

Entry type: Person  
Entry ID: AWE0004

Ryan, Edna Minna

(1904 - 1997)

Born	19041215, Pyrmont New South Wales Australia
Died	19970210, Canberra Australian Capital Territory
Occupation	Activist, Feminist, Trade unionist, Writer

Summary

Edna Ryan was a leading figure in three eras of feminism in the 20th century. As a feminist and labour activist she is credited with achieving equal pay for women, maternity leave and work based child care. Ryan wrote numerous articles, conference papers, submissions to government and two books, *Gentle invaders* (1975) and *Two thirds of a man* (1984).

## Details

### Parliamentary and Local Government Career

#### Local

Alderman, Fairfield Municipal Council, 1956-65  
Deputy Mayor 1958  
Member, Prospect County Council retired 1972

#### State

Candidate, Mosman, 1953

### Other Highlights

Participated in the first International Women's Day 1928;  
Organised the wives of the timber workers strike 1929;  
Member of Communist Party and International Workers of the World 1920-35c;  
Joined Australian Labor Party 1935;  
Organised first residential Summer School for women for the Workers Educational Association;  
First female Deputy Mayor in NSW 1958;  
Alderman Fairfield Council 1959-65;  
First woman president of the largest branch of the Municipal Employees' Union 1960s;  
Campaign manager for future Prime Minister Gough Whitlam;  
Founding member of Women's Electoral Lobby 1972;  
Presented breakthrough submission to the Arbitration Commission to award low paid women workers the same minimum wage as men 1974;  
Published *Gentle Invaders, Australian Women and the Workforce 1788-1974* with Anne Conlon 1975.

Ryan campaigned for maternity leave and work-based child care for women workers, was an advocate of women's reproductive rights, and campaigned on the negative impacts of enterprise bargaining and compulsory superannuation on low paid women workers. In 1984 she published *Two-thirds of a Man: Women and Arbitration in New South Wales 1902-08*. The following year she was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters by the University of Sydney, and in 1995 was again awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters, this time by Macquarie University.

Edna Ryan had three children – Julia, Lyndall and Patrick – whom she raised alone after the early death of her husband, Jack Ryan.

### Published resources

#### Book

*Gentle Invaders : Australian Women at Work*, Ryan, Edna and Conlon, Anne, 1989

*Two-thirds of a Man : Women and Arbitration in New South Wales, 1902-08*, Ryan, Edna, 1984

*Getting Equal: the History of Australian Feminism*, Lake, Marilyn, 1999

*The matriarchs: twelve Australian women talk about their lives* to Susan Mitchell., Mitchell, Susan, 1987

*Women in Australian Parliaments and Local Governments, Past and Present : A Survey*, Smith, A. Viola, 1975

#### Edited Book

*Edna Ryan Remembered : Tributes from the Australian Feminist Policy Network and Union Women*, Hutton, Marg, 1997

*A decade of Mary Owen dinners*, Waterfield, Dorothy, 1995

*Australian Feminism: A Companion*, Caine, Barbara, Gatens, Moira et al., 1998

#### Journal Article

Proving a dispute: Laundry Workers in Sydney in 1906, Ryan, Edna, 1981

Equal Pay, Comparable Worth and the Central Wage Fixing System, Ryan, Edna, 1988

Edna Minna Ryan, Owen, Mary, 1997

### **Book Section**

Women and Production in Australia, Ryan, Edna, 1986

Talking Back, Ryan, Edna, 1987

### **Finding Aid**

Guide to the Papers of Beryl Henderson - MS 9360, National Library of Australia, 2017,  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-299073938/findingaid>

Guide to the Papers of Edna Ryan - MS 9140, MS Acc09.172, National Library of Australia, 2017,  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-300771402/findingaid>

### **Resource Section**

Edna Ryan 1904 - 1997, 1997,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20001023143531/http://list.waikato.ac.nz:80/archives/prir-l/1997/02/msg00020.html>

Death of Ms Edna Ryan, Whitecross, Carnell, Tucker, Reilly, 1997,  
<http://www.hansard.act.gov.au/Hansard/1997/week01/79.htm>

### **Article**

WEL NSW 1972-1997., Bielski, Joan, 1997

Commemorating Our Dear Departed Equal Pay Activists, Webb, Rosemary, 1999,  
[http://workers.labor.net.au/3/c\\_historicalfeature\\_edna.html](http://workers.labor.net.au/3/c_historicalfeature_edna.html)

Back to the Future: Urgent Issues for Men and Women of Australia, Summers, Anne, 1997,  
<http://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/archives/1997/back-to-the-future-urgent-issues-for-the-men-and-women-of-australia>

Comments for Edna Ryan's Funeral, Ryan, Susan, 1997,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060821151110/http://wel.org.au/announce/edna/ednasury.htm>

### **Videorecording**

Edna Ryan: a political life, Oliver, Margot, 1992

### **Resource**

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### **Site Exhibition**

Putting Skirts on the Sacred Benches: Women Candidates for the New South Wales Parliament, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2006,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/pssb/home.html>

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

## Archival resources

### **National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection**

On their own terms : profiles of five very individual Australians / prepared by Tim Bowden and Ros Bowden

Edna Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse [sound recording]

Edna Ryan interviewed by Lucy Taksa in the NSW Bicentennial oral history collection [sound recording]

Interview with Lyndall Ryan, Professor of Australian Studies, University of Newcastle [sound recording] / interviewer, Sara Dowse

### **State Library of South Australia**

Yarn spinners [sound recording]

### **National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**

Papers of Edna Ryan, 1948-1993 [manuscript]

Papers of Beryl Henderson, 1973-1992 [manuscript]

Papers of Julia Ryan, 1947-1982 [manuscript]

Papers of Meredith Stokes, circa 1970-1997 [manuscript]

### **Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University**

Edna Ryan and Sylvia Winters papers

Jack Kavanagh collection deposit 1

### **Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio Archives**

Interviews with Edna Ryan

### **Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection**

Edna Ryan papers, 1965-1986

Edna Ryan further papers, 1961-1989

Pat Richardson scrapbooks relating to the Women's Electoral Lobby and women's events, 1977-2002

Ros Bowden - interviews conducted for radio programs and documentaries, ca.1975 - 1989

### **National Library of Australia**

[Biographical cuttings on Edna Ryan, unionist and author, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

### **State Library of New South Wales**

Audrey Blake - further papers, 1915-1998

## **Author Details**

Elle Morrell

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## Digital resources

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