

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE6015

## Ivens, Kate Spencer

(1869 - 1942)

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**Born** 10 September, 1869, North Canterbury New Zealand

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**Died** 4 August, 1942, Christchurch New Zealand

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**Occupation** Photographer

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### Summary

Kate Ivens was an early, amateur ethnographic photographer of Indigenous people. She also photographed flora and fauna.

### Details

Kate Ivens was born in England in 1871. She was a deaconess as well as a trained nurse. In 1896 she travelled to Norfolk Island along with other female missionaries to join the Melanesian Mission there. Whilst on the island, she set up and managed the mission hospital.

Ivens took many photographs on the island, documenting everyday life there. Ivens's images document women doing the laundry and sewing, children playing, the surrounds of the mission settlement, the native islanders, as well as the local flora and fauna. The original motivation for Ivens to take these photographs is still uncertain. Richard Wesley suggests that '[i]f it was to demonstrate that the charges of the Melanesian Mission embraced their life on Norfolk with joy, she was singularly unsuccessful'; the life depicted in her photographs is far from joyous.

Ivens created 'makeshift studio backgrounds with sheets to emphasize and stylise her subjects' (Hall 133) and set up a darkroom in the outbuildings near the Barnabas Chapel, which was also used as the carpentry workshop and printery.

In 1908 she left the island to care for her sick father in Adelaide.

A retrospective exhibition of her work was organised by the Norfolk Island Museum in 1995, entitled '*In Gods Image: Miss Ivens and the Melanesian Mission*', which featured 28 of her photographs.

### Collections

Anne Firmstone and Kate Ivens's work can be found in albums of the Collenso Collection, Norfolk Island Museum.

### Events

#### 1970 - 1900

#### 1995 - 1995

Kate Ivens' work featured in '*In God's Image: Miss Ivens and the Melanesian Mission*

#### 1981 - 1981

Kate Ivens' 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](http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/crawford_farr2004.pdf)

### **Thesis**

Consuming Illusions: The Magic Lantern in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand 1850-1910, Hartrick, Elizabeth, 2003

### **Resource Section**

Kate Ivens,  
<https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/kate-ivens/>

### **Edited Book**

Past Present: The National Women's Art Anthology, Kerr, Joan and Holder, Jo, 1999

### **Newspaper Article**

Personal Items,  
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19080804.2.26>

### **Journal Article**

Exploring a Region's Social History, Wesley, Richard

### **Magazine article**

A First For Women Photographers in Australia: Quick Thinking and Ladders Got the Top Shots, Bowen, Jill, 1981,  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55457051>

## Archival resources

### **Archives New Zealand**

[New Zealand, Archives of New Zealand, Passenger Lists, 1839-1973 Kate S Ivens, 1908](#)

### **Author Details**

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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