

### **John Anderson Gilruth DVSc MRCVS FRSE 1871-1937**

John Gilruth was born in Scotland and educated in Glasgow and London where he was admitted to MRCVS in 1892. Like so many second sons born in the frugal conditions of Scottish farming, he was obliged to seek a living elsewhere. Almost immediately on qualification, he sailed for New Zealand to become the Dominion's first government veterinarian. In 1896 he undertook post-graduate training in bacteriology at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. On returning to New Zealand in 1897, he was appointed Chief Veterinary Surgeon and by 1902 he was administering the largest veterinary staff of any authority in the Empire outside Great Britain.

In 1908 Gilruth stood out as the dominating veterinary figure in the Southern Hemisphere, and he accepted the call and was appointed the first Professor of Veterinary Pathology and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Melbourne. The Veterinary Research Institute building at Parkville was erected in 1909-10 to his specifications on a site chosen by him. In teaching, as in other things, he followed no traditions but established them. The BVSc course he established at Melbourne in 1909 opened up to students a new approach to learning, which in today's curriculum would be termed "problem-based learning."

In 1912 he was appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory. In 1919 he returned to Melbourne and worked as a consultant until 1929 when he was appointed the first Chief of the Division of Animal Health of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, where he led research into the livestock diseases of national importance. When Gilruth was chosen as foundation Chief of CSIR's most important division, he was 59 years of age and had been out of active veterinary research for more than a decade. In his favour was his vast experience, acceptability to the veterinary community and his undiminished drive. The appointment was seen at the time as a calculated risk; it paid handsome dividends. Gilruth was given an excellent start by the completion in 1930 of an outstanding piece of research on black disease of sheep by AW Turner. By 1935 when he retired, he had created a sense of unity among his dispersed team and helped diminish the mistrust between scientists and graziers. .

WT Kendall was the pioneer of veterinary education in Australia (1888-1908), but Professor Gilruth, coming later, was the pioneer of the more modern methods in veterinary education and the investigation of problems in animal health. In 1909 the University of Melbourne honoured JA Gilruth and WT Kendall by conferring on them the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Science (honoris causa). The AVA elected him president in 1933 and, later, inaugurated their preeminent award - the Gilruth Prize - in his honour.

Throughout his career, Gilruth's high academic standing and wide practical knowledge of the animal industries and their requirements all over Australia encouraged the fullest co-operation between State laboratories and universities. He used his leadership skills and dominating personality to foster productive partnerships between scientists and graziers, with whom he always insisted on the necessity for sound husbandry and nutrition.

#### References

Gilruth Memorial Issue *Aust Vet J* 1937;13:93-120.

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