

I. M. H. Etherington: a brief biography

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Ivor Malcolm Haddon Etherington was born in Lewisham, England, on 8 February 1908. Both of his parents had been Baptist missionaries in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). His father died a few months before his birth, and his mother moved then to England.

He attended the Mill Hill School in London in the years 1922–1927, and began to study mathematics at Hertford College in Oxford in 1927. His tutor at Oxford, W. L. Ferrar, recognized Etherington's talent, and arranged for him to become a research student in relativity under E. T. Whittaker at the University of Edinburgh. This University has then been his home institution all the time until his retirement in 1974.

Etherington had received almost no education in physics before coming to Edinburgh, and he was more interested in the geometrical rather than the physical aspects of relativity. The paper reprinted here is based on his PhD Thesis "On Relativistic Cosmology, and the Definition of Distance in General Relativity". He got his degree in 1932. The thesis is said to have originated from Etherington's capturing an error in Whittaker's treatment of the subject [1].

Under the influence of his lifelong friend, Ffoulkes Edwards, Etherington soon changed his research subject to genetical inheritance. This led him to the non-associative algebras that were the mathematical framework for the research in genetics. The latter research has become his main achievement, highly valued by later researchers [1]. For this, he was awarded a D. Sc. by Edinburgh University in 1941, and the Keith Prize of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1958.

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Etherington was very active in running the Mathematics Department in Edinburgh. He was the Director of Studies from 1946 to 1952, and for a period in the 1960s he was practically, if not formally, the Head of the Department. Apart from this, he was Secretary of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society in the periods 1933–1938 and 1939–1944. He was the President of the Society and the editor of the *Edinburgh Mathematical Notes* in 1947–1948. Together with his wife, Elizabeth Goulding, he was very actively involved in helping refugees to escape from Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The Etheringtons are personally credited for getting 32 people out of there.

Ivor Etherington was given a Personal Chair at the University of Edinburgh in 1972, and retired in 1974. He died on 1 January 1994 in his home in Easdale.

Ref. 1 is a much more detailed account of Etherington's life.

By A. Krasieński, abstracted from Ref. 1.

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References

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2. Monk, D.: Obituary in the University of Edinburgh Bulletin, date unknown, p. 11