

Obituary

John Butler Morgan (July 1910 – August 1997)



In his 1964 Presidential Address, John Morgan announced as his theme ‘...every teacher must take responsibility for re-educating himself and the prime duty of the Association is to help him.’ [1]. Certainly he demanded nothing less from himself than the very highest standards in this respect and to the end of his teaching career and well beyond he kept abreast of developments both in mathematical education and in the way the subject was developing at university level. Such professional integrity left its mark on both his students and his colleagues.

After a successful three years at Oxford, where he secured not only the expected first but a soccer blue as icing on the cake, John determined upon a career in education and set out with well-merited confidence to find a post commensurate with his talents. But the Thirties were difficult times and he was, as he later admitted, lucky to find anyone at all to employ him. What he secured was a part-time teaching job at Hereford Cathedral School, but his talents were rapidly recognised and his employment there was soon put on a more secure basis. Despite all the social and economic difficulties of those pre-war days, John had a happy time at Hereford and many past

members of that school have affectionate memories of him.

In 1938 he left Hereford for Liverpool Collegiate but then the war intervened, disrupting his burgeoning career as it did with so many others of his generation. John had what he laconically described as 'a difficult war' though others in the know would add that he had a distinguished one too. He reached the rank of major, serving in the Middle East and Italy, where he was wounded. Once he had recuperated from his war wounds, John left the Army and joined the staff at St Edwards, Oxford. After only one year there he was enticed to Harrow School, and it was here that he spent the remainder of his working life, first as Assistant Master, then as Head of Mathematics and finally as Housemaster and Second Master.

The move to Harrow proved a successful and productive one in other ways too, for it was here that he met Kenneth Snell, then Head of Mathematics, and through him, Arthur Siddons – long since retired but still a formidable figure in the wider mathematical world. They introduced John to the Mathematical Association and also to the world of textbook writing. Among their subsequent publications, an excellent four volume work on elementary mathematics for the then new O level examination and a three volume calculus text for sixth-formers should be mentioned. Fashions change and, sadly, those books are no longer in print but in their day they were held in high esteem and were widely used; indeed, it is perhaps not too fanciful to imagine a schoolteacher idly thumbing through them today and picking up a relevant idea or two.

In the Association, John first made his mark as Honorary Treasurer from 1948 to 1959 – difficult and challenging years that demanded of him much time and effort – but he steered his way successfully through them and left the finances in a sound, indeed healthy, condition. In 1964 he became President of the Association, following in the footsteps of his co-authors Siddons and Snell. His year of office was particularly noted for the support he gave to Branches, which he considered a vital part of the nationwide structure of the Association. Over the years, he was a member of a number of committees, perhaps most notably the Teaching Committee and the Algebra Committee that produced the influential 1957 *Report on the teaching of sixth-form algebra*.

John continued his support for the Association over many years and was for long a familiar figure at the Annual General Meetings, but recently his failing eyesight severely restricted his movements. His wife, Joan, died many years ago but he is survived by his son and two daughters.

Reference

1. J. B. Morgan, The thirteenth grade, *Math. Gaz.* 48 (October 1964), pp. 253-267.

S. L. PARSONSON

formerly of Harrow School

Alhambra Cottage, 9 Boundary Road, St John's Wood, London NW8 0HE