

## AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FACT FILE

### DAME CONSTANCE ELIZABETH D'ARCY

(1879-1950)

#### Obstetrician and Gynaecologist

1879	Born 1 June in Rylstone, NSW
1894	Completed primary education at Rylestone Public School
1898	Matriculated to University of Sydney from Riviere College, Woollahra
1904	Graduated Bachelor of Medicine (MB) and Bachelor of Surgery (ChM), University of Sydney
1905–1907	First Resident Medical Officer to be appointed at the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington, NSW
1908	Appointed Honorary Surgeon at Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington, NSW—first woman member of its honorary medical staff Opened practice in Macquarie Street, Sydney
1919	First woman elected to the Senate of the University of Sydney
1923–1945	Honorary Gynaecologist at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney
1925–1939	Lecturer in Clinical Obstetrics at the University of Sydney; first woman to be appointed to the Faculty
1926	Foundation member of Council of Sancta Sophia College within Sydney University
1933–1934	President of the Medical Women's Association NSW
1934	Foundation member of the Guild of St Luke for Catholic doctors
1935	Awarded a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) for services to the welfare of children
1940	Awarded Papal Cross <i>Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice</i>
1943–1946	Deputy Chancellor of the University of Sydney; first woman to appointed to the position
1944	President of the Business and Professional Women's Club, Sydney
1948	Retired from practice
1950	Died 25 April; buried in Waverley Cemetery, NSW

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**Constance D'Arcy** was born the fifth daughter of Bridget (née Synnott) and Murty D'Arcy, sergeant of police, in Rylstone near Mudgee. She was a distinguished obstetrician and gynaecologist. Throughout her career she was concerned with reducing the incidence of maternal death through the control of puerperal septicaemia. She advocated improved nursing standards and regular antenatal examinations and was a founder of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation. An active Catholic, she contributed to both Catholic and secular organisations during her life. As a member of the National Council of Women, she organised its sex education program.

She was chosen to give one of the speeches at the formal blessing and opening of Sancta Sophia College for Catholic women within Sydney University in 1926. Freeman's Journal reported: *Dr Constance Darcy (sic), as a representative of university women, declared that the hall would act as a stimulus to the higher education of women... Women with trained brains, and who were clear thinkers,*

*made better mothers... There was no sex discrimination at the University. Women lecturers got the same pay as men...*

As president of the Business and Professional Women's Club in Sydney in 1944, she made clear her commitment to equal pay for women. D'Arcy was associated with Jessie Street's Australian Women's Charter and this association caused her to fall foul of the Catholic women who were to found the St Joan's Alliance. There was opposition to Street because of her association with USSR causes and the establishment of the St Joan's Alliance was seen as a way *to offset the damage done to the Catholic image by the association of one of Sydney's most prominent Catholic women, Dame Constance D'Arcy, with Street.* D'Arcy was to have opened the Women's Charter conference in 1946 but was persuaded to withdraw from the opening.

D'Arcy served on the Council of Sancta Sophia until her death, her final years as Chair. On her death, in 1950, the student magazine said: *Hers was a life distinguished by its learning and by its generous human sympathies, sympathies always inclined particularly to what concerned the welfare of women.*

The old Paddington Royal Hospital for Women had a building named in memory of Dame Constance D'Arcy. When, however, the hospital relocated to Randwick, the name was forgotten: there is no memorial for her at Randwick.

#### **Sources**

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\* In JSNWL

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