

Dr Mary Burnell: A remarkable life



It is 50 years since Dr Mary Burnell became the first dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

Mary Taylor Angel was born in Norwood, South Australia, on February 21, 1907. She was educated at St Peter's Collegiate Girls School for both primary and secondary schooling. Having completed school at age 16, she found herself, in her own words, "quite without ambition" and in 1924 enrolled in an arts degree at the University of Adelaide. The following year she transferred to science, which she studied for two years, and in 1927 transferred to medicine, from which she graduated, MBBS, in 1931. Her younger sister, Laura Angel, had also enrolled in a science degree and they graduated together.

In 1932, Dr Mary Angel was a resident medical officer at Adelaide Children's Hospital and by 1934 had been appointed honorary anaesthetist². Her relationship with the hospital continued in this capacity until 1965, when she took up the position of honorary consulting anaesthetist, later renamed emeritus anaesthetist.

It also was in 1934 Burnell became involved with the Australian Society of Anaesthetists (ASA), becoming a founding member of the society, as well as the first female member. A year later, in 1935, she worked as secretary for the South Australian section of the society. Burnell also joined the British Medical Association in 1932 and was awarded honorary life membership in 1982 after 50 years of membership.

Also in 1934, Mary married a surgeon, Glen Howard Burnell. Together they had three children and Mary Burnell stepped

aside from her public anaesthesia practice in 1937 to devote time to their growing family. However, she was able to continue private practice working with her husband as they scheduled operations around domestic commitments.

She returned to public practice in 1942 when hospital staff and resources had been drained by the demands of World War II, causing many women to be called back into public service. At this time Burnell was honorary anaesthetist at both the Royal Adelaide Hospital and Adelaide Children's Hospital. In a brief, unpublished memoir, she recounted having to "learn the specialist paediatric (sic) techniques the hard way, as there was no one who knew any more to teach me"³. She became aware of the great differences between administering anaesthesia to children and to adults and, as the only visiting anaesthetist there for a number of years, performed "all the difficult anaesthetics"⁴. As a result, Burnell went on to make significant contributions to paediatric anaesthesia.

Burnell continued to contribute to the ASA throughout the 1940s and, in 1953, was elected president⁵. She was the first female to hold this position. A year earlier, the Faculty of Anaesthetists at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons was established, with Burnell as a foundation Fellow. Burnell reflected on her involvement with the foundation of the Faculty, downplaying any direct contribution: "Another source of pride to me is the fact that I was able to arrange in my own drawing room the meeting between Dr Harry Daly and Mr (later Sir) Ivan Jose (president of the College of Surgeons) which led very quickly and smoothly to the foundation of the Faculty of Anaesthetists in the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons⁶."

Burnell believed strongly in collaborative practice and knowledge sharing. In 1953 she invited Dr Bernard Johnson from England to speak at the annual meeting of the society in Adelaide⁷. This began a tradition of inviting overseas speakers which continues today.

Burnell was elected to the board of the Faculty of Anaesthetists in 1955, and the board minutes of June 18, 1966 record her official appointment as dean. She was the first woman in Australia to hold such an appointment and one of the first in the world.

Appointments and accolades continued throughout her career, testament to her dedication and expertise.

In 1968, her determination to create and foster international collaborative relationships saw her recognised with election to the fellowship of the Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Surgeons⁸. In 1973, she was further recognised with honorary life membership of the Australian faculty⁹.

In 1977, she was awarded a Silver Jubilee Medal, presented by Queen Elizabeth in a ceremony held at Buckingham Palace¹⁰, and in 1995, the inaugural Mary Burnell Lecture was given at the annual scientific meeting in Townsville, Queensland, by Dr John Sear from the UK¹¹.

Outside of anaesthetics, Burnell was a member of the committee of Mothers' and Babies' Health Association of South Australia and the South Australian Medical Women's Society¹². She was an avid reader and highly knowledgeable about wines. Her love of good wine gained her the distinction of being a *Chevalier du Tastevins*, a rare honour for a woman of her time¹³. She had a passion for history and sponsored the appointment of a female historian, Gwen Wilson, to the staff of the faculty.

Dr Mary Taylor Burnell is remembered as a forthright and generous woman in both her personal and professional life.

Monica Cronin, Curator, Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History and

Ari Hunter, Deakin University

Ari Hunter is a student with Deakin University's Master of Cultural Heritage & Museum Studies program. Ari has been undertaking a collection management internship at the Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History since September 2015.

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Above from left: Official portrait of Dr Mary Burnell, Dean Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, 1966; Dr Burnell being presented with Honorary Fellowship, Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Surgeons, 1973; University of Adelaide graduation program, 1931; Invitation to Silver Jubilee celebration, 1977.

Women leaders in anaesthesia: Past presidents and deans

Mary Burnell
Dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists
1966 – 1967

MBBS, FFARCS

Mary Burnell was a key figure in the establishment of the Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Her dedication to the practice was recognised through an array of awards and leadership positions. Burnell served as President of the Australian Society of Anaesthetists and Dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists. Through her commitment to fostering overseas connections, Burnell was awarded a fellowship of the Faculty of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Surgeons, honorary fellowship to the Faculty of Anaesthetists at RACS, honorary fellowship to RACS, life membership of the ASA and member of the Court of Honour, RACS.



