmony of the colours. It is a paper that can hardly fail to be adopted by many who have been searching for a pleasing one’.⁵⁰⁸ The paper was careful to note that ‘the contents of the room, excepting, of course, the carpentering, are shown as women’s work’.⁵⁰⁹ These glowing reviews of Garrett’s work would have served to extend the promotional reach of the exhibition.

The following year, in 1886, Agnes Garrett exhibited at a second internationally-focused exhibition, the Edinburgh International Exhibition. Unlike in Paris, this time her work was not included in the Furniture and Decoration section, alongside her male competitors, but in the Women’s Industries Section, ‘devised to further the employment of women’.⁵¹⁰ Women’s sections were common at international exhibitions, having first appeared in Vienna in 1873, but it is not known whether Garrett chose, or was assigned, this section.⁵¹¹ Her inclusion within it could be read in two ways. It could demonstrate the extent of opposition she faced from the (male) artistic establishment. Perhaps, despite maintaining a successful career for a decade, the criticism she attracted in Paris meant she was cautious about exhibiting her work directly against that of her male competitors. Alternatively, it could again demonstrate her dedication to promoting the cause of work for women (whilst simultaneously promoting her own business to visitors interested in supporting women-run businesses). However, one reviewer noted that the section ‘impresses one with a sense both of the number of the industries in which women excel, and the variety of their tasks and powers’.⁵¹²

Although she did not exhibit abroad, Robinson regularly participated in British exhibitions. Her connection to journalist Emily Faithfull meant she was easily able to publicise her exhibition success in the press. In 1887 Faithfull wrote that ‘Miss Robinson has had in addition to her ordinary business two exhibits, which have attracted universal admiration, one

⁵⁰⁸ ‘Exhibition of Women’s Industries’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 22 April 1885, 6.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Exhibition of Women’s Industries’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 26 February 1885, 3.

⁵¹⁰ ‘The Edinburgh International Exhibition’, *The Times*, 7 May 1886, 5. As surviving copies of the exhibition catalogue are extremely rare, it has not been possible to find out which male-run firms exhibited in the ‘Furniture and Decoration’ section.

⁵¹¹ Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers ‘Introduction: Positioning Women at World’s Fairs, 1876–1937’ in Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers (eds.) *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876–1937* (London: Routledge, 2018): 1–24.

⁵¹² ‘The Edinburgh International Exhibition’, *The Times* 13 July 1886, 12.

at Saltaire and the other at the famous Manchester Exhibition; next year she proposes to exhibit at Glasgow and possibly at Brussels'.⁵¹³ Robinson's decision to concentrate on the northern market demonstrates her considerable business acumen as, prior to the 1888 opening of her London shop, she must have wanted to concentrate on this region. The first exhibition at which she displayed her work was the Royal Yorkshire Jubilee exhibition, held in her home town of Manchester in 1887 and opened by Princess Alexandra, and which aimed to 'illustrate, as fully as possible, the progress made in the development of Arts and Manufactures during the Victorian era'.⁵¹⁴

As at the Edinburgh International Exhibition, there was no dedicated women's section and, out of three hundred and forty-five displays in the Industrial Design section, only five were by woman-run businesses.⁵¹⁵ Many of the displays in the section were by local cabinet-makers and designers, but it also included work by prominent London-based firms William Woollams & Co., Jeffrey & Co., Morris & Co., and the Century Guild.⁵¹⁶ An image of the Industrial Design section of the exhibition [Figure 3.24] showing the numerous exhibitors along the East Nave to the music room (Charlotte Robinson's display was in one of the smaller bays), demonstrates the importance of ensuring a display stood out.⁵¹⁷ Crucially, by displaying her work alongside that of her male competitors, like the Garretts at Paris, Robinson was making a strong statement about how she saw her position in the marketplace. The catalogue [Figure 3.20] listed her display as 'Charlotte Robinson, of 64 King-street, Manchester. Frieze. Corner Sideboard. Overmantel. Draught Screen. Fire Screens. Tuckaway tables. Newspaper and Music Stands. Photograph Frames etc.'. ⁵¹⁸

⁵¹³ Emily Faithfull, 'Ladies as Shopkeepers', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 December 1887, 12. As there is no evidence to support Faithfull's claim about Brussels, this reference may have been an attempt to raise Robinson's professional status by associating her with an international exhibition.

⁵¹⁴ *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford* (Manchester: J. Heywood, 1887), 20.

⁵¹⁵ The other female exhibitors were Mesdames Scown & Newling (nursery furniture and wicker), Anne Cowburn (carriages), the Kensington School of Art Needlework and the Leek Embroidery School. *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford* (Manchester: J. Heywood, 1887), 47, 53, 69, 88.

⁵¹⁶ *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford*, 49, 74, 78, 79.

⁵¹⁷ Walter Tomlinson, *Pictorial Report of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish: 1888), 65–66

⁵¹⁸ *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford*, 81.

As with the Garretts' bedroom scheme at Paris, the designs Robinson displayed were decidedly feminine in nature.⁵¹⁹ Many of the male exhibitors showed library shelves, dining tables or the accoutrements of the smoking room. For example, Kendall, Milne & Co. showed a 'gentleman's house completely decorated and furnished', Joseph Hunter & Co. a selection of 'library, study and office furniture' and W. and J. S. Collinge a 'Pollard Oak dining room'.⁵²⁰ In contrast, Robinson's exhibits are delicate, floral and heavily decorated. A description of her exhibit noted:

Miss Robinson's little show was very quiet and unobtrusive, and so delicately feminine in character as to stand no small chance of being overlooked in the company of its louder-voiced brethren all around. It was supposed to represent a portion of a room, the walls of which had a light frieze of roses, and birds, and palms, running round the upper part, the lower portions being hung with blue brocade. Indian matting and little squares of carpet were upon the floor; and round about were arranged various articles of furniture, small paintings, screens, vases, and so on. The furniture was exquisitely simple and elegant in design and colouring; the quaint little "tuck-away" tables, the dainty corner cupboards, overmantels, and other things, were certainly not intended for the rough and clumsy use of individuals of the male persuasion.⁵²¹

While this feminised approach could have been an attempt to ameliorate critics of female engagement in the world of commerce, it was also symptomatic of how, by pointedly targeting the newly-developed female market for interior design, Robinson could distinguish herself from her male competitors.

The exhibit gained considerable press attention. The *Leeds Mercury* claimed her stand would 'undoubtedly excite admiration. Here are beautiful painted screens, brackets, plaques, a corner cabinet richly ornamented with painted flowers, and an excellently painted frieze'.⁵²² It later reported that Robinson had won a second-class prize for 'artistic design and high quality of painting on glass'.⁵²³ Articles like these could not have failed to have a significant positive effect on her local trade. However, Robinson's contribution to the exhibition also gained coverage in national publications. Popular women's magazine *Myra's Journal* enthused that

⁵¹⁹ Kinchin, 'Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' Room', 12–29.

⁵²⁰ *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford*, 81–84.

⁵²¹ Tomlinson, *Pictorial Report of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester*, 65–66.

⁵²² 'Saltaire Exhibition', *The Leeds Mercury*, 3 June 1887, 8.

⁵²³ 'The Royal Yorkshire Jubilee Exhibition Saltaire', *The Leeds Mercury*, 12 November 1887, 7.

‘the painted friezes she exhibited at the Manchester Jubilee exhibition were so beautifully executed that the best judges thought they came from France, and not from an English studio’.⁵²⁴ Reports such as these would have significantly expanded the reach of the exhibition’s impact. They may also have been the reason that, as with the Garretts in Paris, the press credited the Manchester exhibition with launching Robinson’s career.

The *Pioneer of Fashion*’s profile of Robinson commented that with the exhibition came ‘Charlotte Robinson’s chance. Her stand of furniture and fittings, many of novel form, from her own graceful designs, proved one of the most attractive in the building and drew the attention of royalty, with the result that the appointment of ‘Decorator to the Queen’ was conferred upon her’.⁵²⁵ This sentiment was echoed by the exhibition’s pictorial guide: ‘since the close of the Exhibition, an announcement on the public prints which gives evidence of the Queen’s acquaintance with and appreciation of this lady’s work inasmuch that she has been appointed Home Art Decorator to Her Majesty’.⁵²⁶ This appointment, the first Royal Warrant of this kind ever given, was a significant distinction.⁵²⁷ It allowed Robinson to advertise the fact she had royal patronage and placed her in the same level as, for example, cabinet makers Holland & Sons, who had been granted a Royal Warrant early in Queen Victoria’s reign and had supplied furniture to Balmoral, Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.⁵²⁸ It gained Robinson considerable coverage in both the national press and had a significant impact on her business as, the following year, she opened her London premises.

In 1888, ten years after her participation in the Paris exhibition, Agnes Garrett again showed her work directly alongside that of her male competitors, when she contributed a selection of furniture and decorative items to the first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Established by members of the Art Workers’ Guild, including illustrator and designer Walter Crane (1845–1915) and metalworker W.A.S. Benson (1854–1924), the Society aimed to give recognition to the designers and makers of decorative art and handicrafts,

⁵²⁴ ‘The Ladies’ Gallery’, *Myra’s Journal*, 1 April 1889, 186; Brake and Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, 436.

⁵²⁵ ‘Business Women of Today: No. 1 Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *Pioneer of Fashion*, 1 March 1893, 50.

⁵²⁶ Tomlinson, *Pictorial Report of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition Manchester*, 65–66.

⁵²⁷ Unfortunately, there is no information in the Royal Archives pertaining to this appointment. Email correspondence with Julie Crocker, Archivist (Access) Royal Archives, 27/05/2016.

⁵²⁸ Banham, Joanna (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Interior Design* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 575.

and to provide their work with a display platform equivalent to traditional exhibitions of pictorial art.⁵²⁹ The first exhibition, held in London, at the New Gallery at 121 Regent Street, reflected contemporary concerns about the status of decorative art within the traditional artistic hierarchy. This concern was particularly relevant to the emergence of the professional interior decorator. By participating in this exhibition, Garrett made a statement about how she saw her work. It was artistic and, crucially, worthy of display directly against that of her male rivals (on display in the same room was work by the Century Guild, W. A. S. Benson, John Aldam Heaton, Walter Crane and Minton & Co.).⁵³⁰

The exhibition catalogue listed Garrett's contribution as including wood panelling, a cupboard, panel paper, a carpet, 'a long chair, tea table, fire-side chair, and flower stand' and a pendant and candle sconce.⁵³¹ Garrett was not the only woman to participate in the exhibition, or even to display her work in the entrance hall.⁵³² She was, however, particularly singled out for censure in a scathing review by the trade journal *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher*.⁵³³ The reviewer particularly vilified Garrett's contribution and illustrated her 'strange couch which on page 143 shows its weird angularity [**Figure 3.25**].'⁵³⁴ In contrast, a couch designed by Morris & Co., illustrated on the same page is described as 'a cosy thing'.⁵³⁵ As with Lewis Foreman Day's review of her Paris exhibit, this review reminds us that, for any exhibitor (but particularly for a woman) contributing to an exhibition was a risk. Garrett later asserted in *The Women's Penny Paper* that her failure to contribute to any further exhibitions was because the expense of 'sending and arranging these exhibits is so great that the undertaking hardly repays

⁵²⁹ Imogen Hart, *Arts and Crafts Objects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 148–180.

⁵³⁰ Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society, *Catalogue of the First Exhibition* (London: Chiswick Press, 1888), 143–166.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 148–9.

⁵³² The entrance hall, for example, also contained work by Aimee Carpenter, Miss Parker, Mary Sargant, Mary Gemmel, Miss Burden, the Miss Burden and Charlotte H. Spiers. *Ibid.*, 143–166.

⁵³³ 'Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Exhibition', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furniture*, 1 December 1888, 143–144.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

the pecuniary outlay'. However, it is notable that while the article refers to the Garretts' success at both the Paris and Bristol exhibitions, this final exhibition is not mentioned.⁵³⁶

In contrast, after her success at the Royal Yorkshire Jubilee exhibition, Robinson continued to participate in exhibitions throughout her career. As **Chapter One** has demonstrated, like the Garretts, she was motivated by an interest in expanding professional opportunities for women and it is not surprising that she also participated in sections of exhibitions dedicated to promoting women's work. In 1888 she showed her work in the Women's Arts and Industries section of the Glasgow International Exhibition and, in 1890, at the Women's Industries Section at the Edinburgh International Electric Exhibition. A review of the latter exhibition noted 'A glance at the stall of Miss Charlotte Robinson ... is sufficient argument, if any were at this time of day needed, of women's aptitude for work of this kind'.⁵³⁷ Clearly, Robinson's participation in exhibition sections dedicated to showing women's work was successfully raising awareness of the female achievements in the field of interior decoration. Crucially, her participation would also have raised awareness of her work amongst people interested in supporting the work of women.

Press reports, which expanded the reach of Robinson's display's promotional impact, again demonstrate the success of her feminine decorative style. At Edinburgh, while there were numerous other women interior decorators represented in the Women's Industries Section (including 'Mrs Smout of Glasgow' and Brighton's Mrs Frank Oliver), Robinson's display was given the most press attention.⁵³⁸ At Glasgow, the press noted Robinson's floral Billet Doux and Interloper tables and 'the two friezes, specially designed for drawing-rooms, bearing groups of roses and chrysanthemums'.⁵³⁹ The journalist, obviously an admirer of her style, also commented: 'Miss Robinson's work is delicate and beautiful; it may be equalled, but not surpassed'.⁵⁴⁰ The emphasis on floral decoration and the use of adjectives associated with femininity (e.g. delicate and beautiful) is striking. Robinson intended her furniture to appeal to women, which would have ameliorated public concerns about her activity in the traditionally

⁵³⁶ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 2.

⁵³⁷ 'Edinburgh International Exhibition', *Glasgow Herald*, 5 July 1890, 9.

⁵³⁸ *The Official Guide to the International Exhibition, Glasgow* (Edinburgh, T & A Constable, 1888), 233; 'Grand Opening Ceremony' *Dundee Courier & Argus*, 2 May 1890, 3.

⁵³⁹ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 1888, 9.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

masculine field of furniture design. However, the press also noted that one of her designs for Glasgow was for a frieze for a smoking-room ‘with a design of wild ducks in full flight’.⁵⁴¹ It is significant that, amongst her feminine furniture, Robinson exhibited a design for a masculine space.⁵⁴² Despite showing her work in a women-only section, with a Royal Warrant, Robinson was able to demonstrate that she could fully compete with her male competitors.

Unlike the Garretts and Robinson, and perhaps because of her aristocratic status, Crommelin did not exhibit at any major national or international exhibitions. She did, however, stand on the Committee of Direction of the 1891 Women’s Handicrafts Exhibition, organised by popular women’s magazine, *Woman*, to ‘bring together a collection of the most beautiful, profitable, and commercially important forms of women’s work in the British Isles, the colonies and British India’.⁵⁴³ The exhibition, which was held at Westminster Town Hall, had a one shilling entrance fee and a portion of the funds raised went to the Irish Distressed Ladies Fund.⁵⁴⁴ Crommelin’s involvement in organising the event was, presumably, beneficial for her business in that it established her as an authority on women’s craft. As she also displayed her work at the exhibition it would also, as with Agnes Garrett at Bristol and Robinson at Edinburgh and Glasgow, have served to promote her business amongst people interested in supporting woman-run businesses. In doing so, she was following the example of men like William Morris, W. A. S. Benson and Walter Crane, who all stood on the Committee of Management for the 1888 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibitions, as well as exhibiting at it.⁵⁴⁵

Again, although the exhibit showed Crommelin’s typical antique-revival style, it is notable that the display is a woman’s boudoir, rather than a more traditionally masculine room. The *Manchester Times* described her display:

perhaps the most attractive exhibit is the little boudoir arranged by two of our cleverest lady art decorators, Miss Caroline Crommelin and her sister, Mrs Goring Thomas. These ladies have shown that chairs and sofas can be at the same time pretty and comfortable, that old oak

⁵⁴¹ ‘Women’s Industries’, *Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 1888, 9.

⁵⁴² Kinchin, ‘Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the ‘Masculine’ and the ‘Feminine’ Room’, 12–29.

⁵⁴³ ‘London Correspondence’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 December 1890, 5.

⁵⁴⁴ ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 January 1891, 8.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘The Arts and Crafts Exhibition’, *The Leeds Mercury*, 19 October 1888, 8.

furniture need not be gloomy and dusty, and that new furniture may be made to look almost as well as old, even if the old be Chippendale or Sheraton, Queen Anne or Dutch Marqueterie.⁵⁴⁶

It may be that her aristocratic status meant Crommelin was more cautious about overtly advertising the less-feminine aspects of her work. The exhibition gained extensive news coverage and was also covered by, amongst others, the *Daily News*, *The Graphic*, the *Morning Post*, as well as in the regional press and provided Crommelin with considerable valuable publicity.⁵⁴⁷ However, the exhibition's philanthropic purpose tempered this commercial advantage.

This further demonstrates how women manipulated interior decoration's connection to philanthropy to promote their work without receiving censure from a public still wary of their involvement in the commercial world. This was, as Harvey, Press and Maclean demonstrate, something William Morris was also aware of: the educational and philanthropic nature of his displays at exhibitions 'in conveying the impression of disinterestedness, of altruistic rather than selfish motives, made them all the more potent as a marketing device'.⁵⁴⁸ It is striking that so many of the exhibitions women interior decorators participated in were connected with social reform. Agnes Garrett's participation in the suffrage-supporting Bristol exhibition in 1885, Robinson and Garrett's efforts to raise awareness of work for women at Glasgow in 1888, and Edinburgh in 1886 and 1890, and Crommelin's fundraising for distressed Irish women in 1891 are all examples of this trend. By participating in these charitable exhibitions, the connection of interior decoration to philanthropy and social reform was cemented in the public imagination, in turn contributing to its perceived respectability as a profession for women.

Events

Holding one-off events was another method used by women interior decorators to attract customers and generate publicity. This was, from the mid-nineteenth century, a technique

⁵⁴⁶ 'Woman's Handicrafts Exhibition', *Manchester Times*, 30 January 1891, 6.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Women's Handicrafts Exhibition', *Daily News*, 27 January 1891, 6; 'Multiple News Items' *Morning Post*, 27 January 1891, 5; 'Scraps', *The Graphic*, 31 January 1891, 18; 'Women's Handicrafts Exhibition', *Leeds Mercury*, 28 January 1891, 5.

⁵⁴⁸ Charles Harvey, John Press and Mairi Maclean, 'William Morris, Cultural Leadership and the Dynamics of Taste', *The Business History Review*, 85:2 (June 2011), 20.

employed by a wide variety of retailers.⁵⁴⁹ However, scanning the nineteenth century print media reveals that, although holding seasonal sales were common, this was not a method frequently used by male retailers in the field of interior decoration. In contrast, women interior decorators seem to have held frequent events and exhibitions which particularly targeted female customers. For example, in 1891 Crommelin was able to gain press coverage of the opening of her new Victoria Street premises by inviting journalists to a lavish two-day private view attended by ‘members of the Irish nobility and other well-known families of the country to which the Misses Crommelin belong, artists, authors, actors and journalists, handsome young guardsmen who were useful as well as ornamental during the progress of afternoon tea.’⁵⁵⁰

By calling on her aristocratic and celebrity friends to attend, Crommelin ensured press coverage. By providing afternoon tea, she made the event attractive to the increasing numbers of middle-class women who used shopping as a social and leisure activity.⁵⁵¹ According to the *Belfast News-Letter*, the event was a great success and ‘hundreds of ladies availed themselves of Miss Crommelin’s hospitality and inspected the antique furniture, old and new brocades, old silver, brass-work, with all the beautiful examples of carving, inlaying and engraving. Mingling tea and conversation, gossip and criticism’.⁵⁵² Like Agnes Garrett, whose 1896 ‘Christmas Sale’ has been discussed in the previous chapter, Crommelin took advantage of seasonal shopping trends by, for example, promoting a ‘Noel Sale’ which, according to press, involved ‘the addition of a number of small things suitable as gifts, antiques or selected curios, not to be had in ordinary shops’ to her stock.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁹ Christopher P. Hosgood, ‘Mrs Pooter’s Purchase: Lower Middle-Class Consumerism and the Sales, 1870–1900’ in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls (eds.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800 to 1940* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), 146.

⁵⁵⁰ ‘Metropolitan Gossip’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 March 1891, 8.

⁵⁵¹ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delights: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Lynne Walker, ‘Vistas of Pleasure: Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West End of London, 1850–1900’ in Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995): 70–85.

⁵⁵² ‘Metropolitan Gossip’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 8.

⁵⁵³ ‘Metropolitan Gossip’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 December 1890, 3.

Robinson also used her premises to stage special themed events. One, an 1890 exhibition of decorated screens, generated a staggering amount of publicity.⁵⁵⁴ It even garnered mention in a column in *Punch* focusing on contemporary artistic events:

sent Young Par to see Miss CHARLOTTE ROBINSON's Exhibition of Screens. He behaved badly. Instead of looking at matters in a serious light, he seemed to look upon the whole affair as a "screening farce," and began to sing—

Here screens of all kinds you may see,

Designed most ar-tist-tic-a-lee,

In exquisite va-ri-e-tee,

By clever CHARLOTTE ROBINSON!

They'll screen you from the bitter breeze,

They'll screen you when you take your teas,

They'll screen you when you flirt with shes—

Delightful CHARLOTTE ROBINSON!

He then folded his arms, and began to sing, "with my riddle-ol, de riddle-ol, de ri, de O," danced a hornpipe all over the place, broke several valuable pieces of furniture, and was removed in charge of the police. And this is the boy that was to be a comfort to me in my old age!⁵⁵⁵

While, admittedly, this is not the most sympathetic of reviews, that *Punch* considered Robinson's artistic celebrity well-known enough to warrant lampooning, signalled the decorator's considerable success.

Dispensing advice

Another method used by women interior decorators to promote their businesses was contributing to the flourishing market for advice on good taste in interior decoration. A body of literature on this subject had existed since the emergence of the pattern book in the eighteenth

⁵⁵⁴ A selection of the coverage of the exhibition includes 'Athletics', *Standard*, 11 April 1890, 3; 'The Man About Town', *The Country Gentleman*, 12 April 1890, 6; Rambler, 'Out and About', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 3 May 1890, 10; 'The Ladies Column', *Myra's Journal*, 1 June 1890, 12; 'London Notes', *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 11 April 1890, 2.

⁵⁵⁵ Old Par, 'Pars About Pictures', *Punch*, 22 November 1890, 11.

century and, in 1807, banker Thomas Hope (1769–1830) had attempted to reform British taste with his book, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs by Thomas Hope*.⁵⁵⁶ In the second half of the nineteenth century, with the advent of mass production, and the development of a burgeoning middle-class keen to spend money on their homes, the body of literature expounding taste rapidly expanded. One of the first books to directly target amateur decorators was by museum keeper, architect and designer Charles Lock Eastlake (1836–1906). His 1868 *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details*, vilified the professional decorator and advocated ‘simplicity, rectangularity and honest craftsmanship’ of the Gothic style.⁵⁵⁷

As writing and journalism were already established as (largely) inoffensive careers for women, by writing books and articles on interior decoration, women could promote themselves, and their services, without receiving censure from a public still wary of the engagement of middle-class women in the commercial world.⁵⁵⁸ As previously noted, methodological writing on domestic advice literature, and particularly the work of Grace Lees-Maffei, has been helpful in informing a critical reading of these works.⁵⁵⁹ Lees-Maffei’s assertion that advice exists as ‘a genre between fact and fiction’ and cannot be taken as impartial evidence of professional practice is particularly pertinent.⁵⁶⁰ It would be unwise to take the account the women gave of their professional work in their advice writing at face

⁵⁵⁶ Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs by Thomas Hope* (London: Printed by T. Bensley, for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807).

⁵⁵⁷ Charles Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste: The Classic Handbook of Victorian Interior Decoration* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868).

⁵⁵⁸ For more details on women’s engagement in literature, journalism and publishing see F. Elizabeth Grey (ed.), *Women in Journalism at the Fin de Siècle: Making a Name for Herself* (London: Palgrave, 2012); Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Beth Palmer, *Women’s Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ann Hawkins and Maura Ives (eds.), *Women Writers and the Artefacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁵⁹ Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘A Special Relationship: The Transatlantic Domestic Dialogue,’ in Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (eds.), *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 188–210; Grace Lees-Maffei, *Design at Home: Domestic Advice Books in Britain and the USA Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2014); Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘From Service to Self-service: Etiquette Writing as Design Discourse 1920–1970’ in *Journal of Design History*, 14, 3 (2001): 187–206.

⁵⁶⁰ Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography’, in *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 1 (2003), 1.

value. Instead, it is perhaps best understood as as a marketing tool, which the women used to promote both themselves and their businesses.

Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture

In 1876, eight years after Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*, the Garretts published their own contribution to the genre, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* [Figure 3.26].⁵⁶¹ The book formed part of Macmillan's 'Art at Home Series', published between 1876 and 1883 and edited by the writer and antiquarian W. J. Loftie. The series comprised a collection of twelve advice manuals, four of which concerned decorating the domestic interior.⁵⁶² Emma Ferry provides a cogent analysis of the series, focusing particularly on the four volumes dedicated to interior decoration. She rejects previous scholarship, which has dismissed the books as unimportant, or suggested that they actively promoted middle-class Victorian domestic ideologies. Instead, Ferry convincingly argues that the texts offer an ambiguous, sometimes openly subversive, response to the construct of separate spheres.⁵⁶³ The Garretts were paid for their contribution for the series and, as Ferry's research has demonstrated, their fee was somewhere between thirty and forty pounds (roughly £2,590) for their book.⁵⁶⁴

This thesis, however, looks not at the immediate financial reward that ensued from the publication of the book, but its wider contribution to the promotion of the Garretts' business. Ferry's discussion of how the cousins used their book to define their status as professionals by demonstrating their training, practical experience and expert knowledge is more relevant. She argues that the Garretts did this by defining the role of house decorator, by engaging with contemporary architectural, art and design issues, through their use of appropriate architectural

⁵⁶¹ Garrett and Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*. The book contained four chapters ('Houses As They Are', 'Houses As They Might Be', 'On Draperies' and 'What Will It Cost?') and was based on a paper entitled 'How to Improve the Interior of Modern Houses', which Rhoda Garrett had presented at the Social Science Congress in 1876. Rhoda Garrett, 'How To Improve The Interior of Modern Houses, With Special Reference To Their Furniture and Decorations', in Charles Wagner Ryalls (ed.), *Transactions Of The National Association For The Promotion of Social Science* (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1876): 863–865.

⁵⁶² Garrett and Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*; Lucy Orrinsmith, *The Drawing Room: its Decoration and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877); Martha Jane Loftie, *The Dining Room* (London, Macmillan, 1877); Mary Anne Barker, *The Bedroom and Boudoir* (London: Macmillan, 1878).

⁵⁶³ Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior*; Ferry, "'Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors'".

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 23/02/2018].

terms and by demonstrating knowledge of materials and construction techniques.⁵⁶⁵ By contributing to the growing trend for interior decoration manuals, the Garretts were positioning themselves as experts, with equivalent status to their male rivals, many of whom also wrote books. For example, royal upholsterer George Smith, furniture retailer William Watt (1857–1888) and architects Robert Kerr (1823–1904) and Bruce Talbert (1838–1881), all also contributed to the trend.⁵⁶⁶ This bold public statement about their professional status would have served to reassure the Garretts’ potential clients of their knowledge and capability.

However, Ferry argues that *Suggestions for House Decoration*, like the rest of the ‘Art at Home’ series, explicitly targeted a lower-middle-class readership.⁵⁶⁷ Presumably lower-middle-class households did not have spare income to spend on hiring professional house decorators. How then, did the book promote the Garretts’ business? We cannot assume that the intended readership of the book was reflected by reality. Each book in the series was sold for 2/6s, equating to roughly £27.43 in contemporary currency, meaning that collecting the series in its entirety would cost the equivalent of £329.63.⁵⁶⁸ For a lower-middle-class household, this would be a considerable expense and it is reasonable to assume that, contrary to Ferry’s suggestion, the volume was more frequently purchased by higher-income middle-class households. While comfortably off, this audience would not be extravagant. Supporting this, the introduction to *Suggestions for House Decoration* noted that the book was suited ‘especially to those people of moderate means, who, while wishing to live in an atmosphere of refinement and cultivation, are neither willing nor able to spend large sums upon their rooms’.⁵⁶⁹

Throughout the text, the Garretts brand themselves as a new and affordable variety of decorator, the employment of who would engender savings, rather than additional expense. For example, in the introduction, the cousins claim: ‘it is middle-class people specially who require

⁵⁶⁵ Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior*, 111.

⁵⁶⁶ George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London: J Taylor, 1808); E.W. Godwin and William Watt, *Art Furniture, from Designs by E. W. Godwin and Others, With Hints and Suggestions on Domestic Furniture* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1877); Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences from the Parsonage to the Palace; With Tables of Accommodation and Cost, and Plans* (London: J. Murray, 1865); Bruce Talbert, *Gothic Forms Applied to Furniture, Metal Work, and Decoration for Domestic Purposes* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1867).

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁶⁸ <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 16/02/2018].

⁵⁶⁹ Garrett and Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*, 7.

the aid of the cultivated and yet not extravagant decorator’ and assert that while ‘the wealthier classes have been able to get all that they have ever wanted in the way of decorative work and beauty’, the middle-classes have previously been over-looked by the home decoration industry.⁵⁷⁰ Further to this, two out of three of the house decoration rules presented by the Garretts to their readership are centered around negotiating client-decorator relationships.⁵⁷¹ Presumably, this advice would not have been given to a readership unable to afford even a low-cost decorator.

The only Garrett commissions for which we have documentary evidence are for upper-middle-class and aristocratic clients [see **Chapter Four**]. However, as the Garretts focused on private commissions rather than retail trade, it is reasonable to assume that their actual client-base may have been much wider in terms of class and financial scope. More prosaic clients are less likely to be commented upon in the press, or to leave archival records documenting the interiors they commissioned. A desire to appeal to a wide clientele by offering a low-cost service is something emphasized in interviews with, and articles about, the cousins. For example, Moncure Conway claimed that they ‘believe that with care they are able to make beautiful interiors which shall not be too costly for persons of moderate means’.⁵⁷² By asserting within the text that their services were not only accessible to very wealthy clients, the Garretts were presumably hoping to increase their trade amongst the book’s readership. *Suggestions for House Decoration*, which was one of the most successful books in the ‘Art at Home’ series, running to six editions by 1879, with 7,500 copies printed, had the potential to considerably raise the profile of their business amongst their targeted clientele.⁵⁷³

As noted in **Chapter Two**, Elizabeth Crawford interpreted *Suggestions for House Decoration* as representative of the Garretts design philosophy and asserted that six of the seven illustrations within it are likely to be illustrations of the Garretts’ home at 2 Gower Street.⁵⁷⁴ By establishing their affordability, and then publicly setting out their philosophy and including illustrations of their work to demonstrate its merits and provide tangible evidence of

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, 8–11.

⁵⁷² Moncure Conway, ‘Decorative Art and Architecture in England’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, November 1874, 18.

⁵⁷³ Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior*, 106.

⁵⁷⁴ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 192–197.

their professional capability, the cousins were considerably widening the reach of their business. In addition, Harvey, Press and Mclean note that by including decorative advice in his brochures, William Morris ‘sought to educate rather than simply to promote his wares, thereby inspiring customer confidence and loyalty’.⁵⁷⁵ As, unlike William Morris and many of their other male competitors, the Garretts did not operate retail premises open to the public, this would have been particularly important in compensating for their lack of a high street presence. Potential clients who admired the tenets they propounded in the book would have easily been able to look up the Garretts’ contact details in a trade directory such as *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory*.⁵⁷⁶

Crucially, the impact was not limited to its purchasers and readers. Macmillan advertised the book widely in the print media and paid for advertisements in popular publications such as *John Bull* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, providing the cousins with a level of public exposure that they could not have afforded to fund themselves.⁵⁷⁷ In addition, the book was widely reported in the national, regional, trade and architectural press. Ferry’s research has uncovered a letter from Alexander Macmillan to Rhoda Garrett indicating the marketing methods employed by Macmillan:

We have already sent a copy to Mr S C Hale [sic] of the Art Journal & I have instructed our clerk to offer him clichés of any of the illustrations for insertion in his paper along with any review he may have. The Building News has borrowed some. Copies were sent to two Manchester, two Birmingham, two Liverpool and one Leeds paper, also to the Scotsman & Glasgow Herald. Altogether we sent about 60 copies all over the country.⁵⁷⁸

As Ferry notes, the reviews generated by Macmillan’s promotional campaign were generally positive.⁵⁷⁹ For example, the *Examiner* commented that the cousins ‘write well and with authority upon their subject ... Knowing thoroughly their theme, they treat it clearly and

⁵⁷⁵ Harvey, Press and Maclean, ‘William Morris, Cultural Leadership and the Dynamics of Taste’, 20.

⁵⁷⁶ *Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory* (London: Frederick Kelly, 1879–1900).

⁵⁷⁷ ‘New Books’, *John Bull*, 18 November 1876, 8; ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 November 1876, 16.

⁵⁷⁸ Letter from Alexander Macmillan to Rhoda Garrett, 6 December 1876, MS. 55401/71, British Library Archives and Manuscripts, British Library, London. Cliché in this sense means a metal casting of a stereotype or electrotype. Ferry, *Advice, Authorship and the Domestic Interior*, 51.

⁵⁷⁹ Emma Ferry does note that reviews in trade journals such as the *Furniture Gazette* were typically less positive and tended more towards misogyny than others. Ferry, *Advice and Authorship in the Domestic Interior*, 50–56.

practically in a volume which all to whom the subject of decoration has any—even the slightest—interest ought to be acquainted with'.⁵⁸⁰ These adverts and reviews would have significantly widened the promotional reach of the Garretts' book. Their status as experts was affirmed not only by the book itself, but also by the increased press visibility it generated.

'Home Decoration'

As previously noted, during the later nineteenth-century the responsibility for decorating the home shifted from male to female control. With this shift came the professional art advisor, typically an upper-middle-class woman, who gave advice on the decoration of interiors through magazine columns, books and, occasionally, by appointment. Feminist, writer and illustrator Mary Haweis (1848–1898) wrote the advice manual *The Art of Decoration* in 1881 and *Beautiful Houses* in 1889.⁵⁸¹ Charlotte Talbot Coke (1843–1922) wrote a decorating advice column in *The Queen* in the late 1880s and published the advice manual *The Gentlewoman at Home* in 1890.⁵⁸² In 1891 she founded popular women's magazine *Hearth and Home* for which she wrote, amongst other things, a regular 'Home Advice' column.⁵⁸³ Writer Jane Panton (1847–1923) wrote a series of articles on furnishing and managing a home for the *Ladies Pictorial* which developed into a regular advice column. Her association with the paper ran from 1881 to 1900, but during this time she also published a series of advice manuals based on her columns, including *From Kitchen to Garret* in 1897.⁵⁸⁴

The contribution of women to the genre of domestic advice literature has been considered by a variety of scholars, including Deborah Cohen, Judith Neiswander and Annemarie Adams, who have all connected their work to what Adams has dubbed 'spatial feminism', the call, by a variety of prominent nineteenth-century feminists, for women to take

⁵⁸⁰ 'Literature', *The Examiner*, 25 November 1876, 7.

⁵⁸¹ Mary Eliza Haweis, *The Art of Decoration* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881); Mary Eliza Haweis, *Beautiful Houses: Being a Description of Certain Well-known Artistic Houses* (London: Samson, Low, Marston, Dearle & Rivington, 1889).

⁵⁸² Charlotte Talbot Coke, *The Gentlewoman at Home* (London: Henry and Company, 1890).

⁵⁸³ Brake and Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent, Belgium: Academia Press, 2009), 278.

