
CHARLOTTE SIMMONS, University of Central Oklahoma, 100 N. University, Box 129, Edmond, OK 73012
Benjamin Gompertz: Pioneer of Actuarial Science

In this talk, we investigate the contributions of actuarial pioneer Benjamin Gompertz, known for his capacity to sustain the complex computation required to generate “tables of lives and tables of stars”, to the field of actuarial science. Gompertz is best known today for his Law of Mortality, an extremely powerful tool in the study of mortality and the creation of life tables for actuaries. The significance of this law will be examined. Additionally, we will discuss the contributions of friend and staunch supporter, Augustus De Morgan, to the field, both direct (via his own work) and indirect (via his defense of Gompertz during the Edmonds–Gompertz controversy). Because of De Morgan's efforts, Edmonds is “now remembered only for the disparagement of the work of a man of genius”, while Gompertz is remembered “because his outstanding brilliance as a mathematician was equalled by his modesty and generosity”.