

Dr Greg **de Moore**

The life and death of Tom Wills

This is the story of how a single medical record from the nineteenth century led to the uncovering of a great Australian biography.

Over 10 years ago, I came across the name of Tom Wills - not someone many readers will know. But Tom Wills was this country's most important sportsman - our first great cricketer; architect of Australian Rules football and the first captain of the famous aboriginal cricket team which eventually toured England in 1868. But at the young age of 44 years, Tom Wills committed suicide. Which is where I come in.

The day before Tom Wills took his life, he was taken to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. I hoped that a record of his admission had survived. I contacted the hospital to be told that the records from the nineteenth century were stored - in no order and incomplete - at the back of the hospital. No one had really wanted to go through them. Until I came along. When I arrived at the hospital I entered this back room of the Royal Melbourne Hospital: before me lay the unopened cardboard boxes in which slept the medical stories of thousands of patients from the nineteenth century. After six hours of searching I came across the single sheet I was after. The rest of the story took 10 years of archival searching and trips around the globe to complete. In the end I found a story of human frailty and drama, that took in Australian history, suicide, alcoholism and a stirring story that goes to the heart of our nation.