

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** IMP0130

## Cowan, Edith Dircksey

(1861 - 1932)

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**Nationality** Australian

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**Born** 2 August, 1861, Glengarry, near Geraldton Western Australia Australia

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**Died** 9 June, 1932, Perth Western Australia Australia

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**Occupation** Community worker, Lawyer, Magistrate, Political activist, Politician, Public servant

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### Summary

Edith Cowan, the first woman to be elected to an Australian parliament in Western Australia in 1921, was described in her entry in *Australian feminism, a companion*, as 'a committed, tireless and public campaigner for women's and children's rights from the early twentieth century'. Married at the age of seventeen to James Cowan, registrar and master of the Supreme Court, they had five children. She was the founding secretary in 1894 and later president of the Karrakatta Club, a women's club in Perth, which campaigned for female suffrage. Her commitment to women's well-being resulted in her active involvement in the establishment of the Western Australian National Council of Women in 1911. She was a foundation member of the Children's Protection Society in 1906 and the first woman to be appointed to the Children's Court bench in 1915. She became a Justice of the Peace in 1920. In the same year her work was acknowledged with her appointment to the Order of the British Empire for her contribution to the Western Australian division of the Red Cross Society, of which she was a founding member in 1914.

A clock tower at the entrance to King's Park in Perth was erected to her memory in 1934 and in 1995 her portrait was printed on the Australian fifty dollar note.

### Events

#### 2001 - 2001

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

### Published resources

#### Book

Reflections : profiles of 150 women who helped make Western Australia's history; Project of the Womens Committee for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Western Australia, Popham, Daphne; Stokes, K.A.; Lewis, Julie, 1979

Mrs Cowan's clock: the location of the Edith Cowan Memorial, Wycherley, Paul, 1997

A unique position: a biography of Edith Dircksey Cowan, 1861-1932, Cowan, Peter, 1978

The voice of Edith Cowan, Australia's first woman parliamentarian 1921-1924, Cowan, Edith Dircksey, 1996

Uphill all the way: a documentary history of women in Australia, Daniels, Kay and Murnane, Mary, 1980

Liberal women : Federation to 1949, Fitzherbert, Margaret, 2004

Women on the warpath : feminist of the first wave, Davidson, Dianne, 1997

The Complete Book of Great Australian Women: Thirty-six women who changed the course of Australia, De Vries, Susanna, 2003

No ordinary lives: pioneering women in Australian politics, Jenkins, Cathy, 2008

### **Journal Article**

Bishop Hale and secondary education, Cowan, Edith Dircksey, 1930

Early social life and fashions, Cowan, Edith Dircksey, 1928

Some pioneer women, Cowan, Edith Dircksey, 1931

Breaking the monumental mould: how the Edith Cowan clock was built., Bulbeck, Chilla, 1996

Edith Cowan, Cowan, Peter, 1976

In the thick of every battle for the cause of Labor' : the voluntary work of the Labor women's organisations in Western Australia, 1900-1970, Oliver, Bobbie, 2001

### **Resource Section**

Cowan, Edith Dircksey (1861-1932), Brown, Margaret, 2006,  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080137b.htm>

The National Library of Australia's Federation Gateway, National Library of Australia, 2002,  
<http://www.nla.gov.au/guides/federation/people/cowan.html>

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

### **Book Section**

Edith Cowan, Steadman, Margaret, 1988

Cowan, Edith, Grahame, Emma, 1998

Making a Difference: Women in the West Australian Parliament 1921-1999, Black, David and Phillips, Harry, 2000

### **Edited Book**

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

### **Site Exhibition**

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

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

### **Resource**

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

## Archival resources

### **State Library of Western Australia**

[Letter, 1922 15 Dec. \[manuscript\]](#)

[Minute book, 1932-1952 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia records](#)

[Edith Cowan and Cowan family papers](#)

### **National Library of Australia**

[\[Biographical cuttings on Edith Cowan, former first woman member of an Australian parliament, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

### **Author Details**

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