

## Chapman, Henry George (1879 - 1934)

CHAPMAN, HENRY GEORGE (1879-1934), professor of physiology, was born on 13 January 1879 at Ealing, Middlesex, England, son of Henry Chapman, solicitor's clerk, and his wife Mary Ann, née Ryden. About 1886 he accompanied his family to Melbourne and was educated at Hawthorn College. While at Ormond College, University of Melbourne (M.B., 1899; B.S., 1900; M.D., 1902) he won the Beaney (1899) and MacBain (1901) scholarships. He then attended the University of Adelaide (M.B., 1901), where he was acting professor of physiology before returning to the University of Melbourne in 1902 as demonstrator in pathology.

In 1903-13 Chapman was lecturer and demonstrator in physiology at the University of Sydney; he was awarded the David Syme research prize by the University of Melbourne in 1910. In 1913-18 he was assistant professor of physiology under Sir Thomas Anderson Stuart, becoming professor of pharmacology in 1918 and succeeding to Stuart's chair in 1921. In 1907 he had been appointed honorary pathological chemist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Always interested in public and industrial health issues, he gave evidence next year before a Western Australian royal commission into meat supply. In 1908 he began lecturing on the technology of breadmaking at the Sydney Technical College where, under his direction, a school of bakery was established in 1916; he gave detailed evidence on diet to the Commonwealth royal commission on the basic wage in 1920.

Active in local scientific societies, Chapman was honorary treasurer of the Royal Society in 1912-34 and president of the Linnean Society in 1918; he was honorary treasurer of the national council and New South Wales branch of the Australian Chemical Institute from 1919 and State president in 1931-33. He published on his research into biochemistry and plant products in learned journals and the *Medical Journal of Australia*, often with D. A. Welsh and J. M. Petrie.

Probably Chapman's most useful work was as chairman in 1919-20 of the complex technical commission of inquiry into the prevalence of miners' phthisis and pneumoconiosis in the Broken Hill mines. Tall and craggy, with a dominating personality, he managed to win the confidence of the unionists and the assistance of the mine-managers and companies despite a bitter strike. After reporting that the Broken Hill mines did cause the industrial disease as the result of inhaling dust, he made strong recommendations for immediate measures including compensation for all persons affected and, implicitly, the 35-hour week. He then 'played an honourable and courageous part in settling the strike', doggedly refusing to divulge the names of the 251 men found suffering from lung disease until compensation was certain.

In 1924 Chapman visited England on behalf of the Australian Meat Council and next year attended the conference on the reorganization of the Commonwealth Institute of Science and Industry. In 1928 he presided over the physiology section of the Hobart meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science.

An appeal in 1926 had raised over £120,000 for the university's Cancer Research Fund. After the successful British applicant had declined the appointment, in 1928 Chapman was made director of cancer research despite opposition from members of the science faculty, who doubted both his integrity and his scientific status and distrusted his public image. He made little contribution to research, and in 1930 a series of newspaper articles exposed bitter dissension within the cancer committee and some dubious aspects of Chapman's career.

On 30 December 1903 at Walkerville, South Australia, he had married Julie Adelaide Elizabeth Ramsay Cox, by whom he had a son and two daughters. About 1916 Chapman separated from his wife, and thereafter resided at the University Club, Sydney, also maintaining flats in the city and at Bondi—by 1928 he was living prodigally. On 24 May 1934 in his university rooms he took poisons, never isolated, and died

next day. He was buried in the Anglican section of Northern Suburbs cemetery after a service at St Mark's Church, Darling Point. Ten days later his estate was sequestrated on the petition of the Royal Society, which claimed he owed its funds £3360. The other principal claimant, for £15,280, was the Australian National Research Council, of which Chapman had been honorary treasurer. Officers of both bodies had been pressing for an audit and Chapman had just been asked to resign his university post. His assets realized £2380. The circumstances of his troubled last years and death prevented any balanced assessment of his achievements in the field of social and preventive medicine.

### Select Bibliography

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**Print Publication Details:** Ruth Teale, 'Chapman, Henry George (1879 - 1934)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7, Melbourne University Press, 1979, pp 612-613.



Ruth Teale, 'Chapman, Henry George (1879 - 1934)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition,  
Copyright 2006, updated continuously, ISSN 1833-7538, published  
by Australian National University  
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