

# Women of the Welfare Landscape

One hundred years ago, in 1922, before gaining the right to vote, 25 years old Brenda Colvin decided to start her own independent garden design business. Her practice – today Colvin & Moggridge – is the longest running landscape firm in this country. Once described as ‘wildly eccentric’ and run by a ‘Polish Countess who needed to live in a constant state of high-drama’, Colvin’s office has been at the forefront of finding new ways of working to preserve our landscapes and to tackle what we call today the climate and biodiversity emergency.

This exhibition aims to give a flavour of the variety of projects they designed between the start of the business in 1922 and Colvin’s death in 1981. Selecting a limited number of examples from a hugely rich and varied portfolio (Colvin completed more than 600 landscape commissions during her career) is never easy. Our curatorial principle was to show the variety of typologies and scales, to show how Colvin’s practice can exemplify the changing profile of the profession of landscape architecture in the post-Second World War period, and to show designs that prove the continuity of ideas and working principles in her collaboration with Hal Moggridge and the practice’s history.

The decades between the foundation of the practice and Colvin’s death have seen fundamental changes not just in the legal context of planning and landscape architecture, but also the way women participated in a variety of professions and in society in general. They played a crucial role in the development of landscape architecture, and Colvin was a prominent leader of this development as a designer, campaigner, author, educator and driving force in the Institute of Landscape Architects (today the Landscape Institute).

As Hal Moggridge, Brenda Colvin’s business partner from 1969, asserted, ‘landscape design is a co-operative undertaking’. This collaborative nature of the profession sometimes leads to one – or more – of the partners being overlooked in historical accounts. But landscape architecture is arguably also much broader than just design. Policy, theory, and education all play a key role in the creation of successful landscapes, and actors in these areas are also often ‘not-seen’, due to a focus on the designs and built projects.

While showcasing the many aspects of Colvin’s landscape projects, we also aimed to introduce other female professionals with whom she collaborated and whose achievements have so far been overlooked. As with the selection of projects that are represented here, we could only include a small selection of these remarkable individuals, but the guiding principle was the same: showing the different faces of female praxis in landscape architecture and its crucial contribution to the profession.

The material has been arranged so that the different scales at which Colvin worked is colour-coded: orange denotes urban-scale, blue relates to landscape planning, and green to large-scale industry. The life and work of Colvin’s friends, colleagues and collaborators are provided in short introductory sections at the bottom of relevant posters.

This exhibition is part of the Women of the Welfare Landscape project, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. During the project we aim to delve deeper into some of the questions discussed in this exhibition. We hope to understand the legacy of landscape architecture in the post-Second World War period, and the contribution women made to it. We would welcome any comments, information, memories, or images you might have. Please do get in touch with us – we would love to hear from you!

1922



Brenda Colvin establishes her garden design practice in London working on a number of private commissions for individuals in England.



Cheyne Row, Chelsea

1929



The Institute of Landscape Architects is formed after a meeting at the Chelsea Flower Show. Thomas Mawson becomes the first President.

1931



Colvin attends a talk by Thomas Adams on the ‘Meaning and Scope of Landscape Architecture and Its Relation to Town Planning’ and is inspired to travel to America to expand her professional horizons.

1939



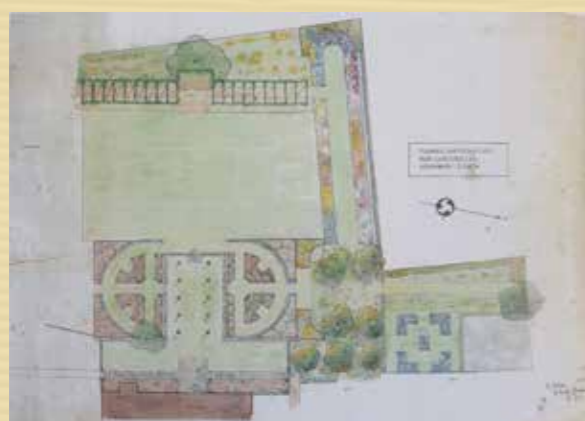
The grounds of Swanley Horticultural College in Kent, to which Colvin regularly returned as a visiting lecturer



