

# Who was Dr. Bowie



**John Herbertson Bowie**  
1 August 1909 - 15 April 1984

The name Dr. John Bowie is connected to an important period of sterilization. As a bacteriologist he is especially known as the inventor of the Bowie Dick test for evaluating the efficiency of dynamic air-removal of pre-vacuum sterilizer.

A real "revolution of sterilizers" triggered his publication on steam sterilization in 1955 (Bowie J.H. PharmJ. 1955;174:473-489). His study made in major parts in the UK, between 1949 to 1955 culminated in the conclusion that the majority (90%) of the hospital sterilizations systems did not ensure sterility because of faulty construction, faulty installation, or the sterilizers were not used correctly. After extensive experiments the four-man team of Dr. Bowie to which also James Dick belonged developed a new method of sterilization, the high vacuum autoclave, together with the Bowie Dick test, which, 30 years later, is still the yardstick by which other methods are measured.

In the context of his study of infection causes and sterilization, Dr. Bowie came to the conviction that the requirements for sterilization within the hospitals, centralized sterilization departments have to be created to take over full responsibility for sterilization.

In this sense he became the real advocate of CSSD. Agreement seems to have been reached for the general aims of such a service, that is, to eliminate all ward boilers, secure efficient sterilization, minimize cross infection, reduce the possibility of human error, save nursing time and set up simple but adequate standardized tray system covering the needs of every hospital.

Dr. John Herbertson Bowie was born in Edinburgh and he died, aged 74, at Ruwa, Zimbabwe on 15 April 1984.