To understand how the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Qld.) Inc. was formed it is necessary to begin this discussion in Sydney in April 1883. A group of gentlemen, interested in the promotion of geography in Australia gathered to either re-organize the defunct Geographical Section of the Royal Society of New South Wales or to form "a new entirely independent organization" that would promote the subject throughout the Australasian colonies. This meeting decided to establish a new body and elected a committee to initiate proceedings aimed at founding a Geographical Society of Australasia (hereafter abbreviated as GSA). Two months later the Inaugural meeting of the GSA was held in Sydney. Over 700 persons were in attendance.

The first members of the GSA decided it should be an all encompassing Federal body which aimed to promote the study of geography at the Australasian level and began proceedings to form local branches of the GSA in the other capital cities of the Australian colonies. Strangely enough, even though the new organization was supposed to be promoting geography throughout Australasia, there were no attempts to form branches in New Zealand.

Success in founding local branches was initially, however, confined to Melbourne where the Victorian Branch was formed in July 1883. Leading citizens in Brisbane such as the Hon. Archibald Archer, William Landsborough, the Hon. A. C. Gregory and Sir Thomas McIlwraith were not interested in promoting the scheme.
There was also discussion in Adelaide in 1883 but nothing eventuated.

Two years were to pass before the next moves were undertaken to establish a branch in Queensland. James Park Thomson, a Government Surveyor in Fiji between 1879 and 1884 and a member of the New South Wales Branch of the GSA, arrived in Brisbane in early 1885 to take up a position in the Survey Branch of the Department of Public Lands. Shortly after his arrival, Thomson was sent a letter by Francis Gerard, Treasurer of the New South Wales Branch asking him to take steps to form a branch in Queensland. Acting upon Gerard's suggestion, Thomson convened a public meeting to consider the establishment of a branch of the GSA in Brisbane. He also communicated with citizens likely to support the cause, such as W. Alcock-Tully, Surveyor-General and the Hon. A. C. Gregory.

James Park Thomson, Founder of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia.
On the 10 July 1885, the first of a series of meetings was held in the Old Town Hall, Brisbane (the site of Lennon’s Hotel today). This meeting, after hearing an address by Thomson extolling the need for a geographical society in Queensland, decided to form a branch of the GSA in Brisbane. A committee was elected to draw up the constitution of the new Society.

This committee met four days later in the Surveyor-General’s office and agreed to accept the constitution that governed the two other geographical societies in Australia. Thus, the main aims of the Queensland Branch were to be the exploration of Australasia, dissemination of knowledge on the various types of geography to all classes through publication and public lectures and the compilation of a reliable geography of Australasia. The new Society was to consist of ordinary, honorary and honorary corresponding members. To join the organization, a potential member had to pay an entrance fee of one pound and the annual subscription was also one pound. Finally, the Society was to be governed by a Council of eight members.

In late July another public meeting elected the Society’s first Council. The Hon. A. C. Gregory became Foundation President and J. P. Thomson the first Secretary/Treasurer. Council members elected included Dr Neil Waugh, a Brisbane surgeon, W. Alcock-Tully and W. H. Miskin, a solicitor. Sixty persons also joined the Society that night, including Sir Charles Lilley, Chief Justice of Queensland, several politicians (e.g. Hon. P. Macpherson, Hon. C.S. Mein, Hon. B. Moorehead) and thirteen officers of the Survey Branch of the Lands Department, no doubt as a result of the influence of the Surveyor-General and J. P. Thomson.

**BECOMING ESTABLISHED 1886-1896**

Once formed the Society’s members set about the task of ensuring that the Queensland Branch became a permanent part of the scientific and social scene in late nineteenth century Brisbane. This involved contacting other scientific bodies, finding a suitable home, building up its membership, publishing a journal and holding regular monthly meetings. A highlight of these early endeavours was the approval by Queen Victoria in late 1886 for the Society to assume the title Royal in its name.

