

## Tribute for Roger E. Backhouse, Distinguished Fellow

This nomination was put forward by at least five prominent members of our History of Economics Society. The best one starts true to form, with a double entendre:

"Roger E. Backhouse" is not the pseudonym of a secret group of historians loosely based in England who write numerous books or articles each year on different historical topics. The Professor of the History and Philosophy of Economics at the University of Birmingham, and Fellow of the British Academy, names Backhouse, is a real person.

His most important and transformative work has been, and continues to be, in the history of twentieth-century economics, yet he is a polymath, a scholar who makes fundamentally important and transformative contributions across the field. If Donald Winch revolutionized our understanding of the history of economics in the nineteenth century, it is Backhouse who has done this for the twentieth. This sub-field of the discipline's history was one which, until quite recently, more or less stopped with Keynes. While Backhouse has made tremendous contributions to our understanding of British economics in the period of Cambridge's ascendancy, it was he, more than any other scholar, who stimulated historians of economics to begin to write the history of economics in the post-World War II period. His History of Modern Economic Analysis (1985) was the first major effort in this area, a truly pioneering work that opened the door to the process of historicizing how and why economics evolved as it did in the modern era.

Backhouse has been masterful at unlocking these stories, skillfully weaving together traditional methods in the history of economics with those from the history of the natural and social sciences, intellectual history, and beyond (e.g., bibliometrics). The results of his work have not simply transformed our understanding of the history of modern economics; they have transformed how historians study the history of modern economics.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to pigeon-hole Backhouse as simply a historian of twentieth-century economics. Backhouse is now the leading generalist historian of economics in the world, a scholar who has made important contributions not only to scholarship (e.g., via his Penguin History of Economics, The Ordinary Business of Life, 2002) but as well to popular understandings of the history of economics across the entire spectrum of economic thinking—from ancient times to the present. His range is astonishing.

His service to the larger history of economics community is exceptional. His time as book review editor of the *Economic Journal* increased attention to history in its reviews. His continuing service on doctoral committees in the U.K., France and the Netherlands has itself linked a number of scholars. His work with historians of other social sciences has opened both those historians, and their historiographies, to the work of historians of economics, and *vice versa*. He has thus been a good will ambassador for all who seek more comprehensive histories of the social sciences.

For these reasons it is altogether fitting that the History of Economics Society recognizes Roger E. Backhouse by naming him a Distinguished Fellow of the Society.