Dr James Edward Neild

James Edward Neild was born at Doncaster, Yorkshire, England, in 1824. Between 1836 and 1842 Neild attended an unusual private school run by an educational reformer, Richard Hiley, in Leeds. When Neild was 18, he began an apprenticeship to his uncle, Edwin Harrison, a leading medical practitioner in Sheffield in 1842. He attended lectures at a medical school in Sheffield during his apprenticeship and went on hospital rounds at the General Infirmary. On completion of his apprenticeship in 1847 he went to London and enrolled in medicine at University College and its practical training institution, University College Hospital. He qualified as a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries in 1848.

After his time at University College he became Resident Apothecary to the Rochdale Dispensary for the years 1851 to 1853. In addition to compounding and dispensing medicines, he vaccinated the children of the poor every Monday at 2 o'clock, provided that the parents paid a shilling deposit, to be returned when the child was brought back for inspection of the result.

At the height of the gold rush, Neild sailed for Australia as a medical officer on the clipper ship "Star of the East" and tried his hand on the diggings near Castlemaine but was unsuccessful. He then worked for Mr Daniel Rutter Long as a druggist in Long's pharmacy in Bourke Street, Melbourne. But he also took care to have his name included in the medical practitioner's register in 1855. In 1857 Neild married Susannah Long, his boss's daughter. In 1861 he left the pharmacy to pursue his career in medicine. In 1864 he gained the University of Melbourne higher degree of MD.

The University of Melbourne medical school began in 1862. Neild's higher degree was one of the first granted by the University. He specialised in forensic pathology. Shortly afterwards, in 1865, he was appointed the first Lecturer in Forensic Medicine by the University and was, thus, an original member of the university medical school staff. He held this position for forty years until 1904, not long before his death. He served as a Medical Officer for Health and also deputised as City Coroner when required, thus becoming closely associated with many criminal inquiries, including the famous Deeming case.

Neild was an assistant honorary medical officer at the Melbourne and Alfred Hospitals. He was an honorary physician to the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum and helped found the Medical Benevolent Association. He was also Honorary Librarian of the Royal Society of Victoria for more than 20 years.

Neild was appointed Editor of the *Australian Medical Journal* from 1862, only six years after its commencement. It was going through a period of serious criticism of its quality and was under threat of closure. Three years later, an address with testimonial on vellum, signed by 27 eminent fellow practitioners, was presented to him as an appreciation of services rendered to the *Australian Medical Journal* and to the medical profession, by bringing the journal back to professional standards.

Dr Neild was a leading member of the Medical Society of Victoria, to which he was admitted in 1861. He was appointed Librarian in 1863, Vice-President in 1867 and President in 1868. He was again Librarian from 1870 to 1874, and from 1875 to 1879 was Honorary Secretary. Holding the two positions

of Honorary Secretary of the Medical Society of Victoria and Editor of its journal, he was able to exert strong influence on policy. He was in conflict around his virulent attacks on what he regarded as quackery. He was also in conflict with some of his colleagues over the failure to elect Dr Louis Henry to membership of the Medical Society of Victoria, which he saw as an antisemitic bias. Consequently, he resigned from both posts in 1879.

As this was happening, he was one of the founders of the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association, initially intended to foster connection with British counterparts but which now became an alternative medico-political forum. In time it was to eclipse the Medical Society of Victoria and eventually become the Australian Medical Association. The first meeting was held in Neild's house, and he was elected President in 1882. Dr Louis Henry became the Honorary Secretary. This ensured that Neild remained at the forefront of medical politics of the time. In fact, his position was so powerful that despite years of negotiation to merge the BMA Vic and the MSV, he was able to forestall it until after his death in 1906.

In 1868 he was elected President of the Eye and Ear Hospital Board. The Medical Society building, now owned by the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is named in his honour.

In 1883, Neild and Dr Richard Warren of Brighton wrote a circular announcing their intention of forming a Melbourne Branch of the St John Ambulance Association to teach first aid to the public. They arranged a meeting under the chairmanship of Mr George Coppin MLA. The Order of St John in Australia regards the meeting in the Athenaeum Hall as the foundation date of St John Ambulance in Australia. The first meeting of the new Council took place in Neild's rooms nine days later. Neild remained on St John Council for 23 years until the year of his death. In 1895 he was enrolled as an Associate of the Order of St John, a grade equivalent to 'Member' in today's terminology.

Outside medicine he had broad interests. He wrote literary pieces for the newspapers of the day. His theatrical reports for '*The Age*' in 1855 were the first ever published by that new newspaper. He was a founding member, subsequently President, of the Shakespearean Society and was a frequent attender of theatre performances. His contributions were so well appreciated that near the end of his career in 1890 a public concert was held at the Town Hall and he was given a public testimonial at the Princess Theatre presided over by his friend, George Coppin. He was also inducted into the Performing Arts Hall of Fame.

He died on 17th August 1906 and is buried in a grave with his wife, Susannah and daughter, Helen, at the Melbourne General Cemetery.

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