

WOMEN'S NEWS

THE LONDON SCENE

From Camilla Beach

Oldest graduate
a fine example

AUSTRALIAN widow Mrs. Ethel Bensusan sets a fine example for the over-nineties.

The oldest living graduate of Sydney University, she is 93 and lives alone in London's largest block of flats.

She thinks little of entertaining seven friends to a dinner cooked on her one-ring electric stove, and washes her hair herself. She can't see the sense in paying someone else to do it for her.

Her flat is compact — two rooms, kitchen and bathroom — spotlessly clean, finicky and crammed with mementos of her world travels. Her late husband, Arthur, was a mining engineer and his work took him to all five continents.

In those days, but some of them weren't even literate and they couldn't see the point in women studying at university."

Although Mrs. Bensusan continued her studies at the turn of the century at the London School of Economics, she regrets she has never put them into practice.

"If I had worked I might have had a pension now," she said wryly.

She met her husband in Sydney shortly after graduating.

"He came to our house to call on my brother and I remember his saying, 'You don't know me,' and I replied, 'Well, you look all right!'"

It was the beginning

came to hills like William Street.

"And in those days in London, a man always ran in front of a car waving a flag to warn people out of the way."

Mrs. Bensusan and her children lived alone in London for a time.

Her husband was working in a gold mine on the Gold Coast and had forbidden his family to join him.

"They used to say that when new people were sent out to the Gold Coast, they would see their predecessor's coffin being loaded on the ship for the return journey. There were many more incurable diseases in those days."



MRS. ETHEL BENSUSAN, who is the oldest living graduate of Sydney University.

Bensusan discovered the mine was "salted." False reports had been submitted and he quit, returned to England and then found work managing a large gold mine in Brazil.

"We lived there for 26 years," Mrs. Bensusan recollected. "They were the happiest years of my

get out there, stopping over with my son who lives in Rhodesia, but something went wrong with my kidneys when I was in Rhodesia and I had to turn back.

"It made me very annoyed. I hadn't been ill before in my life."

She had been looking forward to that last look

to all five continents.
Mrs. Bensusan's clear blue eyes, accentuated by her snow-white hair, dance with enthusiasm when she reviews her old, browning photos, like those taken at her Sydney wedding in 1898 when the women wore ankle-length dresses, large frilly hats and carried parasols.

Minis

"I don't like minis," she said when she invited me round for tea of homemade sandwiches and cakes recently. "But I understand the men like them."

"When I was young, women on buses weren't even allowed to sit on the top deck because we might show an ankle climbing up the stairs."

Times have certainly changed since Mrs. Bensusan—then Ethel De Lissa—attended the Women's College at Sydney University, from which she graduated in 1897 with a Bachelor of Arts degree.

She was the college's eleventh resident, studying logic and philosophy. "It was a hard battle even getting the women's college started," she remembered.

"The members of parliament were much better

It was the beginning of a long association. They celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary before his death 10 years ago at the age of 90.

Mrs. Bensusan had two sons (altogether she had four children) before the family moved to England in 1901. The sea journey took nine weeks.

She was most surprised to see a car on arrival.

"There were no cars in Sydney in those days—only trams and horse-buses to which they attached a leader (an extra horse) when they

Transfer

When Arthur Bensusan transferred to South Africa he sent for his family, who trekked from the coast in bullock wagons to join him in the North Transvaal.

The Boer War had recently ended and Prince Arthur of Connaught had requisitioned the only nearby hotel. "So we lived in a mud hut with a thatched roof which had a fence round it to keep the lions out."

The Bensusans' sojourn in South Africa was not long. Arthur

the happiest years of my life." During the Second World War years when the Bensusans lived in Australia, Mrs. Bensusan paid a return visit to her old college.

"When I talked to the students, they couldn't believe there was a woman still alive who had graduated from the University more than 45 years previously."

She would like the chance to tell them she graduated 73 years ago, "but I am too old now to make such a long journey."

"Last year I tried to

forward to take them forward to take them at Australia, particularly to see a suite of rooms at the Women's College named after her, paid for by contributions made by graduates living in England.

"We had a reunion tea of English graduates a fortnight ago and one of them had seen the rooms and showed me some pictures she had taken." Mrs. Bensusan enthused.