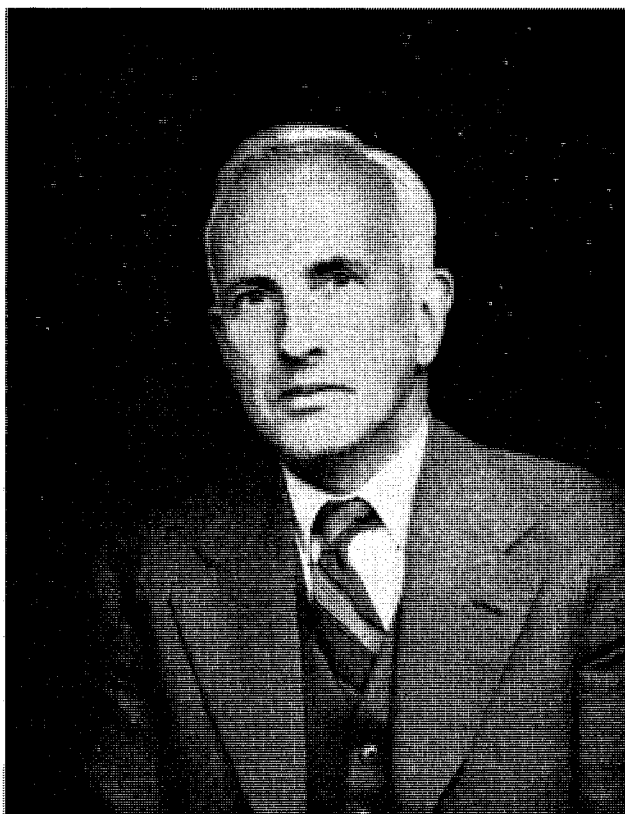


## Obituary Notice



ARCHIBALD LAWRENCE MESTON, M.A. (1890-1951)

Archibald Lawrence Meston, elder son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Meston of Southern Rhodesia, was born at Launceston, Tasmania, on 5th June, 1890, and died at his home, Windsor Park, Glenorchy, on 21st December, 1951. His boyhood days were spent in Launceston and he received his early education at the Glen Dhu Primary School. In 1906 he joined the Education Department and entered the Teachers' Training College, where he qualified for matriculation. He had already displayed marked ability in the subjects of History and English Literature and was now in a position to continue the study of these subjects at the University.

He enrolled in the Faculty of Arts in 1909, but, like many other young teachers, soon discovered that the demands of his chosen vocation prevented his attending lectures as a full-time student. In 1911 he was appointed to the staff of the Battery Point State School and two years later was transferred to the West Coast, where he taught at Queenstown and Gormanston. In spite of his isolation from the University he continued his studies as an extra-mural student and completed with notable success not only the course for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts but also part of the Law course.

His distinguished academic record soon gained him a post in Secondary Education and he was appointed to the staff of the Hobart High School. In a very short time he was transferred to the Launceston High School and promoted to the position of Master of a Subject Department. It was while occupying this responsible position and still continuing his university studies as an extra-mural student, that he took the Degree of Master of Arts, obtaining first class honours in English. The examiners commended him for the merit of his work and the originality of thought which it displayed.

In 1929, A. L. Meston's ability was further recognized by his being appointed headmaster of the Devonport High School. Three years later he was placed in charge of the Launceston High School. Although occupied with the numerous duties associated with the position of headmaster of a large secondary school, he found time to write "A Junior History of Australia". The book was published by the Oxford University Press. It is intended for young scholars but is written in such an attractive style and tells the story of Australia in such a fascinating way, that it appeals to both young and old readers. He dedicated the book to 'M.J.M. and other little Australians', M.J.M. being the initials of his youngest daughter.

By now his reputation in the field of secondary education was well established and his many friends were highly pleased when he was invited by the Commonwealth Government to represent Australia at the Seventh International Conference on Public Education, which was held at Geneva in 1938. While abroad he also visited England and South Africa.

