

Dale, John (1885-1952)

John Dale (1885-1952), medical practitioner, was born on 2 May 1885 at Coleshill, Warwickshire, England, son of James Francis Dale, grocer, and later chemist, and his wife Mary, née Grace. He was educated at Solihull Grammar School and the University of Birmingham, where he graduated M.B., Ch.B in 1908, also taking his M.R.C.S. and L.R.C.P. Next year he gained his B.Sc. (Public Health) in Birmingham where in 1911, after a two-year travelling studentship to Germany, he became assistant medical officer of health; he worked mainly in the depressed area of Smethwick. On 9 July 1914 he married Wynifred Mary Evans, a trained Montessori kindergartener. There were four children of the marriage.

Dale served with the British Army in 1915-19 as a major in the Royal Army Medical Corps and as deputy assistant director of medical services (sanitation) to the Second and Fourth Armies and the Army of the Rhine. He was appointed O.B.E. in 1918, and was awarded a French decoration for 'overcoming a typhoid epidemic'. On his return to Birmingham he took his M.D. (1919). After demobilization Dale and his family migrated to Australia and in February 1920 arrived in Perth where he had been appointed medical officer of health and assistant inspector of hospitals. Early in 1927 he left Western Australia to become medical officer of health to the City of Melbourne.

His first concern was for the children of the poor and for their mothers. When he took office, the infant mortality rate in the inner city was higher than that of any other municipality; five years later it was lower than that of any of the five adjoining, similarly depressed municipalities. When Dale retired in 1950 it was virtually the same as the State average. This improvement was partly due to the appointment, at Dale's instigation, of two assistant medical officers—Dr Hilda Kincaid to supervise child welfare, and Dr Hilda Bull (wife of Louis Esson) to take charge of the successful anti-diphtheria campaign. The building of more baby-health and pre-school centres, and the council's provision of free milk, and in the Depression years, of free vegetables, also improved city children's health. The only major health crisis was the poliomyelitis epidemic of 1937-38. Dale tried to improve the housing of the poor but the Depression, then World War II and the subsequent shortage of building materials delayed progress.

In 1929-50 Dale was lecturer in public health at the University of Melbourne, reputedly the only man who could pack a lecture theatre with undergraduates on a Saturday morning. He was a council-member of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association and president in 1945, and a member of many committees connected with public health. In appearance he was tall, lanky and angular, with a rugged face, a charming smile and a 'deep resonant musical voice'. Outside his work his interests were cultural and his friends included many prominent musicians, writers and painters. He loved the theatre, especially opera, rarely missed an orchestral concert and was himself a fine singer of German *lieder*. Other recreations included trout-fishing and duck-shooting.

Dale's first marriage ended in divorce in February 1951 and on 7 March he married Dr Hilda Bull. Shortly after, the couple left for Holland, where Dale spent eighteen months as a medical officer for the Commonwealth government, checking the health of prospective migrants. He was killed in a road

accident at Venice, Italy, on 27 September 1952 and was buried near Verona. His wife returned to Melbourne, where she died of cancer on 29 June 1953.

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Dr John Dale portrait 1932 for Archibald competition