

OBITUARY

SIDNEY BENJAMIN



Actuaries around the world will be saddened to learn that Sidney Benjamin died on 19 February 1992, aged 63. He had suffered from cancer for some time.

Those who attended ASTIN Colloquiums and International Congresses will remember his stocky figure, his pawky face, and his requests to speakers to speak “international” English, and to speak slowly and clearly. He always did this himself, in his frequent contributions to discussions, always getting to the essential point and explaining it so that it seemed extremely simple.

He was brought up in the East End of London, went to Cambridge University, and began his actuarial studies at the Prudential Assurance Company. After qualifying as a Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries in 1957 he joined the computer manufacturer, Ferranti. After three years there he joined the consulting firm of Bacon & Woodrow, where he spent the rest of his working life.

He first distinguished himself at the Institute of Actuaries by presenting a paper jointly with C. W. Bennett: “The Application of Elementary Linear

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Programming to Approximate Valuation” (JIA, 84, 1) at the Institute on the same day that he received his diploma as a new Fellow. This was the first in a succession of papers presented to the Institute, in each of which he demonstrated his ability to explain quite difficult ideas in an extremely simple way.

I first met him when he was working for Ferranti, and I was just learning about how to use those early computers in which everything was written in the basic “machine language”. His own early work with computers gave him an understanding of their potential that most of us have not yet even realised. His paper “Putting Computers onto Actuarial Work”, presented at the Institute of Actuaries in 1966 (JIA, 92, 134), contains a wealth of ideas which are still worth going back to for their originality and applicability.

Sidney was interested in all aspects of actuarial work, especially where new ideas were being developed. However, his main work and his main contribution was in general insurance, in recent years in connection with Lloyds and with health insurance.

He was also interested in the application of modern investment theory, and he attended and contributed greatly to the discussions at the first two AFIR Colloquiums. He was a leading member of the Maturity Guarantees Working Party, whose Report in 1980 significantly changed the way in which unit linked life assurance business in Britain was written.

He served several terms on the Council of the Institute of Actuaries, was a Vice-president from 1975 to 1978 and Chairman of its Research Committee for very many years. He provided inspiration and advice to a whole generation of younger actuaries. We were all delighted when the Institute honoured him with a Gold Medal in 1985.

He was also appointed an Honorary Visiting Professor at the City University in London, was a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and of the British Computer Society, and served on the council of the R.S.S. He was a man of many interests and many talents.

In his spare time he enjoyed painting, and he and his colleague and namesake (but no relation), Professor Bernard Benjamin, used to enjoy painting holidays together.

He had a long and happy marriage, and his wife Goldie is well known to those who attended International Congresses and ASTIN and AFIR Colloquiums. Their children, Ivor and Sara, were a joy to them, as were Sara’s two children. Sidney is survived also by his elderly father.

Sidney was a warm, friendly, loving and well loved man. The world is darker for his loss.

DAVID WILKIE