

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5767

Balmford, Rosemary Anne

(1933 - 2017)

Born	19330915, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	20170808
Occupation	Academic, Judge, Lawyer, Ornithologist

Summary

Rosemary Balmford was the first woman judge appointed to the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Details

The Hon. Rosemary Balmford AM, daughter of judge Sir John Norris and Dame Ada Norris (nee Bickford), has been a trailblazer for women in the legal profession. Notably, she was the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court of Victoria and the first to run a murder trial in the state. At the University of Melbourne she also made history by becoming the first woman to be appointed to a permanent academic position in the Faculty of Law.

Taught by her mother to read when she was three, Rosemary Norris (as she was then) was educated at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School and the University of Melbourne, where she won the Supreme Court Prize (at that time awarded to the LLB student placed first in the final examinations) for 1954.

She undertook articles of clerkship with Saf (Lt-Col Samuel Austin Frank) Pond OBE of Whiting & Byrne in 1955 and was admitted to practise as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria on 1 March 1956. Between 1957 and 1961 she resided at Janet Clarke Hall where she was tutor-in-law. During this period she was also employed as independent lecturer in conveyancing at the University of Melbourne (1957-62), and at Whiting & Byrne, where she was the first woman on staff to hold legal qualifications; she practised mainly in conveyancing but also liquor licensing. She became partner and later consultant before finally leaving the firm for good in 1969. By this time she had been married to fellow solicitor Peter Balmford (d. 2005) for six years and they had a young son, Christopher. She embarked on an MBA at the University of Melbourne.

In 1971, Rosemary Balmford became inaugural executive director of the Leo Cussen Institute for Continuing Legal Education. She spent five-and-a-half years with the Institute, before leaving to take up a role of assistant solicitor (special projects) at the University of Melbourne. In 1979, she served on the Victorian Equal Opportunity Board which heard the case of Deborah Wardley v Ansett Airlines. From 1983 to 1993, she served on the Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

In July 1993 Balmford became the second woman after Lynette Schifftan (nee Opas) to be appointed a judge of the County Court of Victoria. In March 1996 she was appointed the first woman judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria. She retired from the bench in 2003 and became a reserve judge. Between 1995 and 2003 she was a member of the Governing Council of the Judicial Conference of Australia.

Outside the law, Balmford has had an enduring interest in ornithology. She has been a member of various bird organisations, including the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union of which she was secretary between 1969 and 1972, and she has written a number of books, articles and reviews in the field. She has also been heavily involved with grassroots community organisations; in particular, those that have encouraged better parenting and breastfeeding.

In 1998, Monash University, Clayton, awarded Balmford an honorary Doctor of Laws. In 2012, Balmford was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia '[f]or service to the judiciary, the practice of law in Victoria, and to the study of ornithology.' Balmford's autobiography, *A Funny Course for a Woman*, was published in 2013.

Published resources

Resource Section

Podcast No.10: Interview with Rosemary Balmford, Robertson, Craig, 2008,
<http://www.thestudy.net.au/people/RosemaryBalmford.html>

Norris, Dame Ada May (1901-1989), Fitzherbert, Margaret, 2012,
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/norris-dame-ada-may-14997/text26186>

Balmford, Rosemary Anne (1933 -), Alafaci, Annette, 2006,
<http://www.eoas.info/biogs/P004718b.htm>

Women Barristers Association Anniversary Dinner,
<https://www.vicbar.com.au/GetFile.ashx?file=VicBarNewsFiles/WBA%20Anniversary%20Dinner.pdf>

Site Exhibition

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

Book

First Principles. The Melbourne Law School 1857 - 2007, Waugh, John, 2007

A Funny Course for a Woman, Balmford, Rosemary, 2013

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Rosemary Balmford interviewed by Ruth Campbell in the Law in Australian society oral history project \[sound recording\]](#)

Author Details

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