# Robin Harte

Robin Harte was born in Belfast in May 1938 - there are streets in Mexico named after his birthday. His father was a school teacher, teaching Latin and Greek, and his grandfather and great grandfather were preachers: by their vocation they cut Robin off from his share of a timber business. While most of his schoolmates at the Belfast High School left school at the earliest opportunity, it was obvious that Robin was staying on to the bitter end, and going to go to University. Determined to stay as far away as possible from Latin and Greek, he opted for Physics and Chemistry, and was told that in that case he would have to do Extra Maths. As it turned out, he was unable to tie two wires together without bcausing an explosion, and so Mathematics became his escape route from the blind alley of Science.

In 1956 Robin Harte went to Trinity College Dublin, with the First Entrance Scholarship, rather to the astonishment of one Timothy Trevor West, son of another schoolmaster, who had been expected to take that honour. Discovering that he had not in fact won a "Foundation Scholarship", Robin entered himself for the Scholarship exam, a year earlier than was customary, and with the help of an unorthodox Mechanics paper won that too, to the further chagrin of Trevor West and all the Second year Schol candidates. Resting on his laurels somewhat, his examination marks declined, and he was lucky at the end to scrape home with a First Class Honours degree. Some lobbying on his behalf from a now reconciled Trevor West may have helped: they were both on their way to Cambridge, their final exam was not until September, and there was an understanding that they would be presenting themselves with First Class honours degrees.

At Cambridge in 1960 Robin read Functional Analysis under the supervision of John Williamson, where there was a lively seminar conducted by Williamson, Frank Smythies and later John Ringrose: Robin and Trevor, Barry Johnson, Ben Garling and David Fowler all starred, and then also Graham Allan, Simon Bernau, Nicos Varopoulos, John Erdos and Harry Dowson. After some angst, Robin settled on a thesis topic, and wrote about "Modules over a Banach algebra". The idea was to try and copy out Banach space theory with enhanced scalars: he did come up with an extension into Banach algebra scalars of the transformation of the Hahn Banach theorem from the reals to the complexes, and formulated the "mixed identities" for the tensor product of modules over a Banach algebra, but in all honesty rather missed the point.

In 1963 Robin went to Swansea, then a college of the University of Wales, under Jeffrey Weston, who as a reformed engineer wanted Mathematics to be done properly: colleagues included Tony Thompson, Alan Ellis and Peter Rogosinsky. In his career at Trinity College Robin as Auditor of the Mathematical Society had hosted the visit of W.W. Rogosinsky in the presence of another famous mathematician, Eamonn de Valera. Apart from putting together two little papers about the Hahn-Banach theorem, and presiding over Mehmet Orhon's Ph.D., Robin's career flagged at Swansea, and in 1968 he went to Cork, then a college of the National University of Ireland. In Cork he started to write about multiple spectral theory, stimulated by the investigations of Finbarr Holland and David Walsh into the theory of Hankel and Toeplitz operators. David Walsh had come to Swansea on a Travelling Studentship, and Robin acted as his PhD supervisor there; in Cork he also supervised Miceal O Searcoid. Asked at a promotion interview if he was "writing a book", he sent his Third Year Functional Analysis syllabus to six publishers, two of whom wanted to see more. He sought out a student with good handwriting and sent copies of his notes to the two surviving publishers: one of them agreed to continmue. In 1985-86 Robin visited Raul Curto and Paul Muhly at the University of Iowa. He landed back in Cork in the middle of the second of the sequence of Cork Operators Conferences, organised by Gerard Murphy.

In 1988 Robin took an early retirement from Cork University, and spent some time affiliated to Queen's University Belfast, with Tony Wickstead, and a year at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. He visited Capetown, with Ronald Cross, and Bloemfontein, with Heinrich Raubenheuimer, and spent a year in Lille, with Mostafa Mbekhta, visiting also Laura Burlando in Genoa and Pietro Aiena in Palermo. He returned to Dublin, giving a course in Topology at Trinity College, and went to Mexico for two years with Hugo Arizmendi and Carlos Hernandez.

While in Mexico he travelled to Utah to meet face to face for the first time Woo Young Lee, with whom he had been having a stimulating correspondence for some years, and indeed written some papers. This was the beginning of his many visits to Suwon and Seoul, starting in 1998: this was his first meeting with Jerry Koliha, and Bhaggy Dougal, and reunion with Carl Pearcy and Muneo Cho. He shortly afterwards made the first of several visits to Nis, with Vladimir Rakocevic and Dragan Djordjevic.

Robin's work in multiple spectral theory starts with the proof, in 1972, of the spectral mapping theorem for the left and the right spectrum of commuting systems of Banach algebra elements. Work in abstract Fredholm theory started in 1976 with the "exponential spectrum", and a new look at upper and lower semiFredholm operators in 1977, with John Buoni and Tony Wickstead. In 1984 he tried to describe algebraically the spectral projection associated with an isolated point of spectrum, unwittingly rediscovering the "Drazin inverse". In the same year he began to think about the relationship between open, onto and almost open mappings between normed spaces. In 1985 he also started out on the trail of operator matrices and abstract determinant theory. A sequence of papers in "commutative Fredholm theory", stimulated by the work of Mostafa Mbekhta, starts in 1991. In 1997 with Woo Young Lee he started on the process of deconstructing "Weyl's theorem". From around 2000, stimulated by the PhD work of Ciaran Taylor, he has written a number of papers with Sean Dineen, extending work of Lucien Waelbroeck from commutative to non commutative algebras, and from the projective to more general tensor products. Lately he has been exploring "algebraic closures" with Dragana Cvetkovic in Nis, and "spectral triangles" with Cora Stack in Tallaght.

Apart from writing Mathematics, Robin has a weakness for short stories and bad poetry, and a late conversion to Karaoke singing.