Between 1886 and 1896, the Queensland branch (hereafter referred to as the Society) was led by such persons as A. C. Gregory, W. H. Miskin and Neil Waugh, all who had been involved in the Society’s foundation. There was, however, one exception — Sir Samuel Walker Griffith, Premier of Queensland — who was President during the 1890-1891 session. A staunch advocate of the University Extension Movement, which sought to establish a University and Public Library in Brisbane, Griffith no doubt hoped to find allies
in the Society who would support his cause. However, the Society failed to aid Griffith in his endeavours, although years later, J. P. Thomson representing the Society was involved in establishing the University of Queensland, but the authorities refused to allow geography to be included in the new university’s curriculum.

Throughout the first decade, J. P. Thomson was intimately involved in all the Society’s affairs. He held the combined position of Secretary/Treasurer until 1891, after which he was Secretary until 1894 and President from 1894 to 1897. The work of the Society occupied all his leisure time, but several years later he wrote it had been a “labour of love”. As Secretary, Thomson handled all the correspondence of the Society, compiled the Annual Report, edited the *Proceedings and Transactions* and initially cared for the library. Between 1885 and 1897 he gave fourteen addresses to the Society, all of which were subsequently published in the *Proceedings and Transactions*. As well, in 1892, he published a book, *British New Guinea*, and wrote articles for the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Marseille* and the *Bulletin of the Commercial Geography Society of Paris*. His literary achievements were recognized in 1897 when he was awarded the medal of the Incorporated Society of Science, Letters and Art of London for “merit in science” and in April 1903 when he was bestowed with an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada, for “distinguished services to science”.

In the first decade of the Society’s operation, membership remained small. When founded, the Society had sixty supporters. By 1890, this had doubled, but by 1897 membership was still only 134. Two possible reasons exist to why support of the Society remained so low. Firstly, the economic depression of the 1890s may have made it difficult for interested persons to afford the entrance fee of one pound and yearly subscription of one pound. Secondly, and more significantly, the Society only appealed to a narrow band of educated people drawn mainly from the wealthier upper classes in Brisbane. Meetings attended by Governors of Queensland at which “learned” addresses were delivered, the establishment of a library and publication of a scholarly journal would not have appealed to most members of Brisbane’s working class at this time. Indeed, the Society could then be classified as an elitist body that supported the conservative values of God, King and Empire.

The Society’s small membership meant there was not a large annual income. Most of the funds were diverted towards publishing the *Proceedings and Transactions*, or the “Journal” as it became commonly known. First issued in 1886, it was usually an annual but in some years such as 1888, 1890 and 1891 it was published in several
parts. Containing texts of the monthly addresses, the Annual Council Report, notes on other geographical Societies and the yearly membership list, the Journal became not only a record of the activities of the Society, but also a medium in which the observations of the early explorers of Melanesia and New Guinea and research of the first colonial scientists in Queensland was published. There the New Guinea explorers Captain J. Hennessy and E. G. Edelfelt and the former administrator of the colony, Sir William Macgregor reported their findings about that country. The Australian ethnologist and surveyor, R. H. Matthews also published some of his research into the aboriginal tribes of Australia in the *Proceedings and Transactions*.

With most of the Society’s funds being absorbed by the Journal, there was little money available to promote its other aims. Unlike the Victorian and South Australian Branches, the Queensland Branch could not afford the funds to mount its own expeditions. Similarly, it lacked the money to sponsor a scheme to improve the standard of geographical education in Queensland, although J. P. Thomson in 1892 corresponded with the Royal Geographical Society (London) about the possibility of that organization extending its educational scheme to the Australasian colonies. The Society’s sporadic and largely ineffectual efforts to promote geographical education included petitioning the Legislative Assembly in 1887 to establish a university in Queensland, organizing a class of commercial geography at Brisbane’s Technical college in 1894 and distributing to all schools in Queensland a copy of the Thomson’s 1895 Presidential Address titled ‘The Physical Geography of Australia’.

