



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Ruth Gall Lecture 2025

Professor Cordelia Fine



Wednesday 29th October 2025

Lecture Theatre 4

About the Ruth Gall Lectureship

The Gall Memorial Lecture was established to honour the life and achievements of former University of Sydney and School of Chemistry staff Associate Professor Ruth Gall (1923-2017). Ruth Gall was a distinguished scientist, the first female appointed Associate Professor of Chemistry at the University (1969), and the first female Head of School in Chemistry (1978-1980). Ruth Gall had an interesting career path, including serving in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during WWII, research with British Industrial Solvents in London, and with CSIRO prior to her appointment at the University of Sydney. Her research in steroid chemistry was internationally renowned.

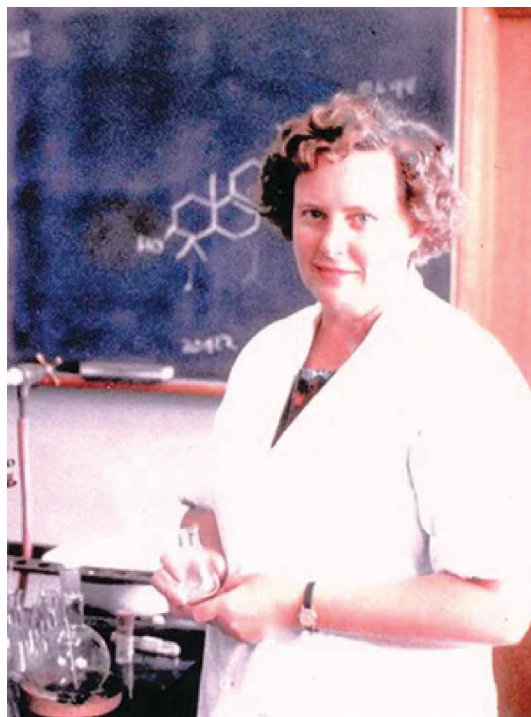
A portrait of A/Prof. Gall, painted by local artist Dr Kate Gradwell, was commissioned in 2018 and hangs in Lecture Theatre 3 in the School of Chemistry, since renamed Ruth Gall Lecture Theatre.

The Ruth Gall Memorial Lecture aims to raise the profile of women in Chemistry and the STEMM disciplines, and was launched by the School of Chemistry's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee in 2018.



The portrait of A/Prof Ruth Gall, unveiled in 2018

Associate Professor Ruth Gall



Ruth Gall, born in Sydney in 1923, defied gender barriers to carve out a remarkable career in science. Despite limited opportunities for women in STEM subjects during her school years, Gall's always preferred science to the humanities in an era where very few schools offered physics or chemistry to girls to matriculation level. After finishing school, Gall needed to support herself and due to the war, joined the Royal Air Force as a radar

operator. After the war, Ruth Gall enrolled as a mature age student in science at the University of Sydney under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. After graduating, she moved to England, working at British Industrial Solvents, then returned to Australia for a role in the company's Australian subsidiary. She later held a research position at CSIRO and then returned the University of Sydney to complete her PhD in 1961. Gall's exceptional qualities were evident as she became the first female Associate Professor of Chemistry at the University in 1970. Her recognition extended further when her all-male colleagues elected her as Head of School.

Gall's groundbreaking research centered on steroid chemistry, encompassing reaction mechanisms, nuclear magnetic resonance studies, and the synthesis of biologically active modified steroids. She was widely regarded as Australia's foremost female chemist, making a substantial and enduring contribution to the field of chemistry throughout her career.

Previous Lecturers

2018 [Professor Jennifer Martin](#)

Griffith University

2019 [Professor Juliet Gerrard](#)

