

Peter Mathias

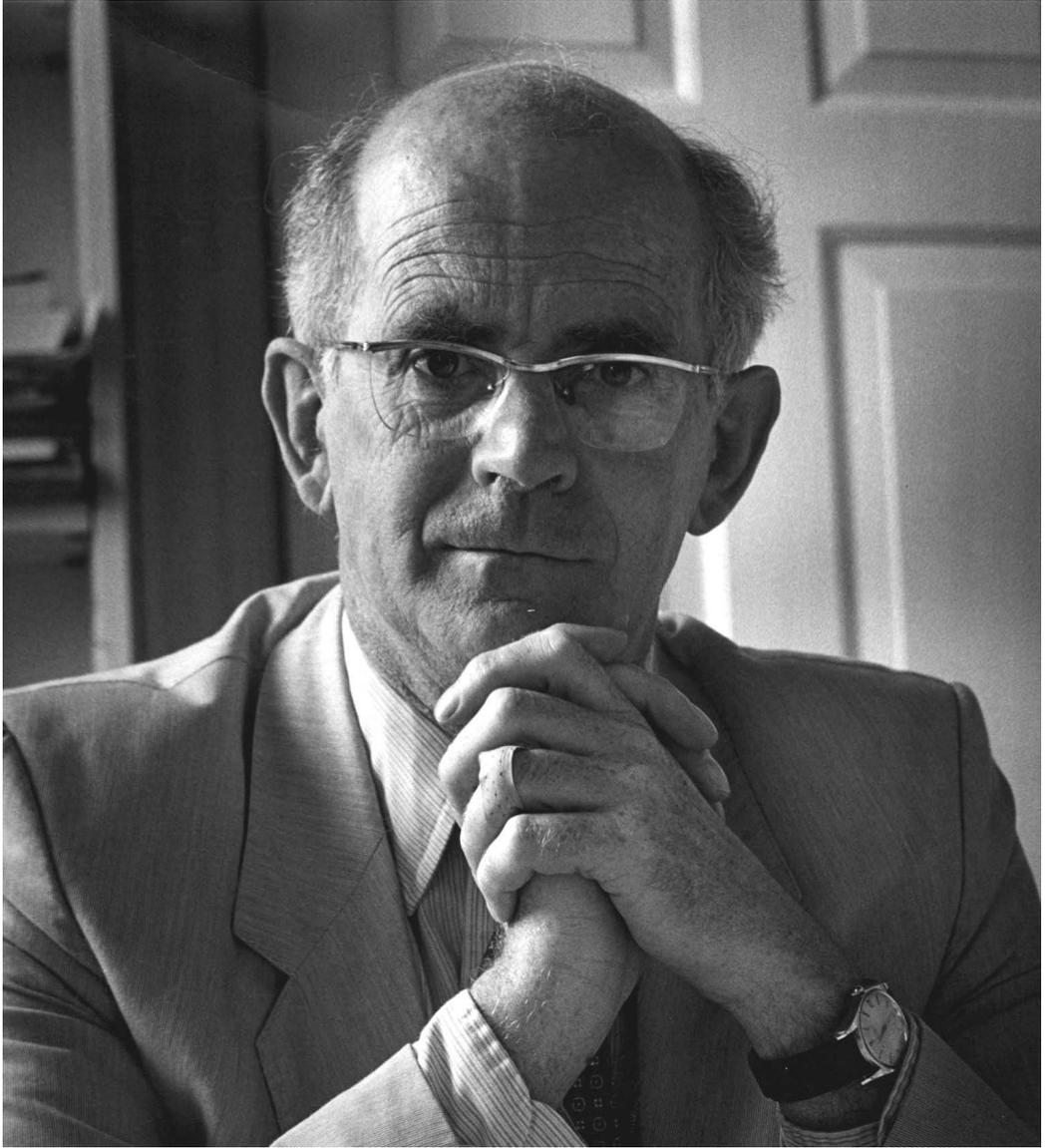
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elected Fellow of the British Academy 1977

by

MAXINE BERG

Fellow of the Academy



PETER MATHIAS
at All Souls College, Oxford, July 1984

Peter Mathias was Chichele Professor of Economic History at the University of Oxford, the leading chair in economic history, during the period of the subject's greatest strength, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Economic history later went in different directions; some would say that it declined, at least for a time. In his reflections on this later period, Mathias said that economic history lost the battle, but won the war. It had become a central part of mainstream historical research and teaching. If it did so this was in no small part due to Mathias's activities. Richard Smith called him the most internationally oriented of economic historians, and indeed he was fundamental to a major internationalisation of the subject in the third quarter of the twentieth century. His contribution was intellectual, through his focus on comparative industrialisation, and institutional, through his considerable success in building networks that crossed disciplines, countries and barriers of class and culture. He was always open to, and in touch with, new intellectual developments in economic history; he had a quick sense of where the opportunities opened for the field and of the way in which his subject fitted into the wider historical disciplines. He worked on many international and national committees, demonstrating great integrity, courage and fairness.¹

