

## Wilke, David Elliot (1815-1885)

David Elliot Wilkie (1815-1885), physician, was born on 14 August 1815 at Rothobyres, in Haddington near Edinburgh, third son of Rev. Daniel Wilkie (1782-1838) and his wife Jane Clerk, née Elliot. Educated at the University of Edinburgh (M.D., 1836), he studied for two years in Paris, and in 1838 was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, after presenting a thesis 'On Acute Pericarditis'. Attracted by the ideals of the founders of South Australia he arrived in Adelaide late in 1838 as surgeon-superintendent of the *Lloyds*. Disappointed by the state of the colony, he moved to Melbourne in March 1839 and from June practised in partnership with David Patrick, becoming an honorary of the first public hospital in 1840. Wilkie became a manager of the church and of Scots School, and on 20 October 1842 married Mary Elizabeth, daughter of Rev. James Clow. In December he became an elder of Scots Church and remained a member in the period of disruption.

Soon successful, Wilkie specialized in diseases of women and children, and was an honorary physician to the Melbourne Hospital for many years. His address on the alleviation of foetal distress on 1 December 1846 was the first-recorded scientific paper in Port Phillip. Earlier that year he was chairman of the committee which drew up the rules and regulations of the Port Phillip Medical Association of which he became first secretary. He was first president in 1852 of its successor, the Victoria Medical Society, and president in 1858 of the subsequent Medical Society of Victoria. From 1846 he had campaigned for rigorous academic qualifications for admission to medical practice; the Acts of 1854 and 1862 owed much to him. A pioneer of preventive medicine, he was a vigorous critic of the Yan Yean water-supply scheme and active in combating such diseases as cholera, diphtheria and smallpox. He published several medical and scientific papers, was editor of the *Australian Medical Journal* in 1858 and a member of the Medical Board of Victoria in 1874-78.

After two failures Wilkie was elected to the Legislative Council for North Western Province in 1858 but was defeated when his ten-year term expired. He was minister without office in the Heales government from November 1860 to November 1861 and chairman of committees in the council in 1864-68. Though regular in attendance, he rarely spoke. He had been prominent in 1839 in founding the Melbourne Mechanics' Institute (from 1873 the Melbourne Athenaeum) of which he was treasurer in 1856-78. An inveterate collector and classifier of specimens of natural history, he and his friends Sir Ferdinand Mueller and John Macadam helped Andrew Clarke to form a national collection initially under the charge of the Philosophical Society of Victoria (1854). He was later a council member of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria (Royal Society from 1860), and was a leading executive member and treasurer of the Exploration Committee which sponsored the Burke and Wills expedition; with Mueller and Macadam he jointly published seven reports between 1857 and 1863.

Wilkie took little part in public affairs after 1870 but was in excellent health when he retired in 1881. He was a director of the Australian Alliance Assurance Co. from 1862 and of the Land Mortgage Bank of Victoria, and a member of the Port Phillip Club. He visited Europe in 1884 and died unexpectedly in Paris on 2 April 1885, survived by his wife, four of his five sons and five daughters. Two sons became solicitors, one a doctor and one a sharebroker. Wilkie was buried in Greyfriars cemetery, Edinburgh. A man of integrity and versatility, he was an ornament to the medical profession.

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