



TITLE

Introduction to the First Women Lawyer pages of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

AUTHOR

Bourne, Judith and OUP

DATE DEPOSITED

10 June 2020

This version available at

<https://research.stmarys.ac.uk/id/eprint/4126/>

COPYRIGHT AND REUSE

Open Research Archive makes this work available, in accordance with publisher policies, for research purposes.

VERSIONS

The version presented here may differ from the published version. For citation purposes, please consult the published version for pagination, volume/issue and date of publication.

Oxford DNB November 2018

The November 2018 update adds 17 articles, containing 17 biographies, accompanied by 3 portrait likenesses. The particular focus is on the first generation of women admitted to the legal profession in the United Kingdom following the passage of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919. These newly-added lives have been curated by Dr Judith Bourne of St Mary's University, Twickenham.

From November 2018, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB) offers biographies of 60,742 men and women who have shaped the British past, contained in 63,012 articles. 11,612 biographies include a portrait image of the subject – researched in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Introduction to the lives of women in the legal profession, by Dr Judith Bourne

It has been a great honour to be Advisory Editor on this new release. My Ph.D was on the life of Helena Normanton (the first woman to join an Inn of Court in 1919 after the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act) and the opening of the legal profession to women. That research made me appreciate how little has been recorded of the history of women lawyers. These newly-added *Oxford DNB* articles on women and the law are a tremendous start on the road to the accurate recording of this successful, post-suffrage, feminist campaign.

The writers of these biographies have all been participants of the First Women Lawyers in Great Britain and the Empire Symposia, which has been running since 2015. The aim of the symposia has been to stimulate research in this area in time for the centenary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act passed in December 1919, and this collection of articles is one outcome, offering a celebration of those first women lawyers, while documenting their achievements for a wider readership, and providing a resource for academics.

The exercise has been an opportunity to fill in some of the many gaps in this history. For me, it was particularly satisfying to be able to record the life of Bertha Cave, a woman who, very publicly, attempted to join Gray's Inn in 1903. Her application was rejected and her appeal against that rejection set a quasi-precedent preventing later women from entering the legal profession until the 1919 Act. She is frequently referred to, but often reduced to a caricature; this exercise has been an opportunity to set out what can be established of her life, and to acknowledge her role in this feminist campaign.

This collection of biographies also recognizes many women's 'first' achievements: Madge Easton Anderson's success as the first woman to qualify as a solicitor in the UK; Fay Kyle, the first to be called to the bar in the UK; Ada Summers, the first to preside over a magistrates' court; Helen Archdale the first woman to qualify as a fellow of the university senate at the University of Sydney; and many more. Now that the numbers of women entering the law exceed men, it is timely to revisit the lives of those who first sought admission to the profession.

Judith Bourne

November 2018: summary of newly-added lives

In March 1903 **Bertha Cave (1881-1951)** applied to join Gray's Inn, but her application was rejected by the benchers and again in December 1903 by a group of senior judges, on the ground of there being no precedent for a woman being admitted to the bar. In May 1917 **Madge Easton Anderson (1896-1982)**, a graduate of Glasgow University, was taken on as an apprentice at a Glasgow law firm, whose head believed that the disqualification of women must eventually be removed. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, enacted on 23 December 1919, was effective from 24 December. By October 1920 she had met every qualification for admission as a law agent in Scotland, her petition for admission was granted in December 1920, and was registered in January 1921,

making her the first woman in the United Kingdom to qualify as a solicitor. Born in Belfast, **Frances Christian [Fay] Kyle (1894-1958)** studied at Trinity College, Dublin, where she took a law degree in 1916. She enrolled at King's Inns, Dublin early in 1920, passed her bar final examinations in October 1921, and was called to the Irish bar in November 1921. Although separate jurisdictions had by then been created for Dublin and Belfast, the Anglo-Irish treaty was not signed until December 1921 so she was called while Dublin was still part of the United Kingdom, making her the first woman to qualify in a branch of the legal profession in the United Kingdom. She was later called at the Northern Ireland bar. The daughter of a Co. Wicklow solicitor, **Averil Katherine Statter Deverell (1893-1979)** was called at King's Inn on the same day as Kyle, In 1911 she had been presented at court in Dublin Castle on the visit of George V. Also like Fay, she took a law degree at Trinity Dublin before joining King's Inns. She joined the Law Library at King's Inns in January 1922 where, as well as giving numerous written opinions, she was mentor to women at the Dublin bar.

In England, **Olive Catherine Clapham (1898-1973)** who studied jurisprudence at Oxford during the First World War, was admitted to the Middle Temple in January 1920. In May 1921 she was the first woman to pass the bar final examinations, though she was not called until November 1924. Also joining the Middle Temple in January 1920 was **Ethel Bright Ashford (1883-1980)** who had gained a London University BA, taken a social work diploma course at Birmingham University, and studied public administration at the London School of Economics. She promoted the election of women to local councillors and was herself elected a councillor in 1919. She was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in November 1922 (along with Davy, Geikie Cobb, and Llewelyn Davies, also included in this update). **Monica Mary Geikie Cobb (1891-1946)**, a London University graduate who had studied philosophy at University College, London, undertook charitable work during the First World War, for which she was appointed MBE in 1918. Passing her bar finals in October 1921, she was called in November 1922. **Theodora Llewelyn Davies (1898-**

1988) followed a family tradition by studying at Girton College, Cambridge and took honours in the Cambridge law tripos. Admitted to the Inner Temple in January 1920, she was called in November 1922. After the First World War, during which she had been an organizer in military hospitals in Devon, **Beatrice Honour Davy (1885-1966)** studied for a London University LLB at King's College, London, was admitted at the Middle Temple in January 1920, and was called in November 1922. She gave up the bar and became a solicitor in practice with Edith Berthen and Madge Anderson.

Brought up in Bombay (Mumbai), **Mithan Ardeshir [Mithibai] Tata (1898-1981)**, the daughter of an industrialist, studied economics at Elphinstone College, and became involved with her mother in the women's suffrage campaign in India and came to London in 1919 to promote the cause. She studied economics at the London School of Economics, taking a London University MSc degree, and in April 1920 joined Lincoln's Inn and in January 1923 became the first woman to be called to the bar there. **Gladys Mary Chatterjee, Lady Chatterjee (1883-1969)**, born in India the daughter of an army officer, was educated in Britain where she studied philosophy at University College, London and took a London University BA, before going on to a teaching diploma at Bedford College, London. During the First World War she undertook welfare work among women employed in munitions and was appointed OBE in the first honours list (1917). Like Tata she studied economics at the London School of Economics. She married an Indian civil, and in 1933 was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn, and took part in the work of the International Federation of Women Lawyers. Called to the bar at Gray's Inn, in June 1937, **Helen Elizabeth [Betty] Archdale (1907-2000)**, the daughter of the Scottish feminist and journalist Helen Alexander Archdale, had studied law at University College, London, and taken a London University LLM degree. She was an officer of the Six Point Group, founded in 1921 to promote legal equality between the sexes, and also well known as captain of the English Women's Cricket Association touring side to Australia and New Zealand in 1934-5. She settled in Australia after 1945.

The first woman to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales was **Carrie Morrison (1888-1950)** who studied medieval and modern languages at Girton College, Cambridge, and was a schoolteacher before the First World War, when she was a civil servant. Entering solicitor's articles following the 1919 Act, she passed the Law Society final examinations in December 1920, and was admitted in December 1922, after which she went into practice in London. Originally a schoolteacher by profession, **Edith Annie Berthen (1877-1951)** studied philosophy at University College, Reading, taking a London University degree, but after the passing of the 1919 Act she entered into articles with a solicitor in Liverpool and qualified in 1923, aged forty-six. Setting up in practice in London, she took on Davy and later Anderson as articled clerks, both of them subsequently becoming partners. The daughter of a solicitor in the West Riding of Yorkshire, **Mary Elaine Sykes (1896-1981)** had studied English at Royal Holloway College during the First World War, taking a London University degree, but enrolled to study law at Leeds University at the end of the war and on the day after the passing of the 1919 Act entered articles with her father. Admitted solicitor in 1923 she set up her own firm in Huddersfield, where she was elected a borough councillor and became first woman mayor in 1945.

Another effect of the 1919 Act was to permit the appointment of women to the magistracy. The Lord Chancellor appointed a committee to advise on women suitable to be appointed Justices of the Peace, and this was chaired by **Margaret Etrenne Hannah [Peggy] Crewe-Milnes, marchioness of Crewe (1881-1967)**. The daughter of the fifth earl of Rosebery, she was thirteen when her father became prime minister; she met her husband, the Liberal politician the marquess of Crewe, at a party given by H. H. Asquith, also a future prime minister. During the First World War she served on government committees on women's employment and was herself appointed a JP in 1920. The daughter of a Lancashire cotton manufacturer, and married to an iron manufacturer, **Ada Jane**

Summers (1862-1944) was prominent in the civic life of Stalybridge, where she was elected a councillor in 1912, and undertook wartime refugee work, for which she was appointed MBE in 1918. Elected mayor of Stalybridge in November 1919 she became, by virtue of her mayoral office, the first woman to legally sit and preside over a magistrates' court and was sworn in within a week of the passing of the 1919 Act. She was appointed a JP in her own right in 1920.

Most libraries across the UK subscribe to the Oxford DNB, which means you can access the complete dictionary for free via your local library. Libraries offer 'remote access' that enables you to log in at any time at home (or anywhere you have internet access). Elsewhere the Oxford DNB is available online in schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions worldwide. Full details of participating British public libraries, and how to gain access to the complete dictionary, are available [here](#).