

WILLIAM ERNEST JONES (1867-1957). C.M.G., M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Eng.), M.D. (Lond.). - Psychiatrist who was appointed Inspector-General of the Insane in Western Australia.

“For Jones, the psychiatrist was ‘the apostle of common sense,’ whose proper concerns ranged from the imbecile and psychopath to the delinquent and degenerate.”

Australian Dictionary of Biography (1983).

William Ernest Jones (1867-1957) [Epsom College 1882-1884] was the son of Alfred Jones, surgeon, of Upper Gornal, Dudley, Staffordshire. He won a Clothworkers Scholarship to Epsom College, and then received his medical education at the Middlesex Hospital and Melbourne University. He was early attracted to the study of lunacy and, in 1903, was appointed Medical Superintendent of the new Brecon and Radnor County Asylum, at Talgarth, Wales. In 1905, Ernest Jones emigrated to Australia where he took up the appointment of Inspector-General of the Insane, in Victoria. Although the initial appointment was for five years, he held office until 1937. Soon after his arrival in Melbourne he visited the six Victoria asylums. In his report to the Australian Government he criticised serious overcrowding, inadequate staffing and outmoded attitudes. He then recommended building improvements totalling £250,000, an enormous sum by today's values. His early achievements included construction of a modern asylum at Mont Park, McLeod, Victoria in 1912, and amendment of the Lunacy Act to allow the admission of patients at their own request.

After wartime service as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Australian Army Medical Corps, he chaired a 1921 commission of inquiry into lunacy in Western Australia. In 1929 he conducted a Federal Government Inquiry into the mentally deficient, which concluded that a little less than 3 per cent of the Australian population fell into this category. Ernest Jones saw this as a grave threat to national efficiency and advocated eugenic ideals as a remedy, partly through the Council of Mental Hygiene which he helped to establish. At his instigation, the name of the Lunacy Department was changed to the Department of Mental Hygiene, and his own title to Director of Mental Hygiene. Although he rejected as impractical compulsory sterilisation and doubted whether society would act to prevent the mentally defective from marrying, he proposed eugenic research and urged the ‘inculcation of good hygiene in our matings.’ In 1933, he advised the Tasmanian Government on the rebuilding of the New Norfolk Asylum and, following his retirement, was appointed Inspector-General of the Insane in Western Australia. In 1947, aged 80, he chaired a government inquiry into his old department. He was appointed C.M.G. in 1935. In the *Dictionary of Australian Biography* is written: “Of medium height and slight build, bespectacled and well-groomed, he was at home at the Melbourne Club and Sandringham golf links. Jones died, sane but cantankerous about the moral deterioration of the world, on 1 May, 1957.”