

Abstract

It's easy to attach the adjectives "pioneer" or "trailblazer" to the career of Australian journalist Patricia Irene Jarrett (1911-1990), but those words actually don't reveal the extent of her contribution to what was an often-insular, male-dominated and unsophisticated profession in the Antipodes.

The parade of years has actually applied layers of ignorance to Jarrett's remarkable achievements, to the point where we now have to excavate her significant milestones and ensure there is due recognition for what by any measure are noteworthy contributions to the development of women's sport in Australia in particular, her place as a powerful role model for aspiring female journalists and the unstated but equally significant place she occupied as a single woman whose sexuality has only become more relevant in the modern context.

Pat Jarrett was a protégé of the Australian media owner Keith Murdoch (father of Rupert), who hired Jarrett after she had caught his attention with her junior athletic and swimming exploits. She became the first (and for some time, only) female sports reporter on *The Melbourne Herald*, an afternoon broadsheet in Melbourne, that attached great importance to local sport. Jarrett was never treated as a novelty, although she was a rarity. After covering the first English women's cricket team's tour of Australia in 1934, Jarrett was sent to England to cover the Australian women's tour three years later: no other male or female sports journalist in the country was given that opportunity. It was a singular feat of recognition usually only afforded to her male counterparts on sporting tours.

Her coverage of women's cricket from 1934 onwards, and throughout the five-month English tour in 1937, became integral to helping to build the profile of women's cricket in Australia, while underlining Jarrett's skills as a news reporter and writer. She was the pre-eminent cricket writer among a small group of women who wrote about the women's game and helped drive public interest and engagement to a new level.

When World War II broke out, Jarrett became a war correspondent, and as captain in the Australian Women's Army Service, she was active in Australia, but not overseas.

As press attaché to the Australian ambassador to the US, Jarrett became the only foreign member of the Women's National Press Club in Washington, rubbing shoulders with Eleanor Roosevelt – a formidable journalist in her own right – and Dorothy Thompson, among others. This honour underlined Jarrett's capacity to connect with an influential circle of journalists, and she took the opportunity to build a powerful and enduring network of important women across US journalism. Her relationship with the Caseys – in particular, Richard's wife Maie – became a source of speculation and occasional gossip: that Jarrett and Maie were closer than just friends, and constant companions across the Caseys' time in the US and later, in Bengal, when Jarrett was in their employ.

Jarrett completed her journalistic career at *The Herald*, where she became a forthright editor of the newspaper's women's pages, a columnist, and a radio broadcaster who was an ardent feminist, actively engaging with the issues of contraception, abortion and equal pay during the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite these significant contributions to Australian journalism, Jarrett remains largely unknown. She has an entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, and a modest biography was published almost 20 years ago, but she is not a member of the Australian Media Hall of Fame, where the pioneers of the profession are given recognition. It has taken an increasing recent public interest in women's sport in Australia to provide the motivation to celebrate the foundation role Patricia Jarrett played in writing about the who, how and the why of women's sport, and the consequences of her broader career – for women seeking influence and recognition in what had hitherto been male-only domains.

Bio

Dr Nick Richardson is the CEO of the Melbourne Press Club in Australia and Adjunct Professor of Journalism at Latrobe University in Melbourne.

He has been a journalist for more than three decades, and has published widely on journalism, and Australian history. He has taught journalism at three Australian universities and has written and edited nine books. He has a doctorate in Australian history from the University of Melbourne. In 2021, he released a podcast series entitled *The Maiden Summer*, which told the story of Australian women's cricket.