

OBITUARY

JAMES BREMNER DOW, MA, BA, FFA

James Bremner Dow died on 8th August 1987 in his 82nd year. He was honoured, admired and respected by all his colleagues for his business and professional achievements. Above all, however, it was his fine personal qualities which leave us in the profession with a deep sense of loss. He had the ability to make friends wherever he went, whatever he did or whoever he met. He had a wonderful gift of pawky Scottish humour which combined with his keen intellect and great common-sense enabled him to express himself with interesting lucidity in all the spheres of life in which he participated. The Faculty has lost one of its most distinguished Fellows but all those who knew him or worked with him in business or the profession have lost a friend.

He was educated at George Watson's College, Edinburgh and then proceeded to Hons. Mathematics degrees at Edinburgh and Cambridge. He was, therefore, relatively old when at age 23 he joined the Standard Life Assurance Company as a junior apprentice and started his actuarial career in the Faculty of Actuaries.

In the Standard Life he filled a series of important official positions, Actuary, Secretary, Deputy General Manager and finally—almost inevitably one might say—he deservedly became General Manager of his Company in 1964. In his early days as an official of the Standard Life he had two major tasks in both of which he displayed the great efficiency we came to expect of him. The first major task covered the period of the Second World War 1939-1945 where he played an important part in enabling the Standard Life to continue its expansion, with the help of a staff short both in numbers and technical skill. The second, and probably more important contribution to the Standard Life, was the launching of its occupational pensions department. Along with the late A. R. Davidson he gave his Company a sound start in this field where the Company is now one of the industry's leaders.

In his capacity as General Manager he visited all the branches of the Company at home and overseas. Although, as might be expected, he took great care over the efficiency and success of his Company, this in no way prevented him from taking a keen personal interest in the welfare of his fellow workers in the Company. On many of his visits he was accompanied by Mrs Dow and her charm and keen interest in her husband's activities contributed materially to his successful managership.

Few Fellows have given so much to the Faculty of Actuaries as J. B. Dow has done. He qualified as a Fellow in 1931 and quickly started to take part in Faculty activities. Two years after he qualified he was appointed a Tutor. All those who were his students—including the writer—recall how interesting he made the subject of Life Contingencies and how very clear and informative were his lectures and test papers. That fortunate group owe him a special debt of gratitude. In 1933 he also submitted his first paper, jointly with the late A. R. Reid, to the Faculty on the subject of Graduation by Osculatory Interpolation.

He was also a member of the Board of Examiners and in 1948-50 was Secretary before becoming Chairman of the Board for the period 1950-1954. In addition to these posts he also filled the post of Hon. Librarian to the Faculty for the eight year period 1938-1946. On his retirement as Chairman of the Board of Examiners he was elected Hon. Secretary of the Faculty which office he held for the four year period to 1958 when after 25 years continuous service to the Faculty he retired from the Council. He had little respite, however, as he was elected Treasurer for the period 1963-65 and became a Vice-President in 1965. During all these activities he made two major contributions to the Faculty. Along with J. L. Anderson he produced an actuarial Text-book "Actuarial Statistics" Vol. 2. In 1957 he was selected to submit a paper to an international audience of leading actuaries present at the Centenary Congress of the Faculty. In his treatment of the subject—"On the Transaction of Life Assurance and Annuity Business without Participation in Profits"—he showed his usual skill in presentation and the discussion which took place showed how much interest he had aroused in his distinguished audience.

He was duly elected President for the years 1966-68 and during his Presidential term of office, represented the Faculty at the International Congress in Munich in 1968.

Not content with his non-stop service to the Faculty, J. B. Dow did not rest after his retirement. He conducted a most interesting piece of historical actuarial research and presented the results of his enquiries in 1972 in a paper entitled "Early Actuarial Work in Eighteenth Century Scotland". He also served on various committees. One of these, the Hilary Scott Committee on Property Bonds and Life Assurance, was on a subject of much interest to the profession and the report produced by the Committee was discussed at the Faculty in 1973.

Notwithstanding the heavy demands of his business and professional life, he had many outside interests and activities. He gave great service to the Church of Scotland not only as an Elder in his own congregation but also in the wider sphere of the Church finances as a whole. He was a keen and skilful golfer and enjoyed his membership of the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers at Muirfield. He had a love of literature, art and music and was a keen gardener. His speeches and writings reflected his literary knowledge, his house was adorned with many beautiful paintings he had purchased, while his garden and greenhouse exemplified his gardening ability. Above all, however, he was a family man and the achievements of his children and grandchildren gave him and Mrs Dow great joy.

In 1973 the Faculty of Actuaries awarded him the unique award of a Gold Medal—the first occasion on which the Faculty alone has awarded such a medal, the previous two occasions being jointly with the Institute in England. Although naturally a modest man, this recognition by those who really knew and appreciated his service gave James Bremner Dow much pride and great pleasure.

J. G. W.