

## A. P. ROLLETT

News of the death of A. P. Rollett came as a shock and a blow to his friends scattered widely up and down the country. Scores of run of the mill schoolmasters like myself feel a deep sense of personal loss. I first met him when he called into my school in his beloved Lincolnshire in the early fifties just after a full inspection. Since that time the debt I owe for his inspiration, help, and friendship is impossible to repay. There are many, many others who feel the same.

Rollett was a far more able mathematician than he ever claimed to be. In the teaching of mathematics he always put first things first. While he was ever encouraging experiment, he scorned gimmickry and was never taken in by it. While he hated sloppiness, he had a fine sense of what degree of rigour suited any given situation. He hated portentous jargon, and scorned the modern band wagon riders, who even in the everyday rough and tumble of the class room pedantically distinguish numerals from numbers and insist on the empty set instead of zero. Yet he was an ardent supporter of the 'purity' component of Dr Matthews' P vector.

He was most entertaining company on any social occasion yet had an endearing habit of worrying after any such occasion that maybe he had talked too much. The lightness of his mathematical style is well exemplified in the Ministry pamphlet No 36 on the Teaching of Mathematics in Secondary Schools (H.M.S.O. 1958). During the last few years he had been collecting a large amount of material on the life of George Boole. Most of this material was new, and the book was partly written. The last time I saw him, some few weeks before his death, he was on his way back to Devonshire from Lincolnshire, and he was very full of a most intriguing sequence of discovery which had led him to the house in which Boole had spent one of his periods of schoolmastering. All who have any interest in mathematics must fervently hope that all the material will not be lost to the world, and that Rollett's extensive work on it will somehow be published.

Rollett's interest in Boole sprang partly from the attractiveness of Boole's mathematical work and of his character. But one of its sources was undoubtedly the fact that Boole was a Lincolnshire man. Rollett was passionately fond of his native county, its history and its way of life. He loved its open skies, its wide spaces and the gentle unspoilt hills and valleys and the wolds. His attitude to mathematics had its image in his attitude to the craftsmanship in well designed machinery. He used to say (quite rightly) that the tone of any school he visited was immediately revealed by the reactions of the youngsters to his vintage Rolls.

In spite of his far flung journeying about Britain, he was a keen and practical gardener, and obviously a very hard working one. Many of us must be envious of his apple tree grown from a seed from that from which the apple (mythical?) fell before Newton's eyes. He had a deep feeling and knowledge of music and had catholic tastes for it. He had another theory that one could assess the type of mathematician a man was, by knowing whether he was also an amateur musician. He had a great respect for good wine, good food, and elegance in living. In short he was a very full man.

We must be thankful that we made him our President before he left us. His contribution to school mathematics has been outstanding, and his death is a loss since he had much more to contribute. And to many, from primary school to university, who are interested in the problems of teaching mathematics, his death is the loss of an inspiring friend.

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COLONEL LOUIS MARQUARDT THEAKSTONE, T.D.

The North Eastern Branch of the Association has suffered a great loss through the unexpected death of Col. L. M. Theakstone on 24th January, 1968.

Col. Theakstone had been a member of the Mathematical Association for many years. He was President of the Branch from 1955 to 1957, and subsequently a Vice-President. In addition he served the Branch as Auditor from 1957 to 1965, and as Secretary from 1965 onwards.

Having spent his youth in what is now the city of Leningrad, Col. Theakstone chose as his Presidential Address to the Branch in October 1955 to speak on "A Schoolboy in Russia 40 years ago."

Because of his fluency in the Russian language, he was in September 1941 appointed interpreter to the British Military Mission in Russia. After service in Kuibyshev and Moscow, and at the international conferences at Yalta, Potsdam and San Francisco, he returned to teaching in September 1946.

A graduate of the University of Edinburgh, Col. Theakstone came to the North East in 1931, and from then until 1953, (except for war service), he was a member of the Mathematics staff of the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne. From 1953 to 1964 he was Head of Mathematics Department at Gateshead Grammar School. After his retirement he continued to teach part-time at Gateshead.

During his life Col. Theakstone had many interests, all of which he tackled with tremendous energy and enthusiasm. Apart from his work for our Branch, he had in the past given distinguished services to the Territorial Army and was a keen amateur astronomer. His pupils will remember him for his interest in the C.C.F., in astronomy, in chess—but above all for his sympathetic and inspired teaching and his flair for making mathematics live.

In addition to losing a member and most effective secretary, the Branch has lost a friend and wise counsellor who will be sadly missed by us all.

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