1922

1939

1925



An early garden design for Catchbells, Essex

1927



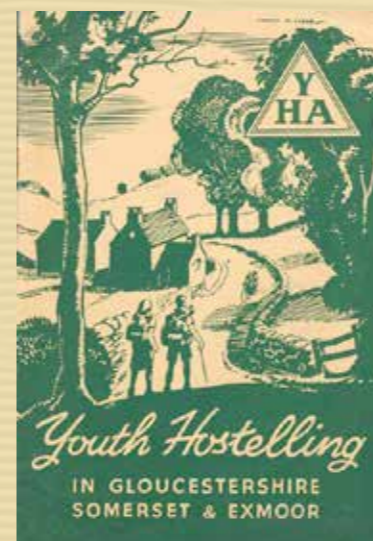
British Broadcasting Corporation created

1928



The Equal Franchise Act gave the vote to all women over the age of 21, bringing franchise in line with men. Previously only women over the age of 30 who owned property could vote.

1930



Formation of the Youth Hostel Association and Ramblers Association

1932



Mass trespass of Kinder Scout in the Peak District

1934



Landscape & Garden, featuring ‘Quarterly Notes’ by Brenda Colvin



Colvin’s early work and trip to Zwic in Poland



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## BRENDA COLVIN, A LIFE IN LANDSCAPE

Brenda Colvin was born in Sima (now Shimla), India, where her father worked in the Indian Civil Service. Her early childhood was spent in a privileged but enlightening environment, in which education was delivered on a houseboat on a Kashmiri river and complemented by tours with her father of the districts that he oversaw as Agent and Chief Commissioner. Colvin was drawn to art and horticulture from a young age, and as a teenager was unsure whether to pursue her artistic studies in Paris or to study horticulture in Britain.

In 1918 Colvin enrolled on the general horticultural course at the female-only Swanley Horticultural College. The general horticulture course covered a range of scientific and practical subjects, including botany, chemistry, beekeeping and general gardening skills and rigour and discipline was expected from all of the students. Colvin changed course to take Landscape Design, taught by another Swanley graduate, Madeline Agar. Agar had studied and worked in the United States within a civil engineering firm and brought a unique and professional approach to the topic. When a change in management forced Agar to leave Swanley, Colvin was soon to follow, taking up private tuition along with other Swanley students under Agar's direction.

Colvin's first experience of professional practice was working for Agar as clerk of works and site assistant on a war memorial garden on Wimbledon Common. In 1922 Colvin started her own independent practice, whilst also contributing as an alumna of Swanley, giving visiting lectures on garden appreciation and advocating for periods in practice for aspiring landscape architects. Her practice quickly grew, with commissions arriving through the network of family and friends and then growing through word of mouth. Within a decade, Colvin was exhibiting her designs at the Chelsea Flower Show, and she was one of the founding members of the Institute of Landscape Architects in 1929.

Having travelled to America in the 1930s, Colvin was a vanguard of a new kind of landscape architect who sought to engage with the rapidly changing and developing world, something that stood her in good stead after the end of the Second World War. Her innovative engagement with the landscape architecture of roads, power, universities, housing, reservoirs and large-scale tree planting led her and her contemporaries to set the standard for sensitive industrial and institutional design.

A sensitivity to the ecological and spatial qualities of trees and vegetation was key to her approach, which was underpinned by a philosophical understanding of humanity's relationship and reliance upon the natural world which she eloquently expressed in *Land and Landscape*:

*'The control which modern man is able to exert over his environment is so great that we easily overlook the power of the environment over man ... We should think of this planet, Earth, as a single organism, in which humanity is involved. The sense of superior individuality which we enjoy is illusory.'*

Colvin was the first woman to be elected president of any leading built environment institute, when she took on the role of President of the Institute of Landscape Architects in 1951. Her work not only defined the future of the Institute - and the profession - but also had lasting impact on the education of landscape architects. Her collaboration with Hal Moggridge through their practice Colvin & Moggridge ensured the lasting legacy of her work.

1940



Colvin trains female gardeners of the Womens Farm and Garden Association, of which Madeline Agar, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt and Fanny Wilkinson were members of.

1942



Colvin starts teaching at the Architectural Association and Regent's Street Polytechnic



Colvin offers Sylvia Crowe a 'house room' at her office on Baker Street

1945



Lord Reith consults the ILA for his New Towns Committee

1948



Formation of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) creating a network that fostered a global practice as part of post-war reconstruction.

