

Dr Robert Andrew Douglas AM

On 15 April 1998 was buried a doctor of singular reputation in Northern Australia, mourned by all who were privileged to know him. Dr Robert Douglas graduated with Honours in Medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1939 and completed his residency training at Brisbane General Hospital. In 1941 he joined the Second Australian Infantry Force (AIF) and served with distinction as a senior doctor. His subsequent medical career saw extensive service at the Repatriation General Hospital in Melbourne (1947 to 1951), and in 1952 he commenced in private practice as Senior Consulting Physician in Cairns (Qld) and was the Senior Visiting Consultant in General Medicine at Cairns Base Hospital for nine years. In 1960 he moved to Townsville (Qld) and lived there for the remaining thirty-eight years of his life. During this time he was regarded as one of the best clinical diagnosticians in internal medicine, covering many of the disciplines within internal medicine which are now regarded as specialities in their own right.

Bob Douglas had been a brilliant student, receiving the Jamieson Prize in Clinical Medicine in his final year at the University of Melbourne, and his life's work continued as a mixture of clinical acumen and scholarship. He described tick typhus, adding a new disease to the textbooks of pathology. He became a consultant in all areas of tropical medicine and he had a particular interest in the envenoma-

tion of both land and sea creatures. He contributed much to the organizational side of medicine, and for his services to the profession in general was created a Fellow of the Australian Medical Association in 1989, made a Member of the General List within the Order of Australia (AM), and elected a Foundation Fellow of the Australasian College of Tropical Medicine which he had helped found.

Robert Douglas contributed significantly to the discipline of the history of medicine. Always interested in history and scholarship, he researched historic themes within medicine and from the 1960s gave many papers to both medical and lay groups. Significant among these was 'One day in the medical life of Queensland', delivered at the Bicentenary Symposium on the History of Medicine held at the North Queensland medical congress in 1988. He described the foundation of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine which was opened in Townsville in 1913. He was a Foundation Member of the Australian Society of the History of Medicine and brought a thoroughness to scholarship and historic detail which were an example to all. His legacy is the example of a fine clinical, a fine historian and a fine man.

John Pearn
University of Queensland