Peter Mathias was an economic historian of industry, business and technology. His outlook was comparative and he was open to new social science methods. He kept a balance between empirical economic and social history as practised by earlier historians and arising out of the tradition of T. S. Ashton, and the emerging 'new economic history', based in economic theory and quantitative methodologies. He wrote a major monograph, the best-known textbook of his generation, which was translated into many languages. He also published several shorter monographs and many edited collections and articles. More than any other economic historian of his generation, Mathias contributed to making his field both internationalist and broadly conceived, of appeal to both social scientists and historians.

¹ See the obituary notice by J. A. Davis, 'Peter Mathias CBE 1928–2016', *Journal of European Economic History*, 45 (2016), 1–8. Also see extended interviews with Peter Mathias: Negley Harte and Peter Mathias, Economic History Society Interviews with Economic Historians, 2002, LSE Archives, <https://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=ECONOMIC+HISTORY+SOCIETY%2f2010%2f12%2f25&pos=26> (accessed 14 March 2018); A. McFarlane, 'An interview on the life and work of the historian, Peter Mathias, Part 2, 23 September 2009' <http://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/226099> (accessed 14 March 2018); and A. McFarlane 'Interview with Peter Mathias', 18 December 2008 www.alanmacfarlane.com/ancestors/mathias.htm (accessed 26 March 2018). See, in addition, P. O'Brien, 'Preface', in K. Bruland and P. O'Brien (eds.), *From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism: Essays in Business and Industrial History in Honour of Peter Mathias* (Oxford, 1998), pp. vii–xi, and 'Peter Mathias: a bibliography', in Bruland and O'Brien, *From Family Firms*, pp. xix–xxv. I have also benefited from unpublished obituary notices by Richard Smith and Negley Harte.

I

Peter Mathias came from a modest rural background. His family originated in Dublin, but his father, Jack Mathias, was born in Plymouth; he went on to work in the Plymouth dockyards and later joined the Royal Navy. His mother Marion Love was from the small Wiltshire village of Wingfield. Many in her family had been in service to the Caillard family at Wingfield House. Peter was born on 10 January 1928 in Freshford, Somerset, and spent his early years there with his mother and grandparents, while his father was on active duty abroad in the Navy. In 1932, the family moved to Bristol where his father became a clerk in the local building society. A teacher spotted Peter as a bright boy, and in 1938 entered him for a scholarship to Colston's Hospital, a local charity and direct grant grammar school. He boarded there and, while his father was again away on naval duties during the Second World War, his mother returned to her parents in Wingfield. Peter spent his school holidays with them and did much of his growing up in these rural surroundings. He remembered a community of tiny workers' cottages with large families and great poverty. Extra tutoring and some classes at Bristol Grammar School helped him in his application to Cambridge where he gained an exhibition at Jesus College in 1946. He did his National Service before taking up his college place in 1948.

Mathias's tutor at Jesus was the medievalist, Vivian Fisher, while Charles Wilson taught him English Economic History. Wilson was an enormous influence, joined, in his later undergraduate years, by Sir Michael (Munia) Postan. A further mentor in his early undergraduate years was Edward Welbourne, Senior Tutor and later Master of Emmanuel College. Peter graduated with a distinction in the History Tripos in 1951.

Mathias went to Welbourne's lectures during all three years, and later described him as an eccentric, very traditional about Cambridge, but radical in economic history. Welbourne had written on the Durham miners, but was an embattled figure of the right in Fabian-dominated economic history at the time. It was Wilson, a leading figure on English mercantilism and Anglo-Dutch relations, who sent Mathias to Welbourne's lectures. Wilson too took a strongly empirical and anti-Fabian or anti-socialist approach to his subject, and he also fostered an academic approach to business history. Wilson, at the time Mathias came to Cambridge, was already involved in the great history of Unilever, along with a team of research assistants in London and Rotterdam. This was to be the first major academic business history in Britain, resulting in a two-volume work in 1954.

