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**Newtown's Noble Woman**

## “Newtown’s Noble Woman”

According to the *Labor Daily* dated Tuesday 1 April 1930<sup>i</sup>, “Newtown should be proud of Nurse Angermunde of the Chelmsford Private Hospital, Erskineville Rd, for she is one of the most humane and self-sacrificing of women, writes L. Steel, Newtown ... Nurse Angermunde’s door is never closed to the poor and distressed surrounding her...”



Figure 1: Matron Olive Angermunde, c 1932  
(With permission, Angermunde Family Archive)

Olive Delilah Angermunde (1884-1960)<sup>ii</sup>, was a woman of influence in Sydney’s inner suburbs during the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s. In these years she elevated herself from an earlier life of deprivation, hardship, tragedy and sadness<sup>iii</sup> to become a much respected midwife<sup>iv</sup>, private hospital matron<sup>v</sup>. She became an outstanding organiser of charitable fund-raising events in support of hospitals, mothers and babies and other public concerns<sup>vi</sup>. At the same time she had leadership roles in the Labor movement<sup>vii</sup>, other socialist causes<sup>viii</sup>, women’s activism<sup>ix</sup>, access to justice<sup>x</sup>, and anti-war pacifism<sup>xi</sup>. In the Great Depression years she earned the respect of her community by delivering babies, caring for the injured and unwell and those who were destitute and disadvantaged<sup>xii</sup>.

Some 225 press citations were generated by Olive in the space of a decade<sup>xiii</sup>. They appeared in a wide range of newspapers, as shown in Table 1, and they reflect her influential and intense mid-life.

**Table 1: Olive Angermunde press citations 1924-1943 Sourced from the NLA Trove Digitised Newspaper collection**

Title	Citations	Percent
Labor Daily	97	43.1
Others	47	20.9
Syd Morn Herald	24	10.7
The Sun	21	9.3
Daily Telegraph	15	6.7
Daily Pictorial	11	4.9
Evening News	5	2.2
Sunday Times	5	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The *Labor Daily* tops the list but Sydney’s mainstream dailies, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph* gave her a fair share of recognition. News about Olive spread to newspapers in country areas, some other capitals and even Tasmania<sup>xiv</sup>. The citations speak volumes about Olive’s communication skills and in the early days of radio she even developed on-air presence through her 7:00 pm 10 minute programs on Radio 2KY<sup>xv</sup>.

Content analysis of a sample<sup>xvi</sup> of citations provides a perspective of Olive’s growing influence. Her high esteem in the community, her state of health and news about her family dominate the sample with just over one third of the citations (Table 2). Nearly a quarter acknowledged her prodigious fund raising activities. Her roles in Labor and left wing politics, women’s activism and the Women’s Justices Association brought her into contact with power brokers and established her as a contributor to social and political change. Her work and concerns about mothers and babies and the disadvantaged also attracted many press reports.

**Table 2: Content analysis of a sample of 90 citations of Olive Angermunde in Newspapers covered by NLA Trove 1924- 1935**

Citation type	Percent of citations
1. Stories about Olive, including tributes about her work, her state of health, her family and travels, including photographs, radio programs, talks and presentations given by her.	34%
2. Organisational activities, including fund raising events such as balls, dances, garden parties, and competitions.	23%
3. Political activity, including roles in the ALP, international relief associations and women’s activism.	13%
4. Activities in the Women’s Justices Association, including lobbying for representation of women in juries.	10%
5. Concern for the welfare of mothers and babies.	10%
6. Campaigning on behalf of the disadvantaged and destitute and other special appeals.	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Olive's transition from relative obscurity to community prominence is clearly reflected in these citations but a profound change of this order begs the question, how could such a transformation take place?

In the early 1920s she gave up working as a humble dressmaker, reduced her demanding mothering burdens and trained to become a nurse at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women (RHW). She was in her early forties and only just overcoming the death of her second husband. She commenced training in 1925, still rearing the three very young daughters of that marriage while living with her two older children from her tragic and short-lived first marriage.

