

Dr Lilian Cooper

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Dr Lilian Violet Cooper features in book 2 of 'Carly Mills, Pioneer Girl': *Emergency!* She was Queensland's first female doctor. She was also the second female doctor in Australia (Constance Stone was the first).

Dr Cooper was born in England in 1861. She studied medicine in England but had to do her exams in Scotland because in those days English universities did not give medical degrees to women. She became a doctor in 1890. The next year she came to Australia with her best friend Josephine Bedford.

At first, some patients and doctors didn't like the idea of a woman practising medicine.

Luckily for the people of Brisbane, Lilian Cooper took no notice of these views. She cared deeply for women and children and worked hard to look after their health and fight for their rights in society.

If it was rare for a woman to work as a doctor in those days, it was even more unusual for a woman to become a surgeon. Dr Cooper was one of the few female surgeons in Australia for her time. She became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1928.

She was also one of the first women in Queensland to drive a motor car. When the Automobile Club (now known as the RACQ) formed in 1905, Dr Cooper was the only woman amongst the eighteen founding members. She was said to be a bit of a wild driver. She really did knock over a pedestrian once, but luckily he wasn't injured.

When the First World War broke out, The Australian Army wouldn't let women join up as surgeons; they told them that they would serve the

country better by staying home and knitting! Lilian and Jo refused to accept this and joined the Scottish Women's Hospital. They served very bravely under terrible conditions, and the King of Serbia awarded them medals for their service.

By the time Dr Cooper retired from practice, she had earned the respect of the people – including the doctors – of Brisbane. Today she is known as one of Brisbane's finest pioneers.



Miss Josephine Bedford (left) and Dr Lilian Cooper. Image courtesy of the State Library of QLD.

Timeline

- 1861, August 11: Lilian Violet Cooper is born at Chatham, Kent
- 1886: Lilian enters the London School of Medicine for Women
- 1890: Lilian is awarded her degree from the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow
- 1890: Lilian works briefly for a doctor in Essex
- 1891, May: Lilian migrates to Australia with her lifelong friend, Josephine Bedford
- 1891, June: Lilian becomes the first female doctor registered in Queensland
- 1893: Lilian becomes a member of the Medical Society of Queensland
- 1905: Lilian starts working at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital

- 1911-1912: Lilian travels to England and the USA. She receives a doctorate of medicine from the University of Durham in June 1912
- 1915: Lilian joins the Scottish Women's Hospital and serves in Macedonia (with Jo Bedford) for twelve months
- 1923: Lilian is sued for damages in a court case but is found not guilty
- 1928: Lilian becomes a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons
- 1941: Lilian retires
- 1947, August 18: Lilian dies in her home in Kangaroo Point

To learn more about Dr Lilian Cooper, follow these links:

[Historic Queen's Wharf: Cooper, Dr Lilian](#)
[Australian Dictionary of Biography: Cooper, Lilian Violet](#)
[Great Queensland Women of Our Past: Lilian Cooper](#)

A quote from Dr Lilian Cooper

'Women these days are as free to choose healthful occupations as men'
(*The Daily Mail*, 24 Sept 1926, p.13)