Wilson became Mathias's research supervisor and arranged for him to go to Harvard for some economics training but he forgot to send in the application, so this was delayed for a year. Mathias spent 1952–3 at Harvard, taking part there in the early years of the Research Center for Entrepreneurial History (1948–58). Wilson had good

international connections that he would pass on to Mathias, first within the USA, then later with the European University Institute and the Datini Institute. Even more significant for Mathias's trajectory was his early encounter with Postan. Wilson did not like Postan; therefore, as an undergraduate, Mathias had to sneak off to Postan's lectures. Confronted once by Wilson, he defended himself: 'you must admit that he knows a lot about the manor'. Wilson retorted, 'He should do; he grew up on one.'

Postan had come from the London School of Economics (LSE) to the Cambridge Chair of Economic History in 1938 and was the major force in economic history in Cambridge throughout Mathias's time as a student and then lecturer in the Cambridge History Faculty. Postan introduced Mathias to a wider world beyond Cambridge—that of Weber, Dopsch, Durkheim, Marx and wide reading in European economic history. Postan was as much at home among the economists as the historians. He lectured on Marxism for the Economics Faculty and on both medieval and twentieth-century economic history for the History Faculty. A medievalist with an up-to-date knowledge of writing on the twentieth-century economy was a rare thing, but Postan had gained his expertise during his wartime service in the Department of Economic Warfare. He ran the famous Economic History seminar in Cambridge which Mathias attended from 1951. Both Wilson and Postan pushed him, as a young researcher, to take up opportunities and to respond to influences outside Cambridge. Mathias went to W. W. Rostow's lectures in 1951–2 on 'The British Economy of the Nineteenth Century' and, some years later, he attended his series on 'The Stages of Economic Growth'. Apart from his year at Harvard, Mathias was also a regular participant in T. S. Ashton's seminars at the LSE. He remembered Donald Coleman cooking meals after the seminars in his flat in Charing Cross Road where debate continued; many brought wine but this never quite measured up to Coleman's expectations. Mathias later made brief excursions to the *École des Hautes Études* in Paris. He was centrally involved as a student and young researcher then lecturer in the making of new directions in the field at Cambridge, London and Europe, learning much from European traditions as well as from the USA.

II

Mathias was a research student for only a year before being elected a Research Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, whereupon his supervisor, Charles Wilson, told him he no longer had any need for a PhD degree. He was researching the brewing industry, a subject that combined his interests in industrial and business history. This was an important topic, perhaps less appreciated at the time than it is now when historians

have recently turned to research the histories of food and drink. Mathias made pioneering use of business records held by many surviving local brewery firms throughout the country, although access to them was seldom easy. The brewers were very conservative and reticent, but Mathias had cousins in the industry, and Welbourne too had links to Dale's Brewery in Cambridge. Mathias researched with great success using records that had suffered the 'hazards of efficient chief clerks, the salvage drives of two world wars, and the Luftwaffe (all destroying records in their different ways and effective in that order)'.²

The book Mathias wrote, *The Brewing Industry in England 1700–1830* (1959), set high standards for future industrial and business histories, and remains unsurpassed as a study of brewing.³ The volume also conveyed the significance of the industry to historians of the factory system. It demonstrated that the transition to porter brewing had been part of an early and very rapid shift from small-scale and household processing to very large-scale and mass production; this was thus a frequently neglected case of industrialisation. The book led naturally to further interests connected with those of Charles Wilson, arising out of Wilson's Unilever study. Mathias went on to write *The Retailing Revolution: a History of Multiple Retailing in the Food Trades Based upon the Allied Suppliers Group of Companies* (1967).⁴ This new book formed an important contribution to academic business history.

Fast on the heels of this book came another that more truly conveyed Mathias's central interest in the history of industrialisation in Britain: his textbook, *The First Industrial Nation: an Economic History of Britain 1700–1914* (1969),⁵ which went through many imprints, with the last in 2001. It remains in print. This work was based on the lectures Mathias gave in Cambridge from 1955 onwards when he took over the first-year economic history course from Charles Wilson. The book marked the end of his long teaching on this course. In 1968, aged forty-one, he left Cambridge to take up the Chichele Chair in Economic History at All Souls College, Oxford.

The First Industrial Nation became the main text alongside Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire* during the years when economic history grew to its height in the historical disciplines.⁶ It was read in sixth forms and universities across Britain and the English-speaking world, then translated into many languages; it made Mathias one of the best-known economic historians. Its lucid coverage of most of the key topics, combining

²N. Harte, 'Peter Mathias', Obituary Notice.