⁵⁸⁴ Jane Ellen Panton, *From Kitchen to Garret: Hints for Young Householders* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887).

control of their domestic environments.⁵⁸⁵ As Neiswander observes, Pantton claimed to have pioneered a new profession for women by extending her advice-giving to in-person appointments. In the Preface to the seventh edition *From Kitchen to Garret*, Pantton claimed ‘I go to people’s houses and advise them about their decorations, and tell them the best places to go for different things’.⁵⁸⁶ It could be argued that by doing so, she elevated her status from art advisor to interior decorator. However, unlike the other women discussed in this thesis, there is no indication that Pantton, Haweis or Talbot Coke sought to compete on the same level as the men active within the field of interior decoration. These women were known, as Cohen notes, as ‘decorators on paper’.⁵⁸⁷ They did not operate retail premises, design furniture or participate in exhibitions and there is no record of them undertaking any commissions. They were, however, household names and, by the turn of the nineteenth century, almost every woman’s magazine employed a decorating advice columnist.⁵⁸⁸

In 1888, Robinson, presumably keen to exploit the popularity of the ‘decorator on paper’, joined their ranks and became ‘in a double sense “Home Art Decorator to the Queen”, for the newspaper of that name has engaged her to edit the decorative department in succession to Mrs Talbot Coke, who is obliged to follow her husband, the colonel, to Egypt’.⁵⁸⁹ Established in 1861 by publisher and journalist Samuel Beeton (1831–1877), weekly paper *The Queen* adopted a broadsheet format aimed at an upper-middle-class audience. Heavily illustrated and featuring fashion, news and stories, by the 1880s the paper had become ‘the preferred weekly of ladies of the upper-ten-thousand’.⁵⁹⁰

Although there is no record of how much, Robinson was no doubt paid for her ‘Home Decoration’ column. However, as with the Garrett’s book, the immediate financial reward was not the only benefit to accepting the position of regular decorative advice columnist to *The Queen*. The opportunity for weekly exposure to the upper-class readership of the paper was

⁵⁸⁵ Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*, 150–159; Cohen, *Household Gods*, 105–108; Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior*, 96–103.

⁵⁸⁶ Pantton, *From Kitchen to Garret*, vii–viii.

⁵⁸⁷ Cohen, *Household Gods*, 65.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁸⁹ ‘Gossip from the State’, *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 26 October 1888, 6.

⁵⁹⁰ Brake and Denmoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, 523.

presumably also attractive. As *The Pioneer of Fashion* commented, Robinson's 'influence on the English standard of taste in decoration became greatly extended by her acceptance of the post of advisor on such matters to readers of the *Queen* newspaper'.⁵⁹¹ *The Queen*'s readership was comprised of exactly the type of fashionable, wealthy women a professional decorator would have been keen to attract commissions from and writing the weekly column was, presumably, a key part of Robinson's marketing strategy. For example, the column prominently advertised Robinson's royal commission, by crediting its author as 'CHARLOTTE ROBINSON (By Special Appointment Home Art Decorator to Her Majesty)' [Figure 3.27]. Publicising this royal stamp of approval asserted her status as a desirable decorator.

Further to this, as with the Garrett's book, Robinson's column consciously established her as an expert on interior decoration. The column often included a short essay, on topics as various as 'Early Florentine Embroidery', 'A Visit to FooChow Enamel Works' and 'Japanese Art'.⁵⁹² As well as educating and entertaining *The Queen*'s readers, these demonstrated the depth and breadth of Robinson's knowledge. A brief examination of one example reveals the authoritative authorial tone she assumed for the column. In 'Stained Glass', Robinson traces the origin of painted windows from the Egyptians, to the early Christian era and onwards to Norman architecture.⁵⁹³ She quotes St Chrysostom and St Jerome, notes the personal taste of Pope Leo III, and gives specific examples of glass from Canterbury, York and Gloucester cathedrals.⁵⁹⁴ She indicates her practical knowledge of the subject by using technical language (e.g. 'state of fusion' and 'vitrifiable colours'), demonstrates her knowledge of contemporary work by referencing the Victoria Hotel in Manchester, Long's in Bond Street and the Grand Hotel in London, and closes with an allusion to her travels in America.⁵⁹⁵

With these short essays, Robinson was attempting to position herself publicly as an expert on interior decoration and decorative art. However, most of 'Home Decoration' column

⁵⁹¹ F. M. Strutt-Cavell, 'Business Women of Today: No. 1 Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Pioneer of Fashion: A Journal of Reference for Gentlewoman*, 1 March 1893, 50.

⁵⁹² Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: Early Florentine Embroidery', *The Queen*, 7 September 1889, 301; Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: A Visit to FooChow Enamel Works', *The Queen*, 2 August 1890, 186; Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: Japanese Art', *The Queen*, 19 January 1889, 75–77.

⁵⁹³ Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: Stained Glass', *The Queen*, 8 June 1889, 810–811.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 810.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 810.

space in *The Queen* was filled with Robinson's replies 'To Correspondents'. *Manchester Faces and Places* commented on their popularity: 'The important position she holds on the staff of the Queen newspaper brings her into communication with correspondents in every part of the world'.⁵⁹⁶ Robinson received a large volume of enquiries and it was not unusual for her responses to span an entire page. *Manchester Faces and Places* claimed that her answers:

evinced singular conscientiousness and careful attention to the individual needs of each application; she evidently keeps herself well up to date with every new departure relating to the woman's kingdom – home, which is no easy task in these days of new designs, inventions, and domestic appliances, but without this knowledge it is impossible not to miss "effects," even if absolute blunders are avoided by the amateur decorator.⁵⁹⁷

Robinson's answers, like her essays, promote her as an expert on interior decoration and, particularly, establish her encyclopaedic knowledge of new products, designs and suppliers.

A typical reply from Robinson gave specific advice about furniture, textiles and wallpaper, including precise details about where correspondents could acquire the items she recommends:

ULTRAMARINE – There are some charming summer silk bedspreads to be seen at Walpole's (New Bond-Street, W). The designs are conventional and the colourings most artistic. For your room I should recommend their china blue. The new damask blinds can be obtained from Hampton and Sons (Pall Mall East), and will give your house just the "Air" you want.⁵⁹⁸

The same column contained seventeen other replies to correspondents, each demonstrating Robinson's in-depth knowledge of the latest developments in interior decoration and the stock of a wide variety of fashionable suppliers.⁵⁹⁹ *World* magazine, and Robinson herself within it, noted the value of this knowledge:

As you listen to her methods of work you realise the value of the expert's counsels. Those who do not devote themselves to the task cannot possibly keep pace with the new designs and decorative materials of English and foreign manufacture. "Many ladies," observes Miss

⁵⁹⁶ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Manchester Faces and Places*, 10 April 1892, 120.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Although it is not known if Robinson received commission from the companies she promoted within the column, this could be regarded as an early form of product placement. Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 12 July 1890, 76.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

Robinson, “have good taste, an eye for colour, and a tolerably definite idea of what they may want, but half the shops in London may be searched before they find the right thing. The commercial instinct is to sell what is in stock and the material which yields the most profit; the artistic advisor studies the clients interests alone, and seeks to produce the perfect results apart from all trade considerations...”.⁶⁰⁰

The ‘To Correspondents’ section of ‘Home Decoration’, did not just emphasise Robinson’s expert status as an experienced interior decoration professional. By displaying the large numbers of readers who desired her advice, it positioned Robinson, like the suppliers she recommended, as fashionable and desirable.

Again, as with *Suggestions for House Decorations*, with ‘Home Decoration’, Robinson was able to publicly set out her design philosophy. She did so partly through her answers ‘To Correspondents’, in which she could be strikingly blunt. For example, to ‘Hortus’, Robinson replies ‘Your wallpaper is so appallingly ugly and inartistic that I would advise you to alter it rather than spend a halfpenny on any other part of the room’.⁶⁰¹ She also partly does so through her essays (for example, her essay on ‘Electrical Furnishing’ set out her opinions on how and where in the home to utilise electric lightings).⁶⁰² Robinson also occasionally illustrated her essays and answers ‘To Correspondents’, thereby providing examples of her own design work and demonstrating her style to the paper’s readership. For example, an essay on ‘Cosy Corners’ included an illustration of a room, in Robinson’s typically ornate floral style, including a ‘Convertible Cosy Corner’ [Figure 3.28].⁶⁰³

It is important to note that while many of Robinson’s male rivals published decoration advice in books, unlike her, they do not seem to have contributed column to magazines or periodicals aimed at women. However, doing so was a canny method of promoting an interior decoration business amongst an interested audience. Tangible evidence of the success of Robinson’s column as a promotional tool comes, however, not from the diary of a fashionable upper-class *Queen*-reader, but from the archives of the Cunard Steamship Company, now held

⁶⁰⁰ Edmund Yates, ‘Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester’, *The World*, 816.

⁶⁰¹ Charlotte Robinson, ‘Home Decoration’, *The Queen*, 27 October 1888, 511.

⁶⁰² Charlotte Robinson, ‘Home Decoration: Electrical Furnishings’, *The Queen*, 13 February 1892, 144.

⁶⁰³ Charlotte Robinson, ‘Home Decoration: Cosy Corners’, *The Queen*, 16 November 1889, 698.

at the University of Liverpool.⁶⁰⁴ In 1892, the Cunard Steamship Company were becoming dissatisfied with cabinet makers Wylie and Lochhead Ltd.'s work on the interiors of their new steam ships, the *Lucania* and the *Campania*.⁶⁰⁵ The Company's Secretary, aware of Robinson's work through her column in the *Queen*, telegraphed the newspaper's offices to obtain Robinson's address.⁶⁰⁶ He then wrote to Robinson asking for her 'opinion as to the Decoration of Drawing Rooms on the new steam ships we are building'.⁶⁰⁷ Although, unfortunately, the work was never carried out [see **Chapter Four**], that the Secretary wrote to Robinson at *The Queen*, rather than at her shop or home, demonstrates that it was in this capacity that he knew her work.

'Furniture and Decoration'

The market for decorative advice manuals did not diminish after the publication of *Suggestions for House Decoration*. The genre remained popular in the later years of the nineteenth century, with new contributions coming from both male and female authors.⁶⁰⁸ It is not surprising that in 1903, thirty years after the publication of the Garrett cousins' book, Crommelin also published (under her married name of Mrs. Barton Shaw) an advice manual on house decoration. With her elder sister, the writer May Crommelin, she contributed a chapter, entitled 'Furniture and Decoration', to *Some Arts and Crafts*, the fourth book in Chapman and Hall's Woman's Library series. Edited by bookbinder Ethel M. M. McKenna, this series, like Macmillan's 'Art at Home', covered a diverse range of subjects. Little is known about the commissioning and production of the volumes although, again like 'Art at Home', the series were beautifully bound in the Arts and Crafts style [**Figure 3.29**] and were intended for a

⁶⁰⁴ Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁶⁰⁵ Copy of letter to Wylie & Lochhead from Secretary to Board of Directors, 30 May 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁶⁰⁶ Copy of telegram from Company secretary to *The Queen* office, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁶⁰⁷ Copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 4 June 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁶⁰⁸ George Faulkner Armitage, *Decoration and Furniture* (London: John Heywood, 1886); G. A. and M. A. Audsley, *The Practical Decorator and Ornamentist* (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1892); Robert Brook, *Elements of Style in Furniture and Woodwork* (London: published by the author, 1889); Robert Edis, *The Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses* (London: C. Keegan Paul, 1881); Mrs Horsfall, *Pretty Homes* (London: European Mail, 1897); John Aldam Heaton, *Beauty in Art* (London: Heineman, 1897); Florence Mary Gardiner, *Furnishings and Fittings for Every Home* (London: Record Press, 1894).

middle-class readership, with each volume initially priced at 5 shillings (roughly £24.64 today).⁶⁰⁹

The chapter began with a brief (and rather histrionic) introduction to the history of interior decoration, spanning from descriptions of ‘tables on which Joseph may have feasted with his brethren’ to condemnation of the “‘new things” of the nineteenth century.’⁶¹⁰ This history is divided in ‘French Furniture and Decoration’, the ‘Jacobean or Stuart Period of Furniture’, the ‘Queen Anne Period’ and ‘Eighteenth Century English Crafts, in Woodwork and House Decoration’. Considering that a large part of Crommelin’s business involved buying and selling antiques, this was presumably intended to assert her status as an expert and connoisseur. Combining historical anecdotes with descriptions of museum pieces, it is peppered with technical language, details about production and manufacture, and the names of obscure historical makers and commentators. Crommelin was not alone in focusing on furniture history. Decorator John Aldam Heaton’s *Beauty and Art* also devoted a considerable number of pages to the subject, as do the Garretts in *Suggestions for House Decoration*.⁶¹¹ However, unlike the Garretts’ manual, Crommelin’s chapter is clearly intended for female consumption. For example, the section emphasises the personal lives of the historical figures detailed, with female figures particularly well-represented. Five pages are dedicated to an imagined episode from the life of Marie Antoinette, in which, ‘wreathed in smiles’, she inspects a boudoir she has had redecorated for the King’s mistress.⁶¹²

The second part of the chapter ‘General Remarks on Walls, Ceilings, Fireplaces, Flooring and Beds’, contained more practical information. It included advice on choosing colours, negotiating with landlords and choosing durable floor-coverings. Notably, like *Suggestions for House Decoration*, ‘Furniture and Decoration’ frequently advises against ‘false economies’, presumably to encourage lower-income readers to buy quality items from her own premises. Again, like the Garretts, Crommelin is quick to advocate hiring a professional decorator. For example, when discussing grates, she advises that ‘all good decorators will be

⁶⁰⁹ May Crommelin and Caroline Barton Shaw, ‘Furniture and Decoration’, in Ethel M. M. McKenna (ed.) *Some Arts and Crafts* (London:Chapman & Hall, 1903), 1–138.; ‘List of New Books and Reprints’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 May 1903, 7; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 23/02/2018].

⁶¹⁰ Crommelin and Shaw, ‘Furniture and Decoration’, 3–21.

⁶¹¹ Heaton, *Beauty and Art*, 94–96, 100–104, 115–116, 125–126; Garrett and Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*, 11–14.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 35–40.

able to show a sufficient number of examples to satisfy even those buyers most difficult to please'.⁶¹³ The historical theme is further built upon in the third part of the chapter, entitled 'A House with Period Rooms'. Here, as with the Garretts' book, we are told that, despite its recommendation that readers hire a decorator, 'Furniture and Decoration' is aimed at those with 'moderate incomes'.⁶¹⁴ Crommelin reminds readers that if genuine antique furniture cannot be afforded, 'most excellent copies of the same are to be bought, and, some hundred years hence, or say two hundred, these will be looked upon in turn with reverence, as specimens [sic] of latter nineteenth or early twentieth century, of excellent workmanship and seasoned wood'.⁶¹⁵

The chapter continues with a section on 'Bargains'. Here, Crommelin sets out her qualifications, by describing the four kinds of bargain hunters. She, presumably, is a 'connoisseur', or an individual 'belonging to the wealthy classes' who has 'been surrounded from childhood by objects of taste and art, often priceless, set in rooms built by Wren, Vanburgh, or Ware. With them, the knowledge of what is artistic, genuine, is verily inborn, approaching intuition'.⁶¹⁶ The remainder of the chapter recounts the various pitfalls the amateur 'bargain hunter' may encounter: again, the implication is that they would be better off buying from a reputable dealer, such as Crommelin herself. The final chapter 'Some Hints to Those Who Wish to Become Decorators', has been previously discussed in **Chapter One**, in relation to Crommelin's motivation and training. Again, however, when considered from the perspective of marketing, as with the Garrett cousins frequent references to their training and professional status, this section of the chapter is clearly an attempt to assert Crommelin's own authority.

Unlike the Garretts book, 'Furniture and Decoration' is not illustrated with pictures of the authors' home, perhaps yet again demonstrating how her aristocratic status led her to be more reticent than the middle-class Garrett cousins and Robinson. Instead, the chapter is illustrated with photographs of period rooms from: 'Mrs Yerkes House in Fifth Avenue, New

⁶¹³ Crommelin and Shaw, 'Furniture and Decoration', 91.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁶¹⁶ Clandeboye House, where the Crommelin sisters were brought up, dates from 1801 and was built from a design by Robert Woodgate (d.1805), who had completed his apprenticeship with Sir John Soane (1753–1847). Ibid., 122–123.

York', 'Lord Portman's Townhouse', 'Mr. G. A Cooper's House, Hove, Brighton' and an anonymous 'Louis XIV' room. While, as there are no records to suggest that Crommelin ever travelled to America, it seems unlikely that she was responsible for the New York mansion [Figure 3.30], it cannot be ruled out that she had some involvement in the other rooms depicted. The 'Sheraton' room in 'Mr G. A. Cooper's House, Brighton' [Figure 3.31] seems particularly reminiscent of Crommelin's style, depicting what is apparently a magazine rack converted from an antique barrel and the style of Sheraton-style wall lights and furniture, described by *Woman* magazine as stocked by Crommelin's shop.⁶¹⁷

This chapter has considered the methods late nineteenth-century women interior decorators used to promote their businesses. Neither the Garretts, Robinson nor Crommelin directly advertised in the print media, something which may have been a result of their desire to assert the status of interior decoration as an art and/or a profession (rather than a trade). Instead, they used a wide variety of other methods to attract clients and generate press coverage. They gained column inches and promoted their services by giving interviews in periodicals. They exhibited their designs at national (and, in the case of the Garrett cousins, international) exhibitions and cleverly used events, such as seasonal sales and special exhibitions, to attract customers and capitalise on press coverage of exhibitions. Finally, they manipulated the rich culture of interior decoration advice manuals and periodical columns to promote their businesses and brand.

It is worth noting that, without archival records, it is impossible to assess to what extent these efforts were converted to sales (though this is also true for many of their male competitors). However, the fact that they were able to generate such extensive press coverage throughout their careers indicates that the women's promotional activity was successful. Through these various methods, the women were able to assert themselves as professionals in a male dominated field, and as experts operating on a similar scale to their male rivals. In addition, by cannily promoting the femininity of their designs they were able to capitalise on the growing female market for interior decoration. Doing so also asserted the suitability of interior decoration as a profession for women, as did their participation in exhibitions, and exhibition sections, promoting women's work and their engagement in the women's press. By demonstrating their support for the expansion of professional opportunities for women, they

⁶¹⁷ 'The Man About Town', *The Country Gentleman*, 14 March 1891, 6.

were able to simultaneously ensure their work was seen by consumers interested in supporting the women-run businesses and increase public goodwill towards their work.

Illustrations

Figure 3.1

Cover of illustrated catalogue for John Aldam Heaton, c.1893, RBQ 747.204 HEA, Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection. From

<http://collection.hht.net.au/firstthtpictures/fullRecord.jsp?recnoListAttr=recnoList&recno=40462> [accessed 8/6/2018].

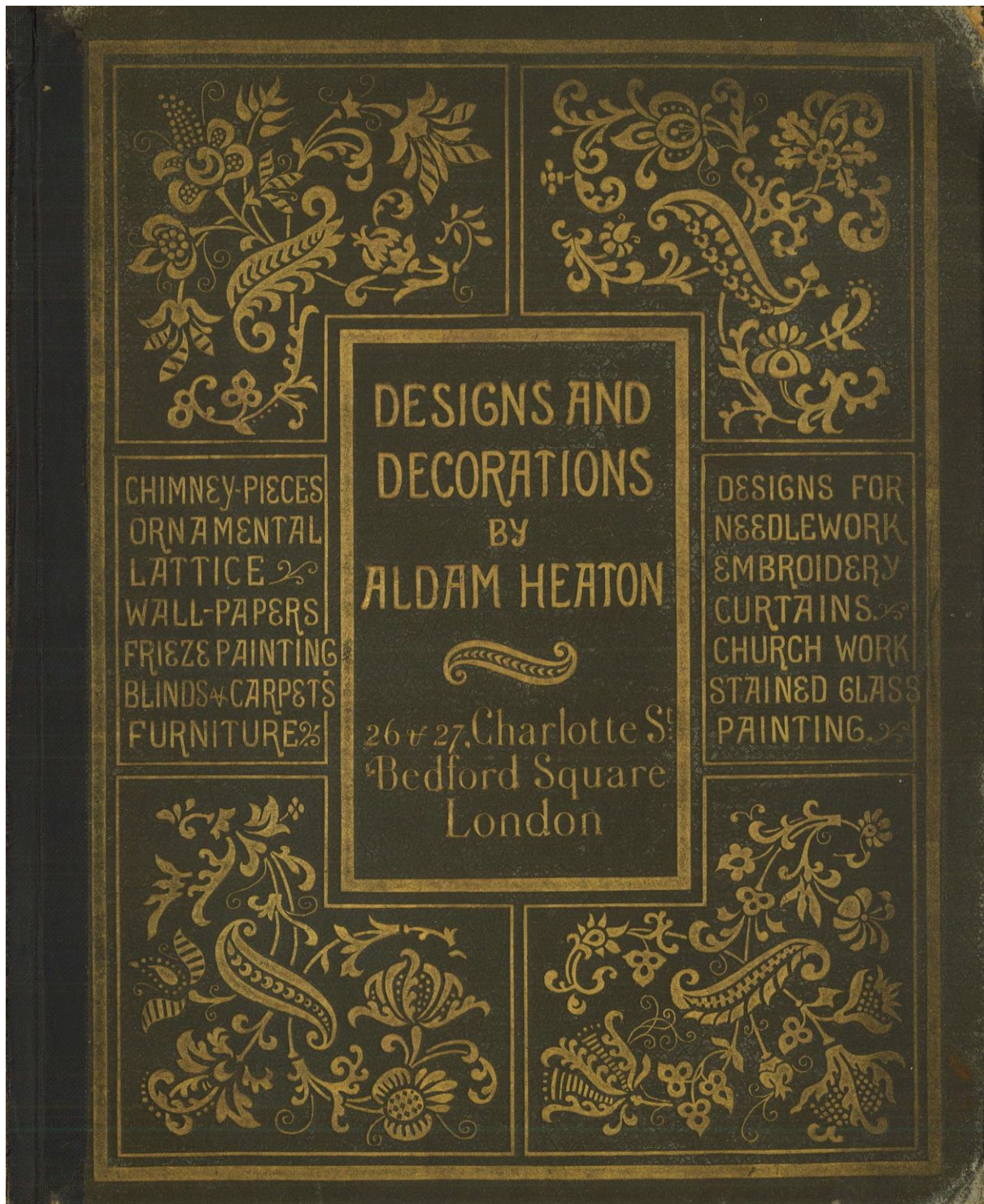


Figure 3.2

Notice for 'Christmas Sale of Furniture by the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett', LSE9/02/105, Autograph Letter Collection, Women's Library, London School of Economics, London.

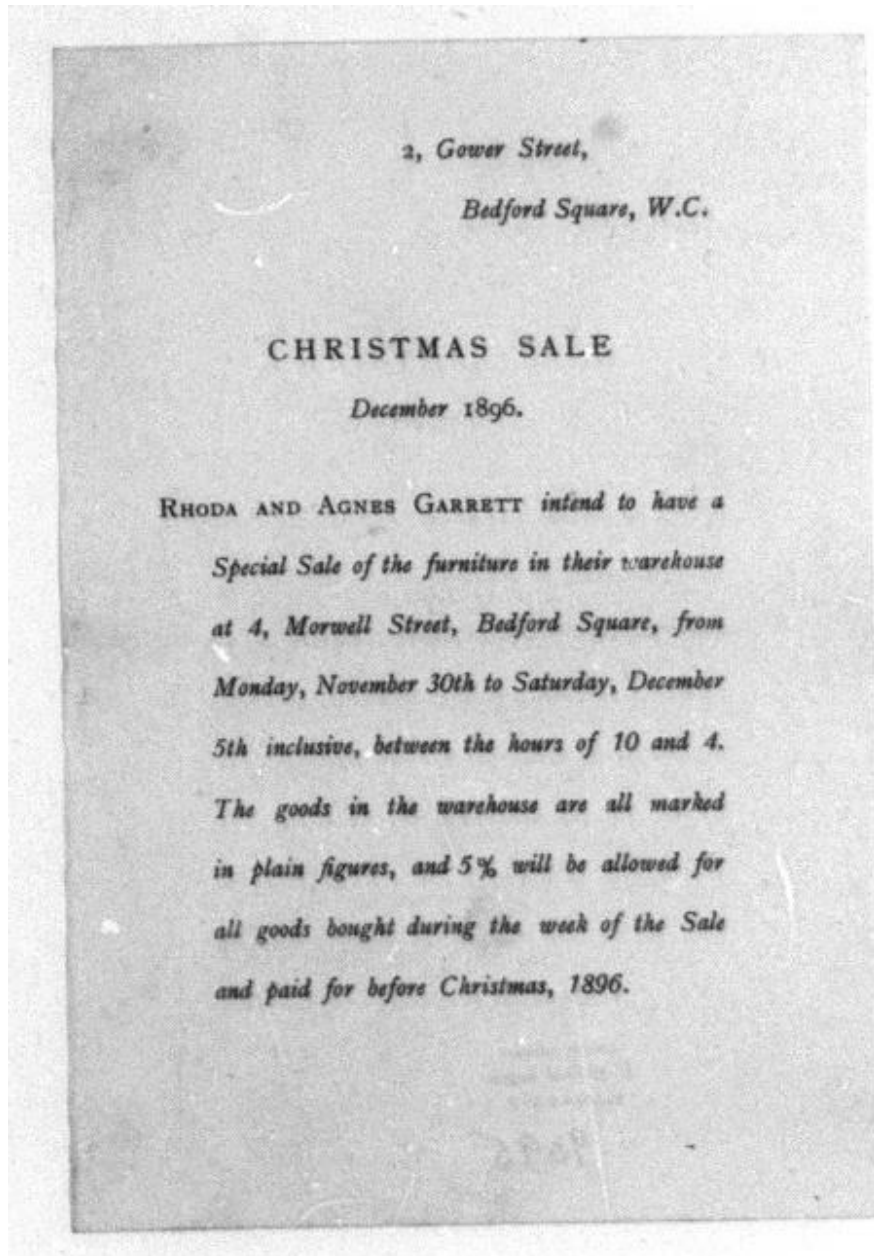


Figure 3.3

Advertisement for Hewetsons, *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 3.

HEWETSONS TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD
LONDON. W.

CARVED OAK DWARF BOOKCASE 50/-

OLD COFFIN STOOL 15/6

THE LARGEST STOCK OF OLD OAK FURNITURE IN THE WORLD ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUES FREE

CARVED OAK TABLE 75/- 2 ft. 6 Across

How to Furnish
For £150 0 0
300 0 0
500 0 0
1,000 0 0

All goods CARRIAGE PAID to any railway station in GREAT BRITAIN.

Every description of modern FURNITURE in the newest styles and woods.

CARPETS CURTAINS BEDSTEADS BEDDING

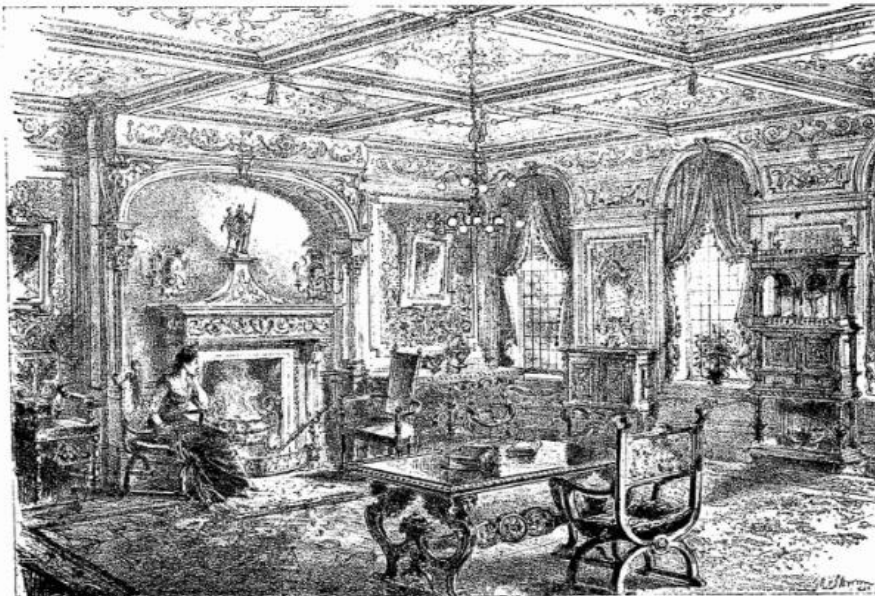
The Largest Stock in London to select from.

HEWETSONS,
Tottenham Court Rd.,
LONDON, W.

Figure 3.4

Advertisement for James Shoolbred & Co, *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 4.

**JAMES SHOOLBRED & CO.,
Extension of Furniture Showrooms.**



Customers will find great assistance in the Selection of Furniture, Carpets, Curtains, and Wall Decorations, by an inspection of the Additional Specimen Rooms recently completed.

JAMES SHOOLBRED & CO., TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD,
LONDON.

Figure 3.5

Advertisement for Newson & Co, *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 27.

ESTABLISHED 10 YEARS. NEWSON & CO.'S ESTABLISHED 10 YEARS.

INEXPENSIVE HIGH-CLASS FURNITURE ATTRACTIVE DURABLE

Of their own Manufacture, as recommended by Mrs. Talbot Coke.

New Illustrated Catalogue Post Free.

Hall Furniture
Of every description, in Walnut, Oak, or Mahogany, and in Carved Oak.

Library Furniture.
A very large stock of Library Furniture, including all kinds of Writing Tables, Chairs, Bookcases, &c.

Dining-room Furniture.
Dining-room Furniture, in great variety in Oak, Walnut, or Mahogany. Chairs covered in rush, leather, velvet, saddle-leather, &c., &c.

Rush-seated Furniture
It is now much used for small Dining-rooms, and is very durable and looks well.



THE HERTFORD SUITE. 12 Guineas.
The "Hertford" Suite comprises a solid Oak Sideboard fitted with cellaret and levelled silvered plate in lock; extending Dining Table, patent screw, solid oak legs, hand-lashed top; six strong Chairs with rush seats, and two Armchairs to match. 12 guineas.

New Illustrated Catalogue Post Free.

Drawing-room Furniture.
Drawing-room Furniture in all the prevailing styles and latest designs. Articles sent at a minimum of cost.

Bedroom Furniture.
A large stock of Bedroom Suites, in various woods, and at prices to suit all requirements. Our plate-suites from 8 guineas to 100 guineas. "Comer" suites and "Combination" Suites to conserve space.

Easy Chairs and Lounges.
Really easy and comfortable Chairs and Lounges, in all styles and shapes and in any covering.

All goods sent CARRIAGE PAID to any Station in Great Britain.

NEWSON & CO.,
FINSBURY HOUSE, FINSBURY SQUARE, and 2 & 4, WORSHIP ST. LONDON, E.C.

Figure 3.6

Advertisement for Godfrey Giles & Co, *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 28.

FOR INTERIOR DECORATIONS CABINET WORK, UPHOLSTERY, WALL PAPERS &c.

Godfrey Giles & Co. Latest Novelties.
No. 19, Old Cavendish St. LONDON, W.

The "SIR WALTER RALEIGH"

NOVEL, LUXURIOUS, & INDISPENSABLE SMOKING CHAIR.
THE SUCCESS of the SEASON.

Read what the "GLEANER" says about our Chair: "Messrs. Godfrey Giles & Co. have lately constructed a most luxurious easy chair, with all imaginable fittings and devices to ensure ease and comfort. The chair, of which we give an illustration, although principally invented for the use of smokers, can easily be adapted for non-smokers, and even for ladies and their various occupations. In leisure time—reading, writing, doing needlework, slipping tea, &c."

As illustrated, £7 10s. 6d., excluding lamp. Other designs and full particulars on application.

Pronounced by all who have tested it to be the most complete, comfortable, and luxurious Chair ever produced.



NOTICE!!! GREAT SALE
Of High-Class FURNITURE & DECORATIONS

Commencing Monday, April 17, at 10 o'clock.
An OPPORTUNITY such as seldom occurs to buy GOOD RELIABLE ARTICLES at astonishingly LOW PRICES. ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE 4 POST FREE.

In consequence of the REBUILDING and ENLARGING of their premises, and to avoid the damage to the stock and expense of moving it, a temporary reduction.

All Furniture and Decorations at GREATLY REDUCED PRICES. Many of their Specialities being unobtainable elsewhere.

FURNITURE. WALL PAPERS. CRETONNES. DECORATIONS.

<p>BED ROOM SUITES. Reduced from 3 6, 2 9, 2 4, to 1 11</p> <p>DINING AND DRAWING ROOM FURNITURE. Reduced from 3, 2, 1 4, to 1-1</p> <p>OVERMANTELS. Reduced from 4 1, 3 9, 3 3, to 2 8</p> <p>REC'D. SCREEN DESKS. Reduced from 4 1, 3 9, 3 3, to 2 8</p> <p>COZY CORNERS. Reduced from 4 1, 3 9, 3 3, to 2 8</p> <p>WROUGHT IRON WORK, EASY CHAIRS, SOFAS, AND SETTEES. Reduced from 4 1, 3 9, 3 3, to 2 8</p>	<p>Per piece, reduced from 3 6, 2 9, 2 4, to 1 11</p> <p>THE GODFREY GILES PAPER. Reduced from 3, 2, 1 4, to 1-1</p> <p>THE GODFREY CRETONNE PAPERS. Reduced from 4 1, 3 9, 3 3, to 2 8</p>	<p>Our wall-to-wall SPECIALITIES, reduced from 3 3, 2 9, 2 6, to 1 11</p> <p>Other designs & qualities reduced from 2, 1 8, 1 6, to 1 2</p> <p>Isle and China MATTINGS, reduced from 1 9 to 1 10s. per yard.</p>	<p>ORNAMENTAL ARCHWAYS, &c. AT VERY EXCEPTIONAL PRICES.</p> <p>ALL BUSINESS IN DECORATIVE & OTHER DEPARTMENTS WILL BE CARRIED ON AS USUAL.</p> <p>Customers are requested to send CASH with orders in every case to save delay.</p>
--	---	--	--

WALL PAPERS. DON'T MISS this opportunity of Repapering at half the usual cost. Patterns sent free. ALL ORDERS will be executed as promptly as possible, in strict rotation.

GODFREY GILES & CO., ONLY ADDRESS, 19, OLD CAVENDISH ST., OXFORD ST., LONDON, W.

Figure 3.7

Advertisement for William Wallace & Co, *Hearth and Home*, 13 April 1893, 29.

BEFORE DECIDING ELSEWHERE, CALL & INSPECT

WM. WALLACE & CO.'S,

Art Furniture Manufacturers & Decorators,
151, 152, 153, 154, & 155, CURTAIN ROAD,
LONDON, E.C.,

INEXPENSIVE ARTISTIC FURNITURE, CARPETS, & DECORATION,

AS RECOMMENDED BY ALL THE LEADING SOCIETY PAPERS.
ALL GOODS CARRIAGE PAID TO ANY STATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.
An Immense Saving to Country Buyers

**SPECIAL
SCHEMES
OF
Decoration**

A Saving of 25 Per Cent.
CATALOGUE, ESTIMATES AND
DESIGNS
POST FREE.



MR. TALBOT COLE SAYS:
"I read your letter just as I returned from a long visit to Wallace's, 154, Curtain Road, E.C. I am convinced that you will get more for your money (quality and appearance) there than in a more fashionable locale. Mr. Wallace will, I am sure, send you one of his pretty catalogues so that you may choose for yourself."

Figure 3.8

Advertisement for Liberty & Co., *The Country Gentleman*, 10 April 1897, 66.

LIBERTY & CO., LTD.

