

The Origins of the Institute

In the spring of 1959 Prof. M. J. Lighthill organized the first meeting of the British Theoretical Mechanics Colloquium at the University of Manchester with the aim of catering for the needs of a large body of mathematicians in universities, Government establishments and elsewhere. The response was immediate and so enthusiastic that arrangements were made for the Colloquium to meet annually, at a different university each year. Encouraged by this success, Prof. Lighthill in 1962 (being by that time Director of the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough) proposed in an after-dinner speech at the Colloquium in Bristol that a professional institute of applied mathematicians should be set up. He followed this up at the Colloquium at Liverpool in 1963 by calling a meeting of all interested people to discuss the project. Nearly 300 attended and almost unanimously endorsed his views and authorized him to take action towards the formation of an institute to meet the needs of all those working in mathematics and its various applications. An *ad hoc* committee, consisting of Profs. G. J. Kynch, D. C. Pack, R. S. Scorer and K. Stewartson, was formed to help him in this task.

Almost simultaneously but independently, in May of 1959, a committee was formed which consisted of the heads of the mathematics departments of several colleges of technology together with some interested mathematicians from universities, industry and Government research establishments. Mr. A. Geary, Head of the Department of Mathematics at Northampton College of Advanced Technology, London, was elected chairman.

This committee drew up a memorandum setting out the arguments in favour of an institute and outlining its proposed objects and activities. This was circulated for comment to eminent people in industrial and other research organizations who themselves were either mathematicians or responsible for the employment of mathematicians. The committee also obtained the views of learned and professional societies and of leading mathematicians in universities.

The replies varied considerably, but the number containing encouragement was sufficient to justify further action. Some, however, were worried lest the result might be just another mathematical organization, and some were anxious about the position of pure mathematics in the Institute and about the possible attitude of pure mathematicians to the proposal.

The Geary Committee (as it came to be called) next sought an interview with representatives of the London Mathematical Society (LMS) and of the Mathematical Association (MA) and a meeting was held at Burlington House on Thursday, 2 February 1961. Prof. H. A. Heilbronn, Prof. V. C. A. Ferraro and Dr. F. Smithies represented the LMS, Mr. W. J. Langford the MA, and Prof. W. G. Bickley, Dr. J. Crank, Mr. A. Geary, Dr. J. M. Hammersley and Dr. S. H. Hollingdale represented the sponsors of the Institute. Prof. Heilbronn was voted into the Chair.

The LMS members subsequently reported to their Council, and in due course Prof. Heilbronn, as President, wrote to the sponsors of the Institute. He said that his Council had concluded that the aims of the proposal Institute would not lead to any rivalry

with the LMS, at any rate in the immediate future. They had reservations, however, about the proposed name of the Institute.

The Geary Committee consulted also, among others, the Royal Statistical Society, the British Computer Society (BCS) and the Operational Research Society (ORS). These made the point that they each had many members who were not mathematicians and that consequently amalgamation with any of them would be inappropriate.

Mr. Geary then called a meeting at his College on 21 July 1961. He invited members of the LMS, the MA, the BCS and the ORS to meet his committee, not as delegates but as individual members of their respective societies. Unfortunately the invitation sent to the Secretary of the LMS for his members did not reach him; members from the other three societies attended.

At the end of the meeting Mr. J. T. Combridge, then president of the MA, gave an invitation to Mr. Geary's committee to select representatives to meet the Standing Committee of the MA in September. This was welcomed and accepted, and a meeting was held in King's College, London on 21 September 1961, Mr. Geary bringing with him Prof. Bickley and Dr. Hollingdale. The MA Standing Committee offered to recommend (a) the appointment of an additional Hon. Assistant Secretary of the Association with special responsibility for technology; (b) the expansion of the Association's recently established Diploma Examination Board so as to provide for a Diploma in the mathematics of technology in addition to the new Diploma for mathematics teachers; (c) the setting up of an Editorial Board of the Association with a view to issuing a new publication that would cater for the interests represented by the Geary Committee in areas not already covered by *The Mathematical Gazette*. A second meeting was held on 27 October to work out the detailed action implicit in these proposals. They were accepted by the Geary Committee and in due course approved and put into effect by the Mathematical Association.

Meanwhile many diverse efforts were being made to remedy the shortage of mathematicians in this country; among these was the calling of a Conference of University Professors of Mathematics under the chairmanship of Prof. Sir William Hodge, F.R.S., one of the Secretaries of the Royal Society. An absence of communication between existing organizations and activities was manifest, and on 27 February 1962 a letter was sent to a number of mathematical societies urging the formation of a Council to provide a means of co-ordination and also of communication among these societies and, on their behalf, with outside bodies. It was signed by Sir William Hodge and by Dr. Mary Cartwright, F.R.S., and Mr. J. T. Combridge as presidents of the LMS and the MA respectively. As a result of this letter what is now the Joint Mathematical Council (JMC) of the United Kingdom was called into being and a preliminary meeting was held in King's College, London, on 11 July 1962. Among other things, the proposal for an Institute of Mathematics was mentioned at this meeting, and Mr. Combridge was asked to prepare and circulate a memorandum on it for consideration at the first formal meeting of the new Council. This took place on 9 January 1963. Mr. Combridge was then asked to arrange meetings between the Geary Committee and representatives of the JMC, namely, Prof. E. T. Copson, Prof. M. H. A. Newman and Mr. D. Paling. Such meetings were held on 20 February and 20 March, and an agreed report, including a draft

constitution for an Institute, was drawn up for presentation to the JMC on 23 May 1963.

In the meantime, three things had happened. Firstly, Sir William Hodge had interested the Trustees of the Leverhulme Foundation in the activities of the JMC and in particular in the proposals for an Institute. The Trustees sympathized, and generously promised a grant of £2000 a year for three years in support of these objectives. Secondly, the colloquium at Liverpool (referred to in our opening paragraphs) was held and authorization had been given by it to Prof. Lighthill and his colleagues to take action. Thirdly, a meeting of the Conference of University Professors of Mathematics was held in the rooms of the Royal Society on 25 March at which, among other items, the proposals before the JMC were explained and the action at the Liverpool Colloquium was made known.

The need for consultation between the Geary Committee and the delegates of the Colloquium was at once apparent, and a meeting was arranged for 24 April, held in the rooms of the Royal Society at the invitation of Dr. Lighthill. Complete agreement was reached on an amended draft of the proposed constitution, and accordingly the report submitted to the JMC on 23 May represented the views of all those interested in the formation of an Institute. At that same meeting it was confirmed that the name "Institute of Mathematics and its Applications" would be satisfactory to all those concerned.

The JMC thereupon set up a Provisional Council consisting of Dr. Lighthill and his four colleagues, Mr. Geary and nine other members of his committee, and, as direct nominees of the JMC, Profs. Barnard, Newman, Rees, Semple and Thwaites, Mr. W. J. Langford, and Mr. Combridge as Convenor.

The Provisional Council held its first meeting on 15 July 1963 and appointed an Executive Committee to deal with numerous points in connection with the proposed constitution. This committee held five meetings, reporting to the Provisional Council on 19 December 1963 and on 16 and 24 March 1964. At this last meeting formal application was made to the Board of Trade for the registration of the Institute as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Approval was granted and a certificate of registration, dated 23 April 1964, was handed to the Provisional Council at a meeting on 27 April. The Provisional Council was thereupon dissolved and became the first Council of the Institute.

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