³P. Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England 1700–1830* (Cambridge, 1959).

⁴P. Mathias, *The Retailing Revolution: a History of Multiple Retailing in the Food Trades Based upon the Allied Suppliers Group of Companies* (London, 1967).

⁵P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: an Economic History of Britain 1700–1914* (London, 1969).

⁶E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: the Pelican Economic History of Britain*, vol. 3: *From 1750 to the Present Day* (Harmondsworth, 1969).

accounts of individuals with basic economic concepts and a good set of statistical tables and graphs, complemented another key text of the period, Phyllis Deane's *The First Industrial Revolution* (1965), which was designed around economic concepts and data.⁷ Mathias made use of basic concepts of economic theory and time-series data in the way of Clapham and Ashton; indeed, the book was dedicated to 'T.S.A.'. The chapters were short and lively, and it became *the* book for students of the subject in its heyday, with economic growth as its theme and sound historical explanations of how modern economic growth had begun in Britain.

III

Mathias's inaugural lecture of 1970 in the Chichele chair (which he had taken over from H. J. Habakkuk) was entitled 'Living with our Neighbours'. It responded to the impacts of the new sociology on social history and of economic theory on economic history.⁸ Mathias pointed to the impetus provided to social and economic history by the new study of social relations as a dynamic in the process of economic growth, especially through demography, law, education and cultural structures of the market. He warned economic historians against retreating into examining exclusively economic variables, and of relying on data and measurement outside of context. In Mathias's view, economic history would 'remain a largely synthesizing discipline' drawing new ideas from the social sciences but 'the limitations of data would condemn it to remain an inexact science': 'The methodological claims of economic history to be a social science are modest, but it can challenge over-ambitious methodologies among economists and sociologists.'⁹

His caveats were to some degree acknowledged by the first wave of new economic historians emerging from the USA from the end of the 1960s, though largely forgotten by the next. And Mathias, in his Chair in Oxford, was instrumental in bringing the new economic history to Britain through visiting fellowships that brought Americans, Europeans and other international scholars to All Souls. He had arrived there at an opportune moment. Not long before, the college was criticised in the Franks Commission of 1964 for 'its infirmity of purpose'. Habakkuk had suggested a visiting fellows programme as a means of avoiding it becoming a college for graduate students, rather than a fellows-only institution. Since the late 1960s, over six hundred visiting

⁷ P. Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 1965).

⁸ P. Mathias, *Living with our Neighbours: the Role of Economic History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University in the Hall of All Souls College, Oxford, on the 24th of November, 1970* (Oxford, 1971).

⁹ Also see the version published as P. Mathias, 'Living with our neighbours', in N. B. Harte (ed.), *The Study of Economic History: Collected Inaugural Lectures, 1893–1970* (London, 1971), pp. 1–20.

fellows have participated, and each year between twelve and twenty are elected. Mathias had the contacts and the energy to implement the scheme and he quickly found a number of key players to fill the slots.

The visiting fellowships gave Mathias the opportunity to bring in established and ascendant figures in the field in Europe, North America and elsewhere: Herman Van der Wee, François Crouzet, David Landes and Rondo Cameron, Jacob Price, Richard Goldthwaite and Louis Cullen, and the new wave of quantitative economic historians, Robert Fogel, Albert Fishlow, Robert Galman, Peter Temin and Paul David were all visiting fellows over the next twenty years. Nuffield College, with Max Hartwell as Reader in Economic History there, brought in other visiting economic historians, including Nathan Rosenberg and Stanley Engerman, and had studentships and post-doctoral fellowships to offer, which brought those working in economic history and economics alongside the new social history. Max Hartwell assiduously built up the economic history holdings at the Nuffield Library, quickly acquiring the newest journals, working papers and books, especially those from the USA. At All Souls, Mathias ran the celebrated Friday evening seminar in economic history, crowded out with those from several faculties.

While not becoming himself a ‘new economic historian’, Mathias brought his knowledge of industry and technology in the eighteenth century to bear on debates during the 1970s on the role of technology and innovation in economic growth among the new economic historians, and also took part in debates on the role of science and technology arising out of the new social history of science. He brought several historians of science to All Souls just at the key juncture of these debates and himself published several important articles on these subjects, some of which were gathered into his *Science and Society 1600–1800* (1972) and later into *The Transformation of England* (1979).¹⁰

During these Oxford years, Mathias was also the editor of the distinguished multi-volume *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, its first volume edited by J. H. Clapham and Eileen Power, and several subsequent volumes by Postan. Mathias took on the final volumes and brought the enterprise to a successful completion.¹¹ He also started and was series editor of the very influential Methuen series, ‘Debates in

¹⁰ P. Mathias (ed.), *Science and Society 1600–1900* (Cambridge, 1972); P. Mathias (ed.), *The Transformation of England* (London, 1979).

