

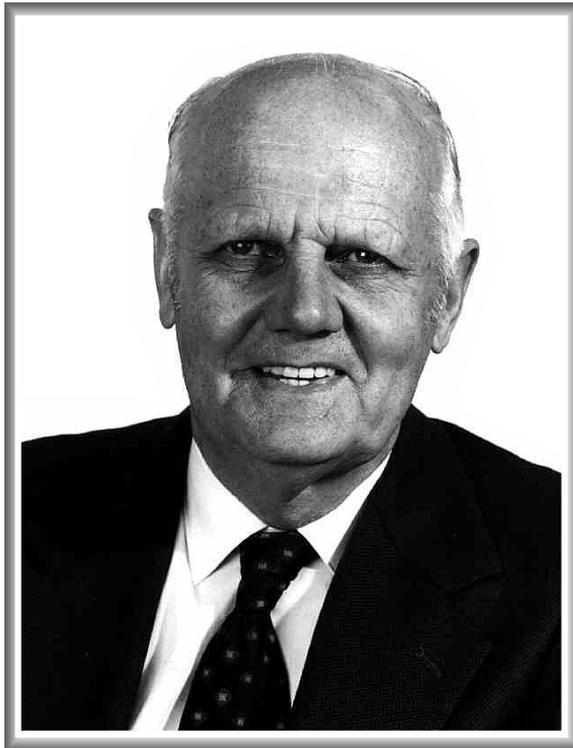
○ OBITUARY: ERNEST BULTE, TSA LIFE MEMBER

Blair Feenaghty

Ern Bulte died on 6th February 2010 at age 100 years and 5 months. He joined the PMG's Department in 1927 as a Cadet Engineer and retired from Telecom Australia in 1974 after 47 years service. At the time of his retirement he was serving as the Assistant Director (Engineering) Victoria.

He commenced as a young engineer in Victoria but early in WW II he was seconded to the Headquarters Telephone Equipment Section as part of a special team to plan and organise Australian wartime communications. This was designated a 'protected occupation' and he was not able to volunteer for war service. He was however given some basic defence training and issued with a rifle.

He stayed in the Telephone Equipment area for some 20 years before moving back to the Victorian administration as Supervising Engineer Metro Service. He later became Superintending Engineer Metro Branch and then Country Branch.



Ern Bulte

Ern played a number of significant roles in the Telecommunication Society of Australia and was made a Life Member in 1965. He was President of the former Postal Electrical Society in

1958/59, chairman of the Victorian Division of the Telecommunication Society in 1961/62 and Editor of the *Telecommunications Journal of Australia* in 1956/59. When he transferred back to Victoria in 1959 he became a sub-Editor and continued in that position until he retired in 1974.

Ern was a speaker (as ex-chairman) at the 1974 Centenary celebration of the Telecommunication Society of Australia. He was introduced by Arthur Morton, Chairman of the Victorian Division. The organisation had started out as the Electrical Telegraph Society in Melbourne, 100 years earlier.

During his career in the PMG and the TSA, Ern worked with many notable personalities (“there seemed to be plenty of them in those days”). Some rose to fame and others remained notable. Among these colleagues emerged a select few who shone above the rest and were destined for greater things. A few of these that Ern mentioned were Evan Sawkins, Bill Pollock, Frank O’Grady, Mel Ward and Bob McKinnon.

Ern particularly liked to quote some of the sayings and antics of his colleagues. One was the motto of an engineer by the name of Archie McGregor, who at the time was pursuing the laudable aim of undergrounding as many aerial wires as possible for aesthetic and protective reasons. Archie would move around the office on a regular basis saying “no poles, no poles”. This policy did make an impression in earlier years, but of course was totally demolished when Optus was permitted to string cable on power poles.

In his time in the wartime communication position Ern was located in an old building in Melbourne named “Lumeah”. His Supervising Engineer was a very capable engineer fondly referred to as Arthur (“I know that”) Wilson. Now the old building was freezing in winter and only had small grate fireplaces for heating. A limited supply of briquettes was provided and Arthur Wilson had the job of rationing these to a bunch of clever frisky young engineers who of course saw their sole aim in life as siphoning off as many as possible for themselves.

Ern used to tell the tale also of the day he yielded to the temptation to visit the MCG for an “inspection” on a day that Bradman was playing in the team against England. To their mutual surprise and embarrassment, he spotted his Superintending Engineer (unnamed but known) also making an inspection! Ern was a keen cricketer, being a star player for the Bentleigh ANA premiership team in 1937/38.

Ern’s other interests were tennis (A grade) and music (violin). He was a member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for two years when he moved from his home town of Ararat to study for his science degree at Melbourne University. The rehearsals became too much in the finish and he resigned to focus on his degree.

Ern is survived by two children, Ian and Merlyn, who both pursued careers in the PMG with his encouragement.

The Telecommunication Society of Australia/ACS Telecommunications Special Interest Group would like to express its great appreciation of the life and work of Ern Bulte, and to offer our condolences to the members of his family.