

Caroline Haslett 125th birthday commemoration – outline of video #2.

Start with juxtaposed images of (Dame) Caroline Haslett and U.K. three pin plug.

Here we have two images, one is Dame Carline Haslett, and the other is the three pin plug, used in the United Kingdom – but what, you may ask is the connection between them and why does the British plug design have such a prominent third pin (uniquely large in the world)?

Well - this earth pin is a safety feature promoted by Ms Haslett to prevent electric shocks from faulty equipment or wiring. She proposed this during World War 2. But the story begins two decades earlier.

Caroline helped to found the Electrical Association for Women in 1924, and a concern for safety in adopting electricity was one of her highest priorities. She wanted to persuade domestic consumers (especially women) that electricity was actually safe enough to have in their home.

Why so? There were many well-publicised stories of injury or death by electric shock from early electrical installations. So there was a reluctance by many to abandon gas and candles - which at least had risks that were familiar to users - for the new and unfamiliar source of electricity. Caroline sought to overcome this scepticism. During the 1930s she was active in several organisations dedicated to promoting safety in public and private domains.

The main story goes back to World War 2. In 1941 Caroline Haslett was President of the Women's Engineering Society. By then, after the worst phase of the London Blitz, plans were already being made for rebuilding bomb-shattered Britain once the war was over.

The Minister of Works and Planning, Lord Reith set up an Electrical Installations Committee and invited Caroline Haslett to join it. This was both in her capacity as President of the Women's Engineering Society and as Britain's leading expert on domestic electrical safety.

In fact she was the only woman on that twenty person committee, and the only safety expert too.

Before the war was over that committee produced one of the longest lasting safety innovations of the wartime period: a design for electrical plugs and sockets focused on safety (not just on convenience, cheapness or efficiency). Apart from the very substantial earth pin, the design was particularly focused on child safety in the home. It was engineered so that the socket's electrical contacts were prevented from causing harm if accidentally touched by wandering fingers or toys... Arguably, it was and still is the safest electrical plug design in the world.

In June 1947 the Government published the new British standard BS 1363 'Fused-Plugs and Shuttered Socket-Outlets' with a few further additions this design is still in use. Its safety features were the product of Caroline Haslett's unique technological expertise. In the rebuilding of post-war Britain that plug design became eventually a feature of every single household in the country – everyone watching this video will have benefitted from her work!

After Caroline Haslett's untimely death in 1957, this plug became an emblem of the Electrical Association for Women and is on the cover of its best-selling volume The E.A.W. Electrical Handbook e.g. 9th edition 1971.

The important story - of how numerous deaths have been avoided by electrical safety has nearly been forgotten - except in Caroline's home town of Crawley.

So let's help Crawley commemorate Caroline Haslett on her 125th birthday, 17th August 2020, and support the campaign to fund a permanent monument to her achievements.