¹¹ P. Mathias and M. M. Postan (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 7, parts 1 and 2: *The Industrial Economies: Capital, Labour and Enterprise* (Cambridge, 1978), and P. Mathias and S. Pollard (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 8: *The Industrial Economies: the Development of Economic and Social Policies* (Cambridge, 1988).

Economic History', one that did much to shape the teaching of the subject over more than two decades.¹²

IV

Equally important as his writing and teaching, and his position in the Chichele chair, were Mathias's roles in the Economic History Society and, connected with this, in the International Economic History Association (IEHA). As a final year undergraduate, he was taken from Cambridge to his first meeting of the Economic History Society by E. E. Rich. This was the first residential conference of the Society, at Worcester College, Oxford, in 1951. It was so cold that R. H. Tawney came down to breakfast wrapped in a blanket. He lit his pipe during the first session, and proceeded to set this blanket on fire, creating quite a scene. Tawney's great commitment to keeping subscriptions to the Society and the *Economic History Review* low was later continued by Mathias, together with Kenneth Berrill, both of whom transformed the Society's finances when they became successive Treasurers, making shrewd investments, increasing membership and initiating larger print runs of the journal to bring costs down.

The Oxford conference was the beginning of the residential conferences of the Society, and Mathias quickly became a driving force in the Society, working alongside Habakkuk, Postan and Berrill. Berrill, the bursar of St Catharine's and later King's College, Cambridge, had worked in the City, and invested the Society's funds in Japan and in a Dutch investment company. He once carried gold in a belt to Japan to invest for the Society. Mathias continued the tradition, deftly investing so that he was able to raise the Society from a small organisation during the 1930s relying on 'whip rounds' in Eileen Power's kitchen to the best-funded subject group organisation in the humanities and social sciences by the 1980s.

Mathias's work for the Society, as Reviews Editor, then as Assistant Editor of the *Review* from 1955, Treasurer of the Society (1968–88) and President (1989–92) made it a formative institution for his own and other research students. Experiences for these students were rich and varied. There was a great frisson, with debates of the moment between economic and social historians, catching of late-night buses to sleep on the floors of various friends near to conferences held across the North of England, and going off on conference excursions where Mathias and his friends and colleagues on the Council led the way to mills, sites of former open field agriculture, ports and customs houses.

¹²A full listing of his publications is 'Peter Mathias: a bibliography', pp. xix–xxv

Mathias, both within Oxford and within the Economic History Society, fostered a broad and connective economic history. While bringing so much of the new economic history to Britain and Europe, he viewed the subject as one also connected with social and cultural history. And indeed, the Economic History Society grew as a society of economic and social history. The period when Mathias presided over economic history was also the time of the great rise of social history with History Workshop and the new Social History Society, along with the great period of labour history. Mathias's 'broad church' kept the fields together, whereas in the USA they divided.

V

The Economic History Society and Mathias's early close link to this through Postan also brought him into the origins of the IEHA. Both Berrill and Mathias assisted Postan in the early meetings, most held in Paris with Fernand Braudel. The IEHA grew out of panels and meetings at the CISH (Comité International des Sciences Historiques) Congress in Stockholm in 1960. Meetings were held beforehand in Paris, and in Stockholm with Ernst Söderlund, then Professor of Economic History at the University of Stockholm.

Mathias went to many of these, though not funded for his travel, and reported 'turning out his pockets' to find the cash for his expenses. It was not easy dealing with Braudel, but Braudel had access to the funding, some of this provided through the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations as well as the French government. Braudel also had many close connections with young East European scholars through the visiting fellowships he could offer them, and the *raison d'être* of the IEHA was to provide an opening and access to Western scholarship for historians, especially of the smaller East European countries. A small group of mostly likeminded Europeans formed the Executive Committee, and Mathias was on this from the start. The Committee was as much an arm of international diplomacy as it was a group for organising international conferences. It brought together West and East Europeans, the Americans and the Russians in this effort in its early days. Mathias called the IEHA a 'Cold War project', and he was pivotal in negotiating the complexities of various stages of *détente* while on the Committee, especially in his periods as Secretary (1959–62) and when he was President between 1974 and 1978.¹³

