**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** AWE4866

# Masters, Isabel A.

(1912 - 2000)

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| **Born** | 19120820, Northam District Western Australia Australia |
| **Died** | 20000724, Nedlands Western Australia Australia |
| **Occupation** | Principal, Teacher |

## Summary

Isabel Masters was born in Western Australia in 1912. She graduated from university in 1934 with Honours in English and taught at Kobeelya Girls' Grammar School in Katanning, Western Australia, Ascham Girls' School in Sydney, New South Wales and Merton Hall (now Melbourne Girls' Grammar School) in Melbourne, Victoria before becoming principal of Canberra Girls' Grammar School in 1947. She retired in 1962, having overseen the doubling in size of what was described as a 'happy' school.

## Details

Isobel Masters was educated at Perth College, where she was a member of the Girl Guides. She was thirty-five when she became headmistress of Canberra Girls' Grammar. She was an experienced English teacher, had been a member of the Shakespeare Club in Western Australia and a boarding house mistress at Merton Hall in Melbourne. Like her predecessor, Una Mitchell, she could turn her hand to other subjects when required. In addition to English, she also taught German and Religious Instruction, among other subjects.

Enrolments at the school nearly doubled during the fifteen years Masters spent at Canberra Girls' Grammar. This required the physical expansion of the school and Masters oversaw the conversion of ex-Army huts into classrooms and a library as well as encouraging parents, teachers and students to assist in painting classrooms, covering Chapel kneelers and sewing curtains. She was also a keen gardener and probably found relaxation in tending the school roses, which blossomed under her care. During her time at Canberra Girls' Grammar, a wider range of courses, particularly vocational ones including Domestic Science and Dressmaking and in the 1950s some senior classes were combined with the Boys' Grammar School. Her staff were dedicated, although not particularly well-paid, according to one staff member, who recalled that when the basic wage was introduced for women, their pay had to be increased to be level with those of the domestics. Nevertheless neither did she know how she got the job teaching geography, with no teacher training and no geography beyond Junior level. Perhaps it was because she too was a Perth College old girl.

Masters was poised and well-groomed, as was expected of a woman in her position in that era, but she also seemed to understand the importance of having fun, or perhaps of publicity. She made the most of the celebrations for the school's twenty-first anniversary in May 1948 and subsequently introduced other celebratory days, Founders' Day, Shakespeare Day and the Combined Grammar Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. All of these not only provided enjoyment for students but were also an ideal opportunity to promote the school within the wider community, no doubt contributing to the expansion of the student population. Upon her retirement in 1961 she was praised not only for the expansion of the school but also in creating its 'happy atmosphere', in which 'no appeal for assistance has gone unanswered'. Masters died in July 2000, according to records in the Canberra Girls' Grammar School Archives.

## Published resources

**Book**
A Light in the Bush: The Canberra Church of England Girls' Grammar School and the capital city of Australia, 1926-1977, Waterhouse, Jill, 1978

**Magazine**
Burrawi, 1961

**Thesis**
The Shakespeare Club of Western Australia 1930-2000: an example of adult education, Hewson, A., 2002

**Newspaper Article**
Girl Guides, 1928,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article79490760

**Site Exhibition**
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

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

**Canberra Girls Grammar School Archives**
Maxine Pickering on teaching at Canberra Girls Grammar School

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