

Lady Jean Duncan Foley

The degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) was conferred upon Lady Jean Foley at the Arts ceremony held at 6.00pm on 2 March 1995.

Citation

Presented by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor D McNicol

Chancellor,

I have the honour to present Lady Jean Foley for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa).

In 1943 Lady Foley, who was then known as Jean Duncan Laing, enrolled at this University as an evening student in the Faculty of Arts. She worked in the Public Trust Office while studying concurrently for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, which was awarded in 1946 and the Diploma in Social Studies, which was awarded in 1947. She then worked as a personnel officer in industry, and as Assistant Secretary at the Appointments Board of the University of Sydney.

In 1953, she joined IBM to start a career which was to give her an intimate knowledge of computers and their application to the processing of data. Lady Foley spent several years helping to design, implement and supervise the conversion of clerical procedures to computer-based ones at the Hospitals Contribution Fund.

In 1960, she returned to the University of Sydney as Assistant Registrar with a brief to perform the same task on the student records. She took an essentially clerical and paper-based record system that had evolved over a century, and successfully transformed it into a sophisticated computer-based system. She achieved this in the face of deep scepticism and an almost universal lack of staff confidence in the project.

She was a central figure in the establishment of the Metropolitan Universities Admissions Centre when the three metropolitan universities, Sydney, New South Wales and Macquarie, combined to admit students through a single selection procedure. During the student troubles of the 1960s and 1970s, she demonstrated considerable courage, good sense and good humour in dealing with a number of difficult and violent confrontations with students. In 1970, she became Deputy Registrar and, in 1972, Associate Registrar.

Also in 1972, she married Noel Foley, a leading figure in the Australian business community with a very close association with the University of Sydney. Lady Foley was appointed Acting Registrar in 1974 and Registrar in 1975, although she resigned in that year for personal reasons. Her years at the University were very difficult and, at times, turbulent ones. It was a period of great change in the University's administration to which she made a lasting and wide-ranging contribution.

Lady Foley has gone on to study early Australian history and was awarded the degree of Master of Arts in 1985. She has also completed a book on the early history of quarantine in Australia which is to be published soon. Altogether a life of dedicated public service and scholarship which has enriched the University and all those who have had the pleasure to know Lady Foley.

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Lady Jean Foley for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa).