

# ***"This Is Not A Success Story": Florence Fulton Hobson. Architect in Northern Ireland***

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## **Introduction**

*This Is Not A Success Story* is the title of Florence Fulton Hobson's (later Patterson, 1881-1978) autobiography.<sup>1</sup> She was the first woman in Ireland to gain an accreditation from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and worked for the Belfast Corporation, the White Cross, and in private practice. She wrote her autobiography during the 1960s or 70s and long after her career ended, and the title indicates that she fell short of her own aspirations and expectations.

Hobson became an architect during a time of change when institutions were being opened up to women. She was nevertheless unable to develop a practice beyond building for family and acquaintances so that this chapter analyses factors that supported as well as hindered Hobson in developing her architectural career.

## **Becoming an Architect**

Hobson came from a family of Quakers. Her father, Benjamin Hobson (1852-1927), was a grocer from Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, and her mother, Mary Ann Bulmer Hobson (1857-1947), an active member of the Society of Friends, and supporter of Women's Rights. It

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seems to have been her outlook that formed the basis for her daughter's decision to take a profession. In her memoirs Bulmer Hobson explained:

I have never forgiven the men of my generation for keeping the doors of the universities closed to women. ... My interest in the movement for Women's Rights is, therefore, intimately personal ... but it is also traditional: for the Society of Friends ... have, from their foundation, always treated women on an equal footing with men.<sup>2</sup>

This is not surprising as there were a number of Quaker women active in the Suffragette movement in the United Kingdom. Bulmer Hobson also took on the task of finding an architectural practice that would train her daughter:<sup>3</sup>

My mother had great difficulties in finding an architect willing to take a girl pupil. She interviewed the Youngs (of Young & Mackenzie), and Mr. Young junior was willing to discuss the matter. Mr. Young senior kept calling out, 'Now Robert – it would never do!'<sup>4</sup>

The disagreement between the two architects is reflective of juxtaposing opinions on women in architecture that, in 1898 – and just before Hobson started her training – had been voiced on the occasion of Ethel Mary Charles' (1871-1962) being admitted to the RIBA as their first woman member. Architect W. Hilton Nash (1850-1927) initiated a petition against her election and after her membership was approved, efforts to overturn it led to a vote that only confirmed her by the slim margin of one vote.<sup>5</sup> In 1902 Charles then gave the talk "A Plea for Women Practicing Architecture."<sup>6</sup> Here, she defended women's capacity to act as architects and refuted objections that might be raised against women in architecture. In response, the article "May Women Practise Architecture?" appeared. Although accepting Charles'

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<sup>2</sup> Mary A. Bulmer Hobson, *Memoirs of Six Generations* (Belfast: Graham and Heslip, 1947), 68. On Hobson see: Tanja Poppelreuter, "Architecture as Method of Self-Realization: The Belfast Architect Florence Fulton Hobson," in *Women Designers, Craftswomen, Architects and Engineers between 1918 and 1945*, eds. Marjan Groot, et.al. (Ljubljana: MoMoWo, 2017) 256-267. "Hobson, Florence Fulton, *Dictionary of Irish Architects: 1720-1940*, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2yehR1q>; and Cathy Hayes, "Hobson, Florence Fulton," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds. James McGuire, James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Royal Irish Academy, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> H. Larry Ingle, "A Quaker Woman on Women's Roles: Mary Penington to Friends, 1678," *Signs* 16, no. 3 (1991): 587-596, Myrtle Hill and Margaret Ward, "Conflicting Rights: The Struggle for Female Citizenship in Northern Ireland," in *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane (London, 2010): 113-138.

<sup>4</sup> Florence Fulton Hobson, *This Is Not a Success Story*, Manuscript held in private collection. See also: Florence Fulton Hobson Patterson, *Letter to Mr. Sawyer*, October 8, 1972, held at the Public Record Office Northern Ireland, call no. D4489/11.

<sup>5</sup> Lynne Walker, "The Entry of Women into the Architectural Profession in Britain," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1986): 16 and "The Admission of Lady Associates," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (11 March 1899): 278-281.