Despite the lack of funds, the Society in this period maintained a great interest in exploration and to a lesser extent in the improvement of the standard of geographical education. The ‘Journal’ often contained a page of notes on current exploration or discussions on the latest views on geographical education, while speakers at the monthly meetings told accounts of their most recent expeditions, often to New Guinea or Melanesia. Others read descriptions of their journeys to foreign lands. The Society was always willing to entertain explorers and in December 1891 the Council organized a meeting to welcome the African explorer H. M. Stanley to Brisbane.

Even though it stopped the organization financially from undertaking many activities, the Council persisted in publishing its Journal each year. This was done, firstly, because the Journal was often the only contact the Society’s provincial members had with the Brisbane based organization. The Councils of the Society made no attempt to involve its widely dispersed country members in the affairs of the organization in this period, despite nearly thirty per cent
of the Society’s supporters residing in outside Brisbane. Secondly, and probably more importantly, the “Journal” could be used in exchange for the publication of other societies. By 1890, the Society was exchanging its Journal for the publications of thirty-six other Societies, and by 1897, the Society was sending its publication to seventy-two other organizations.

One of the benefits of the exchange of publications, was the growth of the Society’s library — which was housed at Thompson’s private residence. The space provided at the Queensland Museum, the initial home of the Society until 1895 was simply to hold meetings. The matter of suitable accommodation was first raised by A. C. Gregory in 1887, and the Society’s Auditor suggested forming a Capital Account in 1889 to provide funds to construct or purchase a building, but the Council refused to act. Eventually, in 1893 the Council approached the Queensland Government which, after negotiations, allocated two rooms in the old Education Office, William Street to the Society.

As a result of the move to new rooms the Society appointed an Honorary Librarian, who relieved J. P. Thomson of the task of caring for the library. However, by 1896 the Council was complaining that the limited space provided by the Government did not allow the Society to adequately display all its publications numbered between four and five thousand. No action was taken to acquire its own property. Unfortunately, this indecision by the Councils in the mid 1890s was repeated by successive Councils. The issue of ‘space’ was a recurring problem that had to be faced periodically until the Society purchased its own building in 1941.

By 1896 the Society had been in existence for a decade and had become well established. Even though membership was small, it included Queensland politicians, distinguished colonial scientists and professionals. It had become recognized throughout the world, as indicated by the large number of other Societies wanting its publications and the reciprocal membership rights awarded to it by the Royal and Royal Scottish Geographical Societies.

Despite its early successes, did the Society fulfil the aims of its constitution? After considering the early activities of the organization, it is reasonable to conclude that it had not. The nature of the monthly meetings and the style of the Society’s Journal meant the organization only attracted the better educated citizen. No effort was made to disseminate a knowledge of geography “to all classes” as stated by the constitution. Similarly, attempts at promoting better geographical education were sporadic and achieved little. Other constitutional aims, such as undertaking further Australasian exploration and compiling a Geography of Australasia were totally neglected. However, this failure was not important, for over the next
two decades, the Society survived and expanded its membership, involving some of Queensland’s leading politicians in its affairs.

**POLITICIANS TAKE CONTROL: 1899 to 1920**

In July 1897, the Hon. William Allan was elected President. The election of a politician as President of the Society was not unusual as the Hon. A. C. Gregory and Sir Samuel W. Griffith both served as Presidents. The significance of his election was that it marked the beginning of a period when politicians and Governors of Queensland dominated the Society’s leadership. In the next quarter of a century the Society had as its Presidents such individuals as Sir Hugh Muir Nelson, William Kidston, Lord Chelmsford, F. T. Brentnall, J. W. Blair and Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams. Many of the Councillors in this period were also politicians.

