



Dr Guido Saverio Carlo Mayrhofer

*BA(Hons)UWA, 1916; MBBSMelb, 1922;
MRACGP, 1953*

Recollected by Professor Max Kamien

GUIDO SAVERIO CARLO MAYRHOFER (1898–1968) was born on 1 March 1898 in Perth, the oldest of six children of Alberto Fortunato Mayrhofer, a merchant and picture framer from Naples in Italy, and his Victorian-born wife Mabel Emma Allpress. Guido and two of his brothers, Mario and Max, became medical doctors.¹ Viola and Oscar, two of his other siblings, became teachers and his sister Alberta was a clerical worker, carer of her mother and later a receptionist at Guido and Mario's medical practice.

Guido was educated at the Christian Brothers College in Perth. His father was a lapsed Roman Catholic but all his children (except Max) attended Catholic Schools as non-Catholics and did not participate in religious instruction. In 1913, Guido won a government exhibition to the University of Western Australia. He graduated with First Class Honours in Greek and English and, having topped the Latin 2 class was also awarded the Lady Hacket Prize for Classics. He, together with Mario, then studied medicine at the University of Melbourne. He graduated MBBS in 1922. He was a junior resident at the Royal Perth Hospital and the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. He stayed a second year at the Children's Hospital as a senior medical officer.

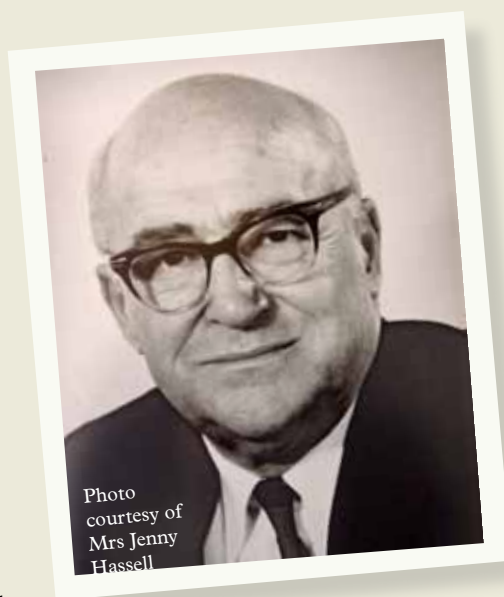
The Medical Superintendent was James Gordon Hislop who became one of Perth's leading citizens as a specialist physician, District Governor of Rotary, and Member of the Legislative Council. He wrote Dr Mayrhofer an insightful and laudatory reference:

I must express my thanks to Dr Mayrhofer for all the assistance and willing support he gave me during his time as house physician and later as senior medical officer. His medical opinion is one to be respected and one which I have often called for during our months together. His relationship to patients and nurses was one of confidence and respect which they displayed to him at all times. He is highly respected by his medical confreres since, in addition to his medical knowledge, he has those attributes of character which demand respect as a man and a brother medico.

ƒ Gordon Hislop, Medical Superintendent, December 8, 1926

Dr Mayrhofer retained honorary clinical appointments at both hospitals and by 1953 was honorary consultant physician to the Princess Margaret Hospital.

In 1927, Dr Mayrhofer formed a partnership with Dr Donald Tregonning at 128 Stirling Highway (later renumbered 328) Claremont. He was then a single man and was a regular visitor to the Tregonning household. Traditionally the Tregonnings were sportsmen and not much interested in books, yet two of the Tregonning children became medicos while the third child, Ken, became a Professor of English History at the University of Singapore, and then a long serving headmaster of Hale School in Perth. He attributes his interest in books and history to the visits of Dr Mayrhofer who always brought a book for him to read and then discuss on his next visit.²



In the early 1930s, Dr Mayrhofer set up his own practice in Bayview Terrace before moving to 278 Stirling Highway, where he worked with his youngest brother, Max, who had graduated in 1936.

In 1937, Dr Mayrhofer married Elsa Pauline Shearer at Claremont Presbyterian Church. She was a Presbyterian and was a teacher. They built a house at 83 Stirling Highway (later renumbered 283) on the corner of Mary Street. They had two daughters, Jenny and Rosalind.

Guido and his brother Mario had provided financial support to enable Max to attend Melbourne University Medical School. Max had a very different personality to Guido, he was less obsessive and more decisive. Their personalities complemented each other.

Guido's slow and painstaking approach to his research and to a patient's diagnosis sometimes 'drove Max mad', but he accepted this as part of the privilege of working with his much loved and respected older brother. In 1958 Max followed Guido's example and completed a BA (majoring in psychology) at The University of Western Australia (UWA). Guido was a competent diagnostician and a highly trusted family physician. He was a much appreciated medical officer for the town of Claremont, and for 28 years he was doctor to St George's College, the main residential college of UWA, whose journal, *The Dragon*, carried the following obituary:³

It is with great sadness that we record the death of our college doctor Guido Mayrhofer. Dr Mayrhofer was an exceptional doctor whose knowledge of modern medicine and brilliant diagnoses were well-known. However, he was much more than a great doctor; he secured First Class Honours in Classics before proceeding to his medical degree in Melbourne. He was unusually widely read and in fact, there were few subjects, from medieval history to women's fashions, on which he could not offer some comment. A visit from Dr Mayrhofer was likely to lead to a diverting and cultivated talk.

