

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6078

Merz, Blanche Isobel

(1920 - 2007)

Born 1 January, 1920

Died 31 December, 2007

Occupation Scientist, Teacher

Details

Blanche Isobel Merz nee Chidzey took her BSc from the University of Melbourne in 1941. Born in Northcote, she came to the University from University High School where she had won an Honours certificate in her final year and was awarded a 1938 non-resident Exhibition worth £10 from Queen's College. In deference to her father's wishes she did not take up the place she was offered by the Faculty of Medicine, studying Science instead, with a view to a career in teaching. Armed with majors in Physics and Pure Mathematics as well as her Diploma of Education, she travelled to Glasgow as an exchange teacher in 1948. She was followed to Britain by Kurt Merz whom she had known in Melbourne and they were married in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral by Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean' in 1950.

Both Blanche Merz and her husband were active politically. Kurt Merz, born in 1921, was a refugee from Austria who had arrived in Australia in 1939 and was a member of the Melbourne University Labor Club. He completed his degree despite being classified as an enemy alien and wrote a number of pamphlets on religion and revolution and the place of the individual in Soviet Russia. He died in 1993.^[1]

On their return to Melbourne, Blanche Merz taught at Mt Scopus, MacRobertson Girls' High School and St Catherine's School before joining the staff of the University's Faculty of Architecture and Building. In 1959, she gave a paper to the Mathematical Association of Victoria which was published in *Master Classes in Mathematics*, on the history of mathematical notation from the ancient to the relatively modern notations of the last three or four centuries.^[2]

Although she was initially appointed to contribute to the development of courses in mathematics and environmental science under the direction of Professor Brian Lewis and Elizabeth and Alan Coldicutt, Blanche Merz is best known for her work from the 1970s onwards in the physics of light and colour. She joined the Illuminating Engineering Society of Australia in 1968 and was elected its first female Fellow in 1987. She delivered several papers on the subject of colour at its meetings, the last in 2003.

^[1] See *Pamphlets held in the Communist Party of Australia and McLaren Collections in Special Collections*.
http://library.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1687503/CPA-Pamphlets.pdf

^[2] W.M. Stephens (Ed.) *Master Classes in Mathematic*. Melbourne: Mathematical Association of Victoria, 2006

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/>

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