The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3121

Osborn, Betty Olive

(1934 - 2020)

Born	19340101
Died	20201210, Maryborough Victoria Australia
Occupation	Historian, Journalist, Print journalist

Summary

An accomplished journalist and local historian, Betty Osborn (then Betty Roberts) was known as the ‘girl reporter’ of the *Argus* newspaper in the 1950s.

Details

In 1951, a young Betty Roberts took herself to the *Argus* offices to enquire about a career in journalism. She was advised to complete her matriculation at University High School, keep up her typing and short-hand, and return the following year. Betty began work as a secretary for the *Weekend Magazine* at the *Argus* in 1952, and noted that – unusually – men and women journalists were being paid equally. That year, she wrote a report for the paper on the itinerants living at Melbourne's Dudley Flats (now the exclusive Docklands development site), who survived by scavenging from the tip. She took photographs for the feature herself, using her mother's box brownie camera.

Feeling there was little prospect for a career in journalism, Betty enrolled to do a Bachelor of Laws at the University of Melbourne, but on the eve of her first week as a law clerk was offered a cadetship with the social pages of the *Argus*. She accepted, but continued at the university as a part-time Arts student. She remembers, on returning to the *Argus*: 'Virginia Gerrett, of Sydney, was in charge of the Social pages… She had replaced Gladys Hain much to the consternation of all the women journalists who considered Freda Irving as the heir apparent. Freda cooled her heels briefly on the *Weekend Magazine* where her deep voice would often have telephone callers referring to her as "Peter Irving". This greatly appealed to her sense of humour.'

Under Freda Irving, Betty worked with Kath Coyne, Grace Hutchinson, Cynthia Strachan, Elaine Young and Julie Sparrow. In addition to the usual social pages fare, Irving encouraged her young proteges to investigate stories of importance to women, and to write detailed profiles of women in the news. The cadets were expected to look the part, with hats, gloves, and appropriate evening wear when necessary. In 1955, Betty Roberts won the Australian Journalists' Association's Montague Grover Prize for cadet journalists. She was soon transferred to the general staff:

For a start I didn't have to worry about hats and gloves any more. Ellie Knox, the Town Hall roundswoman, and I were the only women in a sea of men, young and old. The newsroom was a vast open space with the day chief of staff Laurie Kerr's office at one end, an array of reporters' desks in the middle and the subs tables at the northern end where a door led to the printery. Once opened, the noise of the old linotype machines could be heard clattering away and in the distance the compositors could be glimpsed, quietly going about arranging their leaden trays of type. How close we all were, journalists and printers, bringing out the news of the world to the people of Melbourne.

Betty was assigned to cover nearly every session of the Legislative Assembly as a gallery reporter in 1956 – 'competition was fierce and I can remember being absolutely appalled when I came upon the *Sun* political roundsman rifling through Lance [Loader]'s papers one day' – and made the most of the parliamentary library for her studies. She remembers: 'There was not one woman in the Victorian Legislative Assembly that year and the only woman I recall coming into the press gallery was Rose Kinson from the *Sun*'. Outside of parliament, Betty was given a number of reporting tasks, including coverage of a Coroner's Court case in which Frank Galbally was representing an Italian man whose wife had been stabbed to death.

To her delight, Betty Roberts was assigned to cover the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. She spent a great deal of time at the Olympic Village in Heidelberg, chasing up stories on famous (and infamous) international athletes. Just six weeks after the closing day of the Games, the *Argus* folded. Betty wrote for the *Sun*, but the *Argus* was the paper she truly loved. She returned to full time study at the University of Melbourne.

After marrying Bruce Osborn, Betty moved to Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. Here began her abiding interest in local history. By 1971 she had published *A History of Holy Trinity, Bacchus Marsh* (republished 1977). In 1973, she published *The Bacchus Story: A History of Captain W.H. Bacchus and his Son*. That same year, the Osborns moved to Maryborough with their four children: Robyn, Diana, Cathy and Philip. Betty became a member of the Midlands Historical Society, and for three years she edited the Wimmera-Mallee edition of the *Country Bulletin*. She was also a columnist for the *Maryborough Advertiser*. With local resident Trenear DuBourg, Betty was commissioned by the Maryborough City Council to produce a history of the region, and in 1985 they published *Maryborough: A Social History 1854-1904*. Ten years later Osborn completed its sequel, *Against the Odds: Maryborough 1905-1961*, again by commission from what had then become the Central Goldfields Shire Council.

Betty Osborn was a life member of the Bacchus Marsh and District Historical Society, and a member of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

Events

1952 - 1980
Career in journalism active

1952 - 1980
Career in journalism active

Published resources

Book
Maryborough: A Social History 1854-1904, DuBourg, Trenear and Betty Osborn, 1985

Against the Odds: Maryborough 1905-1961, Osborn, Betty, 1995

Site Exhibition
The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details
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