



PIONEERS *in* PICTURES

In 2018, a century after women first won the vote, a unique collection of 100 photographic portraits will be unveiled. First Women will showcase women who were first in their field of achievement – all captured by photographer Anita Corbin...

Six years ago, Anita Corbin was approaching her 50th birthday. Despite being a successful editorial photographer for *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* for more than 30 years, she knew she wanted to do something more, to create a body of work that would be a lasting legacy.

At the time, Anita was a member of a group of six professional women, who met regularly to discuss their business struggles. 'I was nearing 50, the mother of twins aged 14, and this group gave me the space and time to think about my photography again, not motherhood, as my role as a mother became less demanding. It was at one of these meetings that the seed of First Women was planted.'

Anita wanted to create a photographic archive of trailblazers – 100 women who, in the century since women won the right to vote, had become 'first women', pioneers in their field.

So far, Anita has photographed 58 women – keeping the identities of many under wraps until the collection's



launch in 2018. Some, though, have been revealed. And they make an impressive line-up.

Anita's first subject was Sarah Outen, the first woman to row solo across the Indian Ocean. 'I actually contacted Sarah by email when she was midway through the attempt. But I didn't mention that I'd like to photograph her for the First Women project until she'd reached Mauritius. I didn't want to jinx it!'

Charlotte Budd is another of the women that Anita affectionately calls her 'firsts'. Back in 1977, Charlotte became the first woman ever to ride in the Grand National, which became possible only with the passing of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act.

Such sportswomen and adventurers naturally feature highly – another is Felicity Aston, the first woman to ski solo across Antarctica. But there are many more: Lieutenant Becky Frater, the first woman to fly in the Royal Navy's Black Cats helicopter team; Jane Atkinson, the first woman in the world to manage a blast furnace; geologist Angela Strank,

Left: Photographer Anita Corbin is creating an archive of First Women, including Sarah Outen (below left) and Lieutenant Becky Frater (right)





BE PART OF IT

If you have family photographs of women at work, rest or play in the decades since 1918, immortalise them through Anita's archive. Simply scan your photo, along with a handwritten caption and the approximate date, and email it to info@1stwomenuk.co.uk.

Anita is still researching First Women for the remaining portraits. 'Some are more difficult to find,' she says, 'for example, women in the forces. So if *Townswoman* readers have a relative who is a first in their field, please let me know. And I'd love to hear from possible "firsts" from far-flung parts of the UK.'

Anita – who is based in Somerset – also gives talks and presentations. Contact her on info@1stwomenuk.co.uk.



First women (clockwise from far left): Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin (documentary image); Jane Atkinson; Baroness Betty Boothroyd; Charlotte Budd; Felicity Aston

the first woman vice president of BP; Angela Rippon, the first woman newscaster; and Baroness Betty Boothroyd, the first woman speaker of the House of Commons (also the First Women project's patron).

One recent subject is a long-distance swimmer (who Anita joined in the water to photograph). Plus, she has photographed the first woman to receive equal pay, the first woman to become a surrogate mother and the first woman head cutter in Savile Row... 'But there are still places to be filled,' she says. 'I want to include "firsts" from all walks of life – medicine, business, the arts, engineering – especially those that have broken barriers in male-dominated sectors.'

When asked which subject is her favourite, Anita diplomatically answers that she loves them all for different reasons. But she does admit that one had a particular impact on her – Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin, the first woman Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. 'I often take some documentary pictures of my subjects, as well as the portrait, so I went with

Anita wanted to create a photographic archive of trailblazers – 100 women who had become First Women, pioneers in their field

Rev Rose to her inner-city parish in London's Dalston. The contrast between her work in the community and her work in the House of Commons was immense. Here was a woman who didn't just talk the talk, but walked the walk.'

Anita's mission is to both secure the images of these women in history and inspire young women to see beyond traditional stereotypes and believe they can achieve anything. So, as well as a prestigious exhibition launch in 2018 and a glossy book of all the images, Anita is planning to take the portraits around the

country, to schools and town halls, to inspire a future generation.

However, Anita recognises that – alongside the leaps made by these pioneers – women's everyday lives have been changing beyond all recognition since 1918. So she is also planning a photographic archive on the www.1stwomenuk.org website chronicling women's lives – and to which she would like *Townswoman* to contribute (see above).

There is a personal reason that Anita has focused on women's achievements since being granted the vote – and it is one that will resonate with members of TG, which grew out of the suffragist movement. 'My great-grandmother and her husband were freethinkers, involved in the great political movements of the early 20th century,' explains Anita. 'And they were passionate supporters of the suffragists. So this project is also a tribute to those in my family who helped changed women's lives.'

Find out more about the project at www.1stwomenuk.org