On returning to Tasmania he was appointed an Education Officer and at the time of his death held the responsible position of Education Officer for High Schools. For nearly twenty years he served on various committees connected with the Public Examinations and did much to widen and liberalize secondary education in this State. In 1944, when the Schools Board of Tasmania was constituted, he became one of its most active members. Much of the work connected with planning the new courses of study for which the Board was responsible was carried out by him or under his guidance. As a member of the Faculty of Arts for more than ten years, he kept in close touch with the University and always endeavoured to strengthen the link between the University and the schools. He had a large part in the plan which initiated the present scheme of university training for teachers.

However, A. L. Meston will be remembered not only for his work in the field of Secondary Education but also for his researches in Tasmanian history and anthropology. His historical studies included publications on the growth of self-government in Tasmania, the work of the Van Diemen's Land Company in land settlement, and work of the astronomer, Alfred Barrett Biggs. When examining old documents and maps dealing with various areas of the State, he was never satisfied until he had traversed the

same areas on foot and had been able to recognize the geographic features to which the documents and maps referred. There were few parts of Tasmania that he did not know intimately and nothing pleased him more than climbing some remote mountain or tramping through the virgin bush. His familiarity with the origin and history of place names was remarkable.

He possessed a first-hand knowledge of many Tasmanian animals and plants. The eucalypts were of special interest to him and he had planted many different species in the grounds of his home at Glenorchy. Any movement to establish sanctuaries for the protection and preservation of the native flora and fauna always received his support. In 1932 he was appointed chairman of the Board set up to control the Cradle Mountain Reserve.

His contributions to a knowledge of the culture of the Tasmanian aborigines are of the greatest importance and have attracted international attention. In 1931 he made a thorough study of the aboriginal rock-carvings on the Mersey Bluff near Devonport and was the first to publish a detailed and accurate description of them. In the following year he described a more elaborate series of carvings, which he had discovered on the West Coast of Tasmania near Mount Cameron West. Papers in which he discussed the form and probable significance of these carvings appeared in the journal of this Society for the years 1931 and 1932 and also in the British archaeological journal, 'Antiquity', published in June, 1934.

Questions concerning the origin of the aborigines and the route by which they came to Tasmania always interested him and he never tired of searching for evidence that might throw some light on these problems. With the help of fishermen operating off the north coast he had visited many of the smaller islands in Bass Strait, hoping to find some indication that the aborigines had reached Tasmania by way of these islands. In a well-reasoned paper read before the Northern Branch of this Society in August, 1936, he discussed the existing theories and presented his own views on 'The Problem of the Tasmanian Aborigine'.

In Tasmania there were few native camping sites and middens that he had not examined. In the course of his investigations he had built up an extensive and unique collection of aboriginal implements and artifacts. His home contained a valuable library, which revealed the breadth of his interests. Many rare works on the early history of Tasmania lined the walls of his study. He became a recognized authority in his chosen field of research and shortly before his death he was invited to write the section on the Tasmanian aborigines for the new edition of the Australian Encyclopaedia. In 1949 he was elected a Vice-President of the Anthropology Section at the Hobart meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science.

The objects of the Royal Society of Tasmania were furthered not only by the papers which A. L. Meston contributed to its journal but also by the active part which he took in the Society's work. He became a member in 1921 and was Chairman of the Northern Branch in 1936 and 1937. On moving to Hobart he served on the Council for ten years and was a Vice-President of the Society in 1942, 1943, 1949 and 1950. He was also a trustee of the Tasmanian Museum and a member of the Editorial Board of Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand.

In all his work he enjoyed the sympathetic help and understanding of his wife and family. His home was a centre of hospitality and good-fellowship. Friendliness and a delight in the simple pleasures of life were keynotes in his character. Although in failing health during the last four years, he maintained a courageous spirit and refused to relinquish his work.

He has left as enduring memorials a record of unselfish service in the cause of Secondary Education in this State and notable contributions to the study of Tasmanian anthropology.

V.V.H.