

Can she fix it?

Yes she can! As **Julie Bindel** discovers, female builders are in huge demand – but can they ever compete with the tea-slurping boys?



'We get a lot of respect' ... builders Louise Horwood and colleague at work in Milton Keynes

- 1 Of all the construction workers employed at London's Wembley Stadium, what percentage would you guess are women? Five? Ten? Twenty at a push? How about 0.05%? "Out of 10,000," notes Karen Procter, director of the national organisation, Women and Manual Trades (WAMT), "between three and five are women."
- 2 It's a statistic that seems even more shocking when you consider that, in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics in London, Britain is short of 350,000 builders. Across the building trade, women account for fewer than 1% of workers, making the building site still very much a man's domain – what Procter describes as 'the last bastion of sexist discrimination in the workplace'.
- 3 The government belatedly seems to have taken notice. Education Secretary Alan Johnson recently reserved £20m for training women in construction. Whether this will be enough remains to be seen.
- 4 Amid all this bad news, though, there are a few success stories. Plasterer Janet Shelley says that she has always wanted to "do things that people think are impossible", and so set up Women Builders, a company that now employs the UK's largest female construction workforce – 14 full-time builders. "We have no problems filling vacancies," says Shelley. "There are lots more women wanting to work in the trade than there are jobs."
- 5 So I set off for Milton Keynes, where Women Builders set up three years ago. Women Builders are renovating a local village school, ripping out kitchens and rebuilding walls. I meet Louise Horwood, a 20-year-old carpenter. "I always wanted to be a builder," she tells me, "but my dad, who is in the trade, was dead against it." After leaving school, Horwood briefly tried hairdressing college, but hated it. "I had never been so bored in all my life," she says, "and my dad's pressure on me only made me more determined." She entered the world of construction aged just 16 and at first struggled to cope. "Men would harassingly say, 'Don't break your nails on that, love, it's too heavy.' But I kept going and now I'm one of them."
- 6 Janet Shelley works closely with WAMT – which represents and supports women working and training in skilled manual and craft occupations – to try to establish better working practices and reduce discrimination. When WAMT

began in 1975, small numbers of middle-class, white, educated women entered the trade partly to protest at women's exclusion. Today, however, 60% of members are black, and have similar class backgrounds to their male counterparts. "Most of these women are moving out of manual jobs like cleaning and catering into trades where they can earn four times as much," says Procter.

7 Women Builders is never short of work, but there is still the occasional customer who does not understand the kind of firm they are. "Sometimes you turn up for a job at someone's house, or business, and the highly surprised client will say to us, 'Oh, you really are women!'"

8 Shelley and Horwood say that when they are on a building site, people will stop and openly stare at them. Some will shout and ask what they are doing. "We are at the stage with women construction workers today that we were 25 years ago with male nurses," Procter believes. "In a few years, it will be far more common to see women in hard hats up on scaffolding."

9 If women in building are to really flourish, organisations such as WAMT say, it is crucial that the opportunity offered by the 2012 Olympics isn't wasted. "We will see how keen the government is to end the extreme levels of sexism and discrimination in the building trade," says Procter, "and we expect to see many more women encouraged and trained to work on building sites, alongside men who treat them as equals." A tall order, maybe, but these women certainly know how to stand up to the big boys.

- 1p 22 According to paragraphs 1 and 2, what is meant by "the last bastion of sexist discrimination"? (end paragraph 2)
- A London's Wembley Stadium
 - B the building site
 - C the Olympics
 - D the WAMT
- 1p 23 Which of the following is true for Janet Shelley according to paragraph 4?
- A She has to put great effort into finding suitable workers.
 - B She herself also works in the building trade.
 - C She is not a very enterprising person.
 - D She is struggling to make her company profitable.
- 1p 24 What becomes clear about Louise Horwood from paragraph 5?
- A She had to work very hard to be seen as equal by her male colleagues.
 - B She had worked as a hairdresser for years before she took up building.
 - C She only started on a building course after the death of her father.
 - D She still has a problem with some of the remarks made at work.

- 2p 25 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen over de organisatie WAMT aan of deze juist of onjuist is op grond van alinea 6.
Omcirkel 'juist' of 'onjuist' in je uitwerkbijlage.
De organisatie
- 1 zet zich ook in tegen discriminatie van vrouwen in de bouw.
 - 2 ondersteunde helemaal in het begin alleen laagopgeleide vrouwen.
 - 3 vertegenwoordigt op dit moment voor het grootste deel zwarte vrouwen.
 - 4 helpt vrouwen meer te verdienen dan ze in de schoonmaak of horeca doen.
- 1p 26 “Oh, you really are women!” (end of paragraph 7)
What does this reaction point out about the customers of ‘Women Builders’?
- A Not all of them realise that ‘Women Builders’ employs only women.
 - B Some of them refuse to believe that women can build houses.
 - C They have made clear they strongly prefer men to do the job.
 - D They think the female builders employed by ‘Women Builders’ look a lot like men.
- 1p 27 ‘...can they ever compete with the tea-slurping boys?’ (introduction)
Karen Procter answers this question in paragraph 9.
What does her answer come down to?
- A In future men and women will definitely work together as equals on building sites.
 - B The 2012 Olympics will hopefully function as a positive turning point.
 - C The government is unwilling to change its policy to achieve this equality.
 - D Women will always be discriminated against in construction work.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.