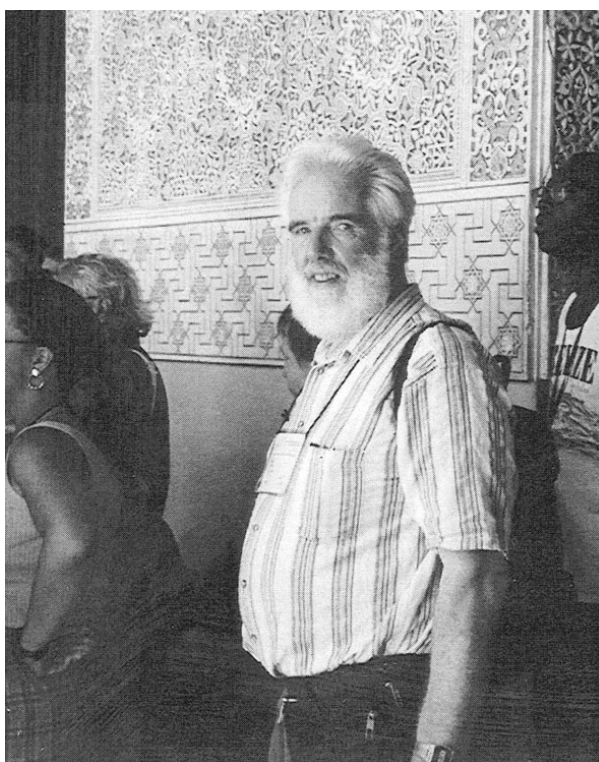


**CENTREFOLD**



**Gordon Knight**

In December, 1996, farewells were held at both the Albany and Turitea campuses of Massey University for Associate Professor Gordon Knight retiring after 37 years of secondary and tertiary mathematics teaching and research. Teaching was a vocation Gordon did not consider when he completed his honours degree in mathematics at London University in 1956. Gordon initially went into the design office in the aircraft manufacturing industry in Coventry, a job that he had previous experience in a vacation job. There, he was in the Design Office, the only mathematician among engineers, doing both stress calculations and modelling stress with the Research Section. However after 3 years sitting at the same desk in the same office every day, doing similar tasks, Gordon sought a change. He went to the Coventry Technical College as a Lecturer, where he taught mathematics to a variety of students in vocational courses. It was there that he discovered that he really enjoyed teaching.

Gordon was born in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, England, and attended secondary school in Warwick. In 1962, Gordon and his wife Margaret were seeking to move away from Coventry and were attracted by the recruitment drive for teachers to New Zealand. Gordon accepted a 3 year contract to come to New Zealand on a trial basis. He accepted appointment to Southland Boys' High School, where he found he was the only teacher with a degree in mathematics. (Jack Alabaster, the senior maths teacher was on tour in South Africa with the New Zealand cricket team.) Without consciously deciding to stay, they delayed returning to Britain, as they found New Zealand a good place to raise a family.

In his second year at Southland Boys', he became HoD, applied for the school to be a pilot school for the "New Maths" syllabus, and commenced involvement in in-service training courses for teachers. After 7 years, he found the normal advancement route into administration not appealing, and succeeded in his application for a senior lectureship at Wellington Teachers' College. After one year he was recruited to a senior lectureship in mathematics at Massey University by Brian Hayman, who valued his school teaching experience for the development of the first year teaching programme.

Thus in 1970, Gordon began his association with Massey University. He took the opportunity to update his qualifications, enrolling in courses in statistics, computing and education, to complete a BA in education. The late Clem Hill, Professor of Education at Massey, encouraged Gordon to enrol for a PhD in the Education Faculty. Supervised by Dr Don McAlpine his topic was "Why some very able students find mathematics so difficult". Thus in 1982 Gordon was awarded the first New Zealand PhD in mathematics education. Gordon was continuing a full lecturing load within the Mathematics Department during this

period.

During this time Gordon was asked "If you had the responsibility of designing a syllabus for Maori students how would you do it?" This question appealed to Gordon, but he realised he did not have the background to approach it. Over several years he took 6 courses up to the 300 level in Maori language and culture. He then teamed up with Monte Ohia of the Department of Education and Mihi Maloney, a mathematics teacher in a secondary bilingual unit, to conduct a survey of the mathematics teaching in that area. He also wrote several articles analysing the Geometry behind Maori art. He was also involved in other team contracts in mathematics education such as with the IEA International Studies of Mathematics, looking at how students learnt fractions, the mathematics needs of NZ school leavers, and the implementation of the (current) new curriculum.

Although he has been a leading figure in mathematics education research, Gordon emphasises that it is the teaching of mathematics that has given him the greatest satisfaction. However, he was also involved in wider university activities. He served 6 years on the University Council as staff representative, 2 years as local chairperson of AUT, and 11 years as university mediator. In 1993 he undertook the oversight of the introduction of teaching in mathematical and computing sciences at Massey's new Albany campus. This he saw as new challenge at the end of his career, becoming the Associate Dean of FIMS and Head of the Mathematics Section. This group is now well founded with 16 full time academic staff continuing at Gordon's retirement.

Gordon and Margaret have returned to Palmerston North, but retirement is in name only. He continues with the supervision of 6 graduate students, and with active mathematics education research projects, and he maintains a close contact with the department.

His love of restoring old houses and cars continues, having bought the 90-year old farmhouse on the hill above the main Massey campus and he has parts of a 1903 Wolesley stored in the garage. This is their 13th home, having restored old houses in locations as diverse as Thorndon and Devonport, and Woodville and Kiwitea in the Manawatu, as well as several in Palmerston North city. This restoration alternated with the restoration of a number of old cars and taking a polytech course in panelbeating to enhance his skills. An active sportsman for many years, he played and coached Rugby in his earlier days, and continued with Basketball and Tennis. He enjoyed participation above being a spectator.

*Mike Hendy*