

Shy student who worked alongside Albert Einstein

Natalie Walker looks back at the life of a modest Lancashire schoolboy whose studies took him to America to work alongside one of the greatest men in history

Humble Bernard Cannon had made great advances in the world of maths and numbers and had even worked with Albert Einstein.

Described as a 'quiet man,' he never really talked about his work or his contemporaries, but there were plenty of people who were willing to shout about his academic success.

Born in Euxton to Joseph and Ellen Cannon, Bernard showed an enthusiasm for numbers at an early age.

He gained a scholarship with Balshaw's Grammar School and was taken on by the University of Liverpool from 1931 to 1934.

While there, he was placed in the first division of the final Bachelor of Science Lists and was awarded the Frank Stanton Carey Prize, which enabled him to enter the Honours School of Mathematics.

A year later, he got a first class honours in maths and was awarded a prestigious Derby Scholarship for post graduate research.

Unfortunately, he was unable to pursue this any further, as he received a letter from Lancashire County Council, informing him he owed £100, which he had borrowed for a grant a few years earlier.

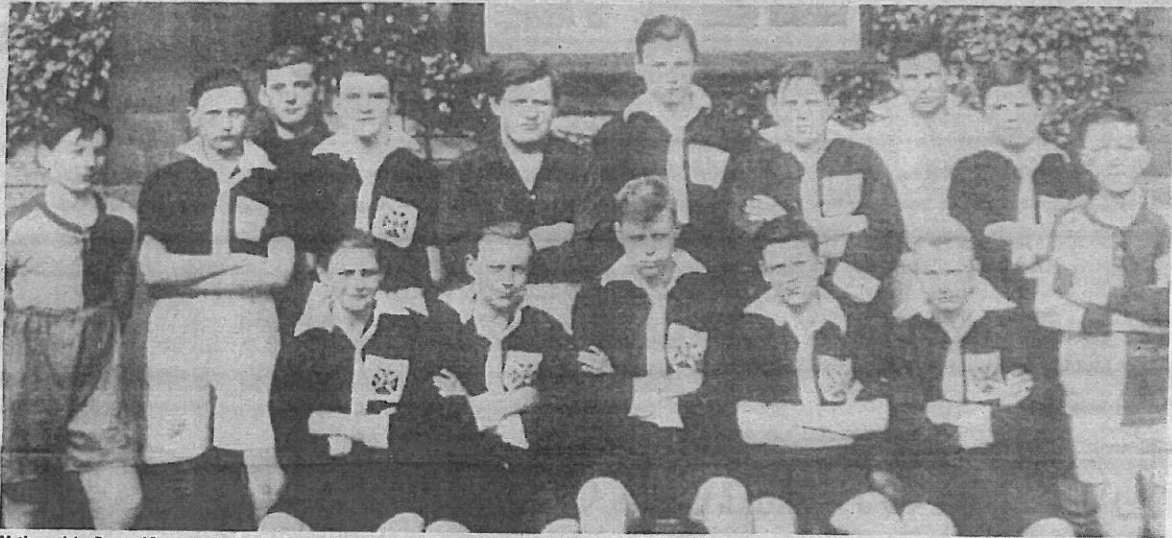
He left his post at the university and took a job as assistant master at Bury Grammar School for a year, paying back the money.

Determined to go back into research and further his education, he applied for a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship to attend any university he wanted in America and was successful.

He decided to undertake advanced graduate work in mathematics at the Graduate College, Princeton University, where Albert Einstein was so working.

Bernard's achievements were printed in the Lancashire Daily Post article, in January 1940.

The article says: "His mother told a colleague that her son seldom spoke about



Mathematician Bernard Cannon at Balshaw's. Pictured front row, second right



Bernard Cannon while he was doing National Service in India

his work or about people like Einstein who were at Princeton. He has had several papers published by the London Mathematical Society and seems destined for a high position in the world of mathematics."

Bernard had set sail on the Laconia ship from Liverpool on September 10, 1938, ready for his next academic challenge at Princeton.

His niece, who lives in Anderton but does not wish

to be named, now has ownership of official documents, reports and photos detailing Bernard's career and contacted the Post to share his story.

Speaking of his opportunity at Princeton, she says: "He was really excited. All his expenses were paid for by the Commonwealth Fund Fellowship. That paid for everything."

"He was told what to do and what he needed. He had

to carry his books in boxes, rather than suitcases.

"I don't really know much about his time there and how much he worked with Einstein. But the fact he was at the same college as one of the world's leading theoretical physicists is really interesting."

"He met up with several scholarly people there and went on several trips, including the national park there."

"His uncle Albert had emigrated to Canada, so Bernard had planned to visit him. But immigration said he couldn't go as he had to report in every day."

Bernard returned to the UK in June 1940 and was called up to do National Service in the Second World War.

Speaking about the war, Bernard had told the Lancashire Daily Post: "World War Two was a great shock to us, though we had seen that it was inevitable."

His niece adds: "He got called up as a normal civilian to go into the air force."

"He worked in India, spotting planes. As he was a doctor, people thought he was there as a medical practitioner and so he had to explain that he was a professor in mathematics."

"His name was well

known overseas. The University of Cairo published some of his work."

"He was happy in India and didn't want to go back, but he had to return and was demobbed in 1946."

Bernard moved to Leicester, getting a job at a boarding school.

He lived in a boarding house with Mrs Tyrell and found love with her daughter, Lucy, who was a widow, with two children.

He died in Leicester 1984, aged 70, leaving behind a legacy in the world of mathematics.

Professor of pure maths at Liverpool University, JM Whittaker, wrote a glowing reference, saying: "He permits an undue modesty to cloak his attainments but this will not bar his success as a teacher. He is one of the ablest mathematicians I have ever taught."

L Rosenhead, professor of applied mathematics, added he was "one of the best students I have had."

His niece adds: "Uncle Bernard was a quiet man and softly spoken. He was very

gentle and never pushed himself forward. I didn't see him much, as he lived in Leicester, but would come up to Euxton during the school holidays. I was quite young then and so I never talked to him about his time in America or India, so I don't know much."

"He didn't come from a rich family. He had two twin brothers, Hubert and Arthur. Sadly, Arthur died aged 15 from diphtheria. He also

had two sisters, Margaret and Ellen, who was my mum. Their mum, Ellen, died when my mum was only

12, in December 1928, so the children were brought up by their father."

"My mum moved to Adlington, uncle Arthur lived in Chorley and Margaret moved away to Coventry. I remember going to my grandad's when Bernard would visit. He played whist with us."

"My grandad was deaf and Bernard had brought back some records from America. He would play Beethoven's Fifth so loud so grandad could hear it."

