

GEORGE EASON
BSc, MSc, PhD(Birm), FIMA

George Eason was born in Chesterfield on 15 March 1930, the son of Henry Swindell Eason and his wife Annie Shepherd (née Warchurst). His early childhood was spent in the mining village of North Wingfield (near Chesterfield), where he attended the local primary school. In 1941 he was awarded a scholarship to Clay Cross Tupton Hall Grammar School, and a County Major Scholarship in 1948 enabled him to go to Birmingham University to study Mathematics (with subsidiary Physics) with G N Watson and R E (later Sir Rudolf) Peierls as Professors of Mathematics. He later said that, with such a choice of subjects and under such leadership, he enjoyed an ideal training for a subsequent career in applied mathematics. In his final year as an undergraduate, inspired by a lecture course in the mathematical theory of elasticity, he expressed to Peierls a wish to work for a PhD in that subject. At that time there was no one on Peierls staff able to supervise graduate work in elasticity, but Peierls had been a member of the academic council of the recently-founded University College of North Staffordshire (later Keele University), and he knew that a Birmingham graduate working at Keele could submit a thesis to the University of Birmingham in support of an application for a higher degree. Thus it came about that George, who had graduated BSc with 2.1 Honours in 1951, became (supported by a DSIR Grant) the first graduate student at Keele, an institution beginning its second year of existence, and at which the Professor of Mathematics (E N Sneddon) was the only applied mathematician on the academic staff! However, they were soon joined by A J M Spencer, B Noble and D Berry. The resulting group, though small, was close-knit and lively. Not only did they interact with each other but also with the young lecturers in pure mathematics, which may be partly explained by the fact that each of them lived on the campus and only Sneddon was married.

George duly obtained his MSc degree in 1952 and his PhD in 1954. He was then appointed a Scientific Officer at the Royal Armament Research and Design Establishment, Fort Halstead, Kent, and assigned to the Branch of Theoretical Research in armaments where he worked with R T Shield and H G Hopkins on problems in the mathematical theories of elasticity and plasticity.

From 1957 to 1961 he was a lecturer in Mathematics at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where he worked under the leadership of Professor A E Green, already the leading elastician in the UK – arguably, in the Western World. At the end of that spell George moved to a Senior Lectureship in the Royal College of Science and Technology, Glasgow, soon (1964) to become the University of Strathclyde, where he was promoted in 1968 to Reader in Solid Mechanics and then – after spending 1968-69 as an invited Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin – in 1970 to Professor of Mathematics for Applied Scientists. This post involved responsibility for courses to a large number of students from a wide variety of disciplines other than mathematics, and involved great changes in curriculum content in the ensuing years. He was dedicated to the idea of bringing mathematics and engineering closer together, and he introduced an honours degree that linked mathematics, computer science and operational research. His activities in the university at large were too numerous to mention in detail. Most notably he was Dean of the School of Mathematics and Physics for four years, a post filled by election of the whole staff of the School, reflecting his popularity as a person and as a professional colleague. George was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1975. He held office in the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications at both local and national levels. After his early retirement in 1983 he took a great interest in the work of the Vocational Education Council.

George was one of a comparatively small group of applied mathematicians who, in the post-war years, began to tackle – and solve – three-dimensional problems in solid mechanics of real interest to engineers and physicists. Of the forty-three papers he published, thirty-five were in the field of solid mechanics of Cosserat continua. In all of these he showed not only a mastery of mathematical techniques but also a high measure of physical intuition. By a happy coincidence the last-but-one of his publications on solid mechanics was the manuscript of a course of lectures on the dynamical theory of elasticity that George had delivered at CISM (Centre International des Sciences Mécaniques) in Udine, Italy. At that time the Scientific Director of CISM was Professor W Olszack, a Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences; he attended George's lectures and was so impressed, not only by the elegance of their contents but also by the clarity of George's delivery, that he arranged for them to be translated into Polish and for George to be invited to repeat them in Warsaw (the lecturer speaking in English but the audience being provided with a set of lecture notes in Polish!). The remaining eight published papers were devoted to the solution of mathematical problems in human biology, stemming from an interest George acquired over the years in the work of the Bioengineering Unit of the University of Strathclyde, especially that of Professor J C Barbenel. Five were concerned with models of the renal modulla, the others with heat transfer through the skin, impulse loading of muscle fibres and back-scattering of light by blood. In addition to what was published, he made an important contribution to the analysis of blood oxygenators. These studies, like those in solid mechanics, were characterised by their close relation to reality.

In 1958 George married Olive Holdstock, by whom he had two daughters, Ann and Jill. After Olive's untimely death he married Esmé Burgess and, a little later, following his retirement, he and Esmé moved from Balfron first to Tarland and then to Aboyne. George entered with enthusiasm into the life of the community, concerning himself with the local theatre group, adult education in the area, and the bowling clubs. In all these and other activities he held office. He was a very keen Rotarian; at one time he was President of the Rotary Club of Strathendrick, and he held the same and other offices in the Aboyne and District Rotary Club. Rotary International awarded him a Paul Harris Fellowship in recognition of his services to the community. Throughout his life he was fond of sport, and he particularly loved hill-walking, alone or in

company. After his retirement he found time to train for the London marathon and, having taken part in it, went on to take part in nine other major races in a year, saying that it would be a waste not to use his fitness for further effort!

George was a gentle man with a lively sense of humour, held in great affection by many friends and colleagues. He will be very much missed by all who knew him. He is survived by his wife, Esmé, his two daughters and two grandchildren, Ben and Amy.

I am indebted to Emeritus Professor Sneddon for the account of George's time at Birmingham and his subsequent research work and to Professor Barbenel and Mr J McCulloch (Aboyne and District Rotary Club) for some other details.

DONALD PACK