Charles Hilliard Feinstein, Fellow of All Souls College, and Chichele Professor of Economic History emeritus at the University of Oxford, died on 27 November 2004.

Charles Feinstein’s achievement was to work out the structure and size of the British economy from the present and all the way back to the Industrial Revolution. His work makes it possible to evaluate how well the economy has performed at any period in the past two centuries, and to compare it with other periods and other countries. When the British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown recently proclaimed the economy’s longest period ever of unbroken growth, it was Feinstein’s work that he relied upon.

Charles Hilliard Feinstein was born in Johannesburg in March 1932. He studied economics and subsequently accountancy at Witwatersrand University. Initially, he was attracted to Marxism, and as a student participated in the early stirrings of the anti-apartheid movement. In 1954 he arrived at Cambridge to study economics, and eventually wrote a doctoral dissertation on ‘Home and Foreign Investment 1870-1914’. In 1958 he married Ruth Loshak, and also began to work as a research officer at the Department of Applied Economics, where, among other tasks, he joined an effort to construct a set of retrospective national accounts for Britain. The objective of national accounting was to construct a descriptive statistical model to capture the flow of economic activity on an annual basis. Keynes’ *General Theory* of 1936 gradually persuaded policy makers that government could beat unemployment and control the level of economic activity by means of precise interventions in taxation, government spending and credit. National income accounts became the indispensable tool for ‘tuning’ the economy. During the 1940s, this method was implemented all over the world, and the growth rate of GDP became the benchmark for economic and social performance which it remains to this day.

By the 1950s, the main industrial countries had all embarked on projects to extend the national accounts backwards into history. In Britain this was undertaken at Cambridge University, and after Feinstein joined this effort in 1958, he made a notable contribution with an estimate of domestic capital formation. By the mid 1960s, the Cambridge project had reached a crisis, and Feinstein undertook single-handedly to bring it to completion. In 1972 this was published as *National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom, 1835-1965*. Although Feinstein undertook many more investigations, this was perhaps his crowning achievement. Of the several similar projects undertaken in different countries, e.g. the American, Canadian, Australian, and German projects, it is fair to say that the one which Charles brought into being was the most elegantly reasoned, organized, and presented, all the more remarkable for being the work largely of one man. It was achieved with very simple means: hardly more than a mechanical calculator and some research assistance. The large red volume, familiar to all students of British economic history, embodies an exceptional talent for order. It was a foundational work, and has stood the test of time remarkably well. Eventually, Feinstein and others extended the estimates back to the eighteenth century. It remains the backbone of our knowledge of British economic performance, and links almost seamlessly with the modern annual series of national output and income which continue to unfold. The meaning and implications of historical national income series were analysed (together with R Matthews and J Odling-Smee) in an important book on *British Economic Growth, 1856-1973* in 1982.

From 1963 and until 1978, Feinstein was a Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, where he was an inspiring teacher, and a reforming Senior Tutor. In 1978, he accepted a Chair in Economic History at the University of York. His distinction and professional goodwill began to be recognized with a series of leadership positions. He became the head of a large and respected economics department, as well as joint-editor of the *Economic Journal*, the leading British journal in the field. He was also elected to the British Academy in 1983. There followed a succession of influential and prestigious positions in professional associations.

In 1987, after a year at Harvard, he moved to Oxford, first to Nuffield College, and then to All Souls College, where he was the Chichele Professor of Economic History for a decade after 1989. Economic history was falling on hard times. A large number of small independent departments created in the academic boom of the 1960s were being absorbed into larger departments of history or economics, as the subject became more technical and less appealing to undergraduates. At Oxford, however, Feinstein and his colleagues were able to reverse the trend and to build up a flourishing graduate course which attracted students from all over the world. He also pushed his research into new directions, into important studies of the standard of living during the nineteenth century, and of international capital movements between the wars.

Feinstein possessed an austere and supremely disciplined mind, and had an almost magical ability to impose order on the complexity of the past, combined with a scrupulous respect for the smallest detail. These gifts also served him well as an administrator and academic entrepreneur. They inspired his lectures, which imparted a wonderful clarity to the protracted muddle of the British economy. Generations of students took this clarity of vision as an ideal to aspire to, in economic history as in other disparate pursuits.

Feinstein was a private man. But despite a slight austerity, and a taste for hard-nosed social theory (first Marxism, then a more conventional neo-classical economics) he attracted much personal loyalty and feelings of great warmth, both
among close colleagues, and in wider academic circles. Along with his sense of propriety and order there was also a manifest integrity, and a great innate generosity. He was always a giver, rather than a taker. In a crisis, his response was often to roll up his sleeves, to do it himself if others would not, in first-year teaching or in the grind of administration or editing.

The end of apartheid released a new outflow of generosity. He was exhilarated by the chance to take up the struggle for African betterment where he had left off as a youth. He began to teach courses at the University of Cape Town, and to spend part of every year there. Despite a difficult illness, the years after retirement were exceptionally productive, with a book on the economic history of South Africa about to be published. A not-quite-finished book-length study of the British economy in 1851 is another ambitious project, which we look forward to being completed by other hands.

Feinstein was a great craftsman, and the advances he made in his field were both decisive and durable. Economic interpretations change, but all of them rely in the end, on the quantitative foundations that he laid down. In that respect, at least, he was probably the most influential British economic historian of his age. He was also a good man, a considerate mentor, colleague, and friend. He leaves a second wife, Anne Digby, herself a noted social historian, and four children from his first marriage.

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