

## OBITUARY

ALEXANDER ROBERT REID  
M.A., F.F.A., F.I.A., F.S.S.  
1903-1971

By the death on 20th April 1971 of Alexander Robert Reid the Faculty lost a distinguished Past-President and one of its most loyal members. Although he had been in impaired health for some time, and an illness in the early months of the year had given cause for anxiety, he appeared to be making a good recovery and his death came as a great shock to his many friends.

He was an Edinburgh man, educated at the Royal High School, of which he was dux in 1920, and at Edinburgh University, where he graduated M.A. with first class honours in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1924, having won every possible medal and distinction in the process. In addition to his degree he had obtained the Diploma in Actuarial Mathematics which the then professor of mathematics, E. T. (later Sir Edmund) Whittaker, had introduced in co-operation with the Faculty to encourage the entry of mathematical graduates into the actuarial profession. With this assistance, he completed his Fellowship in 1926 and, for good measure, added to his qualifications the Fellowship of the Institute of Actuaries in 1929.

On leaving the University he entered the service of the Standard Life in Edinburgh, the first mathematical graduate to be employed by that office. There his progress was as rapid and inevitable as his academic career had foreshadowed. His first official appointment was that of Assistant Agency Manager, and as the Agency Manager whom he assisted was A. R. Davidson it is clear that the office's new business organisation lacked neither technical advice nor energetic example. Thereafter he was successively Investment Secretary, Secretary, Deputy Manager and finally, when Davidson retired in ill health in 1951, he was appointed General Manager and Actuary, a position which he held for thirteen years.

The years of his managership were busy and difficult. In Great Britain the life assurance industry was recovering from the restrictions and frustrations of wartime and was expanding rapidly. New patterns of investment were emerging. New legislation affecting areas as far apart as taxation and national pensions called for new thinking and the discarding of many long-accepted principles. In

other countries comparable but different changes were taking place so that the problems of managing a company with overseas interests were formidable. Unflurried and unhurrying, Reid not only kept his own company on a steady course but, by advice and example, particularly in 1962 and 1963 when he was Chairman of the Associated Scottish Life Offices, helped others to do the same.

He did not allow his business activities to restrict his services to the Faculty. In 1929 he succeeded R. Ll. Gwilt as tutor in Life Contingencies and many of his former students, now themselves elderly or retired, remember gratefully the lucid and helpful way in which he introduced them to the fundamentals of their science and the patient courtesy with which he listened to and tried to ease their difficulties. For eighteen years he was a member of the Board of Examiners, for twelve of these as its Secretary. At various times he was Council member, Librarian, Editor, Treasurer and, from 1958 to 1960, President.

He made many contributions to our *Transactions* on a wide variety of subjects, usually in collaboration with one or other of his colleagues. The first of these, which was actually delivered in 1925 before he qualified, was a joint paper with A. R. Davidson on the theory of graduation. Two years later the same partnership produced an important paper on the subject of rates of mortality in which the theory of "Generation" mortality was expounded and developed. It is interesting, too, to note that in 1931 he submitted a short paper to the Actuarial Congress in Stockholm showing how the idea of a compound reversionary bonus could be extended to allow for one rate of bonus on the sum assured and another, probably a higher rate, on attaching bonuses. At the time this seemed no more than an interesting theoretical exercise, but thirty years later this type of bonus was adopted by many offices, including his own.

Those who knew Alec Reid best would probably agree that his qualities of mind and character almost ideally fitted him for an actuarial career. He was a clear and logical thinker with an enviable capacity for reducing a problem to its essentials so that the principles governing its solution emerged. He was never satisfied until the solution had been set out in lucid and concise terms and all loose ends tidied up, but when a rigorous theoretical solution had been reached he was equally insistent that it must be applied to a practical problem in a practical way.

He had a very proper pride in his profession and no one took a higher view of the responsibilities which an actuary must assume or of the integrity with which his duties should be discharged. In discussion and on committees he often said less than many who

spoke without his knowledge or authority, but his words carried weight and often his quietly persuasive methods were more effective than vigorous argument.

Outside his business and professional affairs he had many interests. He was a director of an investment trust. He gave much loyal service to the Church of Scotland both in his own Congregation and as one of the Church's General Trustees. He was active in the affairs of his old school. His recreations were golf and bridge. For some fifty years he was a member of Duddingston Golf Club, served on its council, was elected its Captain and was honoured with its life membership. He was a keen member of the Melville Bridge Club and a keen student of the theory of the game with an impressive library of books on the subject. He was one of those who founded the Edinburgh Insurance Bridge League and he presented the cup for which the offices annually compete. (Incidentally he was more than once a member of the team which won it!)

He played both games, as he did everything, with care and concentration even on the friendliest and least formal occasions, not because he disliked losing but because he believed that any game of skill was most enjoyable when it was a contest between two opponents who were both trying their hardest to win.

All this added up to a formidable total demand on time and energy and he often taxed his never very robust health to the limit and beyond. Certainly he could never have done what he did without the constant care and support of his wife. Sharing fully in his interests, she surrounded him in his home with the atmosphere of quietness in which he could relax and be refreshed. To many it would seem that he lived his life in too narrow a groove, content to repeat experiences that he had enjoyed often before. To that the answer is to be found in the peace and happiness he enjoyed in his family circle and with his chosen friends. His lines, he felt, were cast in pleasant places and he did not wish to change. Even in the closing months of his life, when he could no longer do many of the things he enjoyed, this happiness remained.

J. B. D.