

## Elizabeth Kleinhenz on Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, born in 1905, was the granddaughter of pioneering Melbourne real estate agent, John Robert Buxton, whose investments in land brought him wealth, and significantly influenced much of Melbourne's early development. In her memoir, [Solid Bluestone Foundations](#), described by her great friend Manning Clark as 'a magnificent book of memories', Kathleen painted an evocative picture of her childhood and upper middle-class social life in early twentieth-century Melbourne.

In adult life, Kathleen, a protégé of Professor Ernest Scott, became a prominent academic at the University of Melbourne, renowned for her brilliant performances as a lecturer. Appointed as a Senior Lecturer in the History Department in 1942, she subsequently became the first woman in the Humanities field to hold the position of Associate Professor, under Professor Max Crawford. When a second Chair of History was established in 1954, she was Crawford's first choice for its occupation, but with a diffidence that was curiously at odds with her well-known assertiveness and championing of women, Kathleen refused the opportunity to become the university's first full Professor, her main reason being that she did not consider herself to be a sufficiently accomplished scholar.

In retirement, Kathleen, who had become wealthy mainly due to the success of her father, Henry Pitt, as a stockbroker, spent her life between her homes in South Yarra and Lorne and the Italian Riviera, where her sister Lorna and her husband had built a villa overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. She remained active in public life, giving lectures, serving on committees and The University of Melbourne Council and contributing reviews and articles to Melbourne newspapers. As a member of the 'Third University Committee', which was planning for the establishment of La Trobe University in the 1960s, she can almost certainly be given credit for choosing its name.

In her regular correspondence with Manning Clark, published after her death in [Dear Kathleen Dear Manning](#) (MUP 1996) Kathleen wrote of the three major disappointments in her life. The first was her failure to gain First Class Honours in her Oxford degree, the second was the failure of her marriage to economic historian Brian Fitzpatrick, and the third was the failure of what she saw as her major life's work, her biography of Henry James, to find a publisher. In 1983 she was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Laws at a special ceremony for women to honour Bella Guerin, the first woman to graduate from the university just one hundred years earlier. In 1989, one year before her death, she became a Member of the Order of Australia.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's biography, [A Brimming Cup](#) by Elizabeth Kleinhenz, takes up the story of her life where [Solid Bluestone Foundations](#) finished, in 1928. It was published by MUP in 2013.