

The death of Peter Davies at the age of 92 after a short illness marks the end of a life-time commitment to the business and maritime history of Merseyside and of the wider world, including West Africa and Japan. Apart from periods spent abroad, whether undertaking research or as a visiting professor at two Japanese universities (Musashi, Tokyo and Hiroshima Shudo), he remained a member of staff at the University of Liverpool from his original appointment as Tutor in 1964, being awarded a personal chair in the Department of Economic and Social History in 1991, shortly before his retirement in 1993 when he became an Emeritus Professor. For ten years, he served as Head of Department. He continued to be research active for around 25 more years; was a stalwart supporter of the Centre for Port and Maritime History; and remained President of ESHGOM (Economic and Social History Grumpy Old Men) until his death, only ever missing a single meeting. Today, such a total commitment to a University is unusual, but Peter's career was exceptional in three ways.

First, Peter was a product of the 'Liverpool School of Maritime History', at a time when it was the foremost centre for research in this field in the country. Led by Francis Hyde, the Chaddock Professor of Economic History, and ably supported by colleagues, including Sheila Marriner (whose work never received the credit it deserved), they made significant contributions to the development of maritime business history with detailed studies of some of the port's most successful shipping companies and founded in 1958 the pioneering journal *Business History*. Peter, having entered the Department of Commerce and Economics in October 1958 as a 30-year-old mature student, subsequently took his MA and PhD there, having developed a passion for maritime history. There followed a series of monographs, each of which tackled new themes and extended the research agenda, including Peter's most important book *The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa, 1852-1972* (1973; 2nd ed. 2000). This was followed by *Sir Alfred Jones: Shipping Entrepreneur Par Excellence* (1978) and a brief, but innovative, study of *Henry Tyrer: A Liverpool Shipping Agent and his Enterprise, 1879-1979* (1979). But what sets Peter apart from many other maritime historians was his willingness to contextualise Liverpool's maritime history within an international framework, whether focusing on trading in West Africa (1976), the history of Fyffes and the banana trade (1990) and, with Tomohei Chida, a modern history of the Japanese Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries (1990). His growing interest in Japan was reflected in a biography of Brigadier (Sir) Philip Toosey, the senior Allied officer at the Tha Maa Kham Japanese prisoner-of-war camp on the Burma-Thailand Railway (1991), which was notable for the contribution of HRH Prince Philip in writing the foreword; the publication of the memoirs of Yoshihiko Futamatsu, the engineer who supervised its construction (2013); and the editing of the letters of Frederick Cornes, one of the most successful British traders in Japan (2008).

Second, Peter played a key role in strengthening the international standing of maritime history. For too long, it had been a fragmented discipline with a mix of high-quality academic papers and informative contributions by amateur historians. Nor did it have an institutional profile. Peter, together with other colleagues, was instrumental in establishing the International Maritime Economic History Association and became its first President in 1990. In addition, he was Senior Vice-President of the International Commission for Maritime History, Chairman of the British Commission for Maritime History and Chairman of the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Maritime History*. This, indeed, was a formidable service to his discipline and testimony to his skills at managing fellow academics without ever upsetting them. He was always ready to ask questions at seminars, but never in a way that placed in question the speaker's central hypothesis.

Third, Peter's career is an excellent example of the way in which universities used to promote social mobility. He was brought up in Egan Road, part of the Council's housing development for the North End of Birkenhead in the early 1920s. Even then, it was a disadvantaged area, prompting his father, an employee of the Great Western Railway, to reflect that among the road's residents, 'only he and a postman were in regular jobs' during the early 1930s. He attended two local primary schools and, subsequently, Temple Road School. Conscripted for National Service (in the Royal Army Service Corps) he claimed to have been one of the last British soldiers to have left Palestine. After being demobbed, his fascination with motorcycles (particularly the new Japanese models) led him eventually to establish a business in Birkenhead (Davies & Jones) which was followed some years later by his acquisition of a stake in two local car companies. This was hardly a traditional background for anyone seeking university admission, but after obtaining his teaching diploma at St. John's College, York, he taught History for two years at Hamilton Secondary School for Boys in Birkenhead. By the 1970s, Peter's success certainly encouraged junior staff in the Department of Economic History to believe that they had made the right career choice. He drove Professor Hyde, then suffering from failing eyesight, into the University in his 1953 Bentley R Type, arriving precisely at 10.30 in time for refreshments in the Senior Common Room; he left Birkenhead behind and built a house in Caldy whose residents already enjoyed a higher life expectancy than those on the eastern side of the Wirral Peninsula; and 'Cmar' (otherwise known as 'the ranch') became the venue for the annual reception for external examiners. Today, as a result of the government's tuition fee policy, mature students have become a rarity, but Peter by his own determination proved what could be achieved at a time when opportunities were also restricted.

He first met Maureen Cheshire in 1956 when they both attended a British Constitution 'A' level course at Birkenhead Technical College. Throughout their marriage she was a constant support: looking after a stream of visiting academics, including a Japanese professor who stayed with them for three months; entertaining external examiners; and always showing a supportive interest in Peter's colleagues and research students. He was 'a lovely man and a real gentleman'. Peter is survived by Maureen and Simon, his son, of whom he was very proud.

Peter Neville Davies, born Birkenhead, 14th July 1927; died Caldy, 19th March 2020.

Robert Lee