



T/Surgeon Sydney O'Neill (RAN)



Played with Adelaide University



Football Club: B Grade (1913-15)

Degree – MB BS (1917)

Background

Coinciding with the Centenary of Anzacs our incentive behind the series of biographical publications is the Adelaide University Football and Cricket Club's desire to honour our players who served in the Great War (1914 - 1918). These brave men put on hold their academic, professional and sporting careers for King and Country in the name of peace and freedom. The AUFC/AUCC WW1 Memorial Committee is endeavouring to identify every one of our players who served and prepare life stories on all. This is to ensure their sacrifices and further contributions to society will be recognised by future generations.

On Anzac Day 2015, the Centenary of the Gallipoli landing, a memorial plaque was unveiled on the Adelaide University Oval Pavilion and this was followed by the erection of a picket fence between the pavilion and the scoreboard with each picket bearing a plaque with the name of an AUFC/AUCC player who served.

The following documentation relates to the life of Sydney O'Neill. It is compilation of information and photographs collected from a variety of historical sources.

Service Record

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=5423374>

RECORD OF SERVICE (OFFICERS)					
Name <i>O'Neill Sydney</i> <i>N.S. S.S.</i>					
Date of Birth <i>25th January 1897</i>		Place of Birth <i>Melbourne Victoria</i>			
Next of Kin (Relationship and Address) <i>Mr. Palmerston Rd North Sydney</i>					
Date of joining R.A.N. or Permanent Naval Force <i>6.8.17</i>	Rank <i>Temporary Surgeon</i>	Date of Promotions <i>20.11.18</i>	Gazette <i>6244</i>	Period and Date last from R.N. <i>1919</i>	Rank and Seniority in R.N. <i>Surgeon</i>
					Other Notations <i>Equipment all of 1919 approved</i>
SPECIAL ALLOWANCES					
Authority <i>17/11/19</i>	To date from <i>6.8.17</i>	Nature of Allowance <i>Lodging Allowance whilst no accommodation available at Naval Base (No. 11.12.17)</i>			
<i>£ 15. 6. 8 Price Money 1.12.17</i>					
<i>£ 56 - Share of Naval Fund 1.12.17</i>					
<i>Encounter 9th Oct 1919</i>					

WHERE ATTACHED FOR DUTY						
Ship or Establishment	From	To	Ship or Establishment	From	To	Remarks
<i>Encounter</i>	<i>15.12.17</i>	<i>1.12.19</i>				<i>Disembarked 1.12.19 (along) (10/10/19) (17/12/19)</i>

Published Biography

Blood Sweat and Fears: Medical Practitioners and Medical Students of South Australian who Served in World War 1,
C Verco, A Summers, T Swain & M Jelly. July 2014

O'NEILL Sydney

MB BS FRCS

1895 - 1961



Sydney O'Neill was born in Richmond, Victoria on the 25th January 1895, son of Arthur O'Neill and Maud Evelyn nee Williams. He was educated at the Adelaide High School and qualified for a Government Bursary to study medicine at the University of Adelaide with his best friend John Besley Gillen. O'Neill graduated in July 1917 and lived at Palmerston Rd, North Unley.

O'Neill joined the naval cadets prior to WW1; the University of Adelaide archives record that he served in the RAN. The RAN service card is the only record of his service during WW1 as a temporary surgeon PNF (S) with his appointment from the 6th August 1917 until demobilisation on 1st December 1919.

O'Neill completed his FRCS in London after the war and returned to Australia where he established a practice in Sydney, NSW. He married Grace Mary Smith, daughter of Mrs Theresa Smith and the late Charles Smith of "Fairholme", Guildford, Western Australia on 7th February 1924. The couple left for Sydney on the overland express train on the evening of the wedding. However, by March 1925, he was living in Western Australia and had commenced a

practice at 1290 Hay St, Perth. Whilst attending a function at Government House ballroom in Perth, on 26th August 1925, he unfortunately witnessed the shooting of a man close to him and was a witness in the subsequent court case. O'Neill moved back to NSW in the 1940s, and was embroiled in a legal case in 1943 when the house he owned at 13 Carr St, Coogee, was rented out and used as a convalescent and rest home for aged people. O'Neill required the home to be vacated for his wife and two children. He won the case and the house was vacated. He continued to practice in NSW. Sydney O'Neill died on 14th November 1961 in NSW and was survived by his wife and his son and his daughter.

