

Archer, Mary Ellinor Lucy (1893-1979)

Mary Archer, known as Ellinor Archer, was a founding member of Victorian Graduate Women, and held the position of Honorary Treasurer for the first ten years of the association's life, from 1920-1930. She enjoyed an outstanding professional career as a scientist and librarian, as outlined in the article below, republished from the Australian Dictionary of Biography, volume 13, 1993, by Jean P. Whyte.

Mary Ellinor Lucy Archer (1893-1979), librarian and scientist, was born on 13 November 1893 at Malvern, Melbourne, daughter of Oakeley Archer, a civil engineer from England, and his Victorian-born wife Lucy Georgina Elizabeth, née Gaunt. Lucy was a sister of [Cecil](#), (Sir) Ernest, (Sir) Guy and [Mary Gaunt](#), and in 1906-18 was principal of Trinity College Hostel (later [Janet Clarke](#) Hall). Educated at the Church of England Girls' Grammar School, Melbourne, and the University of Melbourne (B.Sc., 1916; M.Sc., 1918), Mary added Ellinor Lucy to her name, but was to be known as Ellinor Archer professionally. After graduating she became a government research scholar in botany and joined the teaching staff of Trinity College.

In November 1918 Archer was appointed secretary and investigator to the special committee on seed improvement of the Advisory Council of Science and Industry (Commonwealth Institute of Science and Industry from 1920). The committee endeavoured to improve crops and published bulletins in 1922-23 (which she probably wrote) on the classification of barleys, oats and wheats. In May 1923 she took charge of the institute's library; following the inauguration (1926) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, her post was reclassified in 1929 as librarian and scientific assistant. She was secretary to the citrus preservation committee, compiled a register of agricultural research, and was effectively head librarian and supervisor of libraries in divisions and experimental stations. Visiting scientific libraries in Britain in 1936, she studied the universal decimal classification and, on her return, encouraged its introduction in C.S.I.R. libraries. Her title was changed to chief librarian in January 1946.

A foundation member (1937) and first female president (1948-49) of the Australian Institute of Librarians, Archer made a lasting contribution to her profession. She had been appointed to the institute's board of certification and examination in 1941. When the A.I.L. was reconstituted as the Library Association of Australia, she served as an active past president (1950-53). Having attained her objectives of including special librarianship in the national examination system for librarians and of establishing the special libraries section within the L.A.A., in 1952 she became the section's first president.

As one of Australia's foremost special librarians with charge of a national library system, Archer travelled frequently. She went to Perth in 1954 to establish a library for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization's Western Australian regional laboratory and visited a number of special libraries, offering goodwill and advice; her friendly and informal approach was appreciated. Archer urged inter-library co-operation through the standardization of codes and forms: she published her views in the *Australian Library Journal* and addressed the L.A.A.'s eighth conference (1955) on the subject. She

advocated membership of the professional association and promoted the education of librarians.

Although Archer liked to say that she had entered her calling by accident, she became a successful librarian and senior administrator in an organization which had few women in positions of authority. She gathered about her a dedicated staff and regarded it as immaterial that they were predominantly female. Fierce in argument, imaginative in her hopes for her profession and outspoken in her judgements, she maintained that librarianship was as much about people as books, and no occupation for introverts. Archer saw the establishment of an information section within C.S.I.R.O. as a threat to the library service. Beyond the requirements of her work, she read little except detective stories and travelogues. Small and slight, with bright, brown eyes and a sallow complexion, she was intelligent and energetic. She retired on 17 December 1954 and was appointed M.B.E. in 1956.

In addition to further trips abroad, Archer sold books to aid the Save the Children Fund, belonged to the Lyceum Club, was a keen walker and photographer, and painted wildflowers. She died on 3 May 1979 at Toorak, Melbourne, and was cremated; her estate was sworn for probate at \$100,086. The L.A.A. instituted the Ellinor Archer award in her honour; it was first bestowed in 1984.

Select Bibliography

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