

LESLIE MAURICE BROWN  
MSc(Brist), PhD(StAnd)

The Rev Leslie Maurice Brown, Maurice to his friends, was born in Rye, Sussex on 23 April 1904 but spent his early years in Bicester, where his father was minister of the Baptist Church. On the death of his father the family moved to Salisbury, where Maurice received an excellent secondary education at Bishop Wordsworth's School. Here he acquired among other things a love of poetry which remained with him throughout his life. In 1921 he left school and, with the help of a Wiltshire County Scholarship, entered the University of Bristol as a student of Pure and Applied Mathematics. After graduating BSc in 1924 he continued as a research student, working on algebraic geometry under Mr Peter Fraser, and after a year was awarded the degree of MSc. He carried on for a further year as a John Stewart Scholar. Peter Fraser, who came from Aberdeen, seems to have been a most inspiring lecturer. P A M Dirac of quantum theory fame, who graduated in Mathematics at Bristol a year before Brown, remembered Peter Fraser with particular enthusiasm as the one who introduced him to mathematical rigour and to the beauty of projective geometry. For the next few years Brown taught in a number of private schools, where he realized that he had an aptitude for teaching and obtained much enjoyment from it.

In 1930 Brown was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics in University College, Dundee in the University of St Andrews. Here he continued his studies in geometry and in due course obtained his PhD. During his stay in Dundee Brown did much hill-walking, a love for which he had acquired during his Bristol days. It was at this time also that he acquired his wife Euphemia (Effie) Souter from Cupar, Fife.

In 1935 Brown moved to Glasgow as Lecturer in Mathematics in the Royal Technical College, at that time affiliated to the University of Glasgow and now the University of Strathclyde. In 1934, when R O Street, who had graduated as a wrangler with distinction at Cambridge and had worked in geophysics in the University of Liverpool, came to the College as Professor of Mathematics his full-time staff consisted of himself and two lecturers! However, after a year he began to augment his staff by inviting Brown to join it. A significant contribution to the teaching was made by Brown, who devised a second-year course in Mathematics for students working for the Diploma of ARTC in Chemistry. At this time students of Engineering worked on the so-called sandwich system under which they studied from September or October until the following March and then went out to firms for practical experience until the autumn. A consequence of this arrangement was that, in the Summer term, there was very little teaching in the Mathematics Department and a long unbroken period was made available for advanced study or research. Brown made full use of this opportunity by writing several papers on geometry of the kind associated with H F Baker in Cambridge and his disciples such as W L Edge in Edinburgh. Since the work of the Italian school of geometers was very relevant to his own work, Brown learned Italian and, indeed, became very fond of Italy. Apart from the fact that World War II raged for more than half of his time in Glasgow, Brown was very happy there. He lived in Helensburgh from where it was easy for him to have a full day on the hills; the early morning train from Glasgow could take him to Corroon, say, by 9 o'clock. In his lifetime he climbed more than 200 Munros.

On the cessation of hostilities in 1945, universities were faced with the mammoth task of restructuring after the years of dislocation. In the University of Edinburgh A C Aitken, who had succeeded Sir Edmund Whittaker in the Chair of Mathematics a few years earlier, felt that the teaching of Mathematics to students of Engineering needed to be upgraded. After looking around for a suitable person to do this, he invited Brown to join his staff. Brown's previous experience made him eminently suitable for his post which he held from 1946, first as a Lecturer and then as a Senior Lecturer, until he retired in 1974. He lectured with consummate skill in the best tradition of Scottish universities and will be remembered by his many students not only for the clarity of his exposition but also for his understanding of their difficulties and the warmth of his personality. Although he was primarily a pure mathematician, Brown had a shrewd judgement of what was needed by academic engineers and planned his courses accordingly. After coming to Scotland, Brown played an active part in the affairs of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society of which he was at different times Treasurer, President, editor of *Mathematical Notes* and joint editor of the *Proceedings*. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1947. In the mid 1960s he published two small volumes *Solving Problems in Differential Calculus I and II* in the *Solving Problems in Mathematics Series*, started up by Oliver & Boyd but which, unfortunately, never properly got off the ground because of a takeover of the firm. A relaxation that gave him great pleasure over the years was playing the violin in a quartet which met in its members' houses.

On coming to Edinburgh in 1946, Brown joined the Church of St. John the Evangelist in the Episcopal Church in Scotland and so began an association with that Church that lasted for more than half a century. In 1953 he was licensed as a lay reader and in this capacity officiated at one time or another in most of the churches in the Diocese of Edinburgh. After his retirement from the University in 1974, his bishop, Kenneth Carey, persuaded him to go forward for ordination to the priesthood on the grounds that he would be of much value to the Church if he did so. After his ordination in December, 1974, he served as a non-stipendiary member of the clergy of St John's for 14 years, retiring in 1988. His sermons were clear and precise, showed much original thought, and often gave fresh insight into whatever he was discussing. His views were in the centre, or perhaps a little to the right, of the theological spectrum.

After Effie's death in 1968, Maurice lived alone and, being an excellent cook, looked after himself very well until lameness and deafness forced him to move into a nursing home in 1996. Although he had deteriorated physically, his mental powers remained sufficiently strong for him to write a note on an algorithm for square roots, which was published in the *Mathematical Gazette* in November, 1997.

Maurice died in Edinburgh on 10 April 1999 and is survived by his son Walter, daughter-in-law, Marian, and grandson, David. He will be greatly missed not only by them but also by a wide circle of friends and acquaintances who appreciated his friendliness, sincerity, and attractive personality. With an utterly impeccable character he was indeed a veritable “man of God”.

D MARTIN