



The World of Mab Grimwade: Australian Women, Biography and Archives

Date: Thursday 2 May
Time: 11am-12.30pm

In person:
Seminar room 6.71 (level 6 - turn right from the lifts)
RSSS Building, 146 Ellery Crescent, ANU

and

On Zoom:
bit.ly/BioWorkshop2022
Meeting ID: 849 0058 9945
Password: 630803

No registration required.



Mab and Scottish Terriers at Westerfield, December 1931, Papers of Wilfrid Russell and Mabel Grimwade, University of Melbourne Archives, photograph by Russell Grimwade, 2002.0003.00889

Searching for the imprint of a woman's life is a challenge repeatedly expressed by the biographers of women, and Mab Grimwade is no exception. Born into a genteel family of pastoralists and investors in colonial Victoria, Mabel Louise Kelly (1887–1973), or ‘Mab’ to those who knew her, would grow up to make an enormous contribution to Victoria and Australia. Most evidently, it was made through bequests to the University of Melbourne and through the donation to the university of a large, diverse and highly valuable collection of books and artworks. Mab Kelly married Russell Grimwade — chemist, botanist, industrialist and philanthropist — in 1909, and much of her life from that point was publicly defined by her husband's narrative. While Russell Grimwade left a large private collection including autobiographical papers, letters, and miscellanea that could be accessed by his biographer, Mab preserved very little in the way of personal papers. How do we recover the lives of women who left little documentation? How do we piece together their stories and cultural impact? Using Mab Grimwade as a case study, this seminar addresses some of the methodological problems faced by historians writing biographies of women.



Thea Gardiner researches and writes on the place of women in Australian historical memory. She is a scholar in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, writing a biography of the artist and political activist Portia Geach (1873–1959). Her research brings together the fields of art history, family history, and gender history, examining the ways in which Geach contributed to Australian cultural and political life. In October 2023 she published a biography of an influential Victorian philanthropist titled *The World of Mab Grimwade* with Melbourne University Publishing. Gardiner also works as a public historian for the heritage consultancy Dr. Vincent Clark Archaeology + Heritage.

