

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE0568

## Tenison Woods, Mary Cecil

(1893 - 1971)

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**Born** 9 December, 1893, Adelaide South Australia Australia

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**Died** 18 October, 1971, Ryde New South Wales Australia

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**Occupation** Academic, Barrister, Child welfare advocate, Lawyer, Solicitor

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### Summary

Mary Tenison Woods (née Kitson) was the first woman to graduate in law in South Australia. She was admitted to the bar on 20 October 1917. Her application to become a public notary in 1921 led to a change in the law: the existing Act did not include women as 'persons'.

When Mary married in 1924 her partners did not wish to work with a married woman. Mary left the firm and formed a new partnership in 1925, in what may have been the first female practice in Australia. In the mid 1930s, Mary moved to Sydney and worked as a legal editor.

Following the failure of her marriage to Julian Tenison Woods, she moved to Sydney with her son, where she worked as a legal editor. In 1941 she became a member of the Child Welfare Advisory Council (NSW), held many honorary positions and served on a number of boards. Mary lectured at the university on legal aspects of social work and wrote several legal textbooks on a range of subjects.

In 1950 Tenison Woods was appointed chief of the office of the status of women in the division of human rights, United Nations Secretariat, New York. During her term two major conventions were adopted: the Convention of the Political Rights of Women (1952), the first international law aimed at the granting and protection of women's full political rights, and the Convention of the Nationality of Married Women (1957) which decreed that marriage should not affect the nationality of a wife.

On 13 June 1959 Mary Tenison Woods was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for public service, especially with the United Nations. Previously she had been appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire on 8 June 1950 for services to child welfare.

## Events

### **1916 - 1916**

Graduated from the University of Adelaide, (LLB)

### **2017 - 2017**

First woman to be admitted to the Bar in South Australia

### **1948 - 1948**

Nominated (unsuccessfully) to be the Australian representative on the United Nations Organization Status of Women Commission

### **1919 - 1919**

Became a partner in the reconstituted firm of Johnstone, Ronald & Kitson

### **1921 - 1921**

Kitson's application to become a public notary led to a change in the law: the existing Act did not include women as 'persons'

### **2024 - 2024**

Mary Kitson married barrister and solicitor, Julian Gordon Tenison Woods, they were to have one son

### **1925 - 1925**

Joined Dorothy Somerville in practice, as her former partners preferred not to work with a married woman

### **2027 - 2027**

Her husband's name was removed from the roll for misuse of trust funds. The couple separated.

### **1930 - 1930**

She received grants from the Carnegie Corporation to research delinquency

### **1937 - 1937**

Published *Juvenile Delinquency*

### **1930 - 1950**

After moving to Sydney with her son, she worked as legal editor with Butterworth's Book Company

### **1944 - 1944**

Wrote two articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald* highlighting problems at Parramatta and at the Gosford Boy's Home

### **1935 - 1940**

Served on the New South Wales Board of Social Study and Training

### **1941 - 1949**

Served on the New South Wales Board of Social Studies at the University of Sydney

### **1946 - 1946**

Founder of the New South Wales St Joan's Social and Political Alliance

### **1950 - 1958**

Appointed Chief of the Office of the Status of Women in the Human Rights Division of the United Nations

### **2059 - 2059**

Appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for public service, especially with the United Nations Organization

### **2050 - 2050**

Appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to child welfare.

### **1940 - 1945**

Sat on the board of the Women's Australian National Services

### **1940 - 1950**

Lectured part time at the University of Sydney on legal aspects of social work

## Published resources

### Resource Section

Law, Kerwin, Hollie and Rubenstein, Kim, 2014,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0624b.htm>

Mary Tenison Woods - Social and Political Activist,  
<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/whits/Requestedtranscripts/reqtranscript06.html>

Tenison Woods, Mary Cecil (1893-1971), O'Brien, Anne, 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120213b.htm>

### Book Section

Mary Tenison Woods, O'Brien, Anne, 1988

### Book

Capital issues and economic organization regulations : ... as amended to date and continued in force by the Commonwealth Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act, 1946, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Ex-servicemen's legislation, being the Re-establishment and Employment Act, 1945, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1945

Juvenile delinquency : with special references to institutional treatment, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1937

Landlord and tenant and land sales control legislation of New South Wales : being the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act, 1948 and War Service Moratorium Regulations, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1948

Landlord and tenant Commonwealth regulations, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Price regulations : consolidated and annotated, being prices regulations as amended to date and continued in force by the Commonwealth Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act, 1946, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Three Women of Faith: Gertrude Abbott, Elizabeth Anstice Baker and Mary Tenison Woods, Press, Margaret M., 2000

### Edited Book

Butterworth's commercial legislation service : being a complete digest of acts of Parliament, regulations and orders of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia including notes on decisions of the courts, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1948

Butterworths' digest of commercial legislation 1947 being a complete digest of Acts of Parliament, Regulations, Rules and Orders of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia which relate to commerce including notes on decisions of the courts, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Digest of commercial legislation : being a complete digest of Acts of Parliament, Regulations, Rules and Orders of the Commonwealth and all states of Australia which relate to commerce, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil) and Jelbart, J. M. (John McClure), 1946

Digest of war legislation in Australia : being a complete digest of acts of Parliament, regulations, rules and orders, by-laws, proclamations and notices of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia relating to or affected by the existing state of war and including reported decisions of the courts there on, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1939-1945

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Mary Cecil Tenison Woods, barrister, legal author and editor and child welfare reformer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

### Author Details

Anne Heywood and Larissa Halonkin

**Created** 29 September 2003

**Last modified** 29 October 2018