Robin Matthews held the two most senior chairs of economics in the UK — the Drummond Chair at Oxford (1965-75, succeeding John Hicks) and the Chair of Political Economy at Cambridge, ‘Marshall’s Chair’, (1980-91, succeeding Brian Reddaway). His many contributions to the discipline, the profession and the community make it abundantly clear why. He described his empirical work as economic history written in the style of an economist. His teaching, research and administrative duties over the years made him more and more aware of the inadequacies of ‘the conventional model of rational individualistic utility maximisation, [so that increasingly his] interests moved toward the institutional and psychological underpinnings of economic behaviour’.

His wide-ranging interest and approaches are reflected in his major publications. Though he had no formal training in mathematics, he was a capable mathematician; he understood theory set out in a mathematical manner. His own writings, while they used mathematics relevantly and with mastery, also used them sparingly.

His earliest work was on the historical and theoretical aspects of the trade cycle in the UK. His first book, A Study in Trade Cycle History (1954), is far more than a complement to Walt Rostow’s 1948 ‘Essays on the British Economy of the Nineteenth Century. His Cambridge Economics Handbook, The Trade Cycle (1958), is still one of the best introductions to this inherent characteristic of capitalism.

One of his most influential articles, ‘The saving function and the problem of trend and cycle’, was published in 1955 in what Dennis Robertson called ‘The Green Horror’ (The Review of Economic Studies). Robin pointed out that James Duesenberry in his classic book on the consumption function (1949), had neglected the existence of ongoing productivity growth when he dated the onsets of the ratchet effect as the previous highest levels of income attained, rather than the previous lowest levels of unemployment. This is the sort of basic insight that the best economists make and then spell out their implications, in Robin’s case, for the relationship between trend and cycle. The latter has become the most important base on which our understanding of the processes at work in capitalism is built, associated especially with the contributions of the (late) Kalecki and of Richard Goodwin (who was Robin’s colleague at Cambridge in the 1950s and 1960s).

At much the same time, in Economica (1961), Robin wrote, using Keynes’s liquidity preference theory of the role of interest, one of the earliest and best accounts of what is happening in the banking and financial sectors of the economy when the Kahn-Meade-Keynes multiplier is working itself out in the real sector. Robin also showed how self-finance and ‘other imperfections of the capital market’ could be incorporated into the analysis. In 1964, with Frank Hahn, Robin published in the Economic Journal the famous survey of the theory of economic growth, the article which has been the role model for survey articles ever since. Though all three sections of the survey achieved high levels of exemplary scholarship, the second section on technical progress, which was primarily due to Robin, is the jewel in the crown of the survey. Its lucidity and clarity bring out the deep economic intuitions it contains.

Robin’s most cited and admired article is his 1968 paper in the Economic Journal on why the UK had had full employment since the war. There, his great understanding of historical and political processes linked to his command of sound economic theory (not only that of Keynes) combined to produce a convincing set of arguments for why full employment was attained and maintained, a set of arguments that are so much more sophisticated and measured than the simple appeal of the then conventional wisdom to the application of Keynesian policies by governments in the post war period.

Robin himself thought he spent too much time on the treatise published in 1982, with Charles Feinstein and John Odling-Smee, on the causes of growth in the UK from 1856 to 1973, especially in the post war period to 1973, ‘years of unparalleled growth in Britain, as in other countries.’ The volume used a framework suggested by the editors, Moses Abramovitz and Simon Kuznets, for comparable studies of the experiences of other major industrialised economies. Be that as it may, it is easy to concur with the judgement of Feinstein and Odling-Smee that they wished ‘to put on record that it was...Robin ...., who made by far the most significant contributions to the design of the investigation, the analysis of the material and the writing of the final text’.

Robin always kept up to date with developments in economic theory and history and made sure that his teaching embodied them in a critical but fair manner. I vividly remember going to a fine set of lectures which Robin gave in 1980 to Cambridge undergraduates on macroeconomic and monetary theory and policy in the light of the contributions of Milton Friedman and Robert Lucas. Robin lucidly explained the gist of them; he extracted the positive aspects while maintaining the Keynesian foundations on which he had been brought up and to which he still adhered. As was noted, in later years he became more and more interested in the institutional and psychological aspects of the discipline, as befitted the holder of the Chair of Political Economy. One of his most insightful contributions was his review in
the *Economic Journal* in 1977 of Fred Hirsch’s engaging and fundamental volume, *Social Limits to Growth*. In it Robin coupled his high natural intelligence with his wide and deep understanding of theory and history. The review is the type of essay that the very best products of the Oxford PPE are uniquely fitted to write.

