

Flynn, Michael Richard (1893–1957) by G.L. McDonald



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James Aloysius Foedus Flynn (1899-1969), ophthalmic surgeon, was born on 30 May 1899 in Sydney, fourth child of John Flynn, a medical practitioner from Ireland, and his native-born wife Maud May, née Witton. Of their nine surviving children, the six sons formed a remarkable group: they each attended Marist Brothers' High School, Darlinghurst, studied medicine at the University of Sydney and achieved eminence in their profession. All were prominent in university affairs and sport, particularly hockey and rugby, and in professional and community organizations.

The eldest, Michael Richard (1893-1957), surgeon, was born on 19 October 1893 at Bairnsdale, Victoria, and graduated B.A., 1914; B.Sc., 1916; M.B., Ch.M., 1920; M.D., 1931. Awarded a **Walter and Eliza Hall** travelling fellowship in 1920, he studied in England; from August 1921 to December 1924 he was a fellow at the Mayo Clinic, United States of America (M.S., 1925, University of Minnesota). He distinguished himself as a practical surgeon, holding appointments at Royal Prince Alfred, Lewisham and the Dental hospitals, and lectured at the university's faculty of dentistry. A fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, he was a skilled anatomist and speedy operator. He was prepared to take on difficult surgical procedures—particularly in the head, neck and thorax—well before modern technology made these areas readily accessible. Dick, as he was known, died of cerebral oedema on 11 December 1957 at Lewisham and was buried in Waverley cemetery; his wife Roma Theresa, née O'Dea, survived him.

John Joseph Witton (1895-1955), dermatologist, was born on 26 August 1895 in Sydney, won a Blue for hockey and graduated B.A., 1916; M.B., Ch.M.,

1924. He rose through the ranks to lieutenant in the Australian Imperial Force and in 1917-18 served with the 30th Battalion on the Western Front; he was awarded the Military Cross for an action at Foucacourt, France, in November 1918 which left him blind in one eye. Flynn turned to medicine, studied dermatology in London and became a leading figure at Sydney and Lewisham hospitals. A part-time specialist (from 1940) and consultant dermatologist to the Royal Australian Air Force, he reached the rank of honorary group captain. He was an executive-member (from 1942) of the St John Ambulance Association; he played bowls at Royal Sydney Golf Club, belonged to the Australian Jockey and Sydney Turf clubs, and owned several winning racehorses. Serving on the Medical Board from 1944, he was its president when he died of a coronary occlusion on 6 December 1955 at his Bellevue Hill home. His wife Mary Amelia, née Bridge, and daughter survived him.

James graduated M.B., Ch.M. in 1922. Following residency at Sydney Hospital, he undertook training in ophthalmology at its eye department and in Britain, gaining diplomas of ophthalmology (Oxford) and ophthalmic medicine and

surgery (R.C.P. & S.) in 1925. Returning to Sydney next year, he was appointed to Royal Prince Alfred and Lewisham hospitals. On 16 January 1929 he married Rane Mary Gertrude Adams (d.1959) at St Mary's Cathedral. Their only child Ann was to die of diphtheria. Flynn was a fellow (from 1930) of the R.A.C.S., a founder (1938) and president (1939) of the Ophthalmological Society of Australia, and a fellow (1940) of the Royal Society of Medicine, London.

A surgeon lieutenant in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, Flynn began full-time service on 2 September 1939 and joined H.M.A.S. *Australia* next month (as ophthalmologist specialist from December); the ship spent time with the British Home Fleet in 1940 and took part in the Dakar expedition in September. He was posted ashore in April 1941 and worked in Sydney establishments until demobilized on 1 March 1946 as acting surgeon commander. After the war he was consultant ophthalmologist to the R.A.N. and was promoted honorary surgeon captain on his retirement in 1957.

Flynn had given special attention to eye problems associated with naval war service, including night vision and solar retinal damage. His article, 'Photo-retinitis in anti-aircraft lookouts' in the *Medical Journal of Australia* (1942), was a lucid application to clinical practice of what had previously been rather obscure scientific knowledge. He and J. C. Eccles, in 'Experimental photo-retinitis' (*M.J.A.*, 1944), reported well-designed and carefully performed experiments that revealed new information about solar retinal damage.

Despite his busy professional life, which included clinical practice, as well as teaching and examining at the University of Sydney, Flynn sat on the editorial committee of *Ophthalmologica*, published at Basel, Switzerland. He belonged to the Australian, Royal Sydney Golf, Australian Jockey and Rose Bay Bowling clubs, the Royal Agricultural and Art Gallery societies of New South Wales, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the National Trust of Australia. Courteous and kind, he was unruffled in both manner and dress. On 10 January 1962 at St Joseph's Church, Edgecliff, he married Sarah (Sari) Mary, née Purcell, widow of his fellow ophthalmologist, Adrian Odillo Maher.

Survived by his wife, James died of a coronary occlusion on 15 July 1969 at his Darling Point home and was buried in South Head cemetery.

His younger brother Leopold Rupert (1901-1983), consultant physician, was born on 25 March 1901 in Sydney and graduated M.B., Ch.M. in 1924. On the death of his father in 1926, Leo took over his general practice in College Street. After being admitted to membership of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 1939, he became a Macquarie Street consultant. A conservative, thorough and sympathetic physician, he was an influential figure at Lewisham and St Margaret's hospitals. During World War II he was a part-time specialist with the R.A.A.F. Medical Branch. He belonged to the A.J.C. and Vacluse Bowling Club. Leo died on 12 December 1983 at his Darling Point home; his wife Dorothea Mary, née Hickey, and their two sons and three daughters survived him.

Gregory Stephen (1911-1978), ophthalmic surgeon, was born on 8 January 1911 in Sydney and graduated M.B., B.S. in 1935. He was an honorary at

Lewisham Hospital, a foundation member of the O.S.A. and one of the first fellows in ophthalmology of the R.A.C.S. Having served in the Citizen Military Forces, in 1942 he was seconded to the Australian Imperial Force. He performed specialist work in the 121st Australian General Hospital, Katherine, Northern Territory, the 2nd/7th A.G.H., Lae, New Guinea, and the 110th A.G.H., Perth, and was a major at the end of the war. Predeceased by his wife Mary Margaret, née Curtis, Greg died of myocardial infarction on 10 July 1978 at his Wollstonecraft home; his son and three of his four daughters survived him.

Another brother Francis Stanislaus (b.1906), an ophthalmic surgeon and missionary priest, was widely known as 'Flynn of the North' and was honoured for his medical work among Aborigines. Two of the Flynn sisters became Brigidine nuns.

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