

Obituary of Patricia Drift James (1917 – 1987) by Donald Winch

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Malthus scholars throughout the world, especially those who were fortunate enough either to meet Patricia James at conferences, or to have corresponded with her, will learn with considerable regret that she died after a brief illness on March 15th of this year.

She was born February 14, 1917, the daughter of Colwyn Edward Vulliamy (whom she described as a "miscellaneous author") and Eileen Muriel (nee Hynes). She was educated at two private girls' schools and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, where in 1937 she obtained a good second-class honours degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. After taking the Administrative Civil Service Course at the London School of Economics in 1937-8 she joined the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries as an Assistant Principal. Marriage, in 1939, to a fellow civil servant, Arthur Frederick James, required her to give up this career. She returned as a temporary civil servant after the outbreak of war, but resigned in 1940 on account of pregnancy.

The next two decades or so of Patricia James's life were mainly devoted to bringing up a family of four children, two daughters and two sons, though she also undertook voluntary work for the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and marked 'O' level English examination papers during the summer. One of her neighbours in the Hampstead Garden Suburb where the family lived for over thirty years was Dr. George McCleary, whose book on The Malthusian Population Theory, written during his retirement, was published in 1953. Patricia James was one of the "honorary nieces" who read to Dr. McCleary during the last years of his blindness, and it was in this capacity that she accompanied the ninety-year-old scholar on a visit, undertaken in 1960, to surviving members of the Malthus family living on the Isle of Wight. The object of the expedition was to see if additional Malthus material existed, and while nothing was found during the visit, in the following year the MSS of Malthus's travel diaries was discovered and sent to Dr. McCleary, who passed the news

to another friend and neighbour, Lionel (later Lord) Robbins. When Dr. McCleary died in 1962, Mrs James met Lord Robbins at the graveside, and it was subsequently arranged that the diaries should be transcribed for publication by Cambridge University Press under the auspices of the Royal Economic Society. Between them, the British Academy and the Royal Economic Society gave modest financial support to Patricia James's work on the MSS, and Norwegian Railways later contributed by giving her free tickets to help her retrace part of Malthus's journey. The Travel Diaries of T. R. Malthus appeared in 1966, launching Patricia on the career that was to occupy her so fruitfully for the rest of her life.

Discovering how little was known about Malthus's life, and how many inaccuracies existed in the standard accounts, Patricia embarked on fifteen years of "intermittent research", assembling the mass of original material which eventually provided the basis for her *Population Malthus: His Life and Times*, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1979. This work, the first complete biography to be written, was immediately recognized as the definitive treatment of its subject; and it made its author the leading expert on everything connected with the life of Malthus and the provenance of his writings. This expertise was called upon when an international colloquium devoted to Malthus was organised in Paris by the *Société de Démographie Historique* in 1980; and she also contributed to *The Malthus Library Catalogue* published by Pergamon in 1983. It must be said, however, that in neither case did the published results of these two enterprises fully satisfy the standards of accuracy which Patricia James set for her own work. It was with characteristic care and thoroughness, for example, that Patricia had, in the course of writing her biography, gone a good way towards preparing a variorum of the different editions of the *Essay on Population*, a work which underwent considerable transformation, not merely in the course of the well-known move from the first polemical version in 1798 to the much-enlarged second edition in 1803, but in almost all of the subsequent editions leading up to the final one to appear in Malthus's lifetime in 1826. From 1981 onwards, commissioned and supported, though, still in a modest way, by the Royal Economic Society, Patricia devoted her remaining energies to preparing an annotated variorum of the *Essay* for publication by Cambridge University Press, a task

which engaged all her knowledge, sympathies and formidable detective skills. Any sadness associated with the thought that she died before this handsome two-volume work could be published later this year (in tandem with John Pullen's variorum edition of Malthus's Principles of Political Economy) must be tempered by relief that she was able to deliver her work to the Press in the form that only she could give it. The result will undoubtedly serve as a fitting monument to the elegantly meticulous labours of someone who was an "amateur" in only the fullest and best sense of the term, who not only set a shining example to many a mere "professional", but extended her lively enthusiasms and old-fashioned courtesy and charm to all those with whom she came in contact.

A copy of this archive of Malthusiana based on Patricia James's researches is being sent to Jesus College, Cambridge, Malthus's college. Another copy is currently held by Professor John Pullen, who hopes to deposit it with the Australian National Library in Canberra. Patricia James also left a series of personal diaries and travel journals to her youngest daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Young, which might one day be published in their own right as the reflections of a quietly yet truly remarkable woman.