<sup>6</sup> Ethel Charles, "A Plea for Women Practising Architecture," *The Builder* 82 (February 1902): 179-83.

argument that women may possess the intellectual, artistic and physical capacities to practice architecture the author rejected Charles' reasoning as not touching "the vital issue of the whole discussion."<sup>7</sup> Women, the author contended, are by nature changeable but to practice architecture restraint is needed so that "in the supreme and essential qualities of fine architecture a woman is by nature heavily handicapped."<sup>8</sup>

Despite such disapproval Charles nevertheless was confirmed as a member of the RIBA which indicated that change and progression for women in architecture was underway. Hobson might have been more enthused by Charles' achievement than repelled by the opinions of her adversaries when seeking a practice to train with.

The architectural firm that accepted Hobson – J.J. Phillips & Son – was a small one in Belfast run by James John Phillips (1841/2-1936) and his son James St John Phillips (1870-1935).<sup>9</sup> Between 1899 and 1903, when Hobson trained, the practice built, among other commissions, Methodist Churches on Oldpark Road (1899) and Newtownards Road (1900), buildings for the Methodist College (1902) and a Presbyterian Church in Whitehead (1904-05).<sup>10</sup> The reason why J.J. Phillips & Son took her as pupil are not known but Bulmer Hobson might have been acquainted with James St. John Phillips through the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club where they were members.<sup>11</sup>

In 1903 Hobson passed the preliminary and intermediate exams of the RIBA, an event that was publicly lauded by architect William J. Fennell (-1923) who was "glad to see that there was at least one lady in Belfast who had the pluck to serve her time to architecture, and had passed the Royal Inst. Of British Architects – Miss Hobson."<sup>12</sup> He was also president of

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<sup>7</sup> 'May Women Practise Architecture?' *The British Architect* (February 21, 1902): 125.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Fulton Hobson attended the Friend's Boarding School in Lisburn and the School of Art in Belfast. Royal Institute of British Architects, *Licentiate 794 Florence Fulton Hobson: Statement RIBA* (March 20, 1911).

<sup>10</sup> "Phillips, J.J. & Son," *Dictionary of Irish Architects: 1720-1940*, accessed February 14, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2zJzXbV>, and "Phillips, James John," *Dictionary of Irish Architects: 1720-1940*, accessed 20 January 2020, <https://bit.ly/2LAGWXx>.

<sup>11</sup> "Death of Mr. St. John Phillips," *The Irish Builder and Engineer* (July 27, 1935): 646.

<sup>12</sup> "Belfast Naturalists' Field Club: List of Officers," *Annual Report & Proceedings: Belfast Naturalists Field-Club* 4, Series 2, Part 5 (1897-8): 407.

<sup>12</sup> "Northern Whig," Monday, February 9, 1903, newspaper clipping in RIBA, *Licentiate 794*.

the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club and in its Annual Report & Proceedings that year Fennell commented on plans Hobson had drawn to illustrate her mother's publication "Some Souterrains in Antrim and Down."<sup>13</sup>

It was customary for young architects to further their training in architectural offices after passing RIBA exams and in July 1903 Hobson moved to London. Before leaving, she wrote to Charles who discouraged her from coming. After Hobson arrived anyway, she "found her words to be quite true. Architects did not even have a woman typist in their offices!"<sup>14</sup> Still, she was able to work for two weeks as a substitute at Guy Dawber's (1861-1938) office and had a position with James G. Sivewright Gibson (1861-1951) for 14 months. Here, she was involved with works on the Town Hall in Walsall, near Birmingham. The emphasis of Gibson's practice on commercial buildings was not what Hobson preferred, but he was pleased with her work and assessed her as:

a capable draughtswoman, having had good architectural training, and was very painstaking with her work, and I can thoroughly recommend her for any position for which these qualifications are necessary.<sup>15</sup>

Despite his recommendation Hobson was unable to find further work in London and in 1905 returned to Belfast.

During the next two years she worked again for J.J. Philips & Son, superintended the construction of ten terraced workmen's dwellings in Portadown, Co. Armagh, gave a lecture on "Domestic Architecture of Today" – that might have been related to this project – and took temporary employment in the Surveyor's Department of the Belfast Corporation.<sup>16</sup>

In 1907 James Munce (1852-1917), the Assistant Surveyor at Belfast Corporation, called on Hobson to work on a disinfecting station and to prepare maps of the city to mark

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<sup>13</sup> B[ulmer] Hobson, "Some Souterrains in Antrim and Down." *Annual Report & Proceedings: Belfast Naturalists Field-Club 5*, Series 2, Part 3 (1903-04): 214.

<sup>14</sup> Hobson, *Success Story*.