Olive graduated as a Nurse and Midwife in 1926 and achieved formal registration in 1927. She continued nursing at RHW until 1928 making time to become the hospital's indefatigable honorary organiser of events, when hospitals had to rely heavily on private fund-raising. At the same time she continued her involvement in left wing politics and women's justice issues, often assuming formal leadership roles<sup>xvii</sup>. In 1929 she was part of a delegation to the NSW Minister for Justice demanding rights for women to serve on juries (footnote x). In 1930 a paper she presented at the 1930 NSW Labor Women's Conference led to a series of resolutions about hospital maternity issues being submitted to the Federal Minister for Health<sup>xviii</sup>.

Earlier personal hardships re-surfaced in the form of painful health conditions that were often reported in the press. The deformities of her feet at birth were to haunt her as she grew older. The newspapers<sup>xix</sup> carried reports about Olive undergoing and recovering from complex surgery. In 1928 she quit RHW to undergo an operation in which the surgeon proceeded "by breaking all the toes of each foot, opening the arches and stretching the sinews"<sup>xx</sup>!

In one reference<sup>xxi</sup> to her painful recovery from this operation we catch a glimpse of her recognition in some elite circles of the era. Towards the end of 1928 she is cheered up by her many hospital visitors, including Esther Theodore whose husband, "Red" Ted Theodore was an imposing figure in the ALP<sup>xxii</sup>. This and many other friendships among the elite persisted across the next few years. At a civic farewell in Newtown in October 1935 it was reported Olive's daughter, Ella Angermunde, would be accompanied by Mr and Mrs Theodore on a voyage to Fiji<sup>xxiii</sup> where she was to marry an Australian minerals assayer. In February 1936 another civic reception was held to honour Olive and bid her bon voyage also to Fiji. It was attended by the Mayor of Erskineville, Alderman Henry, who praised her community work<sup>xxiv</sup>.

These festivities were to mark the end of Olive's notoriety in inner Sydney and the beginning of a new chapter in her life. She had stepped out of her matronship in the inner suburbs and was about to leave Australia to spend a few months with her daughter in Fiji and draw her breath after an exhausting decade. This was to be a far cry from the desperate times of the Great Depression, her caring for the socially and economically disadvantaged and her agendas for political and social change<sup>xxv</sup>.

Matron Olive Angermunde returned to Australia from Fiji seven years later in the middle of World War 2 to live briefly with her eldest daughter and family in Tumut NSW<sup>xxvi</sup>. She was later appointed Matron of *Strathmore* Private Hospital in Stanmore, married for a third time

in 1947, retired from public life, pursued a passion for painting and died in Sydney aged 76 in 1960.

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<sup>i</sup> *Labor Daily*, 1 April, 1930, p.7

<sup>ii</sup> Olive Delilah Speer/Angermunde/Mc Miles nee Thomas: NSW Birth Registration No.24984/1884; NSW Marriage Registration #1, 1904/2282; Marriage Registration #2, 10060/1914; Marriage Registration #3 12514/1947; Death Registration No. 3836/1960

<sup>iii</sup> Olive was born with Talipes of both feet in a remote valley deep in the Snowy Mountains, Lobs Hole, far from medical attention: "... her toes were pointing upwards and her feet lay along her shin bones. Her father, long accustomed to relying on his own ingenuity, improvised splints from the stiff covers of a book and bound up his daughter's feet. They grew to be quite normal and it was only much later when Olive was training to be a nurse that she had any further trouble". (Margaret Hudson, "The House on Sheep Station Hill 1884-1956", *Cooma Monaro Express*, 30 August 1956). Olive's father, John Thomas, was a grazier and carrier but also a convicted livestock rustler in the mountains. He was put away for a total of eight years (Prison Records, NSW Government State Records, Photo No.302, Page 85 Series NRS 2021, Item 3/6016 Reel 5093; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 8 April, 1886). Olive's mother, Mary Jane Thomas/Mackey nee Belcher (Birth Registration No. 7194/1862; Marriage Registration No. 2799/1878; Death Registration No. 20620/1928) deserted her family of four young children around this time (Documentary Records of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Matrimonial Causes Jurisdiction: Item No. and Title 13/12592, No. 4803/1903). When Olive grew up and married she suffered the loss of one child at birth (but had five others-- 2 in her first marriage and 3 in the second) and her first and second marriages came to an early end with the untimely deaths of her first husband after 7 years of marriage (William Speer, NSW Death Registration 1911/011667) and her second after only 8 years (Theodore Angermunde, NSW Death Registration 7277/1923). Another sad event was the loss of her first grandchild born prematurely in February 1926, surviving for only 25 hours, (Margaret Mary Beed NSW Death Registration 4868/1926). Olive did not marry again until 1947 NSW Marriage Registration 12514/1947).

