

Briggs-Baumfeld, Ella 1880 - 1977



Ella Briggs [also known as Ella Briggs-Baumfeld] was born Ella Blaumfeld in Vienna, Austria-Hungary on 5 March 1880. Her father, Josef Baumfeld, was a lawyer. It was her intention to study architecture, however, as were not allowed to train as architects in Austria-Hungary at this time, she studied painting and embroidery for two years at the Wiener Frauenerwerbsvereines in Vienna and painting from 1901 to 1906 at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna.

In 1903 she visited the USA, possibly to see her brother, Moritz, who had emigrated to the USA in 1899. In 1904 she was awarded a medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. In September 1907 she married Walter J. Briggs [formerly Brix], an Austrian-born lawyer, in New York. They were divorced in 1912, however, she kept his surname. During this period, she began to develop a reputation as an interior decorator and designer. She decorated and furnished the New York Press Club building and rooms in the German Theatre in New York.

She had returned to Vienna by 1914, and by which time gave as her profession as "architekt" [Meldearchiv Wien - Vienna Registration Archives], although she did not train as an architect until 1918 when she entered the Technische Hochschule in Munich. After graduating in 1920 she worked in the office of a construction firm in Vienna. Soon after, because of the lack of commissions, she went back to New York and designed a few houses. She then moved to Philadelphia, where she was mainly engaged on renovation work. She also produced plans for single-family houses for American magazines. The plans of which could be obtained from the

magazines. In the 1920s she travelled to southern Italy to work on a book on national architecture,, however, it was never published.

Baumfeld went back to Vienna in 1924 and was engaged in the Red Vienna's social housing initiatives. She designed housings for the Westen Baugesellschaft, and for the Vienna city authorities she designed the Pestalozzihof, a residential block of 119 dwellings which was built in 1925. She also designed a smaller block on the Bellrothstrasse in 1926.

In 1927 she moved to Berlin, where she ran a successful architecture office. Her projects included a large apartment block in Berlin-Mariendorf, housing for the unemployed in Blankenfeldand, and a number of single-family houses.

Baumfeld was the first woman to be admitted to the Österreichischer Ingenieur- und Architekten-Verein (ÖIAV). She was also a member of the Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs (VBKÖ), Bund Deutscher Architekten (BDA),

When the National Socialists came to power Germany Briigs, who was Jewish, was expelled from the BDA and barred from practising as an architect. She subsequently fled to England in September 1935 and settled in London. It is not known when she was granted a permit to work as an architect in Britain.

She acquired British citizenship in 1947 and by that time was in practice in Enfield, Middlesex. She was also elected a Licentiate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (LRIBA) in 1948. She designed a housing scheme for Bilston Corporation in the 1940s.

Her address was given as 9 Shades Gardens, Enfield, Middlesex in 1950

She died in London in 20 June 1977

A biographical file on Ella Briggs-Baumfeld is available at the RIBA Library in London

Worked in

Austria

UK

Bibliography

Benton, Charlotte. *A different world: emigre architects in Britain 1928-1958. London: Heinz Gallery, 1995*

Briggs, Ella. 'Houses at Bilston, Notts'. *The Architects' Journal*, 2 January 1947, pp. 15-16

Briggs, Ella. 'Ledigenheim und Kleinstwohnungshäuser'. *Bauwelt*, vol. 19, no. 48, 1928, p. 1132

Prokop, Ursula. 'Ella Briggs and 'Red Vienna'', in *On the Jewish Legacy in Viennese Architecture. The Contribution of Jewish Architects to Building in Vienna 1868-1938*. Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2016 pp.141-144

Schmid, Robert. Ella Briggs (1880-1977): Contributions of an Austrian Architect in Times of Political Change and Economical Distress. *PhD thesis, Institute for Art History, Building Research and Monument Preservation, Vienna University, 2019*

Stingl, Katrin. Ella Briggs (-Baumfeld) *PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 2008*

Stratigakos, Despina and Shapira, Elana Finding Ella Briggs: The Life and Work of an Unconventional Architect *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025*

Links

- Wikipedia [Text in German] https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ella_Briggs
- Az W Architektenlexikon Wien 1770-1945 [Text in German] <http://www.architektenlexikon.at/de/65.htm>
- Online version of Stingl, Katrin. Ella Briggs (-Baumfeld). PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 2008 <https://theses.univie.ac.at/detail/679>
- David Jüdische Kulturzeitschrift [Text in German] <https://davidkultur.at/artikel/judinnen-als-pionierinnen-der-frauenemanzipation>
- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ella_Briggs
- Ben Uri Research Unit <https://www.buru.org.uk/record.php?id=497>
- architektur.aktuell - Ella Briggs' Ledigenheim | Wiens erstes kommunales Studentenheim [Text in German] <https://www.architektur-aktuell.at/termine/ella-briggs-ledigenheim-wiens-erstes-kommunales-studentenheim>
- Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon ab 1815 ÖBL [Text in German] http://biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1/B/Briggs_Ella_1880_1977.xml
- Wien Geschichte Wiki [Text in German] https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Ella_Briggs
- dasrotewien.at - Peter Behrens bis Ella Briggs [Text in German] <http://www.dasrotewien.at/seite/peter-behrens-bis-ella-briggs>
- Stadt Wien. Wiener Wohnen. Ella-Briggs-Hof [Text in German] <https://www.wienerwohnen.at/hof/1342/Ella-Briggs-Hof.html>

- YouTube. Searching for Ella-Briggs-Baumfeld [6.08 mins] PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 2008 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvgNDZO0cRc>
- Matters of Taste. Ela Briggs
<https://mattersoftaste.wordpress.com/2017/03/05/ella-briggs/>
- Austria-Forum [Text in German] https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/Ella_Briggs
- Grokipedia https://grokipedia.com/page/ella_briggs
- Sighs & Whispers. Laura McLaws Helms. Finding Ella Briggs: On Modernism, Women Architects, and New Approaches to History
<https://web.archive.org/save/https://laurakitty.substack.com/p/finding-ella-briggs>
- Architektur Pionierinnen. Ella Briggs
<https://web.archive.org/web/20250418154823/https://architekturpionierinnen.at/en/ella-briggs-2/>
- Despina Stratigakos. Architecture's forgotten figures. Princeton University Press
<https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/architectures-forgotten-figures>
- Commodity Fetishism. Ella Briggs, Karl Marx & Modern Housing
<https://web.archive.org/save/https://commodityfetishism.com/2025/11/10/ella-briggs-karl-marx-modern-housing/>