

DAME CONSTANCE ELIZABETH D'ARCY DBE – FORMER DEPUTY CHANCELLOR (1943–46)

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (MB ChM 1904), Dame Constance Elizabeth D'Arcy was a Fellow of Senate elected by the graduates of the University of Sydney from 1919 to 1949 and Deputy Chancellor between 1943 and 1946.

PROFILE

(1879 - 1950)

MB ChM *Sydney*

**Fellow of Senate 1919 - 1949, including election by Senate as
– Deputy Chancellor 1943 - 1946**

Her early years

D'Arcy was born on 1 June 1879 at Rylstone, New South Wales.

She was educated at Rylstone Public School and Riviera College, Woollahra.

Her student days at the University of Sydney

In 1898 D'Arcy matriculated at the University of Sydney, attending from 1899 to 1903. She graduated MB ChM with honours in 1904.

Her career

As neither Sydney teaching hospitals would accept women, D'Arcy did her residency at the (Royal) Adelaide Hospital. Then in 1905 became resident medical officer at the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington.

In 1908 she began a practice in Macquarie Street and became honorary surgeon at the Royal Hospital for Women. She supported improved standards in nursing, and was instrumental in the formation of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation.

She was a member of the National Council of Women, and when it requested the university in 1922 to establish a chair of obstetrics, she assisted the passage of the proposal through faculty and senate, and in 1924 the government provided funding.

D'Arcy was lecturer in clinical obstetrics 1925-39 at the University, served on the Senate Finance Committee, the Cancer Research Committee and the conjoint board of Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children and represented the University on the Australian Council of Hospital Almoners.

As Deputy Chancellor from 1943 to 1946, the first woman so elected, she took major

responsibility for resolving many of the problems associated with the post-war expansion of the University. In 1929 she was a foundation member of the council of Sancta Sophia College, which she chaired from 1946.

In the 1920s D'Arcy helped to organize the sexual education work of the National Council of Women, and served the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children. In 1944 she became president of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Sydney.

She was created a Dame of the Order of the British Empire in 1935.

She died of cerebrovascular disease in the Sacred Heart Hospice for the Dying, Darlinghurst, on 25 April 1950.

From the Australian Dictionary of Biography



Dr D'Arcy in 1919, *photo, The Sydney Mail, 29 October 1919, Google News Archive.*



Dame Constance Elizabeth D'Arcy in 1933, *photo from the Sydney Medical School Senior Yearbook, 1933 Faculty of Medicine Online Museum.*

Her membership of Senate

From 1919 to 1949 D'Arcy represented the graduates on the Senate of the University of Sydney, the first woman to be elected.

While a Fellow of Senate, she helped to secure recognition of St Vincent's as a teaching hospital and was its honorary gynaecologist from 1923 to 1945.

She remained an active member of Sydney University Women's Union and the Sydney University Women Graduates' Association.



Dr D'Arcy (front row, 2nd from left) and the Board of Directors of the Sydney University Women's Union in 1917. Dr D'Arcy was Vice-President and the Senate representative, *photo from 'Hermes' November 1917.*

The Chancellor informed the Senate at its meeting in May 1950 of the death on 25 April of Dame Constance D'Arcy. The members stood as a mark of respect and in appreciation of her long-service, as a member of the Senate. The following resolution was passed by Senate at its next meeting:

"Dame Constance D'Arcy was a Fellow of the Senate for six quinquennial terms - from 1919 till 1949 - when on account of failing health she did not seek re-election. During that period she gave distinguished service to the University, at first as a Fellow without special office, later as a member of the Finance Committee and later in the high position of Deputy Chancellor. She had prior to 1919 proved herself a force among University women for as far back as 1912 she had been elected President of the body now known as the Sydney University Women's Union. On the Council of Sancta Sophia College she was also a power from the time of its foundation till her death early this year.

Her influence ranged through almost every activity in which women took an interest in this State and it was therefore not surprising when in 1935 she was created a Dame of the Order of the British Empire. This honour was acclaimed at the time as a well deserved tribute to a woman who had served not only her own University with outstanding success but had played a leading part in many movements for the social betterment of the poor.

So broad were Dame Constance D'Arcy's interests and so general her activities that it is apt to be forgotten that she was a distinguished surgeon and that in the first and last instance her main work lay in the professional field. She was the first woman to become an Honorary Gynaecologist at the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington, where she also held the University appointment of Lecturer in Clinical Obstetrics from 1923 to 1939. At St Vincent's Hospital Sydney, she did notable work as an Honorary Gynaecologist and when in 1923 a clinical school was established at that Hospital, no member of the staff entered on and maintained the training of students with deeper zest. She will long be remembered by her students to whom she imparted her learning and by patients who reaped the benefit of her surgical skill.

The Senate desires to place on record this tribute to one who achieved fame as a surgeon, won honour as a leader of women and served the University so long, so wisely and so well."