

## REMINISCENCES OF PATRICIA JAMES (1917-1987)\*

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The death of Mrs Patricia James on March 15th, 1987, will be a great loss to historians of economic thought in general and to Malthus scholars in particular. After editing The Travel Diaries of T.R. Malthus in 1966, she embarked upon an intensive period of research for more than two decades, and became the most knowledgeable and accurate author ever to have written on the life of Malthus.

Her greatest achievement, and the one for which historians of economics will for ever be indebted to her, was Population Malthus. His Life and Times, 1979. The characteristically unpretentious and at times conversational style of Population Malthus might disguise for some readers the extraordinary originality of its contents, but the gulf between the world's knowledge of Malthus before and after Population Malthus is immense. By researching the historical records, by tracing Malthus' descendants in England and New Zealand, and by discovering unpublished correspondence and other documents, Patricia James acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of Malthus himself, his ancestors, his immediate family, and the events, circumstances, and places of his life. Without reference to her bank of meticulously-recorded index cards, she could recount year by year, and almost month by month, what Malthus was doing, with whom he was corresponding, what he was reading, what he was writing, whom he was visiting, who was visiting him, and the state of health and personal circumstances of himself, his family, and his relatives. She worked with a portrait of Malthus on her desk and her empathy for the man and his ideas shows through in her writings. But the warmth of this bond with the man she called "Poor Malthus" did not destroy the objectivity of her judgement. She has in fact been recently reproached for the harshness of some of her criticisms; for example, of Malthus' Definitions in Political Economy.

Patricia James' second greatest research achievement was her variorum edition of the Essay on Population, the manuscript of which is currently with the publishers (Cambridge University Press for the Royal Economic Society). She set up the six editions of the Essay on a row of desks, and alone and without research or secretarial assistance, moved backwards and forwards recording, analysing and

commenting upon the variations. These many months of hard labour were interspersed with visits to the Bodleian Library to compile extensive notes on the sources used by Malthus. She read every known word that Malthus wrote, and probably came as close as any single researcher could to reading every word that Malthus read. This vast store of knowledge was enthusiastically shared, at short notice and embarrassing length, with many importunate Malthus scholars, who can now no longer depend on her help.

- \* A formal obituary by Professor Donald Winch will be published in the History of Economic Thought Newsletter.