



HUMANS OF THE ROYAL

Dr Edward Holbrook Derrick (1898 – 1976)

Dr Edward Derrick is best known for his contribution to the expansion of the pathology department at the Brisbane Hospital in the early 1950s. He was also deeply involved in the discovery of the organism responsible for Q or Query Fever.

Derrick's long and eminent career began as a pathology assistant at London Hospital. After contracting (and later surviving) tuberculosis in mid-1920 and then working as a general practitioner in outback Australia for 10 years, Derrick was appointed Director of the Queensland Health Department Laboratory of Microbiology and Pathology in Brisbane in 1935.

Within the first month in his new role, Derrick began his research into a mysterious illness that was affecting meat workers at a Brisbane abattoir. The disease had not previously been described, so he gave it the name Q (for Query).

Despite years of meticulous investigations to discover the specific causative organism, Derrick eventually required the assistance of a qualified team and laboratory. It was then that he enlisted the assistance Professor Frank Macfarlane Burnet, an internationally renowned researcher at the Walker and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne.

It was during this collaboration that the discovery of the cause of Q Fever was formally documented and given its medical title, *Rickettsia Burnetti* (most obviously after Prof Frank Burnet).

This was highly controversial at the time as a scientist/researcher's efforts in discovering a disease were commonly recognised through the naming of the disease/organism. Even though Derrick played a significant hand in discovering the organism, there was no formal mention of his contribution in the official journals.

