

Memories of Dan Quillen, by Andrew Ranicki

The name of Quillen featured already in the very first topology seminar I attended as a graduate student in Cambridge in 1970. It was given by Frank Adams, who talked about the then recent work of Quillen and Sullivan on the solution of the Adams conjecture. Frank spoke about both Dan and Dennis with an unusual amount of respect!

I actually met both Quillen and Sullivan at the same time, when I spent a year at IHES 1973-4. Sullivan's interest in surgery theory was naturally greater than Quillen's. Both Dan and Jean were kind to me, and I was a frequent visitor at Pavillon 8 of the Residence de l'Ormaille. Although I did not talk to Dan all that much about mathematics there were plenty of other topics, and I was always impressed by his seriousness of purpose and independence of mind, allied with a winning personal modesty.

Soon after Dan moved to Oxford in 1984 I invited him and his family to visit us in Edinburgh. I asked him if MIT had offered to match his Oxford offer: he answered that to do this they would have had to cut his MIT salary by two-thirds!

On my occasional visits to Oxford I would always call on the Quillens, who were as kind to me as they had been at IHES. There was in fact one occasion when Dan and I did talk about mathematics: over dinner I mentioned that I had worked out a formula for the projective class of a finitely dominated chain complex. He asked me to come to his office the next day and explain it to him in detail - it turned out that he needed just such a formula for his work on K_0 of nonunital rings: I was most flattered! But I should have spent much more time talking to Dan about his mathematics. Too late now.

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