Mathias played a particularly important role over Czechoslovakia after it was invaded by the Warsaw Pact in 1968. The Czech economic historian, Arnošt Klíma,

¹³ See M. Berg, 'East–West dialogues: economic history, the Cold War and *détente*', *Journal of Modern History*, 87 (2015), 36–71.

was on the Executive Committee of the IEHA and was well known in the West for his publications on the transition from feudalism to capitalism and later on proto-industrialisation in *Past & Present* and the *Economic History Review*. His student, Jan Palach, set himself on fire in Wenceslas Square at a political protest on 16 January 1969. Klima was summoned to the Czech Academy of Sciences and asked whether he approved of the Russian intervention. His negative answer sealed his fate, and he was no longer allowed to attend international meetings outside the Iron Curtain. Mathias stood up to the pressure from the Soviets and others in the Eastern bloc to have Klima removed from the Executive Committee. At the Edinburgh Congress in 1978, when Mathias was President of the IEHA, the Soviet delegate, Vinogradov, made a further effort to have Klima's now conspicuously vacant seat filled by another Czech representative. Mathias had the decision deferred, and phoned Klima that evening; miraculously his call went through, and he learned that membership of this prestigious international committee was the only thing keeping Klima out of jail.

Mathias concluded the business: 'I reported this to the Committee in Edinburgh. Vinogradov remained silent, his gun having been spiked, and Klima was duly re-elected.' Mathias followed up with a sharp letter to the Minister of Education in Prague, protesting the denial of a passport for Klima, which had caused 'widespread dismay and anger amongst economic historians in many countries'. Klima remained on the Committee, his chair vacant until he resigned in 1982. He was replaced by the Hungarian Iván Berend, though only after an objection by the Russians that another Czech should be elected was overruled.

Klima had been in the USA in 1968 and had participated in the International Congress at Bloomington along with his compatriots, Alice Teichová and Mikuláš Teich, who were also on American visiting fellowships at the time and were invited speakers. Together with Klima they were the only Czechs at the Congress, though it was also attended by a few Poles and some Hungarians including György Ránki and Iván Berend. A Soviet presence was a high priority for the central committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and it sent a strong delegation under the leadership of Vinogradov. The subject of the invasion was a great event at the Congress. Teichová spoke from the floor at a crowded session on industrial structure in the twentieth century; she was applauded and supported by other East Europeans.¹⁴ The Teichs did not return to Czechoslovakia after their fellowship year; Klima did return because his family was still there. Mathias found college fellowships in Cambridge for the Teichs, and supported Teichová's appointment to a lectureship and later chair in economic history at the University of East Anglia.¹⁵

¹⁴ See discussion of these events in Berg, 'East–West dialogues', 62–5.

¹⁵ Interview with Alice Teichová and Mikulus Teich, 23 March 2010.

Mathias remained active in the IEHA as an Honorary President, attending the Congresses right up to 2009 at Utrecht. He was also a member from the start in 1967 of the Datini Institute in Prato initiated by Fernand Braudel and Federigo Melis. Braudel accepted Mathias, while he excluded Postan. Mathias was on the scientific executive committee until he was seventy, and took part in the meetings, often three times a year, to organise an annual week-long conference around different themes of medieval and early modern economic history. Several on the Prato committees were also on the IEHA, and the annual *Settimane* brought many British economic historians into contact with other Western and Eastern European as well as American and Canadian scholars.

Mathias also had connections with Italy. He was one of the founders of the *Journal of European Economic History* (*JEEH*), working closely with Luigi de Rosa of the Maritime University in Naples. The *JEEH* was funded by the Banco di Roma, and Mathias was active on the international board from its founding in 1972 to 2016. The Bank of Rome wanted a journal focused on Europe in its broadest geographical sense, but also addressed to an international audience; hence, its language of publication was English.¹⁶ Mathias continued to take a close interest in the *JEEH* long after de Rosa's death, and checked and proof-read each issue before it went to press right up until his own death.

