Why Do Women Like Working In Building Conservation?

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The Study

The study draws on the reasons women are attracted to Building Conservation and questions whether other areas within the construction industry could learn from Building Conservation to address a major skills shortage.

Women in the Workforce

- Women make up 50% of the UK working population (Williams et al 2002)
- Women represented just 7% of engineering & technology occupations in the UK in 1994
- Just a 1% rise since 1979 (ONS 1995)
- The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) placed it at 8.6% in 2002 across all positions
  - 1% Trade, 10% Professional, 84% Secretarial, 2% Sole Traders

Encouraging Women into Construction

- RICS – Raising the Ratio
- RIBA – Why do Women Leave Architecture?
- CITB – Working towards a 10% year on year increase in participation

Aims of the Study

- To find out if it is possible that those working in Building Conservation have attained a way of working that is more attractive to women
- To find out how young people could be attracted to a career in this area

Targeted Research Groups

- Women working within Building Conservation
- School students (male & female) making their university course and career choices at a local school
Research Methodology

- Qualitative research
- Semi-structured questionnaires to both target groups

Study of Women in Building Conservation

- Targeted at women of all ages working within all aspects of building conservation
  - Including Architects, Building Surveyors, Conservation Officers, Trades and Crafts Women

Questionnaire aimed to discover:
- How long the women had been working in conservation
- Whether they had previously worked within the construction industry
- What attracted them to the profession
- Whether they believe conservation is heavily dominated by men, and if not why are the reasons for this?

Sample of Women

- SPAB and RICS Conservation Forum for a list of female members – Data Protection Act prevents disclosing this information
- Internet database listing Architects working in Building Conservation – 10 women
- Newspaper and Internet articles – 5 women
- MSc Heritage Management SHU – 5 women
- Limited sample however 115% response rate

Students at The Dronfield School
Students at The Dronfield School

- Focused on 17 and 18 year olds at a local school and their knowledge of building conservation
- Aimed to look at how young people might best be informed about a career in this area
- It was hoped that the findings would help increase the number of people entering the conservation sector by looking at the way young people are recruited.

Questionnaire to Sixth Form Students

- 60 questionnaires between 4 classes
- Art, Design Technology, History and Geography
- Questionnaires addressed:
  - subjects studied and preferred career choice
  - whether building conservation would be considered as a career
  - the best way of educating people about a career in building conservation

Analysis of the Data

- The results were analysed using two techniques
  1. Closed ended questions - Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)
  2. Open ended questions – compiled, compared and trends identified
- Sampling – does the research sample represent the whole population of women working in building conservation?
- Proportions of participants mirrored the ratios of women working in different sectors of building conservation

Women in Building Conservation

- The results show that 13 out of the 23 participants had previously worked elsewhere in construction and 8 of these for less than 5 yrs
- Unhappy in construction or using it as a stepping stone into conservation?

Career Choice of Students

- 58% return rate of questionnaires from students
- 71% male, 29% female
- 77% plan to go to university

Career Graph
Why do Women Choose Building Conservation?
- 87% - personal interest
- 13% - work circumstances
- Women are attracted to building conservation through architecture, history, surveying, crafts and archaeology
- None were attracted to financial gains

Characteristics Graph

Is Building Conservation Male Dominated?
- 61% disagreed that building conservation was male dominated
- 39% agreed, however most of these women had previously worked in the construction industry

Why is Conservation Different?
- Requires ‘sensitivity’, ‘patience’, ‘care’, ‘consideration’ and ‘attention to detail’
- ‘Less cut-throat’, ‘less egotistical’ and is ‘less about business’ than construction
- Less about ‘work which can be seen’ and more about being ‘discrete’

Sexual Discrimination
- Are young people deterred from entering a profession dominated by the opposite sex?
  - 97% said NO
  - 3% said YES (surprising male student)
- Have women in conservation experienced sexual discrimination at work?
  - 87% NO
  - 13% YES
  - “Conservation is a relatively young sector of the industry, perhaps it doesn’t have some of the ingrained attitudes as a hangover from the days when women’s roles were limited”

How can Young People be Encouraged to Take up a Career in Building Conservation?
- Building conservation is quite different from other areas of construction and is attractive to women and others who are put off by the macho image construction holds
- There is a major shortage of people working in all areas of conservation
- The image of construction deters many before they reach building conservation
- Conservation should stand on its own two feet when recruiting
How can Young People be Encouraged to Take up a Career in Building Conservation?
- Once informed of the nature of building conservation, 43% of students said they would consider a career in it.
- 49% were interested in doing some work experience in building conservation.
- Miss out the hurdle of the construction industry.

Educating Students about Building Conservation
- Main influence of career choice was personal interest and knowing someone in the profession.
- Most students said they were most influenced towards a career if they have a visit to the school.
- A personal connection can have an inspirational trigger.
- Less effective were career advisors, career event stands and career information databases.

Conclusions to the Study
- The aspects that attract women are not the traditional aspects of the construction industry.
- Money is not an incentive but passion for the work is.
- Students from conservation related subjects show willingness to consider a career and carry out work experience in this area.

Conclusions to the Study
- Promoting conservation through art and history rather than through construction would dramatically increase the chances of wider participation by individuals put off by the image construction still portrays.
- Could other areas within the construction industry, e.g., Surveying, follow this example?