(INVENTORS, DESIGNERS, AND IMPORTERS OF ART FABRICS AND FURNITURE),

Messrs. LIBERTY invite inspection of their carefully selected Stock of **TURKISH, PERSIAN,** and other Oriental Carpets and Rugs. Being large Buyers and direct importers, they can offer special facilities in regard to Variety of Design, Excellence of Quality, and Economy in Price.

EASTERN CARPETS & RUGS

Eastern Carpet & Rug Catalogue (Illustrated) Post Free.

TURKEY CARPETS.

In special designs and rich soft colourings

Size.	Price.	Size.	Price.
9ft 8in by 7ft 4in... £7 15 0		14ft 8in by 12ft 3in... £19 0 0	
10ft 0in by 8ft 2in... 8 5 0		22ft 6in by 13ft 8in... 32 0 0	
12ft 0in by 10ft 9in... 13 10 0		27ft 3in by 18ft 1in... 52 10 0	

Messrs. LIBERTY prepare (free of cost) Designs and Estimates of Artistic Decoration, including the simpler forms of Painting and Papering.

Sketches and Estimates also submitted (free of cost) for every description of Window Curtains, Draperies, Blinds, Bed-Hangings, Loose Covers, and all Upholstery Work.

DECORATION & FURNITURE

Messrs. LIBERTY have in stock a Choice Selection of **PAPER LEATHERS,** including many exclusive designs and fine reproductions of Old Venetian and Spanish Models. **INSPECTION INVITED.**

Pattern Book Post Free.

LIBERTY & CO., Ltd., { CHESHAM HOUSE—For Carpets, Tapestries, Curtains, Muslins, Cretonnes, Furniture, Curios, and Bazaar. }
EAST INDIA HOUSE—For Silks, Cashmeres, Costumes, Shawls, Embroideries, Handkerchiefs, Fans, Jewellery, &c. } REGENT ST., LONDON, W.

Figure 3.9

Advertisement for Oetzmann & Co, *Illustrated London News*, 20 June 1881, 50.

FURNISH THROUGHOUT (Regd.)

OETZMANN & CO.,

67, 69, 71, 73, 77, & 79, HAMPSTEAD-ROAD (NEAR TOTTENHAM-COURT-ROAD).

CARPETS, FURNITURE, FURNITURE.

As London Stock of BRASS, IRON, WOOD, and other materials of choice, for
Wholesale and Retail Supply, the best and most complete of the kind, and of the best
quality, suitable for the most extensive use.

ORDER FOR THIS SERVICE PROMPT AND PUNCTUAL ATTENTION IN THE SELECTION. QUANTITIES OBTAINABLE WITHOUT DELAY.

IN ORDERING ANY OF THE ABOVE GOODS IT IS OUR PLEASURE TO SEE THE GOODS, AND TO BE ASSURED THAT THE "ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS" WILL BE RECEIVED.

WHICH IS AS USEFUL TO YOU AS THE "ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS" IS TO US. COMPANY OF THE "ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS" WILL BE RECEIVED.

OETZMANN & CO., HAMPSTEAD-ROAD, LONDON.

Figure 3.10

Advertisement for Maple & Co, *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion*, 1 July 1877, 51.

CARPETS
CARPETS
CARPETS
DRAWING-ROOM FURNITURE
 Suites from 10 Guineas

MAPLE & CO
 TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD.

CURTAINS
CURTAINS
CURTAINS
DINING-ROOM FURNITURE
 Suites from 14 Guineas



Very handsome 7ft. black Early English Cabinet, with drawer and cupboard, enclosed by two beautifully painted doors. £12 12 0
 Ditto 5 feet 6 inches. 4200. 10 10 0
 A large Stock of highly-burnished Cabinets from 20 Guineas to 100 Guineas.

BED-ROOM FURNITURE
 Suites from 6 Guineas

BEDSTEADS
 10,000
 Brass and Iron Bedsteads in Stock.
 10s. to 30 Guineas.

THE LARGEST AND MOST CONVENIENT FURNISHING ESTABLISHMENT IN THE WORLD.

A house of any magnitude Furnished throughout in three days. Purchases should visit MAPLE & Co's before deciding. All Goods marked in plain figures, the system being Small Posits, as established by this firm thirty-five years ago.

WHOLESALE AND FOR EXPORTATION.
HOTELS, CLUBS, SHIPPERS, AND LARGE BUYERS.
 WILL FIND GREAT ADVANTAGES.

MAPLE & CO
 TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, LONDON.

ALL GOODS MARKED IN PLAIN FIGURES.

ALL GOODS MARKED IN PLAIN FIGURES.

Wheat Dressing Table, with extra shelf, covered with cloth, set silver, fringed, and brass. 25s. 6d.
 Ditto set Gold-leaf. 35s. 6d.

Wardrobe Table, with glass top, and brass feet. 15s. 6d.
 Ditto, with silver top, and brass feet. 25s. 6d.

Bedroom Table set with 2 sets of chairs, with silver and gold leaf. 15s. 6d.
 Ditto. 10s. 6d.

Bedroom Table set with 2 sets of chairs, with silver and gold leaf. 15s. 6d.
 Ditto, with silver. 10s. 6d.

An Illustrated Catalogue, containing the Price of every Article required in Furnishing, Post Free.

Figure 3.11

Advertisement for Emerson & Co, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 15 March 1890, 11.


MARCH 15, 1890.] WOMEN'S PENNY PAPER.

EMERSON & CO.


Fittings.
Moorish Arches.
Cosy Corners,
Screens &c.,
made to order.

Sketches
and Estimates
free.

New Illustrated
Catalogues of
Inexpensive Art
Furniture sent
post free.



ART
FURNITURE
FOR
ENAMELLING
A
SPECIALITE.



Art Furnishers and Decorators,
223, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.
Telegraphic Address—"EMVOI" LONDON.

HOUSES ARTISTICALLY DECORATED AND FURNISHED THROUGHOUT.
CLASSES FOR DECORATIVE PAINTING, &c. TERMS ON APPLICATION.

Figure 3.12

Advertisement for Emerson & Co, *The Women's Penny Paper*, 4 April 1891, 13.

Gold Medal and Diploma of Honour, Anglo-Danish Exhibition.

EMERSON & CO.,

ART FURNISHERS & DECORATIVE ARTISTS,
223, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.



LOUIS SEIZE SCREEN FOR PHOTOS,
Complete, with Silk Curtains,
£3 3s., any Colour.



THE CHAUCER COSY CORNER,
New Green Stain or Enamelled
any Colour, from £2 10s.



ARTISTIC CABINET,
Oak, Stained Green or White Enamel,
£15 10s.

Catalogues and Price Lists on Application.

Figure 3.13

Advertisement for Mrs Charles Muller, *Hearth and Home*, 14 December 1899, 41.

Mrs. CHARLES MULLER,
7, SLOANE STREET, LONDON, S.W.
Artistic House Decorator & Furnisher.

EXTENSIVE WAREHOUSE REplete WITH EVERY KIND OF FURNITURE.

Furniture sent to Clients in the Country and Abroad.

Mrs. MULLER has Furnished and Decorated a MODEL FLAT at 7, Sloane St., where she arranges daily interviews for her clients, free of all charge, advising them as to the successful and artistic arrangement of their homes, and practically demonstrating the suitable furnishing of every part of the house. At such interviews Mrs. Muller exhibits in her studio

**WALL-PAPERS, DECORATIONS, CRETONNES,
CHINTZES, TAPESTRIES, BROCADES, &c.,**

all specially selected—and these she groups into various schemes according to individual requirements; thus illustrating clearly what she advises, while she undertakes to save her clients both time and money.

ESTIMATES FREE OF CHARGE.

Figure 3.14

Advertisement for Katherine Margaret Cooke (who worked in Eastbourne), *The House*, 1 April 1897, xx.

MRS.
F. G. COOKE,
3, HYDE GARDENS, EASTBOURNE,
(Wife of an Architect, and with many years' experience.)
Is prepared to advise, personally, in
town or country, on all matters of
HOUSE DECORATION.

FEES ON APPLICATION.

Figure 3.15

Advertisement for Mrs Innes, *The House*, May 1898, iv.

The "Innes" Drawing-Room Bookcase.



MRS. INNES
Advises as to House
Decorating and Fur-
nishing for a fixed fee,
or gives Estimates for
and undertakes the
entire

**DECORATING and
FURNISHING
of HOUSES.**

MRS. INNES has a large selection of - - -
PATTERNS OF WALL PAPERS AND CURTAIN STUFFS
ON VIEW AT
8, PRINCES STREET, HANOVER SQUARE, W.

Figure 3.16

Advertisement for Mrs Innes, *The Morning Post*, 10 November 1897, 1.

A LADY, with practical experience and artistic taste,
will UNDERTAKE all Details of House Furnishing and
Decorating; estimates free of charge.—Mrs. Innes, 8, Prince's-street,
Hanover-square.

Figure 3.17

'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 1.

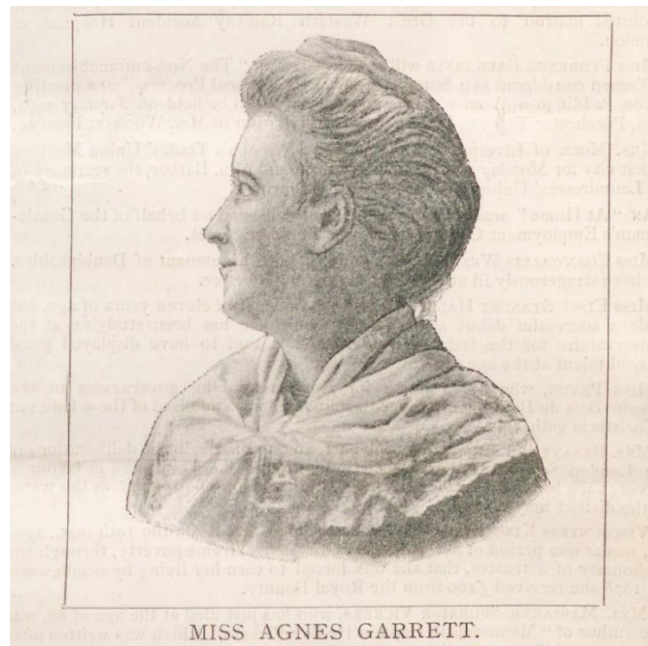


Figure 3.18

'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.



Figure 3.19

'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1.



Figure 3.20

Exhibition catalogue entry for Charlotte Robinson's stand at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, *Official Catalogue of the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford* (Manchester: J. Heywood), 81.

229 CHARLOTTE ROBINSON, 64, King-street, Manchester.
Frieze. Corner Sideboard. Overmantel. Draught Screen.
Fire Screens. Tuckaway Tables. Newspaper and Music Stands.
Photograph Frames, &c.

Figure 3.21

Dressing table designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213969> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 3.22

Wardrobe designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213970> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 3.23

Cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213959> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 3.24

Photograph of the Industrial Design Section at the 1887 Royal Yorkshire Jubilee Exhibition, showing the numerous exhibitors along the East Nave to the music room. Bill Newton, *Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Old Trafford 1887* (Manchester: Trafford Leisure Services, 1889), 25.



Figure 3.25

Illustration of a couch, designed by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett and a settee by Morris & Co., both exhibited at the first Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition, 1888. 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society Exhibition', *The Cabinet Maker and Art Furniture*, 1 December 1888, 143–144.

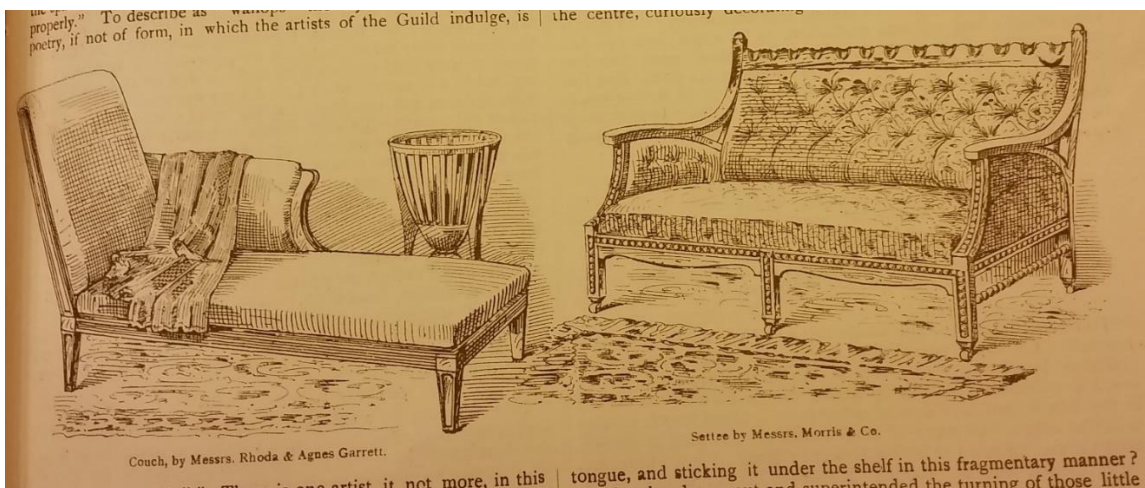


Figure 3.26

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1876).

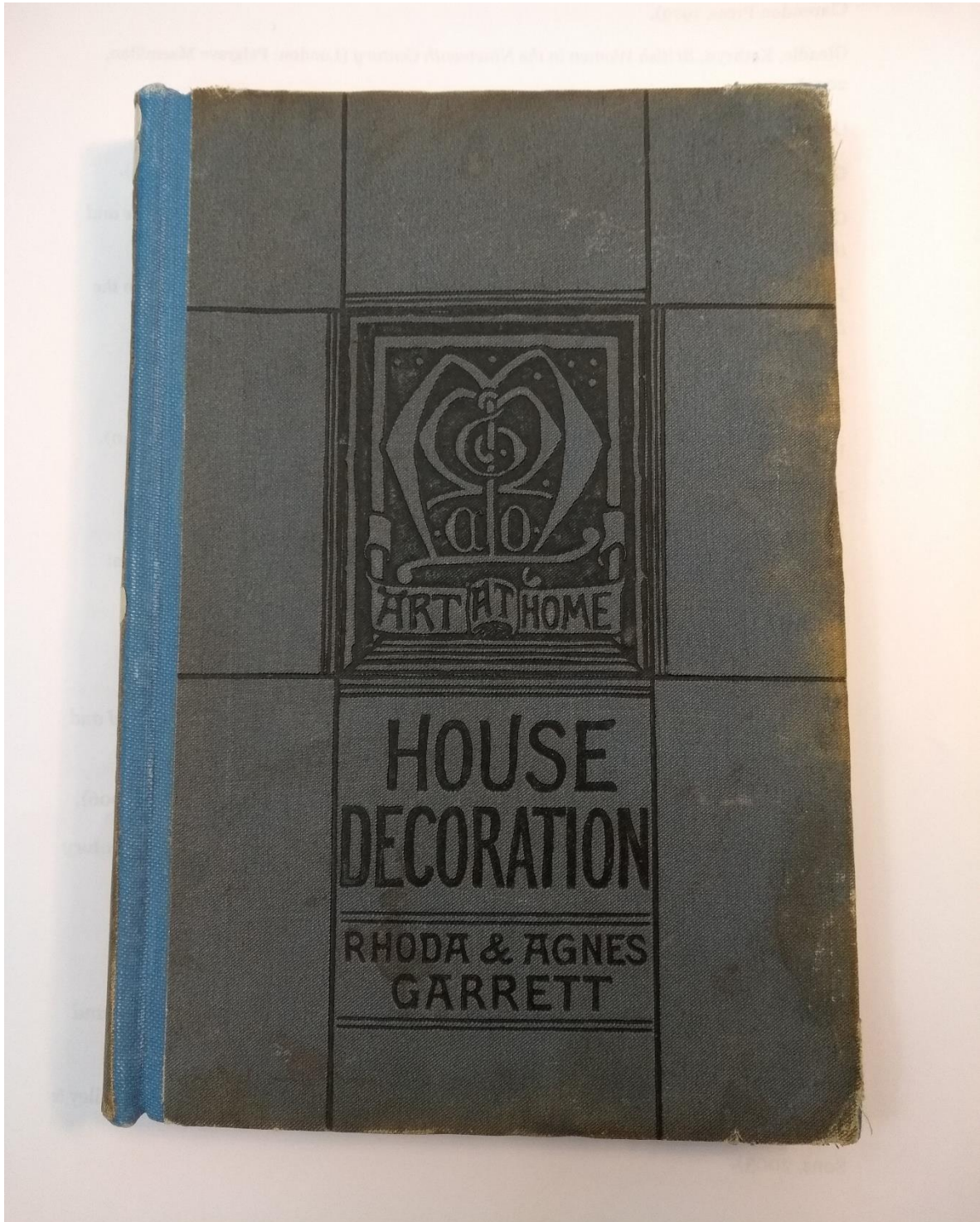


Figure 3.27

Header of Charlotte Robinson's 'Home Decoration' column in *The Queen*, 1 December 1888, 728.

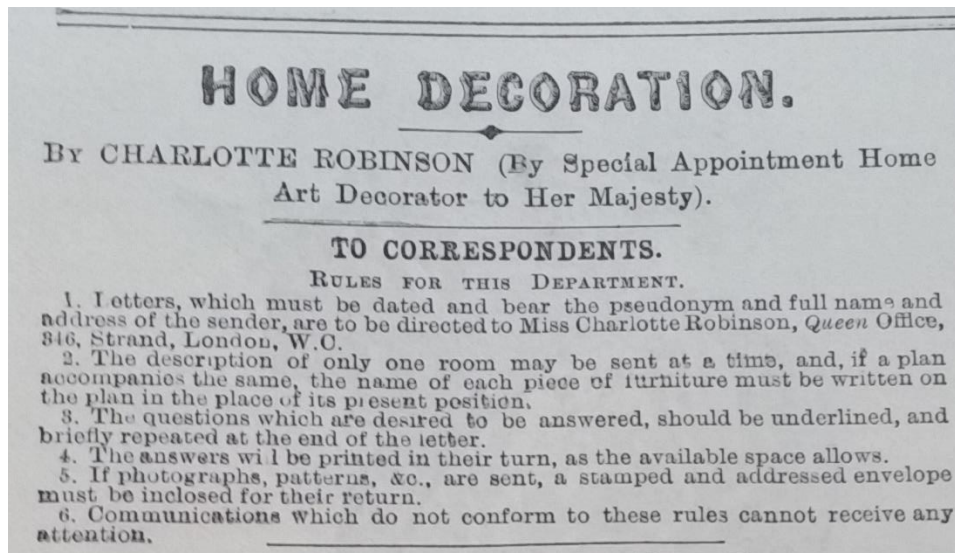


Figure 3.28

Cosy corner design by Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: Cosy Corners', *The Queen*, 16 November 1889, 698.



Figure 3.29

Ethel M. M. McKenna (ed.) *Some Arts and Crafts* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903).

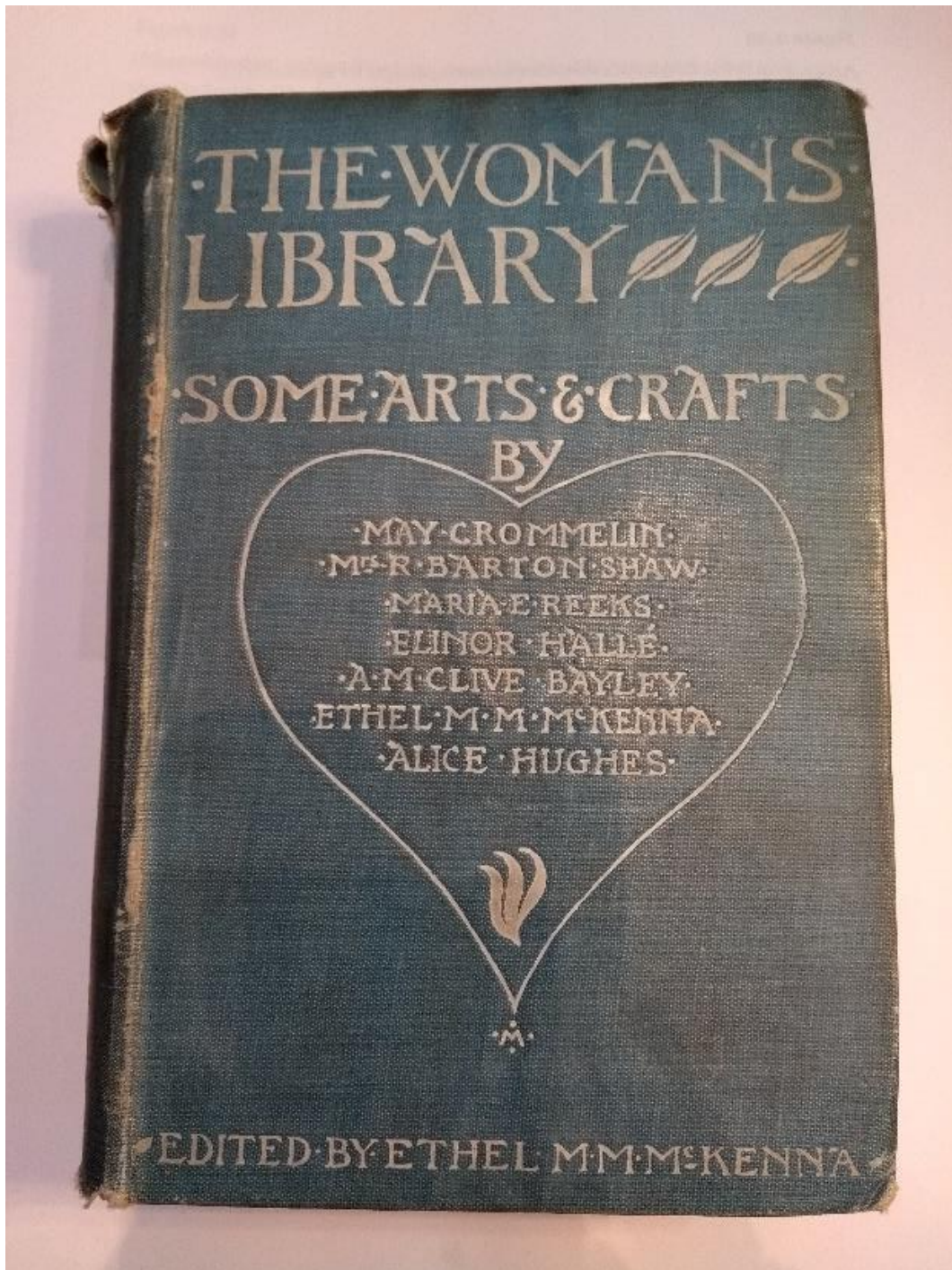


Figure 3.30

'The Renaissance Drawing-Room at Mrs Yerkes' house in Fifth Avenue, New York', from May Crommelin and Caroline Barton Shaw, 'Furniture and Decoration', in Ethel M. M. Mckenna (ed.) *Some Arts and Crafts* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903), facing page 14.



Figure 3.31

'Sheraton Room at Mr G.A. Cooper's House', from May Crommelin and Caroline Barton Shaw, 'Furniture and Decoration', in Ethel M. M. Mckenna (ed.) *Some Arts and Crafts* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1903), facing page 104.



4

Clients and Commissions

The contemporary press frequently emphasised that Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin all undertook decorative interior schemes for private clients, something that differentiated them from the ‘decorators on paper’, such as Mary Haweis and Charlotte Talbot Coke.⁶¹⁸ This was seen by the women themselves as an important distinction: for example, a source on Crommelin was careful to note that she was ‘not a decorator through the press, like Mrs Talbot Coke, but is a practical designer and house-furnisher’.⁶¹⁹ By undertaking decorative commissions, the women were placed in direct competition with the men, and male-run firms, active in the field. These ranged from architects such as Richard Norman Shaw, to specialist decorators like J. G. Crace & Sons, department stores such as Liberty and Shoolbred & Co., upholstery firms including Snell & Co, and artistic retailers like Jackson & Graham.⁶²⁰ This chapter analyses the range and scope of the women’s commissions: firstly, their designs for domestic interiors and, secondly, those for public and commercial interiors. It considers what scale and variety of work they undertook and what, if any, survives today. Throughout, the chapter asks whether the women’s commissioned work differed from, or was similar to, that of their male competitors.

Elizabeth Crawford’s *Enterprising Women* began the process of uncovering commissions by the Garrett cousins.⁶²¹ This chapter continues her work, calling on extensive archival research both to identify previously unknown Garrett clients and to shed further light on those already recognised. In addition, it has discovered new material which greatly expands our knowledge and understanding of the professional work of Robinson and Crommelin. Unfortunately, none of the women left archives and uncovering information about the private commissions they undertook is fraught with difficulty. References to their commissions in the contemporary press have, frequently, provided vital clues; following up these references in the

⁶¹⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: the British and their Possessions* (Boston: Yale University Press, 2009), 65.

⁶¹⁹ E. Rentoul Esler, ‘Irish Literary Women in London’, *Irish Presbyterian*, 1 October. 1895, 5.

⁶²⁰ Joanna Banham, Sally Macdonald and Julia Porter, *Victorian Interior Design* (London: Cassel, 1991), 17–23.

⁶²¹ Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: the Garretts and their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002).

archives of the clients referred to has, often, been fruitful. It has not, however, always been possible to uncover concrete information about individual commissions. As a result, this chapter has also called on additional sources, such as the interior decoration advice the women published in books and periodicals, to infer details about their clients and the decorative work they undertook for them.

Domestic interiors

Sources in the contemporary press indicate that the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin all undertook numerous private domestic commissions during their careers. However, archival sources documenting this work are scant. What can we discover about their clients and the type of domestic projects they undertook? This section closely examines the Garretts' extensive work for family members (uncovering previously unknown work for Philippa Fawcett, as well as several potential new commissions) and considers why this has led them to be dismissed by the scholarship on British interior design. In addition, it uncovers details about two additional Garrett commissions (for the Crisps and Lady Dorothy Nevill [1826–1913]). It scrutinizes Crommelin's commissions for aristocratic clients, calling on new archival research into her work for the Dufferin family, and questions what we can discover about Robinson's domestic commissions from her 'Home Decoration' column in the *Queen* magazine.

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett

Many of the Garretts' known domestic commissions were undertaken for family members [Figure 4.1]. Elizabeth Crawford, following Ray Strachey (who provides no references), notes that their first commissions included Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's house at 4 Upper Berkeley Street and Millicent Garrett Fawcett's houses at 'The Lawn', 51 South Lambeth Road, London, 42 Bessborough Gardens, London and 18 Brookside, Cambridge.⁶²² Crawford also records that Agnes Garrett, in 1884, redecorated Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's Aldeburgh home, West Hill.⁶²³ Although she was paid £200 for the work (roughly £19,130 today), indicating that this was a considerable commission, there is no record of what it involved.⁶²⁴ The only mentions

⁶²² Garrett Anderson moved with her husband to 4 Upper Berkeley Street in 1874. This remained her primary residence until 1902. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 192; Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: John Murray, 1935), 69. Jo Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson* (London: Methuen, 1965), 298.

⁶²³ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 204.

⁶²⁴ Letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to James Skelton Anderson, 29 February 1884, HA436/1/2/3/18, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 08/03/2018].

of the Garrett firm in an inventory of West Hill, dated 1905, are ‘two scones [sic] on walls – Agnes’, valued at £5.⁶²⁵ Crawford also claims that Garrett ‘is thought to have decorated other of the Garrett Aldeburgh homes – Alde House itself, Alice Cowell’s (1842–1925) house in Brudenell Terrace, Bifrons, home of Edmund Garrett, as well as her sister Josephine’s (1853–1925) house in Bury St Edmunds’.⁶²⁶

Although Crawford, like Strachey, provides no references, some evidence is provided by an exchange of correspondence between Agnes Garrett’s great-nephew, Colin Anderson (1904–1980) and her great-niece, Gladys Wood (b. 1878).⁶²⁷ In 1952, less than twenty years after Garrett’s death, Anderson wrote to Wood asking for information about her work for the family:

you and John are important possible sources, particularly in respect of the contents of ‘The Maltings’ [Bridge House, Snape] and ‘Green Hays’, either or both of which might well still contain some of the original equipment provided from the Firm [A&R Garrett: House Decorators] for George on his marriage. Your mother too might well have been a purchaser, and it is known that the original Bifrons and West Hill, to say nothing of Alde House and the Cowell’s house on Brudenell Terrace were all originally fitted out from the same source. According to Cecil G. S., only Aunt Dar stood out against this tendency!’⁶²⁸

Gladys’ reply was not encouraging:

I was very interested in your letter, but am afraid I can’t help you about Aunt Agnes’ designs. I remember very well the wall papers we had at home in Bury St. Edmunds which were hers - but I did not know she designed furniture, & I don’t think mother ever had any - the only two bits of furniture I had from her are antiques. At the Bridge House Snape where John lives, there

⁶²⁵ The inventory also lists a sofa by Cottier in the Winter Bedroom, also valued at £5. Priced Inventory of Alde House, Aldeburgh, HA436/5/1, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

⁶²⁶ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 204; Letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to James Skelton Anderson, 29 February 1884, HA436/1/2/3/18, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 08/03/2018].

⁶²⁷ Colin Anderson was the grandson of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Gladys Wood (née Salmon), was the daughter of Josephine Salmon (née Garrett) [Figure 4.1]. Crawford does refer to this correspondence elsewhere in her exploration of the Garretts’ firm but does not consider it in relation to the work the cousins undertook for family members.

⁶²⁸ Letter to Gladys Wood from Colin Anderson 9 June 1952, HA436/1/4/14, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich. The John referred to is Gladys’s son, John Garrett Wood. George is George Herbert Garrett, Agnes Garrett’s younger brother. Bridge House and Green Hays were both Garrett family homes in Snape, and Bifrons, West Hill, Alde House, and 158 Brudenell Terrace were all Garrett family homes in Aldeburgh. Cecil G. S. refers to Cecilia Garrett Smith (the wife of Agnes’ great nephew Godfrey Garrett Smith). Aunt Dar refers to Clara Thornbury Garrett, the wife of Agnes’ brother Samuel Garrett. Email correspondence with Margaret Young, December 2017.

are some charming brass door plates & handles which I am sure are hers, & a very pretty built in cupboard with glass doors - hers too I think.⁶²⁹

The exchange does confirm that Agnes Garrett undertook work for her brothers George Garrett (18854–1929) (at either/both Green Hays and Bridge House, Snape) and Edmund Garrett (Bifrons), and for her sisters, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (Alde House, Aldeburgh, was built for Newson Garrett [1812–1893] and passed to Elizabeth on his death) and Alice Cowell (158 Brudenell Terrace), as well as supplying wallpaper to her sister Josephine Salmon (Bury St Edmunds).

If Cecil's assertion that 'only Aunt Dar stood out against this tendency' holds true, it is likely that the Garretts also worked for other family members.⁶³⁰ However, unless further archival material is uncovered, our knowledge of these commissions will probably remain minimal. Many of the houses formerly occupied by members of Agnes Garrett's extended family display features typical of the Garretts' work (as described in the contemporary media). According to Agnes Garrett's one-time pupil, Millicent Vince, Garrett's 'most beautiful work' was her panelled rooms.⁶³¹ Vince claimed, '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'.⁶³² Notably, the dining room at Bridge House, Snape [**Figure 4.2**] (occupied by Newson Garrett and then George Garrett) shows panelling and plasterwork which could well be attributed to the Garrett cousins, as does Alde House [**Figures 4.3 and 4.4**] and Prior House [**Figure 4.5**], Aldeburgh, built by Elizabeth Garrett Anderson for her son Alan Anderson.

Research undertaken for this chapter has revealed a final, and previously unknown, family commission that was undertaken for Agnes Garrett's niece, mathematician and civil servant Phillipa Fawcett (1868–1948), who studied mathematics at Newnham College, Cambridge in the 1890s. An article on the college in *The Woman's Herald* mentions that 'every student has a separate room, which she can adorn to her heart's content, and some of these

⁶²⁹ Letter to Colin Anderson from Gladys Wood 1 June 1952, HA436/1/4/14, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ispwich.

⁶³⁰ Aunt Dar (Clara Thornbury Garrett) was the sister of Kate Thornbury. She lived with Charlotte Robinson's elder sister Anne Atherton (of the Society of Artists) in Kensington. It may be that Agnes and Rhoda Garrett inspired Atherton to embark on her career in house decoration. See **Appendix One**.

⁶³¹ Millicent Vince, 'Agnes Garrett: Pioneer of Women House Decorators', *The Woman's Leader*, 11 September 1925, 260.

⁶³² Millicent Vince, *Decoration and Care of the Home* (London: W. Collins, 1923), 260.

sanctums are very cosy and artistic. Miss Fawcett's study has been decorated by her aunt, Miss Agnes Garrett, the well-known art decorator'.⁶³³ A photograph of Fawcett in her study at the college displays an interior which could well be attributed to Garrett [**Figure 4.6**] including, perhaps, the Garrett day bed illustrated in previous chapters.

It would be easy to use the apparent reliance of the Garretts on family commissions as an excuse to dismiss their efforts as amateurish dabbling. This may be the reason that they have traditionally received so little attention by scholars such as Mark Girouard, whose 1977 monograph on the Queen Anne movement only devotes a few lines to their career.⁶³⁴ However, the Garretts did not work exclusively for family members. As noted in **Chapter Two**, they also undertook work for James and Margaret Beale. A cabinet [**Figure 4.7**] attributed to the cousins, and once owned by the Beales, is now in the Victoria & Albert Museum. The upper doors are carved with the couple's monogram and the date 1875, implying it was purchased when the family moved to 32 Holland Park, London.⁶³⁵ Pauline Agius describes the piece as 'a subtly proportioned, architectural piece in what the Garretts referred to as the 'Queen Anne' style', drawing on both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century models.⁶³⁶ The solidity of the mahogany is cleverly balanced by elegant fluting, bevelled mirror glass, an arcaded lower section and decorative walnut inlay. Although made by a skilled (but unknown) cabinet-maker, the piece demonstrates experimental features commensurate with the early stage of the Garretts career in which it was designed.⁶³⁷

As previously noted, there are two further confirmed examples of Garrett-designed furniture, a corner cabinet [**Figure 4.8**] and daybed [**Figure 4.9**], at Standen, the Beale's Sussex home (built for them by Philip Webb in 1892). While the carving on the V&A cabinet implies they designed it specifically for the Beales, the (one time) existence of duplicate examples of

⁶³³ 'Girl's and their Colleges', *The Woman's Herald*, 19 November 1892, 8.

⁶³⁴ Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: Queen Anne Movement, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 8, 54, 241.

⁶³⁵ Oliver Garnett, *Standen, West Sussex* (London: National Trust Guidebooks, 1993), 16.

⁶³⁶ Pauline Agius, *British Furniture 1880–1915* (London: ACC Art Books, 1978), 75.

⁶³⁷ For example, although drawers would have been more practical, access to the storage cavity within the cabinet's pedestal is by hinged flaps. Similarly, the lock of the upper cupboard is upside down to compensate for its inconvenient height.

the day bed and corner cabinet, suggests that these were not commissioned.⁶³⁸ Also at Standen, and attributed by the National Trust to the Garretts, is the bedroom furniture discussed in **Chapter Three** [Figures 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12], as well as a set of drawing room furniture. This includes a pair of armchairs [Figure 4.13], a pair of footstools [Figure 4.14], a further footstool [Figure 4.15], a small sofa [Figure 4.16] and a bookcase [Figure 4.17]. The attribution to the Garretts is plausible considering the pieces are of a similar high quality and, stylistically, strikingly similar to the cousins' confirmed designs. The armchairs, pair of foot stools and settee have similar decorative wooden medallions to those of the Garrett day bed and may have originally formed part of a set. Apart from the bedroom furniture, all the Garrett-attributed Standen furniture has, like the V&A Garrett cabinet, elegant tapered feet decorated with almond-shaped inlays in a lighter wood.

