

Obituary: Professor Rex T Prider

The year 2005 saw the passing of Professor Rex T Prider, the first locally-born student of the University of Western Australia (UWA) to occupy one of its chairs. He was born at Narrogin on 22nd September 1910 and died in Perth on 6th October 2005 aged 95.

Rex Prider received his schooling at Narrogin State School and Bunbury High School, and studied geology at UWA, working in his Honours year on the geology of the Jimperding area near Toodyay. After graduation, he entered the mining industry during the great depression of the early 1930s. As a consequence, despite graduating with a double major in geology and chemistry, and first class Honours, he found himself cleaning boilers at the surface of a Kalgoorlie gold mine for fourteen shillings and tenpence (roughly \$1.50) per shift. He remained for two years, having worked his way up (or down) to the position of assistant underground surveyor, where he could apply geological principles to his work. This experience was probably reflected later in his course in structural geology to UWA students, which emphasized stereographic-projection problems involving mines and the location of missing gold lodes.

In 1934 Rex Prider joined UWA as an assistant lecturer in geology, and three years later, having gained a Hackett Studentship, he began work at Cambridge for his PhD under Professor C. E. Tilley. His Cambridge work on the Western Australian potassium-rich intrusive rocks known as leucite lamproites laid the foundation of an international reputation in petrology. The Cambridge episode, however, left his strong Australian accent intact. He returned to become lecturer at UWA in 1939, and supervised numerous Honours projects in the Darling Range area and elsewhere in WA. In 1949 he succeeded E. de C. Clarke as Professor of Geology and Head of the Department, holding the position until 1975.

Professor Prider was co-author of two elementary geological texts, edited a book on mining in Western Australia, and published 38 papers in peer-assessed scientific journals. Much of his research was on Precambrian rocks in the Yilgarn Craton, but he was probably best known for his work on the leucite lamproites of the Kimberley region which he had begun in Cambridge. His 1960 paper in the *Journal of the Geological Society of Australia* emphasized the remarkable similarity of the lamproites in chemistry and mode of formation to kimberlites, then the only known igneous hosts of diamonds. The paper thus implied the possibility of economic diamond occurrences in the Kimberley region, and served as an impetus to exploration, leading eventually to the remarkable success at Argyle.

Professor Prider was a strong supporter of Australian scientific societies and institutes, and always encouraged students to join them. He served twice as President of the Royal Society of Western Australia (1944–1945 and 1959–60) and was awarded the Society's medal for research in 1970. He also became President of the Geological Society of Australia (1958–59), and Federal President of the Gemmological Association of Australia (1967–70). He was commemorated by colleagues who applied his name to the new mineral priderite, an accessory in leucite-



Professor Rex T. Prider, photographed at about the time of his appointment to the Chair.

bearing rocks represented by the formula $(K,Ba)(Ti, Fe^{3+})_8O_{16}$ and to the Cretaceous fossil *Anomia prideri*.

The Professor held that all geologists need a sound background in field geology, and almost until the end of his career he personally supervised many student field camps, which were notable for their lack of frills. Students were judged not only by their examination results but by their response to his spartan field programmes held under canvas in all weathers. The students of course, were able to observe him under the same conditions, and there developed a body of legend, partly true, in which he was the central figure. He went out of his way to know the students personally, and to encourage them, but when necessary he would review their efforts with pungent colloquialisms. The student reaction to all this was clear. When donations were sought from past students to establish a Rex T. Prider gold medal for annual presentation to outstanding Honours students after his retirement, there was a widespread and enthusiastic response.

Rex Prider married Catherine Esther Walton, whom he met in Kalgoorlie, in 1936 and they had two children, son Rodney and daughter Bobbie. Sadly, he was predeceased by Rodney, an outstanding classics scholar, and shortly after in 2000, by Mrs Prider. Late in his life, in 2004, he was awarded the Chancellor's Medal of the University of Western Australia. It was presented partly in recognition of the personal efforts that he and Mrs Prider had made to enable Asian students to integrate successfully into University life, and reminds us of one of the many sides of his character.

Dr J E Glover
School of Earth & Geographical Sciences
The University of Western Australia