Throughout this period, the Society’s Founder J. P. Thomson was elected to each Council. His involvement was nearly ended in 1898 when he became seriously ill. Upon offering his resignation as Secretary, the Council decided to provide him with clerical assistance to ease the workload. Thomson accepted this offer and continued with his duties. Eventually in 1904, after an investigation by a Committee of Councillors into the workload of the Secretary, Council made provision for the payment to Thomson of a twenty-five pound yearly honorarium. Despite the Committee’s findings about the arduous nature of the duties performed of the Secretary, the Council in 1905 decided to revert to the original system of administration of combining the Secretary and Treasurer’s position. This did not seem to cause Thomson any further concern, and he went on to serve the Society as its Secretary/Treasurer until 1940!

Thomson’s contribution was recognized in 1900 when the Council decided to initiate the J. P. Thomson Foundation Medal. The original intention was that either gold, silver or bronze impressions of the medal be awarded annually, or at such times as the Council approved. Recipients were to be either the author of a significant contribution to Australian geographical literature or persons who had rendered eminent services to the Society. Thomson’s bust appears on the face of the medal while on the reverse there is a wreath comprised of Australian plants (Wattle, Bottlebrush and Sturt’s Desert Pea).

Thomson was awarded the first gold medal in 1901 and during his life time such persons as Hugh Nelson, Arthur Morgan, T. Griffith Taylor, Australia’s first Professor of Geography, Sir Mathew Nathan, Bert Hinkler, Douglas Mawson and Archbishop Duhig all received gold medals. Only T. Griffith Taylor was awarded the medal for contribution to geographical literature. Most of the others received their medals in recognition of their service to the Society.
Under the leadership of the politicians, membership of the Society slowly increased. In 1897 it had 130 members; by 1908 this had risen to 163 and in 1920 membership stood at 213. However, most of the members remained concentrated in Brisbane. Indeed, during this period there was a decline in the provincial membership, probably a result of the lack of contact between the Brisbane based organization and its country supporters, although Councils in the early 1900s did organize a series of meetings in major provincial towns in South-east Queensland in an effort to cater for its country members. Despite attracting substantial local support these meetings were discontinued after 1904.

Throughout this period the Society's major activities continued to be its monthly meetings. As in the first decade, the Society continued to publish its Journal which in 1900 was renamed the *Queensland Geographical Journal*, although the style was unaltered. Demand for the Journal continued to grow. By 1905 it was becoming difficult to meet the "number of applications from all parts of the world for recent and earlier issues". Indeed, by 1908, the Society was posting 300 copies to all parts of the world as exchanges with other organizations. Postage was also becoming expensive and this may have influenced the decision in 1910 to publish only biennially. Even so, the Society still spent an average of forty per cent of its yearly income on printing and distributing the Journal.

The interest of the Society in exploration remained high, and, unlike the late 1880s and early 1890s, the Society had some limited success in this field. In 1901, Mr Thomson convinced the Queensland
Government to provide one thousand pounds to support the Captain Scott National Antarctic Expedition. Eight years later the Society supported a small party which travelled to the Gulf of Carpentaria during which time J. P. Thomson was able astronomically to determine the position of the most northerly camp of Burke and Wills. However, a proposed expedition to the Bellenden-Ker Range in North Queensland in 1919 was abandoned for lack of support. Despite the interest in exploration, lack of funds precluded the Society from undertaking or supporting any major expedition. Indeed, by 1920 most of the world, except perhaps for Antarctica had been explored. Adventurers were turning to flying; a pursuit the Society could not possibly afford.

The Society’s library continued to cause problems. In 1899 it was reported to be in a “state of chaos” for lack of space. This was temporarily solved in late 1899 when, the Society moved into two rooms formerly occupied by the Johnsonian Club in Elizabeth Street. One room was occupied by the library and was used for Council meetings. The bigger meetings were convened in a second, larger room, occupied co-jointly with the Pharmacy Board and the Medical Society of Queensland. In this new accommodation the Society began to organise its library for the use of the members. Shelves were erected, books labelled and arranged and a catalogue was started.

