OBITUARY

Ronald George Louis Praite, JP, OAM
2 January 1922 – 4 April 2011

Ron Praite was notable in a long line of members who have given outstanding and lengthy service to this Society. From its beginning the Society has had a spectrum of members ranging from professionally qualified geographers and historians to interested lay-people. Ron was a fine example of the latter.

When he died Ron was the longest serving of the current generation of members, having commenced on 24th April 1944. Over the years he held a number of positions on Council and its committees and in 1994 the Society conferred upon him Honorary Life Membership in recognition of his fifty years of outstanding service across a range of activities.

The following is a summary of his major contributions to the Society.

In the 1940s he was attracted to the work of the Geographical and Historical Research Committee which began in the year he joined the Society. In 1947 he screened a series of documentary films (on England and Northern Ireland) at the conclusion of meetings. At this time he was a member of the Historical Division (started in 1947 and now defunct) and attended their separate meetings.

By the 1950s he was heavily involved in the task of ‘examining a vast amount of material other than books hitherto uncatalogued’. The Library Committee was responsible for this work and regularly acknowledged Ron’s contribution, and seconded him to the Committee. In 1966 he was given the title of ‘Honorary Curator of Relics’. In 1968 the Committee observed that ‘Now for the first time we know what we have and can plan and make loans etc’. Ron has been the sole bearer of that title and he carried it with only an odd interruption or two until 1980. His involvement with Library Committee, having begun in 1958, continued with some interruptions into 1991 – almost certainly the longest service of any member to that Committee.

Ron’s most intense decade of work with the Society was the 1970s. He was (assistant) Honorary Secretary from 1969–1976 working in succession with three different (first/main) Honorary Secretaries. During this time he was also Chair of Library Committee (1971–1976) when the Society began major revisions to management of its collections and also faced enforced re-location under the State Library’s rebuilding programme. He was also Chair of Historical Memorials Committee (1975–1978) and was involved in preliminary planning for what became a new series of plaques to mark Goyder’s Line. He was appointed Vice President for 1976. For health reasons he then withdrew from major leadership of committees.

Among his other contributions to the Society was his association with the mounting of a number of significant exhibitions on various themes from the late 1950s to the
Society’s Centenary in 1985. These drew upon the Society’s remarkable collections of historical relics, photographs, paintings and publications. Ron’s intimate knowledge of the material greatly facilitated the planning and mounting of the exhibitions.

Ron’s association with the RGSA (SA) and its latter-day renamed body was but one among many interests. Cinema was one of his earliest and during the Second World War he was an assistant projectionist. One outcome was that he could quote extensively from movies of the period. He was also a keen amateur photographer and among his work was a large and comprehensive collection of pictures taken in the Unley area over many years.

He lived in Unley all his life, having been schooled and married there. With his wife Joan they set up house there, and raised a family of three children. Ron was a founding member of the Unley Historical Society and an active member of the Friends of the Unley Museum. His great sense of community was apparent in a range of other activities such as his Chair of Unley Primary School Council, and membership of Unley High School Committee, Chief Warden of Unley Civil Defence, elected member of Unley City Council, and member of various local clubs, and associations. He was a Justice of the Peace and active in his local Anglican Church. In the year 2000 Ron was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for outstanding service to the community.

Ron’s historical research, often with others, resulted in a number of publications as listed below.

*Place Names of South Australia*, Praite, R and Tolley, JC Rigby Ltd 1970

*History of Unley*, Payne, GB and Cosh, E (City of Unley), 1971 (Includes contributions by R Praite)

*Whistler’s Unley, then and now; a pictorial history*, Janet M Maughan, and Ron Praite, (City of Unley), 1988


This Society is grateful for the dedicated support given to it by Ron over many decades and for his work in the broader community. Our sympathy is extended to his wife and family in their loss.