Sources:

Personal Interview and Photo Bob Gillen.
The Register Adelaide 16th December 1911
The Register Adelaide 23rd November 1912
The Register Adelaide 10th July 1917
Sunday Times Perth 17th February 1924
Daily News Perth 21 March 1925
Daily News Perth 8th October 1925.
The West Australian 2nd March 1943
Ancestry .com

Note – some details in this biography differ from the profiler's research on the life of Sydney O'Neill detailed below.

Biography

Early Life

Sydney O'Neill was born on the 25th January 1895 in Richmond, Victoria, the son of Arthur Henry O'Neill and Maud Evelyn Williams. The family moved to Adelaide before 1908. Arthur was a clerk and the family lived at 44 Palmerston Road, North Unley, SA.

Schooling

Sydney attended Adelaide High School where in December 1908 he won an exhibition and in 1909 he passed his Primary Examinations followed by Senior Examinations in 1910. He was on the general honours list and won a bursary to attend Adelaide University.

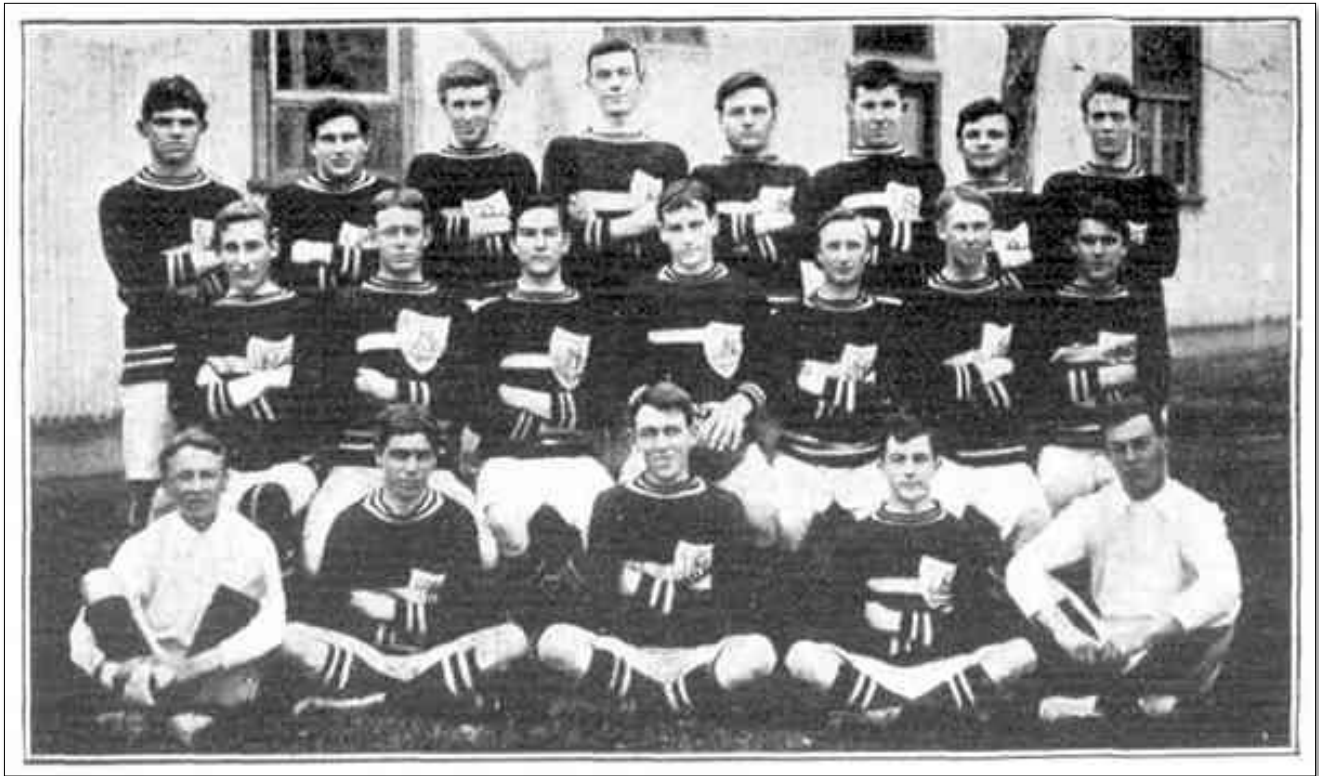
While at AHS, Sydney played football and represented the school in both 1910 and 1911. The first picture below is of the Football and Rifle teams who travelled to Victoria to play the Melbourne Continuation School in matches in Michaelmas Holidays in 1910.