If we accept the National Trust's attribution of the Standen pieces to Garretts, the number of their surviving furniture designs expands from three to ten. This adds considerable weight to the theory that the cousins were operating on a similar scale to their masculine contemporaries, as does the quality of the male-designed furniture also included in the Beale's collection. The couple also collected furniture by a range of established firms and designers, such as Charles Robert Ashbee (1863–1942), Collinson & Lock, Ernest William Gimson (1864–1919), E. W. Godwin, Morris & Co., James Shoolbred & Co., Liberty, Maple & Co. and W. A. S. Benson.⁶³⁹ While it is not known if, aside from supplying furniture, the Garretts undertook any decorative work for the Beale family, there is evidence to suggest they did receive numerous other domestic commissions. For example, Millicent Vince claimed that Garrett undertook decorative work for the house of Sir William Thompson, (1824–1907) Lord

⁶³⁸ Both are also discussed in **Chapter Three**. The day bed was displayed at the Paris exhibition in 1878 and is discussed and illustrated in Lewis Foreman Day, 'Notes on English Decorative Art in Paris' in *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 19 July 1878, 29. The corner cabinet is illustrated in Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 62.

⁶³⁹ Numerous examples survive in the collection of the National Trust at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex:
<http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/results?Places=0d79fad4fffffe0725145d1ac084bc53&Categories=6ba8a81dfffffe0702132e044efd06c4> [Accessed 8/4/2018].

Kelvin.⁶⁴⁰ Although no further information is known about this commission, Lord Kelvin purchased several items from the sale of the Morwell Street warehouse in 1899.⁶⁴¹

It is also known that the Garretts undertook work for household science writer Catherine Buckton (1826/7–1904), presumably for the London home at 4 Vicarage Gate, Kensington which she occupied from 1882.⁶⁴² Buckton, who founded the Leeds Ladies' Educational Association, which promoted women's higher education, moved in similar feminist circles to the Garretts.⁶⁴³ In her 1898 book, *Comfort and Cleanliness*, Buckton mentions that 'The Misses Garrett, who decorated the house for us, greatly improved the entrance and staircase by artistic windows, to admit both light and air, and made every room, from the basement upwards, look cheerful and pretty by covering the walls and woodwork with light papers and paint'.⁶⁴⁴ While no further information is known about this commission, it tallies with *The Women's Penny Paper's* claim that 'Without undertaking any actual building' Garrett 'will often suggest improvements, and will alter an awkward staircase, or throw out a box window'.⁶⁴⁵ Millicent Vince saw this as a real strength of Garrett's working style, arguing that 'No one could have been more skilful in that work of altering and re-arranging the interior construction of houses which forms a very considerable part of a house-decorators work'.⁶⁴⁶

An 1890 article by Mary Billington in *Woman's World* illustrates a 'Chimney piece designed by Miss Agnes Garrett (by permission of Mrs. Wellesley, Portman Square)' [**Figure 4.18**].⁶⁴⁷ This was, presumably, Ada Wellesley (1847–1933), who lived with her husband, artist

⁶⁴⁰ Vince, *Decoration and Care of the Home*, 260. While Vince does not mention which house, Crawford posits that this was likely to be their home in Eaton Square. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 191.

⁶⁴¹ Philips, Son & Neal, *A Catalogue of Valuable Old English and Artistic Furniture* (London: Dryden Press, 1899).

⁶⁴² <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/champion-female-education-pioneer-scholarship-12628828> [Accessed 8/4/2018].

⁶⁴³ <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/52270> [accessed 24/05/2015].

⁶⁴⁴ Catherine Buckton, *Comfort and Cleanliness: The Servant and Mistress Question* (London: Green & Co, 1898), 25.

⁶⁴⁵ 'Miss Agnes Garrett', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 18 January 1890, 145.

⁶⁴⁶ Vince, 'Agnes Garrett', 260.

⁶⁴⁷ Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women' in Oscar Wilde (ed.), *Woman's World* (London: Cassels and Sons, 1890), 193.

Gerald Edward Wellesley (1846–1915), at 33 Portman Square.⁶⁴⁸ The article claims that Garrett:

strongly objects, for instance, to selling a wall-paper alone, which, pretty as it may be by itself, is really only one note in the harmonic whole of a room or a house ... therefore she will only undertake to complete rooms, and refuses absolutely to sell a pair of curtains to one corner, or to design a chimney-piece for another. The latter, by the way, are some of her great specialities, and the illustrations shows one of her best designs. Her panel papers are another speciality, each design filling a whole panel, without repetition.⁶⁴⁹

While Billington states that only the chimneypiece was a Garrett design, we can infer from the rest of the text that she was also responsible for the wider decorative scheme. Although the building is now destroyed, a photograph of the chimneypiece room taken in the 1960s [**Figure 4.19**], shows the cornice still in situ, as well as an ornate floral ceiling that may have also been Garrett-designed. This example is indicative of the uncertainties associated with relying on such sources, rather than direct archival evidence, for evidence of the work of women decorators. Scholars seem less hesitant to make similar assumptions about male decorators. The interior of Standen, for example, is often credited to Morris & Co.⁶⁵⁰ Although the interior contains numerous examples of the company's wallpaper, textiles and furniture, there is no evidence to suggest that Morris was responsible for creating the decorative scheme itself.

In addition, details of two further, and previously unknown, clients of the Garrett firm have been uncovered during the process of research for this thesis. An 1888 article on writer and horticulturalist Lady Dorothy Nevill in *The Newcastle Weekly Courant* noted that 'Miss Rhoda Garrett and her sisters [sic] are responsible for the panelled dado' of Nevill's house at 45 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, acquired in 1851.⁶⁵¹ That the author of the article mentioned the cousin's involvement with the décor is significant as it demonstrates that, by 1888, the cousins' work was sufficiently well-known to be a matter of public interest. The article reveals several further details about the Charles Street interior: there is a 'cream-white overmantle', portraits of Madame de Pompadour and Horace Walpole, porcelain collected by

⁶⁴⁸ Gerald and Ada Wellesley may have met Garrett at Rustington, where their house, Fynches Lodge was nearby Agnes Garrett's at Pound Cottage. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 186, n.318.

⁶⁴⁹ Billington, 'Some Practical Women', 194.

⁶⁵⁰ Garnett, *Standen*, 28.

⁶⁵¹ 'Lady Dorothy Nevill at Home', *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 31 August 1888, 6.

Lady Nevill, a ‘real smoking-room’ and ‘a green mantelpiece, which has almost the appearance of malachite, made out of oak saturated by fungi’ found in the woods of her country home.⁶⁵² However, again, there are no further details as to whether the Garretts were responsible for the panelled dado alone or for the wider decorative scheme.

A letter from Louisa Garrett Anderson to her mother in 1899 (in the Suffolk Record Office) hints at another Garrett commission. Louisa wrote that ‘The dinner at Mrs Crisp’s was very nice last night. They are most attractive kind people with awfully pretty things in their house & the house itself is very "homey" looking from a large finger of A. [Aunt] Agnes in it’.⁶⁵³ Although it has not been possible to identify the Crisp family, the letter underlines the fact that, aside from their work for family members, many of the Garretts commissions were undertaken for members of their wider social circle. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson knew the Crisp family socially and, likewise, Millicent Garrett Fawcett was well acquainted with Lady Dorothy Nevill.⁶⁵⁴ However, relying on networking on this way was not unusual and, as Charles Harvey, Jon Press and Mairi Maclean demonstrate that Morris & Co. carefully manipulated their existing social networks to extend the influence of their business.⁶⁵⁵ For example, one of the commissions often credited with establishing the fame of Morris’s firm was the Green Dining Room at the Victoria & Albert Museum, gained through Phillip Webb’s connection to the building’s architect, Francis Fowke (1823–1865).⁶⁵⁶

This personal/professional exchange could, of course, work the other way, something Millicent Vince noted when she claimed that Agnes Garrett owed many of her friendships ‘to the fact that she decorated their houses’.⁶⁵⁷ This is perhaps true of James Beale, who Garrett

⁶⁵² ‘Lady Dorothy Nevill at Home’, *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 6.

⁶⁵³ Letter from Louisa Garrett Anderson to Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, HA436/1/3/6, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

⁶⁵⁴ Henry and Millicent Fawcett were frequent guests at the Nevill’s house parties and may well have been responsible for introducing Lady Nevill to the work of the Garrett firm. Ralph Nevill, *The Life & Letters of Lady Dorothy Nevill* (London: Methuen, 1919), 296.

⁶⁵⁵ Charles Harvey, Jon Press, Mairi Maclean, ‘William Morris, Cultural Leadership and the Dynamics of Taste’, *The Business History Review*, 85:2 (June 2011), 245–249.

⁶⁵⁶ Lucy Hartley, *Democratizing Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Art and the Politics of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 148.

⁶⁵⁷ Vince, ‘Agnes Garrett’, 260.

later worked with closely on the board of the Ladies Residential Chambers.⁶⁵⁸ Vince specifically refers, however, to Garretts' friendships with 'Sir Hubert and Lady Maude Parry and with Lord and Lady Kelvin'.⁶⁵⁹ Little is known about the latter, but Garrett's relationship with composer Sir Hubert Parry and his aristocratic wife Lady Maude Parry is well-documented in the Parry family archive at Shulbrede Priory. The relationship is worth examining in more detail, in that it provides an insight into the workings of this simultaneously personal and professional relationship.

The two families shared many political interests, including a commitment (at least on the part of Lady Parry) to female suffrage, they had numerous mutual friends and were frequent visitors to each other's houses. Alongside this, the Garretts were involved with the decoration of two of the Parry's residences: Lincoln House, London, purchased by Hubert Parry in 1876, and Knightscroft, Suffolk, commissioned by him from architect Richard Norman Shaw in 1880. The first mention of the Garretts in the archive is a November 1874 entry in Hubert Parry's diary recounting 'a most delightful evening' spent dining together.⁶⁶⁰ Later that month, the Garretts dined with the Parrys again, a visit Hubert Parry described as 'most enjoyable ... They bought us a pretty little table as a present'.⁶⁶¹ A table is a considerable gift to give a friend you have known for a matter of months and, when we consider that the Garretts were launching their interior decoration business at exactly this time, the present takes on a new meaning as a shrewd marketing move. The Parry family were well-connected, and the cousins must have known that having a piece of their furniture displayed in their home might raise their own profile.

The friendly connection between the families continued and, in 1876, Hubert Parry spent a fortnight at 2 Gower Street, an experience about which he enthused 'I was almost

⁶⁵⁸ While it is not known how the Beales met the Garretts, Judith Neiswander speculates that it may have been through their relative, educational reformer Dorothea Beale, who knew Elizabeth Garrett Anderson through feminist circles. Judith Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1875–1914* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art, 2003), 98.

⁶⁵⁹ Vince, 'Agnes Garrett', 260.

⁶⁶⁰ Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January 1869 to 29 July 1875, entry on 16 November 1874, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*

supremely happy. I never was so spoilt in my life'.⁶⁶² Parry, looking for a new London home, was accompanied to house viewings by Rhoda, who offered advice on layout and drainage.⁶⁶³ He purchased Lincoln House, on Phillimore Place in Kensington and, presumably because of his admiration of the decor at 2 Gower Street [see **Chapter Two**], commissioned the Garretts to decorate the interior. Directly after purchasing the house, Parry 'went to see the Garretts, & took Rhoda' to see it.⁶⁶⁴ Subsequent diary entries are full of the cousins. On 9 November, Parry noted an appointment to meet the Garretts at the house.⁶⁶⁵ On 10 November, Rhoda came 'to settle about carpets & such like' and on 15 November:

a carpenter & a carpet man & woman arrived early & set to work to sort the things in their places - & shortly after Rhoda - who took off her great coat & said 'I have come to work' - and work she did ... directing everybody about what to do; progress was made with quite marvellous rapidity ... meanwhile Agnes arrived & the house was put more & more into order.⁶⁶⁶

The following year, the Garretts sent men to Lincoln House 'to hang pictures', before which Parry and Rhoda 'settled where things were to go'.⁶⁶⁷ Interestingly, two years later the architect Philip Webb helped with the hang of the Wyndham family's pictures at their Belgrave Square house.⁶⁶⁸

Later, a bad drain was discovered. Parry 'Went to fetch one of the Garretts ... they immediately telegraphed for their head builder to meet them at Phillimore Place ... after consultation with Rhoda they concluded that the whole drain system must be entirely

⁶⁶² Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry in April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶³ Hubert Parry, letter to Maude Parry, April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory; Hubert Parry, letter to Maude Parry, April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶⁴ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry on 18 June 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶⁵ Hubert Parry, letter to Maude Parry, April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶⁶ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 Dec 1877, entries on 10 and 15 November 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶⁷ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry on 28 April 1877, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁶⁸ Caroline Dakers, *Clouds: The Biography of a Country House* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 77.

reconstructed'.⁶⁶⁹ In fact, the Garretts involvement with Lincoln House continued into the next decade. In 1883, Agnes wrote to Maude Parry:

I was at Lincoln H. yesterday and arranged about the doors and to have the cisterns and boilers and windows cleaned and told the little woman to write and ask you about the carpets ... let me know if there is anything else about the house before you come back. I think the reason the colour did not stand well on the front door is because we kept doing a little to it over the old paint. When the house is done later on I will have the door thoroughly well done and then it will stand.⁶⁷⁰

Although no record of a fee survives, the Garretts' work on the interior of the house was almost certainly undertaken on a professional basis. Then, as now, it would be overstepping the bounds of friendship to request a friend paint your front door for free. The cousins' involvement is directorial, expert, undertaken with solid technical knowledge, and encompassed decorative work, as well as ongoing advice about domestic maintenance. Unfortunately, there are no surviving depictions of the interior but, considering Parry's admiration of the Queen Anne interiors at 2 Gower Street, it is reasonable to assume that the interior was undertaken in a similar style.

In 1877 the Garretts introduced the Parrys to Rustington, the Sussex village where they often spent holidays and, three years later, Parry commissioned Richard Norman Shaw to build his family a permanent home in the village.⁶⁷¹ The result, Knightscroft [Figure 4.20], is a red brick Queen Anne house with a tile-hung upper floor, gables and a tile roof.⁶⁷² In his monograph on Norman Shaw, Andrew Saint notes that Parry was charged '£187 3s 6d' for his designs and that 'Leggatt and Buckly of Littlehampton' were responsible for the building work.⁶⁷³ Saint does not mention any Garrett involvement in the project, nor does architectural

⁶⁶⁹ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry on 18 October 1877, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷⁰ Agnes Garrett letter to Maude Parry, January 1883, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷¹ Hubert Parry, diary for 30 July 1875 to 31 December 1877, entry on April 1876, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory; Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January to 5 September 1880, entry in March 1880, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷² The exterior of house survives intact, but the interior is divided into flats and there are, unfortunately, no extant Norman Shaw plans or drawings.

⁶⁷³ Andrew Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 445. Examination of the Parry archive at Shulbrede reveals that the builder may in fact be Robert Bushby of Littlehampton. Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January to 5 September 1880, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere; Hubert Parry, diary for 18 September 1880 to 13 May 1881, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

historian Julian Orbach who, writing in the 1970s to defend Knightscroft against a proposed demolition, attributed the interior of the house to Norman Shaw.⁶⁷⁴ In *Enterprising Women*, Elizabeth Crawford disagrees, but is reluctant to nominate the Garretts as responsible, instead claiming that ‘rather than commissioning the Garretts, or any other firm, to design the interiors, it appears that Parry did much of the organising himself.’⁶⁷⁵

However, an examination of the Parry archive at Shulbrede Priory reveals that the Garretts’ involvement with the project was considerable. On 16 March 1880, Rhoda accompanied Parry on a visit to see Norman Shaw’s plans.⁶⁷⁶ Between this inspection and 22 July 1881, when the house was completed, Parry’s diary details at least forty engagements with the Garretts, more than at any other time in their relationship.⁶⁷⁷ In May 1880, Rhoda accompanied Parry on a visit ‘to see the bricks which Shaw’s purpose is to make the house of’ and in September he described a ‘long interview’ with her about the house.⁶⁷⁸ The use of the term ‘interview’ is revealing, in that it implies a degree of professional investment (one does not tend to ‘interview’ a friend during a routine social call). Further engagements with the Garretts involved consultations about the gardens and, in October, a visit that involved ‘much discussion over the plans ... chiefly trying to develop the stables’.⁶⁷⁹ Again, the terminology used by Parry here is interesting: his use of the term ‘develop’ implies that the Garretts were looking at the plans professionally. **Chapter Two** has described Parry’s 1881 purchases of carpets and furniture for Knightscroft from the Garretts in 1881.⁶⁸⁰ They were also involved in

⁶⁷⁴ Julian Orbach to B H Saunders, 1976, LMA/4460/01/31/025, Victorian Society Collection, London Metropolitan Archive, London.

⁶⁷⁵ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 200.

⁶⁷⁶ Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January to 5 September 1880, entry on 16 March 1880, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷⁷ Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January to 5 September 1880, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere; Hubert Parry, diary for 18 September 1880 to 13 May 1881, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷⁸ Hubert Parry, diary for 1 January to 5 September 1880, entries on 19 May and 24 September 1880 Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁷⁹ Hubert Parry, diary for 18 September 1880 to 13 May 1881, entries on 25 September, 3 October and 7 December 1880, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁸⁰ Hubert Parry, diary 14 May 1881 to 30 November 1881, entry on 2 April and 8 July 1881, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

the decorative scheme as, also in 1881, Parry records meeting the Garretts to decide ‘on colours for the painting’.⁶⁸¹

Although there is no surviving evidence of a payment, the extent of the Garretts’ involvement with the interior decoration of Knightscroft implies a formal contractual engagement. *The Women’s Penny Paper* described Agnes Garrett’s working style, claiming that ‘as the work approaches completion she [Agnes] visits it several times a day, putting all the finishing touches and seeing everything is properly carried out to design’.⁶⁸² The extensive contact between the Garretts and the Parrys at the time tallies with this statement. In addition, it is worth noting that, by the 1880s, the Garretts were well-established: it is unlikely that they would have had time to undertake pro bono work. We have some, limited, record of the original appearance of the interiors at Knightscroft. The poet John Betjeman (1906–1984), who described staying at the house as a child, noted the ‘Phillip Webb furniture, Norman Shaw fireplaces and de Morgan tiles and Morris papers’.⁶⁸³ Many of these features can be seen in a photograph of Hubert Parry in the house’s music room [**Figure 4.21**] and, although the house has now been divided into flats, the fireplaces and tiles remain in situ [**Figures 4.22 and 4.23**]. Notably, the Garretts used Morris wallpaper in their own house. The illustration of the dining room from their book, *Suggestions for House Decoration* [**Figure 4.24**], clearly shows Morris’s ‘Trellis’ wallpaper [**Figure 4.25**].

Millicent Vince claimed that Agnes Garrett ‘worked with Mr. Norman Shaw’ in a ‘sort of partnership’.⁶⁸⁴ While Norman Shaw did design interiors himself, for example for the Hall sisters at West Wicklow, the houses he designed were also frequently decorated by other designers, such as Morris & Co. at Cragside and 180 Queen’s Gate and John Aldam Heaton at Bedford Park.⁶⁸⁵ While there is no evidence to suggest that the Garretts worked on any other

⁶⁸¹ Hubert Parry, diary for 18 September 1880 to 13 May 1881, entry on 21 April 1881, Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

⁶⁸² ‘Miss Agnes Garrett’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 2.

⁶⁸³ Letter from John Betjeman to Dr Vivian Lipman, 4 December 1974, LMA/4460/01/30, Victorian Society Collection, London Metropolitan Archive, London.

⁶⁸⁴ Vince, ‘Agnes Garrett’, 260.

⁶⁸⁵ Trevor Keeble, ‘Creating ‘The New Room’. The Hall sisters of West Wickham and Richard Norman Shaw’ in Brenda Martin, Brenda and Penny Sparke (eds.), *Women’s Places: Architecture and Design, 1860–1960*, (London: Routledge, 2003): 23–46; Andrew Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw*, 284; Anne Wealleans, *Designing Liners: A History of Interior Design Afloat*, (London, Routledge, 2006), 61.

Norman Shaw houses (or that that their work on Knightscroft was collaborative), their connection to the decoration of one of his buildings is a significant indicator of the scale of their enterprise at the time. It is, of course, frustrating that there is so little evidence for the Garretts' domestic commissions aside from those undertaken for family and friends. It would be easy to use the apparent professional reliance on personal connections, as an excuse to dismiss their efforts as interior decorators as amateurish. This, however, is reductive: it may be more accurate to view the fact that these women were so often able to persuade friends and family to commission them as demonstrative of considerable business acumen.

It is also important to note that we cannot discount the existence of further Garrett clients not acquired through social or familial networks. Writing about women interior decorators, including the Garretts, Moncure Conway noted that 'many of these ladies have begun by undertaking such work as this for personal friends but have pretty generally found that the circle of those who desire such things is large, and that their art is held in great esteem among cultivated people'.⁶⁸⁶ In addition, Millicent Vince claimed that Garrett 'left the beautiful stamp of her art on the interiors of scores of houses in London and elsewhere' and, considering the Garrett firm was operational for around thirty years, it would be surprising if they did not have substantially more clients than those recorded here.⁶⁸⁷ We know little about the decorative commissions of men such as Daniel Cottier (with whom the Garretts trained), or John Aldam Heaton who, from 1888, *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* recommended, along with the Garretts, as the furniture and decoration workers 'whose name seems to us most nearly to accord with the chief aim of this magazine'.⁶⁸⁸ Nevertheless, their gender has ensured that their contribution to the history of British interior decoration is not contested. In comparison, the contribution of the Garretts, about whom arguably more is known, has been systematically forgotten.

Caroline Crommelin

As with the Garretts, there are frequent references in the contemporary press to domestic commissions undertaken by Caroline Crommelin. For example, in November 1889 *The Pall Mall Gazette* reported 'she is a remarkable business woman, and has decorated ten houses

⁶⁸⁶ Moncure Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1874, 18.

⁶⁸⁷ Vince, 'Agnes Garrett', 260.

⁶⁸⁸ 'The Century Guild Work', *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, January 1888, 83.

during the year'.⁶⁸⁹ Similarly, in 1890, the *Weekly Wisconsin* claimed that Crommelin was engaged on a staggering eighteen domestic orders.⁶⁹⁰ *The Women's Penny Paper* informed readers that Crommelin 'undertakes, when required, to furnish a whole or any part of a house, either going with customers to the different firms or selecting for them. She in this manner supplied nearly all the furniture for Lord Cholmondley's old place at Houton [sic].'⁶⁹¹ This would most likely have been for George Cholmondeley, 4th Marquess of Cholmondeley (1858–1923), who inherited the Houghton Estate from his grandfather in 1884. However, no record of the commission survives in the Cholmondeley family papers at Houghton Hall.⁶⁹²

The article continues to describe Crommelin's working methods, claiming 'There is, in fact, nothing connected with the furniture or decoration of a house which Miss Crommelin will not carry out. When painters and paperers are to be called in she engages them from some reliable firm, but herself superintends all they are doing'.⁶⁹³ The article, of course, was intended to promote Crommelin's business by giving a clear indication of the services she provided, whilst simultaneously asserting her respectability by separating her from any manual labour improper for an upper-class woman. It also emphasised her aristocratic client base, presumably as an assurance of the quality of her work. According to the paper, 'the Duchesses of Marlborough and Abercorn, and the Marchionesses of Waterford, Downshire, Sligo, and Hastings' were all 'among the long list' of Crommelin's 'patronesses'.⁶⁹⁴ These women all had connections to the Northern Irish aristocracy, demonstrating that, like the Garretts, Crommelin did not hesitate to call on her existing social and familial connections to gain clients. Unfortunately, the article does not provide any further details of these commissions and research for this thesis has failed to uncover archival material relating to them.

Another article on Crommelin, in *The Country Gentleman*, is more specific. It commented that, at the time, she was 'doing a dining room for Julia Lady Tweeddale' (presumably Julia Charlotte Stewart Mackenzie [1846–1937], who became Julia, Lady

⁶⁸⁹ Miss Mantalini, 'Shows in the London Shops', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 October 1889, 1.

⁶⁹⁰ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Describes Her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 29 March 1890, 7.

⁶⁹¹ Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 23 November 1889, 1.

⁶⁹² Email correspondence with Houghton Hall archivist, February 2016.

⁶⁹³ Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

⁶⁹⁴ Miss Caroline Crommelin', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 1.

Tweeddale after her 1877 marriage to Arthur Hay [1824–1878]).⁶⁹⁵ Again, while it has not been possible to uncover any further information on this commission, it is interesting to note that it involved the decoration of a room traditionally associated with masculinity.⁶⁹⁶ While Lady Tweeddale was of Scottish descent and did not have an obvious connection to the Crommelin family, in 1891 Crommelin revealed that she also undertook work for ‘Armor Corry, the brother of Lord Rowton, and a dear friend of the late Earl of Beconsfield’.⁶⁹⁷ This is most likely Henry Lowry Corry (1836–1919), whose family estate was at Castle Coole in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, and who moved in circles similar to the Crommelins.

In the 1891 census, Corry was living with his wife Geraldine at 5 Eaton Square, the family’s London home and the commission is most likely to have been associated with this address.⁶⁹⁸ Crommelin described the work she undertook in detail:

the mansion ... is in Eaton Square. Upon the decoration much thought has been bestowed and no expense spared. The dining-rooms are being panelled in Resada silk tapestry and ivory paint. Between the two rooms a Moorish window-arch is to be erected, with window corresponding in colours to the walls. Very novel are the double curtains, the first fold being in shrimp-pink shade of brocaded, the second one in soft green silk, very thin, and trimmed with silk fringe, while quite close to the windows hang the softest of white muslin. I have chosen a Japanese paper of white and gold, and a deep frieze of a magnificent red magnolia design with green leaves, for the very beautiful boudoir. The curtains are Eiffel-green plush, while the ‘cosy corner’, for which I have a *penchant*, is upholstered as well as the other chairs, in a wonderful cretonne red magnolia, by which, after some trouble, I was able to exactly match the chairs.⁶⁹⁹

While, again, it has proved impossible to uncover further information about the commission, it is significant that Crommelin was undertaking the type of high-end work more typically performed by upmarket cabinet-makers like Holland & Sons or Gillows of London and Lancaster.

⁶⁹⁵ ‘The Man About Town’, *The Country Gentleman*, 29 November 1890, 7.

⁶⁹⁶ Juliet Kinchin, ‘Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the ‘Masculine’ and the ‘Feminine’ Room’ in Pat Kirkham (ed.), *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 12–29.

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work’, *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

⁶⁹⁸ 1891 United Kingdom census, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> [accessed 3/05/2016].

⁶⁹⁹ ‘Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work’, *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

Attempts to locate archival material relating to Crommelin's work for the aristocratic Dufferin family have been considerably more successful. Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava was a British diplomat, who held various prominent public positions in his lengthy career. His wife, Harriot Georgina Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, née Rowan-Hamilton, was known as a diplomatic wife and for leading an initiative to improve medical care for women in British India. At Clondeboyne, their family estate in Northern Ireland, the Dufferins had been neighbours of the Crommelin family. The two families were on friendly terms and Helen Black described how Lord Dufferin gave encouragement to Caroline Crommelin's sister May in the early days of her literary career.⁷⁰⁰ Clearly, the Dufferins also encouraged Caroline by commissioning her to undertake work on their homes: in 1890 *The Country Gentleman* noted that Crommelin was 'at present busy furnishing for Lady Helen Ferguson', presumably Helen Hermione Munro Ferguson (1863-1941), the Dufferin's daughter.⁷⁰¹

While no evidence survives to support this assertion, the Dufferin family papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland demonstrate that Crommelin had a professional involvement with the family that spanned many years. In a letter to Lord Dufferin, dated 23 June 1891, May Crommelin claimed: 'Caroline says that no one but herself know how largely her success is owing to Lady Dufferin's steady help'.⁷⁰² The Dufferin family papers contain eight additional letters, from Caroline Crommelin to Lord and Lady Dufferin, written between 1894 and c.1898.⁷⁰³ Several contain tantalising glimpses of work undertaken by Crommelin for the Dufferin family at Clondeboyne, which Lord Dufferin extensively renovated throughout his life.

The first significant letter is from 23 May 1894, when Crommelin wrote to Lady Dufferin:

I have just returned & got your letter. The present picture rails will do quite well if painted & as gas is already in ceiling it will only be required to be put on each side of mantel piece but it would be well to decide what picture you will have hung there before the gas is put up, to see what breadth there is on the chimney breast. Relative to the windows having plate glass

⁷⁰⁰ Helen C. Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (London: Maclaren & Company, 1906), 212–213.

⁷⁰¹ 'The Man About Town', *The Country Gentleman*, 7.

⁷⁰² May Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 23 June 1891, D1071/H/B/C/723 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁰³ D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

put in these, I fear the frames would have to be put in new, as they are old & would never hold plate glass. I am glad you like the idea of window seats. As to the carpet if it is fitted all round I don't advise a border as it will look better without. I only advised a border if you had a square room. I enclose an estimate of the painting & paper. This is for sound good work. The paint in the old windows is so bad & woodwork is so bad that there will be a great deal of trouble with it. I am writing about a woman to cut covers who is in Belfast & who I think can go down & do them. I can begin at once if you approve & can have the work finished at the time you want.⁷⁰⁴

The description of Crommelin's working method provided by this letter tallies with her description in the *Weekly Wisconsin*: 'having received a commission it is my plan to inspect the rooms, carefully note their size and shape, and then submit my suggestions in accordance with the amount of money that is to be spent upon their decoration. My suggestions are discussed and sometimes modified in accordance with the preconceived notions that a lady may strongly entertain'.⁷⁰⁵ Clearly, Crommelin had already been to visit Clandeboye and submitted her suggestions, with this letter forming part of the resulting consultation period.

The work went ahead and, in July 1894, Crommelin wrote to Lord Dufferin that she hoped to visit Clandeboye in September to see the finished work.⁷⁰⁶ The Clandeboye expenditure book records, in August 1894, a variety of payments made to 'Crommelin and Thomas [Florence Goring Thomas, Crommelin's sister and business partner]' for 'Painting and papering drawing room at Clandeboye as per estimate £81/7', along with various itemised materials including chintz, carpet, blinds and cushions.⁷⁰⁷ The total paid to Crommelin was £161 10s 11d, equivalent to roughly £17,480 today: this was a substantial commission.⁷⁰⁸ Later that year, on 29 October 1894, Crommelin again wrote to Lord Dufferin about decorative work at Clandeboye:

⁷⁰⁴ Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lady Dufferin, 23 May 1894, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁰⁵ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

⁷⁰⁶ Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 24 July 1894, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁰⁷ Clandeboye expenditure book, 1894–1896, D1071/A/B3/18, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁰⁸ We know the total was paid early in August, as on 13 August 1894, Crommelin wrote to Lord Dufferin: 'I must also thank you so much for sending me a cheque so promptly but I shall be most anxious to know if you are pleased by the work & hope you will let me know when you see it'. Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 13 August 1894, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

I've been thinking a great deal over the saloon and I send you now some gold paper I think would look handsome. That all the paint and pillars should be white picked out with gold, and that the alcoves should all be in soft green silk, (I do not say the actual materials I send but that colour) altho that material, which is very cheap, would look very well, and especially if the curtains in that room was made of the same material. I send you back the pattern you sent me I cannot advise you to have flock unless you paint it as it takes the dust so very much and the pattern you sent me I don't much like as I've seen it up in two or three hotels & it is a bit common. But if you are bent on having flock I will look up some newer designs for you.⁷⁰⁹

While no record of a payment to Crommelin for this later work survives, it is worth noting that contemporary images of the Clandeboye saloon depict a similar scheme [Figure 4.26].

The Dufferin family papers occasionally reveal the names of the other firms the family used for interior decoration. These include the London-based Maple & Co., as well as Belfast company George Morrow & Sons. Both were large established firms, demonstrating the standard of work the Dufferins were accustomed to, and which Crommelin was also clearly capable of supplying.⁷¹⁰ In addition, the correspondence between Crommelins and the Dufferins frequently reveals the complexities inherent in this kind of simultaneously personal and professional relationships. For example, in 1895, Crommelin wrote to Lord Dufferin thanking him for his condolences on the death of her sister. Personal grief did not, however, supersede the need to discuss a commission and Crommelin also noted 'when you are at Clandeboye we must distemper the walls of the saloon to show you the effect I mean'.⁷¹¹

As we have seen in **Chapter Three**, Crommelin did not advertise, instead using her connections to market her business. On 16 December 1898, she wrote to Lord Dufferin:

I see by various papers a report that Mr Pirries of Belfast has bought Downshire House, a fact which interests me greatly. As you know it's 16 or 17 years since I left Co Down and I expect the Pirries would know nothing about me were I to write to them ... to ask them to give me a

⁷⁰⁹ Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 29 October 1894, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷¹⁰ Clandeboye expenditure books for 1898, D1071/A/B3/20, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷¹¹ Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 18 May 1895, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

chance to estimate in either decorating or furnishing, but it occurred to me that perhaps as you know what work I can do you would mention my name to the Pirries.⁷¹²

Dufferin did mention her name, demonstrating that he considered her capable of undertaking such a large commission. Later that year Margaret Pirrie (d.1935) (the wife of William Pirrie [1857–1924], Chairman of Harland and Wolff and a Director of the White Star Line) wrote to Dufferin:

Relative to 'Downshire House' & its decorations the requests are slightly premature – but should anything come of it – we will bear Mrs Shaw's [Crommelin's married name] name in memory – and as we are always interested over decorative art in connection with our ships – first time when we are in London & I have leisure we will make a point of called at Victoria St. to see her things.⁷¹³

While, in this case, nothing seems to have come of Dufferin's intervention, this exchange emphasises how Crommelin cannily manipulated her social and familial networks to gain new clients.

Research undertaken for this thesis has uncovered evidence of a final Crommelin commission for a domestic interior, and one which aptly demonstrates the extent to which the male historical perspective has erased evidence of women's artistic activity. In the *Weekly Wisconsin*, Crommelin describes work she undertook for the dining room of the 39 Norfolk Square home of Australian novelist and playwright Rosa Campbell Praed (1851–1935):

In this case, the dining-room is distinctly original, being painted sealing-wax red, and having a gold frieze three feet deep. Chimney-piece, side-board, ceiling-beams, cornice, and frieze rail, as well as the furniture generally, are of carved brown oak. An effect most glowing and picturesque is obtained by the use of old-gold plush for the curtains, and of a bright red paint for the walls, which are adorned by shield and armor [sic] instead of tapestry hangings.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² Letter from Caroline Crommelin to Lord Dufferin, 16 December 1898, D1071/H/B/C/721, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷¹³ Letter from Margaret Pirrie to Lord Dufferin, 24 December 1898, D1071/H/B/P/266/12, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷¹⁴ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7. Interestingly, Rosa Praed had strong Irish connections: both her parents were of Irish descent and she maintained a friendship for many years with Irish nationalist politician Justin McCarthy (1830-1912). Praed and McCarthy wrote three novels together and, after his death, Praed published a collection of their letters, *Our Book of Memories* (1912). Frederick Leighton also had striking red walls in his studio in Holland Park. Joanne Banham (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Interior Design* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 18.

The room is frequently attributed to artist Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938), who worked on the house’s interior in 1888.⁷¹⁵ However, in a letter to American poet Louise Chandler Moulton (1835–1908), written after Menpes’ work was completed, Campbell Praed claims: ‘I have got my red dining room after all’.⁷¹⁶ The implication is that, unhappy with Menpes’s dining room design, she commissioned Crommelin to revise it. It is worth noting that the use of weaponry as wall decoration was also employed at Clandeboye [Figure 4.27 and 4.28]. That the room is continually attributed to Menpes demonstrates how the absence of surviving archival evidence means the considerable activity of professional women interior decorators during this time, has now been forgotten.