<sup>15</sup> RIBA, *Licentiate 794*.

<sup>16</sup> The cottages were superintended for B.C. Hobson who may have been a family member. The lecture was given under the auspices of the Friends Institute. RIBA, *Licentiate 794*. Florence Fulton Hobson, *Handwritten Curriculum Vitae*, undated [after 1921], held in private collection.

outbreaks of scarlet fever, diphtheria and typhoid.<sup>17</sup> This work led to a permanent position in the Health Department where she stayed until 1921. Because she described her work as “dull but not arduous” she appears to have not been particularly enthused with work that consisted of keeping registers of baths, making charts for the annual reports for the Medical Officer Dr. Hugh William Bailie, working on a the design of a new public abattoir and designing “modern cow shed-extensions, [... an] electricity station [...] + measuring slum property.”<sup>18</sup>

Her work at the Belfast Corporation was reflective of the urban growth and challenges that the city experienced at that time. In 1911 Belfast had a population of 385,000 and was not only the largest city in Ireland but also the fastest growing one in the United Kingdom. This development had been since the 19<sup>th</sup> century driven mostly by linen mills and shipbuilding industries – at the time, Belfast was among the largest center of linen production and largest ship-building centers world-wide.

### **‘Architecture as a Profession’**

In 1911 Hobson’s application for a licentiate of the RIBA was granted; she now was an architect and permitted to add the suffix LRIBA to her name. She availed of the Licentiate Class that, between 1908 and 1913, allowed architects to be registered without exams if evidence of their competence as practitioners was provided.<sup>19</sup> In the same year Hobson also published the article

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<sup>17</sup> “Munce, James,” *Dictionary of Irish Architects: 1720-1940*, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2zJ66QU>. Hobson, *Success Story*.

<sup>18</sup> Hobson, *Success Story*, RIBA, *Licentiate* 794.

<sup>19</sup> David M. Walker, “The Architectural Profession in Scotland, 1840-1940: Background to the Biographical Notes,” *Dictionary of Scottish Architects 1660-1980*, accessed June 12, 2020, <http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk>

“Architecture as a Profession” in *The Queen*.<sup>20</sup> To support aspiring architects it provided not only guidance on studying architecture such as prices for tutelage and information on RIBA requirements but also with responses to a range of obstacles that a woman might encounter. It can be assumed that some of these were based on her own experience, but others were more general and had also appeared in the context of Charles’ 1898 membership. Among them were the beliefs that women should focus on domestic architecture, that it is difficult for women to superintend the construction of high buildings or to supervise workmen.

Essential for an understanding of Hobson’s aspirations are the final paragraphs:

One word of advice to the architectural aspirant, and that is, not to undertake this as a profession unless she feels strongly drawn towards it. ... only those should adopt architecture as a profession who feel that through this medium they can express their artistic ideas; and to the true artist it thus becomes a method of self-realisation.<sup>21</sup>

This advice not only shows her incentives for choosing architecture; it can also be regarded as a response to discourses on the natural place of women in society that feminist movements in Britain had addressed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her explanation shows that she regarded architecture as a means to express herself and to realize her potential. This idea of self-realization did not conform with essentialist arguments according to which a woman’s natural place is within the family and the home and her self-realization was to be found in motherhood.<sup>22</sup> The counter-argument vouched for the right of women to seek an identity outside of socially-determined boundaries.<sup>23</sup> Hobson’s wish is a strong indicator that she wanted to pursue a distinct and autonomous professional identity that was not subordinate to and determined by tradition; whereby spheres of man and woman were divided into binary fields of opposites. Her mother’s background and resolve, the architects who trained,

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<sup>20</sup> Anonymous [Florence Fulton Hobson], “Architecture as a Profession,” *The Queen: The Lady’s Newspaper* 3391 no. 80, December 23, 1911, “Public Work and Women’s Employment,” *The Queen: The Lady’s Newspaper*, February 1912, 284. See also: Poppelreuter, “Architecture as Method,” 256-267.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, “Architecture as a Profession.”

<sup>22</sup> On essentialism see: Ann Heilmann, “Gender and essentialism: Feminist debates in the twenty-first century,” *Critical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2011): 78-89 DOI: 10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss008

<sup>23</sup> Lucy Delap, “Feminist and anti-feminist encounters in Edwardian Britain,” *Historical Research* 78, no. 201 (August 2005): 377-399.

employed and supported her goal as well as forerunners such as Charles' provided Hobson with the conditions needed to become an architect. Her transgressing of boundaries and her aim to pursue self-realization as one of the first women in architecture meant that Hobson placed herself outside societal norms and expectations.

