Last January, CERN put out the saddest press release in its short history. In the few words of this communiqué, the Organization announced with deep regret the sudden death in Geneva, in the evening of 20 January 1968, of Prof. Herbert W. B. Skinner, Head of the Department of Physics, Liverpool University, United Kingdom.

Herbert Wakefield Banks Skinner was born in Ealing, London, on 7 October 1900. After attending Rugby School he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge. There, at the Cavendish Laboratory, he started research under Lord Rutherford and remained with him for 5 years. In 1927 he went as a research fellow to the University of Bristol, where he later became a lecturer. At Bristol he continued his work on excitation processes for spectra in gases at low pressure, which had led him to discover that light excited by an unidirectional stream of electrons was polarized. He carried out research on the soft X-ray spectroscopy of metals and, with H. M. O’Brien, was able to show that detailed information could be obtained from such spectra about the electronic structure of metals and, to a lesser extent, of insulators. “This”, said Prof. Skinner a few months before his death, “I consider to be my main research work and it continued up to the war”. In fact, this work was responsible for his election to the Royal Society in 1942.

In 1932—1933, H. W. B. Skinner held a Rockefeller fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Early in the war, he joined the Telecommunications Research Establishment at Swargate and subsequently at Malvern, to work on centimetric radar then in its infancy. In this capacity, he patented — in conjunction with B. A. Ward and A. H. Cooke — the transmitter-receiver switch which was adopted so that one aerial could be used for both purposes.

In 1944, with the basic work on centimetric radar complete to a stage, he joined Sir James Chadwick’s atomic group and was sent to Berkeley, USA, to work on the electromagnetic isotope separation method for uranium. Returning to England in 1946 he was the first scientist to take up residence at the A.E.R.E., Harwell, where he was successively Deputy Chief Scientific Officer and Chief Physicist. Besides helping to get the establishment started, he was in charge of the General Physics Division which, amongst other things, built an electromagnetic isotope separator and a large cyclotron with 110 in. poles, giving a proton beam of about 170 MeV. He also served on the project committees for the Windscale reactors, the Capenhurst isotope plant and the Dounreay fast reactor.

It was in 1949 that Herbert Skinner was appointed successor to Sir James Chadwick at the Lyon Jones Chair of Physics, University of Liverpool. The University was then creating a nuclear physics laboratory, including a 156 in. synchro-cyclotron, designed to produce 400 MeV particles and incorporating a new beam-extracting device supplying unusually high-intensity particles. The project was completed in 1955.

On account of his experience, Prof. Skinner was called upon late in 1952 to become adviser to the CERN synchrocyclotron group, then designing the 600 MeV accelerator. He played a valuable part in this work, members of the group recall, and ever since he took a deep interest in CERN’s affairs.

At the time of his death, Prof. Skinner had come to Geneva to take part in a meeting of European physicists discussing the future experimental research programme for CERN’s 25 GeV proton synchrotron.

Professor Skinner married in 1931 Erna Wurmbraua, who survives him with one daughter.