1910 - Adelaide High School Football and Rifle Team



S. O'Neill – Second to Back Row – Second Footballer from Right

1911 Adelaide High School – First Eighteen Football Team



S. O'Neill – Top Row – Third from Right

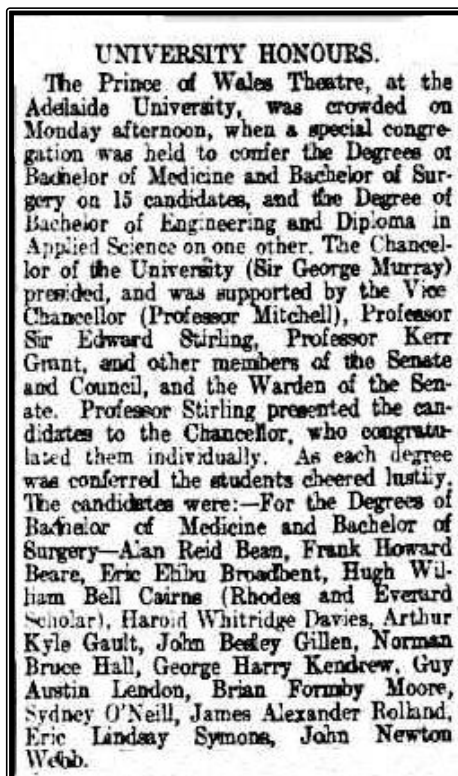
Top Row (L-R) E Johncock, K Parham, A Limb, C Boorn, H Buzacock, S O'Neill, E Haese, J Keipert

Middle Row (L-R) C Holten, E Broadbent, R Thomas, L Carthew (c), C Mugford (v-c), C Orr, T Williams

