

About Janet Duffin

Written by Amanda Hobson (daughter of Janet and Bill Duffin) in 2017



Janet Duffin was a mathematician whose interest lay in the teaching and education of students of all ages. She aimed to convey her love of numeracy through her teaching, particularly to those students for whom aspects of mathematics provoked anxiety.

After graduating from St. Mary's College, Durham, Janet had various teaching posts in Sheffield, Surrey and Hull. Janet married Bill Duffin, a physics lecturer at Hull University and they made their home in Hull for the rest of their lives.

In the late sixties Janet lived for a year in Sydney, New South Wales with her family. While there Janet took the opportunity to record the educational progress of her three children and contrasted the teaching practises of 1960s Australia and England. She also did some teaching practice supervision at the New South Wales University Education Department.

On returning to England Janet lectured at Endsleigh College, Hull and the Kingston-upon-Hull College of Education. Janet's aim was always to provide students with the tools to work out a mathematical problem. She knew the value of the process as this provided the skills needed to approach other mathematical problems. The end result, the right answer, was never the only goal.

Janet worked with her research partner, Adrian Simpson, on the CAN project (Calculator Aware Number project) from Jan 1987 until its termination in Sept 1992. Janet published six evaluation reports on the progress of the project. The project studied the effects of the introduction of the hand held calculator into the Primary classroom. This, combined with a consideration of the likely changes in classroom skill requirements, were the basis of the guidelines issued to teachers in the local Education Authority. Janet was excited to find that, freed from the restrictions of specific methods, children were able to develop their own widely diverse methods of calculating.

Following the completion of the CAN report and the publication of her book "Calculators in the Classroom", Janet taught undergraduates at Hull University with numeracy problems. She continued to do her own research into the learning of mathematics.

Janet nurtured and encouraged every child and student she taught, believing any individual could achieve their numeracy potential. Janet loved learning from her students as well, believing there were often hidden delights in the mathematical universe.

Even in her eighties Janet volunteered at a local Primary School. She listened to the children read and helped with their understanding of numeracy. Janet's enthusiasm for numbers never left her. Her husband Bill Duffin set up the Janet Duffin Memorial Award in her honour after she died in December 2006.