

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5992

Firmstone, Anne

(1861 - 1947)

Born	4 February, 1861, England
Died	11 March, 1947, Tunbridge Wells Kent England
Occupation	Photographer

Summary

Anne Firmstone was an early ethnographic photographer whose work documents life on a Melanesian mission on Norfolk Island during the 1890s. An amateur photographer, Firmstone's photographs record the impact that the arrival of missionaries had on the lives of Indigenous people on the island. She also photographed the native flora of the island.

Details

Born in England around 1870, Anne Firmstone travelled to Norfolk Island in 1894, where she stayed with her sister Mrs Browning. In 1896 she officially joined the staff of the Melanesian mission there.

During the 1890s Firmstone photographed life on the mission, with a focus on the native islanders as well as the local flora. She set up a darkroom built in the outbuildings near the Barnabas Chapel, which was also the carpentry workshop and printery.

Firmstone's photographs are significant as a record of the changes taking place in the lives of the native peoples with the arrival of the missionaries and the impact colonisation had on traditional lives.

In 1899 she married Rev. William Chamberlin O'Ferrall. The couple moved to Vanuatu (Vanua Lava) in the New Hebrides, where they managed the mission school there. It is unclear whether she pursued her photographic interests in Vanuatu. After working and living there for some time they went back to England on furlough in 1902. William returned to Vanua Lava in 1903 and Alice in 1904, but illness forced their return to England. They returned to Melanesia in 1920 but Alice's ill health again led to their return to England in 1922. William died in 1935 and Alice in 1947.

Collections

Anne Firmstone's and Kate Iven's work can be found in albums of the Collenzo Collection (the Collenzo's were a family of missionaries who lived on Norfolk Island)

Events

1970 - 1899

1981 - 1981

Anne Firmstone's work featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

Published resources

Exhibition Catalogue

Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Book

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Conference Paper

"Unpretending Labours": Julia Farr and the Melanesian Mission, Crawford, Janet, 2004,
http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/crawford_farr2004.pdf

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

Created 10 November 2016

Last modified 7 August 2019