<sup>iv</sup> *Government Gazette* of the State of New South Wales, Weds 2 November 1927 (Issue No. 157 (Supplement)). p. 5180: Register of Mid Wives, for 1926. Also, two further items courtesy Angermunde Family Archive: (1) New South Wales Nurses' Registration Act 1924, Certificate of Registration as a Midwifery Nurse, Olive Delilah Angermunde, dated 15 March 1927; (2) Royal Hospital for Women Certificate dated 29 October, 1926 states that Olive Delilah Angermunde trained between 1 July 1925 and 29 October 1926, attended a course of Lectures in Midwifery and satisfied all requirements of the examinations in Midwifery having "been present at 101 cases of labour and 40 of these cases have been personally conducted by her".

<sup>v</sup> *Government Gazette* of the State of New South Wales, 20 August 1930 (Issue No. 116 (Supplement)). p. 3319: Register of Mid Wives, for 1929. Olive states her address as 4 Erskineville Rd. Newtown, the location of Chelmsford Private Hospital which she managed as Matron Angermunde. See also, <https://www.newtownproject.com.au/2009/07/sands-1932/>, The Sands Directory locates Nurse O. Angermunde at 4 Erskineville Rd, Chelmsford Private Hospital.

<sup>vi</sup> *Labor Daily*, 12 June, 1928, p.7. The article notes Olive was appointed Organising Secretary of the Royal Hospital for Women Building Fund "barely three months ago", placing her appointment about March 1928. According to *The Sun*, 13 March 1928, p.3, the hospital board makes an urgent appeal for funds in the order of 100,000 Pounds (with the promise of 30,000 Pounds from the NSW Government) to finance construction of a new maternity block to house 107 new beds, "a landmark to the cause and devotion of Australian Women". In this article, Olive is the newly appointed Organising Secretary, is forming a special committee to help her raise the funds and is appealing to members of the community to step forward to "further the splendid work" of the Royal Hospital for Women. Olive's responsibilities were daunting. At that time she had been a Registered Midwife for about 2 years, working on the nursing staff of the hospital where she had trained and was known as *Nurse Angermunde*. In an era that saw hospital care of citizens become a government priority (1929), public hospitals' dependence on charitable support remained of critical importance.

(See <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/hospitals> for an on-line article by Helen Godden, "Hospitals").

The following 19 citations are drawn from the sample (i.e. 21% of the sample) taken for this essay and each of them mentions a specific role played by Olive in organising the dances, balls, garden parties, cabarets and other fund- raising events mostly in aid of the Royal Hospital for Women: *Labor Daily* 14 Dec 1927 p.21; *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)* 1 Aug 1928 p.20; *SMH* 6 Aug 1928 p.4; *Sunday Times* 2 Sep 1928 p.18; *The Sun* 9 Dec 1928 p.30; *SMH* 15 Sep 1928 p.14; *SMH* 19 July 1929 p.5; *Labor Daily* 21 Jul 1929 p.7; *Daily Pictorial* 9 Sep 1930 p.6; *Daily Pictorial* 18 Sep 1930 p.18; *SMH* 11 Apr 1934 p.9; *The Sun* 17 Apr 1934 p.13; *SMH* 30 May 1934 p.4;

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*Labor Daily* 14 Aug 1934 p.8; *The Sun* 25 Oct 1934 p.38; *SMH* 16 Feb 1935 p.9; *Daily Telegraph* 18 Mar 1935 p 10.

