

JOHN MEADOWS JACKSON  
BSc(Lond), PhD(Cantab), FIMA, FRAS

John Jackson was born on 8 February 1907 in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, near Manchester, and died at his home in Dundee on 23 March 1998 having just passed his 91st birthday. He was elected to Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1947, served on the Council of the Society 1963-66, was congratulated by the Society on fifty years of Fellowship in 1997, and had all but completed fifty-one years as a Fellow when he died. The Society extends sympathy to his widow Pat, and their daughters Kathleen and the twins Esther and Margaret.

John was born into a working-class family but his mother died at his birth and he was brought up by his grandparents. He won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School and from there a scholarship to Imperial College, London. His progress has to count as a memorable example of how, in those difficult years for working-class families after the First World War, family care and the then rare higher educational financial support, taken together, enabled a young man to use his natural abilities to prosper as a student.

At the University of London John took two undergraduate degrees, both with First Class Honours; first, in 1927 a BSc in Physics and second, in 1928 a BSc in Mathematics. All his professional life thereafter he held a global view of the interaction between mathematics and physics.

John's success at Imperial College led to yet another scholarship for him to undertake postgraduate studies at Trinity College, University of Cambridge, under the supervision of the late Sir Neville Mott. He was awarded his degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1933 for a thesis entitled 'Exchange of energy between inert gas atoms and a solid surface'.

After leaving Cambridge John served for a time as an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Manchester. In 1937 he was appointed to a Lectureship in Mathematics at Westfield College, University of London which, in those days, was a women's college. At Westfield there were only three members of the Department of Mathematics, John and two ladies, and between them they did all the teaching and tutorial work in both pure and applied mathematics.

Notwithstanding the demands of teaching and administration, John conducted a modest research programme in mathematical physics, especially in the early years following his PhD studies at Cambridge. He attended many of the research seminars in the Colleges of the University of London. In the years 1932 to 1937 he published a number of research papers in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, the *Proceedings (A) of the Royal Society of London*, the *Journal of Chemical Physics* and the *Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry*. One notable and seminal paper was written jointly with Neville Mott and published in 1932.

Through all his academic life John was a member of the Association of University Teachers. In 1938 he went as a delegate to a Council meeting held in Bristol and in the railway carriage on the way he met another delegate, Pat Harris, a young chemist from the King's College of Household and Social Services, London. Seated together in the hotel in Bristol they discovered that they both lived in Hampstead, and that they both loved music and played instruments. This romantic story had the right ending, for John and Pat were married in 1940.

With the advent of the Second World War in 1939 Westfield College was evacuated to Oxford, but in January 1941 John was seconded to the Mine Design Department of the Admiralty and stationed at Helensburgh. Later in the War he was moved to Fettes College in Edinburgh, to work on the development of mine-sweeping equipment to cope with the increasing menace of influence mines; this work involved sweeping techniques for underwater mines triggered by acoustic, magnetic and water pressure influences. In this work his wide experience in mathematical physics and applied mathematics was invaluable in support of the programme.

At the end of the war John and Pat decided that they did not wish to return to live in London. John applied, successfully, for the post of Lecturer in Mathematics at University College in Dundee, then a constituent College of the University of St. Andrews. He took up this post in January 1946, was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1953 and remained there throughout the metamorphosis of University College to Queen's College (1954), and then to the University of Dundee (1967). He retired from the University in 1974 after nearly thirty years of devoted service, many of them spent as Tutor for Admissions and Adviser of Studies in the Faculty of Science.

John became a member of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society in 1946; he served on the Committee of the Society and held, for the customary period of one year, the office of President.

Personal memories from DCP:

My personal knowledge of John dates from 1947 when I was appointed a Lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at University College, Dundee, at that time led by the late Professor E T Copson. I shared an office with John and he became a close friend; I was delighted, when I married, that he readily agreed to be my best man.

In those early days the Jacksons lived in Wormit, across the Firth of Tay from Dundee, and already had their three daughters. The house was open to any musicians who wanted to play; John played the piano, violin, viola, cello and horn; Pat played the piano, violin and viola and liked to sing sometimes. The first thing John asked me on meeting him was whether I played a musical instrument, and it was through John and Pat that I got to know and to love a whole range of chamber music.

John had other wide cultural interests; he read in several languages, including Russian, and was an avid reader of literature. Although he did not profess a religion he knew his Bible better than many of us who do. He was able to remember so much of what he read making him a remarkable fountain of knowledge.

John loved mountains and was a very skilled climber; he knew his way about the mountains of Scotland. Eventually he gave up this sport, deciding that it was unfair to his wife and family to take the risks involved.

John was a true family man and friend; he was softly spoken and a man of great integrity.

Personal memories from WNE:

I was appointed to the Baxter Chair of Mathematics, Queen's College, Dundee in March 1963. After the University Court meeting, held in St Andrews, I was invited to visit Queen's College by the then Master, Professor A A Matheson. Arthur Matheson took me to meet my new colleagues in the Department of Mathematics but gently informed me that the acting Head of Department, Dr. J M Jackson, had held some hopes of his own appointment to the Chair and Headship.

It was then with some trepidation that I entered the office of Dr Jackson to meet with this quietly spoken man with a tall commanding presence; I was nearly twenty years his junior and felt like calling him "Sir". I introduced myself and suggested that we use first names, to which he gladly agreed. I then took the plunge and said "John, I need your help"; his response was immediate, definite and in the affirmative. We were colleagues for the next ten years until he retired and never once did I sense by word or action any disappointment that a younger man had taken over his reins of office. On a small number of occasions he remonstrated with me, in private, for actions or decisions some of which I later came to see had been inappropriate or even ill-advised. I am in his debt for his generous support, wise counsel and never-failing courtesy over so many years.

Looking back over the years from 1963 to 1974, it is clear that John Jackson had a significant and positive influence in the Department of Mathematics in Dundee that flowed from his quiet ways and comprehensive understanding of the important criteria in University life.

W N EVERITT/D C PACK