After only eighteen months there, the Council applied to the Queensland State Government for new accommodation on the second floor of the Public Library Building in William Street. This application was accepted and in August 1902, the Society once again held its meetings at a William Street address. For several years after the move, there was no mention of any problems associated with shelving new acquisitions. By 1908 the Society’s rooms were open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Members were allowed to borrow any of the books or periodicals, although the Council did note that due to overcrowding the Honorary Librarian was for the first time since 1902 “obliged to put many of the books and maps away off the shelves in inconvenient places”.

The library continued to grow as a result of the exchange of publications. However, with the outbreak of World War I, there was a marked decline in the number of European publications being received. Despite this desire for more space, the Society ended this period in the same rooms at William Street. A new wing of shelves was added in 1917 to accommodate the “considerable number of publications” that had piled up on the tables for the want of shelving space. The Council noted that this was to “meet the needs of the library for some time to come”. Indeed, no further attention was paid to the library until the mid-1920s.

Throughout this period, as in the first decade of the Society’s
operation, there was no attempt by the Councils to seek permanent rooms owned by the Society. It could be argued that the organisation had little funds to devote to a building programme. However, the Society balanced its books for the entire period. Indeed, during the years 1899 to 1902, when the Society received a government endowment of £100 and a £50 grant towards defraying part of the rent incurred by the Works Department in securing rooms for the Society, the Society managed to make yearly profits of around £200. Even after the endowment and grant were removed, the Society made annual profits of around £100, but still there was no attempt to use the profits to secure permanent rooms for the Society.

What was achieved between 1897 and 1920? Most importantly, unlike its southern counterparts, the Society continued to exist as a separate entity. By 1909, the New South Wales Branch had folded and the Victorian Branch in 1920 was only one year away from being incorporated into the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. However, despite the survival of the Society, its leaders did little to expand the organization’s usual pursuits. Apart from the introduction of the Thomson Medal Scheme, the holding of a few provincial meetings, establishing some order in the library, and limited success in assisting or undertaking exploration, the attitude of “business as usual” prevailed. Indeed, by 1920, the Society, despite having its highest membership since foundation, had stagnated. The time was right for a change and new direction. The man to initiate this change was another Governor of Queensland, Sir Matthew Nathan.

THE NATHAN INITIATIVES 1921-1926

In August 1920, Sir Matthew Nathan was elected President. He was the third Governor of Queensland to hold the Presidency and he occupied the position for six consecutive terms, making him one of the longest serving Presidents. He was held in high regard by the members. Upon his departure for England in late 1925, Sir Matthew Nathan was accorded the Council’s appreciation for the way he had discharged the duties of “Leader, Councillor and Guide for the Society” and received a J. P. Thomson Foundation Gold Medal and Honorary Diploma of Fellowship.  

The first scheme which involved the Society at the instigation of Sir Matthew Nathan was the formation of the Queensland Place Names Committee. According to a biographer Sir Matthew Nathan had “a zeal for the preservation of local historical records”. Nathan suggested to the Council that the Society co-operate with the Queensland Historical Society in collating information concerning the origin and meaning of place names in Queensland. Between 1905 and 1911 several Councils had asked various Queensland State Government Ministers to establish a Board of Geographical Names, but all these proposals were rejected in each instance. Nevertheless,
the Council agreed to Sir Matthew’s suggestion. In July 1922 a meeting was held at the rooms of the Society in William Street and, as a result of this meeting, a Committee was formed consisting of Sir Matthew Nathan as Chairman, representatives from three Queensland Government Departments (Public Instruction, Public Lands, Home Secretary), and members of the Historical Society and the Society.

The newly-formed Committee during its first year of operation wrote to all Local Authorities in Queensland and school teachers at various locations throughout the State requesting information on the origin of names about places and natural features in the local area. Copies of the letter were also sent to the Mayors of cities and towns asking for information regarding the names of streets, parks and other sites connected with the history of their municipalities. Members of the Place Names Committee began collecting information on place names by examining accounts of the expeditions of early explorers and reading old newspapers and local histories. At the end of its first year in existence, the Place Names Committee had received responses from only twelve Local Authorities. In his first Annual Report the Secretary of the Place Names Committee noted the poor response with regret, but added that despite this setback the origins of 400 names had been determined and the work of the Committee was “by no means near completion”.