It was hard to get him to charge students adequately, but he was always on call.⁴ In 28 years he never failed us, day or night, in his devoted and detailed attention to every patient. We always knew that everything possible medically would be done with a minimum of effort to everybody except himself. Guido Mayrhofer was not only a great general practitioner and thinker but a great human being. He was our guide, philosopher and friend.

The Dragon 1968

Josh Reynolds, the long serving and charismatic warden of St George's College, paid him this tribute: "Dr Mayrhofer was one of the best-read men in Perth, and one of the last of the all-round doctors, who kept abreast of all the latest developments. He was an unfailing doctor who was on call day and night."⁵ Dr Mayrhofer had a deep interest in medical science and practice.

He was a founding member of the RACGP, and a regular attendee at Royal Perth Hospital clinical meetings. He welcomed the establishment of the new UWA Medical School and soon formed a working relationship with the Professor of Microbiology, Neville Stanley. This collaboration resulted in Dr Mayrhofer's study of patients with virus diseases presenting at his practice. This was conducted at a time when there was little research taking place in general practice. The only other work of its kind in Australia was being done in Traralgon, Victoria by Dr Charles Bridges-Webb, who went on to become Professor of General Practice at the University of Sydney and one of the iconic figures of general practice epidemiological research in Australia and overseas. He wrote to Dr Mayrhofer:

I was delighted and excited to get a copy of your paper, 'Observations on virus infections in general practice'. It is a wonderful achievement and I congratulate you most sincerely. As my own interest in respiratory virus infections has been perhaps more epidemiological than aetiological, and your period of recording is the same as my own, your paper complements my own work in a marvellous way.

I am not sure whether you have enough copies to let me keep the one you sent me? If not, may I have your permission to have it photocopied before I return it? I am sure it is a document I need to have. There are many questions which arise which I will write about when I have thought about it further. Congratulations and many thanks.

*Yours sincerely Charles Bridges-Webb
Traralgon Medical Group 17th July 1967*



Guido was of average height, balding and with a twinkle in his dark eyes. According to Dr Alfred Nailor Jacobs, a well known contemporary medical legend from Narrogin, Guido was modest and self-effacing. In addition to being well read, he was a philosopher, a talented violinist, a Vice-President of the Royal Schools Music Club (Western Australia) and a member the Perth Chamber Music Club. He was the convenor and member of a string quartet whose performances were praised by the music critic for *The West Australian*, Albert Kornweibel, who wrote under the pen-name 'Fidelio'. His daughters followed in his footsteps in their different ways, Jenny Hassell BSc, worked in the Microbiology Laboratory at King Edward Memorial Hospital and then the Serology Department at the Public Health Laboratories at Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital, and Rosalind Hanly became a violinist in the WA Symphony Orchestra.

Dr Mayrhofer was a family man and the generous patriarch of his immediate and extended family. His daughter Jenny describes the driving interests in his life as: "Family, medicine, music and books."

Dr Mayrhofer died of a myocardial infarction on 28 February 1968. He was survived by his wife and two daughters. His research was completed but not yet ready for publication. Dr John Bamford, a visionary educational researcher and activist in the Western Australia Faculty of the RACGP, edited Dr Mayrhofer's manuscript and submitted it to the Research Committee of the RACGP. In October 1968, the RACGP posthumously awarded to Dr Mayrhofer their premier award for research, the Francis Hardey Faulding Memorial Research Prize and Bronze Medal for his work, 'Observations on virus diseases in general practice'.⁶

The Mayrhofer families' medical legacy has been carried on by Oscar Mayrhofer's son, Graham, who became Associate Professor of Immunology at the University of Adelaide, and a generation later by Rosalind's son, Guido Hanly, who like his grandfather is a GP, practising at the Glen Forrest Medical Centre in Western Australia.

Footnotes

1. Mario practised in Three Springs and Max, together with Guido, in Claremont.
2. Interviews in 2010 with Dr Ken Tregonning, son of Dr DRC Tregonning who was in a medical partnership with Dr Mayrhofer from 1927–1933.
3. *The Dragon* (Journal of St George's College) 1968:8(5):13–14.
4. Dr Peter Tunbridge, a long serving GP at 328 Stirling Highway related an anecdote that when he was a student he cut his leg and was sown up by Dr Mayrhofer who asked if he was the son of Dr Tunbridge. When he answered in the affirmative Dr Mayrhofer turned to his receptionist and said: "No charge."
5. Obituaries. *The Daily News* 29 Feb 1968, p.12 and 10 April 1968, p.79.
6. Medal awarded posthumously. *The West Australian* June 12 1969.

Sources

Interviews with Dr Guido Mayrhofer's eldest daughter, Jenny. Her collection of papers on her father that she trustingly loaned to me. Wendy Birman, 'Mayrhofer, Guido Saverio Carlo (1898–1968)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume. Melbourne University Press, 2005, pp. 269–270, from which I have taken some few direct quotes while at the same time correcting some factual errors.