

DEREK BLADES (1937–2014): IN MEMORIAM



Derek William Blades who died in his sleep in the early morning of 26 June 2014 was a well known and much respected member of the international statistical community. His passing was completely unexpected—he had had no major health problems recently and had just returned from an eleven day cruise of the Norwegian fjords with his wife Evelyn. He was about to depart for a six week work assignment with the Asian Development Bank in Manila.

His death came as a complete shock to his family, friends and former colleagues. He will be greatly missed in national accounting and ICP circles; not only for his down to earth practical approach to statistics but also for his erudite and to-the-point interventions at meetings and for the wit and humour with which he made them. His generosity and willingness to help others will also be missed.

Derek was born on 23 December 1937 in Birkenhead in the United Kingdom. He attended Birkenhead School between 1949 and 1956 where he won a prestigious State Scholarship in classical studies to study at university. Subsequently, he gained a place to read classics at Lincoln College at Oxford University which he attended from 1959 to 1962.

Between school and university he did his national service in the Royal Navy during which he saw “action” in the “cod war” between Iceland and the United Kingdom. Although his original intention had been to continue with his classical studies at Oxford, he decided that, after two years before the mast, his Greek and

Latin were too rusty and no longer up to it, although he continued to benefit throughout his career from the intellectual discipline and semantic skills acquired during his early studies in classics. On going up to Oxford he switched to reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics. After obtaining his BA he worked for a year as a journalist in London. But remembering the advice of his tutor—if you want to be an economist you should first be an economic statistician—he returned to Oxford in 1964 to study for a Certificate in Statistics. Having completed his studies, he married Evelyn and together they went off to newly independent Malawi to work in the National Statistical Office in Zomba.

Derek worked in the statistical office from 1964 to 1972 first as a statistician, then as a senior statistician and finally as the Director of Census and Statistics. At the time, Malawi's economic statistics left much to be desired, a state of affairs he set out to rectify. One of his first tasks was to create a system of foreign trade statistics. Almost single handily, he launched the annual and quarterly establishment surveys for various economic activities and worked closely with his colleagues carrying out rural and urban household income and expenditures surveys. His major contribution, and the one of which he was most proud, was the development of the first set of national accounts for Malawi.

On leaving Malawi in 1972, he went to work as an administrator at the OECD Development Centre in Paris. It was during his time at the Development Centre that he researched and wrote *Non-Monetary (Subsistence) Activities in the National Accounts of Developing Countries* (OECD Development Centre, Paris 1979). In 1975 he was promoted to Principal Administrator in the OECD Department of Economics and Statistics where he worked on the national accounts and labour force statistics of OECD member countries. He left the OECD in 1978 to work as a senior statistician at the United Nations Statistical Office in New York where he commissioned and edited statistical manuals on national accounts and price indexes.

In 1980 he returned to the OECD to head the National Accounts Section in the National Accounts and Statistics Division of the Department of Economics and Statistics. He was responsible for developing a work programme for the improvement of macroeconomic statistics in OECD member countries, drafting of methodological handbooks, organising regular expert meetings on national accounts and contributing to analytical research in the OECD Economics Department.

At an international level, the major development in the 1980s and early 1990s was the revision of the UN System of National Accounts (or SNA). All the major interested international organisations—the UN, the IMF, World Bank, EU and the OECD agreed to assume collective responsibility for the revision. Derek played a major role in the revision process acting as the OECD's representative in the Inter Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts set up to manage the process. His services were much in demand during the revision not merely because of his knowledge and expertise but because of his ability to think logically and constructively and to draft clearly, rare talents that were no doubt enhanced by his early education in classics.

When the OECD created a new Statistics Directorate in 1993 Derek became the first head of its Non-Member Countries Division. This involved setting up a

programme of technical assistance in economic statistics for transition economies in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Commonwealth of Independent States and for non-member countries in Asia and Latin America. The main areas of technical assistance were national accounts, price statistics, purchasing power parities, business tendency surveys, and cyclical analysis.

In 2002 he retired from the OECD, but not from his professional work. As just noted, his services were always much in demand and he continued working as a consultant for the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the OECD, Eurostat, the Asian Development Bank and the African Development Bank.

He was a fellow of the *Royal Statistical Society*, a member and former chairman of the Council of the *International Association for Research in Income and Wealth* (IARIW), and a member of the *International Association of Official Statisticians* branch of the *International Statistical Institute*. He also sat on the editorial boards of the *OECD Economic Studies* and the *Review of Income and Wealth*, and coedited with Stephan Klasen the special issue of the Review published in 2013 on *Issues and Challenges in Measuring National Income, Wealth, Poverty, and Inequality in Sub-Saharan African Countries*. Just ten days before his death he had another paper accepted for publication in the Review.

Derek will be remembered for his love of travel, his curiosity particularly when travelling, his ability to establish a rapport with a whole manner of different people even when they did not share a common language, his love of reading, his collection of paintings from around the world, and his willingness to try his hand at anything at least once.

He is survived by his wife, Evelyn, his daughters, Catherine and Nicola, and his grand-daughters, Lea Marie and Amelie.

DAVID ROBERTS*
August 2014

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

- Non-Monetary (Subsistence) Activities in the National Accounts of Developing Countries*, OECD Development Centre, Paris 1979.
- The Hidden Economy*, OECD Occasional Studies, June 1982.
- Defining and Measuring the Public Sector* (with Leila Pathirane), *Review of Income and Wealth* 28(3), September 1982, 261–289.
- Alternative Measures of Saving*, OECD Occasional Papers, June 1983.
- Statistics for a Market Economy*, (editor), OECD, Paris 1991.
- The ‘Recent Period’ of the IARIW, 1988 to 1998, *Review of Income and Wealth*, September 1999, Vol. 45 Issue 3, 409–417.
- National Accounts for China: Sources and Methods* (with Xu Xianchun and Ye Yanfei), OECD, Paris 2000.
- Measuring Capital, OECD Manual on the Measurement of Capital Stocks, Consumption of Fixed Capital and Capital Services* (with Peter Harper, Charles Aspden, Mike Harper, Peter Hill, Barbara Fraumeni), OECD, Paris 2001.

*The author gratefully acknowledges the comments of Peter Hill and Robert Hill on an earlier draft.

- Women and Men in OECD Countries*, OECD, Paris 2006.
- Understanding National Accounts* (with François Lequiller), OECD, Paris 2006.
- A Story Behind Each Number: An Obituary of Angus Maddison (with Bart van Ark and Harry X. Wu), *Review of Income and Wealth*, September 2010, Vol. 56 Issue 3, 640–646.
- Estimating Value Added of Illegal Production in the Western Balkans, *Review of Income and Wealth*, March 2011, Vol. 57 Issue 1, 183–195.
- The Informal Economy in Developing Countries: An Introduction (with Francisco H. G. Ferreira and Maria Ana Lugo), *Review of Income and Wealth*, May 2011 Supplement, Vol. 57, S1–S7.
- How relevant are the United Kingdom's official measures of price change? (with Michael Ward and Carol Carson), *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, 2011, Vol. 27 Issue 1/2, 31–37.
- Issues and Challenges in Measuring National Income, Wealth, Poverty, and Inequality in Sub-Saharan African Countries: An Introduction (with Stephan Klasen), *Review of Income and Wealth*, October 2013, Vol. 59, Supplement, S1–S8.
- A Short-Cut Method of Estimating Capital Stocks: When can it be used and how well does it work? *Review of Income and Wealth*, forthcoming.