

## **Nominee for 2019 RHSV Award of Merit**

### **Mr Robert Ousley, Richmond and Burnley Historical Society**

Mr Robert Ousley has made an exceptional contribution to the Richmond and Burnley Historical Society over a period of nearly twenty years, not only as a committee member and office bearer but also as an organiser and regular volunteer on the roster for assisting visitors to the rooms, and as the most productive contributor to the Richmond Ratebook Project 1852–1906, and the digitisation of a large part of the society's collection.

Robert worked for the Australian Taxation Office and retired prior to 2000. He joined the Richmond and Burnley Historical Society soon after, initially to pursue his own family history, but then to help rebuild the society, which had been in decline for some years and was struggling to continue. In 2008, he and Daryl McMahon inaugurated and oversaw the additional opening of the rooms on Tuesday afternoons. Since then, Robert has continuously maintained the Tuesday afternoon hours of opening, thus making the collection available to the community. Though assisted by other volunteers over the years, he has been the mainstay for more than a decade of the society's weekday service. His knowledge of the collection provides a swift response to any enquiry, and he assists schools with visits, guiding the students through the resources that we have. In the many years that Robert has been volunteering at RBHS, over a thousand students have visited the rooms and benefited from both his knowledge and his research skills.

From 2011 to 2014 Robert also stepped into the position of Treasurer of the society. In 2015, he then took on a major role in a new project led by David Langdon to digitise the Richmond Rate Records 1856 to 1902 in cooperation with the Genealogical Society of Victoria. This involved reading each line of the ratebook records and meticulously recording the contents into spreadsheets. Of the seven RBHS members and seven GSV members on the project over a period of four years, Robert was the most productive and committed, completing many wards and years of records. What we have today is the result of his and others' efforts to make the rate records more accessible and searchable for family and demographic history.

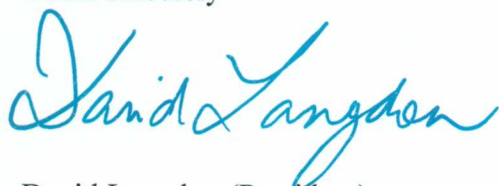
Partly in connection with this project, the society had purchased a range of scanners and copying equipment, and, when the project was completed in 2017, Robert saw the possibilities the equipment provided for the digitisation of the many items in the society's collection—documents of many kinds, photographs and images, maps and other items. Robert has, in pursuit of this objective, worked continuously in the rooms every Tuesday from 9.30am, before opening the doors to schools and other visitors in the afternoons. He has scanned over 15,000 items during this period.

Successful grant applications enabled the society to update its computer equipment in 2016 and to install a central mass storage device. RBHS was also able to connect to the internet through the Carringbush Adult Education Centre, and to purchase the most up-to-date version of DbTextWorks, which made managing the digital collection much easier. Robert commenced renaming each file and located these into folders depending on the category and item. In addition to his continued scanning, he has thus

made significant progress in the structure and organisation of the digitised collection he was instrumental in creating. With the recent acquisition of another new version of DbTextworks, we will be able to use the power of the database to integrate the work that Robert has done on labelling each file.

Robert was made a Life Member of the Society around 2009. His generous and willing nature as well as his dedication and skills have been invaluable to the society and to those in the Richmond and Burnley community who have drawn upon Robert's expertise and knowledge. The society believes that Robert Ousley is a very deserving candidate for an Award of Merit in 2019 and urges the RHSV to provide this recognition and appreciation of his exceptional work for community history.

Yours sincerely



David Langdon (President)



Heather Ho (Treasurer)

26<sup>th</sup> March 2019