

OBITUARY
HAROLD WILLIAM SANDERS 1893–1983



Professor Emeritus H. W. Sanders died on September 3, 1983 in his 90th year. He was the Elder Professor of Mathematics at The University of Adelaide from 1944 to 1958, and was a foundation member of the Society, resigning in 1958 at the time of his retirement.

H. W. Sanders was born on September 16, 1893; his father was a professional organist and established a business in Adelaide for selling musical instruments. H. W. Sanders himself had a deep interest in classical music throughout his entire life. Professor Sanders' grandfather came from Cornwall to Adelaide, shortly after it was colonised and was a Board of Works engineer.

H. W. Sanders received his early education at St. Peter's College, Adelaide, under a scholarship and studied at The University of Adelaide from 1910 to 1912, under a scholarship and the Hartley studentship. At the end of 1912 he graduated as a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Mathematics. At the time of his graduation, he was awarded an 1851 Science Research Bursary and worked under Professor Kerr Grant (later to become Sir Kerr Grant). He resigned his Bursary after six months in order to take up an appointment as a lecturer in mathematics and physics at the Perth Technical School.

In 1916 Sanders was appointed to an assistant lectureship in mathematics and physics at the University of Western Australia and in 1917 was promoted to Senior Lecturer. During the few years he spent there, he enlisted twice in the Australian Imperial Forces, but on each occasion the enlistment was cancelled at the request of the University. One of his students at the University of Western Australia was Isobel Armstrong, the daughter of a Church of England clergyman. Isobel Armstrong and Harold William Sanders were married on July 31, 1920; they had two children Irma Mary and John Veysey. Isobel Sanders graduated from the University of Western Australia and for many years taught mathematics at Woodlands, Church of England Girls Grammar School in Adelaide. Isobel shared her husband's deep interest in music throughout a long and happy marriage.

H. W. Sanders was granted leave by the University of Western Australia in August 1920 and went to Cambridge where he took the examinations for the Mathematical Tripos in 1922 and was placed in the list of wranglers. At the same time he was awarded the Alan Bodley prize for Applied Mathematics by Gonville and Caius College. After spending several months in Europe, mostly in Germany, Sanders came to The University of Adelaide in February 1923 to take up a lectureship in mathematics. For the next few years, the mathematics department at The University of Adelaide had a staff of only two; Professor J. R. Wilton and H. W. Sanders. Sanders was given the responsibility for all the courses in applied mathematics and, in addition, some of the pure mathematics. It is interesting to reflect that, during the next fifty years, this department with an initial staff of two, grew into the Faculty of Mathematical Sciences; and the section dealing with Applied Mathematics, which was initially the responsibility of one person, expanded to a department with a tenured staff of eleven.

In 1944, following the death of Professor J. R. Wilton, Sanders was appointed Elder Professor of Mathematics and Head of the Mathematics Department. Except for short periods of leave and illness, he remained head of the department until his retirement at the end of 1958. Shortly before his appointment to the Chair, Sanders had set up a tutorial system in the department and this was developed and expanded during his tenure as head. This tutorial system is still in

use in most departments of the Faculty of Mathematical Sciences and constitutes an important part of the teaching process.

Although he had outstanding knowledge and ability in mathematics, Professor Sanders never had the opportunity to carry out any original research. This was caused by the extremely large teaching commitment which he carried during his career and, in addition, his heavy work load of examining for the Public Examinations Board of South Australia. He was a gifted and devoted teacher, he took great interest in his students and was unsparing in his efforts to help them with their careers. He will be remembered with affection by many of his students and by his colleagues. A number of his students hold, or have held, professorships in Australia and overseas and several of his students have been elected Fellows of the Australian Academy of Science.

Professor Sanders is survived by his son and daughter, six grandchildren and several great grandchildren. His son John is a well-known physicist with the C.S.I.R.O. and is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science. His grandson Jeffrey holds a Ph.D. (A.N.U.) in Mathematics and is a computer scientist at the New South Wales Institute of Technology.

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