

WAITE ARBORETUM FACT SHEET: C. M. EARDLEY 1910 - 1978

(Arboretum seats, memorial seats, history features)

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CONSTANCE M. EARDLEY 1910 – 1978



Source: Short, 1990, 1929 photo Alice Wells, ABRs. Photo; Elizabeth Gordon-Mills c. 1965 (*Lumen*, 2016)

1. NAME - DOB - DOD Constance Margret EARDLEY, 6 September 1910 in Fullarton - 15 May 1978 in Fullarton.

- **Occupation:** Curator, lecturer, researcher. instrumental in training a generation of taxonomists in Adelaide
- **Seat and table location / history feature location:** in the - *Garden of Discovery, Girls with Grit WOMEN SCIENTIST at the WAITE INSTITUTE 1925 – 1945 Garden of Discovery* metal book.
- **Nearby tree / plant species:** a collection of grasses, flowers and ground cover species.



Photos: Terry Langham

Garden of Discovery

2. QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor of Science (1929),
- Honours *“Her thesis, 'The Occurrence of Mycorrhiza [root fungus] in the Plants of South Australia’ (Cook, 2016).*
- *“Masters of Science, a thesis titled 'Comparative studies of some Australian and extra-Australian floras from an ecological aspect'” (Cook, 2016).*

3. AREA OF RESEARCH:

“In 1933, Eardley was hired by the University as curator of the Adelaide and Waite Institute herbaria.

- *In recognition of her growing expertise she was asked to lecture in Systematic Botany at North Terrace and also the Waite Institute from 1938 and 1943 respectively” (Cook, 2016).*

“Held a joint appointment from June 1933 to 1949 as curator of the herbaria at the Waite Institute and the Botany Department, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

- *She was lecturer in Systematic Botany at the University of Adelaide, halftime from 1943, fulltime from 1950, and was Senior Lecturer from 1966 until December 1971.*
- *She wrote the catalogue of plants for the Simpson Desert Expedition of 1939. Con Eardley conducted research on South Australian sphagnum bogs and swamp vegetation in 1943, moving on to arid zone plants, and cytology, in later years.*
- *She was instrumental in training a generation of taxonomists in Adelaide, inspiring them with her enthusiasm. Her herbarium was lodged at ADU and ADW, both since transferred to AD” (Orchard, 1999).*

4. RESEARCH SPECIALITY:

Systematic botanist

“Apart from various articles in newspapers and magazines, her most widely-known work was the reference manual Wildflowers of Adelaide Hills, published shortly after she retired.

- *During her career, however, Eardley produced important studies of the flora of arid regions including the Simpson Desert and the University of Adelaide's Koonamore Vegetation Reserve.*
- *She also published botanical studies of other regions of South Australia including Eight Mile Creek and Kangaroo Island.*
- *The data she collected during her regular field trips to Koonamore in particular have continued to be of value to researchers across a number of disciplines” (Cook, 2016).*

“Her standing among fellow scientists was reflected in her election to fellowship of the Royal Society of South Australia and, later, the Linnean Society, London.

- *She was also an active member of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy, ANZAAS and a number of conservation groups” (Cook, 2016).*

5. FURTHER INFORMATION - SOME WORDS OF HUMOUR, INTERESTING FACTS, ETC:

“Scientific pioneer ahead of her time” (Cook, 2016)

“For decades, botanist Constance Eardley was something of an Adelaide institution.

“Known as 'Con' or 'Miss Eardley', she was a familiar sight at both the University of Adelaide's North Terrace Campus and the Waite Institute, where she was curator of the herbaria and, later, lecturer in Systematic Botany.

- *A curiosity to some, a mentor and source of inspiration to others, Eardley was one of Adelaide's pioneering women scientists” (Cook, 2016).*

“She seems to have thrived at university, being awarded the John Bagot Scholarship and Medal in Botany in 1929 and on completion of her Bachelor of Science a further scholarship to undertake Honours. Her thesis, 'The Occurrence of Mycorrhiza [root fungus] in the Plants of South Australia', was supervised by the young lecturer in botany, Joseph Wood. Wood shortly afterwards became the nation's first Australian-born Professor of Botany, and he and Eardley shared a close working relationship over the next three decades” (Cook, 2016).

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- *In recognition of her growing expertise she was asked to lecture in Systematic Botany at North Terrace and also the Waite Institute from 1938 and 1943 respectively” (Cook, 2016).*

“Her first decade in charge of the Adelaide and Waite herbaria saw a considerable expansion in their size with the incorporation of several private collections.

