

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2175

Jones, Margaret Mary

(1923 - 2006)

Born	1 January, 1923, Rockhampton Queensland Australia
Died	31 December, 2006, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Journalist

Summary

Margaret Jones was Literary Editor for the *Herald* and worked as a journalist in the London and New York bureaus of John Fairfax Ltd, before becoming Foreign Editor for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the 1970s. She reported from North Korea and North Vietnam, and was staff correspondent in Peking, China. Described as a 'trailblazer for women journalists', Jones wrote for the *Herald* newspaper for a total of thirty-three years.

Details

Margaret Jones was the youngest of six children. Her father, John, worked on the Rockhampton Harbour Board for 40 years. She received a Catholic education at Rockhampton and spent a period at teachers' college in Brisbane, before working as a journalist on the Mackay *Mercury* and as a stringer for the ABC. Moving to Sydney, she worked on *The Daily Mirror*.

In 1954, despite ongoing prejudice against women in journalism, she joined the *Herald*. Two years later she resigned to work in England and Paris, before joining *The Sun-Herald* in 1961. In 1965 she received her first foreign posting, to the *Herald's* New York offices. There she worked, though not entirely in harmony, with Lillian Roxon. The following year she became the paper's first Washington correspondent. Barred from the National Press Club because of her sex, and consequently deprived of access to important functions and major speeches, her work was hindered, but she managed a successful stint in Washington, covering Lyndon Johnson's presidency and the Vietnam War.

In 1969 she moved to London, covering subjects from the IRA to the Beatles. She returned to Sydney to become literary editor of the paper. By the early 70s, the ratio of women to men on the staff had risen from 1:11 to 1:6. In 1972 Jones joined the successful campaign to allow women full membership of the Sydney Journalists Club. The following year, she was appointed foreign correspondent in Beijing (then Peking), the first to hold the position for the *Herald* since WWII.

In 1976, Jones gave the Paton-Wilkie-Deamer Newspaper Address organised by the Journalists' Club, Sydney, and the New South Wales branch of the Australian Journalists' Association. She was the first woman journalist to be invited to do so. According to Jones, 'the integrity of the press, or lack of it, is among the most topical of all subjects today, arising out of the upheavals in the Government of Australia over the last year or so'. Her primary concern was the tendency – on both sides of politics – to use the press as a 'whipping boy', carrying the blame for all misfortune. The credibility of the press, said Jones, was 'at a pretty low ebb – just about the lowest I can remember', but censorship or greater control of the press was not the solution. Jones used the address to reflect upon the dangers of a controlled press based on her own experiences as a reporter in China from 1973. China's two national newspapers, the *Renmin Ribao* and the *Kwangming Ribao*, were the only newspapers that foreigners were permitted to read. The papers were under the strict control of government, and could only report positive news – great feats, economic gains, general prosperity. Foreign correspondents, too, were carefully monitored and not permitted to write about any subject that touched on the health of Chairman Mao, dissension in the leadership, or defence. A 'warning system' ensured their compliance – after two warnings, foreign correspondents would be forced to leave.

In 1980 Jones returned to London as European correspondent. Following her retirement in 1987, she served on the Australian Press Council from 1988-98. Her publications include *Thatcher's Kingdom*, *The Confucius Enigma*, and *The Smiling Buddha*.

Published resources

Book

Thatcher's Kingdom: A View of Britain in the Eighties, Jones, Margaret, 1984

The Confucius Enigma, Jones, Margaret, 1979

The Smiling Buddha, Jones, Margaret, 1985

Lecture

Pressures on the Press, Jones, Margaret, 1976

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of New South Wales

Southern Africa Defence and Aid Fund in Australia - records, 1961-1981, together with the records of Community Aid Abroad (Australia). Southern Africa Group, 1981-1987

Nancy Phelan - papers, 1866-1996? Nancy Phelan - literary manuscripts, with working papers including correspondence, 1866-1996

Salmon family - Malcolm Salmon - papers, 1927-1986

Author Details

Barbara Lemon

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