

# John Davey: in memoriam

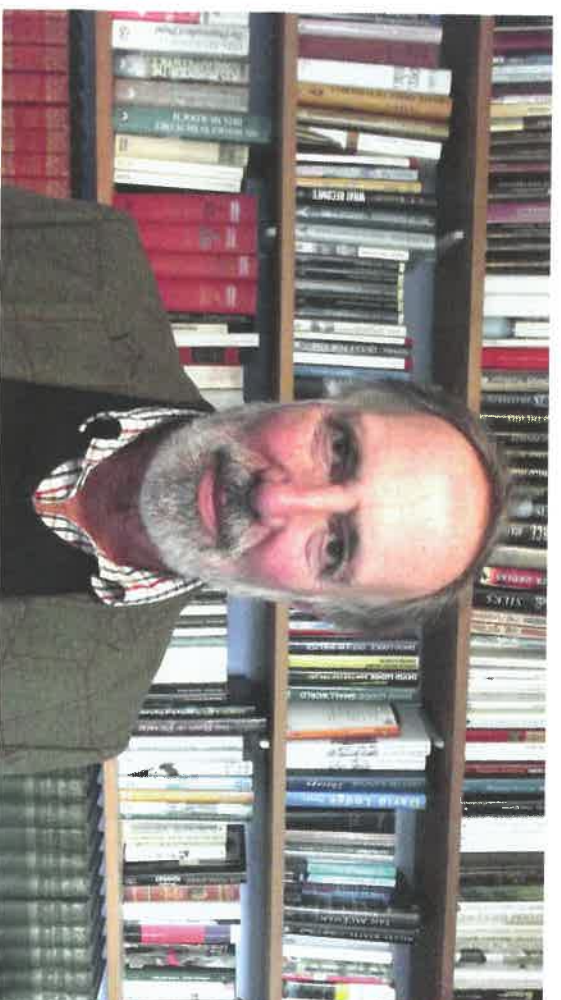
**Ivon Asquith and Andrew Franklin pay tribute to John Davey—a prodigious talent in academic, trade and reference publishing**

John Charles Armstrong Davey (19th April 1945–21st April 2017) was a prodigious figure in academic, trade and reference publishing for almost 50 years. Most of this was as a commissioning editor or editorial director, but he was also involved in the sale of foreign and subsidiary rights, and in the establishment of Blackwell's North American business.

John's range and versatility were exceptional in an academic publishing market which tended to favour specialisation. He published very successfully in at least a dozen subjects, showing an astute understanding of the different market levels and the need to achieve a decent commercial return.

John made his mark at Edward Arnold in the 1970s. When he joined in 1968 as an editorial assistant, soon after graduating from the University of Reading with a degree in English Literature, humanities and social sciences was Arnold's least significant division. After a few years John was put in charge and, by the time he left in 1978, it was the largest and most profitable part of Arnold's publishing. He then joined Blackwell's as its first full-time academic editor. During the 1980s he transformed Blackwell's from being almost invisible into a major force. He rapidly became editorial director, appointed several specialist editors, initiated Blackwell's reference publishing, acquired and started several new journals, and had responsibility for rights and contracts.

In 1989 John went to Blackwell's in the US, where he ran the business for three years, expanded the editorial and production staff, and transformed several years of losses into a profit. His personal contribution to geography publishing was so distinguished that in 1992 he was awarded a certificate of special recognition by the Association of American Geographers, and in 1997 the Gill Memorial Award from



the Royal Geographical Society. The field of geography was being radically reconstructed during this time and John was the go-to publisher for a younger generation of scholars. He had a similar impact on urban studies, publishing key works such as David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* and Manuel Castells' *The Urban Question*. His endeavours in these fields were transformative and remain legendary to this day.

In the mid-1990s John left Blackwell's and became a consultant editor. At Edinburgh University Press he published excellent works in classics, Scottish history and geography, significantly raising the profile of the press and creating a fund of goodwill that extends to the present day.

In 1997 John started commissioning in linguistics for Oxford University Press. Over 16 years he built a programme that included textbooks, handbooks, reference works and centre of lasting scholarship, taking the list to the core of developments in linguistic theory. He signed some of the biggest names in the field, including Alexandra Aikhenvald, David Crystal, James Hurford and Ray Jackendoff. He founded 15 successful series and went after big projects such as the World Atlas of Language Structures. In all this, by the time he retired in 2013, he had made Oxford Linguistics the list to beat.

John joined Profile Books as a freelance consultant editor in 2001 and seamlessly crossed the Great Divide between academic and trade publishing. His range of enthusiasms was encyclopaedic. He acquired Daniel Everett's *Dorí Sleep, There are Snakes*, which shook the

foundations of linguistic orthodoxy, was a Radio 4 "Book of the Week" and was made into a play. Improbably, having published the distinguished Marxist David Harvey's very first book in 1969, he was still publishing him hugely successfully at Profile. Other authors included Ian Stewart, David Crystal, John Sutherland, Bob Marshall-Andrews, Roger Scruton and, most recently, Philip Hook, whose book *Rogues' Gallery* was an early 2017 *Evening Standard* bestseller.

John was not an editor to wait for proposals from agents, though he was happy to work with them and was much admired in agent circles. He actively dreamt up original ideas and matched them to authors. He was a tough but fair and totally honourable negotiator and then stayed with books to, and beyond, publication, nurturing them to success.

Two of John's greatest gifts were spotting a good publishing opportunity and matching it with the best possible author, and forging and maintaining true friendships with authors, who would come implicitly to trust his judgement and expertise. His assets as a colleague included wit, funny stories, outbursts and generosity with expertise, ideas and contacts. He was particularly helpful and encouraging to younger editors. His editorial letters were an art form.

He was a classic and distinguished editor of the old style who is much missed but leaves an extraordinary legacy of grateful authors, affectionate colleagues and remarkable titles.

A man of many talents, John was a keen fly-fisherman, gardener, cook and poker player. He is survived by his wife, four children from two marriages, and five grandchildren.

# Remembrance

The director of  
Consultancy  
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novelist **Kate**  
for her kind  
and wisdom

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