

FRANKISH

The Rise and Fall of a Prominent Christchurch Physician The Life of John David Frankish MD (1842-1913)

A Biography by Geoffrey W. Rice.

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John David Frankish was a leading physician in late nineteenth century Christchurch, New Zealand, who maintained a remarkable range of interests besides medicine, involved in the Acclimatisation Society, the Canterbury Jockey Club, the Coursing Club, the Kennel Club, St John Ambulance and even the Caledonian Society, though he was a Yorkshireman and not a Scot. He was on the honorary staff of Christchurch Hospital for many years and helped found the Canterbury Medical Society in 1880. He was the city's Coroner in 1881, and was well-known as a key advocate of the West Coast Railway and of better drainage for the city, pressing the case for a system of underground sewers, the first in New Zealand when completed in 1882.

This active and promising career faltered after 1887 and suffered a rapid decline after a severe illness in 1891. A trip to England restored his health but left him bankrupt in 1892. His self-treatment of the long-term effects of pandemic influenza relied mainly on alcohol, and in 1893 he suffered the indignity of court appearances and imprisonment for drunkenness. (His appearance in the dock in Cromwell must count as one of the most entertaining ever reported in New Zealand.)

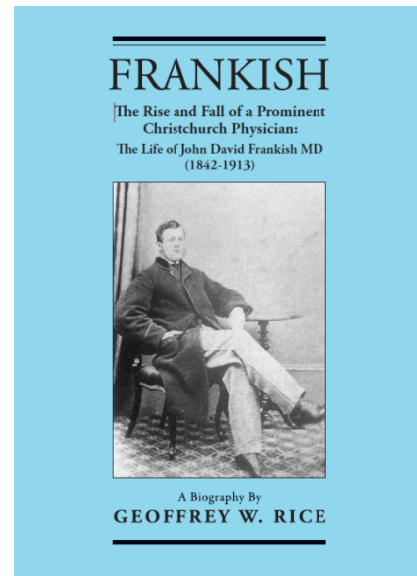
Yet in his prime Frankish was highly respected and made a substantial contribution to the life of his community. This account of his life, based on archives and newspapers, recalls a prominent member of the Christchurch medical fraternity who did not deserve to be forgotten so quickly by his former colleagues.

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DR GEOFFREY RICE was Professor and Head of History at the University of Canterbury until his retirement in 2012. He is now Professor Emeritus and secretary of the Canterbury History Foundation. Known internationally for his research on the 1918 influenza pandemic in New Zealand, he has written or edited twenty books, along with numerous short essays and academic articles. He was appointed ONZM in 2021 for services to historical research and tertiary education.