The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0053

a’Beckett, Ada Mary

(1872 - 1948)

Born	18720518, Norwood South Australia Australia
Died	19480520, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Biologist, Educator

Summary

Teacher, kindergarten activist, and philanthropist, Ada Mary a’Beckett was born in Adelaide in 1872. Throughout her career she worked as a demonstrator and lecturer in biology at the University of Melbourne as well as teaching at various schools throughout Victoria. She was very closely involved in the kindergarten movement, helping to establish the Kindergarten Training College in Kew. Ada was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, 3 June 1935, and had a kindergarten named after her the following year. She died in 1948 in Melbourne.

Details

Ada Mary a’Beckett was born in Norwood, Adelaide on 18 May 1872. She was educated at the Advanced School for Girls in Adelaide.

Between 1893 and 1900 Ada worked as a teacher at several different girls schools in the Melbourne and Geelong area as well as at the Working Men’s College. During part of this time she was also a student at the University of Melbourne, where she was awarded the Wyselaskie scholarship in natural science (biology) and the final honours scholarship in biology. She was Annie Grice Scholar in 1892-1893 and a founder of the Victorian Women Graduates’ Association. She graduated with a BSc (1895) and a MSc (1897). She was president of the Lyceum Club in 1926-28.

Ada maintained strong ties with Melbourne University throughout her life, working there for varying periods as a demonstrator and lecturer in biology – especially during World War I. From 1912 until 1920 she also worked as teacher at the Melbourne Church of England Girls’ Grammar School. In 1921 Ada was appointed head of the biology department at Scotch College, a position she held until 1937. She had a significant impact on her students, many of whom entered medicine or allied professions.

Ada’s involvement in the kindergarten movement began in 1908 when she was elected a foundation president of the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria. In 1916 Ada helped establish the Kindergarten Training College in Kew. Between 1920 and 1923 she helped develop the training course there for kindergarten teachers and lectured in physiology and hygiene. Ada was also the President of the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria from 1919 to 1939; and the president of the Kindergarten Training Council from 1926 to 1939. In 1936 she founded the Australian Association for Pre-School Child Development.

In 1935 Ada was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her philanthropic work and in 1942 had a kindergarten at Fisherman’s Bend named after her. She died of cancer in Melbourne in 1948.

Published resources

Journal Article
Obituary: Ada A'Beckett, 1948

Article
Women's Views and News: The Woman's Part, Mrs T. a'Beckett, 1927,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3838849

Obituary: Mrs A. M. a'Beckett, 1948,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article22539782

Edited Book
Monash Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Australia, Arnold, John and Morris, Deirdre, 1994

Resource Section
à Beckett, Ada Mary (1872-1948), Marginson, Julie, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070005b.htm

A'Beckett, Ada Mary (nee Lambert) (1872 - 1948), Biographical Entry, 2002,
http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/bsparcs/biogs/P000996b.htm

Book
A historical sketch: The growth and development of the Free Kindergarten Movement of Victoria, a'Beckett, Ada Mary, 1939

Degrees of liberation : a short history of women in the University of Melbourne, Kelly, Farley, 1985

Resource
Where are the Women in Australian science?, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, 2003,
http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/wisa/wisa.html

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

The University of Melbourne Archives
University of Melbourne. Office of the Registrar Registrar's Correspondence

Institute of early childhood development

The Ian Potter Museum of Art
Mrs T.A. a' Beckett, CBE, MSC

Author Details
Judith Ion

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