Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0114

Wright, Judith Arundell

(1915 - 2000)

Born	19150531, Armidale New South Wales Australia
Died	20000626, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Poet, Writer

Summary

Judith Wright expressed her love of Australia and its people in her poetry. She was also a respected writer on poetry. Later in her life Wright was well known as a conservationist and campaigner for Aboriginal rights. Wright, a descendant of a pioneering pastoralist family, began writing poetry at the age of six for her ailing mother. At the age of 14 she became a boarder at the New England Girls School, and it was during her time there that she decided to become a poet.

After completing an Arts course at the University of Sydney, Wright worked in a variety of positions including that of research officer at Queensland University, where she helped Clem Christesen to edit *Meanjin*.

In 1975, Wright was the first woman appointed to the Council of Australian National University as the Governor-General's nominee. She was founder and later president of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, and member of the National Parks Association of New South Wales and the South Coast Conservation Council. Wright was a patron of many organisations including: Campaign Against Nuclear Power (Queensland); Townsville Women's Shelter; Amnesty International (Victoria.); Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and the National Forests Action Council (Victoria.).

In 1991, Wright became the second Australian – after Michael Thwaites in 1940 – to receive the Queen's gold medal for poetry.

Joan Williams concludes her obituary on Judith Wright in *The Guardian* on July 5, 2000 with:
"Judith Wright is not a romantic, but makes her judgement on changes in the economy and lifestyle, the growth of industry and the swing from country to city. In her own way she has taken a step further for us in the expression of Australian national, spiritual and environment values in her poetry."

Details

Judith Wright, who died in Canberra of a heart attack, had spent much of her time there from the early 1970s when her daughter Meredith went to study at the Australian National University. Her long relationship with H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs was an added incentive for her to be close to Canberra. In 1973 she was appointed Chairman of the Australia Council. In 1975 She bought the property Edge 100 kilometres east of Canberra and spent much of her time there. By 1998 she was living in a small flat in Canberra.
In 2010 a suburb in Canberra and a federal electoral division in Queensland were named after her.

Events

1949 - 1949
Awarded a Commonwealth Literary Fund Fellowship

1970 - 1970
Awarded Fellow Australian Academy of Humanities (FAHA)

1980 - 1980
Awarded Hon. Life Member Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF)

1980 - 1980
Awarded the Alice Award by the Society of Women Writers of Australia

1965 - 1965
Awarded the Encyclopedia Britannica Prize for literature

1949 - 1949
Awarded the Grace Leven Prize from the Braidwood Historical Society

1972 - 1972
Awarded the Grace Leven Prize from the Braidwood Historical Society

1984 - 1984
Awarded the Indian Asan World prize for poetry

1980 - 1980
Awarded the Order of the Golden Ark, degree of Ridder by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands

1992 - 1992
Awarded the Queen’s Gold Medal for poetry

1976 - 1976
Awarded the Robert Frost Memorial Award from the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW)

1976 - 1976
Awarded the Senior Anzac Fellowship

1977 - 1979
Awarded the Senior Writers Fellowship by the Literature Board of the Australia Council

1964 - 1972
Council member of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF)

1975 - 1979
Council member of the Australian National University (ANU)

1963 - 1963
Foundation council member of the Australia Society Authors (ASA)

1979 - 1983
Member of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee

1973 - 1974
Member of the Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate

1962 - 1976
President of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland

1944 - 1948
Statistical research officer with the Queensland University

1938 - 1942
Stenographic and secretarial work in Sydney

Published resources

Edited Book

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

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

Biographical register : the Women's College within the University of Sydney, Annable, Rosemary, 1995

Who's Who in Australia 1998, Neto, Maryanne (researcher), 1997

Book

The Moving Image, Wright, Judith, 1946

Woman to Man, Wright, Judith, 1950

The Gateway, Wright, Judith, 1953

The Two Fires, Wright, Judith, 1955

Birds, Wright, Judith, 1960

Birds, Wright, Judith, 1960

Five Senses, Wright, Judith, 1960

Selected Poems, Wright, Judith, 1963

The Other Half: Poems, Wright, Judith, [1966]

