

A leader in business and philanthropy



Few individuals have had the impact in their chosen field of endeavour as BGS Old Boy Bob Bryan '52 AM. His 50-year journey in the mining industry has been characterised by innovation, expertise, intelligent risk-taking and sheer hard work.

In modest fashion, Bryan has said that luck played a part in his success, but he made his own luck by grasping opportunities and being a lifelong learner. An industry leader and pioneer in the coal seam gas sector, he is now a remarkable philanthropist.

Bryan began his schooling at BGS in 1949, following in the footsteps of his two older brothers and a sister who attended Brisbane Girls Grammar School. His father was a Professor of Geology at The University of Queensland and had a significant influence on Bryan's studies. Just as important was his mother, whom Bryan described as "an educationalist through and through".

"One of the strongest goals of her life was to see all four of her children get through secondary education and university, an option that had never been available to her," he said.

Bryan remembers his time at BGS fondly, saying it "represented some of the happiest days of my life. It was a fun place. I loved coming to school."

One of the brightest of Bryan's contemporaries was Don Nicklin, whom he regarded as head and shoulders above the class academically. Nicklin had a distinguished career at The University of Queensland, as well as serving as Chairman of the BGS Board of Trustees.

Bryan was conscious of taking the opportunities provided to him at BGS and believed the School offered boys an

ideal precursor to university. Rugby games against Churchie and Nudgee were always a highlight, and he was a regular in the second row.

At university, Bryan followed in his father's footsteps and majored with Geology honours in 1956. From there, he moved to the Bureau of Mineral Resources, which was the Federal geological group based in Canberra.

"I started my career as a Federal public servant in Canberra, but was equally determined not to end that way," he said. Bryan was bonded to the BMR for five years as a condition of his Atomic Energy Commission Scholarship. He saw out his bond and moved to the private sector in 1968.

His initial involvement in mining was frustrating, unable to convince his company of a golden opportunity to orchestrate the redevelopment of gold mining at Meekatharra. Another party jumped in and turned Meeka into a major open-pit gold mine. He wasn't going to let a similar opportunity slip through his fingers again.

That second chance came after a subsequent employer was taken over, and Bryan and his partner orchestrated a management buyout of its Australian mineral interests. These assets were then floated on the stock exchange as Pan Australian Mining.

Bryan retained a controlling interest in the company, and in a gold prospect at Mount Leyshon that was developed into a major gold mine, using heap leach technology. In his capacity as Managing Director, Bryan secured the services of former Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony AC as Chairman.

After Mount Leyshon, Bryan's involvement in the minerals industry flourished. As Chairman of PanAust Ltd, he oversaw the development of two major copper gold and silver mines in Laos. He was also involved in PNG nickel and cobalt development as Chairman of Highland Pacific.

He later became the founding Chairman of the Queensland Gas Company, which blazed a trail in establishing the coal seam gas and liquefied natural gas business in Queensland.

In addition to his business success, Bryan has contributed to research and the broader development of the minerals sector.

In 1991, he provided the initial funding that led to the establishment of the Bryan Research Centre (BRC) in honour of his father. Based at The University of Queensland, the BRC operates within the Sustainable Minerals Institute, bringing together expertise to overcome challenges facing the mineral exploration sector.

Bryan became the first Honorary Life Member of the Queensland Mining Council in 1995. He was instrumental in the development of the council, which would later evolve into the Queensland Resources Council.

In 2009, Bryan was inducted into the Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame. In the same year, he began perhaps his most significant project, the establishment of the Bryan Family Foundation. The Foundation centres on empowering young Queenslanders from disadvantaged backgrounds through focused education.

"I had been blessed career-wise," he said. "I'd had tremendous support in the regions. However, I had seen the terrible inequalities in these communities, and I wanted to do my bit towards closing the gap."

The Bryan Foundation has disbursed more than \$20 million to philanthropic groups, mainly in the education and training space, that are creatively addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable young Queenslanders.

In 2013, Bryan was awarded the QRC Medal for his long and outstanding contribution to the State's resources industry. In the same year, he became a Member of the Order of Australia for services to the mining industry and philanthropy.

It is 70 years since Bryan first walked through the front gates of BGS as a student; his children and grandchildren have since followed in his footsteps. Associate Professor of Earth Sciences at QUT Scott Bryan, Bob Bryan's son, graduated in 1987 and his grandson Lucas is currently enrolled, with younger brother Sebastian soon to follow.

Another grandson, Tom Simes, graduated in 2016. Tom is the son of Bryan's daughter Jill, her husband Michael '79 also an Old Boy. Bryan recalled Tom's comment that coming from a small public school in Brookfield to BGS was like moving from a small pool in which he excelled to a great big pond. "Tom had to work much harder to get to the top in that pond," he said.

In reflecting on three generations at BGS, Bryan advised today's students to make the most of their time at the School. "Students should absolutely make the most of the educational opportunities available, it is the best possible grounding for future careers," he said.

"If you are prepared to take calculated risks and have done your homework, there's every chance that you are going to do well career-wise too."

Pictured is Bob Bryan with son Scott and grandsons Lucas and Sebastian.