The Place Names Committee continued to gather information about the origins of Place Names. By June 1925 nearly 2500 names had been entered on cards. Unfortunately, after Sir Matthew Nathan’s departure the Place Names Committee quickly began to lose interest in its work and by 1928 had ceased to function. However, its records were preserved by Professor F. W. Cumbrae-Stewart at the University of Queensland. In 1938 a new Place Names Committee was formed although not at the instigation of the Society and came under government control in 1958. Members of the RGSA(Q) served on the Places Names Committee until 1982.

The second scheme suggested by Sir Matthew Nathan was the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Committee. After hearing an address at the April 1922 meeting of the Society by Professor Richards of the Geology Department, University of Queensland, on “Problems of the Great Barrier Reef”, Sir Matthew Nathan persuaded the Council to take steps to place the matter before other scientific organizations and public institutions, in order to obtain their support. An invitation to participate, accompanied by a copy of Professor Richards’ address, was sent to forty different Australian scientific bodies. The response was exceptionally good with over sixty representatives being appointed as delegates to attend any further deliberations to promote investigation of the Great Barrier Reef.
A gathering of the Warwick Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland) in 1922.
organized a branch of the Society on Thursday Island. Thus, by 1925, there were eleven branches of the Society throughout Queensland. However, after the departure of Sir Matthew, no further branches were formed for several years, although his successor as President, Archbishop Duhig, unsuccessfully tried to influence the Lord Major of Sydney to sponsor a branch of the Society in that city.

Little is known about the provincial branches as no local records could be located. Nevertheless, enough information does survive from other sources to make some general comments about the local branches. It appears each provincial branch had a Chairman and Local Secretary, who were often members of the local town or shire council. However, it was not possible to ascertain if the local officials were elected or appointed from “headquarters” at Brisbane. Similarly, nothing is recorded in the surviving records of the Society about the function of the branch officials, but it is reasonable to assume that they acted as a liaison between members and the Council in Brisbane as well as collecting subscription fees and organizing the activities of the local branches.

When founded, the provincial branches had between twenty and fifty members. However, after the formation of the branch, membership dropped, except in the case of Thursday Island where support for the local branch increased in the 1920s. By 1928, the Ipswich, Gympie and Maryborough branches all had under twenty members. In most cases, the activities of the provincial branch were restricted to casual lectures, delivered by visiting members from Brisbane. Only the Thursday Island branch followed a pattern of monthly meetings and addresses.

**THE ARCHBISHOP IN CONTROL 1926-1936**

After the departure of Sir Matthew Nathan, Archbishop Duhig was elected President for the 1926-1927 session. He was followed by Sir John Goodwin, Governor of Queensland. However, Sir John resigned in early 1928, and Archbishop Duhig again assumed the Presidency; a position he held until 1931. After an interlude of two years when the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Gerald Sharp was President, Duhig was again elected President. He went on to lead the Society until 1936. For his efforts on behalf of the Society, Archbishop Duhig was awarded a gold J. P. Thomson Foundation Medal, an honour he regarded as no small compliment as the Council at the time was “composed of mostly non-Catholic gentlemen”.

The period during which the two Archbishops led the Society was a difficult time. The world was plunged into economic depression and the *Queensland Geographical Journal* was not published for six years after 1929, due to the removal of the Government grant towards half its printing costs. However, the Society’s membership remained over 500 due to the formation of further provincial branches in 1930.
and 1931 at Charleville, Roma, Longreach and Barcaldine. The motivating force behind the success of these branches, particularly the Roma organization, was Danny O’Brien, a local Inspector of Factories and Shops who later became the Society’s Secretary. Archbishop Duhig accompanied by Dr Thomson visited the new central western provincial branches in the early 1930s, but lack of funds most likely precluded any further trips to the other local branches at this time. Nevertheless, the other local branches remained in existence throughout the depression years, although probably in name only.