Front Row (L-R) N Somerville, J Johncock, S Tiver, S Oliver, S Pearce

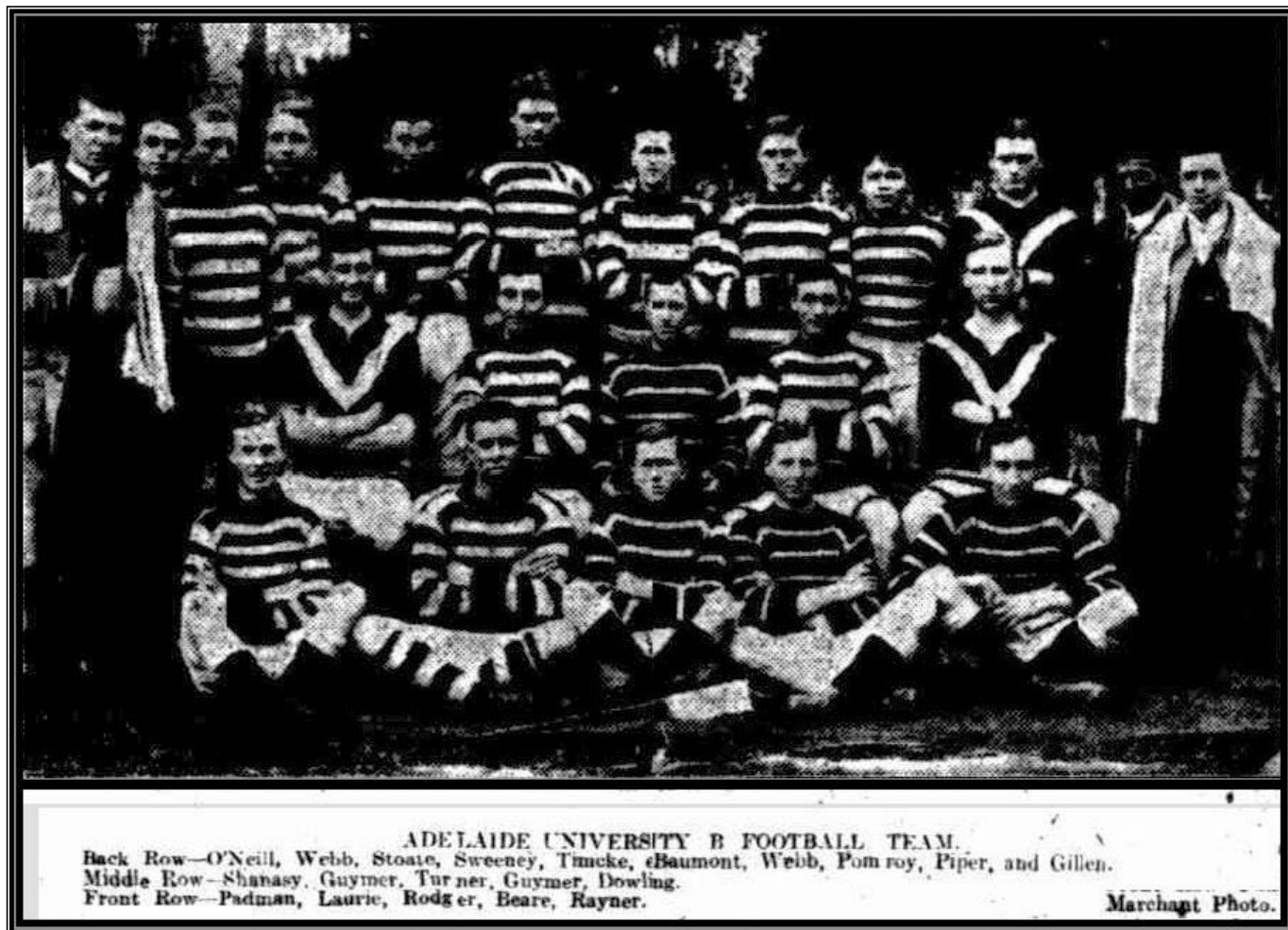
Adelaide University

Sydney commenced studying medicine at Adelaide University in 1912 and graduated MB BS in July 1917.



University Sport

Sydney played football for the Adelaide University B Grade in the Adelaide Students' Association competition in the 1913, 1914 and 1915 seasons.



1914 – Adelaide University B Team

World War I

Sydney was appointed a Temporary Surgeon in the Royal Australian Navy on the 6th August 1917 and served aboard the 'Cerberus' from the 6th August to the 14th December 1917 and on the 'Encounter' from the 15th December 1917 to the 1st December 1919 when he was demobilised.

