

The Streets of York

Ensign Dale Court

Robert Dale was born in Winchester, England in 1810. Through the influence of his great-uncle General William Dyott he was appointed an Ensign in the 63rd Regiment of Foot in 1827. Later Dale was to send his uncle a copy of a report mentioning naming the Dyott Range near York after him.

In February 1829, at the age of 18, Dale embarked for Western Australia on HMS *Sulphur*, captained by Captain Dance, as part of a detachment of troops under Captain Frederick Chidley Irwin. On arrival at the colony, he was made assistant to Surveyor General John Septimus Roe. Dale spent four years with the Survey Department, surveying and exploring. He was speared twice in 1830 near where the West Leederville railway station now stands. He was the first European to cross the Darling Range, trying to trace the source of the Helena River, naming the Avon Valley which reminded him greatly of Yorkshire and also naming Mount Mackie, the Dyott Range, the town of York and Mount Bakewell. He had friendly encounters with local aboriginal tribesmen and sheltered for a night, due to very low temperatures, heavy rain and the river being in flood, at Cave Hill, where he described the wall carvings. He discovered Sandalwood and was also the first European to see and describe the numbat.

He acquired properties near Swan River, York and Helena. During late 1831 George Moore, a lawyer from Ireland whose farm was near Dale's own Swan River property, accompanied him on a six-week expedition. Moore's diary says that Robert Dale led a party of settlers and explorers (21 people including Rev. Wittenoom and Joseph Hardey) from Guildford eastward about 45 miles to York, an area that he had previously discovered and surveyed. Stirling showed his support by accompanying the party on the first day of their journey. Robert Dale went ahead to determine the best route for the settlers with their wagons, horses and cattle, marking trees to guide them. Once they had delivered the settlers to York, Dale, Moore, and party used the town site as a base from which to explore before returning to Perth.

In January 1832 Robert Dale led an expedition to Albany to locate maize and rice-like native grains reported by the Aborigines. It is likely that the forests of jarrah and karri in the southwest, soon found to be suitable for ship repairs, stimulated his interest in the timber trade.

In 1832 Dale was appointed aide de camp to Captain Irwin who praised him highly to the Under Secretary of State, and purchased a vacated lieutenancy, but the following year returned to England after spending only 4 years away. The sale of this commission, along with £500 inherited from his grandfather, enabled him to set up, with his brother Thurston, as timber merchants in Liverpool where they became involved in promoting the use of West Australian jarrah, then known as Swan River Mahogany. He wrote of its importance for furniture making and ship building, reporting that H.M.S. *Success* was repaired with it at the Swan River settlement, and persuading the Admiralty to import it for naval use. The Admiralty was to order 200 loads of the timber but the order was never fulfilled due to the limited resources at the new settlement.

It is widely reported that on Dale's return to England he took with him the head of the aboriginal leader and warrior Yagan which he later gave to the Liverpool Royal Institute, this was not to be repatriated until 1997.

He never returned to Western Australia and died of tuberculosis in Bath on 20 July 1853 leaving his property to his sisters.



A talented artist, he painted a Panoramic View of King George's Sound, a 2.7-metre-long (9 ft.) hand-coloured aquatint which was published in 1834. Some of the earliest remaining images of the Swan River Colony were painted by Dale.

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