<sup>vii</sup> In the 7 June 1924 edition of the *Labor Daily* (p.5), Olive is reported to have given eye-witness evidence at a magistrates hearing about a scuffle that broke out at a meeting of the Camperdown branch of the ALP in which Robert James Stuart-Robertson MLA was allegedly punched by another person at the conclusion of the meeting. Stuart-Robertson went on to become the Minister for Public Health in 1927 in Jack Lang's Labor Party. In the *Labor Daily* of 22 April, 1926, Olive is referred to as the former hon Treasurer of the Newtown-Erskineville branch of the ALP. *Labor Daily* 31 October 1924, p.7, in an article headed "Painful accident to Mrs Angermunde" Olive is referred to as "a well-known Labor and charitable worker". In the *Labor Daily*, 24 September 1930, p.7, Olive is referred to as a "member of the Women's Central Organising Committee of the ALP".

<sup>viii</sup> In 1924 and following years, there are several reports of Olive acting in an organising role for the Workers International Relief (WIR) organisation. It had been founded in Germany in 1921 at the urging of Lenin in Russia. In the ensuing decade WIR had built an international following with many national chapters, including in England, other European countries and the USA. A front for the advancement of Communism, its role was largely to raise money for needy persons in Russia and neighbouring European countries affected by droughts and famine and to counter the influence of President Herbert Hoover's international aid from the USA that might have embarrassed the Russian Communists.

See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers\\_International\\_Relief#National\\_sections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_International_Relief#National_sections)

Olive, then known as Mrs Angermunde before her transition to nursing training, is identified as honorary secretary of the Women's Committee of the WIR in 1924 (*Labor Daily*, 30 September, 1924 p.7) and she is at the WIR "plain and fancy dress ball" at the Communist Hall in Sussex Street Sydney raising funds for WIR and handing out prizes she had donated.

<sup>ix</sup> *Labor Daily*, 7 April 1930, p.5 "NSW Labor Women in Conference – Interesting Papers- Right to Work" "The afternoon session was practically taken up by discussion on Nurse Angermunde's paper on 'Maternal and Child Welfare'. A number of resolutions carried related to the matter are to be forwarded to the Federal Minister for Health". A lengthy paper written by Olive in 1928 (*Sunday Times* 11 November 1928, p.20) may well have been a precursor to her efforts later at the Labor Women's Conference. In this article she wrote: "Australia lost in 1927, seven hundred and ninety-three mothers in childbirth – more than two mothers died so every day. This loss is a mark to aim at – saving every year so many mothers. The means of saving them are: Better home conditions, domestic help in the house, greater pre-natal care, and more encouragement to mother, and calling professional aid sooner. If babies can be born in the atmosphere of cleanliness, care and calm associated with the hospital, instead of homes where want, worry and germs are rampant, the death rate amongst mothers and babies will be decreased."

<sup>x</sup> Olive was a Justice of the Peace (JP) and a visible figure in the early history of the Women Justices Association (WJA). She swore the Oath of Allegiance to become a Justice of the Peace on 16 September, 1927, (Commissions of Justices of the Peace, Oath of Allegiance No. 1907, State Records NSW). This was a relatively early appointment as it was not until 1921 that the first Women Justices were appointed, following the passing of the Women's Legal Status Act 1918 (No.50). In those days, such appointments were for a lifetime and no doubt newsworthy. See <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/justices-the-peace-guide>. In the period 1928 – 1930, she features in a number of press reports, including news about her election to the Council of the WJA (*Evening News* 30 November 1929, p.8). In 1930, Olive and a colleague had been appointed honorary organisers for the WJA to run a dance at the Waldorf Café in aid of the Royal Hospital for Women, Olive's alma mater (*Sydney Morning Herald* 29 September 1930, p.4). According to the press reports (e.g. *The Sun*, 26 November 1930, p.16) the WJA had a women's activist agenda which included energetic lobbying for the appointment of women magistrates and jurors. It was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 November 1930, p.8, that a deputation of the WJA that included Nurse Angermunde had interviewed the NSW Minister of Justice, Joseph Lamero, who was reported to have said: "he could see no reason why women should not be empanelled on juries, so that it was to be hoped that the ensuing year would see this necessary reform brought about".

