

Obituary - Frederick Athol Perkins 1897-1976. Proc. R. Soc. Qd. 89: xix.

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OBITUARY

Frederick Athol Perkins

1897–1976

Athol Perkins was born in Sydney, educated at Fort Street High School, and graduated B. Agr. Sc. from the University of Sydney in 1921. After 18 months as an entomologist in the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, he joined the staff of the University of Queensland as Stanthorpe and District Research Fellow, to work on the fruit-fly problem plaguing the orchards of soldier settlers. He came to Brisbane in 1926 to prepare his report and in July 1927 was appointed Lecturer in Economic Entomology in the University's newly established Faculty of Agriculture. In 1952 the University created the first autonomous Department of Entomology in any Australian university with Perkins as Reader-in-Charge, a post from which he retired in 1965. At that time he had taught all agriculture students, most science students studying entomology, and many medical and medical science students. He was first Manager of the University of Queensland Press, 1948–61, the most demanding of his varied administrative tasks for the University.

Perkins applied himself energetically to whatever he undertook. He was a very good teacher, cheerful, friendly and imperturbable, with a genuine interest in people. At Stanthorpe he had gained a wide knowledge of the identity and natural history of native insects which, coupled with his abiding enthusiasm for the study of living insects, made him a stimulating leader of student excursions. His Department developed an Australia-wide reputation for training entomologists and attracted professors and postgraduate scholars from overseas to work in it. During the 1939–45 war he was Officer Commanding, Land Headquarters School of Malaria Control, training soldiers in his laboratory for malaria control units. His presidential address to this Society on the mosquito problems of Queensland was his only publication on medical entomology but he maintained a keen interest in the field.

His most notable research was reported in six papers between 1934 and 1949 on the taxonomy of Australian and Oriental fruit-flies, three of them published in these Proceedings. One later paper concerned the taxonomy of stone-flies. He was instrumental in obtaining for the University a collection of over 1000 fossil insects from the Mt Crosby beds but did not publish on them; they are now in the Department of Geology, University of Queensland.

He played a leading role in the Entomological Society of Queensland, serving 20 years on its Council (a fuller obituary appeared in its February 1977 News Bulletin) and was active in the Queensland Naturalists Club. He joined the Royal Society of Queensland in 1924, was Secretary (1929–37), Librarian (1938–39) and President (1944) in 16 years on its Council, and was elected an Honorary Life Member in 1965.

Perkins is remembered for his helpfulness to his colleagues and his students. The latter, serving the science of entomology with distinction, provide his living memorial.

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