

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4841

Bailey, Editha Olga Yseult

(1903 - 1980)

Born	19030703, London England
Died	19800801, Chawton Hampshire England
Occupation	Community Leader, Potter

Summary

Yseult Bailey became active in the kindergarten movement from her arrival in Canberra during World War II and she continued to take a leading role in organisations to further the interests of women and children, including the National Council of Women and the Young Women's Christian Association, for the next twenty years. She was founding president of the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society, representing the Society on the National Council of Women (ACT) of which she became president. After the formation of the national Australian Pre-School Association she became president and in the early 1960s she was president of the YWCA (Canberra). She brought to these roles a rigorous mind, communication skills and great organising ability. Simultaneously she studied pottery becoming an accomplished potter.

Details

Editha Olga Yseult Donnison was born on 3 July 1903 in London into a musical family. She was educated at the renowned independent school for girls, Wycombe Abbey, and studied sculpture at the Slade, a school of art attached to University College, London. Through her brother Vernon Donnison who was at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, she met his fellow student Kenneth Bailey, a Rhodes Scholar from Melbourne. On 12 August 1925 at Queen's College Chapel at the University of Melbourne, despite opposition from her mother, she married Kenneth Bailey, who had been appointed the College's Vice-Master and was later Dean of the University's Law School. In Melbourne in the 1930s and early 1940s, as a young mother of three sons, Yseult Bailey was active in the Kindergarten Union of Victoria, the establishment of the Lady Gowrie Centre for pre-school education and the University Women's Wartime Nursery.

When the family moved to Canberra late in 1942, where Professor Bailey was Consultant to the Commonwealth Government and later head of the Attorney-General's Department, Yseult was welcomed by Canberra women anxious to establish a kindergarten in the city. Within a few months of her arrival she was a member of a delegation to the Minister for Health and Social Services, E J Holloway, seeking the establishment of a nursery school in Canberra to free mothers for war work. Although she had been involved with a similar school in Melbourne, the deputation gained no support from the Minister. Subsequently, the emphasis changed to seeking provision of a nursery kindergarten and Yseult Bailey and two other members of the deputation were invited to Government House to advise Lady Gowrie on progress. As a result, a provisional pre-school committee was formed on 7 July 1943 with Yseult Bailey as president. She continued in this role when the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society (later the Canberra Pre-School Society) was formally constituted in November 1943. From the outset she was remarkably active. On one occasion when she needed to discuss the provision of pre-schools with the NSW Director-General of Education and discovered that he was leaving by train, she went to the railway station, bought a ticket to Queanbeyan and engaged the captive official in ten minutes' conversation. She was prominent in the formation of the Australian Pre-School Association, served as president, was made a life member and remained an honorary life vice-president until her death. She was appointed OBE in the New Year Honours in 1961, for her work for pre-school education.

From its inauguration, Yseult represented the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society on the National Council of Women (ACT) becoming vice-president in 1944 and serving as president from 1947 to 1950. Her term was marked by her great ability to create an environment in which other women were activated and grew in confidence and ability to achieve and take charge. One of her most satisfying achievements was the establishment of an Emergency Housekeeper Service, which she regarded as a vital need to assist families in emergencies. In a move typical of her approach to government, she collected information on similar schemes in the states before presenting a case for government support. One of her first roles as president was to accept responsibility for the administration of the Emergency Housekeeper Scheme following the approval of a government grant-in-aid. During her presidency the Council also lobbied for the establishment of a District Nursing Service, the first nursing sister being appointed in 1950.

In all her approaches to government she was an advocate for the preparation of positive, incisive, and specific suggestions towards the solution of problems. In the absence of this type of submission, she believed, there was no point in protesting to government.

Yseult Bailey was president of the Canberra YWCA from 1961 to 1964, a period of rapid growth in Canberra, during which the executive decided to redevelop the YWCA site, an ambitious project which presented many financial challenges. Detailed planning, which began during Yseult's presidency, eventually resulted in a six-storey centre built through an arrangement with a commercial developer. During her presidential term Yseult Bailey also worked towards reorganising the Association and securing new leadership.

Within weeks of arriving in Canberra, Yseult Bailey began taking pottery lessons from Eilean Giblin, a neighbour, who had established a studio pottery in 1940. Like Yseult she had been educated at Wycombe Abbey and her husband, Professor L F Giblin, had been a fellow professor with Kenneth Bailey at the University of Melbourne. When funds were needed to establish the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten, Yseult Bailey's nursery school project, both women donated 'Giblin Pots' for sale and when the Kindergarten opened in 1944 it was stocked with handmade earthenware pipkins for the children's orange juice. The pipkins were made from local clay thrown on the Giblin wheel, fired in the Giblin kiln and marked by potters 'Giblin and Bailey'. After Eilean Giblin left Canberra, Yseult Bailey continued potting at her home. A piece of pottery she made especially for the occasion from clay excavated from the building site was presented to Princess Anne on 24 April 1970 as a souvenir of her visit to the site of the new YWCA building in Canberra and other pieces were sold to raise funds for the YWCA.

From 1963 to 1969 Lady Bailey lived in Ottawa where her husband was High Commissioner to Canada.

She died on 1 August 1980 at Chawton, Hampshire while visiting England. A service of memory and thanksgiving was held on 7 August 1980 at St Paul's Church of England, Manuka, where she had been an active parishioner. Following a funeral service at the parish church in Chawton on 8 August 1980, her ashes were placed with her husband's in St Paul's churchyard, Manuka.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Newspaper Article

Obituary, 1980

Book

A Work in Progress: A History of the YWCA of Canberra 1929-2009, Hutchison, Mary and Andrew, Merrindahl, 2009

Capital women : a history of the work of the National Council of Women (A.C.T.) in Canberra, 1939-1979, Stephenson, Freda, 1992

Journal Article

A short story about a long time 1943-1988, Rudduck, Loma, 1989

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Lyndhurst Falkiner Giblin 1885-1965 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers of Loma Rudduck, 1944-1968 \[manuscript\]](#)

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Lady Yseult Bailey interviewed by Mel Pratt for the Mel Pratt collection \[sound recording\]](#)

Author Details

Patricia Clarke

Created 4 December 2012

Last modified 23 October 2015