

Professor Peter Robson, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University of St Andrews (1926-2020)

It was with sadness that members of the School of Economics and Finance heard the recent news that Professor Peter Robson, a member of this University since 1968, had passed away in Catalunya. A world authority in the economics of international integration, he was one of the leading Africanists of his era, and made important policy contributions to economic development in Uganda, where he played several senior advisory roles with their Government, as well as in many other countries, including Papua New Guinea, where he was Deputy Director of their Institute of National Affairs.

Throughout, he was ever the academic and scholar; and he leaves behind a large corpus of sophisticated analysis of economic integration, in books and articles in research journals, including his classic work, *The Economics of International Integration* (1980), which went through four editions.

Peter was born in Berkhamsted, England on the 21st May 1926. In the days when academics typically did not have a doctorate, he gained a BSc and MSc in Economics from London University, and an MA from Cambridge University. He held academic posts from 1950 onwards, in Sheffield, Queen's Belfast and Cambridge Universities, before a long spell in the University of Nairobi (1962-8), in which his academic and administrative abilities were quickly recognised, and rewarded early, with a chair in economics and the Deanship of Faculty. In 1968, with some highly regarded research publications behind him, including his *Economic Integration in Africa* (1968), he was appointed Professor of Economics at the University of St Andrews.

In terms of his research output, Peter was a gifted applied economist, who blended theory and applications with economic policy and implementation. His *Economics of International Integration* called on economic theories of customs unions, free-trade areas, common markets, etc and led to policy considerations like fiscal integration and harmonization, and monetary integration, and finally to broader matters like equity, cohesion and convergence.

Important to the refreshing of his work on integration was the development of the common market and of the European Union. After decades of witnessing thwarted policies for European integration, Peter and his co-author Jacques Pelkmans (of Maastricht University) were worried that in the EC 'the gap between aspiration and accomplishment often seems discouragingly large'. This stimulated future joint work, including that with the doyen of multinational studies Prof John Dunning (University of Reading), in which they argued for more analysis of the interaction between multinational corporate integration and regional integration.

In further work, Peter broadened his interests to related themes, including joint work with former colleagues or students like Prof David Cobham (now Heriot-Watt University) on monetary integration, and Prof Ian Wooton (now Strathclyde University) on transnational enterprises. Prof Wooton recently commented that Peter was 'a real gentleman, one of the last of his generation in economics', regretting that 'the insights from Peter's writings were not better understood before the UK embarked on...leaving the EU.'

On a personal level, Peter was regarded by another former colleague as being 'reserved with an urbane manner at work, but with a lighter side in social settings, particularly when his wife

Mary was present'. His research, and its spinouts to consulting and policy advising, were his prime concern, which inevitably took him all over the globe. He had polished manners, and a patrician, yet friendly appearance which evoked mandarin-like wisdom and deep learning. All this reassured the people he encountered and contributed to his policy effectiveness. He was a keen sportsman, with a strong competitive streak, and kept very fit. Until late in his years he was capable of a ferociously competitive game of squash. His loves were Alpine climbing, skiing and yachting, and he was a member of the Alpine Club and the Royal Highland Yacht Club.

One way of understanding the professional manner of Peter was to think of him as largely playing an ambassadorial role for the University, as his frequent travels often took him abroad, especially to African nations, where his advisory insights were hugely valued, and were considered to be both judicious and well-grounded. During these visits there were several stalwarts within the Economics Department, like Stuart McDowall, who stepped up to the local leadership challenge.

These travels by Peter were of great value to the University in terms of creating a worldwide network of high-level opinion formers who were sympathetic to the way that St Andrews Economics combined research eminence with policy relevance. This sometimes led to unusual, but fruitful outcomes like our past affiliation with the research centre Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur le Développement International (CERDI).

CERDI, the Centre for Studies and Research on International Development, lay in the School of Economics of the University of Clermont-Auvergne. Peter won a British Council research grant to develop this relationship, which proved synergistic. He was particularly friendly with Patrick Guillaumont, a leading French development economist, author of *Out of the Trap* (2019) and his wife Sylviane Guillaumont-Jeanneney, a top French monetary economist. For a decade or more, staff from St Andrews, like Dr (now Professor) David Cobham, would teach modules there, in French, in situ, and interact with research staff.

Peter formally retired from St Andrews in 1991 and became thereafter an Emeritus Professor in Economics. He moved office from St Katharine's West to Castlecliffe when the School relocated shortly after. He had a frequent presence in the School for many years after that, continuing to teach development economics and allocating much further research time to new editions and republications of many of his major works, including the books *The Economics of International Integration*; *Economics Integration in Africa*; *Integration, Development and Equity: Economic Integration in West Africa*; and the edited collections *International Economic Integration: selected readings*; *The Economies of Africa*; and *Transnational Corporations and Regional Economic Development*, mainly published with Routledge.

Peter married Mary Isobel Tye in 1949, a statistician by training, and beloved wife and mother, who died in St Andrews in 2009. They had three children: Christopher, a talented wind instrumentalist, of international renown, who taught at the Glasgow School of Music, played bassoon with the Scottish, Swedish and Israeli Chamber Orchestras, and died tragically in a paragliding accident in 2003; Colin Michael, a translator; and Gillian ('Gilly') a lecturer in Melbourne Polytechnic University. Peter and Mary had four grandchildren: Julia, Sami, Lily and David.

Members of the School of Economics & Finance express great sympathy to the family of Peter in their loss. It marks the passing of a leading international economic authority who took his profound understanding of theory into practice, and in doing so had a great, positive impact on numerous emerging countries in the African continent, and on several other developing countries of the world.

Gavin C Reid

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Image of Professor Peter Robson courtesy of the University of St Andrews Library
(Transcript #1929498)