1951



1951-53 Brenda Colvin's presidency of the Institute of Landscape Architects

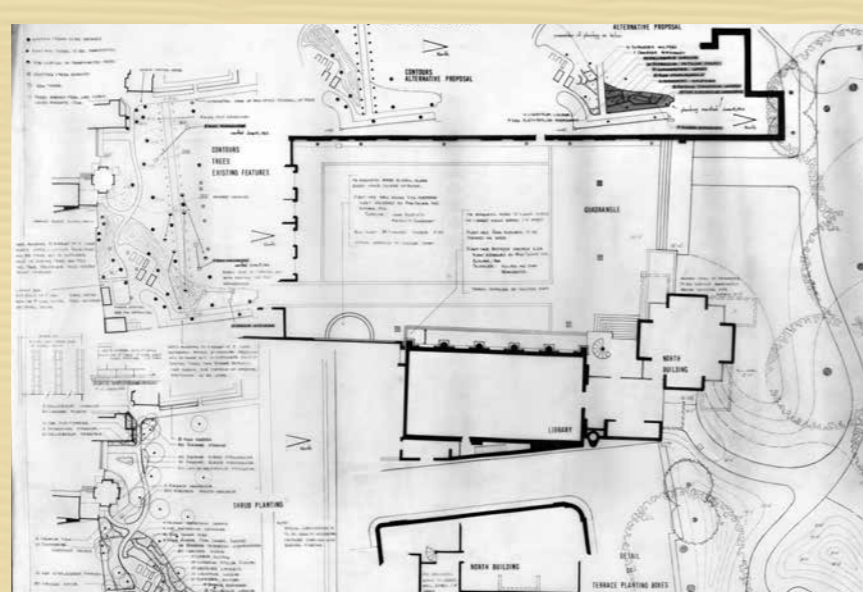
1940

*'And grim though the war most certainly was it was seen as the prelude to a vast policy of reconstruction. If so much effort could be galvanised for war, then there could be no limits to what could be achieved when peace came.'*

*'Forty Years A-Growing'* by L.J. Fricker, *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects*.

1944

*The Education Act* changes provision and governance of secondary schools



Trinity College, Cambridge

1945

*The Water Act* expanded the national water supply

1946

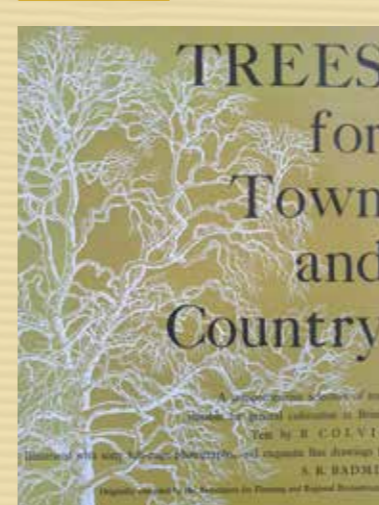
*New Towns Act* established a programme for housebuilding and *The National Insurance Act* introduced a comprehensive system of social security



East Kilbride New Town

1947

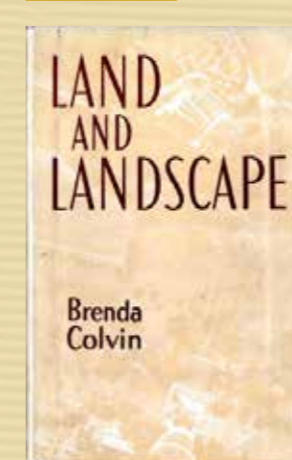
*Electricity Act* which bought the electricity supply industry into state control



First edition of *Trees for Town and Country*

1948

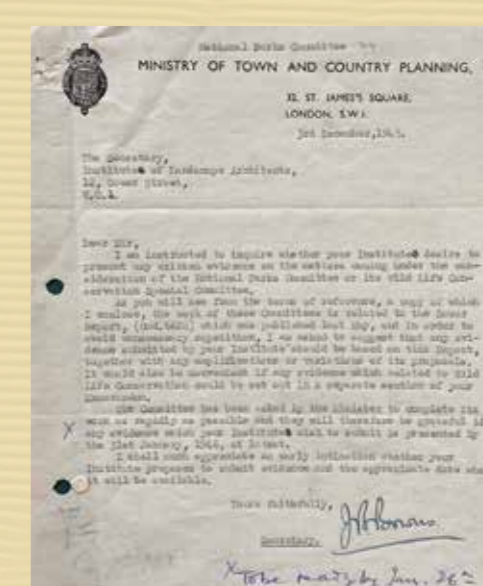
*National Assistance Act* established a social safety net for everyone



