

## Obituary: William Joseph (Joe) Fisher AM, HonFAusIMM

(20 August 1918–12 January 2009)

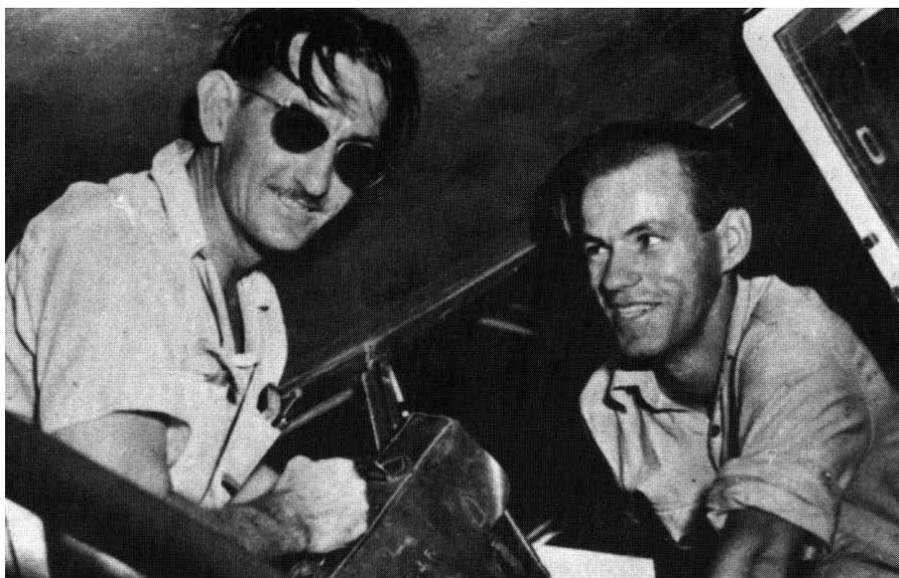
by Geoff Eupene, FAusIMM

**J**oe Fisher crammed a full and rewarding life into his 90 years. He was a fourth generation descendant of Christian Frederick Phlischer, who arrived in Sydney in 1852 and headed to the Victorian Goldfields. This began the Fisher Family's association with the Australian Mining Industry, which lasts to this day. Joe's grandfather and father were both miners, as were many other relatives. The Fisher Family descendants of Christian Frederick are part of the history of many of eastern Australia's famous mining fields.

Joe was born in Nanango, in the South Burnett district of Queensland and was educated in Brisbane. By 1934, Joe had convinced his father to allow him to leave school and join the Fisher Family mining crew at Wenlock. Joe's adventures as a young man are recorded in his 1998 publication, 'Battlers in the Bush'.

Joe met the love of his life, Eleanor, in Cairns in 1939 and they married and moved to Wenlock in 1940, where he worked until World War II disrupted operations. Then he ended up at Mount Morgan, which gave him the chance to formalise his mining studies. While he worked, Joe undertook a Diploma of Mining studies at Mount Morgan Technical College. He joined The AusIMM as a student member in 1945, and obtained a Queensland Mine Manager's Certificate in 1946 returning to Wenlock in 1947, just before he completed his studies.

With his father's passing and the upturn in the economy that followed World War II, it became difficult for the Fisher boys to continue with Wenlock. They decided to pack it in and do something different, setting up a prosperous transport business in Cairns.



*Joe Fisher and NT aviator, Ossie Osgood about to embark on a low level scintillometer survey for uranium in an Auster Aiglet, Darwin, 1954.*

In 1954, Joe was recommended to a Melbourne-based syndicate, NUD, as a Field Superintendent. No one realised where that would lead, or how well Joe's early life in Queensland had prepared him for it. After the war, Australia entered its first uranium boom, but with known resources controlled by government. Joe had arrived just as uranium development by private companies was permitted. NUD transformed into United Uranium NL, which was eminently successful in developing a string of small uranium deposits in the South Alligator Valley, Northern Territory—now a part of Kakadu National Park.

Joe, Eleanor and their four boys moved to Darwin. The family's subsequent lives in the Northern Territory are recorded in his second book (2002), "Trials and Triumphs in the Northern Territory and northern Australia". Mining, particularly uranium mining in the 1950s to 1960s and again from the 1980s, laid the foundation for the development of Darwin with Joe at the forefront; first as Exploration Field

Superintendent, then Mine Manager, and later General Manager of United Uranium NL. During these times, Joe spent hundreds of hours in aerial prospecting with scintillometers, mainly in light aircraft before helicopters were widely available.

After stepping down from UUNL, Joe set up as a consultant in Darwin and provided sound advice to many clients until retiring in his seventies to write his biographies. One of his first clients was the Planet Group, and I met Joe in the east Kimberley on my first field assignment upon completing my studies. Joe taught me how to use the analogue responses of a scintillometer to zero in on an anomaly, something that has held me in good stead since.

I worked with Joe again in the early 1980s, after he discovered, at 63, an outcropping and virtually untouched gold prospect on Ringwood Station, between Adelaide River and Brocks Creek, that later became the Goodall Mine. I remember marvelling at how

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Joe could find this, when thousands of eager prospectors must have passed close by on their way to the Pine Creek gold fields, let alone the companies that had explored there in the century since those days. Joe was also for extended periods a director of publicly listed companies including Euralba Mining NL in the 1970s, and Australian Diamond Exploration NL, until 1995.

Joe was nominated to the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory in 1961, and continued as a member until 1974. He contributed much to public life beyond his profession, and was particularly proud of his work on the NT Reserves Board from 1965 until 1974, where he played an important role in the creation of some of NT's important parks and reserves; he was probably the first proponent of a Kakadu National Park. Joe also worked with the Churchill Travelling Fellowship scheme, helping to select candidates. Joe spoke out loudly on issues he believed in and was for many years an often controversial columnist with the NT News. Many of Joe's harshest words were saved for the stifling role of the Commonwealth in the development of the Northern Territory.

Joe made a huge contribution to the Institute during his 64 years as a member. He, along with BMR geologist, the late Clive Pritchard, and Joe's eldest surviving son, John, were the lifeblood of the Darwin Branch of The AusIMM. In the name of the Institute, Joe organised working bees to collect and re-erect historic mining machinery in the Miners Park in Pine Creek over several years, inaugurated the annual Moline Golf Day that continues under John's stewardship to the present, and organised annual Queen's Birthday long weekend field trips for branch members and friends that did much for the camaraderie and good standing of the industry in the region. Joe was national President of The AusIMM in 1984, the year of a splendid Annual Conference in Darwin. He was admitted as an Honorary Fellow of the Institute in 1996, and was Councillor representing Commonwealth Territories from 1975 to 1988, and Councillor for the NT until 1994. Joe was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977, and admitted to the Order of Australia (AM) for services to the mining industry in 1987. Joe was also an active contributor to both the NT Chamber of Mines and its successor, the NT Minerals Council.

Joe's direct contributions to the Territory and the mining industry will long be remembered. But his greatest legacy to both the Territory and the Industry is the branch of the Fisher Family that has arisen from Joe and Eleanor. To date their three surviving sons, John, Rob, and Greg, (another son, Jeff died accidentally while the family was at Moline) have produced twelve grandchildren and 20 great grandchildren, several of whom continue in the Industry, with most still based in their beloved Northern Territory. At Joe's funeral service, as various family members contributed to the service, I heard someone nearby whisper "is it not amazing what two people can do?" Indeed it is amazing. We miss you Joe, while your legacy lives on. ■