

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE6079

## Nicholls, Yvonne Isabel

(1914 - 2009)

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**Born** 1 January, 1914

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**Died** 31 December, 2009

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**Occupation** Activist, Administrative officer, Author, Civil Libertarian, Public speaker, Teacher

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### Details

Yvonne Isabel Nicholls nee Miles took her BA from the University of Melbourne in 1936 and her MA from the University of Sydney in 1938. She published *Thai Kenaf: a case-study of a new cash crop in a developing country of Southeast Asia*. Her interest in Thailand was sustained by a life of travel, following her marriage in 1940 to Frank Nicholls (1916-2013) who had a long career in scientific administration in Australia. The couple spent the war in England, where she headed the unit in Australia House charged with photographing and sending secret documents.

On her return to Australia, Yvonne Nicholls took up an appointment in Economic Geography at the University of Melbourne, occupying the position between 1948 and 1960, after which, in Thailand, she became principal of a former PEN English-language school, securing government funding and overseeing its expansion to cover from kindergarten to Cambridge GCE level. In Geneva during the 1970s she published on environmental issues.

An interest in ants led to her discovering a new species during a trip to the Otway Ranges. It was named *Monomorium yvonnii* by the University of Melbourne. Her 1952 pamphlet *Not Slaves, Not Citizens* was used during the Yes campaign for the 1967 referendum that gave the Commonwealth power to make laws specifically to benefit Aboriginal people.[3]

In Australia after 1977 she taught at several schools and the Council for Adult Education. Yvonne Nicholls was a frequent speaker in television. Her range of topics was prodigious, inspired by life in many countries. Her lecture 'The Fascinating History of Sex' was broadcast. She told an interviewer:

In sacred sex, for example, I describe rituals such as group sex in the fields, which was a fertility rite practised by the Incas in South America. In sensual sex I cite cultures such as ancient Rome where wives were the faithful watchdogs and married men sought beauty and sex with mistresses. Sinful sex, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition, comes from the view of Eve as temptress.[4]

When Bert Newton interviewed her on television he ensured that the legs of the grand piano were shrouded to avoid upsetting the audience.

[1] Suzy Chandler. 'Scientist and Movie Buff Who Helped Develop Radar and Played Leading Role in Establishing Film Festival'. *Age*.

[2] Yvonne I. Nicholls. *Source Book: emergence of proposals for recompensing developing countries for maintaining environmental resources*. Environmental Policy and Law Paper no. 5) Morges, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1978.

[3] Yvonne Nicholls. *Not Slaves, Not Citizens: condition of the Australian Aborigines in the Northern Territory*. Melbourne: Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1952.

[4] Mary Ryllis Clark. 'It's the Little Things in Life'. *Age*: 15 April 2004. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/04/14/108183877248>

## Published resources

### **Book**

40 Years 40 Women: Biographies of University of Melbourne Women, Published to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the International Year of Women, Flesch, Juliet, 2015,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/4040/>

### **Author Details**

Juliet Flesch

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