

WILLIAMS, James Lewis (Jim) – 1917 to 1993 Obituary

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It is prepared at the request of his daughter, Jill King (email 18 January 2022).

James Lewis (Jim) Williams



Jim Williams was presented with the B H Neumann award at a function on Thursday 24 September 1992 at the Art Gallery, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney. The function was presided by University Vice Chancellor Professor Don McNicol, and Head of the School of Mathematics and Statistics Professor Gus Lehrer.

In Peter O'Halloran's citation speech he noted that Jim was a past Director of First and Second Year Studies within the former Department of Pure Mathematics at the University.

Peter noted that Jim had made a significant contribution to the enrichment of mathematics education, not only in New South Wales, but also for the whole of Australia. He was

1. Foundation National Director of the Australian Mathematical Olympiad Training Programme from 1979 to 1986.
2. Leader of the Australian International Mathematical Olympiad teams from 1981 until 1985.
3. Chairman of the Australian Mathematical Olympiad Problems Committee from 1980 until 1985.
4. Member of the Australian Mathematics Competition Problems Committee for seven years.

Obituary

Born East Newcastle 1917, died Sydney 01 February 1993

Jim Williams was born and raised in Newcastle, attending Newcastle Boys High School. In Newcastle he was a keen surfer and played grade cricket and baseball. (He had a strong love of sport and was also in later life an avid follower of Australian teams in cricket, rugby league and rugby union.)

He attended the University of Sydney and graduated in 1938 with first class honours in physics and first class honours in mathematics. In 1939 he graduated from Sydney Teachers College, winning the Jones Medal. In the same year he set out as a secondary school teacher with the NSW Department of Education.

Jim served with the Royal Australian Air Force during World War 2, first meeting his future wife Dorothy in Melbourne while training, then serving in the Solomon Islands until they were captured by the Japanese in 1942. He then saw further action while variously based in New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Hawaii and Milne Bay. He married Dorothy in Melbourne in 1944 and reached the rank of Squadron Leader.

In 1946 he resumed his role as a teacher. In 1946 and 1947 he became a Lecturer in Mathematics at the Sydney Teachers College and in 1947 was awarded the Gowrie Research Travelling Scholarship, which enabled him to attend King's College Cambridge. Between 1947 and 1949 he graduated BA with honours in Parts 2 and 3 of the Mathematical Tripos. During this period he also served on the Council of the Mathematical Association (UK).

He returned to Australia, and between 1950 and 1959 he was Head of the Department of Mathematics at Sydney Teachers College. During this time he was a member of all mathematics syllabus committees of the NSW Board of Secondary Studies, was assistant examiner, examiner and chief examiner of mathematics at the NSW Leaving Certificate examinations, member of the primary mathematics syllabus committees of the

NSW Department of Education and had become a part-time Lecturer in Mathematics at the University of Sydney.

From 1950 to 1955 Jim was Editor of the *Australian Mathematics Teacher*.

In 1952 he graduated MSc at the University of Sydney and in 1954 MA at Cambridge University.

From 1959 to 1964 Jim was Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at the University of Sydney, and from 1964 to 1975 he was Director of First and Second Year Studies in Pure Mathematics there. During this time he co-authored, with Alistair McMullen, the very successful series of secondary school mathematics texts *On Course Mathematics* published by Macmillan Co. of Australia.

From 1950 to 1975 Jim was a member of the Executive of the Mathematical Association of NSW (MANSW). In 1967 and 1968 he was its President. Through this time he was also a member of the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (US). He was also a regular contributor of articles to the *Australian Mathematics Teacher* and to the *Mathematics Bulletin* of the NSW Department of Education, and Lecturer at Mathematics Seminars organised by the NSW Inservice Training Department. In 1975 Jim was made an Honorary Life Member of MANSW.

In 1964 he was a member of the organising committee for the UNESCO Mathematics Conference held in Sydney.

In 1969 Jim was awarded a Carnegie Travelling Scholarship and spent a year in the US investigating mathematics education at secondary and tertiary levels, attending NCTM Conferences, and taking part in Summer Schools.

From 1973 to 1976 he was Convenor of a Committee which prepared published solutions to the Higher School Certificate examination papers for MANSW. In 1975 he inaugurated a NSW Mathematical Olympiad for Year 11 students based on the USA Mathematical Olympiad. This was later renamed by MANSW as the *JL Williams Competition*.

During the late 1970s this experience enabled Jim to become one of the main lobbyists for Australia to become a participating country at the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) and from 1979 to 1986 he was the National Director of Training for the Australian program and Team Leader for Australia. The last of these events was the first of the IMOs attended by Terry Tao. In this time Jim was also a member of the Problems Committee of the Australian Mathematics Competition, which had just begun.

In 1992 Jim was honoured with the presentation of a BH Neumann Award of the Australian Mathematics trust.

In his MANSW obituary in 1993 for Jim, Jim's friend Geoff Ball noted that Jim was a *character*. Jim was certainly that. In his presence Jim was larger than life, always positive, cheerful, a great sense of humour, strongly batting for the presence of geometry at all occasions. For people like Geoff, who worked with him for many years, he was a major inspiration. Even for others of us who only knew Jim in his later career, he also was. Jim, more than anyone, epitomised a great and colourful period of mathematics and mathematics teaching, in New South Wales and beyond.

Peter Taylor, December 2012

(based to a large extent on information supplied by his family).