

## **Professor Peter Payne**

It is with great sadness that Council reports the death of our distinguished and long serving President, Professor Peter Payne. Peter died on 10 January 2017, aged 87 years. A well attended service of committal was held at Aberdeen Crematorium on 20<sup>th</sup> January, allowing many friends and colleagues to offer their condolences to Enid and their son and daughter, Simon and Samantha. They each contributed moving and frequently amusing recollections of their father, sympathetically read by the minister, Deaconess Marion Stewart.

Peter was a Londoner whose academic path took him to Nottingham University where, in 1951, he graduated in the new and minority discipline of Economic History. His mentor was Professor David Chambers, who then set Peter on his research for his PhD, gained in 1954, and later published in 1961 as *Rubber and Railways in the Nineteenth Century; A Study of the Spencer Papers, 1853 – 1891*. He had begun as he was to continue in his career, his scholarship founded on expert analysis of business records, and demonstrating their significance in understanding wider issues of economic and social development. His successful PhD launched him into two years of research at Johns Hopkins, this producing in 1956 a fine detailed study of *The Savings Bank of Baltimore, 1818 – 1866* co-authored with Lance Davis.

This was a spectacular start to an academic career in the new and relatively small discipline of Economic History, but building it had to wait, as National Service drew Peter into two years in the Royal Army Educational Corps. There he had the unusual experience of serving for a time on the staff of a military detention barracks. He recalled this episode somewhat fondly, frequently capturing the attention of his audience by commencing with the throw away comment, “When I was in Prison...”. When he could be persuaded to recollect, his anecdotes were both scurrilous and hilarious, and he sometimes hinted he might one day put them to pen and paper for his memoirs; regrettably he never did.

On demobilisation he returned to Nottingham in 1958 as a lecturer in Economic History, during which year he met his future wife Enid, who was to be his touchstone and support throughout their long life together. Then in 1959 he came to Glasgow to take up the newly created Colquhoun Lectureship in Business History. This was the first such named lectureship in Britain. It was the brainchild of the new Professor of Economic History, Sydney Checkland, appointed in 1957. He had approached the Glasgow business community through the Chamber of Commerce, and Junior Chamber, to support an appeal to raise funds to establish a lectureship in Business History to undertake surveys of surviving records of important Scottish companies, and to act to save them from destruction. This was to be Peter Payne’s task, and it was the turning point in his career. In pursuing it he was to become the pioneer and

leader in developing business history based on research on business archives in Scotland.

This was the beginning of the University of Glasgow's special expertise in business archives and business history. Peter joined a small team dedicated to that end, Sydney Checkland and Roy Campbell, to which was added Peter's assistant, Tony Slaven, in October 1960. With this support he moved quickly to set up an agency to promote interest in business archives and business history. This was to be The Business Archives Council of Scotland in 1960, with Peter as Honorary Secretary. That meant that he did all the work. That mainly involved approaching local business owners and Directors to persuade them that their business records were important, and should be preserved, and should be taken into care if in danger of disposal.

In this way the work of saving our business heritage began. Listing and preliminary sorting was undertaken, and it was soon clear that many companies were only too happy to have unwanted and outdated records removed free of charge. Removal meant going to the Department of Economic History, where the office in 5 University Gardens soon became overloaded with the massive collection of records of the Govan Collieries and Iron works, rescued by Peter from Dixons Blazes. Soon many offices, corridors and basements all over the campus were filling up with the rescued materials. It was inevitable that this inward tide of records could not long escape the attention of the Principal, Sir Hector Hetherington. So, at one lunchtime in the staff College Club, Peter and assistant were suddenly bracketed by Sir Hector and Lady Hetherington. Sitting across from Peter, Sir Hector barked, "Well Payne, what's this I hear; you are filling up my University with dirty books". Then he laughed, and so did we, but more quietly.

Indeed, the books were dirty, very dirty and often damp and crumbling. So dirty indeed that Peter eventually wrote to the Bedellus, the head of Janitorial and other central services to ask for two boiler suits as protection in our forays into neglected cellars, attics and workshops. Peter then received a reply acknowledging his request, but advising him that "boiler suits were only supplied to workers". As academics we did not qualify.

