

## Stewart Oakley, 1931-1995: A Memoir

With the death of Stewart Oakley on 18th July 1995, following so soon after that of Ragnhild Hatton, we have lost two major figures in the world of Scandinavian history within a comparatively short space of time. Stewart died, suddenly and without pain, at home in Norwich and a celebration of his life was held on 27th July 1995, on a beautiful sunny day, in the Plantation Garden, which he had been helping to restore in the four years before his death. Afterwards, we drank a toast to his memory and took refreshments at Andersens, the Danish restaurant, which was a great favourite of his.

Stewart was born on 21st April 1931 and took his first degree, in history, at Oxford University (Lincoln College) in 1952. He followed this with a Dip. Ed. in 1953, which led him to four years of school teaching in London, at Highgate and the Bec schools. He held a temporary post at Exeter University 1959-60, before moving to Edinburgh University in the latter year, where he stayed until 1969. In that year he was appointed to a lectureship at UEA, from where he retired in 1994 as a Reader. He was awarded a PhD by London University (LSE) in 1961, his topic being *William III and the Northern Crowns during the Nine Years' War 1689-1697* (published in 1987). He was, at times, visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, and Gustavus Adolphus College, in St Peter.

Stewart left behind him a solid body of published work and, alas, much unpublished research material, which he had been planning to put into publishable form in what he (and we all) expected would be a long and fruitful retirement. Apart from his published thesis, as mentioned above, his books included *The Story of Sweden* (1966) and *The Story of Denmark* (1972) – two important and heavily used textbooks; *Scandinavian History 1520-1970* (1984) – a comprehensive bibliography of English-language material in the Historical Association's *Helps for Students of History Series* (no. 91); and, finally, *War and Peace in the Baltic 1560-1790* (1993) – which has been described as being a work by a 'historian at the height of his powers'. Aside

from his books, he published articles and reviews widely in a variety of journals, and contributed papers to collected volumes of essays. His unpublished material includes work on the Scandinavian peasantry and on Gustavus III.

Stewart was a founder member of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies and its first president (1968-69). He did not sever his connections with the society after his move from Edinburgh and I well recall his enthusiasm for the society's Easter conferences, which would often take him to beautiful parts of Scotland, which he would not otherwise have been able to reach, and his corresponding disappointment in years when he was unable to go. In 1977 he became a founding member of the Nordic History Group and served as its chairman from that year until his death. The group usually meets twice a year – for a half-day colloquium in December at University College London, with longer conferences at Easter time, functioning as the history section of the Scandinavian Teachers' Conference in alternate years and going its own way in the other years. Apart from providing a forum at which British historians with Scandinavian interests can meet to exchange news and views on current research and teaching, the group has been responsible for bringing a great number of foreign historians over to Britain, not only from the Scandinavian countries, but from Germany, France, Eastern Europe and USA. Stewart was active, too, in the Viking Society for Northern Research (he taught a course on the Vikings at UEA) and was a member of the council when he died.

Stewart was a fine scholar, but he was a very fine man too. He was very affable and clubbable, with a quiet sense of humour. I can recall going to restaurants with him in Norwich where he would be greeted by the staff as an old friend rather than as a customer. I cannot speak from personal experience of his teaching side, but a former UEA colleague of his, Roger Price, spoke at the celebration of how Stewart's students would remember his 'kindness, his sympathetic understanding of their problems and his constant willingness to devote time and energy to helping them'. I know too that, for many years, he had an arrangement at UCL library whereby he would borrow books on behalf of his students and I do not think that many

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academics would be willing to trust their students to that extent. He was a man of great enthusiasms, who would sink himself so deep into foreign cultures that he would often become more native than the natives themselves. He was a cultivated man, with a love of music and the theatre. Indeed, he was no mean pianist himself and had played a Scarlatti sonata on the day that he died. He was a lover of good food and good wine and something of a connoisseur too.

I shall miss Stewart in many ways. I shall miss his telephone calls asking if I was going to be in college on the following day as he was planning to come up and hoped to meet me for lunch ('though the trains from Norwich are always late'). I shall miss him at the Nordic History Group meetings, as indeed will all my colleagues. He was not just our chairman, he was the heart of the group. His published writings are in the public domain and his unpublished material will, we hope, find talented editors to enable them to be given to the world. It is, however, the man himself that we, his friends, will miss – he is irreplaceable. When I told the librarian's secretary at UCL of his death, she was obviously greatly saddened and said: 'He was a lovely man'. He was indeed. Our deepest sympathies go out to Kate, Helen, Karin, Robin and Tanya, all of whom have lost a very good friend.

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*John Townsend*