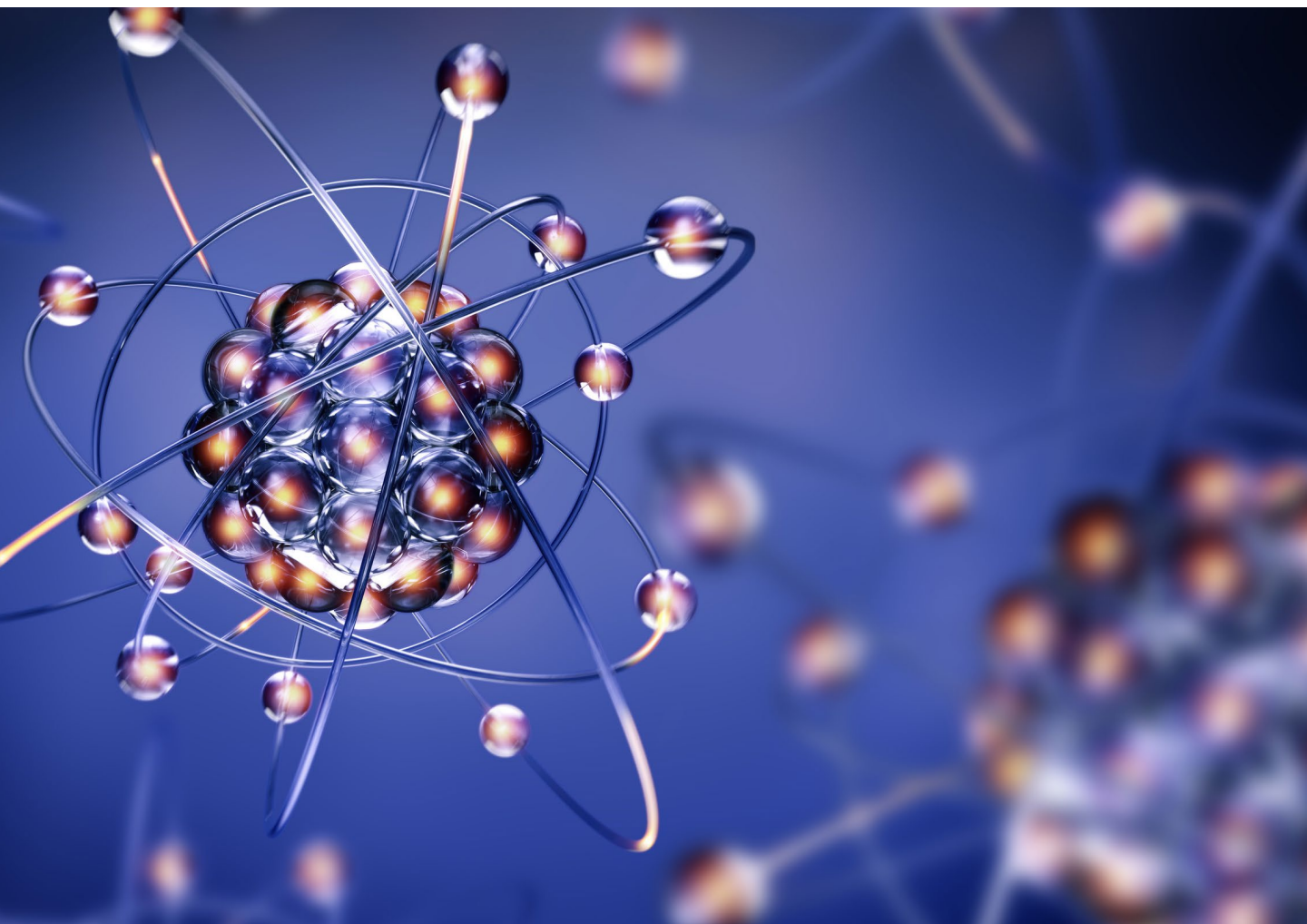
Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

2022 [Professor Cather Simpson](#)

University of Auckland

2023 [Dr Phaedria Marie St.Hilaire](#)

Phaedria Marie Consulting



Professor Cordelia Fine

*School of Historical & Philosophical Studies,
University of Melbourne.*



Professor Cordelia Fine is an acclaimed writer and scholar of science in the History & Philosophy of Science Program at the University of Melbourne. Her work challenges familiar misconceptions about brains, evolution, gender, and diversity, offering a "witty corrective" (Nature) and "keen precision and sharp humor" (New York Times). Her books, including *Delusions of Gender*, *Testosterone Rex*, and *Patriarchy Inc.*, have been described as "essential reading" (Financial Times), "provocative and often fascinating" (Economist), and "important" (The Australian).

Cordelia's work has garnered numerous accolades, including the prestigious Royal Society Science Book Prize. She was named a "living legend" of research by The Australian newspaper and awarded the Edinburgh Medal for her contributions to public debates about gender equality. Her most recent book, *Patriarchy Inc.*, was listed in the Financial Times' "What to Read in 2025 non-fiction" and "Best Summer Books of 2025: Business."

Beyond the Business Case for Diversity

Cordelia Fine

*School of Historical & Philosophical Studies,
University of Melbourne*

In recent years, the “business case for diversity” has dominated discussions on gender equality, positioning women’s inclusion as a strategic tool for enhancing organisational profitability, performance and innovation. But what reasons for caring about equality do we miss, who do we ignore, and what broader benefits do we forego, when we reduce the goal of gender equality to a mere tactic for achieving competitive advantage? Drawing on wide-ranging research – and the occasional personal frustration – this lecture advocates for a revival of the concept of gender equality that moves beyond the business case.