Teresa (Tess) Cramond

Dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists
1972 – 1974

MBBS, DA RCP

Tess Cramond was the first woman president of the Queensland branch of the Australian Medical Association, dean of the Faculty of Anaesthetists at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), and was also the first woman councillor there. She was the first Queensland to be enrolled in the Court of Honour of RACS, and the first woman appointed a colonel in the Defence Health Service. In 1978, Cramond was appointed professor of anaesthetics at the University of Queensland, and went on to specialise in pain control and palliative care. She was awarded an Order of the British Empire, Dame of Magistral Grace in the Sovereign Military Order of St John, Fellow of the Australian Medical Association, Officer of the Order of Australia and the Women in Medicine Award, among other national and local awards.



Leona Wilson

President, 2008 – 2010

BMedSci, Mb ChB, FFARCS, FFARCS, FFANZCA, MPH, FAICD

Leona Wilson was the first woman and the first New Zealander to hold the ANZCA presidency. She was involved with the formation of the Perioperative Mortality Review Commission in 2010, and was a member of earlier committees that changed the NZ Crimes Amendment Act of 1997. During her time as president, Wilson skilfully negotiated the College through the departure of the Joint Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine. Wilson was key in the development of the Emergency Management of Anaesthetic Crises course, alongside other important curriculum developments. Wilson was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2010, and received the Robert Orton Medal in 2013.



Kate Leslie
President, 2010 – 2012

MBBS, FANZCA, MD, M EPI, FAICD, FAHMS

Kate Leslie began her presidency with a vision of engagement. She endeavoured to create networks to ensure the continuity of a healthcare system that would serve effectively in the future. Leslie received the Robert Orton Medal and the Women in Medicine Award from the Australian Medical Association in 2014. More recently she was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia. She has published extensively and is known for her involvement in research around patient awareness during anaesthesia. Leslie is currently pursuing research into large multi-centre trials in anaesthesia and perioperative medicine as head of research at the Royal Melbourne Hospital's Department of Anaesthesia and Pain Management.



Lindy Roberts

President, 2012 – 2014

BMedSci (Hons), MBBS (Hons), FANZCA, FFPMANZCA, FAICD, GradCertClinEd

Lindy Roberts is a dual qualified specialist anaesthetist and specialist pain medication physician. During her term as president she encouraged the understanding of concerns voiced by both Fellows and trainees, and attempted to provide answers to their questions. This quality saw her strengthen and clarify the relationship between ANZCA and the Board of the Faculty of Pain Medication. Roberts also was involved with curriculum and policy development as an ANZCA assessor and as chair of the ANZCA Education and Training Committee. Outside of her medical practice, Roberts has a particular interest in classic Hollywood and film noir. She plays the clarinet for a number of concert bands and orchestras.



Genevieve Goulding

President, 2014 – 2016

MBBS, FFARCS, FANZCA, FAICD, FCAI

Genevieve Goulding is a foundation member and former chair of the Welfare of Anaesthetists Special Interest Group (ANZCA). Her interest in this field is ongoing, with a particular emphasis on the areas of impairment, competency assessment and substance misuse. This interest carried through to her presidency, during which time Goulding initiated a Royal Australasian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists/ANZCA working group to develop evidence-based clinical guidelines for management of propofol misuse in anaesthetists and, in 2015, participated in the National Australian Medical Association/Beyond Blue Roundtable Advisory Group.



Burnell fountain restoration



In 1993, Dr Mary Burnell presented the newly formed Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists with the working maquette of a large fountain she presented to RACS in 1971. The large fountain came to be dubbed “Forest Landscape” and was commissioned in memory of her late husband Dr Glen Howard Burnell.

A maquette is a model produced by a sculptor to help them visualise their ideas and determine both scale and form. In this case the sculptor was Stephen Walker, one of Australia’s premier large-scale bronze artists of the time.

While bronze is a sturdy material, it also requires some attention to keep it looking its best. Over the years the piping had broken down, along with the fountain mechanism and the

plinth had mysteriously disappeared. In early 2016 the maquette was sent to Millennium Art Services for a buff and polish, and to have its various parts serviced and restored.

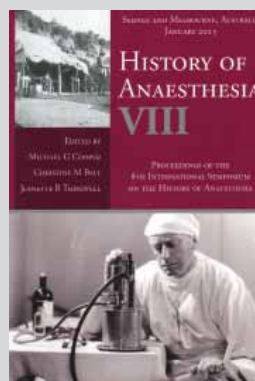
In March it was returned to ANZCA in full working order. Now cleaned and polished, it has retained its patina and will continue to develop the rich, warm colourings of bronze patination for years to come. The working fountain augments the stunning gardens at ANZCA House and provides a touchstone to the values of improvement and innovation Dr Burnell held during her life and which were instrumental in the formation of both the Faculty and the College.

History of Anaesthesia VIII

In 2013, the 8th International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia was held in Sydney, with a satellite meeting in Melbourne. More than 100 people from around the world presented on areas of historical interest within the practice of anaesthesia and pain medicine.

The proceedings from the meeting were published in April 2016 and are now available for purchase.

It is a weighty tome, covering a range of interest areas, including: “Biological and chemical warfare: An historical



perspective” by DR Bacon; “How Joseph Banks was the impetus to materia medica, including drugs of anaesthetic importance” by AG McKenzie; “Anaesthesiologists and the development of pain medicine” by MJ Cousin and DB Carr; and “No experience required: a historical look at the teaching of anaesthesia in Victorian Britain” by the honorary curator of the Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History, Christine Ball.

With 106 papers to choose from, there is sure to be a topic of interest to everyone.

The book can be purchased online via the Australian Society of Anaesthetists’ website.

The 9th International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia will be held in Boston, Massachusetts from October 24-28, 2017. For more information check the website of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

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