

Wilkinson, John Francis (1864-1935)

John Francis Wilkinson (1864-1935), physician, was born on 13 April 1864 at Collingwood, Melbourne, son of William Wilkinson, tailor, and his wife Harriet Emily, née Ezard, both Yorkshire born. John was educated at Boston's Grammar School, Preston, and at Alexander Sutherland's Carlton College, of which he was dux. Graduating from the University of Melbourne (M.B., 1885; B.S., 1886) with first-class honours in medicine, he married Celia Harmer with Wesleyan forms on 20 September 1887 at Bundoora.

After a year as resident medical officer at the Melbourne Hospital Wilkinson moved to Bright in north-eastern Victoria where he practised for ten years. Returning to Melbourne in 1897, he commenced practice in Collins Street, and was appointed honorary demonstrator and lecturer in clinical biochemistry at the university, a post which he held for twenty-five years. Under Professor (Sir) Charles Martin he trained himself in physiological chemistry and graduated M.D. in 1899. According to W. A. Osborne, Wilkinson became the foremost clinical biochemist in Melbourne, and one of the first to establish a private laboratory. His particular interests were the fractional test meal and the opaque bismuth meal X-ray examination which he introduced with H. M. Hewlett. He was an early advocate of massive doses of iron for anaemia, and popularized the dietary treatment of peptic ulcer and diabetes. His *Synopsis of Lectures Delivered ... at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Melbourne Hospital* (1923) was an important contribution to Australian gastroenterology. After seeing insulin used clinically in Canada in September 1922, Wilkinson persuaded the Insulin Committee of the University of Toronto that it should be manufactured under licence by the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories in Melbourne. He demonstrated his initial results to a meeting of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association in June 1923 and to the Australasian Medical Congress in Melbourne in November.

Endowed with energy, Wilkinson gave undergraduate and postgraduate lectures, and was a regular contributor at clinical meetings. Honorary physician from 1903 to the Melbourne Hospital, he was editor (1901-07) of the *Intercolonial Medical Journal of Australasia*, president (1912) of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association and a member (1929-34) of council of the University of Melbourne. A layman of the Methodist Church, he was a councillor of Wesley and Queen's colleges.

During his years at Bright, Wilkinson enjoyed exploring the Victorian Alps and helped to establish Mount Buffalo as a tourist resort. A founder and first secretary of the Alpine Club, he took part in the first winter ascent of Mount Feathertop (1889) and The Horn (1890). His reminiscences were published as a booklet, *The Romance of Buffalo* (1942). Wilkinson's Lookout is named after him.

Sturdy of body, Wilkinson was a handsome man with a naval beard. He was a progressive physician and a competent anaesthetist. Meticulous in his examinations and investigations, and clear and precise in his writings, he was esteemed by his colleagues. He died of complications from acute appendicitis on 29 March 1935 in St Ives Hospital, East Melbourne, and was buried in Melbourne general cemetery. His wife, a daughter and three sons survived him.

Source: R Travers, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.12, 1990.

