MICHAEL PATRICK O'DONNELL

Michael Patrick O'Donnell was born in Brisbane on 16th September, 1928. Despite being handicapped since the age of ten by diabetes, he entered the University of Queensland as an Open Scholar in 1946 and qualified for the degree of Bachelor of Science at the end of 1948. The following year he was employed as a Demonstrator in Physics and he was then appointed a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics for two years. During this period he studied part-time for the Honours degree in Mathematics and this was awarded in 1951 with First Class Honours and a University Medal for Outstanding Merit. He secured the degree of Master of Science in 1952 for a thesis on the theory of rings.

In 1952 he was appointed to a Lectureship in Mathematics in the Department of External Studies and there taught a variety of courses, whilst continuing to lecture to internal students, in particular on algebra to Honours students. In 1955 he was awarded a Foundation Travelling Scholarship, and was granted leave of absence to enable him to proceed to the University of Cambridge. There he enrolled as a research student with the aim of taking the Ph.D. degree. He was unable to find a suitable supervisor for work in ring-theory, and decided to work on the theory of groups under the supervision of Dr. D.R. Taunt.

His leave of absence, even with some extension, expired before he had satisfied the residential requirements, but he was granted permission to complete his work and submit a dissertation after his return to Australia. During his absence he was appointed to an internal Lectureship in Mathematics and he returned to those duties in February, 1958. Whilst in Cambridge, he had made some progress in research on wreath products of groups, but subsequently his results were superseded by published work of others, and he never completed his dissertation. Indeed, throughout his career he never published any mathematical work.

Michael's working life was spent entirely in the service of the University of Queensland, with two absences on study leave, once to Cambridge and once to Oxford. Over the years he taught a wide range of courses and was instrumental in the introduction of a variety of new and significant courses at Pass level. He was very conscious of the needs of the less gifted students; his teaching was meticulous and he spared no effort to help his students in any way possible. However, his main teaching impact was in the area of algebra, his special interest. For many years he gave Final Honours courses in group-theory and a surprising number of the students that he taught now occupy distinguished positions in that discipline. In 1962 he was promoted to a Senior Lectureship.

In addition to his teaching duties, Michael played a full part in Departmental affairs. In particular, he was for many years responsible for the Mathematics Library, at a time of considerable growth and improvement. He was probably best known to the academic staff generally for his concern with wider University affairs, especially with general questions of University government. He was an active member of several Faculty Boards, and in 1974 was elected by the staff to the University Senate.

All this activity is the more remarkable when considered against a background of ill-health, no doubt stemming from his basic diabetic condition. He suffered a heart attack in 1961 and a severe bout of jaundice in 1964, whilst in Cambridge. In 1973 a wound to one heel became gangrenous, forcing the amputation of a lower limb. It was extraordinary how soon after this he was again actively walking and driving with an artificial limb. Indeed, he never allowed his physical condition to restrict his range of activities and was always a cheerful and co-operative colleague. He died in his room at the University on the evening of 11th October, 1976, whilst waiting to give a lecture.

Michael O'Donnell was a University man in a wide and well-rounded sense. The Australian university scene is the poorer for his passing at the early age of forty-eight.

C.S. Davis