

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6077

McRae, Valda May

(1935 - 2014)

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| Born | 19350101 |
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| Died | 20141231 |
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| Occupation | Academic, Chemist, Scientist |
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Details

Valda May McRae nee Heraud entered the University of Melbourne in 1953 with a scholarship that bonded her to the Victorian Education Department for three years after the completion of her BSc and BEd in 1956. She taught at McLeod and Numurkah High Schools before returning to the University of Melbourne in 1960, working part-time in the Department which was to occupy virtually all of her working life.

She took her PhD on some reactions of antimony pentafluoride and related compounds and spent 1966 to 1968 at the University of Leicester, one of the few universities where it was possible to continue her study of fluorine chemistry on a postdoctoral fellowship.

Back in Australia she worked in the Science Faculty Office of the University of Melbourne, as Assistant to the Sub-Dean and as Sub-Dean herself. In 1974 she took a position in the Chemistry Department as principal tutor and was appointed lecturer in 1984 and senior lecturer in 1988. Her research was in analytical and radiochemistry. In 1995 she took the position of Executive Manager of the School of Chemistry, principally responsible for its academic administration, with considerable emphasis on the planning and organisation of timetables, tutorials and practical classes.

When Valda McRae retired in 2000 she continued direct contact with students through examination supervision of people with special needs, but her main interest was recording the history of the Department of Chemistry and Melbourne University Chemical Society. Three publications resulted. She published the Lady Masson Lectures to 2001, which listed all the lectures and provided the text on CD-rom. Her exhaustive history of the Department from 1960 to 2000 began where Joan Radford's earlier history had finished. In the course of writing it she was in direct personal contact with virtually every living graduate, thoroughly enjoying renewing old links. *From Chalk and Talk to PowerPoint* provided an account of the first 1000 meetings of the Melbourne University Chemical Society.[1]

Valda McRae took a sustained and serious interest in the University of Melbourne at large. She was President of University House from 2000 to 2002 and donated the herb garden in its eastern garden in 2011. From 2008 to 2011 she was a representative of the Science Faculty on the Committee of Convocation. She was honoured as a Life Member of the Friends of the Baillieu Library in 2012. The first Valda McRae Memorial Lecture of the MUCS was delivered by Emeritus Professor Don Cameron in April 2014, entitled 'What Possible Use Can Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy Have for Chemistry?'

[1] Joan Radford. *The Chemistry Department of the University of Melbourne: its contribution to Australian science, 1854-1959*. Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1978; Valda M. McRae. *The Lady Masson Lectures, 1949-2001*. Melbourne: School of Chemistry, University of Melbourne, 2003 (pamphlet and CD-rom); *Chemistry @ Melbourne 1960-2000*. Melbourne: School of Chemistry, University of Melbourne, 2007; *From Chalk and Talk to PowerPoint*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne, School of Chemistry, 2013.

Published resources

Book

40 Years 40 Women: Biographies of University of Melbourne Women, Published to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the International Year of Women, Flesch, Juliet, 2015,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/4040/>

Author Details

Juliet Flesch

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