

Rowland Wilson



Rowland Wilson MBE (1896-1981), a New Zealander, trained in Edinburgh in both medicine and ophthalmology. In 1926 he became Director of the Giza Memorial Ophthalmic Laboratory in Cairo, Egypt, and senior surgeon at Fuad First Eye Hospital. Subsequently, he became Professor of Ophthalmology at the Medical School in Cairo. While there, he completed significant research in trachoma, which was recognised by Sir Stewart Duke-Elder in his magnum opus *System of Ophthalmology*. Wilson's work paved the way for the isolation of Chlamydia as the causative organism of trachoma by T'ang in Beijing in 1957. He was awarded the MBE in 1943 for his work in the civilian defence of Cairo during World War Two. He was also a talented cricketer, and captained the Maadi (Cairo) Sporting Club cricket team for eighteen years.

Wilson had international standing, and thus his appointment to Dunedin was considered a great coup.

He arrived in his birth city Wellington from Cairo on the SS Strathmore in 1945, with his wife and four children. In Dunedin, he was an inspiration to a young Barrie Jones, and he gave Jones a solid education in microbiology and in writing papers. Professor Doug Coster of Adelaide has written an excellent article on these two remarkable New Zealand ophthalmologists.¹ This background certainly contributed to Jones' meteoric career at Moorfields, where he became Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology. Unfortunately, Wilson's health was compromised by several heart attacks, and he had to decline an invitation to deliver the prestigious Bowman Lecture in the United Kingdom in 1948. Nevertheless, he became president of the Ophthalmological Society of New Zealand in 1948, and editor of its transactions from 1956 to 1961.

Rowland Wilson became New Zealand's first full-time hospital ophthalmologist in 1945. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1954, and retired in 1977 at the age of 81 years. Interestingly, the late Professor John Parr credited Rowland Wilson, rather than Sir Lindo Ferguson, as laying the foundations of academic ophthalmology in New Zealand. One of Rowland Wilson's innovations was to appoint an optometrist to the Department of Ophthalmology, a move which was opposed by ophthalmologists especially in northern centres, ostensibly because of patch protection.

Reference

1. Coster, DJ. Ancient Egypt to modern ophthalmology: via Otago, New Zealand. *Clinical and Experimental Ophthalmology* 2009; **37**: 810-813.