
Sir Edward Ford (1902-1986)

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Edward Ford's *Bibliography of Australian Medicine 1790-1900* is one reason Ford's name will be permanently recalled in any study of the historiography of Australian medicine.¹ His work was meticulously accurate; guided and inspired, it is thought, by his friend and tutor, Ferguson. (Significantly Ford's bibliography is dedicated to the memory of Frederick Wood Jones and John Alexander Ferguson.) An additional reason for our enduring memory of Ford is provided by the three separate donations of book collections he made to the Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP). His books now form the essential and primary strength of the College library. (He gave 2200 items and the collection was subsequently built up to 3500 items.) The vital importance of that library and its librarians in the furtherance of medical history as a discipline in Australia are beyond question.

Sir Edward made a substantial donation of books to the La Trobe University Library, to the Fisher Library at Sydney University and to Macquarie University, and was well-known as a frequent and generous giver of books to friends, colleagues and students. At Sydney University, where he had been Professor of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and later Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (even for a year, acting Vice-Chancellor), there is a named building to honour his memory. It also houses the Burkitt-Ford Library. Some of Ford's personal papers are deposited in the Mitchell Library; it would have given Ford much pleasure, seeing he was well acquainted with David Scott Mitchell.

1. Edward Ford, *Bibliography of Australian Medicine, 1790-1900*. Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976.

Ford liked people, he liked anecdotes, he had lived an interesting life and he liked to tell a good story interestingly, often with an economy of words which increased rather than decreased the interest. He was cultured, knowledgeable, spoke and wrote beautifully-crafted English, and loved classical literature. He was a Latin scholar. All his life he owned and read Samuel Pepys' *Diary*. He was a connoisseur of Australian art and was acquainted personally with many of the artists. He enjoyed good cuisine. Essentially he loved the beautiful, loved books in particular, looked after them carefully, lovingly annotated them. I believe it was bibliophilism which led him to the related muse of history and inexorably to medical history.

Ford was engaged but never married. His fiancée, a nurse, died during the war of typhoid fever. (Some cynics would assert that a happy marriage and happy bibliography are incompatible.) Everyone who knew Edward Ford, without exception, refers to him as a nice man, a kind man, a gentle man, courteous, generous, intensely loyal.

He came of a poor Victorian family, worked very hard to 'put himself through' medicine, and early in his life was recognised as a lad with much potential and promise. People liked him, were intrigued by his interest in books and scholarship, and in their turn were kind to him, helped and encouraged him. In mid-life he could well be described as a bohemian, in later life a patrician, using the word in its most endearing signification. He had a high-pitched voice, a peculiarity to be borne in mind in the context of Ford's historic admonition to Sir Thomas Blamey. Ford, a malariologist (with some good papers on the subject to his credit) asked to be paraded before Major General Blamey to advise on malaria precautions which he thought advisable, if not indispensable, in the New Guinea campaign. Blamey was paying no attention and then baldly announced, 'Ford, my army goes back over the Owen Stanleys next week'. To which Ted Ford squeaked, 'Sir, if your army goes back over the Owen Stanleys next week, you won't have a bloody army!' Blamey took notice.

As a lad, he worked in the Post Office at night to pay for his university studies, which he started in Arts but, after a year, moved to Medicine. He was thirty before he graduated. Already as a student he frequented the Melbourne Public Library, read voraciously—and well-chosen books at that. He soon aroused the interest and then admiration of the Chief Librarian, with the result that at an unusually early age he was given a pass to use all the library as he wished. Meanwhile, at Melbourne University he was taught by Professor Wood Jones, not only a charismatic teacher but also a considerable bibliophile. A fellow

student was that other colossus of medical history, K. F. Russell. Ford was already *beginning to collect*. His mother's modest home in Moffat Street, Prahran, was packed with his books. Young Ford had found a Melbourne dealer who was selling early Australian medical reports for a risible and therefore thoroughly affordable amount. Today, with subsequent library acquisitions in this field, and of course with many more of Ford's books, they reside at 145 Macquarie Street, Sydney, the home of the Royal Australian College of Physicians and its library. It is impossible that a library like his will ever be assembled again; and scholars and investigators are content to travel great distances to consult the Ford Collection and its unique items.

Soon after graduation, he was teaching histology and embryology in his medical school, then moved to anthropology and eventually to public health and tropical medicine. When, after World War II, he translated to Sydney, he took the Chair of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, *succeeding Harvey Sutton*. As well as his papers on malaria, he had made an important study of the epidemiology of venereal disease in part of Papua, the Trobriand, Goodenough and d'Entrecasteaux islands. When World War II broke out, he was in charge of the Commonwealth Laboratory in Darwin. Soon he was in the Middle East as AIF commanding officer for the First Australian Mobile Bacteriological Laboratory. At the war's end, he was Director of hygiene, pathology and entomology to the AIF. It was his military service, as well as his professional merit, which won him his university chair over the claims of his co-contender, Dr F. W. Clements. Ford served on many committees, went as a member of an Australian medical delegation to China in 1957, work for the World Health Organisation and at home with the National Health and Medical Research Council. In 1960 he was knighted.

He became curator of the RACP's historical library and chairman of the library committee. In that role, in a gentle, unobtrusive way, he advanced the interests and intentions of the library. I treasure the memory of his nobility, his warm friendship for others and the way he conducted meetings. When he gave his charming smile and said 'Thank-you very much!', in his language it meant, 'let us pass to the next item on the agenda'. In another context, Sir Edward was to evaluate himself as a physician, teacher and historian, but not as a scientist. Ford is cited twenty times in Gandevia, Holster and Simpson's *Bibliography of the History of Medicine in Australia*.² Ford taught medicine,

2. Bryan Gandevia knew Ford very well, wrote the entry for him in the *Roll of the*

wrote history, spoke engagingly, lectured and encouraged. Withal, he was an exemplary man and an inspiration to many. It has been said, that he in his turn, identified with the redoubtable Dr William Redfern.

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R.A.C.P. (Vol. II), and has spoken about him at a meeting of the NSW Society of History of Medicine. Thus I am obliged to him for most of the facts in this modest profile of Sir Edward Ford.