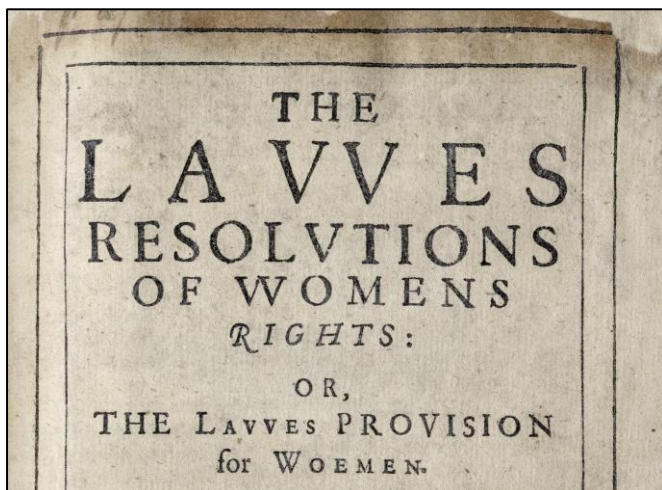


Women in the Law

Pioneers in the profession & law
'for' women



Middle Temple Library

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Introduction

2019 marked the 100th anniversary of the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, which allowed women to become practising solicitors and barristers in an official capacity, and to join the Law Society and the Inns of Court. The Act states that: “a person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society (whether incorporated by Royal Charter or otherwise), and a person shall not be exempted by sex or marriage from the liability to serve as a juror.” As a result of that legislation, the first woman to be called to the Bar on 10 May 1922 was Ivy Williams, a member of Inner Temple. Helena Normanton was Called to the Bar at Middle Temple in November 1922. This exhibition examines women’s roles in the law, including but not limited to practising lawyers.

Women lawyers

In 1888 Eliza Orme became the first woman to earn a law degree in England at University College London. In 1919 Ada Summers became the first female magistrate. In the same year Helena Normanton was the first woman admitted to an Inn of Court. In 1920 Madge Easton Anderson became the first female solicitor in the United Kingdom. Olive Clapham became the first woman to pass the bar finals exams in 1921. In 1922 Ivy Williams became the first woman to be called to the Bar in England and Wales.

Women printers

According to Maureen Bell, over “300 women [have been] identified as connected with the [book] trade between 1557 and 1700.” Women often co-managed the printing businesses with their husbands, and continued managing the business after their husband’s death; many of these were law printers.

“Ladies’ law”: the law in relation to women

Men (and some women) have been publishing books in Britain relating to women's legal rights since at least 1632, when a 'T.E.' published *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights*. The book focuses on three stages of a woman's life: spinster, wife and widow. 'T.E.' most likely refers to Thomas Edgar, who is often named as the editor of this work, although it is sometimes attributed to Sir John Doddridge (1555-1628), the author of *The compleat parson* and *The English lawyer*.

In 1700 the anonymous work *Baron and feme: a treatise of the common law concerning husbands and wives* was published. While not strictly focused on women's legal rights, it does focus on the law of husband and wife (baron and feme in the old sense) and marriage, which of course would be of relevance to women in the 18th century. It was reissued in 1719 and 1738. This was followed soon after in 1732 by *A treatise of feme covert or, the lady's law* which 'contained all of the laws and statutes relating to women'. This work was reissued in 1737 as *The lady's law or, a treatise of feme covert: containing all the laws and statutes relating to women*.

In 1735 an anonymous work entitled *The hardships of the English laws in relation to wives* was published. The 70 page book was written by Sarah Chapone (née Kirkham) and parts of it were reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The book examines the subjection of women and their legal status as wives. She outlines several cases of the abuse of women in the law, and how little protected they were.

In 1777 *The laws respecting women* was published. This work is divided into four parts dealing with the legal status of women, including proprietary rights, marriage law, criminal law and family law.

Many more books were published during the 19th and early 20th centuries, including J.J.S. Wharton's *An exposition of the laws relating to the women of England* (1853), *Women and law* (1896) by Elizabeth C.W. Elmy, *Women under English law* by Maud I. Crofts (1928) and *Everyday law for women* by Helena Normanton (1932).

Writers like John and Harriet Stuart Mill wrote bestselling books about women's rights in the 19th century which often discussed how women were treated unfairly by the law. The Stuart Mills wrote about two 'miscarriages of justice' which took place three days apart in March 1850: the cases of Mary Ann Parsons and that of Susan Moir, two victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Selected items on display

John Aylmer, *An harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiectes, agaynst the late blowne Blaste*, 1559

John Fortescue, *De laudibus legum Angliae*, 1672

John Indermaur, *Ladies' law: a book for spinsters, wives and widows* [circa 1886]

Inner Temple, *Report of the committee appointed to obtain information and to report on the admission of women as advocates in the courts of countries other than the United Kingdom*, 1919

The lavves resolutions of womens rights, 1632

James Ley, *Reports of divers resolutions ... in the Court of Wards and other courts at Westminster*, 1659

John Stuart Mill, *The subjection of women*, 1869

Helena Normanton, *The trial of Norman Thorne*, 1929
and *Trial of Alfred Arthur Rouse*, 1931

Helena Normanton, *Everyday law for women*, 1932

Edmund Plowden, *Abridgment des tous les cases reportez*, [circa 1597]

A treatise of feme covert: or, the lady's law, 1732

Robert Robinson, *A discourse concerning the law of inheritances*, 1736

Suffrage Speeches from the Dock. Made at the Conspiracy Trial, Old Bailey, May 15th-22nd, 1912

Rice Vaughan, *Practica Walliae*, 1672

John Webster, *Vittoria Corombona, or, The white devil. A tragedy*, 1672