

Dr David Pratt CBE (1924-2019)

Dr David Pratt CBE, who died aged 94 on 13 March 2019, was a former member of Council and Long Serving Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

Born in Swindon on 16 August 1924, David grew up in Gloucestershire and, on leaving school, attended the Royal Engineers Officer Cadet Training Unit. During WWII, he was posted to 26 Assault Squadron Royal Engineers and was among the first to land on Juno beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

David left the army in 1948 and went on to complete an engineering degree at Trinity College, Cambridge and learnt to fly. Gliding became David's great passion and he continued to fly fixed-wing aircraft and gliders into his eighties.

Upon completing his engineering degree, David was offered the role of Transport and Engineering Officer on the Society's Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, which became the first expedition to reach the South Pole overland for 46 years. Tasked by Sir Vivian Fuchs, the expedition's leader, with devising a way of getting the expedition vehicles across crevasses, David sought the advice of Sir Donald Bailey, whose portable 'Bailey bridges' had been vital for moving tanks across battlefields during the war. The aluminium bridges that Bailey designed were instrumental in the expedition's success.

On his return from the South Pole in 1958, David joined the Society and completed a PhD at Imperial College London, writing up what he had learnt during the expedition.

David was awarded the Polar Medal and a mountain in the Shackleton Range of Antarctica — Pratts Peak — was named after him.

David is survived by his wife, Victoria, who he met while she was working in the office of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition, and two sons.