

Furnell, Herbert Giblin (1898 – 1974)

Dr. Herbert Giblin (Harry) Furnell was born on 24 October 1898 at Maryborough, Victoria, son of George William Furnell, a gaol governor from England. After winning scholarships to Geelong Grammar and Trinity College, he graduated M.B., B.S., from the University of Melbourne in 1921. He was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1927, obtained the Diploma of Gynaecology and Obstetrics from the University of Melbourne in 1930, became a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in 1950, and a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1959.

He was gynaecologist to St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, from 1945 to 1960 and consultant gynaecologist since that date; visiting gynaecologist to the Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, from 1947 until 1955; and Dean of the St. Vincent's Hospital Clinical School from 1955 until 1957-

He became a member of the British Medical Association in 1921. He has served as a member of the Victorian Branch Council since 1947 and was President of the Victorian Branch in 1955. He has been Honorary Treasurer since 1962, and the Director for Victoria of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company since 1962. He was Chairman of the Medical Committee of the XVI Olympiad, Melbourne, 1956.

He served with great distinction in the Second World War, notably in the siege of Tobruk and in New Guinea. He commanded the 10th Field Ambulance from 1932 until 1939 and in October 1939 was seconded to the A.I.F., eventually being appointed Deputy Director of Medical Services, H.Q., 1 Australian Corps, and attaining the rank of Brigadier. He was mentioned in despatches five times, was awarded the D.S.O. in 1941 and the Efficiency Decoration in 1945. He was created a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1945. Dr. Furnell has been Honorary Colonel to the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps since 1962.

Harry Furnell was for many years a Director of the British Medical Insurance Company and its Chairman for the last few years of his life. His patience, understanding and willingness to comprehend the other man's point of view guided this organization over a difficult time when the reinsurance agreement was negotiated. He also served the Victorian Branch of the Australian Medical Association outstandingly in the Federal sphere as a Director of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company; his opinions were widely sought and respected by his fellow directors from all over Australia. Perhaps Harry will best be remembered for his leadership in the building of the new Medical Society Hall in Parkville.

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Sources: Obituary, MJA 6/4/1974; A.J. Hill, "Furnell, Herbert Giblin (Harry) (1898-1973), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.14, 1996.