Robin’s legacy to the Faculty at Cambridge through his writing and teaching will be a lasting one. As he ruefully was to admit, his attempts to reshape the ways in which that faction-benighted Faculty went about its business were not successful. Moreover, in retrospect, he felt that his aims in this regard were probably mistaken anyway and that his own comparative advantage lay much more with scholarship than with attempting to change administrative structures.

Robin had an austere presence but he was basically a friendly and kind person, extremely supportive of the young, both students and colleagues. He was excellent company, with a dry wit. He enjoyed tossing about ideas and old-fashioned gossip.

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*Jesus College, Cambridge and School of Economics, University of New South Wales*
In the October issue of the RES Newsletter Geoff Harcourt’s obituary of Robin Matthews concentrates comprehensively on Robin’s economic publications. There are other important aspects of Robin’s life and work, however, which are well worth discussing.

In his obituary Geoff says that Robin felt that his comparative advantage lay much more with scholarship than with attempting to change administrative structures. This was in reference to Robin’s attempts to reshape the ‘faction-benighted’ Cambridge Faculty of Economics. This conclusion was probably generally correct, given Robin’s outstanding scholarship. It relied too much however on the problems of the Cambridge Economics Faculty in the 1980’s. Robin had considerable success in administration in other spheres, two in particular — the SSRC and Clare College, Cambridge.

Robin was Drummond Professor at Oxford from 1965 to1975, but in the years 1972 to 1975 he was on leave in order to be Chairman of the Social Science Research Council. This was a major task, running a research council that had been created only seven years earlier. Robin faced opposition to the SSRC from Margaret Thatcher, when she was Secretary of State for Education in the Heath government, but he did not have the major problems that Michael Posner encountered a few years later. Then Sir Keith Joseph objected to social studies being regarded as a science, and threatened the SSRC’s very existence, until Posner, with the help of a report by Lord Rothschild, saved it under its new name of ESRC. But Robin did an excellent job as Chairman of the SSRC, with his outstanding mind, his strong sense of fairness, and his ability to steer an acceptable way, in a clear and rational manner, on important funding issues affecting many different institutions and individuals. He showed these same virtues as Master of Clare College, Cambridge, from 1975 to 1993, where his civilised qualities, together with his intelligence and wide learning, and the support of his wife Joyce, made him an admirable head of house. In addition, during his tenure, he led a major fund-raising campaign, which enabled the College to build a new library, common room and musical facilities.

Soon after he became Master, Robin together with Alec Cairncross, decided that there was room for an informal group of economists who could tackle conflicting views of the problems of the British economy in as objective and clear manner as possible. Thus was born the Clare Group, which was in existence from 1976 to 2002. Its members were economists from some dozen different institutions. Among its members from Cambridge were Brian Reddaway, Charles Feinstein, and Michael Posner, from London David Henderson, Tony Atkinson and myself, from Oxford Alec Cairncross, John Flemming and Peter Oppenheimer, and from Warwick Dick Sargent (later chief economist of the Midland Bank) and Marcus Miller. Other members included John Kay, Mervyn King, Alan Prest, and also Brian Tew from Nottingham. Members of the Clare group produced over 50 articles in total, published initially in the Midland Bank Review and then in the National Institute Economic Review. Robin and J R (Dick) Sargent edited a volume of the earlier papers of the group — ‘Contemporary Problems of Economic Policy’ — in 1983.

As if this was not enough, Robin was distinguished in a completely different sphere — that of chess problems. He once told me that he was far more distinguished as a chess problemist than as an economist. His speciality was to compose problems based on mate in three moves. In the British Chess Magazine in 1957 he published an article on mate in 3 which won the prestigious Brian Harley Award. In 1963 he published, with M Lipton and J M Rice, Chess Problems — introduction to an art, and in 1995 Mostly three-Movers, Collected Chess Problems 1939 to 1993. In 1939, it will be noted, he was twelve years old! On the occasion of the 1995 publication his publisher described him as ‘one of the world’s leading composers of 3- movers’. Robin spoke good Russian, in addition to his other linguistic gifts, in order to keep up with the Russian chess literature. His distinction was marked, already in 1965, by being named by the FIDE (Fédération Internationale des Échecs) as an ‘International Master of Chess Composition’.

Returning to Robin as an economist and a generally wise man: he was awarded the CBE, was a Fellow of the British Academy, and a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among other appointments, he was a Managing Trustee of the Nuffield Foundation, President of the Royal Economic Society (1984-6), member of the OECD Expert Group on non-Inflationary Growth (1975-7), Chairman of the Bank of England Panel of Economic Consultants (1977-93), and the recipient of several honorary fellowships and degrees. He was also a cultivated and civilised human being, and a loyal friend. There are very few who can match him.

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