

MEMOIR

VICTOR PERCIVAL AUGUSTINE DERRICK

V. P. A. DERRICK died at Bromley on 21 July 1960, aged 73 years. Though he began his professional career in a life insurance office (the Alliance) he left this sphere very soon after he qualified, in 1911, and in 1912 entered the Civil Service as an assistant actuary on the staff of the National Health Insurance Joint Committee. In 1919, just before the formation of the Government Actuary's Department, he was promoted to actuary. He remained with the new department until 1922 when he was seconded to the General Register Office to assist in the analysis of the results of the 1921 Census. This marked a new stage in the development of the statistical side (as distinct from the purely registration side) of the General Register Office. Up to that time the Statistical Branch, following the tradition of William Farr, had been in the care of a medical practitioner, the then incumbent being Dr Stevenson. Now population, as distinct from medical statistics, began to develop as a separate entity. When Stevenson retired in 1931, Derrick became Statistical Officer and was designated as Assistant Registrar General (another Assistant Registrar General was in charge of the Registration Branch). This was the most fruitful period of his career. He had already delivered to the Institute in 1927 his classic paper on generation mortality (*J.I.A.* 58, 117) and though this was almost his only departure from official anonymity, he developed many ideas about population measurement. Under his guidance the official demographic statistics became a model not only for the rest of the Commonwealth but for many countries outside. The 1939–45 war was unkind to Derrick, both domestically and officially. He lost a son on active service. In 1945 Derrick ceased to be Head of the Statistical Branch which with all its staff was handed over to a lay administrator. Derrick and his medical professional colleague, Dr Stocks, became consultants outside the administrative hierarchy with the title of Chief Statistician. Stocks left a few years later and became Senior Research Fellow to the British Empire Cancer Campaign. Derrick remained to plan the 1951 Census and new demographic developments recommended by the Royal Commission on Population, but he could never reconcile himself to the handing over of his workshop, especially as he had a tremendous flair for organizing large-scale computations and laying out complex tabulations. In the office (though not outside it) he became withdrawn and somewhat embittered, sharp with those who consulted him too late or too little, but never other than kindly and encouraging to those few professional colleagues who joined him in the period of statistical expansion after the 1939–45 war. He was awarded a C.B.E. in 1952 while re-engaged after formal retirement, and finally retired in 1954 after which he made little further contact with his colleagues or the Institute.

Derrick's contribution to British demography has not been fully recognized. He was associated with three population censuses as well as the National Registration of 1939. He was responsible for the development of fertility studies arising from the 1938 Population (Statistics) Act and did much pioneer work in cohort analysis. He greatly improved the design and coverage of official tabulations and was responsible for many innovations, e.g. annual population projections and annual abridged life tables. When in the interwar period non-official

demographers were exploiting the decline in the birthrate Derrick alone insisted on the likelihood of an ultimate reversion from childlessness; for this he received cool treatment, even animosity, from the academic world. He had differences on the same score (as well as on methods of measurement) with some of his non-actuarial colleagues on the Statistics Committee of the Royal Commission on Population (1944) of which he was a member. Yet recent trends have proved him to be right. As a man he was difficult to know but his reserve hid a lovable character. He was utterly honest, uncompromising in the defence of his beliefs, severe in criticism, but always constructive. He could make arithmetic look like artistry; in his own way, he was an artist.

B. BENJAMIN