

OBITUARY

GEOFFREY TIMMS, O.B.E., Ph.D., F.R.S.E.

Geoffrey Timms, a Yorkshire lad from Bradford, took his first degree at Leeds; his record as an undergraduate so impressed Professor W. P. Milne as to produce a cordial recommendation to study geometry at Cambridge under H. F. Baker. Timms was, and always appreciated that he was, most fortunate to arrive in Cambridge when Baker's school was flourishing; but he was, although by nature a very retiring sort of person, not at all intimidated by the galaxy of talent there surrounding him and suggested emendations to what Baker said in lectures on more than one occasion.

Baker set Timms a problem which he solved to—no lesser word will serve—perfection, and so gained his Ph.D. in 1928. Soon after the 27 lines on a cubic surface F had been discovered the question arose: what kinds of isolated singularities can F acquire, and what are the consequent coincidences among its lines? The question of the singularities was answered by Schläfli, on whose paper Cayley wrote a long commentary dealing also with the lines. Baker asked Timms to obtain all these cubic surfaces as projections of non-singular surfaces in spaces of higher dimensions. Clebsch had mapped F on a plane π by the cubic curves through six points, so that F is the projection of P , the surface of order 9 in $[9]$ mapped by *all* cubic curves in π , from a hexad H of points on P . F may acquire singularities consequent upon confluences in H , or else by more points of H than would do so in a random choice lying on certain curves on P . But while it may be easy to surmise that something can be done it is quite another matter actually to do it. Timms obtained not only all the Schläfli–Cayley surfaces but also those, singular and non-singular, of order n in $[n]$ for $3 \leq n \leq 9$. He displays them all in an illuminating genealogical table [*Proc. Royal Soc. A*, 119 (1928), 238].

It was in October 1928 that Timms obtained his first, and only, university post: an assistantship at St. Andrews which remained a year to year appointment for at least six years. He attended meetings of the Society in Edinburgh frequently and was our protagonist at a celebrated meeting in Dundee: a meeting unique in our annals and surely to remain so in that it marked the unbroken tenure of a professorial chair for 50 years. The jubilarian was Professor Steggall, one of the original staff when University College was founded at Dundee in 1883. At this meeting, after Professor Whittaker pronounced a eulogy, Timms gave a memorable lecture on projective geometry using the double-six for his launching pad.

Timms did not appreciate warmth and seemed impervious to cold: no Mediterranean holidays for him; Iceland was his Mecca. He had two absorbing hobbies: “wireless”, as it was then called, and motor cycling. The latter took him once to Moscow where he had to endure hospitalisation to recover from typhoid; the former turned his room at Dean's Court into a mantrap, cables bestrewing the floor made the word “wireless” a complete misnomer. He liked St. Andrews, especially in the winter; but an offer of

government service took him to the Foreign Office where he spent the rest of his working life; he was awarded the O.B.E. in 1953. His last years, from 1975, he spent with his daughter and her family in Canada and New Zealand.

W. L. EDGE