

PETER McLAREN DONALD DUFF
BSc, PhD(Edin)

Donald Duff was born in Edinburgh on January 31, 1927. In many ways his professional career mirrored his itinerant schooldays in Scotland and England caused by his father's peripatetic work as a personnel officer with the LNER. Donald attended six different schools before becoming a pupil at the Royal High School. From there, encouraged by his parents and Dr Mary Noble FRSE, a neighbour and a well-known plant pathologist, he entered the University of Edinburgh in 1944 with the intention of pursuing agriculture, but a year later he was called up and spent three years in the Fleet Air Arm before returning to the University to study geology. He graduated in 1951 with a First Class Honours degree and immediately joined the British Geological Survey where he was given the task of mapping the coalfields of Notts and Derby, thus forming the basis of his subsequent research career.

In 1954 he was invited to become Lecturer in Economic Geology at the University of Edinburgh. He became a popular Director of Studies and was later promoted to Senior Lecturer and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Science. During sabbatical leave in 1965 he was a Visiting Research Worker at the University of Sydney in Australia where he was able to examine the coalfields of New South Wales. For reasons that only Jean can tell, Donald received a grant to fly to Australia while Jean and her three young children travelled steerage in a migrant boat.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1974 and later that year appointed to the Chair of Applied Geology at the University of Strathclyde, where he became Dean of the School of Civil Engineering. During this period (1974-82) he was much in demand during the summer vacations as a consulting geologist in British Columbia. He resisted attempts to expand the Strathclyde department arguing that he was only prepared to take on as many undergraduates as he could find jobs for. A mounting sense of frustration with University expansion finally let him be headhunted by BP in London to become their Chief Coal Review Geologist. From 1982 to 1987 he subsequently examined and reported on many of the world's major coalfields in North and South America, South Africa, Australia, Malaysia and a more protracted stay in Spain. In spite of sextuple bypass heart surgery in 1985 he was able to continue working until he retired at the age of 60 in 1987.

In his own research, Donald was a late developer. He had previously served three years in the Fleet Air Arm and three years in the Survey. Then as a newly appointed lecturer at Edinburgh he was encouraged by the then Regius Professor, Arthur Holmes FRS, FRSE, to start his PhD research by remapping Ben Hiant, an extinct Tertiary volcano in Ardnamurchan. But it was a poor project at the outset. The ground had previously been mapped meticulously by Dr J.E. Richey FRS, FRSE, and the hypothesis of granitization so enthusiastically pursued by Doris and Arthur Holmes was fast losing favour. Donald eventually abandoned it but by this time the Duffs had fallen in love with Ardnamurchan and bought a house there. The family still retain their close connections with that beautiful area.

Donald Duff's original research really started when he returned to his first love - coal. In the early 1960s he examined with R Beveridge the joint systems in the coal seams of the Midlothian coalfield. They started with the hypothesis that a better understanding of the jointing in the coal seams could lead to more effective methods of coal extraction. Their underground work in different pits in Midlothian in the company of a mining surveyor was arduous and the results unfortunately were not published.

Apart from an early and continuing interest in the relative academic performance of science undergraduates with English and Scottish school examination results published in 1962, his published research was almost entirely concerned with coal and its associated sediments. With A Hallam and E K Walton he wrote the book *Cyclic Sedimentation*, subsequently translated into Russian. He contributed the chapter on Economic Geology to the *Geology of Scotland* and after he retired he edited with Professor Alec Smith the *Geology of England and Wales* in which he wrote the Chapter on Economic Geology. Recently with geological colleagues he updated the most successful geological textbook of the 20th century, *Principles of Physical Geology* by Arthur Holmes. An ambitious multi-volume project on the Geology of China remains unpublished.

Donald Duff was an enthusiastic committee member of geological societies. On three separate occasions he acted as a Council member of the Edinburgh Geological Society and then was elected its Vice-President from 1972 to 1975; he became Secretary of the Geological Society from 1973 to 1976 at the critical time when it was decided to drop its London title and concurrently was also Chairman of its Publications Board. He also acted as an editor of the *Geological Journal* and was on the editorial board of several other journals including the *Scottish Journal of Geology* (Scottish Academic Press), the *RSE Earth Sciences* and *Applied Earth Science*. He was also Chairman of Colby Gold, a company which a few years ago carried out successful but uneconomic exploratory drilling for gold near Aberfeldy.

A most cheerful and friendly man, Donald Duff was a genuine *bon viveur*. As an undergraduate he was elected President of the King's Buildings Common Room at Edinburgh University. This early exposure to committee work stood him in good stead for the rest of his life. He was a member of numerous University committees both in Edinburgh and

Strathclyde and most recently was co-opted to membership of the General Council of the University of Edinburgh. As a most clubbable of clubbable men, he served on such convivial committees as the Edinburgh University Staff Club in Chambers Street Edinburgh, and later the University of Strathclyde Staff Club at Ross Priory near Loch Lomond. Donald also much enjoyed his membership of the Athenaeum in London and the New Club in Edinburgh. He was a member of the Geological Society Dining Club in London and most recently served as Treasurer of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Dining Club. There he inherited from Neil Campbell the discrepancy of the lost 1/2d and continuing adversarial questioning from the late Lord Cameron about the Treasurer's traditional incompetence in handling the accounts.

Donald enjoyed following most sport. He had been an enthusiastic footballer as a schoolboy. An operation for the removal of a disc in 1946 brought his sporting career to an end but that made no difference to his zest for life. He was a passionate follower of Hearts FC and he would have been overjoyed to have lived to see *his* team win the Scottish Cup in 1998. All too often the fortunes of the Scottish rugby team made him despair but that did not stop him becoming a debenture holder and regular attender at Murrayfield. Throughout his life he attracted an extraordinarily wide range of friends. He adored conversation, especially argument, and it was sometimes difficult to know whether jokes or disputation pleased him more, but good humour and boisterous laughter invariably triumphed in the end.

Throughout his life he gained much steadfast and, whenever necessary, hilariously corrective support from his wife Jean whom he married in 1952. His boys, Peter and Alistair, are now both successful lawyers in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and his daughter Jennifer is a schoolteacher in the Shetlands. There are six grandchildren. After some months of illness Donald Duff died of cancer on the 23rd March 1998 in the Fairmile Madame Curie Centre.

The last word must surely rest with his wife Jean "Life with Donald was never dull!"

I am much indebted to Jean Duff for her willing help with some of the details of Donald's life.

GORDON CRAIG