

Donald Winch (15 April 1935–12 June 2017)

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Donald Winch is best known and greatly admired for his scholarly work in intellectual history, especially for his work on Adam Smith which began with *Adam Smith's Politics* (1978). As he put it himself (Winch, 1996: 1), he had been ‘after Smith in recent years – engaged in a search, like many before me, for the meaning of his intellectual enterprise’ and also interested in what followed by way of interpretation and misinterpretation after Smith’s death. But while this returned him to his early interests in his doctoral research, completed under Jacob Viner at Princeton and published as *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (Winch, 1965), he had also established himself as an accomplished historian of 20th-century economic thought with his very successful *Economics and Policy* (Winch, 1972 [1969]) and, what he described as its sequel (Winch, 2009a: 6), a study of the Economic Advisory Council in Britain during the great depression of the 1930s (Howson and Winch, 1977).

In *Economics and Policy*, Donald Winch (1972) had commented that he was ‘conscious of the need ... for more detailed research and documentary evidence from memoirs and official files not yet, or only recently, released’ (p. 30). I first met Donald one day in October 1972 in Brighton, after he had decided to undertake such archival research himself, specifically on the Economic Advisory Council set up by James Ramsay MacDonald, Prime Minister of the second Labour government 1929–1931, and wanted some research assistance.

The Council, which included J.M. Keynes, was an advisory body but it had a permanent secretariat, headed by the Cambridge economist Hubert Henderson; it was in fact the first attempt in Britain to recruit economists into government on a full-time basis. But since the Council itself stopped meeting after 1931 and most of its sub-committees lapsed soon after, the almost unanimous verdict was that it had been a complete failure. (The exception was that of Richard Sayers (1956), in his official history of *Financial Policy 1939–45*.) I readily agreed to work with Donald, as I was then engaged in the archival research for my doctoral dissertation (Howson, 1975) and had already come across relevant material in the UK national archives.

In 1969, Donald had been appointed professor of economic thought at the University of Sussex, where he had been a lecturer and then reader in economics since 1963; he was also in the second of his 6 years as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences (hence the need for research assistance). In our conversations in Brighton, I learned much of his background and education (he and I were both LSE (London School of Economics and Political Science) graduates).

He was born in Fulham in inner London but grew up in the outer London suburb of North Cheam, except for a period as a wartime evacuee at Keswick in the Lake District

in 1943–1945; as I recall, his father Sidney, who had been trained as a marble mason by his own father, had worked on the decorations of the liner *Queen Mary* in the early 1930s and served in the navy as a stoker during the war; invalided out he worked in an office after the war; and his mother Iris' family in Suffolk had kept a pub. Donald received his secondary school education at Sutton Grammar School and saw himself as an archetypal beneficiary of the changes in secondary education introduced by the 1944 Education Act. He benefitted particularly from the encouragement and excellent teaching of his sixth form teachers, graduates with good degrees who would nowadays have university posts. He went on to the London School of Economics in 1953, graduating 3 years later with a first in the BSc (Econ), specializing in international economics under James Meade.

As Donald Winch (2009b) explained in his address to a conference of the History of Economic Thought Society of Australia in Fremantle,

Good fortune played its part in what happened next I had chosen to go to Princeton because I originally hoped to write a dissertation on customs union theory, the field in which Viner was a pioneer and James Meade the latest exponent ... That became the topic of my term paper for Viner's course on international trade; and when choosing a subject for [his] only other course ... on the history of economic thought ... it seemed natural to select an episode that could be connected with the theory of international trade [Interested in the consequences of trade under conditions of factor mobility between trading countries] my choice ... involved the study of the writings of an active proponent of 'systematic colonization' in the 1830s, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, and his defence of the benefits of capital and labour mobility from Britain to new colonies in Australia and New Zealand. (p. 5)

The topic, and the way Donald placed it in the context of classical economic theory which had by and large dismissed the utility of colonies, is fascinating to a New Zealander (or to a South Australian).

Donald spent another year in the USA, teaching the history of economic thought as well as international trade theory at Berkeley, before returning to the UK to a permanent lectureship at Edinburgh, finding his colleagues intellectually stimulating and the city agreeable except for its short dark winter days. His move to Sussex enabled him not only to continue teaching HET but to teach it in an interdisciplinary context including the history and methodology of the other social sciences.