These pioneering years were extraordinarily busy and the pressure on space led to a Record Store being designed into the plans for the new Adam Smith Building, which became the home of the growing Economic History business archive. This was a milestone, the University recognising the importance and significance of the work of the Colquhoun Lecturer, and accepting responsibility for the growing collection of business records. This coincided in 1967 with the publication of *Studies in Scottish Business History* planned, and edited by Peter, and making available in accessible form for the first time, comprehensive information on our National Archive Sources for

Business History, Business Archives in private hands surveyed by the National Register of Archives (Scotland), and the Business Records surveyed by the Colquhoun Lecturer. In order to extend this service beyond the west of Scotland, Peter then negotiated an agreement by which the Council of the Abertay Historical Association would act as the Dundee Local Committee of the BAC(S). This was the beginning of regional initiatives which from 1970 delivered the Western, Eastern and Northern Surveys. In a decade, Peter had been the catalyst bringing into being a formidable collaborative framework of business record surveying and preservation, to protect and begin to understand our industrial and commercial heritage. This effort emerged both from his position as Colquhoun Lecturer, and his role as Secretary of BAC(S), to which he had added Editor of the Newsletter, introduced in 1966.

Peter's Glasgow decade from 1959-1969 had been a period of great activity and remarkable achievement, and earned for him the accolade of being appointed to the new Chair of Economic History in the University of Aberdeen in 1969. He had to build a new Department from the small core of Malcolm Gray and Bob Tyson. With a number of new appointments the department was soon offering a full programme of courses in support of a Degree in Economic History. His move to Aberdeen took him out of Central Scotland just as its major industries began to slip into terminal decline. Fortunately the framework of archival services and business history he had helped create, was left in experienced local hands, Michael Moss in Archives, and Tony Slaven as Colquhoun Lecturer. From his Aberdeen base he continued to direct much of the work of BAC(S) as the volume of business liquidations accelerated into the 1970's. The timing was not propitious either for Scotland's traditional industries, or for Peter's ambition to grow his department, as the buoyancy of the Social Sciences began to subside. Small departments soon began to come under pressure to merge with larger units to save on posts and costs. Peter fought this threat with an outpouring of high quality research and publication, the things that Universities recognised and applauded.

Beginning in 1974, he published his influential study of *British Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century*, reprinted on numerous occasions, and the bible for students of entrepreneurship and management. This was followed in 1979 by his monumental study of the Scottish Steel Industry, *Colvilles and the Scottish Steel Industry*, which won the Wadsworth Prize. The following year saw the publication of his path breaking analysis of *The Early Scottish Limited Companies, 1856 -1895*. This was an outpouring of the highest quality, and was deepened by a constant stream of learned papers published regularly in the leading Journals. His reputation was stellar, and saw him appointed as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Yet all this achievement could not sustain his Department's independence, and it was duly merged into the enlarged Department of History. This was more than a little

hurtful, and scant recognition of his achievement. But his scholarship continued with his remarkable analysis of *The Hydro: A Study of the Major Hydro-Electric Schemes Undertaken by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board* published in 1988. He also took on making sense of the George Washington Wilson collection of photographs, and edited the journal *Northern Scotland* from 1989. He also served on the Council of the Economic History Society from 1970 to 1991, and from 1991 was also Vice President of our sister organisation the Business Archives Council. His last major work came in 1992, *Growth and Contraction: Scottish Industry, c.1866-1990* a bold analysis and explanation of the forces underlying the rise and ultimate fall of Scotland's traditional industries.

Peter Payne stands in the front rank of the most influential economic and business historians of the second half of the twentieth century. He is the outstanding business historian in Scotland, and stood behind the work of the BAC(S) from its foundation in 1960 till his death this January. He achieved this through distinguished and meticulous scholarship, and a friendly humanity that endeared him to colleagues and students alike. He was a quiet man, a humorous man, and an unswerving friend and supporter of young scholars. His warm smile and booming laugh, only modestly offset by his sometime smelly pipe, were characteristics we all knew, and cherished. He was a family man with deep attachment to Enid, his wife, and to his son and daughter, Simon and Sam, and to their grandchildren. In a busy life, and in retirement, he relaxed with carpentry, in which he was expert, and spent much time with his stamp collection. He was a considerable expert in philately. He was also a lifelong Millwall supporter, and if given the chance, happy to dwell at length on his teams shortcomings, misdemeanours, and occasional successes.

We in the Council share his loss with his family, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy and respect.

Tony Slaven, March 2017