

Source: Stories of Democracy (CD-ROM)

PEOPLE

EDITH COWAN
1861 - 1932
FIRST WOMAN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARIAN

Edith Cowan was the first woman elected to an Australian parliament. She was also a social worker and women's [rights](#) campaigner.

At an early age Cowan became committed to social reform. She took leading roles in many organisations which helped women and children, and was honoured for her voluntary work during [World War 1](#).

In [1921 Cowan was elected](#) to the Western Australian Parliament. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly she promoted migrant [welfare](#), infant health centres and women's rights. She introduced [legislation](#) which enabled women to become [lawyers](#).

Cowan lost her seat in parliament in 1924, but continued her social work. With other Western Australian women, including [Bessie Rischbieth](#), she provided a model for future Australian women reformers.