

McClelland, Elspeth Douglas 1879 - 1920

Elspeth Douglas McClelland [also known as Elspeth Douglas Spencer and as Elspeth MaClelland] was born in Keighley, Yorkshire, England on 20 May 1879. Her mother, Espey McClelland, was an artist and her maternal aunt, Charlotte Robinson (c.1859-1901), was a furniture and interior designer much admired by Queen Victoria.

Elspeth McClelland began her career as a furniture designer - the 1901 census gives her occupation as "furniture designer." By the age of nineteen she was already designing furniture. The Sketch: A Journal of Art and Actuality, Volume 15, 1896 p. 216 and Sheffield Weekly Telegraph 5 September 1896 p.16 reported that "Miss Elspeth Douglas McClelland has invented and Messrs Wallan and Co., of Curtain Road, are supplying a sports and cycle cabinet lately patented and just brought out. In this handsome piece of furniture may be stored not only a bicycle, but tennis balls, and racquets, cricket bats, golf clubs, and similar "implements of amusement." The floor can be pulled out, and your favourite wheel set upon it in such a way as to enable you to spend a wet afternoon in "scorching to your heart's content. No noise, no dust, no smell, no punctured tyres, no tiresome pedestrians, no heart-breaking hills, and the distance you travelled had you been on the road is registered by a mileage indicator. Truly an up-to-date cabinet".

By 1904 McClelland had decided to train as an architect. The Clarion 30 December 1904 p.2 reported: "At last a woman has chosen to be a builder and a planner of houses. Miss McClelland is the only girl among five hundred male students at the Polytechnic [Polytechnic Architectural School in London], and although she is only a little over twenty [she was 25], she has already had the plans of a house passed to be built in Eastbourne . . . A woman ought to know better than a man how to plan a house with a view to its domestic comfort and convenience and we shall watch Miss McClelland's career with interest" The Cambridge Independent Press 18 November 1904 p.6 reported that she whilst a student at the Polytechnic she was engaged by a West End firm to do decorative work.

In 1905 there was considerable interest in the press in a cottage designed by her for an exhibition of £150 cottages held in Letchworth Garden City. The house was built at 106 Wilbury Road, Letchworth. The Jersey Independent and Daily

Telegraph 17 November 1906 p. 6, reported "Miss Elspeth McClelland, the girl architect, who sprang into fame among women workers last year, has been rising steadily in her profession. Her latest achievement is a design for a house at Grange-over-Sands, overlooking Morecambe Bay. She also designed other houses in Letchworth Garden City and Pinner.

In an interview with her entitled 'The Woman Architect' in *The Common Cause* 28 March 1913 p.870 she talked in detail about her approach to architecture. She said that she had designed many houses, ranging from cottages at £600 a pair to the larger residence of £2,200 in value. Commissions had been received from both men and women; "about one-third of her employers being men, and she gave the comforting assurance in conclusion that she found in men clients no prejudice on account of her sex, and also that her fees were on the same scale as those of men architects."

McClelland also wrote at least three articles on the subject of interior design for *The Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury*: "That Ugly Dining-Room!" Home to Beautify the Home' (6 February 1907 p. 4); 'An Ideal Bedroom. How it should be furnished' (6 March 1907 p.3); and 'Our Own Home.' (8 March 1907 p. 3). She headed these articles "By Elspeth McClelland (the only Lady Builder in the Country)". For *The Hull Daily Mail* 26 September 1907 p.3 she wrote an article entitled 'How to give a Luncheon Party.'

A wallpaper pattern designed by her and executed by C. Knowles & Co. Ltd. is illustrated in 'The Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art' 1907 (p.127)

On 19 October 1912 she married Albert William Spencer (1887-1954), however, retained Elspeth McClelland as her professional name. Until her marriage, McClelland lived in Pinner. After the marriage she moved to Edgware, Middlesex [now London].

McClelland was a member of the Women's Social and Political Union and on 23 February 1909 was one of a group of suffragettes who posted herself as a "human letter" to the then Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, at 10 Downing Street, London.

She had three children and died in childbirth in Edgware, Middlesex on 12 March 1920.

Entry in *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* 1913. London: Stanley Paul & Company, 1913 p. 361

SPENCER, MRS. ELSPETH DOUGLAS (professional name: Elspeth McClelland). Society: W.S.P.U.; born March 20th, 1879, at Keighley, Yorkshire; daughter of the late John and Esey McClelland; married October 19th, 1912, to A. W. Spencer; first woman to practice architecture as a profession; only woman among 600 male students at the Polytechnic Architectural school; houses erected at Grange-over-Sands, Letchworth, Pinner, and in the course of erection at Chelsea and Penn, Bucks; writer in current periodicals and lecturer on Cottage-building, Home-making, Furniture, Decoration, etc.; W.S.P.U. deputation, 1910; was sent by post as a letter to Mr. Asquith, December 1909) see "The Suffragette," by Sylvia Pankhurst). . Recreations: Needlework, walking, and reading. Address: 40 Warrington Crescent, London, W.

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Bibliography

The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who 1913. London: Stanley Paul & Company, 1913 p. 361

Links

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