Charlotte Robinson

This is particularly true for the work of Robinson. There are frequent mentions in the contemporary press of Robinson’s domestic commissions: for example, in *The Women’s Penny Paper*, she spoke of ‘the various houses’ she had ‘to decorate in London and in the country’.⁷¹⁷ Similarly, *Manchester Faces and Places* commented that Robinson spent much of her time ‘travelling about the country between the houses she is decorating and furnishing’ and claimed that her work can be seen ‘in the bachelor’s cottage and flat and in the smoking room in the family mansion’.⁷¹⁸ Likewise, *Woman’s World* claimed that Robinson ‘has taken the complete responsibility of furnishing and decorating several large houses lately’.⁷¹⁹ In addition, we know from press reports of Robinson’s various exhibition displays, that she designed interior schemes for domestic rooms. None of these sources, however, mentioned specific names and it has proved impossible to trace any of the many domestic designs Robinson must have produced during her seventeen-year career in the archives of her clients.

⁷¹⁵ For example, see ‘A Menpes House’, *Dominion*, 12 May 1911, 9. Menpes had provided the illustrations for Campbell Praed’s book *The Grey River* (1889). Patricia Clarike, ‘Two Colonials in London’, *National Library of Australia News*, Sept 2003, 3; Mrs G. A. Sala, ‘Mrs Rosa Praed’, *The Australasian*, 10 January 1891, 39.

⁷¹⁶ Rosa Praed to Louise Chandler Moulton, 27 November 1888, MSS33787, Louise Chandler Papers, United States Library of Congress, Washington.

⁷¹⁷ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *The Women’s Penny Paper*, 9 February 1889, 1.

⁷¹⁸ ‘Miss Charlotte Robinson’, *Manchester Faces and Places*, 10 April 1892, 120.

⁷¹⁹ Billington, ‘Some Practical Women’, 195.

Despite this, clues as to Robinson's clientele and working method are occasionally found in the press. In her first column for *Queen*, Robinson defended her profession, claiming that:

Rich people can perhaps afford to indulge in the costly luxury of mistakes; but those who only possess limited incomes, and yet desire the immediate results which can only be obtained by oft-repeated experiments and varied experience, may reasonably expect to avoid mistakes if they seek the advice of artists whose training has taught them the possibilities of domestic ornamentation.⁷²⁰

Clearly, Robinson was positioning her services as suitable for the middle class, rather than exclusively for the wealthy elite. Robinson echoed these sentiments in *World* magazine, arguing that while 'the commercial instinct is to sell what is in stock and the material which yields most profit', a house decorator 'studies the client's interest alone, and seeks to produce perfect results apart from all trade considerations'.⁷²¹ Robinson's implication is that an advisor connected to an artistic retailer or department store (such as Liberty, Jackson & Graham, William Watt and Shoolbred & Co), would only recommend furnishings and fittings designed, manufactured or sold by the establishment in which they are employed, whereas employing an independent house decorator would result in savings.

Often, the illustrations accompanying Robinson's 'Home Decoration' column, such as the designs for a library and drawing room discussed in **Chapter Two**, were produced in response to a correspondent's query. However, although they do not represent designs for a realised commission, these can still provide valuable clues about Robinson's designs for domestic interiors. For example, her response to 'Theodora' [**Figure 4.29**] aptly demonstrates the veracity of the statements described above. In the sketch, Robinson mixes her own designs (the fire screen is apparently 'one of the newest' she has designed) with those of others (including a 'Tynecastle tapestry' and a 'winged arm chair from Hewetson') and recommends a variety of cabinetmakers who would be able to undertake the work proposed for a reasonable price.⁷²²

⁷²⁰ Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 20 October 1898, 498.

⁷²¹ Edmund Yates, 'Celebrities at Home: No DCLXI Miss Charlotte Robinson at Plymouth Grove, Manchester', *The World*, 14 May 1890, 816.

⁷²² Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 4 July 1891, 40.

On only one occasion does Robinson reproduce a design she had undertaken for a client in her 'Home Decoration' column. In December 1890, she used an interior sketch [Figure 4.30] in an answer to a correspondent, to whom she commented:

I do not think I can do better than introduce a sketch of a section of a very successful boudoir I have just completed ... The ceiling and cornice were made in fibrous plaster, the flat part of the ceiling was painted with clouds and cupids, the ornamental part as well as the cornice in a soft warm yellow, packed out with steel grey, and the higher lights were gilded; the dado and the wall panels were composed of white woodwork with enriched mouldings, with the addition of what is technically called 'compo ornament', painted in tones to harmonise with the striped French silk with which the larger panels were covered; the dado-panels were of warm terra-cotta, with golden brown styles and mouldings in gold; the carpet was in Axminster in two shades of delicate terra-cotta; the furniture, Louis XVI, included some beautiful cabinets.⁷²³

This opulent boudoir, with its hand-painted ceiling, French silk, luxurious carpets and antique furniture, demonstrates that Robinson also worked for wealthier clients. Although the article does not give a name, sources frequently mention her patronage by royal and aristocratic clients such as Alexandra, Princess of Wales (1844–1925) and Hannah Primrose (1851–1890) Countess of Rosebery, who both purchased her furniture.⁷²⁴

Unfortunately, evidence elucidating details about the domestic interior decoration commissions of the less well-known women active during this period is even harder to find, although, in 1892 *The Queen* noted that Edith Wetton was undertaking a large order for a home in Rutland Square.⁷²⁵ Wetton cannot have been the only other woman decorator to service the domestic market as many, including Mrs Charles Muller, targeted their advertising specifically to clients seeking designs for domestic interiors [Figure 4.31]. In addition, an 1899 edition of *Hearth and Home* described Mrs Master's working methods, claiming:

Mrs Masters herself undertakes every department of furnishing and decorating ... she will not, of course, ever do the actual house-painting herself or the heavy nailed upholstery, both men's work, but she must study both and be able to direct anything and everything involved in the furniture of a house from top to basement. Mrs Masters finds her work generally

⁷²³ Ibid., 41.

⁷²⁴ 'Foreign Telegrams', *Manchester Times*, 26 May 1888, 4; 'Women's Industries', *Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 1888, 9.

⁷²⁵ 'Decorative Ideas at Miss Wetton's', *The Queen*, 18 July 1891, 164.

resolves itself into two kinds, either she undertakes the entire decoration and furnishing in every details, even down to cushions and pictures ... In this case the usual arrangement is to pay a lump sum for the whole piece of work ... Her other kind of work takes the form of advising and decorating by the day, in which case she receives so much each day, usually two guineas.⁷²⁶

It is hoped that future research will uncover further details about the scope and scale of the work undertaken by these other women interior decorators.

Public and Commercial Interiors

In the late nineteenth-century public and commercial buildings were, typically, associated with masculinity and the male sphere. Certainly, men designed most of these buildings both externally and internally. Architects were particularly active in this area, with notable examples in London, including Charles Harrison Townshend's (1851–1928) Bishopsgate Institute (1894), John Brydon's (1840–1901) Chelsea Public Library (1899) and Charles Fitzroy Doll's (1850–1929) Hotel Russell (1898). However, as this chapter section demonstrates, despite the limitations placed on them by their gender (they could not, for example, undergo architectural training), the women active as interior decorators in the period also undertook commissions for the buildings of this type. As above, this section uncovers previously unknown Garrett commissions, but also builds on the work of Elizabeth Crawford, by calling on a wider variety of contemporary press sources. Through comparison to their male rivals, it positions the cousins' work within the wider marketplace. In addition, it examines Crommelin's public commissions for the Dufferin family and calls upon archival material to reveal previously unknown details about Robinson's work for the Lord Mayor of Manchester and the Cunard Steamship Line.

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett

While Moncure Conway commented on the Garretts 'admirable treatment of the new female colleges connected with the English universities' as Elizabeth Crawford notes, 'no researcher has managed to uncover archival evidence of a formal commission for work by the Garretts in any of the women's colleges'.⁷²⁷ Crawford continues, 'it would seem unlikely that they did not have some part to play in the interior decoration of Newnham at the very least since Millicent

⁷²⁶ 'The Work of a Woman House Decorator', *Hearth and Home*, 15 June 1899, 225.

⁷²⁷ Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', 18; Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 175.

Fawcett was a founder'.⁷²⁸ Notably, the commission for Newnham's building went, in 1873, to architect Basil Champneys and, at this time, the Garretts were working as pupils to John Brydon in the 39 Marlborough Street offices he shared with Champneys.⁷²⁹ The Garretts were also involved, however, in the decoration of the Somerville Club. The club, founded in Berners Street, London in 1879, was intended as a meeting place for women interested in political and social questions, and counted the cousins amongst its first members.⁷³⁰ When it moved to Mortimer Street two years later, the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* noted 'the rooms are to be furnished under the kind and gratuitous direction of the Misses Garrett ... the rooms are light, airy, and elegant'.⁷³¹ Although, no further evidence for this commission has, as yet, come to light, the use of the term 'gratuitous' implies the cousins were, by this stage in their career, successful enough to be able to undertake pro bono work.

In 1889, with solicitor James Beale (of Standen), legal scholar John Westlake (1828–1913), artist Christiana Herringham (1858–1929) and the Rev. Giles Pilcher, Agnes Garrett became a director of the Ladies Residential Chambers Company, founded to provide purpose-built accommodation at a moderate rate for working women in London.⁷³² John Brydon (with whom she had trained) was appointed architect for the Company's first building and both *The Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Women's Penny Paper* reported on the opening, by Millicent Fawcett Garrett, of the resulting Queen Anne style Chenies Street Chambers [Figure 4.32].⁷³³ While Elizabeth Crawford has drawn upon these press reports, and the Company archives, to provide an account of the Chambers it is worth repeating that, though Garrett was responsible for fitting out communal areas, the decoration of the building was undertaken by Squire and Potter, Walton Street, Chelsea.⁷³⁴ Garrett presumably did have some involvement in the interior

⁷²⁸ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 173.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ In the 1880s, the Garretts also joined the Albemarle Club, one of the few to admit man and women equally. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 41–42; David Doughan and Peter Gordon, *Women's Clubs and Associations in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2009), 24, 51.

⁷³¹ 'Our Ladies Column', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 January 1881, 2.

⁷³² 'Record of Events', *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 February 1888, 18.

⁷³³ 'The Ladies Residentials Chambers', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 25 May 1889, 6; 'The Latest Thing in Flats', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 May 1889, 6.

⁷³⁴ The archives of The Ladies Residential Chambers Company are held in the Westminster Archives. Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 206–216.

decoration, which included ‘pretty tiles, and mantels, and corner-cupboards, and all kinds of dodgy [sic] little contrivances, such as without the suggestive aid of the feminine mind (one concludes) no fellow could have hit upon’.⁷³⁵ The Chambers was a success and the Company, for whom Garrett continued to work until 1931, opened an additional building, the York Street Chambers, in 1892.⁷³⁶

Presumably, Garrett’s position on the board prevented her from taking a more formal role in the decoration of the Chambers. In contrast, her family connection did not prevent her from winning the commission to decorate Elizabeth Garrett Anderson’s New Hospital for Women. Originally opened in 1871 as a ten-bed ward above Garrett Anderson’s Berkeley Street dispensary, the Hospital moved to a larger location on the Marylebone Road in 1874 and, in 1890, to a new building [Figure 4.33] with forty-two beds on the Euston Road.⁷³⁷ This, the first purpose-built hospital devoted to the treatment of women by female doctors, was, like the Chenies Street Chambers, designed in the Queen Anne style by John Brydon. Garrett did not, however, receive the commission automatically, but was invited to tender alongside six other firms (Barkes & Son, Foster and Dicksee, Roome & Co., Mawer Cowtan, Shoolbred & Co. and Crace & Sons).⁷³⁸

Her estimate, for £650–£700, was slightly less than those submitted by established firms Shoolbred & Co. and Crace & Sons, but more than the other four firms. Garrett suggested that, for an extra £320, the corridors and staircase could be tiled, and decorative Italian casts hung in the four large wards.⁷³⁹ The Hospital’s Management Committee accepted Garrett’s estimate, including the extra £320, and awarded her the contract.⁷⁴⁰ She was paid, in eight instalments between August and December 1891, £1000 (£103,800 today).⁷⁴¹ Crucially, the success of Garrett’s bid demonstrates that not only was she was competing on the same level

⁷³⁵ ‘The Latest Thing in Flats’, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

⁷³⁶ Crawford, *Enterprising Women*, 216.

⁷³⁷ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30406> [accessed 8/4/2018].

⁷³⁸ Managing Committee Minute Book, 1882–1885, H13/EGA20, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*; <https://www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk/> [accessed 08/03/2018].

as two of the major players in the field (Shoolbred and Crace), she was beating them to major lucrative commissions. Notably, the interiors of nineteenth-century hospitals were more frequently designed by the (male) architects responsible for the fabric of their buildings. Examples in London include E.M Barry's (1830–1880) London Hospital for Sick Children (1875) and Alfred Waterhouse's (1830–1905) University College Hospital (1896).

The Managing Committee were pleased with Garrett's work, also awarding her the contract of refreshing the Hospital's paintwork in 1892 and 1896.⁷⁴² *The Woman's Herald* reported on Garrett's success:

Miss Agnes Garrett, sister of Mrs Fawcett and Mrs Garrett Anderson, M.D., has beautified the entrance hall, stair case, and wards with artistic decorations. A lovely frieze of blue tiles makes the staircase remarkably pretty. The beds in the wards are draped in art chintz, and above each bed is a plaster bas-relief – a copy of some famous work of art. Each ward is supplied with bookcases, flowers and pretty bits of colour for the tired eye to rest on. Several have pianos ... The cosy little sitting-rooms for the nurses and the pretty kitchen at the top of the building, with its red brick floor and pink-tinted walls, all do credit to the oft despised 'petticoat government', while the expenditure per patient shows that economy is a feminine virtue.⁷⁴³

While the connection of Garrett's gender to the success of the interior is unsurprising in a publication written by and for women, *The Woman's Herald* was not the only publication to hold this view.

The *Illustrated London News* claimed, 'it is not the medical speciality alone which constitutes the attraction of the place, it is the pervading presence of the womanly element', and that 'this sympathetic quality is nowhere more evident than in the interior decoration of the building. Here, nothing is utilitarian, dull, or negative, but everything is artistically beautiful and suggestive of good hope and cheer'.⁷⁴⁴ The article closed with the forceful assertion that 'the hospital is signal proof, if proof were needed, that in this, as in other directions, the extension and not the limitation of woman's sphere is one of the chief aids towards the supply

⁷⁴² House Committee Minute Book, 1890–1890, H13/EGA35, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

⁷⁴³ 'English News', *The Woman's Herald*, 19 March 1892, 8.

⁷⁴⁴ 'The New Hospital for Women', *Illustrated London News*, 10 September 1892, 342.

of the world's needs and the remedy of its defects.'⁷⁴⁵ The article also gave a detailed description of the interior:

The walls ... of the corridors, and of the staircase are decorated with a high dado of tiles; these are of a beautiful lapis-lazuli blue, and seem to fill the whole building with a shining glow of colour. The upper part of the walls – with the exception of the hall, where an embossed paper has been used – is painted pale yellow, and the combined effect, radiant when heightened by sunlight, must prove a wonderful and unexpected welcome to the poor patient from the dreary grey back street.⁷⁴⁶

A photo of the entrance-hall from 1899 [Figure 4.34] shows the embossed paper and the panelling typical of so many of Garretts commissions, as well as a Morris-style settee, small fireplace with Delft cheek tiles, convex mirror, a black and white tiled floor, and the sculpture 'Opportunity' donated to the hospital by sculptor Henry Stormonth Leifchild (1823–1884). This panelling, and a recreation of the embossed paper, can still be seen in situ in what is now the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at the Unison Centre [Figure 4.35].

The *Illustrated London News* went on to describe the Hospital's four wards, claiming that although they were 'naturally quieter in tone', 'the colouring is equally attractive' and the fact that this varied in each ward added 'the special charm of particular thought and care'.⁷⁴⁷ The paper also described the success of the Italian casts:

the decorator has not rested content with giving pleasure in ordinary details; in every ward the walls are enriched by a series of casts taken from old Italian bas-reliefs, some by Luca della Robbia, some by Donatello from the church of Sant' Antonio at Padua, some from the walls of the Children's Hospital at Florence – all carefully chosen out and brought together as masterpieces of their kind.⁷⁴⁸

An 1892 edition of *Christian World* agreed, commenting on 'the large airy wards ... the cosy beds with their tasteful coverlets, each occupant of which has an oak cupboard and bookshelf, the polished parquet floor, the delicate art colours of the wall ... the cheerful open fireplace,

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

the bright blossoming plants'.⁷⁴⁹ Many of these details can be seen in three photographs [Figures 4.36 and 4.37] of the wards, again dating from 1899.

The *Illustrated London News* was keen to emphasise that the success of Garrett's scheme extended beyond the public parts of the hospital:

in the nurses' as well as the patients' rooms, the aim has been not only to make the rooms habitable and comfortable ... one great and noticeable speciality being the wall-papers designed in nearly every case by Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett. The interests of the medical staff have not been overlooked ... On the ground floor a fine room specially designed for the purpose forms a library and reading-room, and as such is used by the Medical Women's Institute. Here the bookshelves which line the walls, together with a portion of the furniture, are of American butternut, the soft brown-green of the wood producing a very pleasing and harmonious effect. The great feature of the room is high Jacobean mantelpiece, by Miss Agnes Garrett, and given to her by the hospital.⁷⁵⁰

Frustratingly, there are no surviving photographs of the nurses' rooms or of the library/reading-room. However, the room itself, including mantelpiece (although the upper part has not survived), can still be seen in the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery [Figure 4.38]. With the assistance of Elizabeth Crawford, the Gallery has also attempted to recreate a section of the one known Garrett wallpaper design, 'Laburnum', from the small black and white illustration found in Millicent Vince's advice manual *Decoration and Care of the Home* [Figure 4.39].

Clearly, many of the Garrett's non-domestic commissions were for projects concerned with the nineteenth-century women's movement. The cousins were involved with the design of one of the first women-only clubs, one of the first women's university colleges, with an initiative to reform the housing of working women and with a women's hospital. It would be easy to look at their involvement with these projects from the perspective of partiality and argue that the firm only received these projects because of their (or their family's) involvement in their conception and organisation. However, it is perhaps more reasonable to assert that the Garretts, who were both deeply committed to social reform, were particularly interested in bidding for interior decoration projects that would further the cause of women.

⁷⁴⁹ *Christian World*, 14 April 1892, clipping in an album containing newscuttings relating to the hospital, 1881–1917, H13/EGA/144, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital Collection, London Metropolitan Archives, London.

⁷⁵⁰ 'The New Hospital for Women', *Illustrated London News*, 10 September 1892, 342.

Caroline Crommelin

In contrast to the Garretts, Crommelin does not seem to have made public or commercial commissions a large part of her career. Commissions of this type are not mentioned in contemporary articles about her work and it may be that her aristocratic status meant she was reluctant to risk societal disapprobation by deviating from domestic interiors which were, arguably, considered more suitable for women. She did, however, undertake one commission for the Dufferin family which straddled the line between public and private. Lord Dufferin served as the British Ambassador to Italy from 1888 to 1891 and, in November 1889 *The Women's Penny Paper* reported that 'Miss Crommelin has just shipped off the last of the furniture' for the 'decoration of the British embassy at Rome'.⁷⁵¹ This was a prestigious commission and one, as Clive Edwards notes, typically given to an established male-run firm such as Maples, who supplied furniture to various British embassies during the nineteenth century.⁷⁵²

German bombs destroyed the embassy in 1946 and details of the appearance of its interior are scant. In 1891, in the *Weekly Wisconsin*, Crommelin described the commission:

It was a difficult piece of work, as the entire decorating was done from the architect's plans. Several of the rooms, moreover, had to have the regulation crimson and gold dais and chairs, and it was not an easy matter to add harmonious colours. I had several consultations ... with Lord and Lady Dufferin, and at length a scheme was agreed upon. It was decided to do two of the large reception rooms with old gold brocaded silk, all the paint being white. The curtains were to be old gold, with a frieze of chestnut brown plush, while the chairs were to be covered with different brocades and tapestries to blend with the same tones of colour. *Eau-de-nil* silk brocade was chosen for the hangings of the ante-room. The paint being also white, the curtains and coverings have to be shrimp-pink.⁷⁵³

A further account, of 'Lady Dufferin's Sitting Room at the British Embassy in Rome', this time accompanied by an illustration [**Figure 4.40**], was published in an 1890 edition of *The Queen*:

The sitting room represented is almost round, and has a dome ceiling, which is decorated with blue, and has a white and gold raised stucco ornamentation. The window occupies a very large portion of the room, and has a long well-filled bookcase running below it. The walls are dark

⁷⁵¹ 'Current News About Women', *The Women's Penny Paper*, 2 November 1889, 14.

⁷⁵² Clive Edwards, 'Tottenham Court Road: The Changing Fortunes of London's Furniture Street, 1850-1950', *The London Journal*, 36 (2), 140-160, 22.

⁷⁵³ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin Explains her Work', *Weekly Wisconsin*, 7.

green, relieved by a high and handsome dado of Spanish leather, with a gold background.

Over the door is a fine portiere of old and valuable tapestry.⁷⁵⁴

The description tacitly acknowledges Crommelin's involvement by acknowledging that Lady Dufferin has 'shown a practical sympathy in the lady decorator's attempts to beautify homes of even modest pretensions'.⁷⁵⁵

As with Crommelin's work for the Dufferins at Clandeboye, scrutinising the Dufferin family papers in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland has revealed further information relating to the commission. The account books of the Clandeboye Estate include various payments for furniture, textiles, decorative items, work and associated materials for the Rome embassy between October 1889 and October 1890.⁷⁵⁶ Three payments stand out as possibly related to Crommelin's work:

1. In October 1889, a payment of £8 16s was made to 'Miss Crommelin' for 'rugs and Brass guards for Embassy at Rome'
2. In November 1889, £39 8s 9p was paid to 'Colbanne & Co, London' for 'furniture for Embassy at Rome'
3. In November 1889, £2 11s was paid as 'Miss Crommelin's commission on buying furniture for Embassy at Rome'

If we assume that the furniture purchased in London was acquired by Crommelin for the Dufferins, and the two former sums are combined, Crommelin's commission of £2 11s (roughly £267.90 today) equates to around 5%.⁷⁵⁷ However, the descriptions in the *Weekly Wisconsin* and *The Queen* imply that Crommelin was involved, not just with purchasing furniture, but in consulting on decorative schemes for several of the embassy's rooms. Various sources, including the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* which commented that it 'should help to make her reputation', credit the commission with launching Crommelin's career.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁴ 'Lady Dufferin's Sitting Room at the British Embassy at Rome', *The Queen*, 15 November 1890, 700.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Clandeboye expenditure books, D1071/A/B3/15; D1071/A/B3/16 and D1071A/B5/1, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁵⁷ Clandeboye expenditure books, D1071/A/B3/15; D1071A/B5/1; D1071A/B5/1, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

⁷⁵⁸ 'Miss Caroline Crommelin', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 1889, 5.

Charlotte Robinson

As noted above, although the contemporary press frequently referred to Robinson's domestic commissions, it did not mention specific clients. The same reports, however, often contained frequent references to the work Robinson undertook for a variety of commercial and public clients. The *Pioneer of Fashion* asserted that:

Miss Robinson's talent and experience are not expended merely on replacing the commonplace with the magnificent in middle-class mansions. She revels in "large orders" such as the fitting up of hotels and ocean liners. "My ambition used to be theatre," she will tell you, "but I am quite contented with a hotel."⁷⁵⁹

Although Robinson clearly considered these large orders to be important signifiers of her professional success, references to them are frustratingly vague. For example, an 1892 edition of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* mentioned that 'one of the leading banks in Manchester bears the evidence of her decorative skill and judgement.'⁷⁶⁰ Unfortunately, although this was not the only publication to reference Robinson's work for a bank, it has proved impossible to uncover any further details.

In 1892, the *Illustrated London News* enthused that 'Miss Charlotte Robinson, the Art Decorator to her Majesty, has received the important appointment of decorating and furnishing the new great hotel which the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Company are erecting. She is to be congratulated on having received so big a piece of work'.⁷⁶¹ The *Woman's Signal* gave more detail, claiming that 'the hotel committee unanimously appointed her to look after the decorations and furnishings, and to supervise the firms whose tenders were accepted after due competition'.⁷⁶² Clearly, this was a major commission which included both designing and project managing the interior decoration of the hotel. As with hospitals, railway hotel commissions were more typically undertaken by their architects. For example, the interiors of the Midland Grand Hotel at St. Pancras, London was designed by its architect, George Gilbert

⁷⁵⁹ F. M. Strutt Cavell, 'Business Women of Today: No. 1 Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Pioneer of Fashion*, 1 March 1893, 50.

⁷⁶⁰ 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 8 June 1892, 1.

⁷⁶¹ Florence Fenwick-Miller, 'The Ladies' Column', *Illustrated London News*, 11 June 1892, 21.

⁷⁶² Frances Willard, 'Two Pioneers', *The Woman's Signal*, 1 March 1894, 2.

Scott (1811–1938) (though these works were carried out by Frederick Sang and Gillows & Co.).⁷⁶³

The commissioning of a woman for this type of project was clearly remarkable, with reportage even reaching New Zealand: *The Otago Times* reported that Robinson had been commissioned to undertake the complete decoration and furnishing of one of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company's 'palatial hotels at Grimsby.'⁷⁶⁴ The Company, formed in 1847, owned two hotels in Grimsby. The first, the Royal Hotel in Grimsby Docks [Figure 4.41] originally opened in 1865 as the Royal Dock Hotel. The second, the Yarborough Hotel in Grimsby Town [Figure 4.42], was built in 1851 for the second Earl of Yarborough and The Royal Dock Company, but enlarged in 1891 for the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company.⁷⁶⁵ Investigating the archives of the Company in The National Archives, has revealed (as the date suggested) that Robinson's work was for the latter. The minutes of the Hotel's Management Committee record that Robinson was given details of the furniture required in December 1891 and, in February 1892, she submitted her designs for the interior, along with an estimate of the cost of the furniture.⁷⁶⁶ In March 1893, Robinson submitted her account, a total of £124 10s, to the Committee (£13,130 in today's money).⁷⁶⁷

Unfortunately, the Committee's minutes do not provide any details about Robinson's work for the impressive three storey Yarborough Hotel, now a J. D. Wetherspoons hotel and public house. However, the building is listed and retains several original features, including ornate plasterwork cornices and pedimented panels in the ground-floor function rooms.⁷⁶⁸ The first-floor ballroom (now partly the ladies toilets) has pedimented panels and a panelled plasterwork ceiling [Figure 4.43] with scrollwork, flowers, fruit, and frieze with urns and masks, arguably in the ornate floral style typical of Robinson's work. Robinson's work for the

⁷⁶³ https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101342037-st-pancras-station-and-former-midland-grand-hotel-st-pancras-and-somers-town-ward#.Wseg8lj4_IU [accessed 17 March 2018].

⁷⁶⁴ 'Ladies Gossip', *Otago Witness*, 24 November 1892, 42.

⁷⁶⁵ <https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101379373-yarborough-hotel-west-marsh-ward> [accessed 17 March 2018].

⁷⁶⁶ Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company Hotel Committee Minute Book, 1890–1896, RAIL 463/81, The National Archives, London.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, <https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare> [accessed 27/05/2018].

⁷⁶⁸ <https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101379373-yarborough-hotel-west-marsh-ward> [accessed 17 March 2018].

Yarborough Hotel was clearly a success as, in July 1894, the company again consulted her about decorative work, this time for the Royal Hotel.⁷⁶⁹ Robinson was commissioned for the project, which was to cost the Company £500 (£54,120 in today's currency).⁷⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the hotel was demolished in the 1960s and no record survives as to its original appearance.

Another major commission with which Robinson is frequently credited by the contemporary press is a suite of mayoral apartments in Manchester Town Hall. For example, Robinson's obituary in the *Illustrated London News* claimed that Robinson was responsible for 'the decoration of the Mayor's apartments in Manchester Town Hall.'⁷⁷¹ Although no archival evidence appears to survive relating to Robinson's connection with this commission, there is no reason to doubt the attribution. The building was designed by the architect Alfred Waterhouse and completed in 1877. Three firms were responsible for the original decoration of the building: the London firm Heaton, Butler and Bayne decorated the Great Hall, while Manchester-based firms Best & Lea and Politt & Coleman were responsible for the Council Chamber/reception rooms and Mayor's parlour respectively.⁷⁷² Again, this demonstrates that Robinson was undertaking work on a similar scale to her direct male rivals.

The Lord Mayor's Apartment was a private suite of rooms that served as the residence of the Lord Mayor for the duration of his time in office. They included 5 bedrooms, as well as a private dining room, drawing room and dressing room. As Waterhouse's original plan [Figure 4.44] shows, this was a sizeable commission. It was also a prestigious commission, presumably undertaken for Sir Anthony Marshall (d.1911), who held the position of Mayor of Manchester from 1892 to 1893, and the Lord Mayor of Manchester from 1893 to 1894.⁷⁷³ In 1894, *The Woman's Signal* reported that Robinson had recently undertaken the decoration of the 'Lord Mayor's private suite of rooms in the Town Hall, in which distinguished visitors are so often entertained and sometimes Royalty itself'.⁷⁷⁴ The reference to royalty implies that the

⁷⁶⁹ Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company Hotel Committee Minute Book, 1890–1896, RAIL 463/81, The National Archives, London.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.; <https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ukcompare> [accessed 27/05/2018].

⁷⁷¹ 'Ladies' Pages', *Illustrated London News*, 2 November 1901, 29.

⁷⁷² Claire Hartwell, *Manchester, Pevsner Architectural Guides* (London: Yale University Press), 82–83.

⁷⁷³ Future mayors of Manchester were granted the title of Lord Mayor in 1893.

⁷⁷⁴ Willard, 'Two Pioneers', 2.

work may have been undertaken in preparation for the visit of Queen Victoria, who came to Manchester to open the Ship Canal in May 1894.⁷⁷⁵

Also in the 1890s, the press reported that Robinson undertook work for the Cunard Steamship Company. For example, in 1893 the *Bristol Mercury* reported that ‘the directors of the Cunard Steamship Company, have quite lately sought Miss Robinson’s advice and assistance, and, what is more to the point, have taken it’.⁷⁷⁶ In 1894 *The Woman’s Signal* commented that ‘the Cunard Steamship Company consulted her [Robinson] about the decorations of their latest boat’.⁷⁷⁷ *The Pioneer of Fashion* gave more detail, noting that among Robinson’s ‘latest enterprises are the superintendence of the interior fittings and decoration of the big Cunard steamer just added to the company’s fleet; her designs for the scheme’s adornment being heartily approved by the Board of Directors, before whom she was the first woman artist to appear’.⁷⁷⁸ The Company launched two new boats in the early 1890s: the first, RMS Campania, was launched in September 1892; the second, RMS Lucania, was launched in February 1893.

Investigating the Cunard Line archives, at the University of Liverpool, has uncovered further details of Robinson’s connection to the Luciana and Campania (both built in Glasgow by the Fairfield Shipbuilding Company).⁷⁷⁹ The interiors of both ships were, in fact, designed not by Robinson, but by Glasgow cabinet makers Wylie & Lochhead.⁷⁸⁰ However, minute books reveal that, in May 1892, the Board of Directors were becoming concerned about Wylie & Lochhead’s designs for the drawings rooms which, they believed, did not bring ‘out the idea of the enormous size, and power, which will be essential characteristics’ of the new ships.⁷⁸¹ On 4 June, they wrote to Robinson at *The Queen*, asking her to come to their Glasgow office

⁷⁷⁵ Email correspondence with Meg McHugh, Curatorial Manager, Manchester City Council, April 2018.

⁷⁷⁶ ‘Our Ladies’ Column’, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 16 September 1893, 6.

⁷⁷⁷ Willard, ‘Two Pioneers’, 137.

⁷⁷⁸ Strutt Cavell, ‘Business Women of Today’, 50.

⁷⁷⁹ Cunard Archive, 1840-1970, D42, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸⁰ Extract from Cunard Magazine on the history of the ‘Campania and Lucania’, 1893–1918 (Sep 1926), D42/PR3/24/9, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸¹ Copy of letter to Wylie & Lochhead from Secretary to Board of Directors, 30 May 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

to give her opinion.⁷⁸² Robinson, unable to attend at such short notice, was instead sent the designs and, after clarifying several details with the builders, sent her own designs to the Board.⁷⁸³ These were received and Robinson was asked again to come to Glasgow so ‘the whole question of Decoration can be discussed, and the necessary arrangements decided upon’.⁷⁸⁴

Robinson agreed, meeting ‘the Chairman of the Board and Mr. Cunard, Sir W.B. Forwood and Mr John Williamson, Directors, accompanied by the General Manager, General Supt. and Supt. Engineer of the Fairfield works’ at the Fairfield Works in Govan, on 9 August 1892.⁷⁸⁵ Unfortunately, on 15 September, the Secretary of the Board wrote to Robinson to inform her they would be unable to use her designs as, when the Directors had visited the ship, they found that:

the Work, Panellings, etc. of the two new steamers, were so far advanced, in accordance with the Builder’s own designs, that it was impossible to adopt your scheme of decoration – which they had been wishful to do ... Regarding your design of Staircase (which the Directors liked very much) the discussion at Fairfield, unfortunately, showed that the space and light were too limited to admit of its being successfully carried out. Your alternative scheme shall be carefully considered, and the Directors still hope to derive benefits from your suggestions.⁷⁸⁶

The Board asked Robinson to send her bill, and she was paid £52 10s for her work (£5,240 today).⁷⁸⁷ It is not known to what extent, if at all, her alternate staircase design was used.

The Cunard Line’s decision to ask Robinson to give her input on such a major project is significant. Photographs of the *Campania*’s interior [**Figure 4.45, 4.46 and 4.47**], taken

⁷⁸² Copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 4 June 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸³ Copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 14 June 1892, copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 31 June 1892 and copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 9 July 1892. D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸⁴ Copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 19 July 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸⁵ Board of Directors Minute Book, 10 August 1892, D42/B1/4, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸⁶ Copy of letter to Charlotte Robinson from Secretary to Board of Directors, 15 August 1892, D42/S1/16, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

⁷⁸⁷ Board of Directors Minute Book, 7 September 1892, D42/B4/11, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

c.1900, show the extraordinarily rich interiors which, as Basil Greenhill claims, one of the ultimate forms of the self-expression of a highly prosperous and confident age.⁷⁸⁸ Wylie & Lochhead were, by the 1890s, the largest cabinet-making business in Scotland and that Robinson was asked to improve on their designs demonstrates that she had gained considerable renown.⁷⁸⁹ Notably, various architects were, at this time, also working on passenger ship interiors: Richard Norman Shaw worked for the White Star Line, J. J. Stevenson (1831–1908) for the Orient Line and Thomas Edward Colcutt (1840–1928) for the P&O.⁷⁹⁰ Robinson's connection with the project garnered comment in the international, as well as national, press. As with her work for the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company, the New Zealand paper the *Otago Witness*, reported on the news, commenting that Robinson had been 'summoned to Scotland by the Directors of the Cunard Steamship Company to give her valuable ideas as to the furnishing and decoration of the company's new boats'.⁷⁹¹ In addition, at least two American sources also reported on the event.⁷⁹²

As with their domestic commissions, evidence for the public and commercial interior decoration clients of the less well-known women interior decorators, active during the period in question, is hard to find. In 1892, *Hearth and Home* commented that Jessie Whyte-Walton had recently decorated 'The Kettledrum', a tea room in New Bond Street and, in 1896, *Le Follet* recorded that she had decorated and furnished the International Club at 13 Old Bond Street.⁷⁹³ However one commission, by Emerson & Co., is better documented. In 1903 Sylvia Pankhurst undertook the decoration of the new Pankhurst Hall, which the Independent Labour Party was building in St James Road, Salford in memory of Richard Pankhurst (1835/6–1898). Christabel Pankhurst wrote that, at this time, Sylvia's role within her mother's business was 'mainly to design and paint in a studio'.⁷⁹⁴ This studio was hired for Sylvia above her mother's

⁷⁸⁸ Basil Greenhill, *Victorian and Edwardian Merchant Steamships From Old Photographs* (London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1979), 39.

