



### **OBITUARY OF MEMBER BRUCE MANNING**

A much respected member, Bruce Manning, passed away on Tuesday, 3 June 2025.

Bruce Manning was born in Mackay, the youngest of three boys, and raised on a sugar cane farm at Koliyo, 50kms north of Mackay. He followed his grandfather, William Joseph Manning, who owned, managed and edited fledgling newspapers in Gladstone (Observer) and Mackay (Daily Mercury) into the newspaper industry. It was the newspaper connection that brought Bruce to Toowoomba in 1973 as General Manager of The Chronicle.

Bruce's primary education was at the Calen State School. He boarded for three years at Scots College, Warwick, and left school at the end of Sub-senior (year 11) to start work. After about a year in sugar industry administration he joined the Daily Mercury in May 1954 having commenced accountancy studies. In 1962 he took a two year sabbatical with an accountancy firm in Townsville to develop his accounting and business experience. There he met Jean Nimmo, a secondary school teacher on transfer from Brisbane. They married in May 1964 and settled in Mackay where Bruce had returned earlier to work at the Mercury. They had three children in Mackay, Leanne, Greg and Margot. Their fourth child, Phillip, was born in Toowoomba.

Bruce's positions after returning to Mackay were Accountant (Associate of the Australian Society of Accountants – later CPA), Manager Commercial Printing, and then Business Manager. He was offered the Toowoomba Newspapers position in July 1974 and he and Jean moved in the following November.

Coming to Toowoomba, Bruce became immersed in the aftermath of the merger between Toowoomba Newspaper Company Pty Ltd (The Chronicle, a paid daily) and the Downs Star Pty Ltd. (Downs Star, a free daily). Although the merger occurred in October 1970 there were still tensions at Board level between the former owners of The Chronicle, Provincial Newspapers Qld Ltd (PNQ) and the Downs Star (Downs Star Pty Ltd). The Downs Star was owned by the Rowe family Group, their principal being Treg Rowe. There were also staff tensions brought about by the merger and subsequent redundancies.

The merger agreement provided for a clear 50-50 split. The company had a four-member Board, two from each of the shareholders, PNQ and Downs Star. It also provided that the chairman was to be a PNQ appointee and he had the casting vote in the event of a deadlock. This also meant that PNQ had the right to appoint the General Manager. Bruce's first appointment was General Manager. He became Managing Director in 1975 upon filling a vacancy on the Board. It was arranged that Bruce and Treg should meet over lunch some months before Bruce was to take up the appointment. On that occasion, a mutual empathy developed and respect and trust remained between them.

The 50-50 arrangement caused occasional tension on the Board in those early years but in the final analysis of an arrangement such as this, the business could succeed only if total agreement were reached quickly. When Bruce took up his appointment, differences in style and procedure had largely been resolved. However at times he found himself as the “meat in the sandwich” especially when PNQ, his appointing company, had a view and position different from that of his own and of the Rowe Group. Cooperation and common sense always had to prevail and when this was realised and accepted by all parties, Board meetings became cooperative and productive.

In November 1974 the Carnival of Flowers Association bestowed life membership of the Association on the Chronicle. In accepting the award, Bruce honoured former executives of the newspaper, namely Rowley Dunn (Director), Walter Bruce (General Manager) and Bert Hinchliffe (Editor) for their support of the Carnival since its inception. Some days later, Bruce received a personal letter from Bert Hinchliffe which said in part “...Although I haven’t been to the office a great deal lately I still keep pretty much in touch with local affairs and am happy to say that since your appointment as manager it has been very obvious that the public image you have given to The Chronicle has been extremely favourable. It has been the real Manning touch....”

The 1970s was a decade of considerable unrest in newspapers Australia wide, especially with printing and allied staff and their Union. This was the era of the introduction of “new technology”. Put simply, hot metal and letterpress production was to be replaced by computerised photo-composition and offset printing. Staff in those areas could see work they had been trained to do was becoming redundant and would be replaced by other methods which required new skills. There was a fear for job security and efforts had to be made at management level to maintain morale, to retrain and maintain production.

Managers and supervisory staff gave wonderful support to Bruce and the Board although not all decisions were received without dissent. Discussion with the staff affected and at times their Union representatives was necessary. However, the changeover from hot metal to cold type was achieved relatively smoothly. Bruce received a comment, albeit second-hand, that a State Union official had said the changeover in Toowoomba was one of the smoothest he had experienced. Credit for that must go not only to management but to all the staff involved. To add to the drama, journalists would no longer require typewriters but moved to visual display terminals (VDT’s), thus eliminating most of the typesetting of news previously done by tradesmen.

In addition to this, a new press with new technology was installed and the whole newspaper operation was relocated from 191 Margaret St to 618 Ruthven St. It was a huge undertaking but thanks to teamwork and cooperation by all involved it was achieved with little disruption to production and with minimum inconvenience to advertisers and readers.

## **STATE AND NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

As well as the daily routine, Bruce had other industry responsibilities. These included:

- Attendance at meetings in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne in relation to Industrial Awards, advertising and circulation revenue matters.
- Executive and Board positions with the Queensland Regional Dailies Association.
- Board member of PANPA (Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers Association) from 1975. President 1982 to 1984.
- Board member of PNQ 1985 to 1988 when control of PNQ passed to the Irish Independent newspaper group, based in Dublin. At that time the company name was changed to Australian Provincial Newspapers Ltd (APN).
- Following the takeover, appointed Regional Manager-Western of APN.

The western region incorporated newspapers in Toowoomba, Warwick, Stanthorpe and various non-daily newspapers at Gatton and west of Toowoomba. He held this position as well as Managing Director of Toowoomba Newspapers Pty Ltd and its subsidiary companies until retirement in 1995.

During his time of stewardship at Toowoomba Newspapers the newspaper experienced considerable growth in circulation, advertising volume and profitability. Bruce attributes this to the economic growth of the region, the dedication and commitment of leaders in the various departments supported by staff at all levels and the talent and support of members of the Board of Directors.

Bruce had an active interest in community affairs.

His various interests have included:

- Rotary
- Toastmasters
- Lifeline Darling Downs – Building Appeal Committee in 1993 and 1994
- Blue Nurses Toowoomba – fund raising committee for a number of years
- Miss Australia Quest 1991 – member of the selection panel for the Darling Downs final
- Toowoomba Community Care Transport
- Local Ambulance Committee
- Fairholme College – deputy chairman of the College Council 1980 to 1999
- Heritage Building Society – director 1995-2003
- St Andrews Toowoomba Hospital – director 2000 to 2011
- Christian church activities with the Presbyterian and Uniting churches and more recently with independent fellowship. This has taken him, with his wife Jean, to India and South East Asia on Christian teaching assignments.

Bruce retired from Toowoomba Newspapers Pty. Ltd. and consequently newspaper life in June 1995. He and Jean have closely followed the activities of their four children in their adult and married lives.

In his lifetime of active involvement in business and community affairs, Bruce always acknowledged the perseverance, support, and encouragement of his wife Jean. For recreation, they both pursued a love of tennis and recreational travel.

Bruce was inducted into Toowoomba Range Probus Club in October 2016, and served for two terms as Treasurer, successfully introducing new banking procedures and account-keeping.