

Attachment B

**Historical Justification for
Dr Margaret Harper Avenue**

Naming Proposal – Dr Margaret Harper Avenue – Historical Justification

Lisa Murray, City Historian

It is proposed to name the new road connecting Bourke Road and Botany Road as Dr Margaret Harper Avenue.

- This is a commemorative naming that acknowledges Dr Margaret Hilda Harper (1879-1964), a trailblazing Australian female paediatrician.
- The name has a direct historical connection to the local history of Camperdown, Alexandria, Surry Hills and Redfern in our LGA.
- It recognises women and leadership in twentieth century Australia.
- It addresses a gap or silence in our history: the recognition of women's achievements in the public domain and in popular memory.

Biography - Margaret Hilda Harper (1879-1964)

Dr Margaret Hilda Harper was a trailblazing Australian female paediatrician, graduating from the University of Sydney in 1906. Through her work, practice and care she helped establish the position of women in the field of medicine. She was a founding doctor of both the Alexandria Baby Health Clinic and the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children. Dr Harper became known internationally for her contributions to paediatrics and the care of newborn and premature babies.

She began her career at the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington and the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Camperdown.

Dr Margaret Harper was the first honorary physician at the Alexandria Baby Health Clinic. This was the state's first government baby health clinic, which opened in August 1914 and operated from Henderson Road Alexandria. Dr Harper attended the clinic one afternoon a week in a voluntary capacity for consultations.

She was one of a group of female doctors, nurses and philanthropists who established the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children in 1922. The New Hospital for Women and Children, which later became the Rachel Forster Hospital, opened on 3 January 1922. It was unique because it was an all-female affair – established by female doctors and administrators for the treatment of women and children. Originally just an outpatient dispensary in Surry Hills, the clinic soon expanded to become a hospital, with premises first in George Street Redfern, and later a new hospital in Pitt Street.

Dr Harper was actively involved in the Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies. She was the medical director of its Mothercraft Homes and Training Schools (Tresillian) for thirty years, from 1919-1949. Dr Harper became well-known across Sydney and Australia for her publication *The Parents' Book*, a guide on child care that was re-published some twenty times, and for her regular radio broadcasts on 'Mothercraft' in the 1930s as 'The Lady Doctor' on ABC radio. Her teachings and writings emphasised the importance of educating not only parents, but nurses and doctors in the care of babies.

Dr Margaret Harper is recognised in the Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in 20th century Australia and in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

A ward at the Rachel Forster Hospital, Redfern and a diet kitchen at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Camperdown were named after her. Both these hospitals have since closed and been demolished or adaptively re-used. A hospital wing associated with the Tressilian Home at Greycliffe, Nielsen Park was named in recognition of Dr Harper. This has also closed and since been adapted as a residence for NPWS staff.



Dr Margaret Harper

Source: Cohen (1971)

References

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Victoria Cowden, 'Harper, Margaret Hilda (1879–1964)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/harper-margaret-hilda-6570/text11301> , published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 18 June 2021

Lysbeth Cohen, *Dr. Margaret Harper: her achievements and place in the history of Australia*, Wentworth Books, Sydney, 1971.

Cindy Li, 'Alexandria: Birthplace of Baby Health', in Grace Karskens and Melita Rogowsky (eds), *Histories of Green Square*, School of History, University of New South Wales, 2004, pp. 89–95.