First edition of *Land and Landscape*

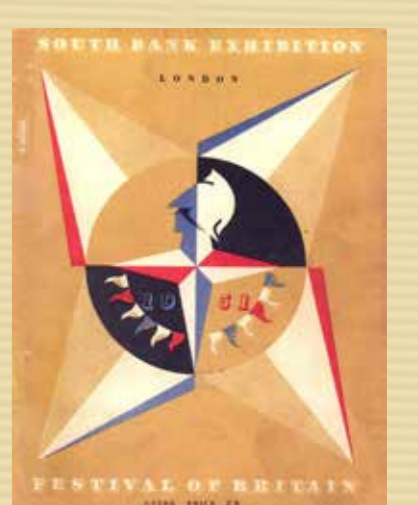
1949

*National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act*



1951

Festival of Britain held on London's South Bank



# Women of the Welfare Landscape

## EDUCATION

The Second World War brought about change, and education in many different formats were developed to address the needs of the country. Colvin and Madeleine Agar were both members of the Women's Farm and Garden Association (WFGA), through which Colvin and Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, launched a course to train female gardeners who could not afford tuition fees for horticultural colleges. The six-month course specialising in food production started in 1942, and the collaboration of the two of them led to further educational projects.

In 1942, Colvin started to teach landscape architecture in the Regent Street Polytechnic to architecture and planning students and Tyrwhitt taught the history of town planning. A year later Colvin started to teach surveying and drawing to diploma students at Studley Horticultural College for women, and also started to teach in the renowned Architectural Association. Together with Tyrwhitt, she also organised a postgraduate evening course through the School of Planning and Research for National Development (SPRND) that Tyrwhitt was leading throughout the War. The SPRND course led to the final examination that allowed students to enter both the Town Planning Institute and the Institute of Landscape Architects, and Colvin worked as a lecturer there until the 1950s.

## PUBLISHING

Colvin's most famous book, *Land and Landscape* (1948) was developed from her lecture notes at the Architectural Association. The book was described by Peter Youngman as a pioneer book which had an enormous influence in 'spreading the wider view of landscape'.

In the 1940s – most probably on the basis of their experiences in architectural schools – Colvin and Tyrwhitt published *Trees for Town and Country* (1947), describing 60 trees suitable for general cultivation in Britain aiming to show them in different periods of their growth. Together with Sylvia Crowe's books *Tomorrow's Landscape* (1956), *The Landscape of Power* (1958), and *The Landscape of Roads* (1960), *Land and Landscape* and *Trees for Town and Country* became a crucial handbooks for landscape architects, while *The Pattern of Landscape*, that Crowe co-authored with Mary Mitchell (1970) is an important visual guide.

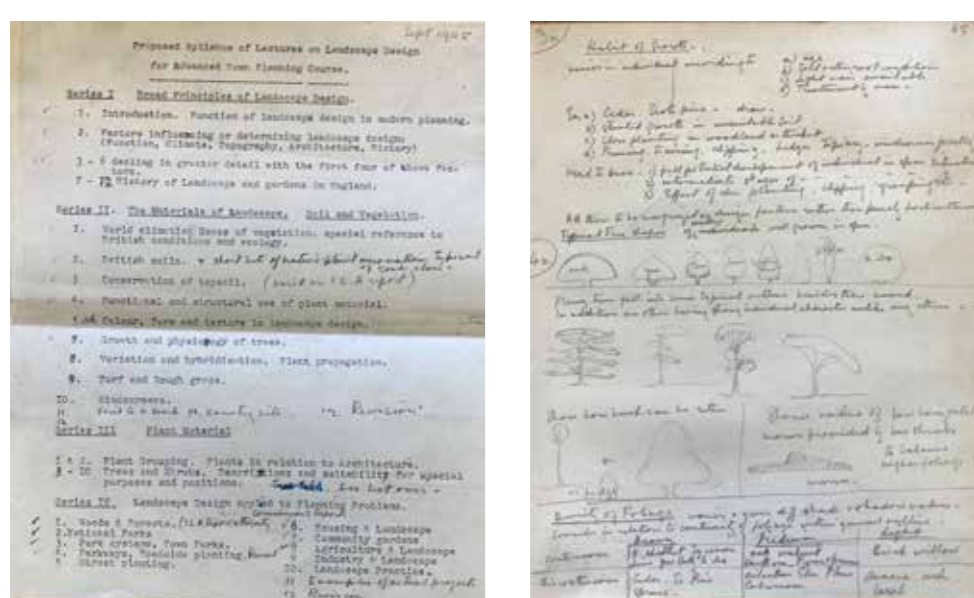
Beyond books, the Journal of the ILA was an important vehicle for shaping and disseminating the theory and practice of landscape architecture, and both Brenda Colvin and Susan Jellicoe was involved in the editorial work. Jellicoe also collaborated on a variety of books, including *Things We See: Gardens* for Penguin (1953) with Lady Allen, and co-authored *The Landscape of Man* with her husband, Geoffrey Jellicoe.