<sup>xi</sup> Olive's involvement as a campaigner against war is reflected in press reports of the mid-1930s. In the *Workers Weekly* 11 May 1934, p.6 Matron Angermunde is listed among other representatives of organisations such as the Christian Women's Temperance Union and the Miscellaneous Workers Union supporting the decision of the Anti-War Women's Conference in Sydney to send a delegate to Paris to attend the International Women's Congress against War and Fascism, 28-29 July, 1934. The report headed "Australia

must be Represented: Four Weeks to get 150 Pounds to send Mrs Moroney to Paris Anti-War Congress” said the Congress had “very great significance for the Australian working class, and all the women who are opposed to war and fascism”. Some 1200 women from around the world are reported to have attended the Congress.

See: <http://www.documentingdissent.org.uk/womens-world-committee-against-war-and-fascism-1934-2/>

On another key occasion, ANZAC Day, 1935, Matron Angermunde is reported to be a speaker at the Movement against War and Fascism at a “mass rally in Adyar Hall, Bligh Street Sydney”. She shares the podium with other luminaries of the day, including the enigmatic Lloyd Ross, member of both the ALP and the Communist Party who in that year became NSW State Secretary of the powerful Australian Railways Union (*Workers Weekly* 19 April 1935, p.6) See: ‘Ross, Lloyd Robert Maxwell (1901-1987)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 18, (MUP), 2012.

<sup>xii</sup> *Labor Daily* 1 April 1930, p.7 “Newtown’s Noble Woman”; *Labor Daily* 20 September 1930, p.8 “Newtown Council’s Tribute to Matron Angermunde”; *Labor Daily* 16 January 1931, p.10 “No Clothes for Baby – Young Mother’s Plight”; *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 September 1933 “Coming Events, Eastern Suburbs Baby Show ... to assist the local unemployed distress relief fund ... Matron Angermunde, Matron Wildford and Mrs Albert Hain ...to act as judges”; *Labor Daily* 3 April 1933, p.5 “Wide Search for Callous Hit-Runner, Two little boys are badly injured by car, one may die”... “The impact was so terrible that Constable Harrison, half a mile away thought that two cars had collided. He ran to the scene and took the children to Nurse Angermunde’s private hospital where they were given first aid treatment.”

<sup>xiii</sup> A search of the National Library of Australia’s *Trove* Digitised Newspapers data base was entered with the search term, “Angermunde”. This yielded some 225 citations relating to Olive Angermunde. As the citations also captured references to the town of Angermunde in Germany these were deducted from the total list of citations to yield the 225 relating specifically to Olive Angermunde. The number of citations appearing in each newspaper is shown in the composite table below.

The Labor Daily (Sydney... (97)	Goulburn Evening Post ... (2)	Recorder (Port Pirie, ... (1)	Warwick Daily News (Qt... (1)
The Sydney Morning Her... (24)	The Herald (Melbourne, ... (2)	Riverina Recorder (Bal... (1)	Weekly Times (Melbourn... (1)
The Sun (Sydney, NSW ... (21)	The Tumut and Adelong ... (2)	Singleton Argus (NSW ... (1)	
Australische Zeitung (... (15)	Australian Town and Co... (1)	The Braidwood Dispatch... (1)	
Daily Pictorial (Sydney... (14)	Clarence and Richmond ... (1)	The Courier-Mail (Bris... (1)	
The Daily Telegraph (S... (8)	Darling Downs Gazette ... (1)	The Hebrew Standard of... (1)	
The Daily Telegraph (S... (8)	Examiner (Launceston, ... (1)	The Land (Sydney, NSW ... (1)	
Evening News (Sydney, ... (5)	Freeman's Journal (Syd... (1)	The Muswellbrook Chron... (1)	
Sunday Times (Sydney, ... (5)	Jewish Herald (Vic. : ... (1)	The Northern Miner (Ch... (1)	
The Workers' Weekly (S... (4)	Manilla Express (NSW ... (1)	The Richmond River Her... (1)	
The Daily News (Perth, ... (3)	Mirror (Perth, WA : 19... (1)	The Riverine Grazier (... (1)	
The Inverell Times (NS... (3)	Morning Bulletin (Rock... (1)	The St George Call (Ko... (1)	
Advocate (Burnie, Tas... (2)	National Advocate (Bal... (1)	The West Australian (P... (1)	
	Newcastle Morning Hera... (1)	Truth (Sydney, NSW : 1... (1)	
	News (Adelaide, SA : 1... (1)	Warwick Argus and Tent... (1)	

Source:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?q=Angermunde>

<sup>xiv</sup> The spread of stories to country newspaper titles was often due to syndication of articles appearing in the metropolitan dailies.