Collected Poems, Wright, Judith, 1971

Alive, Wright, Judith, 1972

Fourth Quarter, Wright, Judith, 1976

Fourth Quarter, Wright, Judith, 1977

The Generations of Men, Wright, Judith, 1955

The Nature of Love, Wright, Judith, 1966

Preoccupations in Australian Poetry, Wright, Judith, 1964

Because I was Invited, Wright, Judith, 1976

Charles Harpur, Wright, Judith, 1978

The Cry for the Dead, Wright, Judith, 1981

The Oxford Book of Australian Verse, Wright, Judith, 1954

New Land New Language, Wright, Judith, 1956

Witnesses of Spring: unpublished poems by John Shaw Neilson, Wright, Judith (Editor), 1970

Kings of the Dingoes, Wright, Judith, 1956

Range the Mountains High, Wright, Judith, 1960

The Day the Mountains Played, Wright, Judith, 1959|| 1976

The River and the Road, Wright, Judith, 1963

Documentary

The Coral Battleground, Wright, Judith, 1977

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Guide to the Papers of Judith Wright, National Library of Australia,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-233793961/findingaid

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

Resource Section
Guide to the Papers of Craig Powell, Diehm, K., 2000,
http://www.lib.adfa.edu.au:85/web/speccoll/finding_aids/powell.html

Judith Wright's Biography: A Delicate Balance between Trespass and Honour, Brady, Veronica, 1996,
http://www.nla.gov.au/events/doclife/brady.html

Vale Judith Wright, Koval, Ramona (presenter) and Donisthorpe, Suzanne (Producer), 2000,
http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/bwriting/stories/s143393.htm

Australian poet Judith Wright (1915-2000): an appreciation, Cornwell, Tony, 2000,
http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/aug2000/wrig-a31.shtml

Judith Wright, Williams, Joan, 2000,
http://www.cpa.org.au/garchve2/1007jw.html

List of Electoral Divisions Named After Women, Australian Electoral Commission,
https://www.aec.gov.au/redistributions/division-names/women.html

Newspaper Article
Lines from the bush, Cadzow, Jane, 2004

Site Exhibition
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

Book Section
Women Research Leaders in the Australian Learned Academies, 1954 to 1976, Grimshaw, Patricia and Francis, Rosemary, 2012,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/sti/pdfs/16_GrimshawFrancis.pdf

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Dymphna Clark, circa 1930-2000 [manuscript]

Papers of Dorothy Green, 1943-1990 [manuscript]

Papers of Judith Wright, 1944-2000 [manuscript]

The generations of men [manuscript] / [by] Judith Wright

Papers of Judith Wright, 1949-1951 [manuscript]

Letters, 1986-1989 [manuscript]

Papers of Nancy Cato, 1939-1995 [manuscript]

Papers of Elyne Mitchell, circa 1928-2002 [manuscript]

Papers of Nonie Sharp, 1980-2000 [manuscript]

Correspondence of Barbara Blackman with Judith Wright, 1950-1998 [manuscript]

Literary papers 1969-1981 [manuscript]

Papers of Patricia Clarke, 1887-2010 [manuscript]

Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Papers relating to Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Special Collections, Academy Library, UNSW@ADFA
Craig Powell manuscript collection

Nancy Cato manuscript collection 1967-1992

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Dymphna Clark interviewed by Heather Rusden and Elizabeth Cham [sound recording]

State Library of New South Wales
Southern Africa Defence and Aid Fund in Australia - records, 1961-1981, together with the records of Community Aid Abroad (Australia). Southern Africa Group, 1981-1987

Author Details
Anne Heywood

Created 12 September 2001
Last modified 12 May 2026