⁷⁸⁹ Juliet Kinchin, 'The Wylie and Lochhead Style', *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, 9 (1985): 4–16.

⁷⁹⁰ Wealleans, *Designing Liners*, 29, 31

⁷⁹¹ 'Ladies Gossip', *Otago Witness*, 42.

⁷⁹² Winnifred Harper Cooley, *The New Womanhood* (New York: Boradway Publishing Company, 1904), 113; 'Miss Charlotte Robinson', *Brenham Daily Banner*, 20 June 1893, 2.

⁷⁹³ 'Through the Shop Windows', *Hearth and Home*, 10 November 1892, 862; 'Answers to Correspondents', *Le Follet*, 1 June 1896, 14.

⁷⁹⁴ Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of how we Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 43.

premises in King Street and it is not unreasonable to assume the commission was accepted under the aegis of Emerson & Co. It may be this commission Sylvia had in mind when, in an account of her younger years, she commented on her desire for an artistic career: ‘I would be a decorative painter; I would portray the world that is to be when poverty is no more. I would decorate halls where people would foregather in the movement to win the new world’.⁷⁹⁵

A draft for the hall [**Figures 4.48 and 4.49**], decorated by Sylvia with striking Arts and Crafts floral embellishment, demonstrated that it would have been a fitting place to undertake such activities. In it, Sylvia declares:

As this hall bears the name of a pioneer whose life was given for the ideal and for the future, emblems of the future and the ideal have been chosen with which to decorate it.

The Entrance Hall. The symbols are the peacock’s feather, lily & rose, emblems of beauty, purity and love; with the motto: “England arise!” and the name of the hall.

The Large Hall. Symbols: Roses, love, apple trees, knowledge, doves, peace, corn, plenty, lilies, purity, honesty, honesty, bees, industry, sunflower and butterflies, hope.

The panels illustrate Shelley’s line: “Hope will make thee young, for Hope and Youth are children of one mother, even Love.”⁷⁹⁶

Clearly, she felt strongly about the importance of art in inspiring the populace to engender and embrace political reform. While the decorations in the hall survived for only eight years, the commission had a significant impact on the history of the women’s movement. The Pankhurst family were outraged to hear that the hall, built in memory of Richard Pankhurst, who had tirelessly campaigned for women’s rights, was not to admit women. It was this affront that inspired Emmeline Pankhurst to call a meeting of local socialist suffragists: ‘Women, we must do the work ourselves. We must have an independent women’s movement. Come to my house

⁷⁹⁵ Sylvia Pankhurst, ‘Sylvia Pankhurst’ in *Myself When Young, by Famous Women of To-day*, ed. by E. A. M. Asquith (London: Frederick Muller, 1938), 263.

⁷⁹⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, design for Pankhurst Hall, ARCH01029/25, Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

tomorrow and we will arrange it'.⁷⁹⁷ The meeting was to be the first of the Women's Social and Political Union.

This chapter called on a range of sources (including a wealth of previously unstudied archival material) to explore, for the first time, the range, scope and variety of the private decorative commissions undertaken by women interior decorators in the late nineteenth century. It has demonstrated that, despite the disadvantages of their gender, the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin were operating on a similar scale to their male rivals. They undertook a wide variety of commissions for domestic interiors, including smaller alterations for middle-class clients (e.g. the Garretts for Catherine Buckton and Crommelin for Rosa Praed), as well as larger-scale work for aristocratic or wealthy clients (e.g. the Garretts for the Parrys and Crommelin for the Dufferins). Their work was not, however, confined to the domestic. They also undertook large-scale commissions for public and commercial clients. For example, Agnes Garrett worked on the New London Hospital for Women and Robinson at Manchester Town Hall and for both the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company and the Cunard Steamship Line. These were important and substantial commissions and were, in several cases, won through a tendering process in which the women were competing against their male rivals.

The clients and commissions discussed here are, however, likely to be the tip of the iceberg. Agnes Garrett's career spanned from 1874 to 1905 (31 years), Robinson's from 1884 to 1901 (17 years) and Crommelin's from 1888 to c.1903 (15 years). Considering the substantial length of time these women were professionally active, operating enterprises able to justify rent on business premises in prime metropolitan locations and which, presumably, supported them financially, it is reasonable to assume that they undertook substantially more work than is currently known. We know as much (if not more) about their professional output as we do about the output of many of their male rivals. For example, although very few clients have been identified for the firms Cottier & Co. and John Aldam Heaton & Co., both are consistently mentioned in scholarship on nineteenth British interior decoration. In contrast, their female contemporaries are frequently ignored, or are mentioned only in passing. While it is hoped that further research will uncover additional information about the commissions

⁷⁹⁷ Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, 43.

undertaken by women interior decorators, crucially, this chapter has suggested that we can no longer continue to ignore or side-line their considerable activity.

Illustrations

Figure 4.1

Agnes Garrett's family tree.

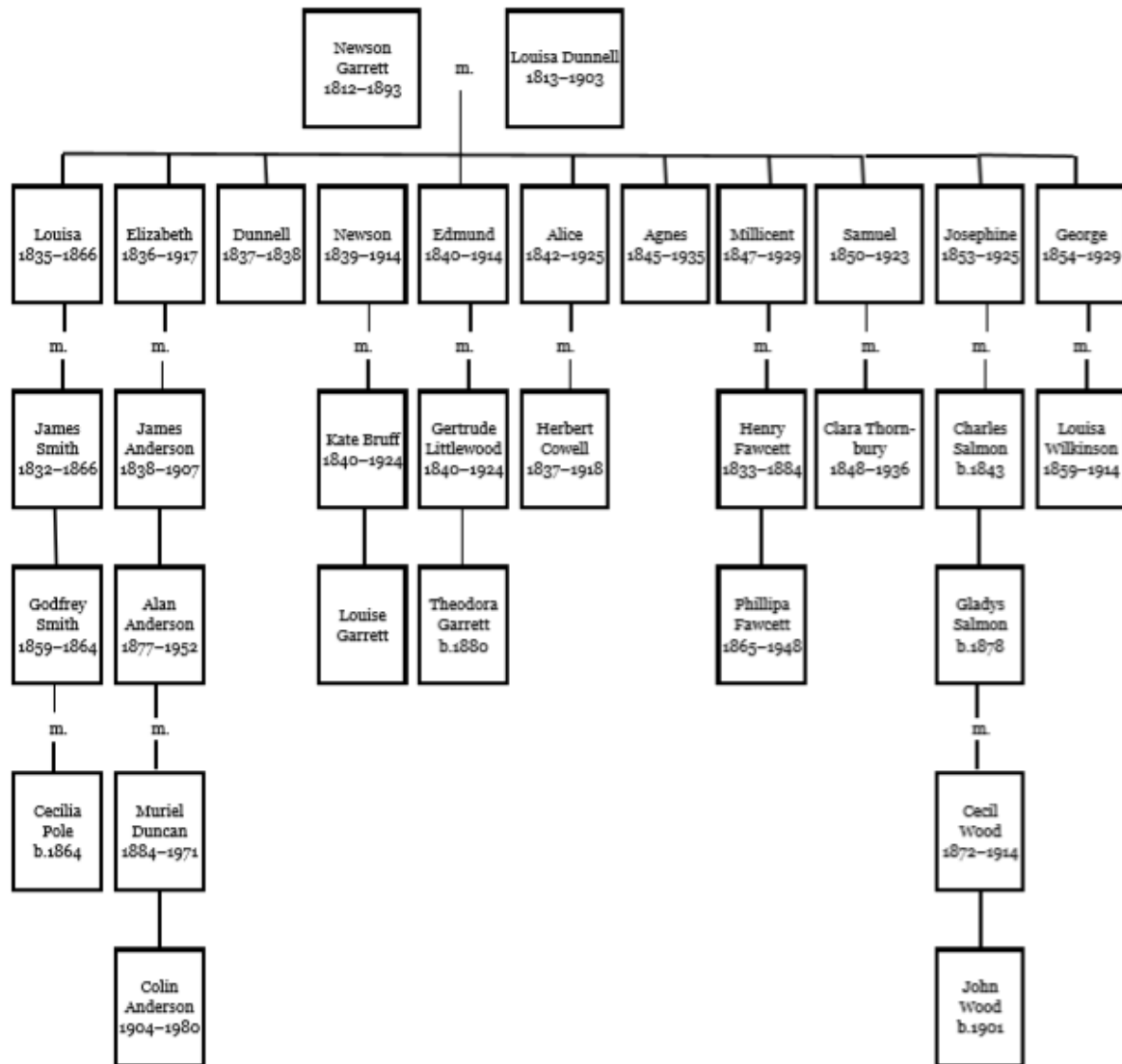


Figure 4.2

The drawing room at Bridge House, Snape. From: <http://www.eadt.co.uk/property/bridge-house-a-unique-family-home-built-by-the-man-behind-snape-maltings-1-4020936> [accessed 11/12/2017].



Figure 4.3

The drawing room at Alde House. Early 20th century. Image courtesy of Margaret Young.



Figure 4.4

The hallway at Alde House (from the dining room). Early 20th century. Image courtesy of Margaret Young.



Figure 4.5

The drawing room at Prior House, Snape. From: <https://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/16868611> [accessed 14/11/2017].



Figure 4.6

Philippa Fawcett in her study at Newnham College, Cambridge. Carol Barker and Felicity Hunt, *Women at Cambridge: a Brief History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.



Figure 4.7

Cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. From <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1389784/cabinet-garrett-rhoda/> [accessed 16/05/2018].



Figure 4.8

Corner cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213990> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 4.9

Day bed designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1214057> [accessed 09/05/2018].



Figure 4.10

Dressing table attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213970> [accessed 23/02/2018].



Figure 4.11

Wardrobe attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213970> [accessed 23/02/2018].



Figure 4.12

Cabinet attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213970> [accessed 23/02/2018].



Figure 4.13

One of a pair of armchairs attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213991.1> [accessed 20/05/2018].



Figure 4.14

One of a pair of footstools attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213940.2> [accessed 20/05/2018].



Figure 4.15

Footstool attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213992> [accessed 20/05/2018].



Figure 4.16

Sofa attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213939> [accessed 20/05/2018].



Figure 4.17

Bookcase attributed to Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. Formerly owned by James and Margaret Beale and now in the National Trust Collection at Standen House and Garden, West Sussex. From <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1213989> [accessed 20/05/2018].



Figure 4.18

Chimneypiece designed by Agnes Garrett for Gerald and Ada Wellesley, Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women' in Oscar Wilde (ed.), *Woman's World* (London: Cassels and Sons, 1890), 194.

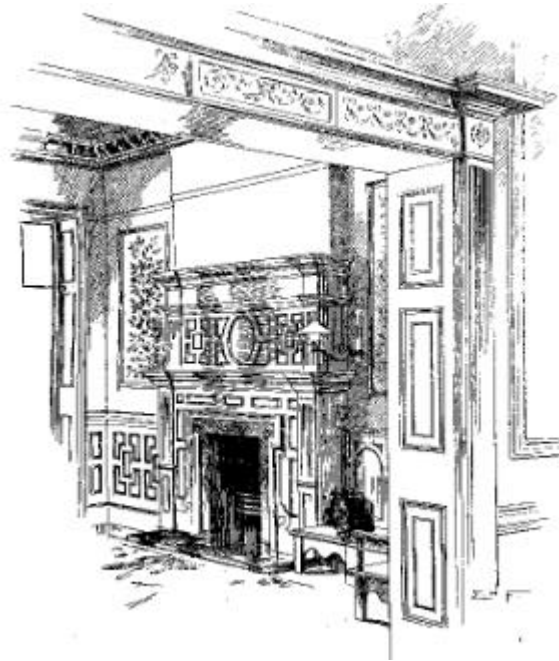


Figure 4.19

1960s photograph of the first-floor front room at 33 Portman Square, image 104236, from www.collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk [accessed 24/05/2018].



Figure 4.20

The Parry family in the garden at Knightscroft. From Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.



Figure 4.21

Hubert Parry in the music room at Knightscroft. From Parry family archive, Shulbrede Priory, Lynchmere.

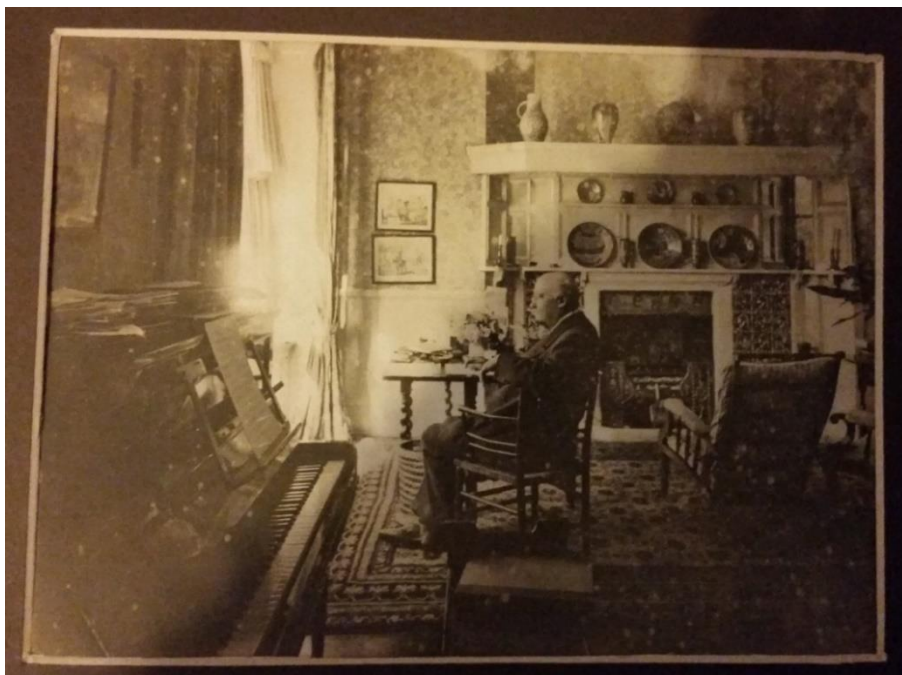


Figure 4.22

Fireplace in the former music room at Knightscroft. From <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-for-sale/Aldeburgh.html> [accessed 25/05/2018].



Figure 4.23

Former reception room at Knightscroft. From <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-for-sale/Aldeburgh.html> [accessed 25/05/2018].



Figure 4.24

Illustration of the dining room at 2 Gower Street, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1877), facing page 46.



Figure 4.25

William Morris 'Trellis' wallpaper design. From

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78220/trellis-wallpaper-morris-william/> [accessed 14/11/2017].



Figure 4.26

The drawing room at Clandeboye. From

<http://www.countrylifeimages.co.uk/Image.aspx?id=c8972d03-b12a-4a84-9114-6272bbbd69c1&rd=2|clandeboye||2|20|79|150> [accessed 25/05/2018].



Figure 4.27

Weaponry displayed in the entrance hall at Clandeboye c. 1900. Image courtesy of Lola Armstrong.



Clandeboye Entrance Hall c. 1900
(Photograph from Clandeboye, published by UAHSS)

Figure 4.28

Contemporary photograph of the weaponry displayed in the entrance hall at Clondeboy. From <http://www.simonwatson.com/archive/archive/lady-dufferin-w-magazine> [accessed 26/05/2018].



Figure 4.29

Illustration accompanying Robinson's response to 'Theodora', Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration', *The Queen*, 4 July 1891, 41.

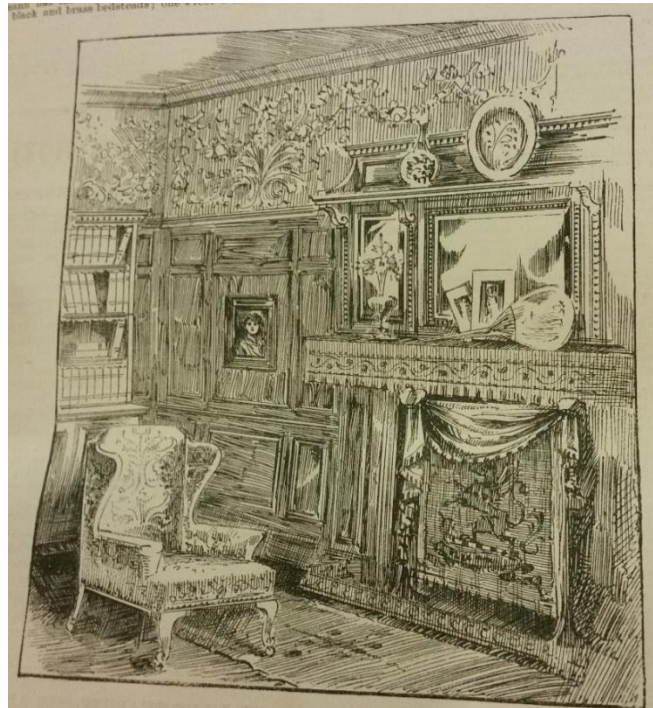


Figure 4.30

Design for a boudoir by Charlotte Robinson, 'Home Decoration: Answers to Correspondents', *The Queen*, 4 July 1891, 40.

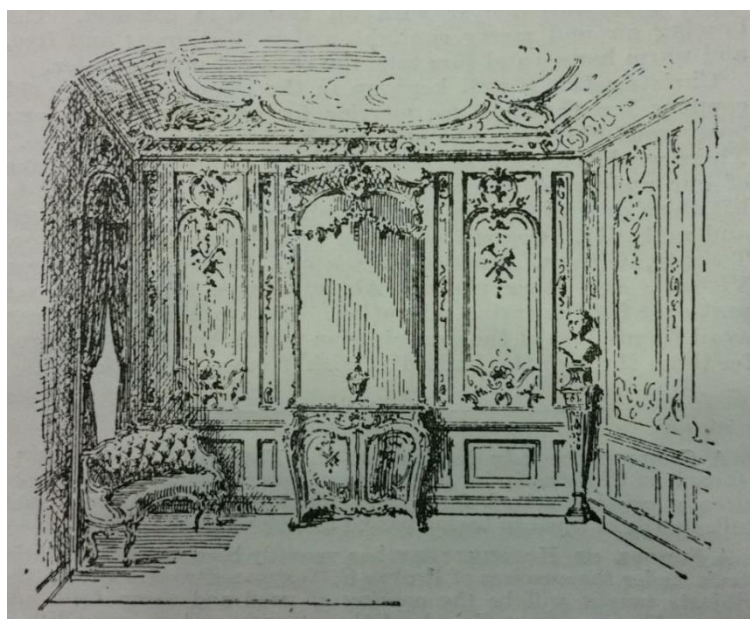


Figure 4.31

Advertisement for Mrs Charles Muller, emphasising her focus on interior decoration for domestic homes, *Hearth and Home*, 14 December 1899, 261.

Mrs. CHARLES MULLER,
7, SLOANE STREET, LONDON, S.W.
Artistic House Decorator & Furnisher.

EXTENSIVE WAREHOUSE REplete WITH EVERY KIND OF FURNITURE.

Furniture sent to Clients in the Country and Abroad.

Mrs. MULLER has Furnished and Decorated a **MODEL FLAT** at 7, Sloane St., where she arranges daily interviews for her clients, free of all charge, advising them as to the successful and artistic arrangement of their homes, and practically demonstrating the suitable furnishing of every part of the house. At such interviews Mrs. Muller exhibits in her studio

**WALL-PAPERS, DECORATIONS, CRETONNES,
CHINTZES, TAPESTRIES, BROCADES, &c.,**

all specially selected—and these she groups into various schemes according to individual requirements; thus illustrating clearly what she advises, while she undertakes to save her clients both time and money.

ESTIMATES FREE OF CHARGE.

Figure 4.32

Illustration of John McKean Brydon's design for the Chenies Street Chambers, 'The Ladies Residential Chambers, Chenies-Street' *The Builder*, 9 November 1889, 332.

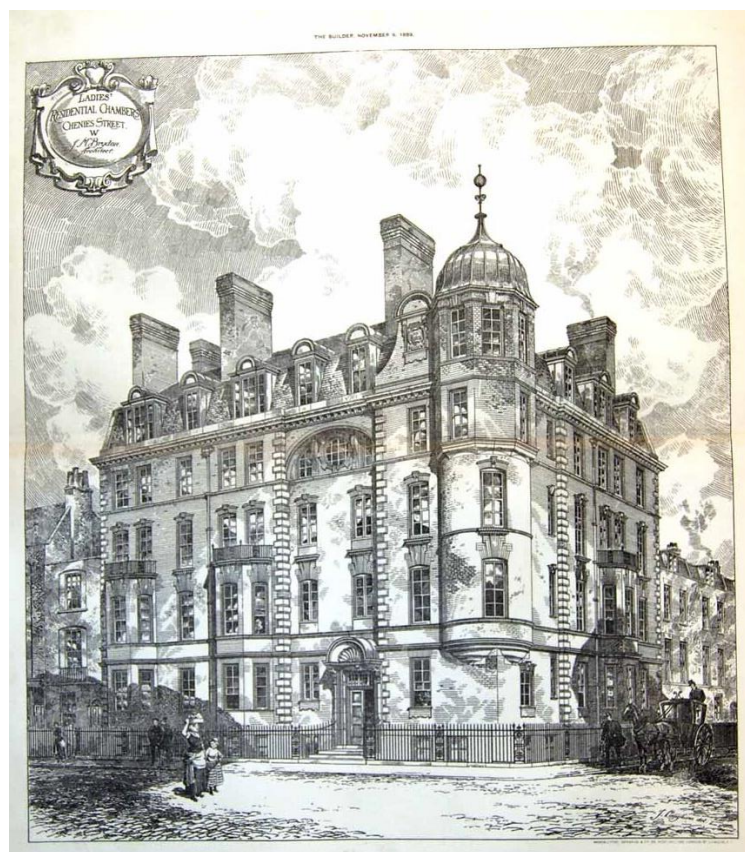


Figure 4.33

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's New London Hospital for Women, now the UNISON Centre.

From <http://himetop.wikidot.com/elizabeth-garrett-anderson-hospital> [accessed 26/05/2018].



Figure 4.34

An 1899 photograph of the entrance hall of the New Hospital for Women, SA/MWF/C.44-48, Wellcome Collection Archives and Manuscripts, London.



Figure 4.35

Contemporary photograph of the entrance hall of the New Hospital for Women, now the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at the UNISON Centre. From <http://www.newangle.co.uk/maritime/> [accessed 26/05/2018].



Figure 4.36

Two 1899 photographs of wards at the New Hospital for Women, SA/MWF/C.44-48, Wellcome Collection Archives and Manuscripts, London.



A WARD IN THE NEW HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN.



ANOTHER WARD IN THE NEW HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN.

Figure 4.37

An 1899 photograph of a ward at the New Hospital for Women, SA/MWF/C.44-48, Wellcome Collection Archives and Manuscripts, London.

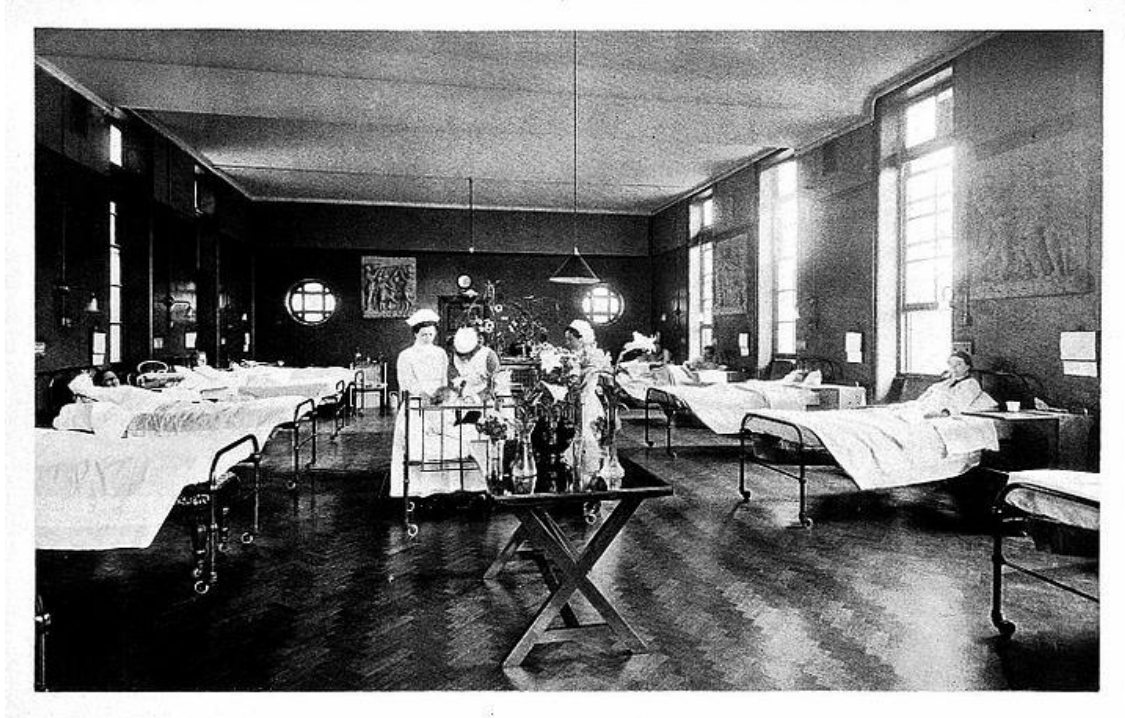


Figure 4.38

Fireplace designed by Agnes Garrett for the New London Hospital. Now in the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at the UNISON Centre.



Figure 4.39

Recreation of the Garretts' 'Laburnum' design for wallpaper, as recreated by the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at the UNISON Centre. From https://www.maharam.com/stories/rawsthorn_agnes-and-rhoda-garrett [accessed 26/06/2018].



Figure 4.40

Illustration of Lady Dufferin in her sitting room at the British Embassy in Rome, 'Lady Dufferin's Sitting Room at the British Embassy at Rome', *The Queen*, 15 November 1890, 700.



Figure 4.41

The Royal Hotel in Grimsby, c.1900. From https://www.francisfrith.com/grimsby/grimsby-royal-hotel-1890_26724 [accessed 27/05/2018].



Figure 4.42

The Yarborough Hotel in Grimsby, c.1900. From <https://www.lincsinspirelibraries.com/web/arena/local-heritage> [accessed 27/05/2018].



Figure 4.43

Ballroom ceiling, Yarborough Hotel, Grimsby. From https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101379373-yarborough-hotel-west-marsh-ward/photos/44273#.WsTyYYj4_IU [accessed 27/05/2018].



Figure 4.44

Waterhouse's original plan for Manchester Town Hall. The Lord Mayor's apartments are highlighted in the bottom left hand corner. Image courtesy of Our Town Hall Project.

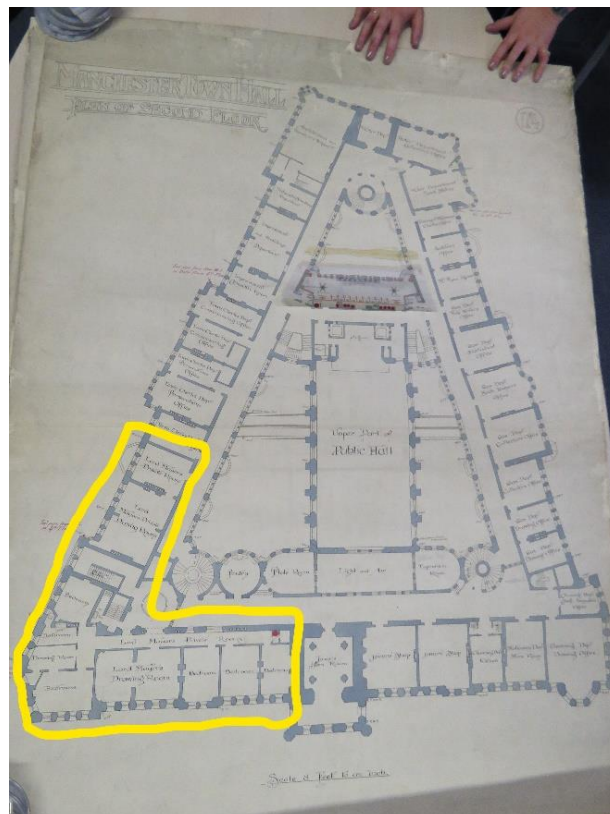


Figure 4.45

Stairway of the Campania c. 1900. D42/PR2/12/21, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.

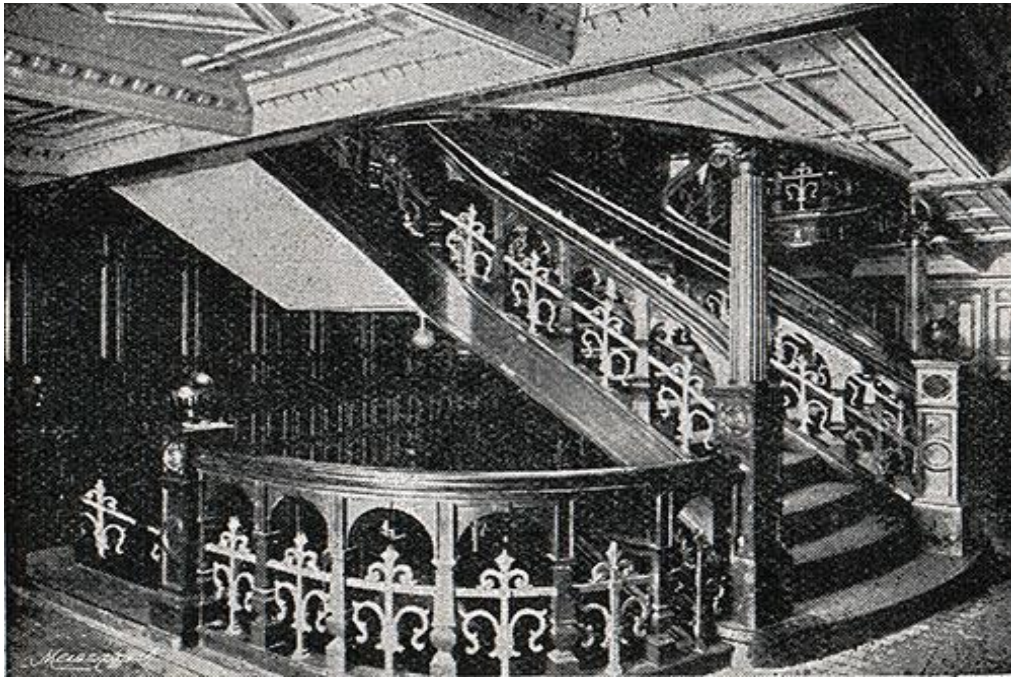


Figure 4.46

Grand Dining Saloon of the Campania c.1900, D42/PR2/12/21, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.



Figure 4.47

Drawing Room of the Campania, c.1900, D42/PR2/12/21, Cunard Archive, Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool University John Rylands Library, Liverpool.



Figure 4.48

Sylvia Pankhurst, design for Pankhurst Hall, ARCH01029/25, Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

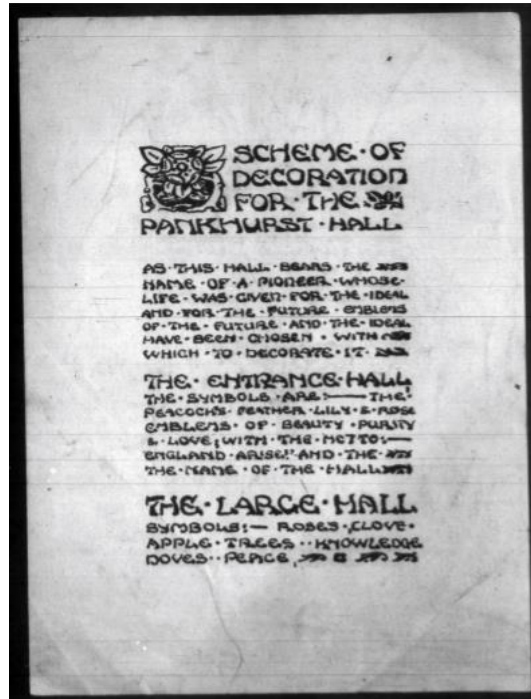
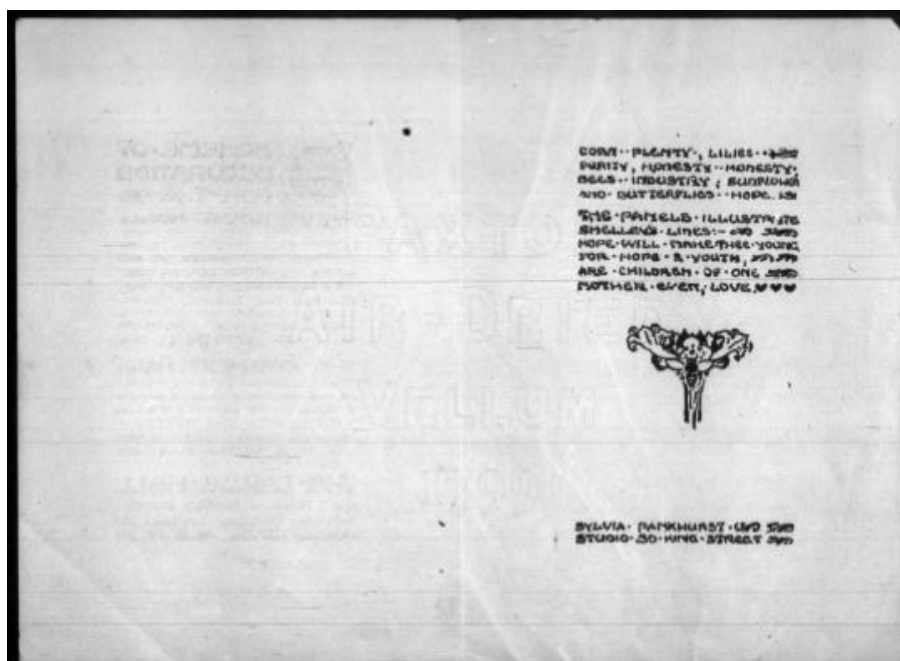


Figure 4.49

Sylvia Pankhurst, design for Pankhurst Hall, ARCH01029/25, Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.



Conclusion

The academic discourse of British nineteenth-century interior decoration has, up to this point, been dominated by the histories of men and of male-run firms. While Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, the first British women to work as professional interior decorators, typically receive a cursory name check in scholarship on the subject, their female contemporaries are routinely absent. For example, Imogen Hart's 2010 *Arts and Crafts Objects* claims to offer a ground-breaking reassessment of the conventional understanding of a cohesive Arts and Crafts movement in Britain and places considerable emphasis on interior decoration.⁷⁹⁸ However, although William Morris is discussed throughout, Hart's work contains only two mentions of the Garrett cousins (one of which is in a footnote), and none of the many other women decorators, such as Caroline Crommelin and Charlotte Robinson, active at the time.⁷⁹⁹ This thesis redresses the balance. By uncovering the narratives of the various women working professionally in the field during the period in question, it counters their historical absence, presenting a significant challenge to the masculinised history of interior decoration.