Her aspiration for self-realization indicates also that it was her goal to practice architecture independently which is why her membership in the RIBA was essential. Between 1912 and 1914 she received small commissions and undertook alterations for the Music Store McCullough on Howard Street – the owner was a friend and colleague of her brother John Bulmer Hobson (1883–1969) – and for Glendun Lodge in Cushendun for Ada McNeill (1860-1959), a member of the Gaelic League and a family friend.<sup>24</sup>

On behalf of the Belfast Corporation and in context with the National Insurance Act she gave a public talk on “Town Planning and its Relation to Public Health” in 1913. The Act stipulated the building of sanatoria, schools, hospitals, and open-air schools to prevent tuberculosis. To prepare, Hobson travelled around England and on the continent.<sup>25</sup> Her talk sought to do more than to simply synthesize considerations of public health and urban planning with findings on how to avoid the spread of tuberculosis in urban centers. *The Northern Whig* reported:

Town-planning must suit the particular needs of the community for which it was designed, as it was only by careful consideration of local conditions that individuality in towns could be preserved. It was not uniformity but variety that was required.<sup>26</sup>

She understood town planning as a social and aesthetic challenge and not only as a practical problem that should be studied by a town planning committee of experts that she wished to initiate; shortly after her talk Hobson organized a meeting with the Town Planning Association in Dublin to gain information but no such committee was initiated in Belfast,

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<sup>24</sup> Hobson, *Curriculum Vitae.*; Florence Fulton Hobson, *Letter to Roger Sawyer*, June 2, 1972. Held at the Public Record Office Northern Ireland, call no. D4489/3.

<sup>25</sup> “Town Planning,” *Freemans Journal*, April 29, 1913, 4. “Municipal Elections in the Provinces,” *Irish Times*, January 10, 1914. “Town Planning and the Public Health,” *Belfast Newsletter*, February 19, 1913, 5.

<sup>26</sup> “Town-Planning and Public Health: Lecture by Miss F.F. Hobson,” *The Northern Whig*, February 19, 1913.

possibly as a result of the outbreak of the First World War and subsequent violent conflict in Ireland.<sup>27</sup>

### **Practicing Architecture in Times of Political Struggle**

In 1914-15 Hobson built her first house for herself in Carnalea, near Belfast. On the same street she built two more houses in 1920-21, one for her parents the other probably as an investment.<sup>28</sup> Stylistically, the houses compare to Arts & Crafts-inspired dwellings with roof shapes that slightly curve outward, a round alcove on the side elevation of one of the

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<sup>27</sup> *Freemans Journal*, April 29, 1913, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Hobson, *Curriculum Vitae*. The construction of the first house was delayed when the First World War broke out. Hobson, *Success Story*; also, Florence Fulton Hobson, *Letter to Mr. Rollason*, November 26, 1976. Held in private collection.



houses, and details such as exposed wooden beams, staircase railings and artwork such as the built-in relief by sculptor Rosamond Praeger (1867-1954) in one of the dining rooms.<sup>29</sup>

The houses in Carnalea were built during a time of violent conflict in Ireland. During the First World War the 1916 Easter Rising broke out that had been caused by long-standing sectarian divisions between the Catholic and Protestant population. The subsequent Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) led to the division of Ireland into the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in 1921 and was followed by the Irish Civil War that continued until 1923. Hobson's brother John Bulmer Hobson was a chief member of the Irish Volunteers and of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and although these organizations were involved in the planning of the Easter Rising Bulmer Hobson was opposed to it and took no part in the fighting.

