Roy Osborne Davies was born in Uttoxeter in 1927. Just too young to serve in the Second World War, he was turned down for National Service in 1945 due to poor eyesight. Instead, he went up to Cambridge to study Mathematics at St Catherine’s College, staying there for seven years to complete his PhD which he received in 1954.

In 1953, having completed his research but not yet written up his thesis, Roy took a post as Assistant Lecturer in the School of Mathematics here at Leicester, which was still a University College at the time. One year later he was promoted to Lecturer and later to Reader. He eventually progressed to a personal chair in the early 1970s, and in 1974 delivered his inaugural lecture, entitled ‘The Appeal of the Paradoxical’. During his time at Leicester, Roy took on temporary positions with other institutions, spending a year at KCL and a year at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. He was well respected in his field and maintained a long friendship with the famous Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdős.

Having learned French at Cambridge, Roy subsequently became fluent in Russian, a skill he put to use translating Russian mathematics journals into English. In 1957 he travelled across Europe by train to attend the 7th World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow where he played chess against former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik.

Professor Davies loved puzzles. During his time at Leicester, he compiled crosswords for the staff newsletter under the pseudonym ‘Seivador’ (RO Davies backwards) and he was several times a finalist in The Times Crossword Competition. He was twice a contestant on Countdown, in 2005 and again in 2016, sadly losing on both occasions. However, his second appearance, at age 89, gave him the title of the long-running series’ joint-oldest contestant. He was also a keen bridge player and a devotee of folk music. He lived in Clarendon Park was notable for wearing sandals in all weathers, including when walking his cat.

Although many of Professor Davies’ papers were highly abstract, with titles such as ‘An elementary proof of the theorem on change of variable in Riemann Integration’ and ‘A direct method for completing eigenproblem solutions on a parallel computer’, he was also drawn to the fun side of mathematics. In 1969 he published a letter in The Mathematical Journal, titled ‘A Pop Charts Problem’, showing that: “If the order is never the same in any two successive weeks, and no tune ever regains any lost popularity,” then the greatest number of weeks in which the ‘Top Twenty’ can consist of the same 20 tunes is 191!

Professor Davies passed away on 12 June 2023, aged 95.