



OBITUARY

Associate Professor W. (Bill) Henderson (1943–2001)

Bill Henderson was born the son of a coalminer and grew up in Ashington, near Newcastle in the north-east of England. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Sheffield, and then commenced studying at Sheffield toward a Ph.D. under the supervision of Dr. Charles Pearce. At this stage Bill was studying various aspects of the analysis of priority queues. In 1968, Bill was half way through his candidature when Charles accepted a position at the University of Adelaide. With the intention of returning to England after finishing his degree, Bill, with his wife Marilyn and two young sons Mark and Iain (who was only six months old), followed Charles to Australia. On his arrival, Bill took up a position as senior tutor in the University of Adelaide's Department of Mathematics.

The Henderson family's plans to move back to the UK never eventuated. Their daughter Kirsty was born in Australia and, after living for a time in the suburbs of Adelaide, they bought a house standing on three hectares of land in the Adelaide hills town of Lobethal, where they have lived ever since. It was there that Bill tended his vegetable garden and planted the trees that attracted the native birds that he loved to watch.

In 1971 the Department of Mathematics was split into separate Departments of Applied and Pure Mathematics. Bill's interests in the applications of probability to real-world problems made it natural that he become a member of the Department of Applied Mathematics. Between that time and his retirement in January 2001 he was promoted to Lecturer (1971), Senior Lecturer (1980) and Associate Professor (1992). In 1985, the Teletraffic Research Centre (TRC) was set up under the Directorship of Dr. Les Berry, to provide contract research services to the telecommunications industry. Bill was one of the founding staff members of the TRC and, after contributing in various roles, he became Director in 1992. The fact that the TRC still exists and is flourishing today is largely due to his efforts.

Bill will be remembered by his students as an inspiring lecturer. He was responsible for a significant number of students deciding to take up study of applied probability at Honours and Ph.D. level. Once students reached this level, Bill was an enthusiastic supervisor who was always coming up with ideas. He was also extremely generous; for example, he used the funds he personally earned from his TRC activities to support travel by his graduate students to overseas institutions and conferences. They all benefited from this exposure to the international applied probability community, and many of them have gone on to make substantial contributions.

In the applied probability community, Bill will be best remembered for his research on insensitivity theory, product-form queueing networks and loss networks. He was among the first to prove product-form results for batch movement networks and stochastic Petri nets. Also, he was the first to show that many forms of network with triggered customer movement maintained their product-form stationary distribution under state-dependent routing. His use of the time-reversed process in establishing these results was innovative.

Bill had a wider involvement in the cause of applied mathematics in the university, national and international environments. He took part in departmental governance, organised conferences and was regularly invited to speak both in Australia and overseas.

He was a fun-loving person who took a leading part in any social activities that were happening. In particular, he was a stalwart of Adelaide University intramural sports teams, the lunchtime running group and the department's restaurant club. In the days when such activities were popular, he loved to play bridge and backgammon in the tea room. His house at Lobethal was the scene of many a departmental party, and he was one of the first to RSVP to attend other departmental social activities. Bill played competitive rugby into his 40s, but was also keenly interested in all sports, and became a keen supporter of both the Adelaide Crows and Port Power Australian football teams.

In 1998, Bill was diagnosed with kidney and bowel cancer. He fought the cancer with great bravery, not allowing it to get on top of his usual good humour. There were several times when it seemed that he might have beaten it, and then bad times when it re-appeared. The cancer finally won the battle on April 27, 2001, but not before Bill shared a joke with his wife Marilyn and a nurse within an hour of his death. Bill has been survived by Marilyn, children Mark, Iain and Kirsty, and nine grandchildren. He was a great bloke, who showed how life should be lived. He will be sorely missed.

Charles Pearce
Peter Taylor
Ernie Tuck