

OBITUARY

HENRY JACK

Henry Jack was born on 6th July 1917 at Menzieshill, which was then a country area outside Dundee. He received his secondary education at Dundee High School, where his mathematics master was Mr J. B. Meiklejohn. It was he who encouraged Henry, whose chief interest at that time may have been rugby football, to develop his mathematical abilities. He entered him for the Bursary Competition at Edinburgh University and Henry went up to Edinburgh in 1936 having been awarded the Dalhousie Bursary. He had a successful career there, receiving prizes and medals, and graduating M.A. with First Class Honours in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1940. He was regarded as one of Edinburgh's best students of that era and Professor Whittaker encouraged him to continue with mathematics. Henry was always modest about his own abilities but, after some discussion with Dr W. L. Edge (as he then was), was persuaded to continue to Cambridge. In fact he went up to Christ's College while awaiting call up.

Soon he entered the Royal Air Force and served for six years as an officer in the meteorological section. He saw service in the Middle and Near East as well as in Britain. Perhaps he developed then that talent and liking for forecasting, which he was to apply later to the performance of University students.

It was then the custom for Scottish students to take the Cambridge Tripos after their undergraduate courses in Scotland. It must have been a more difficult course for someone returning after six years away from university study, but Henry decided to tackle it and did so with his usual success. He took part II in 1948 and received a star in Part III in 1949, graduating B.A. with First Class Honours. He was one of that generation of ex-servicemen who brought a maturity to university life in those days. Other younger Scottish students who went up directly from their undergraduate courses in Scotland have mentioned to me his kindness to them and his concern to see that they made this transition successfully. Henry continued for one further year at Cambridge to embark on research, but partly because of his age and partly from disappointment in seeing work published by another person relating to his problem, when a position became available back in Dundee in 1950 he accepted it. He was to remain in Dundee for the rest of his life.

On entering Professor Copson's department at University College, Dundee he soon showed that interest in students which was to remain a feature of his teaching. Both with a class and with individuals he established a relationship which was paternal, even authoritarian, and yet friendly because he was clearly interested in them and their good. He is remembered with affection by successive generations. He became an Adviser of Studies in the Faculty of Science and then, when Dundee University became independent, he was elected as the first Dean of Students.

Henry did not approve of the Robbins expansion, which he considered had brought lower standards and less satisfactory attitudes to study. He made no attempt, either privately or at meetings, to hide his disillusionment. He combined these views, considered reactionary by some, with a sympathetic attitude to the individual student. He was adept

at finding rescue courses for students who had fallen foul of the system, especially if he felt that they had been misled by those more interested in numbers in honours classes than in the welfare of the particular student. He was also good at encouraging depressed students to believe in themselves and to work again.

Henry had been a sub-warden of Airlie Hall and then warden of the William Low, a hall of residence for medical students. In 1956 he married Winkie Mills. In doing so he also took on the role of stepfather to three boys of secondary school age.

Initially on coming to Dundee from Cambridge Henry concentrated on teaching. When Professor Macbeath had a problem which involved analysis Henry was able to solve it and this resulted in a joint paper in *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* in 1959. Henry then continued working on his own. His gifts did not lie in abstract generalisation but in considerable analytic ingenuity applied to detailed problems. He developed techniques for evaluating integrals over matrix spaces and applied these to a variety of problems. This resulted in a series of eleven papers, all published in Edinburgh. He was modest about the significance of his own work and it was a great pleasure to his many friends when he was awarded the Keith Prize by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1970. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in that year and was also given the title of Reader by Dundee University. His last publication was in 1972 but, in fact, he was working hard on conjectures he had made concerning the relationship between certain classes of symmetric polynomials which he had defined and other known classes. He left a considerable amount of material almost, but not quite, ready for publication. The war intervened at a difficult time for his career, as for the careers of many others, and had he been put in touch sooner with the type of problem to which his skills and industry were relevant undoubtedly he would have made an even greater contribution to mathematics than he has done.

Henry Jack was a well-known figure, both physically and in personality at the meetings of our Society. He served on the committee and later lectured on the work for which he was awarded the Keith Prize. In conversation he expressed his views forcibly but was highly regarded by those with whom he disagreed most strongly about modern developments in mathematics. The casual acquaintance might not have recognised in him the connoisseur of claret or the collector of Mason China.

After an illness first detected in the preceding September, Henry Jack died on 5th January 1978. He is survived by his wife.

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