

Remembering Jim

My memories of Jim are only a few but precious.

I was neither his student nor his colleague. We met as fellow economists at seminars and conferences. I was a member of the first Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) Economics Panel in 1998 which Jim chaired. That was when we downgraded both Cambridge and Oxford. Had anyone else been the Chairman, the fuss would have been unbearable. But everyone knew Jim had standards which all accepted. They trusted his impartiality.

Jim had this amazing reputation as a very high minded, Scottish Presbyterian person. His students who were never more than a couple of years younger were in awe of him. They all tried to mould themselves in his image- high thinking, plain living, idealistic and puritanical.

I was different. I had backed student rebellion, drank in convivial company of my LSE colleagues and friends and had a good time. Also my work was not in theory but in mundane applied economics.

Still somehow Jim liked me, may be as a tolerable other. My most fond memory is at the 1980 European meeting of the Econometric Society in Dublin. We had a high reception at Dublin castle by some local bigwig where we ate and drank. As we left the reception, I was making my way with some friends to the nearest pub. I saw Jim and said Come and have a drink. Jim readily agreed. He came in for a beer, may be just a half. . . He enjoyed himself. My reputation among friends went up. 'Oh My God! You enticed Jim Mirrlees to come to the pub for a drink. How did you manage?' I then realised that I had Jim's friendship. He could relax with me.

He was not just a great economist. He was a fine human being.