The main activity of the Society continued to be the monthly meetings. Speakers still delivered travelogues, descriptions of overseas countries and reports on local happenings in Queensland. However, while the subject manner remained the same, the appearance of women speakers at the monthly meetings in the depression years was a noticeable change to the previously male dominated organization. Similarly film showing in the place of an address started during this time.

Even though the achievements in the period were limited, the Society reached a milestone in March 1935, when it celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The series of commemorative events organized to mark the occasion included a civic reception given to Dr Thomson by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, an afternoon garden party at Archbishop Duhig’s residence and a State Banquet at Rowe’s Cafe where the Premier of Queensland, W. Forgan Smith presided. Most of the celebrations emphasised the achievements of Dr Thomson, who was described by the *Brisbane Telegraph* as being the “main-spring of the Society”. It was unfortunate, however, that the public
equated the Society with Thomson. Archbishop Duhig realized this, when he noted that the Society had come to be regarded as the "Dr Thomson Society"."\textsuperscript{35}

What had been achieved by the Society in its first fifty years? It could be argued that little had been accomplished. The Society had only initiated one long lasting scheme of any relevance (The Great Barrier Reef Committee) and had ceased to be involved with the scheme through a dispute over printing costs. This judgement is perhaps too harsh. The great achievement of the Society up until 1935, was that it kept geography alive in Queensland during the time-span Aurousseau called the "doldrums" in the development of Australian Geography."\textsuperscript{16} Through regular meetings, the printing of a Journal, which allowed researchers to publish the results of their investigations, and the tours to provincial centres in Queensland, the Society disseminated knowledge about exploration, foreign lands and different races and customs. The Society kept geography alive, even if only in the hearts of a few faithful followers, until the schools and universities in Queensland were ready to promote the subject.

**LAST YEARS OF Dr THOMSON 1937-1941**

In the last years of Dr Thomson the Society was led by the politician Sir Donald Cameron, Dr J. J. Bradfield and businessman A. S. Huybers. Unfortunately for the aged Thomson, who had devoted much of his life's work towards the building up of the organization, it was a time of decline for the Society. The provincial branches ceased to exist one by one, the Journal was not published, except in 1940, and the number of meetings and the membership declined. Indeed, when Thomson's successor, Danny O'Brien recalled that when he became the Society's Secretary in 1940, the Society had only forty financial members."\textsuperscript{37} Even though O'Brien was prone to exaggeration, this remark was probably close to the truth.

Positive achievements by the Society during the late 1930s were limited. The library was placed in some order,\textsuperscript{38} after Bradfield as President attempted to donate the books to John Oxley Library; women appeared as Councillors for the first time in 1939, thus ending the previously male dominated leadership of the Society and more importantly some of the new women councillors were school teachers. For the first time in the Society's history, except when academics served as Councillors between 1920-1925, educators were involved in the running of the Society. It seems contradictory that an organisation whose aims included the promotion of geographical education had to wait more than fifty years before a school teacher was elected to its Council. However, the biggest achievement by the Society in this period was the purchase of a building. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Society struggled to operate on a small budget, despite an attempt to improve its financial position in 1925
through the establishment of an “endowment fund” which sought public donations for the Society. However, in July 1940, a legacy of £2500 was bequeathed to the RGSA(Q) by the niece of the Hon. A. C. Gregory, Miss Elizabeth Gregory, who wished the monies to be used to establish a memorial to her uncle. The Council decided to buy a property to generate income for the Society and in April 1941 bought ‘Garden Flats’ at North Quay from Kraft Walker Cheese Pty Ltd. However, the Society did not occupy the building before Thomson’s death; its meetings were still conducted in the Old Teachers’ Training College in Turbot Street, which the Society had occupied since 1925.39

