

Rachel Trixie Anne, Baroness Gardner of Parkes AM



The title of Honorary Fellow of the University of Sydney was conferred upon Rachel Trixie Anne, Baroness Gardner of Parkes AM at the Nursing and Midwifery graduation ceremony held at 9.30am on 4 April 2007.



The Pro Chancellor John McCarthy QC with Baroness Gardner at the conferring ceremony, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*



From left: Vice-Chancellor Professor Gavin Brown, Rachel Trixie Anne, Baroness Gardner of Parkes, Pauline Lyle-Smith (Chair of UK Alumni Association), Dr Robin Fitzsimons (Fellow of Senate) and John McCarthy (Pro Chancellor), *waterdamaged photo, courtesy of Dr Robin Fitzsimons.*

Citation

Pro Chancellor, I present Trixie Gardner, for you to confer upon her the title of Honorary Fellow of the University.

In 1988, Trixie Gardner, now Baroness Gardner of Parkes, accompanied her husband, Kevin, then Lord Mayor of Westminster, came to Sydney to celebrate the Bicentenary. At tea with Dame Leonie Kramer the germ of an idea to found a Sydney University Alumni Association in London was formed. And so Trixie Gardner set out to make it happen. She has been its guiding light ever since.

In honouring Baroness Gardner, we are conscious of her late husband, Kevin, and we share her sadness at his recent passing. We are grateful for the support he gave, directly and indirectly, to Baroness Gardner's work for the University and the wider community. They were dentistry students together at this University, where Trixie McGirr was a student at Sancta Sophia College, after schooldays at Monte Saint Angelo. Together they made their way to London in 1954. We miss him here today, but welcome their daughter, Sarah, who has come from London to be with us.

The success of the United Kingdom Alumni Association did not happen by accident. It has been no easy task to gather together our disparate alumni, who now so convivially and regularly meet in Britain. Baroness Gardner has contributed not only her time and energy, but a canny sense of tactics, a determined will, a flair for networking and an attention to the smallest detail.

Nor has she been shy to tell others in Britain about Sydney University – as in 2000 when she announced in The House of Lords that Sydney University was about to celebrate its Sesquicentenary.

Baroness Gardner has made magnificent contributions to public life, in Britain and internationally.

She was appalled by the state of the children's teeth she saw when she first arrived in Britain. And so she became a formidable advocate for dental prevention and public health. This has been a major focus of her political work in The House of Lords. She has also been Chair of the UK Fluoridation Society, a political lobby group aimed at getting fluoride into British water, so that British children can have the kinds of dental health benefits which we in Sydney take for granted. She remembers the persuasive influence her Sydney University teacher, Professor Martin, had on Australian water fluoridation policy. But, in London, political in-fighting has meant no fluoride in the water. And that hits hardest when poor children don't even have fluoride toothpaste or other oral hygiene help.

As Chair of Plan International UK for twelve years she helped to create awareness of the needs of some of the poorest children in the world, and visited many aid projects. During her chairmanship, Plan's receipts multiplied five times. Support is given in kind, not cash, to avoid corruption problems. She had learned much from African colleagues when she was the UK Representative on the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women.

She has chaired the Royal Free Hospital Hampstead National Health Service Trust and the Suzy Lamplugh charitable Trust, been a Governor of The National Heart Hospital, worked on the Britain-Australia Bicentennial Committee, served on the United Kingdom General Dental Council and been Vice-Chair of the North-East Thames Health Authority - delivering health services to a quarter of London. In 1970, she was elected to The Greater London Council, and in 1978 became British Chair of the European Union of Women.

In 2003, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for fostering links between the United Kingdom and Australia.

Baroness Gardner must know from family experience what civilized discourse across political party boundaries really means. She may be a Conservative life-peeress and a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, but her father was Gregory McGirr, New South Wales Labor Minister for Health and Motherhood, and her uncle, James McGirr, was our Labor Premier.

She may live in Britain, but she still feels very Australian. So when she became a peeress in 1991 she fought the British Nomenclatura bureaucracy to make sure her baronial title incorporated 'Parkes', her home town which is named after the father of Australian Federation. Sometimes her Australian ideas may even be taken a little too seriously. Once when she jokingly suggested in The Lords that Australian echidnas might solve a termite problem in Devon, The London Times seriously suggested that they be imported.

She says that 'If people say to me "How will I find you in the House of Lords?", I just say "Well, ask for that Australian woman", and they'll know'.

Pro Chancellor, I present Rachel Trixie Anne, Baroness Gardner of Parkes for you to confer upon her the title of Honorary Fellow of the University.