

MIDDLE TEMPLE

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN LAW



Press release 12.09.19

Title

Middle Temple Celebrates a Century of Women in Law

Sisters in Law

In December 1919, the first woman was admitted to an Inn of Court, Middle Temple – just 24 hours after the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act was passed.

Who

The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, commonly known simply as Middle Temple, is one of the four Inns of Court exclusively entitled to Call their members to Bar of England and Wales Bar as barristers. The Temple was once the home of the Knights Templar.

What

'Middle Temple, Celebrating a Century of Women in Law' is an exhibition of trail-blazing women barristers now on show in Middle Temple Hall. It marks 100 years (1919-2019) since the first woman was admitted to an Inn of Court. Until this time, women were excluded from being solicitors, barristers, judges and even jurors.

In 1919, there were no women at all at the Bar of England and Wales. It was 30 years before the first women Silks were appointed, in 1949; and 45 years later, in 1964, there were still fewer than 100 women practising at the English Bar amongst a cohort of 2118 (4.6%).



Helena Normanton was amongst the first women to be Called to the Bar. After her first petition to become a law student was refused in 1918 she lodged a petition with the House of Lords. She reapplied within hours of the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act of 1919 coming into force, and was admitted to Middle Temple on 24 December 1919. She went on to be the first woman to obtain a divorce for her client, the first woman to conduct a trial in America and the first woman to appear in cases in the High Court and the Old Bailey. Helena was an ardent campaigner for women's suffrage, becoming the first married woman in Britain to retain a passport in her maiden name.

Other distinguished women followed. Middle Temple ushered in many firsts: Sybil Campbell, the first woman judge; Barbara Calvert QC, the first woman Head of Chambers; and Dame Barbara Mills, the first woman Director of Public Prosecutions. Baroness Scotland was the first woman Attorney General. Professor Dawn Oliver QC was Middle Temple's first woman Treasurer.

'Middle Temple, Celebrating a Century of Women in Law' demonstrates the wide range of specialist law in which women excel. No longer 'the lady barrister' novelty, the exhibition features practising barristers, QCs and judges in chancery, commercial, personal injury, crime, family and human rights.

Where

Middle Temple Hall, Middle Temple Lane, Temple, London EC4Y 9BT

Middle Temple Hall stands at the heart of the Inn. Dating from 1572, it survived the Great Fire of London and the Blitz, and its medieval double-hammerbeam roof is considered the finest in London. On the main wall hang portraits of monarchs by Van Dyke and Kneller, while the oak-panelled side walls are adorned with the heraldic plaques of past Readers (senior members appointed to deliver a reading in Hall). The oldest plaque dates back to 1597.

The exhibition consists of 25 portraits (114 x 86cm) carefully hung from the Reader's plaques. There is a seven and a half minute digital display featuring a further 40 women barristers, dating from 1964 to the present day.

A 74 page colour catalogue (ISBN-13: 9780995736702) is available to purchase and there is a free 24 page guide to the exhibition.

When

Exhibition runs until 31 January 2020. Entrance is free.

Public access

Middle Temple Hall is open from 10:00am - 11:30am and from 15:30 - 17:00, Monday to Friday. Closed weekends. Please note that the Hall is a home to many functions and so visitors are advised to call in advance to check access. Phone: 020 7427 4800



Launch 03.10.19

'Middle Temple, Celebrating a Century of Women in Law' will be officially opened by The Rt Hon. The Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE QC (Lady Hale, President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom), **by invitation only.**

Further details

The Act of 1919, coming only a year after women were given the vote, reminds us of the close relationship between the fight for women's suffrage and the campaign to be admitted to the legal profession. Some of Middle Temple's early members were involved in both struggles: Chrystal Macmillan, a noted feminist, pacifist and suffrage campaigner, and Elsie Bowman, a survivor of the 'Titanic' disaster, who later became Christabel Pankhurst's election agent.

There are at present about 16,000 practising barristers in England and Wales, of whom 37% are women (2017 figures). The proportion of women QCs has risen slightly in recent years to 14.8%. The number of women pupils reached more than half (51.7%) for the first time in 2016.

Women at the Bar compete on exactly the same terms as men. They are selected for pupillage, tenancy, Silk, and judicial office entirely on merit. One hundred years after Helena Normanton fought for admission to an Inn of Court, women work in every area of law, have attained the highest ranks in the judiciary and have led the Bar.

Eleanor Sharpston QC is currently Advocate General at the European Court of Justice; Dame Barbara Mills DBE was the first woman Director of Public Prosecutions; and Professor Geraldine Van Bueren QC was one of the original drafters of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Middle Temple still leads the way in nurturing young talent at the Bar, with Scholarships and Mentoring Schemes.

Website

www.middletemple.org.uk

Credits

The exhibition is curated by Master Rosalind Wright CB QC, former Director of the Serious Fraud Office

Project team

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www.atelierworks.co.uk

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