

Ms Margaret Alison Telfer OBE

At a special meeting of the Senate held in the Great Hall on 30 April 1970, the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*) was conferred on Margaret Alison Telfer, OBE, BA DipEd.



Margaret Alison Telfer, *photo, courtesy University of Sydney Archives.*



Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Bruce Willams, Chancellor Sir Charles George McDonald KCMG KSG, Margaret Alison Telfer and Deputy Chancellor The Reverend Bertram Russell Wyllie, *photo, courtesy University of Sydney Archives.*

Citation

Presented by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Bruce R Williams:

Mr Chancellor, we honour today Miss Margaret Telfer, an important and greatly admired member of the University for many years.

Miss Telfer came up to the University in 1922 and graduated with Honours in English in 1925.

From 1926-1938 she was Secretary and guiding spirit of the Women's Union, and was its Vice-President from 1938-1944 while she was Adviser to Women Students. In 1944 she became Deputy Assistant Registrar and in 1950 Deputy Registrar. Five years later she was appointed Registrar, a post which she filled with great distinction for twelve years.

Her move to the Registrar's office did not mean that she ceased to be an adviser to students. In the post-war period she interviewed very large numbers of ex-servicemen and women seeking War Service Matriculation and her recommendations to the War Service Matriculation Committee showed a sympathy and finely tempered judgement adapted to each particular case. Her warm human approach to students was paralleled in her relations with the administrative and academic staff. Many past and present members of the University remember with gratitude her willingness to listen and give good and sound advice.

Listening and advising is a time-consuming process but she found time for other good works. She was a member of the Council of The Women's College for many years and was its Deputy Chairman and, later, Chairman in 1951 and 1952. She was President of the Australian Federation of University Women, and I am told that many women graduates still talk about the masterly way she conducted proceedings at the Federation Conference in Melbourne in 1960. She was also a member of the Committee to Survey Secondary Education in New South Wales. The Committee, chaired by Dr Wyndham, was established in 1953 and in 1957 submitted its plan for a new form of secondary education in the State, now well known as The Wyndham Scheme; and by the happy timing of Miss Telfer's successor as Registrar, the occasional address today will be delivered by Dr Wyndham.

Miss Telfer was not only a notable Registrar who expanded the quality of her office with humanity, a sense of humour and a warm concern for the welfare of others, she was the first woman to occupy such a post in any Commonwealth university. As Registrar she was also the first woman to be a member of our Professorial Board and so gave full meaning to the invitation which Sir William Manning, Chancellor of the University in 1881, issued to women to become full members of the University, and to "enjoy all its advantages and privileges in complete equality with men".

Walt Whitman wrote in the "Song of the Broad Axe":

"Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as men
Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men
...
There the great city stands."

By her qualities Miss Telfer helped us towards building such a great city here.

Mr Chancellor, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*), Margaret Alison Telfer.

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