The conflict caused considerable destruction in a number of Irish cities but especially in the center of Dublin. During the period of the Irish War of Independence and the partition of Ireland and Northern Ireland between 1920 to 1922 demonstrations and rioting also took

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<sup>29</sup> Florence Fulton Hobson, *Letter to Mr. Rollason*, May 15, 1977. Held in private collection. On Praeger read: Joseph McBrinn, "'A Populous Solitude': The Life and Art of Sophia Rosamond Praeger, 1867–1954," *Women's History Review* 18, no. 4 (2009): 577-596, DOI: 10.1080/09612020903112240.

place in Belfast.<sup>30</sup> The damage in Belfast was described in a 1921 Appeal for Funds issued by the American Committee for Relief in Ireland and the Irish White Cross:

Thousands of workers have been thrown out of employment by the burning of factories and creameries, and in consequence of the generally disturbed conditions in Belfast alone, thirty thousand persons, shipyard workers and their families, are on the verge of starvation.<sup>31</sup>

Hobson left the Belfast Corporation in 1921 and during the Belfast Riots worked or volunteered with the Irish White Cross until c1922.<sup>32</sup> This relief organization had been founded by the Quaker businessman James G. Douglas (1887-1954) in 1921 and she worked with the Reconstruction Commission that administered repayable loans to rebuild and reconstruct houses and devastated areas.<sup>33</sup> The exact nature of her work is not known but she might have undertaken surveying work, mapped, and assessed damages.

Politically motivated disturbances continued in Belfast throughout the 1920s and economic depression impacted on shipbuilding, textile and construction industries – in 1929 28% of the insured workforce was unemployed.

On the other hand women over the age of 21 gained voting rights and furthered their opportunities in professional fields during the 1920s.<sup>34</sup> Women had been given access to universities already in 1908 and after the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act more entered professions such as medicine and law. In 1926 14% of the medical profession in Northern Ireland was female and a few women had been admitted to the Northern Ireland Bar.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: History and Memory, 1923-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). John Dorney, "Belfast Riots – A Short History," *The Irish Story*, accessed 15 July 2020 <https://bit.ly/3gasIKl>

<sup>31</sup> Richard Campbell et. al., *Report of American Committee for Relief in Ireland* (New York: Treasurer's and Secretary's Office 51 Chambers Street, Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank, no date [1921]), 59.

<sup>32</sup> American Committee for Relief in Ireland, *Report of American Committee for Relief in Ireland* (New York, 1922), 57.

<sup>33</sup> Irish White Cross Society, *Report of the Irish White Cross 31 August 1922* (New York: American Committee for Relief in Ireland), 37.

<sup>34</sup> In 1922 in the Free State and in 1928 in Northern Ireland. In the UK, the Representation of the People Act of 1918 had provided voting rights for women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification, the 1928 Equal Franchise Act lifted all age and property restrictions. "Women get the Vote," *Living Heritage*, accessed February 24, 2020 <https://bit.ly/30cxD8h>

<sup>35</sup> "A Century of Women – 1920s," *A century of Women*, accessed 20 July 2020, [www.acenturyofwomen.com](http://www.acenturyofwomen.com)

Hobson, who in all probability was still the only accredited architect in Northern Ireland, built two more houses: “Firenze” for her brother Harold Benjamin (1884–1946) in 1925, also in Carnalea (since destroyed), and a cottage for Helen Chenevix (1886-1963) in Killiney, near Dublin around the same time.<sup>36</sup>

While the architecture of “Firenze” was similar to that of her first house, the cottage in Killiney seemed inspired by bungalow architecture rather than by Arts & Crafts architecture. Her client was an Irish Suffragist and trade unionist who founded, together with Louie Bennett (1870–1956), the Irish Women’s Suffrage Federation.<sup>37</sup> It could have been Hobson’s mothers connections that led to this commission, but it could also have been that she met Chenevix through Bennett who had been with the Reconstruction Commission of the Irish White Cross in 1922.<sup>38</sup>

Altogether Hobson built five houses in independent practice and received a few commissions for shop and house alterations, all of which appear to have been related to family members or acquaintances. In 1927 the article “Ireland’s First Woman Architect: Miss Florence F. Hobson” was published in the magazine *The Crystal*. The author, Maire Garvey, argued that “Homes designed *by women for women*”<sup>39</sup> would become the slogan for a coming revolution in house design. She outlined Hobson’s houses as compact and logical in plan to argue that only a woman is capable of creating practical and labor-saving homes. Hers was an attempt to convince readers that women architects have innate abilities which enable them to design practical and user-friendly houses. Garvey was among a number of mostly female proponents of views that assigned women expert knowledge of domestic arrangements and claimed that

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<sup>36</sup> Hobson, *Success Story*.

<sup>37</sup> Vivien Kelly, “Irish Suffragettes at the Time of the Home Rule Crisis”, *History Ireland* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 38.