In doing so, it also highlights two other considerable gaps in the scholarship on British interior decoration. Firstly, there is still a proliferation of works focused on stylistic modernism and Avant Garde artistic movements. The importance of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements are continually emphasised, to the detriment of the many decorators working in more populist styles. Secondly, while the work of pioneering architects, artists and designers are frequently discussed, there is a lack of scholarship scrutinising the contribution of the less-prominent individuals active in the field, such as cabinet-makers, upholsterers and small artistic retailers. It is hoped that, by drawing attention to the richness and diversity of the field of interior decoration in the late nineteenth century, this thesis will go some way to offsetting these biases. It has followed three main threads of enquiry:

1. Who were these women?

This study has uncovered an extraordinarily wide range of previously unstudied and unpublished archival material relating to the professional lives of the British women active as interior decorators in the later nineteenth-century. Analysis of this material has significantly

⁷⁹⁸ Imogen Hart, *Arts and Crafts Objects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25, 44.

expanded our knowledge of the work of pioneering interior decorators Agnes and Rhoda Garrett. It has also been used to identify the key female players in the field of interior decoration, and to uncover the extent of their contribution. It provides, for the first time, comprehensive professional biographies of two of the Garretts' main female competitors, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin, both of whom were operating interior decoration businesses on a considerable scale. Crucially, by examining the Garretts alongside their direct female rivals, our understanding of the cousins' contribution to the field has been substantially enriched. In addition, by considering the professional lives of these four different women together, and by comparing their experiences, the role of later nineteenth-century women in the field can, for the first time, begin to be fully explored.

This thesis has also highlighted that, from 1871, when the Garretts began their professional training, to 1899, when the Institute of British Decorators was incorporated, the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin were not the only women working professionally in the field. At least nineteen woman-run interior decoration firms, whose details have been collated in **Appendix One**, were also active during the period in question. Although their absence from scholarship on later nineteenth-century British interior decoration implies otherwise, many women (including, for example, Emmeline Pankhurst, Jessie Whyte-Walton, Edith Wetton, Fanny and Louisa Frith, Mrs Frank Oliver and Mrs Charles Muller) played an active part in the market, operating interior decoration businesses on a significant scale.

This information has been woven throughout the analysis to provide context, and to ensure that the contribution of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin is not over-emphasised: although the three case study firms were pioneering, establishing themselves as commercially successful women in a previously male-dominated field, they were not exceptional. However, while this thesis has begun the process of recovering the narratives of the other women active in the field during the period, it recognises that there is still considerable work to be done. It is hoped that, with increasing numbers of historical sources being digitised, more names and narratives will soon be uncovered.

2. How did their businesses operate?

The case study approach adopted by this thesis has enabled a comprehensive analysis of how three significant woman-run interior decoration firms operated. Chapter One, which examined the women's professional motivations, has established that, although they may have been encouraged or inspired by influential women in their familial or social circles, the women

probably needed to support themselves financially. It has highlighted that they would have been painfully aware of the societal disapprobation faced by middle-/professional-/upper-class women engaged in paid work. A commitment to feminism and a desire to engender tangible social change by expanding occupational prospects for women were of vital importance in sustaining them throughout their careers. Chapter One also scrutinised the different pathways the women took to prepare themselves for their careers. As interior decoration was, during this period, a fledgling profession, there was no established educational trajectory. The Garretts gained a hard-won apprenticeship, undertaken firstly with a glass and furniture designer and, secondly, with an architect and, in turn, were able to offer professional training to other women. In contrast, while neither Robinson or Crommelin underwent any formal training, they were able to assert their professional status by emphasizing their foreign travel, natural aptitude for the work and self-study.

Chapter Two has taken a broad view of the spaces the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin used professionally. It has argued that the women were able to capitalize on the connection between interior decoration and domesticity by using their homes as showrooms, providing an example of their work that could be seen by family and friends and, through the press, the public. It has established that, unlike both Robinson and Crommelin, the Garretts did not have a dedicated retail space open to the public. However, this chapter has uncovered a previously unstudied document [**Appendix Two**] relating to the Garrett firm: the auction catalogue from the sale of their Morwell Street storage warehouse. Analysis of this document has added significantly to knowledge of the cousins' enterprise, providing vital information about the stock they held and the scale of their business. The chapter has also demonstrated that both Robinson and Crommelin placed considerable emphasis on their retail trade. It has examined the locations they chose for their shops, before considering the canny techniques they used to tap into the growing female market for interior decoration. Finally, the chapter considers how the women carved out portions of the marketplace for themselves by developing unique specialisations and by targeting the growing female market for interior decoration.

Chapter Three, which considers the women's promotional activity, has examined how the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin actively engaged in a wide range of techniques to market their enterprises successfully. It calls upon the interviews the women gave to *The Women's Penny Paper* to reveal how they manipulated the press, both to assert the respectability of their profession and to promote themselves, and their businesses, to female consumers. For example, the interviews emphasise the women's femininity and highlight their

engagement with philanthropic causes, as well as ensuring that detailed descriptions of their work were available to the public. The chapter has also explored how, as well as giving interviews, the women used a variety of other methods to attract press attention, including participating in national and international exhibitions and staging events in their own premises. Finally, Chapter Three examined the advice on interior decoration published by women interior decorators and has demonstrated how they used books and magazine columns to gain valuable publicity, establish themselves as authorities and promote their status as professionals.

Chapter Four has explored the scale and variety of the commissions undertaken by women interior decorators in the late nineteenth-century. Firstly, it considered the women's commissions for domestic interiors, examining the Garretts' work for the homes of family members, but also emphasizing that familial circles were not their only source of clients. Notably, this chapter uncovered details of two previously unknown Garrett commissions for domestic interiors (for Lady Dorothy Nevill and the Crisp family). The chapter also examines the workings of the complex, personal and professional relationships that women interior decorators had with their clients, by looking in more detail at the work undertaken by the Garretts for Hubert and Maude Parry, and by Crommelin for the Dufferin family. In the face of a lack of evidence, it has used Robinson's 'Home Decoration' column for *The Queen* magazine for evidence of the types of domestic interior she may have produced. Secondly, the chapter has examined the women's work for commercial and public spaces, looking in detail at Crommelin's work for the British embassy in Paris, Agnes Garrett's work for the New Hospital for Women and Robinson's work for the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company, Manchester Town Hall and the Cunard Steamship Company.

3. How can we situate their work in the contemporary cultural landscape?

This study has emphasised the importance of examining the social, political, cultural and economic factors that enabled, fuelled and fostered the emergence of women interior decorators. Chapter One established that the contemporary rise of the middle class, and the resultant increase in demand for interior decoration played a part in enabling the emergence of the female decorator. The fact that, prior to the formation of the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators, interior decoration was an 'unclaimed' area in which women could act without encountering male disapprobation, was also a factor. In addition, interior decoration, during the period in question, was positioned (because of its relationship to female education, to

domesticity, to philanthropy, and to fine art) as a profession inherently suitable for practice by women. In fact, the connection of interior decoration to femininity and domesticity is explored throughout the thesis. For example, Chapter Two emphasizes the fact that interior decoration, which concerned the home, could also be practiced from home, contributed to its perception as a profession suitable for practice by women.

Throughout, to fully situate the work of the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin within the contemporary cultural landscape, this thesis has compared the women, not only to their direct female rivals, but also to their male competitors. It has established that compared to men, the women professionally active in the field of interior decoration faced considerable disadvantages. They could not easily access professional training, were excluded from male artistic institutions and networks, were typically not provided by their parents with the capital necessary to launch a business. They faced considerable societal disapprobation, particularly when engaged in the more overtly commercial side of their trade and when working from retail premises. They also, as the Garretts participation at the 1878 Paris exhibition demonstrates, faced considerable opposition from the artistic establishment. However, the story of women like the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin, who were trying to assert their status in a male dominated field, should not be reduced to a 'progressive struggle against great odds'.⁸⁰⁰ This thesis has revealed that, despite their gender, the professional lives and working methods, of the women were not substantially different from those of their male competitors. In fact, they were able to fully participate in the contemporary market for interior decoration.

For example, the Garretts were able to gain professional training and, although neither Crommelin and Robinson gained a formal artistic education, they do not seem to have found this a hindrance. While the Garretts did not operate retail premises, Crommelin and Robinson did, and, for example, Robinson rented retail space in prime metropolitan areas in both London and Manchester simultaneously for over a decade. The women were able to compete, on a relatively equal footing to their male rivals, in both national and international exhibitions and again, like their male rivals, they published their advice on interior decoration, participating in the flourishing contemporary market for domestic advice manuals. The women were also undertaking similar commissions, and for similar clients, to their male rivals. The Garretts frequently undertook work for the homes of members of their familial and social circles. That

⁸⁰⁰ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), xx.

they did so, however, could be argued to be a sign of their considerable business acumen in successfully using their home as a showroom and manipulating their social networks, rather than demonstrative of a reliance on partiality.

The women did not, however, exclusively undertake work for family and friends. Crommelin worked for novelist Rosa Praed Campbell, and the Garretts for the prominent solicitor James Beale. The women are all credited by the contemporary press with a wide range of commissions for domestic interiors. Often, details of these commissions are not recorded. However, considering the women were able to financially support themselves throughout their lives, there is no reason to doubt their veracity. Chapter Four has also demonstrated that the women were not confined to decorating the more typically feminine rooms in the house: for example, both Robinson and Crommelin designed schemes for smoking rooms.⁸⁰¹ Nor were they confined to undertaking domestic commissions. Like their male rivals, the Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin all undertook work for public or commercial clients. For example, Agnes Garrett was paid a staggering £1,000 for her design for the interior of the New Hospital for Women, and Robinson at least £624 for her work on the Yarborough Hotel, Grimsby.

The focus of this thesis is business history, rather than formal or artistic innovation. Stylistically, the work produced by these women was not, typically, particularly modernising or pathbreaking. They did not drastically reject the work of their predecessors, establish radical new styles of decoration or engender impressive technical innovations. Instead, they worked in popular decorative, or antique revival, styles designed to appeal to a wide range of consumers. This does not, however, mean that their contribution was not significant. As women active in a male dominated industry, they were trail blazers, pioneering a profession in which women could be successful, at a time when they were excluded from so many avenues of employment. For example, during this period, women were unable to practice law or accountancy, were barred from most civil and judicial offices and could not work on the London Stock Exchange.

⁸⁰¹ Juliet Kinchin, 'Interiors: Nineteenth-Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' Room' in Pat Kirkham (ed.), *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 12–29; 'Metropolitan Gossip', *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 March 1891, 8; 'Women's Industries', *Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 1888, 9.

In contrast, these entrepreneurial women were able to run successful enterprises that fully participated in the contemporary marketplace and, by foregrounding their activity, this thesis has demonstrated that the masculinised history of British interior decoration is long overdue revision. This, of course, has far reaching implications. As noted, the process of the professionalisation of interior decoration, prior to the formation of the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators, has yet to be fully explored. If, however, we accept that women were, during this pivotal time in the later nineteenth century, active professionally in the field, and on much the same terms as their male competitors, the contribution of the Garretts, Robinson, Crommelin, and their many female contemporaries, to the history of British interior decoration can no longer be ignored.

For example, this thesis has demonstrated that the women all placed considerable emphasis on creating a range of products unified by style. The Garretts worked in the Queen Anne style, Robinson in a richly-decorated floral style and Crommelin focused on decorating with antiques. This made financial sense in that it encouraged clients to purchase more stock, but also contributed to the creation of the celebrity interior decorator as we recognize them today. This thesis has also noted how the women subverted the 'at home' interview format to promote their businesses. By positioning their home/offices as sites of artistic creativity, equivalent to an artist's studio or an author's study, they arguably contributed to further raising the status of interior decoration in the hierarchy of the arts. In addition, it has examined how the women promoted their work by giving interviews in feminist periodicals and by participating in exhibitions (and sections of exhibitions) dedicated to promoting the expansion of occupational options for women. By doing so they were contributing to the establishment of interior decoration as a feminine profession in the public imagination (a perception that, to a certain extent, pervades today).

They were also paving the way for their better-remembered twentieth-century successors, including Syrie Maugham, Elsie de Wolfe and Dorothy Draper. The knowledge provided by this thesis adds not only to our understanding of the process of the professionalisation of interior decoration, but also, more widely, to the process of the professionalisation of women during the nineteenth century. For example, in 1884 architect Charles Harrison Townsend used the example of women house decorators to argue in favour of women architects. Dismissing the assertion that women would experience difficulty 'as regards the inspection of buildings and the necessary mounting of the scaffold for that purpose', Townsend reminded readers that 'women-decorators have been known to work for days on

scaffolds and that there are such things as “divided skirts ...”.⁸⁰² It is perhaps not a coincidence that Robinson’s niece, Elspeth Douglas Spencer, née McClelland (1879–1920) [the daughter of Robinson’s elder sister and business partner Elspeth McClelland, see **Figure 5.1**] was, active as an architect in the early years of the twentieth century.⁸⁰³

In conclusion, reinserting these women into the history of nineteenth-century British interior decoration is of vital importance. There is, still, an urgent need to intervene in the continuously masculinized history of British interior design. To gain a full understanding of the emergence of interior decoration as a distinct profession, we must recognize that William Morris and his male competitors were not the only professionals active in the field. It is hoped that this thesis will act as a catalyst, encouraging scholars to undertake a richer and more nuanced investigation of the subject, promoting a greater understanding of the diversity of individuals active in the contemporary artistic and cultural landscape. Since research for this thesis began, one important development has already taken place. In 2017, the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired the cabinet designed by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett for James and Margaret Beale [**Figure 4.7**]. Although the piece is not currently on display, it is hoped that its presence in the collection of a major national museum will encourage others to turn their attention to the role of women in nineteenth-century interior decoration.

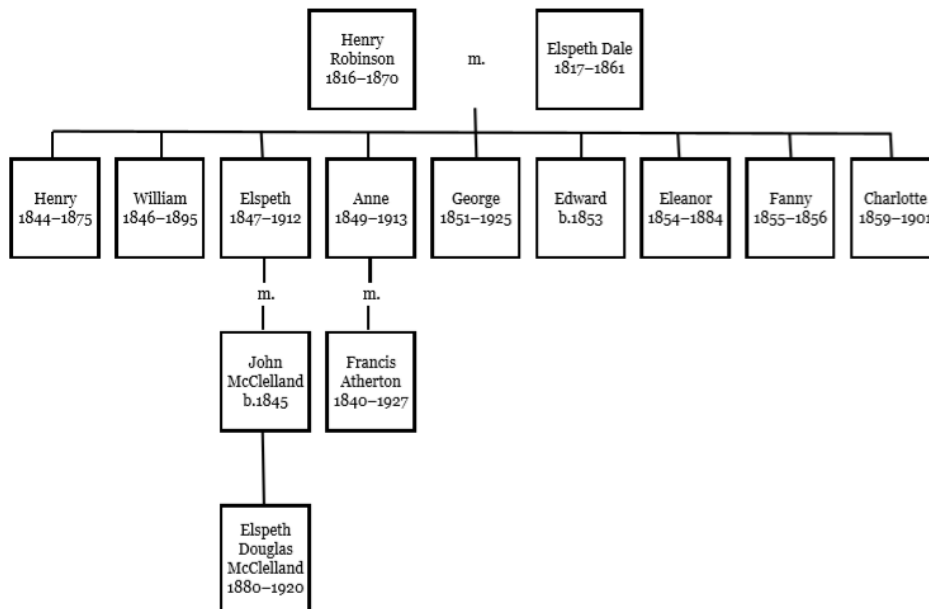
⁸⁰² Charles Harrison Townsend, ‘Women as Architects’, *The British Architect*, 31 December 1884, vii–viii.

⁸⁰³ Diane Atkinson, *The Suffragettes in Pictures* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 69.

Illustrations

Figure 5.1

Charlotte Robinson's family tree, showing her relationship to early twentieth-century woman architect Elspeth Douglas McClelland.



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Appendix One

Survey of Women Interior Decorators, 1871–1899

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, Charlotte Robinson and Caroline Crommelin were part of a growing network of women who, in the late nineteenth century, forged new roles as interior decorators. The following survey introduces their direct female competitors: nineteen firms, all mentioned by the contemporary press as active in the field during the period in question. For each firm, it attempts to record the following: trading name, associated people, years active, premises and key sources. Where possible, it also provides details of notable clients and commissions, publications, specialisations, participation in exhibitions etc. This has revealed some interesting trends. For example:

- The wide variety of terms the women used to describe themselves is striking. Some used their titles and surnames, with many using the title ‘Mrs’ professionally (e.g. Mrs Avant, Mrs Innes and Mrs Frank Oliver). This may have been an attempt to assert their respectability, or to justify their credentials for intervention in the domestic lives of others. However, marriage did not necessarily equate to financial stability and many married women still needed (or wanted) to work. Others, perhaps in an attempt to hide their identities and avoid the stigma associated with commerce, used more abstract names (e.g. The Spinning Wheel and Emerson & Co.).
- The women also used a wide variety of terms to describe their work: house decorator, art decorator, house furnisher and artistic decorator were all common, with no one designation seeming to prevail. This is likely to be reflective of the fledging status of the profession of interior decoration. As a developing profession, the terminology was not yet established.
- Most of the women listed operated primarily in London. Attitudes towards professional middle-class women may have been more progressive in the capital than elsewhere in the country. However, there were women, like Katherine Cooke in Eastbourne, working in the field in other areas of the country. Others, such as Mrs Frank Oliver,

started elsewhere in the country before moving to the capital. It may be that the tendency of the nineteenth century press to focus reportage on London has resulted in a scarcity of surviving documentary evidence on women's regional activity in the field.

- Perhaps to facilitate the raising of capital, the three case study firms were all family partnerships. Apparently, this was common: sisters Fanny and Louisa Frith ran The Spinning Wheel with Mary Monckton, sisters Helen and Isabel Woollan worked together as the Decorative Artists & General Agency and, before her daughters Christabel and Sylvia joined Emerson & Co., Emmeline Pankhurst worked with her sister Mary Clarke.
- The Garretts were able to share the knowledge they gained during their hard-won apprenticeship by offering training to other women. Again, this seems to have been a frequent practice: for example, Mrs Avant and Mrs Innes both ran training schemes. While this may have been a result of their interest in expanding occupational opportunities for women, as pupils would pay fees, it may also have been financially motivated.
- Likewise, an interest in promoting the expansion of occupational opportunities for women may have prompted many of the women, such as Mrs Frank Oliver and Mrs Avant, to follow Crommelin's example and advertise that they employed women in their studios.
- While the Garretts did not operate retail premises, many of their successors, including Robinson and Crommelin, did. Almost all the women listed here followed this example by running their businesses from shops. It is likely that while the Garretts, as the first women in the field, were wary of engaging in retail, women active in the field in the following years were less likely to share this concern as the visibility of middle-class women in the commercial world increased.
- Similarly, while neither the Garretts, Robinson nor Crommelin were to directly advertise in the print media, many of their successors did. This may have been the result of a desire to assert the status of interior decoration as a profession, rather than

a trade. Alternatively, it may be that, as the first women to operate significant businesses in the field, they were reluctant to promote themselves overtly.

- The Garretts, Robinson and Crommelin all placed considerable emphasis on distinguishing themselves from their competition by developing specialisations. Again, this was common, and, for example, many women focused on selling or decorating with antiques or designing and selling furniture. Others, including the Woollan sisters and Mrs Innes, were able to diversify and/or add value to their businesses by maintaining additional other streams of income, often simultaneously running agencies for property or domestic servants.

It is important to note that, while this thesis has begun the process of reclaiming the names and histories of the women active as interior decorators in the late nineteenth century, there is more work to be done. For example, extensive genealogical study may prove fruitful in revealing further biographical details about the women listed here; and research focusing more specifically on the regional press is likely to uncover the names of more women working outside the capital. There are many other avenues of research to pursue and it is very much hoped that this survey will act as a springboard for future research.

Trading name	Aileen, Madame
People	Eugenia Mary Merry (1841/1842–1913)
Years active	c.1890 to 1897
Premises	14 North Audley Street, London (from c.1890); 53 Conduit Street, London (until 1897)
Additional information	Although Eugenia Merry's principal business was millinery, in 1890 an article in <i>Woman</i> magazine claimed that she had recently branched out into house decoration. While it is unclear whether Merry had any success in her new venture, she continued as a milliner until her bankruptcy in 1897
Key sources	'Receiving Orders in Bankruptcy', <i>Daily Mail</i> , 10 July 1897, 2; 'Reading for Ladies', <i>North-Eastern Daily Gazette</i> , 17 October 1890, 4; 'The World of Breadwinners', <i>Woman</i> , 11 January 1890, 5

Trading name	Art Depot, The
People	Miss Clifford
Years active	c.1895 to c.1897
Premises	44 Hill Road, Wimbledon (1895); 130 Western Road, Brighton (1897)
Additional information	Miss Clifford advertised her furniture designs, which were specially designed for the addition of amateur decoration, in <i>Hearth and Home</i> magazine between 28 March 1895 and 15 August 1895. Her furniture designs, including 'The Herkomer' sideboard, a 'French Cabinet' and a 'Spinning Chair' were also discussed in various articles in <i>The House</i> magazine in the later 1890s
Key sources	e.g. Advertisement for The Art Depot, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 28 March 1895, 3; e.g. Advertisement for The Art Depot, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 27 May 1897, 2; 'Gossip', <i>The House</i> , 1 May 1898, 107; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 December 1897, 6; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 June 1898, 6

Trading name	Avant, Mrs
People	Louisa Avant Miss Hairs Eliza Turck (1832–1891)
Years active	c.1886 to c.1893
Premises	13 Queen’s Mansions, Victoria Street, London (1886–1888); 48 Berners Street, London (from 1888)
Additional information	Mrs Avant ran a studio employing women to produce art decoration for household decoration, from which she also taught classes in decorative art. Her pupils could be hired to advise on house decoration or to undertake schemes for interiors. Mrs Avant advertised several times in <i>The Morning Post</i> between 1887 and 1888. Miss Hairs, a young woman associated with the business, was involved in a breach of promise case against a Member of Parliament in 1890. Louisa Avant testified at the trial. Artist Eliza Turck also taught at Mrs Avant’s studio
Key sources	‘Action for Breach of Promise against and MP’, <i>Daily News</i> , 18 April 1890, 3; ‘Answers to Correspondents’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 8 June 1893, 18; ‘Needlework’, <i>Ladies Treasury: a Household Magazine</i> , 1 December 1886, 35; ‘Needlework’, <i>Ladies Treasury: a Household Magazine</i> , 1 June 1888, 44; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Avant, <i>Morning Post</i> , 27 January 1887, 1; ‘Ladies as House Decorators’, <i>Sunday Times</i> , 22 May 1887, 6; Alfred C. Harmsworth, ‘What Shall I Be’, <i>Young Folks Paper</i> , 24 September 1887, 11

Trading name	Cooke, Mrs F. G.
People	Katherine Margaret Cooke (1849–1932)
Years active	c.1897
Premises	3 Hyde Gardens, Eastbourne
Additional information	Katherine Margaret Cooke advertised her house decoration services in <i>The House</i> magazine in 1897

Key sources	e.g. Advertisement for Mrs. F. G. Cooke, <i>The House</i> , 1 April 1897, xx
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Trading name	Decorative Artists and General Agency, The
People	Helen Woollan (b.1861) Isabel Woollan (b.1866) Mary Anne Philips
Years active	1986 to c.1902
Premises	28 Brooke Street, London
Additional information	The Decorative Artists and General Agency was started by sisters Helen and Isabel Woollan and Mary Anne Philips as an agency supplying servants, advertising their services extensively in in <i>The Standard</i> and <i>The Morning Post</i> . They quickly expanded into estate agency, also starting to sell novelty items. Mary Philips left the partnership in mid-1897, after which they additionally listed their services as house decorators. They frequently held special exhibitions of antiques, art and decorative artwork at their premises, for example held an exhibition of pastel drawings by contemporary French and British artists in 1897. Miss Woollan and Philips are listed as interior decorators in Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory in 1897 and the Misses Woollan from 1898 to 1899
Key sources	e.g. Advertisement for the Decorative Artists and General Agency, <i>The House</i> , 1 June 1897; 'In Search of the Latest', <i>The House</i> , 1 May 1897, 140; 'In Search of "The Latest"', <i>The House</i> , 1 May 1898; 'When, Found Make a Note Of', <i>The House</i> , 1 July 1897; 'When Found, Make a Note Of', <i>The House</i> , 1 December 1898. 'Personal & c.', <i>The Times</i> , 25 April 1902, 1; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 November 1897; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 January 1898; e.g. Advertisement for the Decorative Artists and General Agency, <i>The Morning Post</i> , 28 October 1896, 10; e.g. Advertisement for the Decorative Artists and General Agency, <i>The Morning Post</i> , 29 July 1897, 1. 'Multiple advertisements', <i>The Morning Post</i> , 5 June 1896 ;

	e.g. Advertisement for the Decorative Artists and General Agency <i>Standard</i> , 2 October 1897, 7; <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1897–1899
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Trading name	Emerson & Co.
People	Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) Mary Clarke (c.1863–1910) Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958)
Years active	1886 to 1907
Premises	165 Hampstead Road, London (1886–1888); 223 Regent Street, London (1890–1892); 33 South King Street, Manchester (c. 1898–c. 1907); 42 King Street, Manchester (c. 1898–1904); 30 King Street, Manchester (1904–c. 1907)
Additional information	Emmeline Pankhurst opened Emerson & Co., selling a variety of home décor and fancy goods, with her sister Mary Clarke at 165 Hampstead Road, London in 1886. The venture was not successful and closed only two years later. In 1890 Pankhurst reopened Emerson & Co. at 223 Regent Street, but the enterprise closed two years later when the Pankhurst family moved to Manchester. In c.1898 Pankhurst again reopened Emerson & Co., this time in Manchester, at two separate premises: an ‘art furnisher’ at 33 South King Street and a ‘fancy repository’ at 42 King Street (this was to move, in 1904, to 30 King Street, after which it was also listed as ‘art furnisher’). As Mary Clarke had not followed the Pankhurst family to Manchester, Pankhurst called instead on her daughters for assistance with her enterprise: first Christabel Pankhurst, until she withdrew to concentrate on her law degree, and then Sylvia Pankhurst. Emerson & Co. concentrated on furniture, textiles and smaller decorative items, often designed in-house by Sylvia Pankhurst. A sketchbook belonging to Sylvia Pankhurst, contemporary to the time she spent working for her mother, includes designs for decorative bellows, plates, folding screens, vases and Christmas crackers. Much of the shop’s stock seems intended to target the

	<p>newly developed feminine market for interior decoration. Advertising for the firm claims that, as well as operating a retail trade, they undertook private commissions for interior decoration. Despite this, there is evidence for only one private Pankhurst commission: the decoration of the new Pankhurst Hall (opened 1903), which the Independent Labour Party built in St James Road, Salford in memory of Richard Pankhurst (1836/6–1898). Emerson & Co. advertised regularly, particularly in the <i>Women's Penny Paper/Woman's Herald</i>. In c.1907 Pankhurst abandoned the enterprise and devoted herself to the militant suffrage campaign</p>
Key sources	<p>Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst Collection, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; 'Mrs Pankhurst', <i>The Woman's Herald</i>, 7 February 1891, 241; e.g. Advertisement for Emerson & Co., <i>Women's Penny Paper</i>, 24 May 1890, 371; 'At Messrs Emerson's Season Show', <i>Women's Penny Paper</i>, 15 November 1890, 61; 'Emerson & Co.', <i>Women's Penny Paper</i>, 22 March 1890, 263; Mary Billington, 'Some Practical Women', <i>Women's World</i>, 1890, 193–197; <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1889–1892; Christabel Pankhurst, <i>Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote</i> (London: Hutchinson, 1959); Emmeline Pankhurst, <i>My Own Story</i> (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1914); Sylvia Pankhurst, <i>The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst: The Suffragette Struggle for Women's Citizenship</i> (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1935); Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Sylvia Pankhurst' in <i>Myself When Young</i>, by Famous Women of To-day, ed. by E. A. M. Asquith (London: Frederick Muller, 1938); Martin Pugh, <i>The Pankhursts</i> (London: Allen Lane, 2001); June Purvis, <i>Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography</i> (London: Routledge, 2002); <i>Slater's Manchester, Salford and Suburban Directory</i> (Manchester: Isaac Slater). See volumes for 1898–1907</p>

Trading name	Hartley Brown, Mrs and Miss Townshend
People	Mrs Hartley Brown Isabella Townshend (1847–1882)

Years active	c.1874
Premises	12 Bulstrode Street, London
Additional information	In 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', after discussing the Garretts, Moncure Conway claimed that 'Mrs Hartley Brown and Miss Townshend' had set up in the same business and that 'These ladies, who have been employed to decorate the new ladies' College at Cambridge, have not only devised new stuffs for chairs, sofas and wall panels, but also for ladies' dresses.' In addition, Emily Faithfull recorded that Mrs Hartley Brown and Miss Townshend were responsible for the decoration of Merton College, Cambridge. There is no record of their work in the archives at Cambridge University
Key sources	Moncure Conway, 'Decorative Art and Architecture in England', <i>Harper's New Monthly Magazine</i> , November 1874, 18; Emily Faithful, 'The Progress of Women', <i>Universal Review</i> , November 1888, 637–643

Trading name	Innes, Mrs
People	Mrs Innes
Years active	c.1897 to c.1899
Premises	8 Princes Street, London
Additional information	Mrs Innes appears to have started her career as an estate agent, advertising property in <i>The Standard</i> and <i>The Morning Post</i> . Soon, she was also advertising herself as a decorator and complete house furnisher. As well as undertaking interior decoration work herself, Mrs Innes ran a scheme to train women in the more manual labours of papering, whitewashing and painting. Mrs Innes designed furniture and employed several women upholsterers. She advertised in <i>The House</i> magazine in 1898 and was listed in <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> from 1898 to 1899
Key sources	e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Innes, <i>The House</i> , 1 May 1898, iv; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 March 1898, 36–38; 'Women and Domestic Art', <i>The House</i> , 1 July 1898, 196; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Innes, <i>The Morning Post</i> , 10 November 1897, 1; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Innes, <i>The Standard</i> , 23 March 1897, 12;

	<i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1898–1899
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Trading name	Lupton and Scott, Misses
People	Mary G. Lupton (1837–1901) E. Scott
Years active	c.1878 to c.1889.
Premises	13 Old Bond Street, London (1879–1882); 102 New Bond Street, London (Scott, 1883–1884); 15 Baker Street, London (Lupton, 1884–1889)
Additional information	In 1878, <i>Hearth and Home</i> commented that ‘the Misses Lupton and Scott, of 13 Old Bond Street, are Art Decorators, who will in this way undertake the entire or partial decoration of a house’. <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> listed Lupton and Scott as ‘interior decorators’ at 13 Old Bond Street from 1879 to 1882. After 1882, they are separately listed, with Scott at 102 New Bond Street and Lupton at 15 Baker Street, the offices of the Gentlewoman’s Self Help Institute. Lupton was the secretary of the Institute, which sold the artistic work of impoverished ladies as well as acting as an employment registry. Presumably, while Scott continued alone with the interior decoration business, Lupton’s involvement ceased after 1882
Key sources	‘Art V – Events of the Month’, <i>Englishwoman’s Review</i> , 1 January 1876, 15; ‘Fashion in Furniture’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 1 July 1878, 163; <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1879–1889; Barbara Morris, <i>Victorian Embroidery: A Definitive Guide</i> (Dover: Dover Publications Inc.), 2003, 195

Trading name	Masters, Mrs Mary
People	Mary Masters
Years active	c.1897 to c.1898
Premises	39 Lancaster Gate, London

Additional information	Mary Masters seems to have specialised in dealing antique furniture. She was featured by, and advertised in, <i>The House</i> in 1897 and 1898. In 1900 she was interviewed in <i>Hearth and Home</i>
Key sources	‘Employment Notes’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 28 June 1900, 338; ‘Employment Notes’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 5 July 1900, 392; ‘In Search of the Latest’, <i>The House</i> , 1 May 1897, 140; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Mary Masters, <i>The House</i> , 1 January 1898, xviii

Trading name	Muller, Mrs Charles
People	Mrs Charles Muller
Years active	c.1898 to c.1900
Premises	7 Sloane Street, London. Also had a warehouse nearby (address unknown)
Additional information	In 1898, the <i>Daily Mail</i> reported that Mrs Charles Muller, ‘consulting artistic furniture’, had furnished and decorated a ‘model flat’ at No. 7 Sloane Square. The dining room had ‘walls of deep rose-red, thrown up by the black-framed pictures, with touches of yellow in the soft silken hangings, suggests at once that atmosphere of comfort and ease and enjoyable stimulation’. An advert for Mrs Muller’s studio in <i>The Morning Post</i> in 1898 claimed that she was also a ‘well-known Writer and Adviser on Artistic Furnishing and Decorating’. Mrs Muller was also mentioned by, and advertised in, <i>Hearth and Home</i> magazine in 1898. In the early 20 th century, she seems to have moved from house decoration to working in gold, silver and enamels
Key sources	‘A Model Flat’, <i>Daily Mail</i> , 25 May 1898, 3; ‘Mrs Charles Muller’, <i>Daily Mail</i> , 27 November 1905, 9; Christmas at the Shops’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 14 December 1899, 234; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Charles Muller, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 14 December 1899, 261; ‘Women and Domestic Art’, <i>The House</i> , 1 July 1898, 197; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Charles Muller, <i>The Morning Post</i> , 5 April 1898, 1

Trading name	Murray, Miss Marion
People	Marion Murray
Years active	c.1896 to c.1899
Premises	16 Fulham Road, London
Additional information	<i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> listed 'Miss Marion Murray' as an interior decorator at 16 Fulham Road, London from 1896 to 1899
Key sources	<i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1896–1899

Trading name	Oliver, Mrs Frank
People	Mrs Frank Oliver Mrs Green
Years active	c.1888 to c.1890
Premises	63 East Street Brighton (from c.1888); 104 New Bond Street, London (from 1888)
Additional information	Mrs Oliver's New Bond Street shop was opened by Lady Arbuthnot in 1888. An advertisement for the opening of her London premises in <i>The Era</i> noted that it was intended for 'the display of Art Decoration and painting executed by her Lady Artists'. Both her London and Brighton premises offered 'Artistic Home Decoration' and classes in art decoration. The press particularly admired her sets of small tables, particularly the 'Unionist' set, which represented a rose, shamrock and thistle. She exhibited these at the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1888
Key sources	'The Christmas Windows of the West', <i>The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher</i> , 1 January 1889, 169–175; 'Grand Opening Ceremony', <i>The Dundee Courier and Argus</i> , 2 May 1890, 3; e.g. Advertisement for Mrs Innes, <i>The Era</i> , 8 December 1888, 24; 'Decoration', <i>Le Follet</i> , 1 March 1889, 105; 'Mrs Frank Oliver's Gallery', <i>Morning Post</i> , 12 November

	1888, 5; Mary Billington, ‘Some Practical Women’, <i>Women’s World</i> , 1890, 193–197; <i>The Official Guide to the International Exhibition, Glasgow</i> (Edinburgh, T & A Constable, 1888)
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Trading name	Smout, Mrs
People	Mrs Smout
Years active	c.1890
Premises	Unknown, Glasgow
Additional information	Mrs Smout, ‘house decorator’, exhibited at the 1890 Edinburgh International Exhibition
Key sources	<i>The Official Guide to the International Exhibition, Glasgow</i> (Edinburgh, T & A Constable, 1888), 233

Trading name	Society of Artists
People	Anne Atherton (1849–1913) Kate Thornbury (d.1920) Elspeth McClelland Douglas Spencer (1879–1920)
Years active	1883 to at least 1913
Premises	53 New Bond Street (from 1883)
Additional information	Anne Atherton, the elder sister of Charlotte Robinson, married solicitor Francis Henry Atherton (1840–1927) in 1870. The couple then left England to spend two years in Australia, returning in 1872. The marriage was not a success and, in 1873, Francis Atherton returned to Australia without his wife. In 1881, the UK census records Anne Atherton as living with her sister Elspeth McClelland (Robinson’s business partner) in Paddington, with both women giving their occupation as ‘Artist (Painting)’. Kate Thornbury was also present as a ‘visitor’ and the census lists her profession as ‘Secretary’ (Thornbury was secretary to the Central Committee of the National Society for Women’s Suffrage from 1877). As Kate Thornbury

