

BILL BONWICK



Bill died unexpectedly but peacefully at home on 17th March 2011. He was 78. He is survived by his wife Brenda, his two sons Chris and Martin and three grandchildren.

Bill grew up in Surrey Hills and went to Box Hill and Melbourne Highs. He completed his degree in electrical engineering at Melbourne University in 1953 and stayed on for a year as a Senior Demonstrator in the Department before heading off for England and BTH in Rugby for four years, mostly to work on large alternating current machines. He picked up his early industrial experience during these years as well as his wife, the loving and dedicated Brenda.

On his return he joined the staff of his old Department at Melbourne as a Lecturer. He started off by teaching electrical design but he taught a wide range of subjects in the electrical power area. Early on he established an elective on switching. Here was an entirely new subject based on Boolean logic. It was completely different from any other subject taught at the time. Of course those ideas have formed the basis of computers and of all the electrical devices that use digital electronics these days.

Bill moved to Monash in 1967 as a Senior Lecturer and set about establishing teaching and research in the electrical machines area. His ideas about laboratory work were especially impressive and many graduates will tell you that electrical machine experiments were memorable and a lot of learning took place in the machines laboratory.

Bill was promoted to Associate Professor in 1975 and took over leadership in the electrical power area when Karol Morsztyn retired at the end of 1979. Bill was a key person in the Department. He did much more than manage and participate in the electrical power subjects and conduct research. He also took on many administrative tasks in the Department and in the Faculty and in the wider University. He was a great organiser. He always had his own paperwork in order and could organise events and systems with great efficiency. But he also had a way of relating to people that was warm and friendly. He worked well with others. Students and staff always thought about him with great affection.

The high point of his career was the six years when he was the Sir John Monash Professor of Electrical Power Engineering and Head of the Centre for Electrical Power Engineering (CEPE). The SECV supported a Chair with generous funding in order to attract more students into electrical power engineering and to provide a University point of reference for the power industry. Bill was initially a reluctant starter but when he did take on the role he did it wholeheartedly. He achieved what few others could have hoped to achieve. With his balance of the scholarly and the applied, his network of industry and academic contacts, his drive and vision, his ability to get people to work in teams and to bring in grant money he was able to build a group that stood high amongst Australian Universities and indeed internationally. The team that Bill brought together and the achievements they made were most impressive. He retired in 1997 at age 64.

It is worth noting here that Bill's personal assistant during the CEPE years was Brenda O'Keefe. Thus there were two Brendas in his life during that time.

On the research front he always had a love for electrical machines but he also got involved with power electronics, with solar power, with superconductor magnetic energy storage and with breakdown protection in oil-filled transformers.

Bill had strong links with the power industry. After all he had taught about half of the electrical power engineers in practice in Victoria through to the present day. He was frequently contacted by industry for advice and consulting. He ran a number of successful power summer schools and other in-service training courses and symposia for industry.

Bill did a great deal for the profession outside the University. He had a lifelong affair with the IEE. He was very much involved with the Victorian Branch and chaired its committee for a number of years. He became a Fellow of the IEE. He was also made a Fellow of Engineers Australia. He was active in CIGRE and received an Award of Merit from them for Outstanding Service. The list of reviews he undertook, of conferences he ran and of committees he served goes on and on.

When I think of Bill as my teacher, as a colleague and as a friend there are a number of thoughts that come to mind. Firstly his competence. He understood his discipline well and could combine theory with practice in a meaningful way. Secondly he could communicate his knowledge to colleagues and to students. Thirdly he had a great capacity for organization and management. And fourthly and perhaps most importantly he was a warm human being who enriched the lives of all he came into contact with.

Peter Darvall's poem written on the occasion of Bill's retirement in 1997 sums up the man most effectively. Here is the final verse:

*His colleagues know and love his style
His loyalty and twinkling smile
Directness, personality
He is, to state it properly
The kind of bloke we'd like to be*

Prepared by Bill Brown