



## Max Clarke : The Gentleman Engineer

### OBITUARY

Max Percival Preston Clarke was born on 15 February 1926 in Butterworth, in the then Transkei, where he spent his formative and schooling years after which he proceeded to study Electrical Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand. He graduated in 1947 with a BSc (Electrical Engineering) degree.

In September 1946, Max joined the South African Institute of Electrical Engineers (SAIEE) as a Student Member. After his graduation Max completed his pupillage with E.S.C. in the East London area and then took up the position of Junior Engineering Assistant in King William's Town. In January 1951, Max was appointed as a Graduate Apprentice with British Thomson-Houston, Rugby, UK.

While in UK (1951 to 1953), he not only succeeded in acquiring the required experience to register as a Professional Engineer, he also met a young Australian nurse, Eileen, who soon became his wife.

Max was later appointed as the Town Electrical Engineer in Somerset East, Eastern Cape in 1954, where he ran the electricity department which included a coal-fired power station for sixteen years, and during this time obtained a government Certificate of Competency as required for being in charge of machinery. Their three beautiful daughters were born there.

They lived in Somerset East until 1970 whereafter they moved to Newcastle in Natal in 1970, where Max took on the challenge of reconstructing the electrical infrastructure of the little town that was to become a boomtown due to the giant steelworks, Iscor, opening a second plant there.

As always, Max was up for the challenge, and no engineering problem was ever too big for him. Newcastle, a sleepy village with a maximum demand of 4 MW with about 500 domestic consumers, was to suddenly expand to accommodate thousands of workers, management staff and, of course, the related supply industries multiplied as well. He rose to the occasion by designing a 132kV power system supplied from the 400kV Eskom supply, as well as designing and overseeing the building of the Electricity Department's building which was kitted out with state-of-the-art laboratories and control room and appointed staff accordingly.

Max had an exceptionally wide skillset, and was passionate and extremely knowledgeable about all things to do with Electrical Engineering, particularly Municipal Electrical Engineering, and ran very successful projects. Ultimately, in 1979 he left Newcastle and moved on to yet another rapidly growing town.

Randburg Municipality, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, was predominantly a rural town with agricultural smallholdings and electrical distribution by Eskom. There were plans in place to establish Randburg as another economic hub along with upmarket modern housing and large commercial undertakings. Max, as always, was up for the challenge. Once again, with his boundless and irrepressible energy, he proceeded to build an Electricity Department from the ground up, both literally and figuratively, managing the design and construction of buildings and infrastructure, and appointing staff. Max eventually retired from Randburg Municipality in 1990.

This did not stop Max, he continued to work for the AMEU, editing and producing their newsletter. Max was also an extremely active SAIEE member who was instrumental in motivating for the conversion of SAIEE House, the renovation of Innes House for the establishment of the SAIEE museum.

Max was the Chairman of SAIEE's Historic interest group, he lead by example, with knowledge, passion, energy and knowledge. In 2013, he was awarded the Engineer of the Year in recognition of his contribution to the establishing of SAIEE's museum and library.

Max, you have done your duty, go join Eileen and may you both rest in peace.

[Obituary by Paul van Niekerk]

