

MS MARGARET FRANCES CARNEGIE

Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*)

Margaret Carnegie is a distinguished writer, collector and patron of the arts. She is also one of Charles Sturt University's principal benefactors. Twice honoured for her contributions to national life—most recently through appointment as an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia—she is today receiving her second honorary award from this University.

Precisely twenty years ago, the then Riverina College of Advanced Education conferred a Bachelor of Arts (*honoris causa*) in acknowledgment of the gift of her outstanding collection of Australiana. Now housed in the University's Wagga Campus Library, and known as the *Margaret Carnegie Collection*, it comprises some 6000 monographs, 300 serial titles, and a quantity of documents and ephemera. It's a 'working tool', rather than a bookman's collection, in that most of it was acquired to support its donor's own research and writing. But it's no ordinary scholar's library either, because many of the items are scarce, some rare, and a few unique.

The idea of maintaining this exceptional research resource as an entity was suggested by Keith and Vera Swan, who organised its transfer to the College in annual instalments between 1973 and 1982. Appropriately enough, Keith presented Mrs Carnegie for her honorary award in 1977, whilst her son Roderick delivered the occasional address. Sadly, Keith Swan died last year. Vera Swan is, however, present at this morning's ceremony.

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of *our* Margaret Carnegie Collection is that it's just one of several significant collections which this remarkable woman has made during her long life.

Born in Melbourne on 14 March 1910, Margaret Frances Allen attended Lauriston School. At finishing school in Switzerland she began to paint; and, on returning to Melbourne, enrolled at Meldrum's art school. Max Meldrum was a pretty dogmatic fellow, who was known to his detractors as 'McQuibble', so it's not altogether surprising that Margaret 'chucked it' straightaway. But the experience left her enthusiasm for the visual arts undiminished. Shortly before she married Douglas Carnegie in 1931, she bought her first major painting, Arthur Streeton's *Westminster Bridge at Dusk*. Her choice of both artist and subject hints at an Anglo-Australian sensibility which further overseas travel strongly reinforced.

Back in Melbourne, the Carnegies settled at 4 Grant Avenue, Toorak. Still consumed with nostalgia for things English, they commissioned a splendid house in Queen Anne revival style from the architect Tom Freeman. The austere classicism of its white stuccoed walls was complemented by a formal and strongly geometric garden, with restrained planting predominantly in shades of green. The outcome of a collaboration between Mrs Carnegie and the garden designer Edna Walling, it remains the most intact of all Walling's city gardens, as well as one of the most unashamedly Anglophile.

Margaret commissioned a second Walling garden—no mean achievement because Edna was famously difficult to get on with—after she and Douglas moved to 'Kildrummie' at Holbrook. When Walling arrived to inspect the site in 1948, she was unamused to find that Freeman's pisé homestead in the local vernacular manner was half built and work already

under way in the garden. But the emollient effects of a mid-morning sherry were sufficient to secure agreement to planting with Australian native species. The 'Kildrummie' garden marks an interesting departure in Walling's style. It was her first big rural commission in New South Wales, and the way she mixed native and introduced species signalled a clear break from her English mentor, Gertrude Jekyll.

Whilst Margaret Carnegie still had eighteenth century English furniture in her dining room, she soon—notoriously—began to fill the bull pens, which Freeman had constructed to house her husband's prize-winning Poll Hereford stud, with contemporary Australian paintings. Her collection of over 500 major objects was dispersed when she and Douglas returned to Melbourne in 1982, so one needs to turn to photographs in *Art and Australia* and exhibition catalogues to get a feel for the overwhelming impact it must have made on visitors. According to Patrick McCaughey, it gave 'a remarkably comprehensive picture of the main developments' in Australian art during the 1950s and 1960s. 'Of the really big guns,' he noted, 'only Dobell [was] missing!'

By the mid-sixties Margaret Carnegie was collecting books and periodicals. Initially her interest was confined to the arts, but she soon discovered a passion for local history. 'It can be dull in the country', she is reported as saying. 'People play bridge...I do research.' For anyone else in Holbrook, turning one's back on bridge might well have led to social ruin. But, as Mrs Carnegie recalls, her research ensured she was 'never lonely or bored'. Part of the reason was that she began to make friends with historians, archivists and librarians, just as she had come to know so many artists and dealers during the years she was building up her art collection. Captivated by her enthusiasm, tenacity and engaging self-deprecation—'I'm a lousy writer, but a terrific researcher'—they rallied around her in droves as the ever-lengthening acknowledgment pages in her books reveal.

Her first book, *Friday Mount*, a history of settlement at Holbrook, was published in 1973. *Morgan the Bold Bushranger* followed the next year. Originally issued in a limited edition, *Morgan* was taken up as a trade book by Angus and Robertson in 1975, and became the basis for Philippe Mora's film *Mad Dog*, with the American actor Dennis Hopper as Dan Morgan. Her *In Search of Breaker Morant* appeared three years later in 1979, along with her last full-length book, *In Step with Sturt*, written in collaboration with Keith Swan. Since then she's written several shorter books for children.

Still thoroughly engaged with things Australian, Margaret Carnegie has continued to collect Aboriginal art from the Western Desert, and make gifts to a number of institutions, including the Wagga Regional Art Gallery, Charles Sturt University, the University of South Australia, and the La Trobe Library at the State Library of Victoria. Asked by a journalist whether she might be characterised as a nationalist, this great Australian patron of the arts is reputed to have retorted, 'Oh, I don't know...I'm just an Oz!'

Margaret Frances Carnegie, distinguished writer, collector and patron of the arts is admitted to the degree Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

Dated this Twenty Second day of April One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Seven