Extract of letter from Surgeon J. B. Gillen, R.A.N., H.M.A.S. "Brisbane" :-

"Just a line to let you know although far away one has not altogether forgotten the old School. Fancy! Middle of winter, and I am writing this clad in white trousers and singlet, with my electric fan going at full belt to keep me cool. I heard from Syd. O'Neill several weeks ago. He is having a good trip, and is a much travelled chap now. We have five 'varsity men on board - two New South Wales, one Melbourne, one New Zealand, and myself. Our 'varsity degrees seem to mean a good deal in the other States, and what I have seen I think our chaps can hold their own readily. The discipline in this service is splendid, and one gets into a very good routine. Everything seems to work like clockwork. We run a very good moving picture show on board when at anchor, and we have some very good films. These shows buck up the men tremendously, and keep their attention diverted from wrong channels. The world is very small. Several days ago I met a man whose wife worked at the same dissecting table at the 'varsity with me five years ago. Since then she has married him, of course. I was introduced to this chap, and he said, 'O, you are a crow-eater, too!' I looked surprised, and asked him how he knew, and he told me he had heard of me from his wife. One is always running up against people like this, and it is most interesting to meet them. I suppose all the Higher Public classes are plugging away hard, and the budding medicos still hunting for frogs and crayfish."

From Adelaide High School Magazine

Career

After demobilisation, Sydney returned to civilian medicine and travelled to the UK where in December 1922 he was awarded his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Mr. A. O'Neill, of Palmerston Road, North Unley, has received a cable message from his son, Dr. Sydney O'Neill, stating that he has been awarded the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. Dublin.

On the 7th of February 1924, Sydney married Grace Mary Smith, the daughter of Mrs. Teresa and the late Mr. Charles Smith, of Guildford, W.A.

After their marriage they returned to Sydney, NSW where Sydney had his practice.

O'NEILL—SMITH.

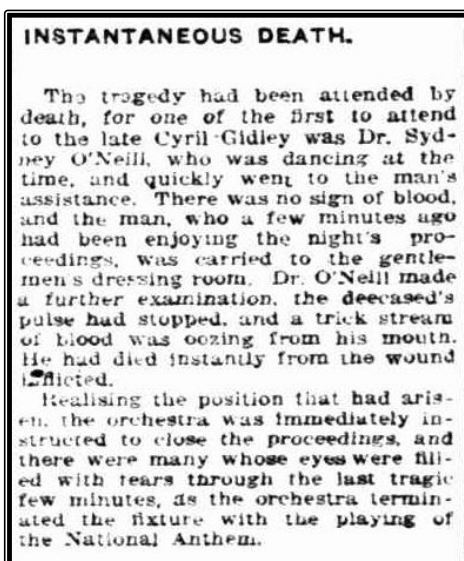
A marriage of interest to a large circle of friends, owing to the popularity of the bride, was quietly solemnised at St. Mary's Church, Guildford, at 8 a.m. on the 7th inst., when Grace Mary, daughter of Mrs. Teresa and the late Mr. Charles Smith, of "Fairholme," Guildford, was married to Dr. Sydney O'Neill (late of London), son of Mr. Arthur O'Neill, Adelaide. The Rev. Dr. T. O'Gorman officiated. The bride was given away by her brother-in-law, Mr. A. J. Baker, of Claremont, and was smartly gowned in navy georgette enriched with Oriental bead embroideries, with which was worn a becoming hat en suite. Miss Hilary Smith (sister) and Miss Mary Burke were in attendance on the bride. The former chose a becoming mode of grey georgette with cherry-tonings effectively introduced, whilst orange and ivory allied themselves richly for Miss Burke's gown. Dr. Cecil Quinlan supported the bridegroom as best man. At the conclusion of the service an adjournment was made to "Fairholme," Guildford, the residence of the bride's mother, where at 1 o'clock a sumptuous wedding luncheon was enjoyed. Mrs. Smith was handsomely gowned in mole georgette and hat in tones to harmonise. Dr. and Mrs. O'Neill left by the overland express in the evening for Sydney, where the doctor is in practice. The bride travelled in a lovely creation of green georgette and gold brocade, smartened with a black hat. A large party of friends were at the train to bid them au revoir. The presents received were of a costly nature and included many cheques.

By 1925 the couple had moved to Perth and Sydney was carrying on his practice at 1290 Hay Street in the city.

