NZMS Newsletter 54, April 1992

CENTREFOLD

Garry John Tee

Garry John Tee was born in Wanganui in 1932, in the depths of the Depression. In those difficult times his father made his livelihood by operating an informal mobile library. Later the family lived in Omihi, near Kaikoura, and then in Glen Massey and Ruawaro. Undoubtedly the hardship which Garry saw all around him in those early years of his life had a profound effect on him and helped shape his social conscience. It was unusual for anyone with the intellectual ability that Garry exhibited to attend Seddon Memorial Technical College but this was what he did, and he was remarkable, not only in winning a Junior Scholarship in the 1948 examination, but also in topping the list.

Because of his wide scientific interests, Garry pursued his BSc degree both in Pure and Applied Mathematics and also in Physics. He qualified in Mathematics for an MSc with first class honours. Garry did not take any foreign language at school. However, it became necessary for him to achieve reading ability in a foreign language as part of the MSc requirements. Garry taught himself Russian and became so proficient at this language that later he was able to use this skill to translate five books by Russian mathematicians. The late Robert Maxwell, founder of Pergamon Press, from the start took a personal interest in this important work. Garry correctly judged that computers had a great future and decided to move into this area of interest. This was many years before there were any computers in New Zealand. From 1958 to 1964 he worked in a congenial research environment for the English Electric Company but then accepted an invitation to join the mathematics staff of the new University of Lancaster. He spent a period of time in 1965 visiting the Computer Science Department of Stanford University and in 1968, returned to Auckland as a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics. He later became a foundation member of the Computer Science Department staff, but recently has returned to a position in the Mathematics and Statistics Department.

In 1971, Garry had the opportunity to study with Professor Richard Bellman at the University of Southern California. The topics on which he worked included an analysis of the Strassen method for numerically solving linear equation systems. Unfortunately, the illness of

Professor Bellman, from which he never recovered, meant that Garry had to return to Auckland without completing his doctorate. However, Garry has been prodigious in research on this and other topics over the years. His early published work was in various aspects of numerical analysis, especially in iterative and other methods for the solution of linear equation systems, and especially those arising from discretised partial differential equations. More recently, a long-standing interest in scientific history has assumed an increasingly important place in his work. He reads an incredible range of material and is always on the lookout for subtle connections. He believes that perhaps his most important scholarly contribution was in connection with the similarity between Western Chou (Chinese) bronze tigers and a Chavín (Peruvian) jaguar. He pointed out that this similarity could quite realistically have been due to a direct—if unintended—link between the two cultures around the -3rd century. His scientific detective work has led to his finding New Zealand connections with a number of great scientific and mathematical people, such as Babbage, Hamilton and Darwin. He takes a particular interest in New Zealand mathematicians who have achieved fame elsewhere. Examples of this include Aitken and Comrie whom he has studied extensively. Garry is much in demand as a reviewer, and his wide-ranging reviews almost invariably add interesting elements to the subject of the work being considered. Informed comments from Garry are also to be found frequently in letters to the editors of such periodicals as *New Scientist* and the New Zealand *Listener*.

Garry's interests in mathematical biography led him to a study of the lives and works of some of the great woman mathematicians. An important example of this is Sof'ya Vasil'yevna Kovalevskaya, the famous analyst whose name is attached to the Cauchy-Kovalevsky theorem. A second example is Augusta Ada, Countess of Lovelace, who is recognised today as the first computer programmer and the scientific partner of Babbage. Later Garry was to write a major article dealing with several of the great woman mathematicians of history.

Garry has been an active supporter and a popular speaker at the New Zealand mathematical colloquia. Most recently, he was invited to mark the 25th anniversary of the start of these annual events by presenting a historical survey of them. This was illustrated by photographs from Garry's own collection of mementos. In fact Garry is a keen photographer, especially of significant conference events. As a keen swimmer and underwater diver, he was also an enthusiastic photographer of marine life, until he had to retire from these activities for medical reasons.

Garry is unique in the New Zealand mathematical and scientific scene. He has a detailed knowledge of an enormous range of subjects from the literary to the scientific, and this knowledge is a valuable resource which he readily shares. He adds his own distinctive flavour to discussions with his colleagues and maintains an active correspondence with many people throughout the world. His influence, one way or another, is enormous. I am sure that fellow mathematicians and all who know Garry will wish to express with us their appreciation for his contributions and to congratulate him on reaching the age of sixty.

John Butcher and Ron Keam