

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE5598

## Schreiner, Susanne (Sue) Elizabeth

(1939 - 2020)

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| <b>Born</b>       | 19391212, Sydney New South Wales Australia                |
| <b>Died</b>       | 20200901, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia |
| <b>Occupation</b> | Barrister, Coroner, Magistrate                            |

### Summary

Susanne Elizabeth Schreiner (Sue) was born in Sydney in 1939 of parents who left Vienna before the outbreak of World War II. She spent her early life in Canberra and was in the year of the first graduates (in Law) of the Australian National University (ANU) in 1962. She also completed a Diploma in Criminology from the University of Sydney.

Schreiner signed the High Court roll as a barrister and solicitor in 1962, the same year she was admitted to practise at the NSW Bar. She was the first female barrister to appear in the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the fourteenth woman admitted to the NSW Bar. She had difficulty gaining articles in NSW and this led to her finally gaining employment as a solicitor in Canberra with Mr J. D. Donohoe. She stayed with him until 1964 when she went to Sydney. She practised at the Bar there until 1975 when she was appointed a NSW Magistrate. She was the second woman appointed as a NSW Magistrate and the first person to be so appointed from outside the Public Service. Her appointment caused great outcry as it heralded a big shift in the way in which NSW Magistrates were appointed.

Schreiner is the co-author (with K.B. Morgan) of 'Probate practice and precedents'. She did some law reporting as well as research for Butterworth's into the feasibility of an Australian version of Halsbury's Laws of England, the existence of which is now a fact.

Go to 'Details' below to read a reflective essay written by Sue Schreiner for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

## Details

The following additional information was provided by Sue Schreiner and is reproduced with permission in its entirety.

As a magistrate, Sue Schreiner presided in almost all courts in NSW, both metropolitan and country. A highlight is the eight years she spent sitting at Redfern Local Court where she had the good fortune to become a close friend of MumShirl (the Black Saint of Redfern) who became a mentor in Aboriginal affairs and in life with all its challenges.

Schreiner was Assistant City Coroner for two years. As a result she authored a study, called 'Ultimate Isolation', into the circumstances surrounding people who died alone and lay dead for days, weeks, months, sometimes years, with a view to helping the community understand how this might be prevented. Her first mine deaths inquest caused some much consternation when she was not allowed access to the site because according to tradition "women are not allowed below ground because it is bad luck". This attitude was changed with good grace when it became obvious that it was not going to prevent her carrying out her coronial responsibilities.

Schreiner presided over the Broken Hill Circuit Court for two years, which provided a good opportunity to see large areas of NSW, particularly the far west, and to understand and try and ameliorate the challenges faced by those communities, particularly in the predominantly Aboriginal towns. Her work as a magistrate gave her wonderful opportunities to engage with people from many areas of life. She became involved with children and helped form the Homeless Children's Association; was the first Patron of South Sydney Youth Services (now Weave), a wonderful organisation which helps young people in inner Sydney with the myriad problems they face. She was President of Glebe House, a halfway house for men leaving jail with drug and alcohol problems and no family or other support. She was also involved in changes to NSW Mental Health legislation.

Schreiner retired from the bench in 2000 but returned for five years as an Acting Magistrate. For several years she served as Chair of the Serious Young Offenders Review Panel (SYORP) which concerned itself with juveniles serving sentences for serious crimes and was an adviser to the Director General on matters such as conditions and leave. Also on her retirement, she was invited to join the (NSW) Premiers Council on Crime Prevention for one year which gave her an opportunity to speak at the highest political level about issues faced by various communities.

After retiring from paid work, Schreiner and her partner, Alan, moved to Canberra where she is at present (2016) engaged in a number of community based organisations as well as following her passion for classical music as a listener and pianist, whilst learning to be an 'older woman'. She has also developed a growing interest in and concern for animal welfare and ethical issues. She completed the first Animal Law Course at the University of NSW, and presently assists the RSPCA as a member of the Approved Farming Scheme Panel, a body which seeks to improve the lives of intensively farmed production animals. She has served for some years on the Boards of Vets Beyond Borders and Delta.

## Published resources

### Book

Probate practice and precedents, Schreiner, Sue and Morgan, Kevin, 1971

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

### Article

Legal pioneer with an empathetic heart, Andrew Blow, 12 September 2020

### Author Details

Sue Schreiner

**Created** 6 April 2016

**Last modified** 6 October 2025

## Digital resources



**Title:** Sue Schreiner

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 3 May, 2023