Through de Rosa, Mathias also became involved in the enterprises of the Avvocato Gherardo Morrato at the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici in Naples. The Istituto launched a series of English-language summer seminars in economic history for Italian students—the first was in Oxford in 1984, led by Mathias. Four further seminars were held at the Centre for Social History at Warwick University, co-directed with Professor John Davis. The papers were published in five volumes edited by Mathias and Davis.¹⁷ Mathias gave annual lectures at the Istituto Filosofici, later published in *Cinque Lezioni di storia e teoria dello sviluppo economico* (2003). His last lecture in Naples was 'L'idea di Europa: Mutamenti di concetti e realtà attraverso i secoli', written in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁸ In this he looked at changing perceptions of the idea of Europe through to the development of the post-Second World War European project.¹⁹

¹⁶See P. Mathias, 'The Journal of European Economic History: a review of its existence over forty years since its foundation in 1972', *Journal of European Economic History*, 40 (2011), 11–27.

¹⁷See P. Mathias and J. A. Davis (eds.), *The First Industrial Revolutions* (London, 1989); P. Mathias and J. A. Davis (eds.), *Innovation and Technology in Europe* (London, 1991); P. Mathias and J. A. Davis (eds.), *Enterprise and Labour* (London, 1996); P. Mathias and J. A. Davis (eds.), *Agriculture and Industrialization* (London, 1996); P. Mathias and J. A. Davis (eds.), *International Trade and British Economic Growth* (London, 1996).

¹⁸Published by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Naples: La Scuola Pitagora Editrice, 2009.

¹⁹See Davis, 'Peter Mathias CBE 1928–2016'.

Mathias was also head of the Advisory Board of the Central European University Press, and through this he became acquainted with George Soros, since the Press was part of the Central European University, the institution that Soros had so generously endowed. He had, in addition, close links with the Wissenschaft Collegium in Berlin, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and held fellowships with Danish and Belgian academies. Mathias's other major international connection was with Japan, where he was an advisor to the Sasakawa Foundation. In 1983, the Japanese Crown Prince, Naruhito, came to study for two years in Oxford and was a member of Merton College with Mathias as his supervisor. Mathias not only supervised but found research assistance for Naruhito's project, and helped with its publication. He also provided great pastoral care, taking Naruhito on his first visit to the archives in the Oxford County Record Office, organising frequent social gatherings with other students and taking him to Ironbridge. He became close to the Japanese royal family and saw Naruhito on frequent visits to Japan over the next two decades. He also built on a link earlier initiated between Downing College, Cambridge, and Keio University to exchange visiting fellows when he went there as Master of Downing in 1987. He added a large annual summer school programme for junior members of Keio at Downing. Mathias became one of two international advisors to Keio, was awarded an honorary degree there and received the award of the Order of the Rising Sun with Gold Rays at the Japanese Embassy in London in 2003.²⁰

VI

Naruhito was only the most illustrious of Mathias's many research students. Mathias supervised most of his PhD students in Oxford, but Brian Harrison came to him earlier, while Mathias was still in Cambridge. Harrison, an Oxford student, sought him out because he wanted to write on the temperance movement, and a man who knew about brewing would be able to help. As Oxford Professor of Economic History, Mathias also had many international students. Others from Japan included Heita Kawakatsu, now Governor of Shizuoka Prefecture, and there were also many from various parts of Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA, as well as British students. The subject was at its height, and at some points Mathias had over fifteen PhD students. These he supervised with individual care, quickly identifying those who needed

²⁰I am grateful to Professors Toshio Kusamitsu and Takao Matsumara for some of these details of Peter Mathias's connections with Japan. Also see Prince Naruhito, *The Thames and I: a Memoir of Two Years at Oxford* (Folkestone, 2006: English Translation of *Thames no tomo ni*, 1993).

more expert supervision and arranging this, making connections with publishers, and writing the carefully crafted references that saw many of his students into academic jobs or helped them in the pursuit of other career paths. His students also took part in the Economic History Seminar, held in the All Souls Old Library, and other faculty history, politics and society seminars, and for some the economic and social history meetings run by Max Hartwell in Nuffield. It was an exciting time to be a research student in Oxford, with easy access also to all that was going on in London, as it had been for Mathias when he was a student in Cambridge, and as it continued there in different areas of the field. Mathias took a genuine personal interest in his students' lives and entertained them at home and in college. Though not an easy person for younger people to talk to, he had a loyal following, his former research students staying in close touch long after their PhDs. In one case, he attended the ordination and later installation of his former student Canon Dr Edmund Newell.

Significantly, these atmospheres, intellectual conjunctures and social networks have to be made; and those who reside mainly in their studies are not the ones who make the subject. Mathias lectured regularly and was a major figure on many university committees, chairing the large Oxford History Faculty for a period. All of Mathias's research students gained from the contributions he made to his subject, where, in Oxford, it lived with its neighbours in social and radical history, economics and sociology. In the very slowly changing course structures of Oxford in the 1970s and 1980s, Mathias, along with Patrick O'Brien, introduced a new cross-faculty degree in History and Economics. Moreover, Mathias never saw himself as leading a 'school' of history. He was open to the subjects brought in, and developed by, his students; indeed, he expected his students to find their own topics, unlike a number of his predecessors and even colleagues.