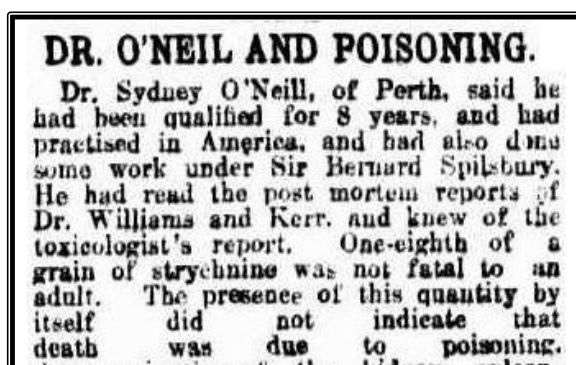
DR. SYDNEY O'NEILL.
M.B., F.R.C.S.I.
Has commenced practice at 1290 Hay-st.,
West, corner of Hay and Outram streets.

Perth.
Tel 3920.

Sydney was unlucky enough to be present at a Charity Ball at Government House in August 1925 when a man was shot nearby by a young woman known to him.



In September 1925, he also gave evidence in the well-publicised trial of Yeong Yen, a Chinese shopkeeper, accused of murdering his young wife, Ruby by suspected strychnine poisoning.



In 1927, Sydney was consulting at Leith House, 220 St George's Terrace in addition to his Hay St, West Perth practice.

Twins John and Jill were born at home on the 16th of July 1927. Sydney was well known for driving sports model Buick cars and in February 1929 he purchased a Silver Anniversary Model Buick Roadster.



In 1936 the family moved to Francis Street, Scarborough and in December 1942 Sydney was fined £1 for showing lights visible at sea.

In 1943, Sydney was involved in a court case to regain possession of his house at 13 Carr Street, Coogee. The house had been rented out and was being used as a rest home and Sydney wanted it as a home for his wife and two children.

POSSESSION OF HOUSE.

Perth Doctor Succeeds.

SYDNEY, March 1.—Efforts by Dr Sydney O'Neill of Perth to recover possession of his house, 13 Carr-street, Coogee, were advanced a stage further in the Central Summons Court today, when Mr McCulloch, SM, ruled that he was entitled to an order for possession.

The house has been rented by Mrs Eileen Goldstein since December, 1940, and used as a convalescent and rest home for aged people. Dr O'Neill said he required the premises as a home for his wife and 2 children.

Eileen Goldstein said she was a registered nurse. There were 13 people in the house at present, their ages ranging from the seventies to 91 years, and some were helpless. It was not possible to get another suitable place.

Mr W. M. Niland for the defendant said that women like Matron Goldstein were doing a national work and it was impossible to get another place to shelter and care for the old people.

Mr McCulloch, SM, said Dr O'Neill had given the defendant reasonable time to look for other premises. He would give the maximum period of time and ordered the issue of a warrant, to be postponed until March 29, after which the tenant would have 28 days to quit.

It is unclear if Sydney moved to the City of Sydney in 1944 as articles in Perth newspapers indicate he was still practicing at St George's Terrace, Perth in 1945. It is likely that his wife and the twins moved to Sydney where John commenced studying to become a doctor. Jill repeated her Leaving year at School before commencing to study dentistry. Sydney probably remained in Perth.

In July 1947 Sydney registered a Buick sedan, giving St George's Terrace, Perth as his address.

In 1948, in partnership with Dr T. Early of Perth, Sydney leased the horse, Filipino, from a Mr Stan O'Neill (no relation).

£10,000 Offer for W.A. horse

MELBOURNE: A Melbourne offer of £10,000, with certain contingencies, for the promising Perth horse, Filipino, was declined this week, and Filipino has now been leased to Drs. S. O'Neill and T. Early, of Perth. He is to be trained at Randwick.

When Filipino was placed on the market recently the price asked for him was £10,000.

Mr. Jim Ryan, of Melbourne, owner of Fresh Boy, is reported to have offered this sum, but on the question of contingencies the sale fell through.

