



Photo courtesy of The Kalgoorlie Miner

WASM ALUMNI

50th Anniversary

Left to right: WA School of Mines alumni Dennis Sands, John Kelly, Doug Marshall, Malcolm Wills and Brian Philips all from the class of 1966

Malcolm Wills

WASM took the opportunity to recognize some of its longest-standing alumni at the 2016 graduation ceremony. Among those honoured was assayer and metallurgist Malcolm Wills who had a succession of career challenges with Alcoa and in gold. Malcolm reflected on his career and the frustrations of retirement golf.

1. Where were you born and when?

Norseman, 25 April, 1940 – the middle child of five siblings.

2. When did you attend WASM?

1956-1966 (part-time student)

3. What did you qualify as?

Assayer (1962), Metallurgist (1966).

4. Where was your first job?

My first job was with the Kalgoorlie Metallurgical Laboratory. As a student and an assayer, I was fortunate to be guided by the laboratory head, Ernie Tasker. Ernie was an exceptional mentor and friend who provided opportunities for me to gain the widest possible experience.

5. What was your best job?

My career with Alcoa of Australia gave me many career opportunities. When I joined them in 1971, at the end of a three-year contract in Fiji at Emperor Gold Mines, Alcoa was expanding its refining operations in Western Australia.

I had a 23-year career with Alcoa that included the Pinjarra (Alumina Refinery) where I was a production superintendent between 1971-75. There, I was responsible for plant design, installation, pre-commissioning and commissioning. After that, I was initially responsible for the management of the raw material, digestion and clarification – half the plant.

In May 1975, I became responsible for management of

the precipitation, calcination and shipping phase of the operation.

I was with the Kwinana Alumina Refinery as a production manager between May 1976-April 1980. I had responsibility for the quality of alumina and shipment of product from the Kwinana and Pinjarra refineries.

I was then the works manager at the Wagerup Alumina Refinery between April 1980-January 1988. Initially, I had responsibility for plant design, environmental review, government, local authority and community liaison and organisation design. During this period, an alumina smelter was being proposed at Kemerton: I was responsible for representing Alcoa in the South-West. This required preparation of an ERMP.

In February 1984, the Wagerup Alumina Refinery was commissioned, and I also became responsible for the total management of the operation, including the Bunbury (Alcoa) Port operation.

Between January 1988-February 1993, I was the general manager of the Hedges Gold Mine

This was an opportunity for me to return to familiar territory in the gold mining industry. I worked with a team to design a modern and efficient, low-grade mining operation with a finite ore body.

6. What was your career highlight and key achievement?

A career highlight was to be appointed Works Manager at Alcoa's Wagerup Alumina Refinery. This was the first time an Australian had been appointed to manage a new Alcoa alumina refinery. To have the opportunity to design the organisation to operate the refinery – the emphasis being on people skills and knowledge – was an added highlight. I consider the key achievement was the development of a management structure that allowed a high degree of worker autonomy and decision-making.

7. What was your last role before you retired?

I was the operations manager at the Boddington Gold Mine between 1999-2001.

During this time, BGM was mining the last of the oxide ore before a decision on the development of deep, open-cut mining and construction of the associated plant.

8. Where do you live now and what family do you have?

My wife Moira and I enjoy a wonderful life in Mandurah where we are not too far away from our daughter, son-in-law and our three grandchildren (that's four, counting the grand-dog).

9. Have you any retirement hobbies?

I enjoy playing golf (although "enjoy" could be stretching the truth somewhat); gardening eases the stress of a less-than-satisfactory round of golf and enjoy membership of Probus Moira and I like to travel as much as possible - these days mostly in our caravan - and we enjoy the company of family and friends.

10. How you feel about your WASM 50th anniversary honour?

Moira and I appreciated the invitation to the WASM 2016 Graduation Ceremony and the day's celebrations. The presentation of the 50th anniversary honour was a very special privilege and I thank everyone involved. We were looked after "most excellently". I did feel very honoured.