

MAGNIFICENT WOMEN:

Verena Holmes

Verena Holmes was a talented engineer and inventor, dedicated to encouraging the development of women engineers. She was a founding member of the Women's Engineering Society and in her own engineering firm, set up in 1946, employed only women.



23 June 1889 – 20 February 1964

Early Engineering Career

Verena Holmes was born in Ashford, Kent, the daughter of a schools inspector. As a child she used to take her dolls apart to see how they worked. She was always fascinated by engineering but when she left school she went on to study photography.

- When the First World War broke out Verena first worked building wooden aircraft propellers in Shoreditch and then for an aero engine firm in Lincoln, taking evening classes at the local technical colleges.
- Before the end of the war and the return of a male workforce she had also completed an apprenticeship as a draughtsman.
- With Caroline Haslett she was a founding member of the **Women's Engineering Society** in 1919.
- Verena entered Loughborough Technical College (now Loughborough University) to complete an external degree in Engineering in 1920. Here she met **Claudia Parsons** who was studying Automobile Engineering. They became lifelong friends.
- Verena Holmes was awarded a B.Sc.(Eng) in 1922. In 1924 she became the first woman to be admitted to Associate Membership of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.

Engineer And Inventor

Verena Holmes worked on a wide range of different engines - marine and locomotive, oil, diesel, and internal combustion engines. She also worked for a time as a technical journalist in the USA.

Verena proved to be a serious inventor and took out a dozen or so patents for medical and safety devices and internal combustion engine improvements. She also had many unpatented inventions.

During the Second World War Verena was influential in setting up the Women's Technical Service Register (1942) and as part of it devised a training course for women munitions workers. She also worked on naval weaponry. In 1946 she founded her own engineering firm.

The demands of the First World War at last gave Verena Holmes the chance to become an engineer. Talented and driven, she worked tirelessly throughout her life to support and promote women in engineering.

Further information

Useful resources:

- <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66362>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verena_Holmes
- <http://www.wes.org.uk/content/verena-holmes-lecture>

Verena During the Second World War

Claudia Parsons wrote: 'Her profession had long been exposed to some of the meanest male prejudices; she was only now winning the merits she had long since earned because they could no longer be withheld'.