Three other Melbourne owners unsuccessfully made inquiries about Filipino.

The W.A.T.C. committee allowed Drs. O'Neill and Early to take a lease of him and Rockdale, a two-year-old.

Filipino and Rockdale, who were raced by Mr. A. S. O'Neill, of Perth, won a double in Perth in March, but later their entries by Mr. O'Neill were banned. With the granting of the lease to Drs. O'Neill and Early, the pair can race again.

Filipino is entered for the Caulfield and Melbourne Cups, and the Epsom and Metropolitan. He is rising five-year-old, and has won races at two, three and four. This season he scored at his only start.



Two Perth medicos, Drs. S. O'Neill (left) and T. Early, made special trips from West Australia to see their horse, Filipino, win. Dr. Early, who left Perth at 11 o'clock on Friday night, arrived at Randwick only an hour before the Villiers.

December 1948

Filipino was successful, winning five races and placing in seven others out of 14 starts in Sydney and Melbourne. In March 1949 Filipino won the £5,000 Alister Clark Stakes, worth £3250 and a £100 trophy to the winner at Moonie Valley, Melbourne (worth \$200,000 today).

Goulburn Evening Post (NSW : 1940 - 1954).
 ~~~~~ Friday 1 April 1949, page 2 ~~~~~

**FILIPINO EQUALS RECORD  
 IN RICH STAKES**

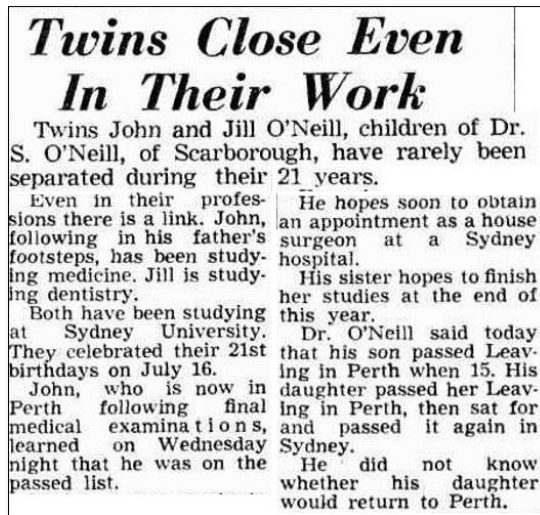
Filipino winning the Alister Clark Stakes, of £5000, from Pholbos and Stamen. Filipino equalled the Moonie Valley 1½-mile record, running the distance in 2.2½.

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National Library of Australia

Unfortunately, following Filipino's successes, the doctors were unable to extend their lease beyond May 1949. The owner Stan O'Neill then raced Filipino for another year before sending the 8-year-old stallion into stud.

In July 1948, John and Jill celebrated their 21st birthdays and in August John passed his final medical examinations.



The 1949 Electoral Rolls give Sydney and Grace's addresses as Francis Street, Scarborough and in 1954 they were listed at 33 Filburn Street, Scarborough.

In January 1956, Dr John O'Neill, 28 of Lang Road, Centennial Park, the recently appointed surgical registrar at St Vincent's Hospital disappeared. He was found 10 days later at Katoomba suffering from loss of memory. He could not explain his loss of memory but did not believe it was the result of studying too hard.

By 1958, Sydney and Grace were both living at 16 Lang Road, Centennial Park, Sydney, as were John Patrick (medical practitioner) and Jill Patricia (dentist).

Death

Sydney passed away on the 14th November 1961 aged 66 years and is buried at Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons obituary to his son John (1926-2007) is below.

John O'Neill | Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

General surgeon - 16 July 1927 - 20 November 2007

John Patrick O'Neill who died on 20 November 2007 was the first Australian surgeon to spend a year at the prestigious Lahey Clinic as part of his post-graduate surgical training. He obtained his FRCS in London in 1952 and instead of following the more traditional pathway of obtaining a surgical registrar job in the United Kingdom where there was an abundance of surgery available for trainees he surprised us all by heading off to the Lahey Clinic in Boston, USA, as a visiting fellow.

It must have been daunting for a young lone, untrained and unknown Australian surgeon to turn up at the Lahey Clinic and work in the rarefied surgical atmosphere that surrounded the great Richard B Cattell doyen of American surgery and world authority on bile duct injuries. Cattell's theatre was generally full of visiting dignitaries, but O'Neill would have acquitted himself well in his own quiet competent way and there is no doubt that he helped forge a pathway to the Lahey Clinic for a later generation of surgical trainees, principally from St Vincent's Hospital, which included Victor Fazio of Cleveland Clinic fame.

