



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Celebrating the
women of Sydney
Law School

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Ada Evans Memorial Launch



Celebrating the women of Sydney Law School.

Trailblazers who overcame many challenges to reshape the legal profession and make it an inclusive and equal place for future generations.

120 years ago Ada Evans made the groundbreaking first step.

In 2022, we celebrate Ada and all of the change-makers who have followed in her footsteps.

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What's inside

Welcome	4
Who was Ada Evans?	5
Ada Evans Memorial Scholarship	6
Timeline of alumnae firsts	7
Women of Sydney Law School	8
More information	10

Welcome

Associate Professor Penelope Crossley (LLB '06, PhD '15)



**Associate Professor
Penelope Crossley**

Director of Alumni
Engagement, Sydney
Law School

In 2022, we proudly celebrate 120 years of educating women leaders at Sydney Law School.

Australian and international society have been profoundly shaped by the efforts of these trailblazing women, whether in the judiciary, in the legal profession, in academia, in business, in public life or in civil society.

Sydney Law School alumnae are notable not only for their extraordinary professional achievements but also for their efforts to challenge and overcome gender stereotypes, fight sexism, and progress diversity and inclusion. These efforts have supported broad societal change, with our students now graduating with an expectation of equality, diversity and inclusion.

In 2022, we not only celebrate the achievements of our trailblazing alumnae, but we must also look to our future. Sydney Law School has long sought to be at the forefront of initiatives to widen participation and support diversity in the next generation of women law students. With that in mind, the Law School has established the Ada Evans Memorial Scholarship. We look forward to your continued engagement with, and support for, Sydney Law School.

Who was Ada Evans?

First female law graduate in Australia paves the way for future women of law.



In 1899, Ada Evans was the first woman to enrol in a Bachelor of Laws at Sydney Law School. Ada submitted her application when the Dean at the time was fortuitously on leave, as he had made it clear he would not accept a female law student. Ada's enrolment was accepted but upon the Dean's return, he told Ada that she "did not have the physique for law and would find medicine more suitable."

Despite there being no precedent of women becoming lawyers at the time, Ada made history in 1902 by becoming the first woman in Australia to graduate with a Bachelor of Laws.

Her journey was a struggle against patriarchy and bias. Even after Ada graduated, she was denied admission to the Bar because she was a woman. At the time, admission rules applied to 'persons' holding a law degree, but this term was interpreted by the (male) judges as applying only to men, excluding women.

Change came with the passing of the *Women's Legal Status Act 1918*, which facilitated Ada's admission to the bar, 19 years after beginning her journey into the law.

Ada Evans Memorial Scholarship

A scholarship that promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion for women of law.

In 1902 Ada Evans was the first woman to graduate with an LLB in Australia. This historical milestone formed a groundbreaking pathway for future generations.

In celebration of all trailblazing women of law, The University of Sydney has established the Ada Evans Memorial Scholarship in honour of Ada Evans and to promote equity, diversity and inclusion for women of law.

“The establishment of a scholarship in memory of Ada Evans will allow us to encourage women from diverse backgrounds who may require support at various stages of their studies.”

Professor Simon Bronitt, Dean and Head of Sydney Law School.



Timeline of alumnae firsts

1902

ADA EVANS

First female law graduate in Australia
First female admitted to the NSW Bar

1924

MARIE BYLES

First female solicitor in NSW

SYBIL MORRISON

First female barrister in NSW

1937

JEAN MALOR

First female to graduate with first class honours

1955

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE ELIZABETH EVATT AC

1955: First female student to win the University Medal for Law

1973: First female Deputy President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission

1976: First female judge of an Australian federal court

1992: First Australian to be elected to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

1972

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE MARY GAUDRON QC

1972: First female appointed to the Council of the New South Wales Bar

1981: First female Solicitor-General

1981: First female Queen's Counsel in New South Wales

1987: First female Justice of the High Court of Australia

1977

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE JANE MATHEWS AO

First female crown prosecutor in NSW

1980: First female judge of the District Court of New South Wales

1987: First female judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales

1981

THE HONOURABLE MAHLA PEARLMAN AO

First female President of the Law Society of NSW

1989: First female President of the Law Council of Australia

1992: First female President of the NSW Land and Environment Court

1990

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE DEIRDRE O'CONNOR

First female judge of the Federal Court of Australia

President of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission

1993

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE MARGARET BEAZLEY AC QC

First female to sit exclusively as a judge of the Federal Court of Australia

1996: First female appointed to the New South Wales Court of Appeal

2013: First female President of the NSW Court of Appeal

1999

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE RUTH MCCOLL AO

First female President of NSW Bar Association

2008

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE JULIE WARD

First female solicitor to be directly appointed to the Supreme Court bench

2021

SALLY DOWLING SC

First female NSW Director of Public Prosecutions

Women of Sydney Law School

Celebrating past, present and emerging trailblazers.

We highlight three visionary women of Sydney Law School who have followed in Ada Evans' footsteps. These inspiring legal minds are creating change and paving an empowering pathway for future women of law.



The Honourable Justice Elizabeth Evatt AC, LLB 1955

- 1955: First female student to win the University Medal for law.
- 1973: First female Deputy President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.
- 1976: First female judge of an Australian federal court.
- 1992: First Australian to be elected to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

"Being the first woman to hold a position creates a great opportunity to show that women can do the job and thus open the way for others."

Justice Elizabeth Evatt is a judge, scholar and human rights advocate. She spent much of her career advocating for human rights, specifically women's rights, in Australia. Demonstrating the power of individual action, she is the epitome of a trailblazer and her illustrious career is filled with "firsts".

Justice Evatt graduated from Sydney Law School in 1955 with first class honours, and she was the first female student to win the University Medal for law.

Notably, Justice Evatt was the youngest law student ever accepted and, later, the youngest barrister admitted in New South Wales.

In 1973, she became the first female Deputy President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. In 1976, Justice Evatt became the first female judge of an Australian federal court when she was appointed as the inaugural Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia.

In 1992, Justice Evatt was the first Australian to be elected to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.



The Honourable Justice Julie Ward, LLB 1982

"Study hard, maintain your academic curiosity, don't be too precious, find strong role models and wear fabulous shoes!"

Justice Ward has celebrated a number of milestones in her career that show her as an inspiring trailblazer for all women of law.

Justice Ward graduated from Sydney Law School with first class honours and the University Medal for law. Today she is the President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal.

Justice Ward was the youngest female partner to be appointed at Mallesons in 1998. In 2008, Justice Ward was the first female solicitor to be directly appointed to the Supreme Court bench.

In 2022, Justice Ward was appointed as President of the Court of Appeal in the Supreme Court of NSW, only the second female to be appointed as a President of the Court of Appeal.



Nora Takriti, Bachelor of Laws student

"It is very important to reflect on the women that paved the path to making the legal profession accessible, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity to pursue my fundamental belief, that the law should be used to lift the bar to gender equality."

Nora Takriti is a penultimate-year Bachelor of Laws student at The University of Sydney. In 2021, Nora was appointed as the Sydney University Law Society (SULS) Women's Officer.

Nora's vision as the Women's Officer was to advocate on behalf of female students and to facilitate meaningful opportunities designed to empower their personal and professional growth.

From launching the Women's Mentoring Program, to organising an Intervarsity Women in Law Conference, the Women's Portfolio instilled a genuine sisterhood within the law school and beyond.



Ada Evans memorial
scholarship gift form.



View other trailblazing
women of Sydney Law
School.



Read more about our
three inspiring Sydney
Law School women of
law.

Inspiring legal minds

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