

MAGNIFICENT WOMEN:

Claudia Parsons

Claudia Parsons was a pioneering engineer, intrepid traveller, and author. She was one of the very first women in England to graduate in engineering and later became the first woman to 'circumnavigate the globe by car'.



15 August 1900 – 5 June 1998

Engineering Training

- Claudia Parsons was born into an Anglo Indian military family in Simla but was brought up in England.
- In 1919 Claudia found out from the newly formed **Women's Engineering Society** that Diploma courses in Engineering were being introduced at Loughborough Technical College (now Loughborough University). She applied and was accepted, one of only three women engineering students in the whole college.
- The College was used to women workers for during the First World War it had served as an Instructional Factory for the Ministry of Munitions, training over 2,300 workers, mostly women.
- In addition to lectures all engineering students had to complete practical training in the College workshops, clocking in and out, just as in a commercial factory.
- Claudia Parsons graduated from Loughborough with a Diploma in Automobile Engineering in 1922.

Round the World and After

Claudia became a paid chauffeur-companion, driving clients through the most far-flung parts of Europe, America, India, and the Far East, doing her own maintenance and repairs. In Delhi in 1938 she bought a second-hand Studebaker car and with the American anthropologist Kilton Stewart, travelled back to England via Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and France, thus completing her journey round the world.

When the Second World War broke out Claudia took a course in workshop practice for women munitions workers, devised by her old friend **Verena Holmes**, whom she had met at Loughborough. She worked as a machinist in a munitions factory in London and later became a Munitions Factory Inspector. In later life, though she never gave up her love of motors or travelling, she became a skilled china restorer.

Claudia was described as 'one who had broken the ice of convention that held women down to certain jobs, but denied them others, and at a time when to the majority of people the world was unknown.'

Further information

Useful resources:

- [Obituary: Claudia Parsons - Arts & Entertainment - The Independent](#)
- [Claudia Parsons \(Open Library\)](#)
- [January | Inspirational space scientist gives open lecture at Loughborough University](#)

On the Shop Floor at Loughborough

Claudia wrote: 'our trouser overalls excited much attention, but we were forced to wear terrible caps in the machine shops on account of the dangerous belting from the overhead drive. Few machines were then electrically driven.'