John was born in Perth on 16 July 1927 to Grace and Sydney O'Neill, a prominent Perth surgeon, together with his twin sister Jill who survives him. He was educated at Aquinas College in Perth and entered the Medical Faculty at Sydney University in 1943 (there being no Medical Faculty in Perth at that time) in the first of the quota years

established during the war. He gained a Commonwealth Scholarship established especially by the then Prime Minister Ben Chifley to guarantee a sufficient number of doctors for military service if required. John graduated with Honours in August 1948 and spent the next 3 years as a junior then senior resident at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney and in his fourth year rose to Clinical Superintendent. He then travelled to the UK and obtained his English Fellowship.

After his time at the Lahey Clinic he returned to Australia and to St Vincent's, obtained his Australian Fellowship and became a Senior Surgical Registrar at the hospital, John, together with John Graham and I, was appointed as a part time senior surgical registrar with limited admitting rights and the right of private practice. We shared the emergency roster, assisted the senior surgeons and became and remained very good friends.

The rest of his professional life was spent at Concord Repatriation Hospital, St Joseph's Hospital Auburn and St Vincent's Private Hospital, often working with Richard Condon. He was a thoroughly trained highly competent technical surgeon whose forte was complicated biliary surgery. He treated all his patients with care, dignity and kindness and was loved by them in return. He was always highly regarded by his colleagues.

At the relatively late age of 35, he married Pauline McGill, an outstanding surgical nurse of St Vincent's Hospital, and they raised 6 children and now have 8 grandchildren. John was a quiet, gentle and generous man who always put his family first and never brought the problems of work home. He was a caring father who did not attempt to pressure his children to achieve and allowed them to choose their own careers, in which they have all done very well.

Apart from his family and surgery, he was keen on rugby union, despite having come from Perth, an Australian rules stronghold. He and I attended several grand finals involving Sydney University over the years and later frequented St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill to watch the College football. His father owned a race horse which had won an important race in Sydney and John also had some interest in horse racing.

John died on the Gold Coast after a long illness in the care of his family. His funeral service was held at the Gold coast but he wished to be buried in Sydney at the Macquarie Fields Cemetery. His burial was attended by his family and all of his fellow residents from the 1948 year at St Vincent's Hospital.

He was a genuine friend and it was an honour and a pleasure to have known him for over 60 years.

Mr Thomas Nash
Vascular and general surgeon
January 2008

Profile Compiled by: Beth Filmer AUFC/AUCC WW1 Memorial Committee

Sources and Acknowledgements:

The AIF Project <https://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/>
RSL Virtual War Memorial <https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/>
The National Archives of Australia <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/>
Australian War Memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/>
The Adelaide University <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/records/archives/>
The National Library of Australia <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>
(Trove Newspaper articles tagged – Dr Sydney O'Neill)
SA Genealogy <https://www.genealogysa.org.au/resources/online-databases.html>
Blood Sweat and Fears: Medical Practitioners and Medical Students of South Australian who Served in World War 1,
C Verco, A Summers, T Swain & M Jelly. July 1914
State Library of South Australia – Adelaide High School Magazines
Ancestry.com.au - Electoral Rolls
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
<https://www.surgeons.org/member-services/in-memoriam/john-o%27neill/>
Rob O'Shannassy AUFC/AUCC WW1 Memorial Committee researcher