

Ethel Bage 1884-1943

Ethel Bage is remembered as the first Treasurer of the Victoria Women's Graduate Association, founded 1920. This association was renamed Australian Federation of University Women Victoria, then Graduate Women Victoria. She inspired the establishment of the Endowment Fund, to provide scholarships for women graduates, and acted as one of the first trustees. As Treasurer, she instigated the practice of setting aside a small proportion of each subscription for the Endowment Fund and left a bequest to the fund at her death. By 1931, there was sufficient money available to award the first scholarship.

Ethel's mother, Marie Charlotte Bage (1863-1931) was active in public affairs in Melbourne, especially the National Council of Women, and in various philanthropic organisations. Ethel was educated in England, then graduated BA 1911 and MA 1913 at the University of Melbourne. She was also a trained accountant. She acted as Honorary Secretary to the Mawson Antarctic Expedition of 1911. Her brother Robert joined the expedition; he died at Gallipoli in 1915. Ethel appears to have been in London during the First World War, presumably engaged in some form of war work, before returning to Australia in 1919.

In 1926 she took over the management of the motor service business founded by her friend Alice Anderson, whom she had assisted with bookkeeping. Building on ideas of female independence expressed during World War I, Anderson declared that her ambition was to turn garage work into a profession suitable for women. In 1926, Anderson died of a gunshot wound to the forehead on 17 September in hospital at Kew after having accidentally injured herself while cleaning firearms. The Alice Anderson Motor Service offered everything then expected from motor garages—petrol sales, vehicle repairs, a driving school, a 24-hour chauffeur service, either with the garage's cars or the client's vehicles stored on the premises—and organized chauffeured tourist parties on interstate trips. It also provided services to educate women in the new technology. Driving classes included mechanical instruction on demonstration engines; for an extra fee women could work alongside mechanics on their own cars; a programme enabled women to work as pupil-mechanics to learn the mechanical side of motoring. When Ethel became ill in 1939, the business was sold, but it operated until staff left in 1942 to join the women's services in World War II. Ethel died in 1943.

Ethel's sister, Anna Frederika (Freda) 1883-1970 was first Principal of the University of Queensland Women's College and is commemorated by our sister organisation in Queensland by the annual award of the Freda Bage Fellowship.