	<p>was the sister of Clara Thornbury Garrett (who had married Agnes' brother Samuel Garrett), Atherton and Thornbury may have been inspired by the Garrett cousins. In a letter to the <i>Pall Mall Gazette</i>, Kate Thornbury claimed Anne 'had started a large business under her own superintendence in New Bond-street, London under the title of the Society of Artists, for the sale of all kinds of artistic work, house decoration, &c., in the year 1883'. In 1886 and 1887 <i>Slater's Director of Manchester</i> listed Faithfull and Robinson under 'Artists', as 'the Society of Artists (under the direction of Miss Emily Faithfull & Miss Charlotte Robinson), 64 King Street' and it may be that Robinson trained, or at least initially worked, with her sister and the Society of Artists. In December 1904 the <i>Derby Daily Telegraph</i> noted that Elspeth McClelland was studying architecture at the Polytechnic in London and that 'she has occupied a post as a designer at a large firm of decorators, known as the Society of Artists.' In 1913 the <i>Pall Mall Gazette</i> reported that "a well-known Princess who is fitting up a "lordly pleasure-house" for herself in the neighbourhood of the Bois de Boulogne, has given the internal decoration into the hands of the Society of Artists. The society has an excellent habit of collecting ancient beams and panelling, and the Princess's Parisian mansion is being transformed into an old English manor-house, after the fashion of Haddon House. In the Princess's house there are to be great open fireplaces, panelled walls, and an entirely new wooden staircase is being put in.'</p>
<p>Key sources</p>	<p>Kate Thornbury, 'Mrs Atherton's Artistic Shop in Bond Street', <i>Pall Mall Gazette</i>, 27 December 1887, 11; 'Society of Artists', <i>Pall Mall Gazette</i>, 10 November 1913; 'Society of Artists', <i>St James' Gazette</i>, 7 April 1898; Obituary of Annie Atherton, <i>The Suffragette</i>, 28 November 1913; https://womanandhersphere.com/2017/05/08/suffrage-stories-house-decorating-and-suffrage-annie-atherton-kate-thornbury-and-the-society-of-artists/ [accessed 9/6/2018]</p>

<p>Trading name</p>	<p>Spinning Wheel, The (occasionally Monckton and Frith)</p>
<p>People</p>	<p>Fanny Frith (b.1855)</p>

	Louisa Frith (b.1851) Lady Mary Louisa Monckton (née Long)
Years active	c.1890 to c.1895
Premises	18 Fulham Road
Additional information	The Spinning Wheel dealt in furniture, antiques and curios, and also undertook art decoration. In 1891 Fanny and Louisa Frith (both daughters of artist W.P. Frith) listed their occupation on the 1891 census as ‘decorating furniture’. In 1901 they are both listed as ‘Decorators’. The Frith sisters were also connected to the Working Ladies Guild. The partnership between the Friths and Monckton (who was also an actress) was dissolved in 1892. Misses Fanny and Louise Frith are listed as interior decorators in <i>Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory</i> from 1892 to 1896. Helen and Isabel’s sister, Jane Panton (née Frith) wrote an interior decoration column for the <i>Lady’s Pictorial</i> but was succeeded by ‘Miss Frith’
Key sources	‘Fashion and Household’, <i>Blackburn Standard</i> , 25 April 1891, 2; ‘The Man About Town’, <i>The County Gentleman</i> , 25 October 1890, 2; ‘Letters from L’, <i>The Hawk</i> , 28 October 1898, 498–499; ‘Lady Monckton’, <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 21 April 1892, 709; Ignota, ‘Ladies as Shopkeepers’, <i>The Idler</i> , November 1895, 478–481; ‘A Letter for Ladies’, <i>Ipswich Journal</i> , 1 November 1890, 2; ‘Notice’, <i>The London Gazette</i> , 13 September 1892, 5230
Trading name	Steadman and Rayment
People	Ellen M. Steadman Katherine Rayment
Years active	c.1898
Premises	59 New Bond Street
Additional information	Steadman and Rayment were listed as interior decorators in <i>Kelly’s Post Office London Business Directory</i> in 1898. They dissolved their partnership in the same year, after which Katherine Rayment continued in business alone until at least 1900. In 1898 <i>The Studio</i> recommended them as ‘lady decorators’ and illustrated their stencilled wallpapers

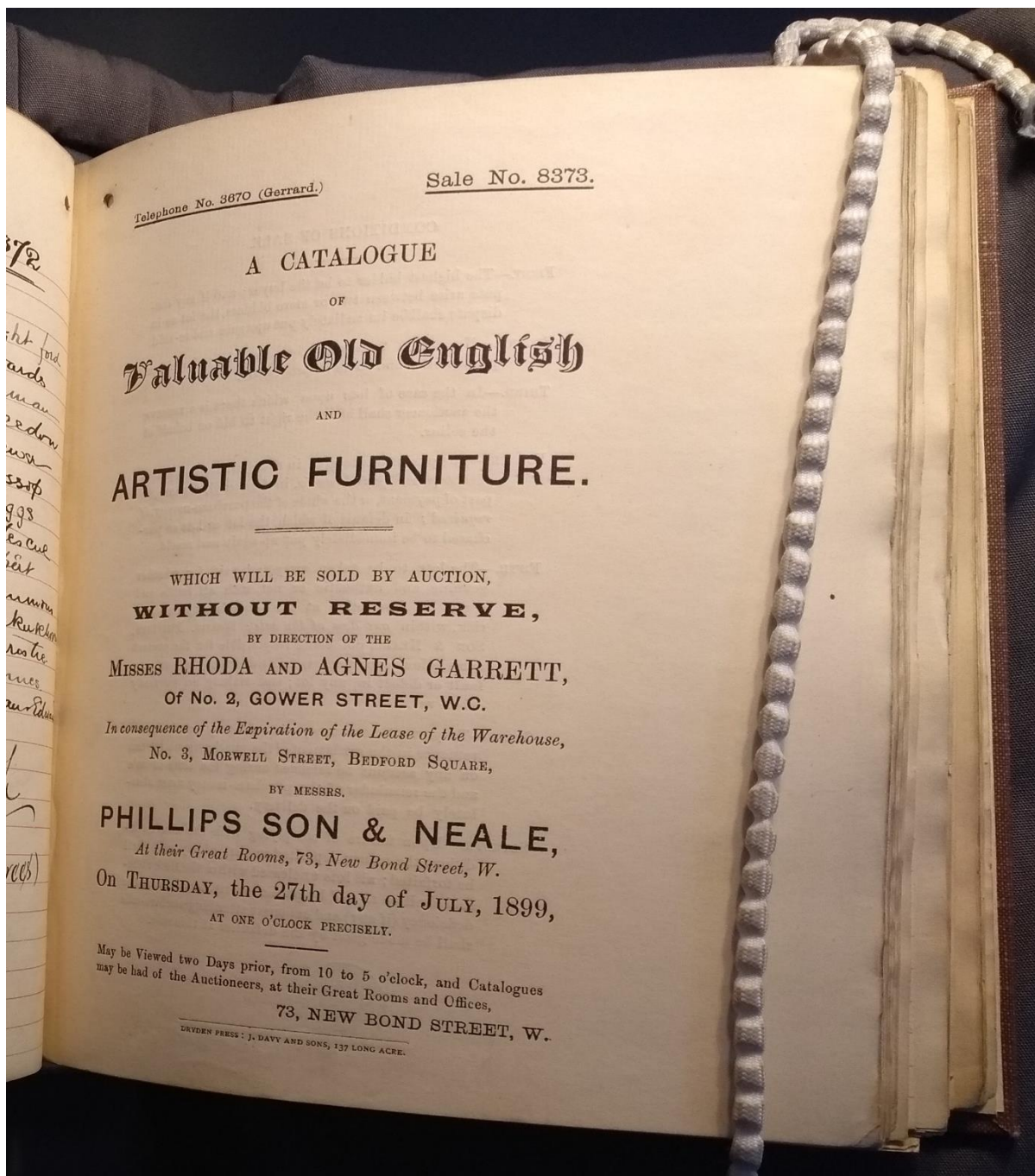
Key sources	‘Studio Talk’, <i>The Studio</i> , 5, 1898, 195; ‘Partnerships Dissolved’, <i>The Times</i> , 15 October 1898, 14; <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 18898–1900
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Trading name	Wetton, Miss
People	Edith Ann Wetton (1848–1923)
Years active	c.1885 to c.1900
Premises	49 Kensington High Street, London (from 1885); 21 Lower Phillimore Place, Kensington, London (1886–1899); 138 Kensington House Street, London (1900)
Additional information	<i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> listed Edith Wetton as an interior decorator from 1885 to at least 1900. She was listed in the UK census in 1881 as ‘Manageress to Work Society’ (based at 31 Sloane Street, the Ladies Work Society was dedicated to selling the needlework of impoverished gentlewoman) and, in 1891, as a ‘House Decorator’. In 1892 <i>Queen</i> magazine recorded that she had recently enlarged her Lower Phillimore Place premises and was currently undertaking a large order for a house in Rutland Gate, London. Wetton exhibited a portière, screen and a ‘fitment’ for a drawing room at the 1889 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition. She also seems to have operated as an estate agency, advertising houses and apartments for let in <i>The Morning Post</i> , <i>The Standard</i> and <i>The Times</i> in the late 1880s and early 1890s
Key sources	‘Our Ladies Column’, <i>Bristol Mercury and Daily Post</i> , 16 April 1881, 6; e.g. Advertisement for Miss Wetton, <i>The Morning Post</i> , 16 August 1898, 8; e.g. Advertisement for Miss Wetton, <i>The Standard</i> , 19 August 1899, 2; e.g. Advertisement for Miss Wetton, <i>The Times</i> , 28 September 1889, 14; ‘Decorative Ideas at Miss Wetton’s’, <i>The Queen</i> , 18 July 1891, 164; Art and Crafts Exhibition Society, <i>Catalogue of the Second Exhibition</i> (London: Chiswick Press, 1889) 1889, 70, 136, 255; <i>Kelly's Post Office London business directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1885–1900

Trading name	Whyte-Walton, Miss (occasionally Miss Walton-Whyte)
People	Jessie May Whyte-Walton (1861–1914)
Years active	c.1892 to c.1900
Premises	43 New Bond Street, London (1894–1896); 14 Old Bond Street, London (1897–1900); 48 Maddox Street, London (from 1900)
Additional information	<i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> listed 'Miss Walton-Whyte' as an interior decorator from 1894 to 1900. In 1892, <i>Hearth and Home</i> commented that 'Miss Whyte Walton' had decorated 'The Kettledrum', a tea room in New Bond Street. <i>The Sunday Times</i> corroborated this, adding that she had also been responsible for the decoration of milliner Miss Westroppp Dawson's shop in New Bond Street. She also advertised in <i>The Sunday Times</i> several times in 1893, listing her services as 'rooms furnished, arranged and decorated in town and country'. In 1896, <i>Le Follet</i> recorded that 'Miss Whyte Walton' had decorated and furnished the International Club at 13 Old Bond Street. Both were fashionable establishments in London's west end founded by a 'Miss Cohen'. In the 1901 Whyte-Walton was listed in the UK census as a 'Decorator'. In 1904 she apparently wrote a column entitled 'Art in the Home' for <i>Madame</i> magazine
Key sources	'Answers to Correspondents', <i>Le Follet</i> , 1 June 1896, 14; 'Through the Shop Windows', <i>Hearth and Home</i> , 10 November 1892, 862; e.g. Advertisement for Madame, <i>The Sunday Times</i> , 31 January 1904, 12; e.g. Advertisement for Miss Whyte-Walton, <i>The Sunday Times</i> , 23 July 1893, 6; 'Fashion and Fancies', <i>The Sunday Times</i> , 25 June 1893, 6; <i>Kelly's Post Office London Business Directory</i> (London: Frederick Kelly). See volumes for 1894–1900; Erika Rappaport, <i>Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 90, 95

Appendix Two

Phillips, Son & Neale, *A Catalogue of Valuable Old English and Artistic Furniture* (London: Dryden Press, 1899).



CONDITIONS OF SALE.

- FIRST.—The highest bidder to be the buyer; and if any dispute arise between two or more bidders, the lot so in dispute shall be immediately put up again and re-sold.
- SECOND.—No person to advance less than 1s.; above five pounds 5s.; and so on in proportion.
- THIRD.—In the case of lots upon which there is a reserve the auctioneer shall have the right to bid on behalf of the seller.
- FOURTH.—The purchasers to give in their names and places of abode, and pay down 5s. in the pound, or more, in part of payment, or the whole of the purchase-money, if required; in default of which, the lot or lots so purchased to be immediately put up again and resold.
- FIFTH.—The lots to be taken away and paid for, whether genuine and authentic or not, with all faults and errors of description at the buyer's expense and risk, within *one day of the sale*; Messrs. PHILLIPS, SON & NEALE, not being responsible for the correct description, genuineness, or authenticity of, or any fault or defect in, any lot; and making no warranty whatever.
- SIXTH.—To prevent inaccuracy in delivery and inconvenience in the settlement of the purchases, no lot can on any account be removed during the time of sale and the remainder of the purchase-money must absolutely be paid on the delivery.
- SEVENTH.—Upon failure of complying with the above conditions the money deposited in part of payment shall be forfeited; all lots uncleared within the time aforesaid shall be re-sold by public or private sale, and the deficiency (if any) and expenses attending such re-sale shall be made good by the defaulter at this sale.



1	4 14	✓	
2	16	✓	Mans
3	7	✓	Stonem
4	7	✓	Jamies
5	12	✓	Jamies
6	18	✓	Smile
7	6 0	✓	Frederic
8	2	✓	Jamies
9	5	✓	Mans
10	1 2	✓	Jamies
✓ 11	2 6	✓	Mans
12	1 16	✓	Mans
13	1 14	✓	Mans
14	4 10	✓	Mans
15	5 12 6	✓	Mans
16	5 5	✓	Mans
17	2 5	✓	Mans
18	2 15	✓	Mans
21	3 12	✓	Mans
79 116			

NOTICE.—73, NEW BOND STREET, W.
 Messrs. PHILLIPS, SON & NEALE beg respectfully to announce
 that their THREE LARGE AUCTION ROOMS and WAREHOUSES
 are OPEN from 10 till 6 daily for the reception of every class
 of property for Sale by Auction. Pistols, Jewellery and Valuables
 are deposited in the Fire-proof Room. Large Vaults for Wine.
 Sales conducted at Residences in Town or Country.
 Valuations made for Probates or any other purpose.
 All communications to be addressed
 PHILLIPS, SON & NEALE, Auctioneers, 73, New Bond Street, W.
 Telephone No. 3870.
 (General.)

A CATALOGUE.

On THURSDAY, the 27th day of JULY, 1899,
 AT ONE O'CLOCK PRECISELY.

- LOT 7
- 1 Twelve mahogany 2-fold towel rings, ~~2~~ 3-rail ditto, and 2 screen frames
 - 2 A 2 ft. mahogany commode
 - 3 A 3 ft. ditto shaped front chest of 4 long drawers, with brass ring handles
 - 4 A 3 ft. 9 ditto tall boy chest of 8 drawers
 - 5 A 3 ft. 6 walnut-wood tall boy chest of 9 drawers, fitted with secretaire
 - 6 A 2 ft. mahogany night commode, inlaid with satin-wood
 - 7 A 3 ft. 3 ditto chest of 9 drawers, on club feet
 - 8 A 2 ft. 3 ditto night commode
 - 9 A 2 ft. 9 ditto chest of 4 drawers
 - 10 A double mahogany butler's tray and stand
 - ✓ 11 Four oval mahogany trays, and a shaped edge ditto
 - 12 A mahogany night commode
 - 13 Another
 - 14 A 2 ft. 6 ditto chest of 4 drawers
 - 15 A 2 ft. 6 ditto dressing table, fitted with 7 drawers and cupboard
 - 16 A 2 ft. 9 walnut ditto
 - 17 A 3 ft. 3 ditto chest of drawers, on club feet
 - 18 A 3 ft. 2 oak chest of 4 long drawers
 - 19
 - 20
 - 21 A 3 ft. mahogany chest of 3 long drawers, with writing tray, hinged with satin-wood

Brought in
 Middlemore £100
 att

- 22 A 3 ft. 6 ditto chest of 5 drawers
- 23 A gentleman's 4 ft. 3 ditto wardrobe, fitted with shelves enclosed by 2 panel doors, 4 drawers under
- 24 A 4 ft. 6 mahogany Sheraton wardrobe, fitted for hanging cupboard
- 25 A mahogany swing frame toilet glass, and a ditto chamber
- 26 A 3 ft. ditto chest of 4 long drawers
- 27 A 2 ft. 6 ditto enclosed washstand, fitted with commode
- 28 A 3 ft. ditto bow front chest of 4 long drawers
- 29 A 3 ft. ditto, inlaid with satin-wood
- 30 A 2 ft. 6 ditto
- 31
- 32 Three folding walnut coffee tables, and 2 mahogany chamber cupboards
- 33 A mahogany corner washstand, and a ditto pedestal cupboard and washstand
- 34 A square mahogany washstand, with lid and drawer, and a ditto toilet glass
- 35 A 2 ft. 6 walnut chest of 5 drawers, with folding top
- 36 A small circular washstand, and another
- 37 A 2 ft. 3 mahogany tray top table, and a walnut frame toilet glass, fitted 6 drawers
- 38 A mahogany inlaid satin-wood corner enclosed washstand
- 39 A 3 ft. 3 mahogany table, with cupboards under
- 40 A ~~walnut~~ cheval glass
- 41
- 42 A brass and copper duplex burner, paraffin lamp, and a copper bowl
- 43 A pair of bronze 3-light candelabra, and a plated ~~metal~~ frame
- 44 Two pierced brass fenders
- 45 A similar lot
- 46 A similar lot
- 47 A similar lot
- 48 A similar lot
- 49 A similar lot
- 50 A similar lot
- 51 A mahogany arm chair, with stuffed seat and back in cotton
- 52 A set of 3 mahogany tables
- 53 Another set
- 54 A mahogany writing table with rising top, 2 drawers
- 55 A birch 2-tier table, and a mahogany commode
- 56 A mahogany cheval ~~table~~
- 57 A ditto paper rack

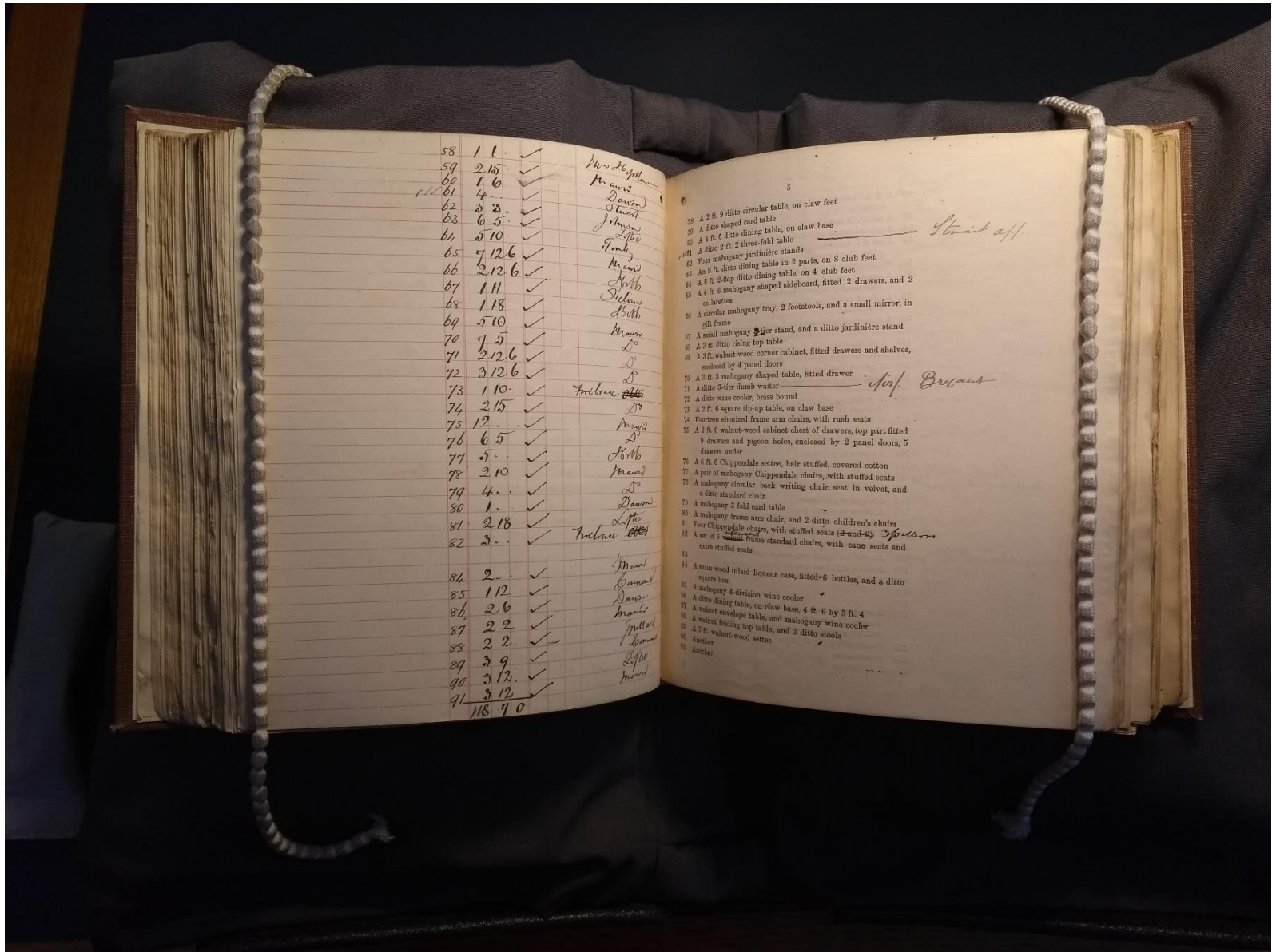
Bruant. mff.

Middlemore
at 1. alt ✓
1 lot ✓

Bruant. isf

- 22 5 ✓
- 23 10 5 6 ✓
- 24 10 ✓
- 25 3 6 ✓
- 26 3 ✓
- 27 2 4 ✓
- 28 4 10 ✓
- 29 4 8 ✓
- 30 4 4 ✓
- 32 3 7 6 ✓
- 33 2 10 ✓
- 34 2 4 ✓
- 35 3 12 ✓
- 36 2 15 ✓
- 37 3 ✓
- 38 2 7 6 ✓
- 39 4 10 ✓
- 40 2 2 ✓
- 42 1 1 ✓
- 43 11 ✓
- 44 4 12 ✓
- 45 4 4 ✓
- 46 4 15 ✓
- 47 4 12 6 ✓
- 48 4 4 ✓
- 49 4 4 ✓
- 50 4 10 ✓
- 51 1 6 ✓
- 52 2 12 6 ✓
- 53 2 5 ✓
- 54 2 ✓
- 55 1 3 ✓
- 56 1 ✓
- 57 1 1 ✓
- 122 10 6 ✓

Lord Nelson
Mauris
Jacobson
Gunn
Mrs. Berg
Fisher
Cotton
Mauris
Mauris
Mauris
Mauris
P. Oliver
Mauris
Littie
Mr. Berg
Turner
Mr. Johnson
Hutchinson
Price
Mauris
Turner
Mauris
Husband
Mauris
Littie
Mauris
Middlemore
Helms
Littie
Richardson
Rymer
L. Pearson



58	1 1	✓	Mrs. Kipling
59	2 10	✓	Mrs. Kipling
60	1 6	✓	Dawson
61	4	✓	Swain
62	3 3	✓	Johnson
63	6 5	✓	Swain
64	5 10	✓	Tombs
65	7 12 6	✓	Mrs. Kipling
66	2 12 6	✓	Swain
67	1 11	✓	Swain
68	1 18	✓	Swain
69	5 10	✓	Swain
70	4 5	✓	Swain
71	2 12 6	✓	Swain
72	3 12 6	✓	Swain
73	1 10	✓	Swain
74	2 15	✓	Swain
75	12	✓	Swain
76	6 5	✓	Swain
77	5	✓	Swain
78	2 10	✓	Swain
79	4	✓	Swain
80	1	✓	Swain
81	2 18	✓	Swain
82	3	✓	Swain
84	2	✓	Swain
85	1 12	✓	Swain
86	2 6	✓	Swain
87	2 2	✓	Swain
88	2 2	✓	Swain
89	3 9	✓	Swain
90	3 12	✓	Swain
91	3 12	✓	Swain
118 7 0			

58 A 2 ft. 9 ditto circular table, on claw feet

59 A ditto shaped card table

60 A 4 ft. 6 ditto dining table, on claw base

61 A ditto 2 ft. 2 three-fold table

62 Four mahogany jardiniere stands

63 Four mahogany dining table in 2 parts, on 8 club feet

64 A 5 ft. 2 flap ditto dining table, on 4 club feet

65 A 4 ft. 6 mahogany shaped sideboard, fitted 2 drawers, and 2 cellarettes

66 A circular mahogany tray, 2 footstools, and a small mirror, in gilt frame

67 A small mahogany tier stand, and a ditto jardiniere stand

68 A 3 ft. ditto rising top table

69 A 3 ft. walnut-wood corner cabinet, fitted drawers and shelves, enclosed by 4 panel doors

70 A 3 ft. 3 mahogany shaped table, fitted drawer

71 A ditto 3-tier dumb waiter

72 A ditto wine cooler, brass bound

73 A 2 ft. 6 square tip-up table, on claw base

74 Fourteen ebonized frame arm chairs, with rush seats

75 A 2 ft. 9 walnut-wood cabinet chest of drawers, top part fitted 9 drawers and pigeon holes, enclosed by 2 panel doors, 5 drawers under

76 A 6 ft. 6 Chippendale settee, hair stuffed, covered cotton

77 A pair of mahogany Chippendale chairs, with stuffed seats

78 A mahogany circular back writing chair, seat in velvet, and a ditto standard chair

79 A mahogany 3 fold card table

80 A mahogany frame arm chair, and 2 ditto children's chairs

81 Four Chippendale chairs, with stuffed seats (2 and 2)

82 A set of 6 mahogany frame standard chairs, with cane seats and extra stuffed seats

83

84 A main-wood inlaid liqueur case, fitted 6 bottles, and a ditto square box

85 A mahogany 4-division wine cooler

86 A ditto dining table, on claw base, 4 ft. 6 by 3 ft. 4

87 A walnut envelope table, and mahogany wine cooler

88 A 5 ft. folding top table, and 3 ditto stools

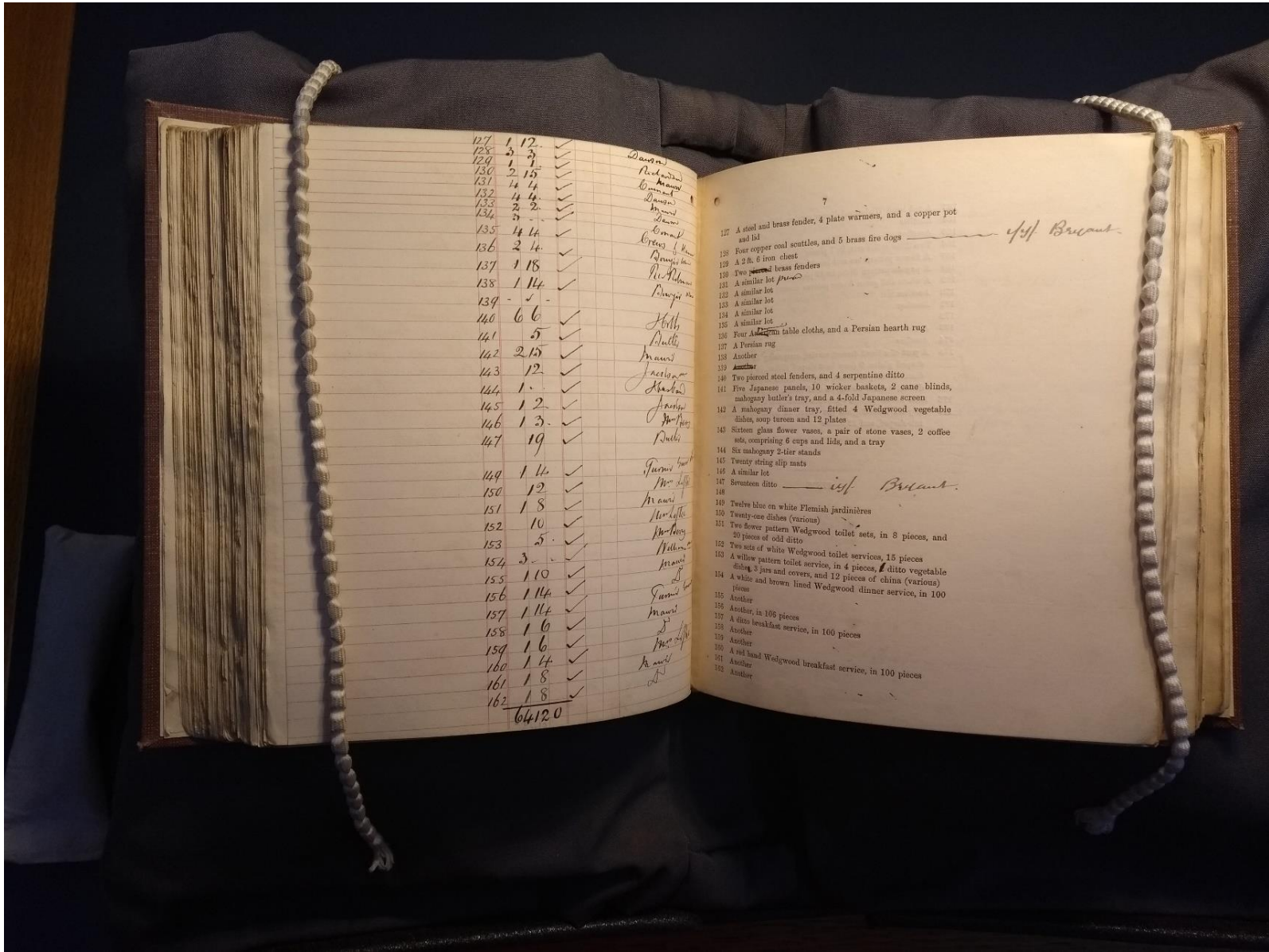
89 Another

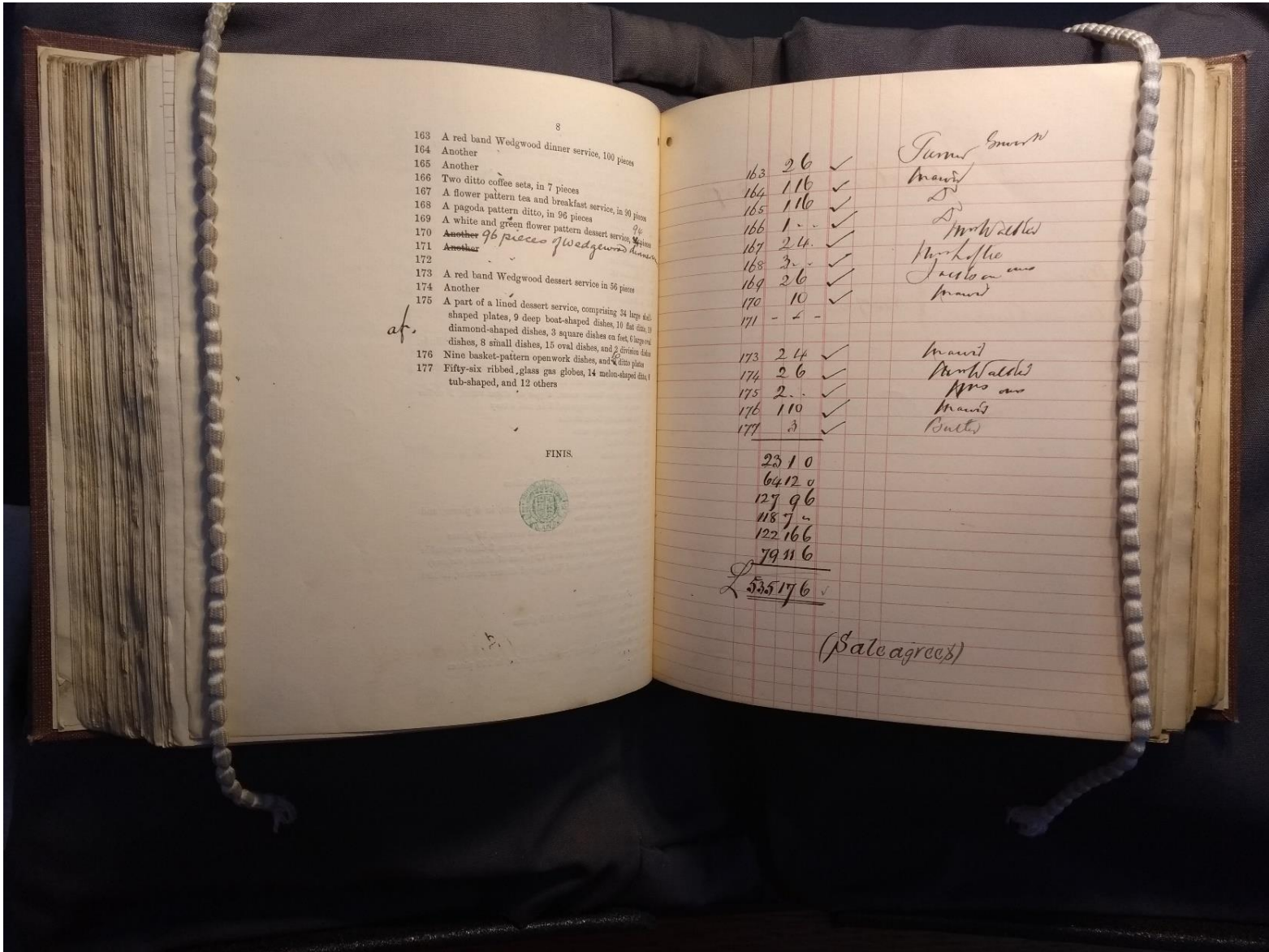
90 Another

91 Another

Strait all

Prof. Brewster





8

163 A red band Wedgwood dinner service, 100 pieces
 164 Another
 165 Another
 166 Two ditto coffee sets, in 7 pieces
 167 A flower pattern tea and breakfast service, in 50 pieces
 168 A pagoda pattern ditto, in 96 pieces
 169 A white and green flower pattern dessert service, 96 pieces
 170 Another 96 pieces of Wedgwood dinner service
 171 Another
 172
 173 A red band Wedgwood dessert service in 56 pieces
 174 Another
 175 A part of a lined dessert service, comprising 34 large shell-shaped plates, 9 deep boat-shaped dishes, 10 flat ditto, 10 diamond-shaped dishes, 3 square dishes on feet, 6 large oval dishes, 8 small dishes, 15 oval dishes, and 2 ceramic plates
 176 Nine basket-pattern openwork dishes, and 4 tin plates
 177 Fifty-six ribbed glass gas globes, 14 melon-shaped ditto, 1 tub-shaped, and 12 others

FINIS.



163	26	✓
164	116	✓
165	116	✓
166	1	✓
167	24	✓
168	3	✓
169	26	✓
170	10	✓
171	-	-
173	24	✓
174	26	✓
175	2	✓
176	110	✓
177	3	✓

James Smart
 Mans
 D
 Mark Waller
 Mark Waller
 Jackson and
 Mans

Mans
 Mark Waller
 Mans and
 Mans
 (Buller)

2310
 64120
 12796
 1187
 122166
 79116
 £535176 ✓

(Sale agreed)