## THE ILA & IFLA

Another founding member of the Institute of Landscape Architects was Lady Allen of Hurtwood, with Madeline Agar joining soon after. Their vision for a changing, independent profession hugely shaped the discipline's future, and their work through the institute was a catalyst for this development. From the very beginning of the Institute's history, Colvin could foresee a developing future. As she wrote

*'The wider application of landscape architecture are those of regional planning. While the main work of members may be at present laying out medium sized gardens, we had to remember that our most important contribution to the life of the nation would be in the wider field.'*

They both served the institute in a variety of roles, including playing an active part in various committees and the council as well as Lady Allen serving as vice-president between 1939-46 and Colvin president between 1951-1953. Soon after the establishment of the Institute they were joined by other visionaries, like Madeleine Agar, Sylvia Crowe, Jacqueline Tyrwhitt and Sheila Haywood.



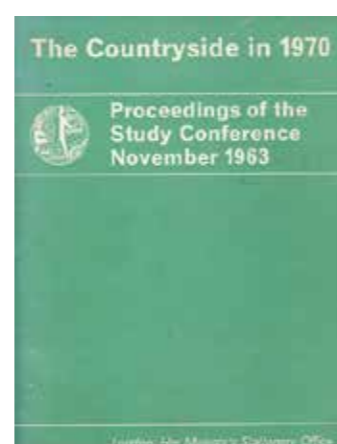
Colvin's lecture notes on Landscape Design and tree growth and habit

1957



1957-59 Sylvia Crowe's presidency of the Landscape Institute

1963



The Countryside in 1970 conference

1969



Hal Moggridge joins Colvin's practice, forming Colvin & Moggridge

1973



Colvin made CBE

1981



1981 Brenda Colvin dies at home in Little Peacocks

1952

1952

*Town Development Act* to encourage growth in county districts across the UK



East Kilbride New Town

1957

*Electricity Act* forms the CEBG and Electricity Council and includes the 'Amenity Clause'



Drakelow Power Station

1963

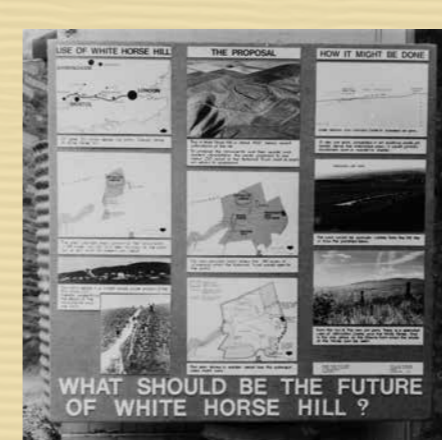
*Water Resources Act* creating an integrated management structure for water infrastructure



Trimley Reservoir

1968

*Countryside Act* creates the Countryside Commission



White Horse Hill

1973

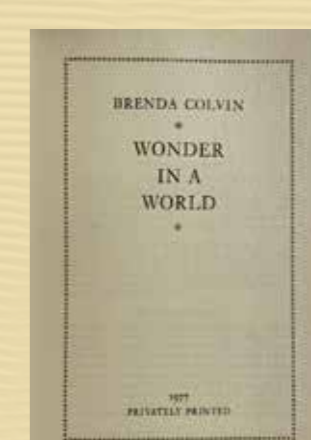
*Water Act* reorganised the water, sewage and river management industry



Brenig Reservoir

1977

*Wonder in a World*, Colvin's last book, privately printed



1981

We would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support in developing this exhibition: Historic Environment Scotland; The Museum of English Rural Life and Special Collections, University of Reading; Colvin & Moggridge, Hal Moggridge, Michael England, the Jellicoe Estate,

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