

Amid calls for more general surgeons and psychiatrists in country Australia, we pay tribute to two such doctors who devoted almost the whole of their professional lives to furthering the health, medical practice and community spirit of a Victorian regional city.

Bruce Wilson Griffiths, MBBS, FRCS, FRACS

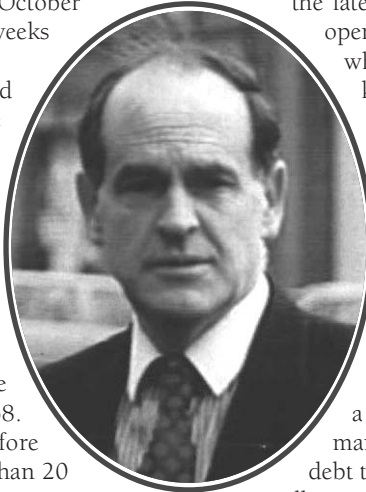
BRUCE GRIFFITHS was born in Ballarat on 13 October 1938 and died on 15 October 2004, only a few weeks after being diagnosed with a brain tumour.

A son of the late "WR" Griffiths, obstetrician and gynaecologist and former President of Ballarat Base Hospital, Bruce followed in his father's footsteps.

After graduating from the University of Melbourne in 1963, Bruce spent a year as a Resident Medical Officer at Launceston General Hospital in Tasmania. This, together with being born into a rural medical family, convinced him that eventually his career lay outside the capital cities. He left Australia for 4 years to train in the United Kingdom, and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1968. He then returned to Launceston for a year before moving to Ballarat, where he practised for more than 20 years.

Bruce was a true generalist, holding appointments as a general surgeon at Ballarat Base Hospital and The Queen Elizabeth Centre, while at the same time practising as a general practitioner in the Ballarat Group Practice.

He played a significant role in the Professional Staff Group of the Base Hospital. In particular, he was the Group's chairman in



the late 1980s during the planning of the new ward and operating theatre block. Few staff, patients and visitors who walk through the wonderful building today know that they do so only because of the earlier vision and perseverance of people such as Bruce.

Bruce resigned from the Ballarat Base Hospital in 1992, but continued to devote his life to the care of rural Australians. After leaving Ballarat, he practised in Derby (WA) and Maryborough (QLD), before joining an Aboriginal health centre in Kempsey (NSW). He was still working at the centre just 5 weeks before his death.

When Bruce left Ballarat, the Director of Medical Services wrote at the time that Bruce was owed a debt for the work he did at the Base Hospital over many years. Perhaps it was in part repayment of the debt that, on learning of his illness, friends travelled from Ballarat to his home in NSW to say farewell.

Bruce is remembered as a man of few words, but his opinions were always considered and truly held. He loved music, was devoted to his family, and was a familiar figure walking his labrador dogs around Lake Wendouree.

Bruce is survived by his wife Wanda and three sons.

Hedley G Peach

Alan Leslie Nicholson, MBBS, DPM, MRCPsych, FRANZCP

THE POPE, a former state premier, actors and sportspeople can testify that Parkinson's disease is no discriminator. Alan Nicholson died on 18 October 2004, following his own courageous battle with the disease. He was born on 8 March 1930 in Melbourne.

Alan graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1956. After Resident Medical Officer appointments in Melbourne, he trained as a psychiatrist at the Ballarat Mental Hospital, established to relieve overcrowding at the Kew Asylum in Melbourne. He obtained a Diploma in Psychological Medicine in 1961, and in the same year became a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists of London and a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. Alan's first appointment as a specialist was to the Larundel Psychiatric Hospital in Melbourne, then in 1967 he was appointed to Ballarat Base Hospital, where he continued to work until illness forced him to retire in 1995.

When Alan embarked on his career as a psychiatrist in 1959, the practice of psychiatry was a world apart from the way it is practised today. Alan was fortunate to have entered psychiatry in Victoria during the "Daxian" years. This period saw the advent of the Mental Hygiene Authority, later the Mental Health Authority, chaired by Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, and, with it, major changes to the care of people with mental illness and the education and training of the staff who looked after them.



Alan played a significant role in the Professional Staff Group of the Ballarat Base Hospital and was the Group's chairman in the early 1980s. As chairman, Alan oversaw the introduction of a credentials committee for doctors practising at the Base Hospital. This was a new and major influence on the practice of medicine in Ballarat. The smooth introduction of the committee was due to Alan's stewardship. An example of his foresight and good judgement was his striving for at least a common liaison member, if not a combined committee, between the Base Hospital and St John of God Hospital in the interest of avoiding duplication and promoting the interrelationship of medical practitioners in the city.

Alan also played a significant role in the Australian Medical Association and was Honorary Secretary of its Ballarat subdivision for many years.

Apart from his medical work, Alan is remembered as an avid and expert collector, particularly of stamps, old banknotes, antiques and wines. He was an enthusiastic member of the Ballarat Wine and Food Society, serving on its committee and as its President and Cellar Master. Alan had the rare honour of being a member of several international wine and food societies. He was also a member and President of the Board of Sovereign Hill, Ballarat's renowned reproduction of a goldfields township.

Alan is survived by his wife Jane and their five children, two of whom are doctors.

Hedley G Peach