

# The Australian Women's Register

---

Entry type: Person  
Entry ID: IMP0071

## Anstey, Olive Eva

(1920 - 1983)

Nationality	Australian
Born	9 August, 1920, Perth Western Australia Australia
Died	31 December, 1983
Occupation	Nurse

### Summary

Olive Eva Anstey was born in Perth in 1920. Against her mother's judgment, Olive pursued her desire to become a nurse, completing her general training at Royal Perth Hospital. Olive eventually became a top nursing administrator who was well respected and admired for the compassion and leadership qualities she brought to her chosen profession. Throughout her career Olive was a staunch advocate for better working conditions and pay for nurses, working on various committees with the goal of obtaining recognition of nursing as a profession. She was appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1969 and in 1982 was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her service to nursing.

## Details

Olive Eva Anstey's mother couldn't understand why her daughter wanted to abandon her relatively well-paid career as a bookkeeper for Betts and Betts, to become a nurse. 'When my mother heard she thought I was nuts,' Olive said. But the desire to be a nurse would not be quashed and Olive quit her pen-pushing job and a dramatic cut in salary to become a student nurse. She recalls that the conditions and facilities for nurses and patients alike were not very good. And neither was she good at obeying rules that she thought were senseless:

'I must admit I didn't take too kindly to the discipline. We had to stand up straight with our hands behind our backs when we spoke to a nurse the station above us on the hierarchic ladder... I was a bit of a rebel and used to spend a fair bit of time on the assistant matron's doorstep.'

When Olive eventually became a top nursing administrator she was one of the first to relax the regimentation but not the standards of nursing. She quickly earned the respect and admiration of nurses, although throughout her life remained surprised that she rose to the top, where she had a reputation for being a compassionate leader.

Born in Perth, Western Australia on 9 August 1920, Olive was educated at St Patricks College and Perth Technical College. She later completed her general nursing training at Royal Perth Hospital and then undertook a midwifery course at the Royal Hospital for Women in Sydney. She worked at Riverton Hospital, the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the Public Health Hospital in South Australia before being appointed first matron of the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (then Perth Chest Hospital) in July 1958 – it was a position she would hold until her retirement in December 1981.

Throughout her nursing career Olive was a staunch advocate for better working conditions and pay for nurses. She worked tirelessly on various committees with the goal of obtaining recognition of nursing as a profession to be valued. These include the Council of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation (Western Australia) where she served variously as a council member; as vice-president; as president; and as senior vice-president. She also served as senior vice-president and then president of the Federal Committee of RANF and as a member of the Florence Nightingale Committee (Western Australia). She also represented Australia at some of the council meetings of International Council of Nurses in Frankfurt-am-Main.

In 1969 Olive was appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) and in 1982 was appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). In 1974, as a tribute to her lifelong contribution to nursing, a multi-storey building, Anstey House, was named after her. Several months after her death almost in 1983, a \$250,000 national appeal was launched as a memorial to commemorate Olive's significant contribution to national and international nursing. Established in April 1984, the fund was designed to provide scholarships for nurses wishing to further their studies.

## Published resources

### Resource Section

Anstey, Olive Eva (1920 - 1983), Biographical Entry, 2003,  
<http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/bsparcs/biogs/P004455b.htm>

### Newspaper Article

A Name Used in Tribute [Olive Anstey], 1974

A quiet revolution [Olive Anstey], 1973

Appeal for \$250, 000 [Olive Anstey], 1984

Matron Appointed [Olive Anstey], 1958

Nurse dies after a life of caring [Olive Anstey], 1983

Nurse retires... as the star [Olive Anstey], 1981

Obituary... The Late Olive Anstey, 1983

The Top Nurse Looks Back [Olive Anstey], 1981

Top WA nurse to retire [Olive Anstey], 1981

WA Matrons Look at Nursing Overseas, 1965

### Journal

Queen's Birthday Honour for a West Australian Nurse [Olive Anstey], 1969

### Journal Article

Tribute to Olive Anstey: A history-maker's retirement, 1982

Untitled [Olive Anstey], 1983

### Book

The concept of a community centred teaching hospital: the impact on nursing, Anstey, Olive E., 1972

The watchword "accountability": international and national implications for nursing, Anstey, Olive E., 1978

Eye to Eye: Forty Famous West Australians, Donovan-Urquhart, Mary L., 1984

Notable Australians: the Pictorial Who's Who, Hamlyn, Paul, 1978

The WAY 79 WHO is WHO: Synoptic Biographies of Western Australians, Sacks, Margaret A. (ed.), 1980

### Resource

Where are the Women in Australian science?, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, 2003,  
<http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/wisa/wisa.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### 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>

## Archival resources

### Australian Dictionary of Biography

[Olive Anstey](#)

### National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Miss Olive Anstey, nurse, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

### National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Records of the National Florence Nightingale Committee \(Australia\), 1946-1993 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers of Barbara Fawkes 1954-1984 \[manuscript\]](#)

## Author Details

Judith Ion

**Created** 5 August 2002

**Last modified** 4 September 2008

## Digital resources



**Title:** Olive Anstey

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 3 May, 2023