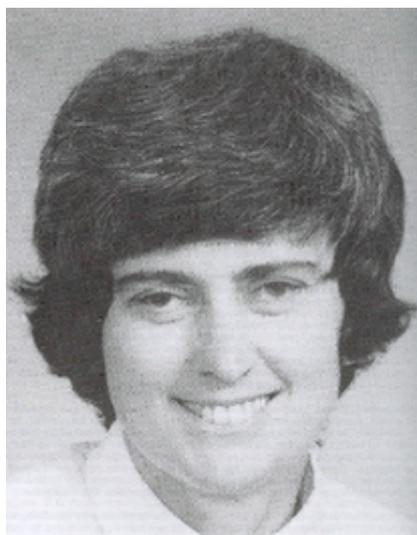


CENTREFOLD

Jan L. Whitwell 1944--1993



When a student, Jan's landlady warned her of the dangers of burning a candle at both ends. The advice was not heeded, and Jan, with her husband Adrian, continued to pack family, profession and recreation into their days until, after a day of recreation together, her activity was ended by a motor accident on 30 October last year.

Jan shed the label mathematician in 1970, but her work never lost the mathematician's imprint. She graduated from Victoria University in 1965 with a BSc(Hons) degree, largely in traditional applied mathematics, and joined the staff of a mushrooming Mathematics Department at Massey University as a Junior Lecturer the next year. At a time of life when today's graduates are establishing a research base under the guidance of senior colleagues, the young staff in this Department were developing new courses and establishing the foundations of a new Department. Jan herself wrote a third year course in linear analysis, a very different course from anything taught elsewhere.

Jan had been bored in vacations working for Arch Glenday as a statistical computer, and research-topics in applied mathematics seemed very distant. Looking elsewhere for a career she chose economics. In 1970, she completed a BA with first class Honours in Economics through Victoria University, and at Massey moved across to the Economics Department. She gave a talk to the Mathematics Department shortly after her move, discussing her impressions of economics and economists. Apart from a difficulty in finding her niche (econometrician? mathematical economist? economical mathematician?) she talked mainly of the lack of rigour in economic analysis. 'Costs at the margin' for example ought to be a partial derivative of cost with respect to one of many variables. The applied mathematicians would not ignore these other variables, but economists usually did, because their tool, human intuition, cannot handle several interrelated variables.

Jan would never leave an unsatisfactory situation unrighted. The same calm persistent

reasoned argument used in defending herself or friends from bureaucrats and bosses was directed towards this lack of rigour in economics. Between 1971 and 1976 her commuting extended to the University of Birmingham. Here she did find a niche, monetary economics, a senior colleague, David Sheppard, and started publishing.

She returned to Massey in 1976, having previously re-established links with the Mathematics Department by marrying Adrian Swift. Jan quickly resumed her place in local music groups and the Swiftwells developed a wide circle of friends which was always ready to incorporate newcomers. Both the Muldoon and Douglas era provided plenty of scope for rigorous economic criticism. Jan joined in the public debate, always with reason, clarity and good humour. Her argument that government policy of the late 1980's was not responsible for lowering inflation, but was causing unemployment, could be understood by anyone. She examined each assumption carefully, and showed that observed associations were better explained if some causal links were reversed.

Jan was promoted to Reader in 1987, but the place of economics at Massey was subject to unending reviews. With no sign that this unsatisfactory situation would be righted, and the continued attraction of Wellington, where she was already a regular visitor, Jan accepted an appointment in the Victoria University Economics Department, and at the time of her death was Chairperson of the Money and Finance Group. Her work on the influence of monetary policy in a small open economy was concerned particularly with stability, another mathematical concept difficult for intuition to analyse.

Jan earned, and accepted, acclaim as an economist, but she will be remembered for her human qualities. She took a close, lasting interest in her family, friends and all those she met.

That is why, after two and a half decades outside a Mathematics Department, so many readers of this journal will have grieved at her death, and felt strong sympathy with Adrian.

Greg Arnold