- *In the mid-1950s, Adelaide's various collections of plant specimens were consolidated in the State Herbarium, but in the meantime a large portion were overseen almost single-handedly by Eardley” (Cook, 2016).*

“In the late 1940s, Eardley was conferred a Master of Science following the completion of a thesis titled 'Comparative studies of some Australian and extra-Australian floras from an ecological aspect'.

- *In 1950, she was appointed Systematic Botanist, a full-time position with the University. Lecturing, collaborating on research projects, leading field trips and supervising postgraduate students, she remained in this position until ill health forced her to retire in 1971” (Cook, 2016).*

“Eardley was also a passionate conservationist throughout her life. As someone whose work was deeply connected to the natural world, she had an intuitive sense of the dangers to our wellbeing of wholesale habitat loss (Cook, 2016).

- ***As a young woman, she helped form a group called the Tree Lovers Civic League, one of the forerunners of the contemporary environment groups.***
- *She spoke about conservation issues to groups of young teachers, and among her papers is a draft of a message to botany students, a prescient plea for "courageous and wise voices" to make the case for national parks.*
- *She wrote: "inviolable areas are of the greatest scientific and often practical importance; they are the Australian heritage which we could easily lose and never replace.*
- *Few Australians realise their value, even in terms of tourist attractions".*
- ***Eardley was also an early advocate of native gardens and one of the first to develop guidelines for estimating the value of vegetation in national parks” (Cook, 2016).***

6. PERSONAL INFORMATION: *“Eardley was born in Adelaide in 1910 and lived her entire life on Wattle Street, Fullarton.*

- ***Her father, Frederick Eardley, was the University's Assistant Registrar from 1911, and Registrar from 1924. It is likely that from him she inherited a capacity for organisation and systematic thinking. The same qualities that he applied to University administration, made for her own success as a taxonomist” (Cook, 2013).***

“Eardley attended Walford House School, taking Leaving Honours in 1927. Her final-year botany notebook survives and reveals a young woman with an obvious flair for the subject. Following her matriculation and encouraged by her parents to pursue further education, she entered the University of Adelaide as a science student” (Cook, 2013).

“Eardley was in many respects ahead of her time. Most obviously, she was an independent woman with an academic career in an era in which space for women in the public and professional spheres was extremely limited. It is difficult to say whether she would have considered herself a feminist as such, but we know she was frustrated by the stark choice between marriage and work - a dilemma faced by well-educated young women at this time” (Cook, 2016).

“When she died in 1978, she was remembered for her meticulousness and dedication to her work.

- **Her service to the University over 40 years, including involvement in the Women's and Graduates' Unions, and the goodwill she fostered in the broader community through her plant identification service, was recognised with the naming of a reserve and prize in her honour” (Cook, 2016).**

“Those who knew her also spoke of her generosity with her time, and her many acts of kindness, particularly to international students. When her friend and colleague Joseph Wood died suddenly in 1959 she wrote an extended obituary that concluded: "his life has been a very full one, to the great benefit of his University, his country, and the science of botany...But much more than a distinguished botanist, he was modest, kindly, tolerant and wise". Perhaps she would have objected, but this is an equally fitting characterisation of the life of Constance Eardley herself” (Cook, 2016).

7. PHOTOS:

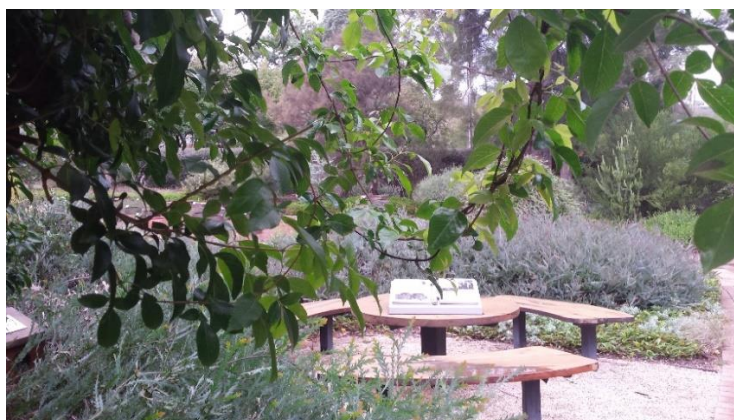


Photo: Terry Langham

8. REFERENCES:

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