

Electrifying Women: Source Packs

Source type: Letters

These three letters between two women are from the Women's Engineering Society (WES) archives held at the [Institution of Engineering and Technology](#) (IET) (IET Archives reference: NAEST 92/04/08/i).

WES was founded in the UK in 1919 to further women's role in engineering and to protect the jobs that were gained for women in World War One. Find more information about the founding of WES [here](#).

The three letters are selected from the correspondence of [Lady Katharine Parsons](#) from March 1919 – June 1919, while she was setting up WES.

One of her letters is to [Caroline Haslett](#), who was the first secretary of WES, then recently appointed by Lady Parsons; Haslett would go on to play a major role in WES's history. The other two letters are unsigned carbon copies of letters from Haslett to Lady Parsons.

Questions to consider:

1. What is the content of the three letters? Why were they written?
2. What is their tone? Is there a difference between how Lady Parsons writes and how Caroline Haslett does?
3. What impression do you get about the relationship between the two women?
4. What can you learn about the early stages of the founding of WES in 1919?
5. More generally, what might these letters tell us about women's place in engineering in the UK in the early 20th century?

Letter 1: Caroline Haslett to Lady Katharine Parsons, 23rd May 1919.

23rd May 1919.

Dear Lady Parsons,

I thank you for your letter of the 21st inst. enclosing two advertisements. I have written to the "Capable Lady", and also to the Education Officer at Richmond.

I note what you say about the Honorary Members. When I first started my book here it seemed necessary to make some distinction, and I decided at the time it would be best to make the distinction according to the subscription paid.

Col. Greig. I thank you for the suggestion you make re shorter technical training for girls rather than a long apprenticeship, and will remember to bring this point up when we interview Col. Greig. Lady Moir rang up this morning to say that it was still very undecided when the Bill would come up in Committee. I told her of your offer to draw up a short memorandum of the work done by Newcastle women, and she said it would be very useful if you would do this, as Col. Greig desires to have as much information as possible. Lady Moir called at the office this week to help to draft a letter to Sir Percy Stothert.

Mrs. Willson has not yet sent me the particulars re the Foremen's Society, and until I receive these particulars I do not think I see very clearly what it is she has in mind.

Thank you for the "Electrician" received this morning. The article by Mr. Wylde is a brief summary of the points discussed at the meeting. I think perhaps a point which needs consideration is how far women will be allowed to work in the shops if they are not members of some trades union.

It seems a great difficulty now to get new members. Most of the people who come to the office now say they feel that engineering for women is practically hopeless and have in most cases decided to take up some other sort of work. I endeavour to make the situation look as hopeful as possible, but evidently not hopeful enough to induce them to join.

As you requested, I telephoned Miss Walkley asking her to send on the two copies of engineering.

Miss Edwards who worked at the Gun Carriage Dept. at Woolwich called this morning and left a short description of her work there. I will send you a copy of this as soon as possible.

Will you please let me know as soon as possible whether you approve of the draft form which I sent you, and also kindly let me know how I should answer the letter from Miss Green of the N.C.W.

Yours truly,

Secretary

Letter 2: Lady Katharine Parsons to Caroline Haslett, May 24th 1919.

STATION - KIRKWHELPINGTON.
TELEGRAMS - KIRKWHELPINGTON.

May 24th

RAY DEMESNE,
KIRKWHELPINGTON,
NORTHUMBERLAND.

Dear Miss Haslett. I quite approve of the draft form
you sent me. Letter from Miss Green. Have not received
it.

Send you letters from Mrs B. Thacker with you value a copy
& return them to me. I think the N.E.C. summer
meeting with help our Society. They are asking lots of women.
Would you like to come? I wish to say your ex. but cannot put
you up. I did not know they wished to have to find a
discussion on my wretched paper. So have given them a list
of names. You could write the Station Hotel for a room.

I too cannot fit members at present! but feel convinced
there is a future. The N.E.C. Institute of Eng: Shipbuilding

Booth Hall

Woolgate Road

Newcastle-on-Tyne

Sunday Fraser Smith Esq

write & ask for programme etc

K Parsons

Transcription of Letter 2 (please send any suggestions to improve this transcription to electrifyingwomen@gmail.com)

Station: Knowesgate

Telegrams: Kirkwhelpington

May 24th [1919] Ray Demesne, Kirkwhelpington, Northumberland

Dear Miss Haslett. I quite approve of the draft form you sent me. Letter from Miss Green.

Have not received it.

I send you letters from [Mrs O Shady]

I will you take a copy and return them to me.

I think the N.E.C. [North East Coast Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders] summer meeting will help our Society... [Try and ask?] Lots of Women.

Would you like to come? I will pay fares [fees?] etc but cannot put you up.

I did not know they wished to [have?] so good a discussion on my wretched paper. I have given them a lot of names.

You could write the Station Hotel for a room.

I too cannot get members at present, but feel convinced there is a future.

The N.E.C. Institution of Eng[ineers], Shipbuilders.

Bolbec Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Secretary Fraser Smith Esq.

Write and ask for programme etc

K Parsons

Dear Lady Parsons,

26th May 1919.

I thank you for your letter of the 24th inst. and for the interesting enclosures. I have taken two copies of each of these and return them to you herewith. The Women Welders certainly seem to have done very wonderful work.

Sir Charles called in this afternoon bringing the letter from Miss Green which I had sent you. He had torn them up by mistake with some of his letters, and had very kindly stuck them together again. I have enclosed them in a separate envelope.

It is very good of you to suggest that I come to Newcastle for N.E.C. Summer Meeting. I shall be most pleased to come, and appreciate very much your kindness. I will write to Mr. Fraser-Smith for programme and also to the Station Hotel for a room.

I am so glad there is going to be such a good discussion on your paper. It will be such a great opportunity to help forward our Movement. Newspaper cuttings arrive here almost every day announcing the fact that you are reading this paper..

I, too, believe there is a great future for the woman engineer, but unfortunately many of the women who come here now seem to be lacking in imagination and incapable of looking ahead.

There is one new member this morning - her name is enclosed on a separate sheet of paper. Also I called to see Miss Borthwick on Friday and she will probably join this week. She took me over her workshops and told me some of her plans for the future. I think perhaps I shall be able to arrange for one of our members to go to her as Car Demonstrator.

Yours truly,

The Hon. Lady Parsons.