

## Notes supporting documents about Leslie John Comrie

*This archive, with a few exceptions, does not include any items readily available from library resources in New Zealand, but does contain references to other archives or sources. References to living persons are accurate at May, 2002.*

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- 1.] The basic information sheet held by the Dictionary of NZ Biography about Comrie requires the following amendments (DNZB have been notified):

d of d: December 11, 1950 (see letter in Carter Observatory files correcting an error in I.L.Thomsen's obituary in the *Evening Post* 14 December 1950.

Mary Croarken, in response to LJR's email request on 20 May 2002 replied on 20 May: 'I do not have a death certificate for Comrie but I am sure the date is 11th December 1950. The obituary in Monthly Notices RAS, written by his brother-in-law W.H.M. Greaves, gives 11 December as does the Miller obituary in Nature. The Blackheath local guide also reports 11 December and the funeral as being on 14th. These seem quite authoritative sources and I would be inclined to go with them.'

There were two children by the first marriage: Neil **John** Robert, and **Alistair** Merton. John Comrie, b. 21.7.21 lives in Otaki; Alistair b.5.8.27 d. 12.12.27 (see family chart in Howard Smith papers attached)

**Julian** Comrie, the only child of the second marriage, lives in Taunton, Somerset.

The DNZB section 'Works relating to this Person' now needs the addition of the research by Mary Croarken recorded in:

Croarken, Mary *Early Scientific Computing in Britain* OUP 1990 [includes two chapters about Comrie's contribution and an extensive bibliography of Comrie publications. Copy in VUW library and ATL's New Zealand/Pacific collection, callmark P 004.9094 CRO.]

Croarken, Mary L J Comrie: A Forgotten Figure in the History of Numerical Computing *Mathematics Today* August, 2000 pp 114-118 [an excellent summary of Comrie's life and work] (copy attached: journal available in VUW library)

Croarken, Mary Case5,656: L.J. Comrie and the Origins of the Scientific Computing Service Ltd *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* Vol 21 No.4 1999 pp 70-71 (copy attached)

Croarken, Mary and Campbell-Kelly, Martin Beautiful Numbers: The Rise and Decline of the British Association Mathematical tables Committee, 1871-1965 *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* October-December 2000 pp 44-61 (copy attached)

- 2.] Other papers dealing with aspects of Comrie's life and work by G(arry) J. Tee can be found in ATL archives or in Auckland University archives. Tee was

responsible for having a computing laboratory at AU named after Comrie. An item about the official opening of this laboratory is included in the Howard Smith papers attached.

- 3.] Comrie's obituary in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* Vol 13, 1953 pp 294–304, written by his brother-in-law W.M.H. Greaves is particularly valuable in its discussion of Comrie's personality. [MN of RAS held by Carter Observatory]

A commentary on Comrie's table typography is recorded in Rollo, Lindsay *The typography of tables: A note on L.J. Comrie* *Kotare: New Zealand Notes and Queries* Vol 4 No 1 June 2001 pp21–31 (will be available in PDF format)

Another aspect of Comrie's life is recorded in Rollo, Lindsay *A Benevolent Astronomer : Further notes on L. J. Comrie* *Kotare: New Zealand Notes and Queries* (in press — to be published in PDF format).

Various documents supporting these two papers are included in the Rollo Collection, Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington (in preparation). The main sources are still in Carter archives.

- 4.] Howard Smith papers.

H.C. Smith is a nephew of L.J. Comrie (see partial family tree attached prepared by HCS). Again some documents in his possession have not been included in this archive as they are relatively readily available in professional and astronomical journals.

- 5.] The papers from the IBM Corporate Archives are not elsewhere available from New Zealand sources. Included is an email exchange with the archive establishing the authority to quote from these documents.
- 6.] Copies of letters made available from the University of Liverpool resources from Comrie in his capacity as a consultant and as the proprietor of a business offering calculating services and selling calculating machines.
- 7.] Letter from Carter Observatory authorising the deposit of copies of documents in the Observatories archives in ATL. Note: copies have not been deposited in ATL as the original files are available at Carter, and are the subject of discussions between Carter and ATL about future location of these and other Carter files at ATL. The material sent to Mary Croarken totalled approximately 350 separate sheets.
- 8.] Comrie returned to NZ in 1948 and toured the country extensively, meeting professional and amateur astronomers and relatives. There are numerous newspaper items about Comrie at this time. Many of these have been collated by Mary Croarken from copies in family and company records in the UK. Her list, re-ordered into date sequence, and commentary notes by LJR attached.
- 9.] P/c of title page and references of a revision of Comrie's appendix to Clarke's *Plane and Geodetic Surveying: Volume II*. Note the reference to the sponsorship

of the National Research Council of America. Comrie visited the USA in 1945 'to preside at a conference held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ... by a committee of the National Research Council of the USA' [Rollo, in press, above]. Note also that the Scientific Computing Services Ltd had an established business as resellers and publishers of a wide variety of tables.

- 10.] P/c of cutting from *The Dominion*, June 18 1941 about Comrie's gift of books to Carter Observatory. [see Rollo, in press, about for a discussion of this and other gifts by Comrie]
- 11.] Schedule of books donated by Carter Observatory to ATL, including a number donated by Comrie (with supporting comments on some items)