<sup>xv</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May 1928 p.8. A program guide for Radio 2KY under heading Trades Hall, 7 to 7.10pm Nurse Angermunde; a similar reference in the *Newcastle Herald* 23 April 1928 p.7.

<sup>xvi</sup> For the purpose of this paper a judgemental sample of 91 citations was chosen from the 225 yielded by the initial *Trove* search. The sampling process involved copying, cutting and pasting the actual citations from *Trove* to a master document. Each citation was then reviewed and its main theme(s) decided. It was now cut away from the master and pasted to what emerged as several distinct “bins” labelled for each category of interest (themes), as shown in Table 2. When a citation covered more than one theme, a judgement was made in favour of what appeared to be the most prominent of the themes, suggested perhaps by a headline. A more time consuming approach -- beyond the resources of the present paper -- would have been to extend this effort across all citations and start with many more themes to be progressively consolidated as the classification process continued.

<sup>xvii</sup> This flurry of extra-curricular activity thrust Olive into the limelight of Sydney’s well-to-do citizenry. She served on committees including many drawn from their ranks such as the Fairfax family especially Mrs Hubert Fairfax, and the Mark Foy’s family. She appealed for their help in patronising and supporting dances and balls, musical programs, garden parties and other events designed to benefit the RHW building fund-- amongst

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others. It also projected her into the left wing political elites of the day where she served as an organiser of women's committees and played leading roles in the denunciation of war and Fascism. The wives of Ted Theodore, Jack Lang and Ben Chifley were often included in these gatherings as were the wives of Senators Arthur Rae and John Dooley. The Speaker of the NSW Parliament, Sir Daniel Levy, paid tribute to Matron Angermunde as a person he had known for 20 years and who had made a strong contribution to the RHW

<sup>xviii</sup> See citation details at footnote ix.

<sup>xix</sup> *The Sun*, 7 November 1928, p.9, "Painful Operation"; *Singleton Argus*, 3 November 1928, p.5 "Extraordinary Operation: Toes broken by surgeon"; *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 6 November 1928, p.2, "Extraordinary Hospital Case".

<sup>xx</sup> Four months later (March 1929) after a long and painful recovery at Chelmsford Private Hospital, Newtown, and Olive was reported to have taken over the running of that hospital: "Although suffering considerable pain Nurse Angermunde has supervised at the birth of thirty-five babies during her first few weeks of matronship." Not long afterwards she had to face a second round of operations on her troublesome feet<sup>xx</sup>

<sup>xxi</sup> *Labor Daily*, 30 October 1928, p.7.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ted Theodore was the former Premier of Queensland and later, Federal Treasurer in the Scullin Labor Government in the early 1930s. See: Ross Fitzgerald (1994) *"Red Ted" The Life of E.G. Theodore*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October, 1935, p.7

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Labor Daily*, 4 February 1936, p.9 "Farewell Party: Matron's Charity Work Praised"

<sup>xxv</sup> Olive wrote a 98 page (handwritten) memoir of her seven years in Fiji and the sea voyages she undertook travelling between Australia, Fiji and New Zealand under navy escort amid the threat of enemy submarines and floating mines in World War 2 years. This document formed a basis for a public "travelogue" lecture she gave at Nock and Kirby's Pompadour Rooms on 16 November 1943. True to form, the event was organized by one of Olive's close friends of the 1920s and 1930s, Mrs F.W. Mijch, wife of Frederick Mijch, an Alderman on Darlington Council 1935-1937. The memoir is held in the Angermunde Family Archive where it is being restored.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Riverine Grazier*, 11 August 1942, p.5.