Hong Kong Rotarian Walter Brown

Emeritus Professor in Mathematics of Hong Kong University
By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)
15 April 2015

Walter Brown, FRSE, AMIEE, MA, BSc (*Glasgow*) (29 April 1886, Glasgow – 14 April 1957, Marandellas, Rhodesia), Scottish mathematician and engineer, was an Active Member of Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社) in the 1930-40s holding the Classification "Education – Mathematics" when he was Professor in Pure and Applied Mathematics of the University of Hong Kong (香港大學). He was conferred the title "Emeritus Professor" by the University in 1950.

The younger son of Hugh A. Brown, a headmaster in Paisley, Scotland, Walter was educated at Allan Glen's School and then studied at the University of Glasgow (BSc Hons Mathematics and Physics 1907; and BSc Pure Science 1910). He began his career as a teacher at Allan Glen's. Walter became a member of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society in March 1911.

In 1914 he took up the post of Lecturer in Engineering at Hong Kong University. He was soon promoted to become Professor in Pure and Applied Mathematics, a post he held from 1918 to 1946.

In 1920 he was elected an Associate Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers. In 1923 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His proposers were Andrew Gray, George Alexander Gibson, John Walter Gregory, John Gordon Gray and Dugald McQuistan.

He was President of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Society, and a member of the Hong Kong English Association, the Hong Kong Sino-British Association, and the Hong Kong Institute of Engineers and Shipbuilders.

A member of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, Walter was captured when the British Crown Colony Hong Kong surrendered to the Imperial Japan during the Pacific War, and he was held as a Prisoner of War at Stanley Camp (赤柱拘留營) (1941–1945). He organized study groups in the internment camp, and helped attend to the medical needs of the prisoners.

Returning to Scotland after the War, he taught civil and mechanical engineering at the Royal Technical College in Glasgow (1946–1947), and mathematics at the University of Glasgow (1947–1948).

He travelled extensively and died in Marandellas in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in April 1957.
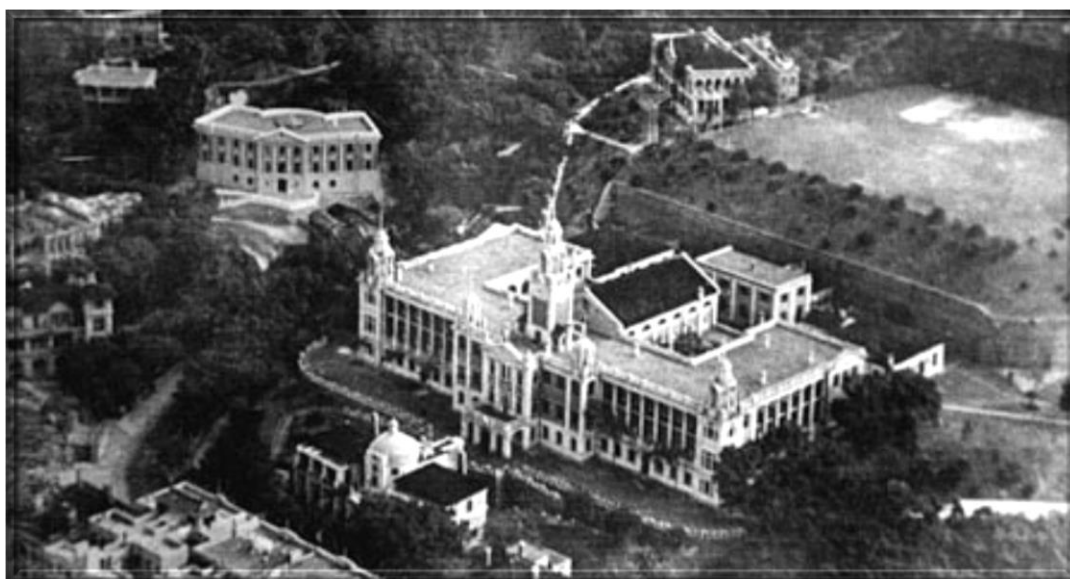
In memory of Emeritus Professor Walter Brown, the University of Hong Kong has set up "Walter Brown Memorial Prizes in Mathematics" awarding to:

(i) The best student in Mathematics, on the recommendation of the Head of Mathematics, among those completing the BSc 2nd year

(ii) The best student in Mathematics, on the recommendation of the Head of Mathematics, among those completing the BSc final year

***** ***** ***** ***** *****

香 港 大 學
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Main campus of the University of Hong Kong in 1930-40s