During the late 1930s Council, on occasions, considered who should succeed Dr Thomson. Thomson himself had expressed concern about this as early as 1932,40 while Sir Matthew Nathan had raised the matter in 1925. Eventually, in January 1939 Thomson called a Special Council meeting to discuss the matter. A Committee was formed and recommended that the Society should appoint someone to help Dr Thomson. This was done in May 1939, when a Col. F. Rosenskjar was employed as Thomson’s assistant, without any indication by Council if he was to be Thomson’s replacement. In fact, in April 1940, Thomson’s position as Secretary/Treasurer was taken by Danny O’Brien, although Thomson became the Society’s Director; a rather ambiguous position for the role of the Director was never defined in any of the surviving societal records. Although no documentary evidence exists to support the claim, it is reasonable to assume the Director’s position was created to remove the aged Thomson from active office, so as to allow a younger man to begin the task of re-vitalizing the organization.

Dr Thomson died on 11 May 1941, at Kilcoy, at the age of 87, thus ending an era in the Society’s history. The Brisbane Courier Mail of 12 May 1941, called him a “fine geographer”, and many people and organizations including Sir Douglas Mawson, Sir Leslie Wilson and The National Geographic Society to name but a few, sent condolences to the Society. The following year, an inadequate anonymous obituary appeared in the 1942 Journal. It was an unworthy tribute to a man who was the organization’s founder. Even after death the Society benefited from Thomson’s efforts, for he bequeathed funds to pay for the awarding of the Thomson Foundation Gold Medal.41

Since Thomson’s death, the RGSA(Q) has gone through periods of growth and stagnation. However, the organization survived and celebrated its Centenary in 1985. As part of the celebrations, 18 J. P. Thomson medals were awarded, including two gold impressions of the medal. Remarkably, the original dyes for the medal were still in good enough condition to be used in the printing of the medals.
The awarding of these medals in 1985, and at any future date, hopefully will continue to remind members of the Society about its founder, who dominated the Society's affairs for over fifty years.

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I would like to thank the Council of the RGSA(Q) Inc. for allowing parts of A Dream in Trust to be quoted in this publication and Mrs Deirdre Timo for typing the draft copy of this paper.

2. Sydney Morning Herald, 23 June 1883.
3. For an example of such correspondence see E. La Meslee, Secretary of the New South Wales Branch to the Hon. Archibald Archer, Brisbane, 4 August 1883, in RGSA MSS., Letterbook A2664 p.81, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
5. Royal Geographical Society of Australia (Queensland Branch) Minutes Vol. 2, 14 February 1894, p.170. Subsequent references to the minutes and unpublished reports are omitted.
10. The Victorian Branch of the RGSA dispatched an expedition into the highlands of New Guinea, while the South Australian Branch was involved in Sir Thomas Elder’s Central Australian Expedition of 1891.
11. J. P. Thomson to the Secretary, Royal Geographical Society, London, 4 December 1892; a copy of this letter was sent to the RGSA(Q) from the Royal Geographical Society’s files.
12. Petition to the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland for the Establishment of a University, 15 August 1887.
13. PRGSA(Q), 9 (1884), p.73.
15. PRGSA(Q) 7(1) (1892), pp.41-43.
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34. *Brisbane Telegraph*, 20 March 1935.
35. Archbishop Duhig to Mr F. J. Morgan, 1 July 1936 in Archbishop Duhig MSS., Roman Catholic Archives, Brisbane.
39. After the State Government reduced the amount of space available to the Society at its rooms in the Public Library in 1922, Sir Matthew Nathan began investigations to find more suitable accommodation.
40. Dr J. P. Thomson to Archbishop Duhig, 19 September 1932 in OMG5/21, Thomson MSS., John Oxley Library, Brisbane.
41. A copy of Dr Thomson's will is held in the Thomson MSS., at John Oxley Library, Brisbane.