

## OBITUARY

**WYLIE DAVID GIBBONS OSM MStJ MBBS(Qld) MS FRCS(Edin) FRACS MCICD(Rome)**

**22 FEBRUARY 1928 - 2 AUGUST 2021**

Wylie David Gibbons was born in Townsville, Queensland, on 22 February 1928, where his father a WWI serviceman worked as a clerk for the Adelaide Steamship Company. His initial schooling was undertaken at the Townsville Grammar School where he remained until the 'Junior' examination level, his preferred subjects including French. His father being concerned about employment prospects post-WWII, had Wylie leave school, and sent him to live in Brisbane, to work as a cadet at the Sugar Board in Queensland.

Wylie also attended night school, interested in biological studies, and developing a desire to undertake medical studies. A 17yo schoolboy when World War II ended, Wylie was accepted for the six-year course at the University of Queensland Medical School, graduating successfully in 1951.

The Korean War broke out in the early 1950s, and Wylie immediately volunteered for active service: however, his application was rejected as he was more valuable working in his own community. Working initially at the Brisbane General Hospital, he proceeded from there into general practice, accepting a position offered to him in a Rockhampton practice.

After some seven years he decided on a career in surgery and gained his MS(Qld) in late 1959 and passed the primary FRACS examination in Melbourne in 1961: cognisant of his Scottish ancestry, he travelled to Edinburgh gaining the FRCS(Edin) in 1962.

Wylie worked in hospitals in Scotland and England developing interests in both gastric and breast surgery: aware of developments at the University of Minneapolis, in the management of haematemesis, he travelled there, to work in the dog laboratories of Professor Owen Wangenstein. Gastric mucosal hypothermia appeared to produce promising results and in Minneapolis, the 'Swenko' gastric freezing machine was developed for clinical use.

Wylie then returned to practise in Rockhampton, and with his friend Mr DH McKay, an electrical contractor, the pair developed their own cheaper Gibbons-McKay gastric cooling machine, which was utilised in clinical studies of haematemesis, the results of which were published in the Medical Journal of Australia between 1964 and 1975.

When patients presented moribund, post-haematemesis, Wylie would utilise this machine and its intragastric balloon, achieving gastric mucosal cooling, and when successful, consequent haemostasis: allowing, if required, surgical intervention: approximately 300 such operations were performed.

In view of the importance of his pioneering and self-funded research, Wylie was encouraged to present his research in the form of a thesis for the award of Doctor of Medicine (MD). His work was submitted in the 1965 thesis entitled 'Gastric Hypothermia' and the 1971 thesis, 'Investigation of Controlled Intragastric Temperature Depression in Man': both works were ultimately never formally acknowledged or accepted, leaving Wylie in a bitter and disappointed state for many years.

He continued working in the field of general surgery in Rockhampton, even for a time as a 'flying surgeon', providing care to remote cattle stations in central Queensland. Working also as a gastroenterologist, he undertook no less than four self-funded study trips to Japan, remaining abreast of advances in technique and instrumentation.

Wylie was a direct communicator and rarely hesitated to speak his mind: he held traditional values and was deeply committed to the ideals of Masonry. His involvement in Masonry spanned 60 years and he held 32 of the 33 degrees in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. In 2020 he was awarded the Order of Service to Masonry, the highest honour the Grand Master can confer on any member of the Craft.

Professor Barry Marshall, Nobel Laureate in Medicine, recognising the unique nature of Wylie's solo research activities into the management of haematemesis, and with a personal interest in all aspects of the history of the management of peptic ulcer disease, was responsible for having Wylie's life work published in the volume, 'Gastric Hypothermia for Major Haematemesis' in 2017. From that time to the end of his life, Wylie felt the load of more than half a century's disappointment and frustration finally lifted.

Wylie married Sibyl in 1954 and theirs was a most fulfilling life, blessed with three children, Tim, Helen, and Peter. Tragically, following the loss of Peter in 1999 and Sibyl in 2008, Wylie was largely estranged from his remaining children, a situation which continued until his passing, much to his dismay.

In 2009, Wylie married for a second time, Erika Hepburn (nee Dobberkau): the couple moved from Rockhampton to Brisbane, Wylie now concentrating on having his research recognised and, also, creating a philanthropic legacy, as well as pursuing his love of fishing for as long as health permitted.

Once again working with Professor Barry Marshall and the University of Western Australia, Wylie created two perpetual medical scholarships. The Sibyl Gibbons, wife of Wylie, Postgraduate Medical Scholarship and the Erika and Wylie, Medical Postgraduate Scholarship. These scholarships built on the legacy of the Sibyl Gibbons, wife of Wylie, Masonic Memorial trust fund that Wylie had established when Sibyl passed away.

Wylie's last months were associated with painful ill-health, frustratingly confining him to bed: nevertheless, his dour sense of humour shone through. In the early hours of Monday, 2 August 2021, Wylie's mortal toils came to an end, and he died peacefully at home, Erika by his side.

This tribute was written by Dr Peter F Burke FRCS FRACS FACEM DHMSA FAMA.