Returning to our work together, Donald's original intention had been to publish a selection of the documents written by economists for the EAC or its committees, with a brief introduction indicating what – if anything – had come of their recommendations on economic policy. We discovered so much more than we expected, especially about the proceedings and official discussion of the Committee on Economic Information, which was created in 1932 and survived until the war, that the volume became a book on the role of the EAC throughout the 1930s, with only a small selection of its reports attached. We took it in turn to write the chapters, Donald producing the first draft of chapter 2, myself chapter 3, Donald chapter 4 and so on, and then swapping the drafts and doing the necessary iterations and redrafting to meet each other's criticisms. Since the process lasted into Donald's first sabbatical leave at Princeton in 1974–1975, we had to defend

our criticisms and requests for revisions as well as our own drafting in a lengthy correspondence. It was for me an invaluable apprenticeship in scholarly academic writing.

It was in that Princeton year that he returned to Adam Smith, and from the history of economic thought to intellectual history, under the influence of the historians of political thought Quentin Skinner and John Pocock, who were also at the Institute for Advanced Study. This development continued on his return to Sussex, where he had as colleagues John Burrow and Stefan Collini (appointed in 1969 and 1974). The first fruit of their collaboration was the acclaimed *That Noble Science of Politics* (1983). He also worked on T.R. Malthus (Winch, 1987), ‘partly [as] a response to a criticism of my work on Smith’, since it was a way of tackling his longstanding interest in the uses to which the *Wealth of Nations* had been put (Winch, 2009a: 8). I admit I did not share Donald’s interest in Smith but I did share his admiration for David Hume (I have long regretted that I did not give him my cherished paperback edition of Norman Kemp Smith’s *The Philosophy of David Hume* (1941) when copies had become virtually unobtainable) and I found his discussions of Malthus and of John Stuart Mill (especially those of his later books *Riches and Poverty* (1996) and *Wealth and Life* (2009b)) fascinating and very stimulating. (I also agree – on this point alone – with Donald’s fiercest Australian critic that the essays in *Wealth and Life* on Louis Mallett, Henry Sidgwick, Herbert Foxwell, Alfred Marshall and J.A. Hobson are “‘must reads’” (Moore, 2010: 100)¹).

Soon after I met Donald he and his parents sold their small houses in Brighton and Worthing (where his parents had moved while he was a graduate student) to buy The Old Brewery, Cooksbridge, a conversion of the brewery into a spacious house with a cottage attached and a garden of five acres with greenhouses, a tennis court and a paddock looking towards the South Downs. I have many happy memories of visiting the house, of meeting his parents, who lived in the cottage, of walking around the ‘estate’ and admiring his and his wife Dolly’s tree felling and tree planting, and of long leisurely lunches taken outside in the yard overlooking the old well, when Donald would often entertain us with tales of his campaigns against foolish or misguided ideas of administrators at the University of Sussex (or elsewhere).

Donald was also very loyal to the profession. He organized the first of the now long-running annual History of Economic Thought conferences at Sussex in 1968. He served as publications secretary to the Royal Economic Society from 1971 until last year, following in the footsteps of Keynes and Austin Robinson in maintaining the RES tradition of supporting publication of learned editions and translations; he commissioned new projects, most notably variorum editions of Malthus’ *Essay on Population* and *Principles of Political Economy* by Patricia James and John Pullen, respectively. He also served as joint review editor of the *Economic Journal* 1976–1983. A more recent project for the RES was to update Paul Sturges’ guide to *Economists’ Papers 1750–1950* (1975) in the form of a website (www.economistspapers.org.uk), recruiting two ‘assistants’ Donald Moggridge and myself. He has entrusted me with the ‘editorship’ and I hope to keep the project going as long as possible. My first task will no doubt be to provide the entry for Donald’s papers.

We continued to correspond frequently – and to discuss pieces we were each writing as well as entries for our website – until this spring. As Donald then remarked, we had

enjoyed over 40 years of friendship and close collaboration – for which I shall always be very grateful.

Note

1. Moore met Winch only in Fremantle in 2009, but Donald had spent 6 months at ANU in 1983.

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