The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6082

Roper, Myra Ellen

(1911 - 2002)

Born	19110101
Died	20021231
Occupation	Educator, Public speaker, Women's advocate

Summary

Myra Roper was Principal of the University of Melbourne’s Women’s College for 14 years. She led a varied life as both an educator and public intellectual.

Myra served on the ABC Advisory Committee, the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Melbourne State College boards. She was also President of the Committee for Australia-China Relations and in 1958 was a member of the first Australian women’s delegation to China.

Myra received an AM in 1985 for her service to international relations.

Details

Myra Ellen Roper was Principal of University Women's College for 14 years and led a varied life as an educator and public intellectual both before and afterwards. Born in Yorkshire, she took her BA from Cambridge in 1933, her DipT from the Institute of Education at London University the following year and MA from the University of Melbourne in 1949.

Before coming to Australia in 1947 she taught in England and Canada and worked as Assistant Education Officer in Wiltshire and Cambridgeshire. In her time as Principal of Women's College, she worked to increase the accommodation offered to students, especially for women from outside Melbourne. Three new wings were opened between 1953 and 1953 with the Roper Wing opened after she left.

Myra Roper was a public figure from her arrival, serving on the ABC Advisory Committee, the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Melbourne State College boards. She was President of the Committee for Australia-China Relations and in 1958 was a member of the first Australian women's delegation to China. In 1964, she moved to Canberra but continued a career of public speaking and broadcasting Australia-wide.

Her principal fields of interest were China and the place of women in society and her speeches were widely reported. In Canberra in 1965, she addressed the local YWCA on the fact that women are 'needed and used in many essential services, particularly in education and commerce… yet they were penalised and hampered by unequal pay and through the marriage bar'.[1] Her visits to China resulted in several books and a television documentary as well as radio broadcasts, television appearances and newspaper articles.[2]

In 1980 a journalist reported:

The re-education of senior Chinese war-criminals convicted after the 1949 revolution has been 'one of the biggest and most successful experiments in practical psychology' recently in the estimation of lecturer and author Miss Myra Roper.

In Canberra at the invitation of the Australia-China Society, Miss Roper has just returned from six weeks in China interviewing these man and their families. She is the first Westerner to have been allowed to do this.[3]

Myra Roper won many awards, including an AM in 1985 for service to international relations and the first annual award of the Rostrum Club of Victoria for contributions to public speaking.

[1] '100 Volunteers to Sell Buttons'. *Canberra Times*. 1 April 1965: 21.

[2] Myra Roper. *China – the Surprising Country*. London: Heinemann, 1966; *China in Revolution, 1911-1949*, London: Edward Arnold, 1971; Emperor's China, People's China. Melbourne: Heinemann Educational, 1981 and C.P. Fitzgerald and Myra Roper. China : a World So Changed. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1972.

[3] 'Practical Psychology'. *Canberra Times*. 6 August 1980: 1.

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/

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Myra Roper, 1958-1981 [manuscript]

Author Details
Juliet Flesch

Created 31 July 2017
Last modified 5 November 2020