

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE0586

## Downing, Cecilia

(1858 - 1952)

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**Born** 13 January, 1858, Islington London England

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**Died** 30 August, 1952, Ivanhoe Victoria Australia

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**Occupation** Community worker, Women's rights activist

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### Summary

Cecilia Downing was a leading figure in the Victorian women's movement in the early twentieth century, spreading her activities and influence over an enormous range of organisations. The daughter of Isaac and Mary (née Morgan) Hopkins, Downing was born in London and came to Australia in 1858. She obtained her Teaching Certificate from the Training Institution in Carlton and taught at Portarlinton before marrying John Downing in 1885. The couple returned to Melbourne in 1901. Although she had seven children, Cecilia became heavily involved in women's groups and welfare work. She was one of Victoria's first child probation officers (1907) and was an officer bearer with both the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Australian Women's National League. From the 1920s, she devoted her energies to the Housewives Association (having become one of its earliest members in 1917) and served as its federal president from 1940-45 and Victorian president from 1938 until her death in 1952. On 8 June 1950 Cecilia Downing was appointed a Member of the British Empire for social welfare services in Victoria.

### Details

A member of the Collins Street Baptist Church for 46 years, she helped establish their Women's Guild in 1910 and the Victorian Baptist Women's Association in 1926. In 1935 she was elected foundation president of the Women's Board of the Baptist Union of Australia. She was also honorary secretary of the National Council of Women of Victoria (1928-1935) and foundation president of the National Travellers' Aid Society (1944), having been an executive member of the Victorian Society since 1920. During WWII she was also involved with the Australian Comforts Fund, the Victorian Council of Women's Emergency Service and the War Loan and War Savings Certificates Committee.

### Events

#### 1912 - 1915

President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union

#### 1932 - 1941

Secretary, Baptist Women's Association, Victoria

#### 1934 - 1943

President, Collins Street Baptist Women's Guild

#### 1935 - 1938

President of the Australian Baptist Women's Board

#### 1928 - 1928

Australian Delegate to the Baptist World Alliance Conference in Toronto

#### 1928 - 1928

Australian Delegate to the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Lausanne

#### 1941 - 1942

President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

**1970 - 1970**

Married John Downing, they had seven children

**1909 - 1909**

Recording secretary of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Victoria

**1911 - 1911**

Founding superintendent of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's immigration department

**1907 - 1907**

One of the government's first child-probation officers

**1906 - 1906**

Joined the Collins Street Baptist Church

**1917 - 1917**

Vice-president of the Housewives' Co-operative Association (later Housewives' Association of Victoria)

**1928 - 1936**

Honorary Secretary, National Council of Women of Victoria

**2040 - 1945**

President, Federated Association of Australian Housewives

**1920 - 1932**

Executive Member, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

**1945 - 1945**

President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

**1944 - 1944**

President, National Travellers' Aid Society

**1938 - 1952**

President, Housewives Association of Victoria

**1947 - 1947**

President, National Travellers' Aid Society

**1949 - 1951**

President of the Federated Association of Australian Housewives

**1932 - 1940**

Junior Vice President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

## Published resources

### Resource Section

Founder of the Women's Board - Cecilia Downing, Baptist Union of Australia, 1987,  
<http://www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org/bua-bio.htm#downing>

Downing, Cecilia (1858 - 1952), Smart, Judith, 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140031b.htm>

### Edited Book

Who's Who in Australia 1950, Alexander, Joseph A, 1950

Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, Dickey, Brian, 1994

### Journal Article

A sacred trust: Cecilia Downing, Baptist faith and feminist citizenship, Smart, Judith, 1995

'For the good that we can do': Cecilia Downing and feminist Christian citizenship, Smart, Judith, 1994

A Mission to the Home: The Housewives Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920-1940, Smart, Judith, 1998

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

### State Library of Victoria

[National Council of Women of Victoria](#)

[Minute books, 1850-1983. \[manuscript\]](#)

[Records, 1939-1985. \[manuscript\].](#)

### National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Minutes \[1904-1960\] \[microform\]](#)

### The University of Melbourne Archives

[Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria](#)

### Australian Historic Records Register

[Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria Inc. : community organisation records](#)

### Author Details

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