



## Wing Commander F. G. CHRISTENSEN

[1913 – 1969]



### Wing Commander Christensen was President of the Club 1957-59

Frederick George (known as George) Christensen was born on 26 December 1913 in Brisbane. He was the only child of Frederick Charles Christensen [1887-1932], a sail maker, and Florence (née Wilkinson) [1890-1974] a teacher from Rockhampton. They had married on 11 September 1912 in Rockhampton. The family lived at Dawson Street, Yeronga and later at Grosvenor Street, Yerongpilly.

He attended Yeronga State School and represented Queensland Primary Schools at the Australian Rules Football Carnival in Melbourne in 1926. He was awarded second place in Queensland's *Lillee Medal Scholarship* to High School in 1926; and was educated, and was *Dux* and Head Prefect in 1932, at Church of England Grammar School, Brisbane. He served in the school cadets, played 1<sup>st</sup> XI cricket (captain) and 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby, and was state schoolboy 440 yards champion. His rugby prowess continued during some of his North American and English post-graduate sojourns. His father died while George was at school and he was able to complete his further studies due to the generosity of Canon W.P.F. Morris – the school's founder. His mother later endowed a bursary at the school in his memory.

*We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.*

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From school he gained a university scholarship - initially for a diploma at the 'Queensland College of Dentistry and Brisbane Dental Hospital' in 1933, which in 1935 became the Dental Faculty of the University of Queensland. He graduated in 1937 as the university's first Bachelor of Dental Surgery (First Class Honours) and was awarded the University Medal.

Further studies gained him:

- 1938 Licentiate of Dental Surgery, University of Ontario
- 1938 Doctor of Dental Surgery (First Class) University of Toronto
- 1939 Licentiate of Dental Surgery, Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow
- 1947 University of Queensland Medical School (with final exams taken in UK in 1952)
- 1952 Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in England in oral and facial surgery

He is reputed to have once said that he "wanted to have more letters after his name than in it"! He succeeded <sup>1</sup>.

George married Dorothy Belle (née Malcolm) [1913-2006] on 22 August 1940 in the "Churchie" Chapel, Brisbane. She was a signaller Lieutenant with the AWAS during World War 2. They lived at Kangaroo Point and divorced in 1944. They had no children.

Christensen married Jean Joy (née Mills) in Victoria in 1945. She was a clerk whose parents John Wright and Ruby Joy May lived in Shepparton. It is not known if she accompanied him on his posting to Baghdad in 1960 – and it appears they were divorced by 1962. She appears to have returned to Victoria by 1967.

George was an eminent Brisbane dental surgeon whose post-war practice (1946-66) was in the AMP Building at the corner of Queen and Edward Streets. In 1966 he moved to *King House* at 77 Queen Street. It was here that his rooms adjoined a fellow dentist, Vivian Riding - in practice with his daughter Dr Vivienne Cowlshaw <sup>2</sup>. Vivienne had graduated at University of Queensland in 1956 and, during her studies and after, George became her mentor, surgical colleague, and close friend.

In addition to his practice, in the mid-1950s he was a part-time lecturer at the University of Queensland Medical and Dental Schools. He was a prolific researcher and a leader in his field and published many papers. He was Reader in Anatomy at the University of Queensland from 1966; was Honorary Consulting maxillo-facial surgeon at the Mater Hospital; and operated extensively at the Holy Spirit Hospital in Spring Hill. One of his appointments included the Chair of Oral Surgery, University of Baghdad, 1960-62. This was regarded as a "plum appointment" as oil-rich Iraq had just completed building one of the most modern and best-equipped units in the world, comprising a dental school, medical school, and hospital.

It is reported that acquiring knowledge came very easily to him and sharing it with others was his real interest. His generosity in lecturing whenever requested was matched by his skill in presenting even the most complex subjects with a clarity of thought that reduced them to simplicity. He had a vocational urge to teach.

Dr Christensen was President of the Queensland Branch on the Australian Dental Association in 1956 and became a Life Member in 1960.

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<sup>1</sup> D.D.Sc. (Qld), D.D.S. (Tor), F.D.S.R.C.S. (Eng. & Edin), H.D.D.R.C.S. (Edin), L.D.S. (Ont), L.D.S., R.F.P. and S. (Glas), L.M.S.S.A. (Lond), F.I.C.D., F.A.C.D.S.,

<sup>2</sup> Dr Cowlshaw [1935-2019] was the daughter-in-law of the 1943 Club President Major Bob Cowlshaw MC [1888-1974]. B.D.Sc. (Qld), D.D.S. (Dalhousie), M.D.S. (Otago), M.Ed. (Syd). F.R.A.C.D.S. She was also a Civilian Member of the Club. She was a prominent Brisbane model (1954-1958), an early female dentist, a founding member in 1965 of the AMARA Women's Dental Study Group, and became the first female Oral Surgeon to qualify in the Southern hemisphere.

George Christensen had a distinguished service with the Royal Australian Air Force. He commenced duties on 4 January 1943 as a Flight Lieutenant (on Probation) in the Medical Branch. During his service he carried out extensive research into otitic barotrauma and conducted a number of training courses for dental personnel. In September 1943 he was appointed to a research position in aviation medicine at Melbourne University, and in July 1944 he was given a specialist appointment at an Air Force hospital to carry out research into the use of penicillin for mouth diseases. Later he became an adviser to the Director of Dental Services, and after demobilization was Consultant Oral Surgeon as a Wing Commander, and carried out part-time duties in the RAAF and gave instruction in oral surgery for dental officers. Subsequently he became Consultant in Oral Surgery and Oral Medicine to the Directorate-General of Medical Services with the rank of Group Captain.

George lived at Highgate Hill after the War; in the United Kingdom in 1952; on return to Brisbane at "Glencrag" – (apartments in Leichardt Street near Upper Edward Street); and from 1965 at Toowong (in Sylvan Road opposite the Regatta Hotel). In his will he bequeathed that house to the ADAQ, by whom it was sold, and the proceeds invested in 1971 in a property at 24 Little Edward Street, Brisbane for their headquarters - which they named "Christensen House". He also endowed the "F.G. Christensen Memorial Prize" (a medal and \$500) for the highest placed candidate in the annual Primary Examinations of the Royal Australian College of Dental Surgeons (first awarded in 1971).

George Christensen joined the Club in 1946. He joined the Committee in 1955 and became Joint Vice President in 1956. He assumed the role of President in mid-1957 due to the untimely death in office of Major Thomas MacMinn. He was then elected President for the period 1957-59.

He did not serve as Immediate Past President due to taking up his academic role overseas. On his return from overseas, he re-joined the Committee in 1962, and again in 1966–68.

The first *Patron's Dinner* (1959) was held while he was President – honouring His Excellency the Governor, Colonel Sir Henry Abel Smith – to popular acclaim and the event has continued since then. His affection for the Club was further demonstrated by the bequest of his silverware to the Club in his will.

Wing Commander Christensen died on 17 July 1969 aged 55 following complications from a major operation, and, after a funeral service at St. John's Cathedral, was buried at Dutton Park Cemetery (beside his father who died in 1932 at age 44).

Sources included:

- Various web pages.
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton.
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, and sundry documents.
- Who's Who in Australia 1968
- Contribution from FLTLT Philip Christensen – Club Member and an unrelated dental colleague of WNGCDR Christensen. June 2020
- Contributions from Mrs Liana (Lani) Roberts– daughter of Dr Vivienne Cowlshaw; and granddaughter of Club Past-President Major B.T. Cowlshaw MC. August 2020