Towards the end of his years in Oxford, many of the separate economic and social history departments across the country were struggling to survive, and nearly all eventually merged with wider history departments, or some of their members joined economics faculties. Mathias accepted this; he had never been keen on artificial boundaries and thought horizons broadened when these departments eventually merged with history. In his view, this was the way the 'war' of the subject areas was won. Economic history was now fully a part of wider historical studies.

VII

Mathias left Oxford in 1987 when he was elected Master of Downing College, Cambridge, a post he held until 1995. He had no previous connection with the college, and succeeded the charismatic John Butterfield, long a college member before his

election as Master. Mathias came in as an outsider, despite his early formation in Cambridge. The transition was not easy; he lost the opportunity to supervise research students too soon in his career, as he had no Faculty appointment. This was certainly a loss, but he continued to participate when he could in the Economic History Seminar in Cambridge, then led by the Chair of Economic History, Barry Supple. He was soon to be brought into the centre of university administration as the Vice-Chancellor's deputy on many syndicates and committees but was not a part of the History Faculty life of Cambridge. He also came from a rich college without students to a modestly endowed institution with a large undergraduate community and a strong sporting ethos. The college chaplain, Bruce Kinsey, described the difference: 'All Souls was "civilized"; the view from the window was of someone raking the gravel [...] this contrasted hugely with the hurly-burly of Downing often more hearty than arty [...] and a boat club, night climbers and rugby club that was often noisy, heavy-drinking and reckless. Mathias was magnificent on the history of brewing, but less on the experience and consumption of beer.'²¹ Mathias tackled the college finances as he had done those of the Economic History Society. He had inherited the first stages of a project for the new Howard Building, and with the support of Alan Howard saw it through to completion, as well as that of Howard Court. He raised further funding to build the Maitland Robinson Library. Together with his wife, Ann, he made the lodge at Downing a centre of entertainment.

Mathias was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1977, serving as its Treasurer from 1980 to 1989 during a period of great expansion in the Academy's funding due to an increase in the government grant-in-aid, and in the market value of investments, as well as the new devolution of the management of Postgraduate Funding in the Humanities to the Academy. His period as Treasurer was also during the planning of, and move to, new premises, from smaller shared spaces in Burlington House to the much larger building on Cornwall Terrace. He chaired the Academy's Records of Social and Economic History Committee (1990–6); and he took a special interest in the overseas British schools and institutes, an important part of the Academy. He was also an 'independent member' of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, and thus contributed on a broad basis to research funding policy. He was awarded a CBE in 1984. He made up for his lack of a PhD by being made DLitt by Oxford in 1985 and by Cambridge in 1987, and became an Hon. DLitt at least six other universities, including the University of Warwick. Among his roles on many advisory boards he was President of the Business Archives Council, and was particularly supportive of the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, which collected business and labour records. He was instrumental in the choice of the

²¹ Rev. Bruce Kinsey, 'Oration at the Funeral of Peter Mathias'.

Modern Records Centre for the records of BP, and the addition to the library building that came with this.

Mathias married Ann Blackmore in Bath Abbey in 1958. They made family homes in Cambridge and Oxford, and lived after retirement first in Bassingbourn Mill, Cambridgeshire, then in Chesterton. They were both collectors, Mathias of a remarkable set of eighteenth-century trade tokens, and both of Newhall and other porcelain.²² They had three children, Sam, Sophie and Henry, and often took the family to sites of agricultural and industrial history as well as to their holiday house in Norfolk, where they enjoyed the local wildlife. Mathias remained close to his roots, with frequent family visits to Wingfield, the small village in Wiltshire where he had been a boy. In Mathias's later years he continued, together with his wife Ann, his travels to Japan and also to Italy, until his increasing physical immobility and then her death confined him closer to home. He kept up with his subject and received many visitors from around the world in his field and outside it. He died on 1 March 2016 and his ashes are buried with those of his parents in Wingfield Parish Church in Wiltshire.

Acknowledgements

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Note on the author: Maxine Berg is Professor of History at the University of Warwick. She was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2004.

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²²P. Mathias, *English Trade Tokens: the Industrial Revolution Illustrated* (London, 1962).