

JAMES CYRIL STOBIE



Design Engineer, Inventor of the ‘Stobie Pole’ for electrical distribution.

Born: SA, 1 January 1895

Died: 1 January 1953

Attended SM&I Prep School (ATHS): 1908-10

Career

The untimely death of Cyril’s father meant that Cyril had to take over the running of the family grocery shop at Mile End to help support his mother and three sisters. Cyril went on to complete his education while involved with the grocery business, enrolling as an evening student at the School of Mines where he gained an Associate Diploma in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering in 1915.

In 1916 he joined the Adelaide Electric Supply Company (AESCo) and continued his studies, achieving a Fellowship of the South Australian School of Mines in 1919 followed by a Bachelor of Engineering in 1923 at the University of Adelaide and in 1932 was awarded a Master of Engineering Degree, also by the University of Adelaide

In 1923 Cyril took up the appointment of Chief Draughtsman for AESCo and soon became aware of the problem of the scarcity of timber in South Australia to use for poles for the transmission and distribution electricity network and the abundance of termites to attack those poles which had to be purchased mostly from the eastern states at considerable expense. The solution he devised in 1924 used two steel beams with a concrete infill which was impervious to termite attack and could hold its own against the depredations of motor vehicles. AESCo adopted the design and paid Cyril an amount of £500 for the patent rights. While the poles were used almost exclusively in South Australia, the hopes of selling them interstate and overseas were largely unfulfilled.

In 1936 Cyril was promoted to the position of Chief Design Engineer.

Following the Second World War, AESCo became a state-owned enterprise and the Electricity Trust of South Australia (ETSA) came into being. With its ambitious plans for expansion, it was necessary for ETSA to take on a far more active role in the design and construction of new infrastructure and in 1950 he was promoted to the position of Assistant Manager Engineering and Research, a position he held until his death in 1953.

Cyril also was active in the Adelaide Division of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. He was always interested in the development of young engineers and in his Retiring Chairman’s address to the Division in 1941, he spoke of his view that the best engineers would be those who started with a liberal school education followed by engineering training but supplemented by industrial experience, participation in sports and social and professional training.