<sup>38</sup> Irish White Cross, *Report*, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Maire Garvey, “Ireland’s First Woman Architect: Miss Florence F. Hobson,” *The Crystal*, September 1927, 263. The cottage in Killiney is mentioned here and in “A Woman Architect,” *Irish Independent*, May 6, 1932, 5. Neither provide a street address or image but the 1928 entry in *Thom’s Directory* lists Chenevix’ address on Kilmore Road in Killiney so that this house can be assumed to be the cottage Garvey mentioned.

they should be the preferred architects of houses.<sup>40</sup> The argument did, however, limit

Hobson's 1911 aspirations where her aim was self-realization within architecture as a whole and where she wrote:

Many people declare that women should be domestic architects, and that they would no doubt excel in house designing on account of their special knowledge on domestic arrangements, but this is about as far as they are willing to go; any larger sphere of work has probably never presented itself to the minds of the majority of people.<sup>41</sup>

Her efforts to initiate a town planning committee in 1913 indicated too that she was indeed interested in "larger spheres of work". After leaving the Belfast Corporation in 1921 and after not being able to attract independent commissions, Garvey's article utilized nevertheless essentialist reasoning to help Hobson acquire clients. In doing so, she placed Hobson within the above mentioned pre-existing binary system that separated the spheres of men's work and women's work based on perceived natural abilities. This might have been a consequence of Hobson's wish for independence. In 1911, she had reflected on obstacles when becoming an architect, but did not take into consideration consequences she might have to face as an individual who tried to establish a professional identity that would be dissimilar to that of any woman of her background in Belfast. Garvey's article can be interpreted as an attempt to synthesize or reconcile the gap that Hobson created by being a woman and an architect at the same time. In that way, the article utilized essentialist arguments so that Hobson's identity could be perceived as a natural and appropriate one for a woman in architecture.<sup>42</sup>

Hobson's final attempt to gain recognition was a short note in a 1932 newspaper that reminded readers of Hobson:

The opening of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which has been built by a woman architect, Miss Elizabeth Scott, reminds me that Ireland has a successful woman architect in the person of Miss Florence Hobson.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example: Annabel Dott, "The Woman Architect and Her Work," *The Architectural Review* 44, no. 261 (August 1918), 31, S.C.M. "Women as Architects: The Training and the Cost," *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1922, 4. "Woman and the Home," *The Journal*, 19 April 1928, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, "Architecture as a Profession."

<sup>42</sup> On identity formation see Joan W. Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 284-304.

<sup>43</sup> "A Woman Architect," *Irish Independent*, Friday, May 6, 1932.

Neither Garvey's article nor this note had the desired effect; Hobson did not built houses after the cottage in Killiney. During the 1930s she moved to Portrush where she opened a craft shop and retired in 1937.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusions

The example of Charles as the first woman in the RIBA, the support of her mother and family networks helped Hobson to become an architect. Her employment in the Belfast Corporation, efforts to initiate a town planning committee, and the article in *The Queen* and *The Crystal* show that she made use of opportunities to pursue her goal of practicing architecture. Despite her efforts Hobson remained an inconsequential pioneer: her licentiate was not an immediate catalyst for women to choose architecture in Northern Ireland, she did not contribute to the history of Northern Irish architecture with a prolific or innovative portfolio, and did not succeed in establishing a practice that could attract commissions outside the circle of family and acquaintances.

Several factors can be suggested that inhibited her establishing an architectural practice;<sup>45</sup> family networks provided Hobson with some commissions but were not far-reaching enough to lead to further work, war and political turmoil between 1914 and 1923 impacted on the construction industry and will have inhibited young architects in particular. Mass unemployment in Belfast during the 1920s also reduced opportunities for architects and it is possible that Hobson's brother's involvement in the Easter Rising had detrimental effects on her reputation. In addition to these factors, that were shared by most architects at the time, the 1927 article on Hobson not only tried to support her by using essentialist arguments, it also demonstrated the consequences of her transgressing traditions and seeking an independent identity as a woman in architecture – namely that pre-existing notions of what women ought to be and do was incompatible with Hobson's aspiration to be an architect.

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<sup>44</sup> The Institute of British Architects, *The RIBA Kalendar* (London, 1957-8), 613.

<sup>45</sup> Kelly, "Irish Suffragettes", 38ff.

While it was possible to *become* an architect in 1911 when institutional boundaries were in the process of transformation, it was for Hobson not possible to *be* a woman who practiced architecture.

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