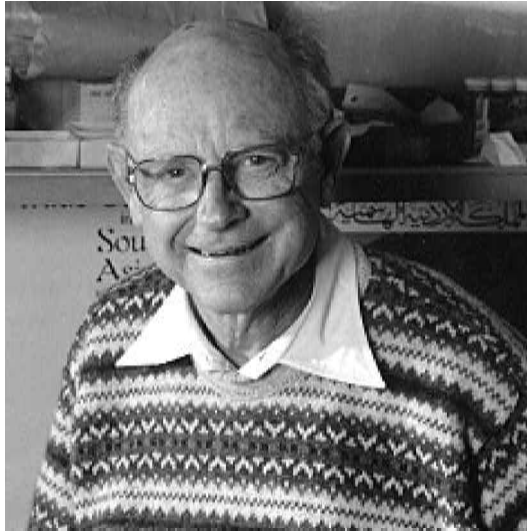


Edgar Ralph Segnit, 1923–1999



E. R. Segnit

Edgar Ralph Segnit B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D. (Cantab), D.Sc. (Adelaide), FMA, FAIMM, was born in Adelaide to a family of German descent. He was educated at Adelaide Boys High School and went on to study geology at the University of Adelaide. Ralph's uncle, R.W. Segnit, was assistant Government Geologist and this may account for Ralph's interest in geology. A year or two before Ralph started at the University his uncle had published a major work on the Precambrian–Cambrian succession in South Australia; a work which was much criticized by Sir Douglas Mawson, Professor of Geology at the University of Adelaide. Despite this, or maybe, because of it, Mawson offered Ralph a cadetship in his Department. This enabled Ralph to obtain a full remission of fees at the University in return for helping with laboratory demonstrations and other tasks around the Department. Ralph went on to do an M.Sc. under Sir Douglas' supervision and his first published works were on the occurrence and analysis of barium feldspars at Broken Hill. In 1945 Ralph joined CSIRO in Melbourne and within two years he was awarded a postgraduate scholarship to study in Cambridge under C.E. Tilley (also an old boy of Adelaide Boys High

School). Ralph thoroughly immersed himself in student life in the Department of Mineralogy and Petrology and also at Emmanuel College. He joined the Mineralogical Society in 1949, remaining a member for 50 years. Ralph completed his PhD on the mineralogy of slags in 1950 and returned to the CSIRO in Melbourne. The following year he accepted an appointment as Senior Lecturer back in the Geology Department in Adelaide. His time in Adelaide was to be short, for in 1956 he moved to the University of California as a research associate. He later moved on to Princeton before returning to Melbourne, to CSIRO Division of Buildings Research in 1960 and the focus of his work became ceramics. In 1972 he transferred to the Division of Mineral Chemistry, also in Melbourne, where he remained until his retirement at the end of 1983. Of course he didn't really retire from mineralogy, but joined a small research unit at Deakin University as adjunct professor, applying his mineralogical knowledge in archaeological research. He remained an Honorary Research Associate of CSIRO.

Throughout his vigorous and versatile career, Ralph collaborated widely and published over 160 research papers. He was awarded a D.Sc. by the

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University of Adelaide in 1987 on the basis of his published work. He established an international reputation in the field of gemmology, in particular for his work with J.B. Jones and J.V. Sanders on the structure of precious opal. Ralph, however, would fondly point out that the Scottish physicist, David Brewster had suggested that the play of colour in precious opal was due to diffraction in the 1820s. Ralph had a strong research interest in refractory materials, ceramics, synthetic oxide systems and phosphate mineralogy. He co-described three new phosphate minerals, peisleyite, aldermanite and kleemanite, the last two named for former colleagues at Adelaide University. The lead iron arsenate, segnitite was named in his honour in 1992. His ability to

communicate his science not only earned him the respect of his peers, but also greatly benefited younger researchers and members of amateur groups. Ralph was a great traveller, attending many meetings, conferences and field trips around the world and he was an active member and supporter of the IMA.

Ralph was devoted to his family; he married Nancee in 1950 and they had two children Carl and Joy, and later 5 grandchildren.

Throughout his long illness, Ralph maintained his positive, cheerful and helpful approach to family and colleagues, and to life in general. He passed away on the 13th of July 1999.

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