

ALFRED HERMANN TRAEGER OBE



Communications & Electrical Engineer. Inventor of the “Pedal Wireless”.

Born: Dimboola Vic, 2 August 1895

Died: Rosslyn Park SA, 31 July 1980

Attended S of M Prep School (ATHS): 1911-12

Career

Traeger, the son of a farmer, had from an early age shown a bent for electrical engineering and a corresponding aversion to farming. Recognising his son's unusual talents, the elder Traeger enrolled him in 1911 in the Preparatory School of the South Australian School of Mines and Industries.

He studied there for two years before proceeding on to the four year Diploma in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering which he completed at age 20 in 1918. The Preparatory School, as it was known, was of course one of the former names of the Adelaide Technical High School.

During his years at the School of Mines Traeger became interested in radio, building his own transmitter and learning Morse code, hoping to gain his Amateur Radio Licence. After graduation, Traeger worked for the MTT, then the GPO, ran his own electrical business before joining Hannan Brothers as an electrical mechanic. It was there he was "discovered" by Reverend John Flynn, beginning an association that would have a huge impact on life in the bush. The Reverend John Flynn was determined to do something about the problem of people dying alone through sickness and accident in the outback who would have recovered had there been a means of calling quickly for help.

The major problem with the development of a radio for use in the outback was to obtain a suitable high voltage supply. The lead acid batteries of the day were unsuitable in the long term. Initially Traeger developed a hand – wound generator but this had the disadvantage that two people were needed to operate the radio, one to wind the generator and the other to transmit the message which had to be in Morse code. After the success of the initial trials the next step was to simplify the transmitter/receiver to enable it to be operated by one person. The answer came to Traeger in August 1928 when he developed a pedal-powered generator leaving the operator's hands free to operate the radio. The complete unit became known as the "pedal wireless" and it spelled the end of outback isolation.

Traeger continued to improve his invention over the following years, developing an automatic Morse keyboard which allowed people with no knowledge of Morse Code to use the radio before going on to improve the system to make voice communication possible. This in turn led to the development of the "galah session" when people could talk with their neighbours hundreds of kilometres away, breaking the isolation of their lives for once and all and later, the implementation of "School of the Air" which enabled children living in remote areas to receive their education from a trained teacher via the radio rather than from a parent with many other calls on his or her time.

Awards:

In January 1944, Alfred Hermann Traeger Esq. was appointed an Officer of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for “public services in connection with Wireless Inventions”.

Traeger died in 1980 and was buried in Centennial Park Cemetery. At the time of his death it was estimated there were around 6000 radio transceivers in Australia