

## **Eddie Cass (1937-2014)**

I'm honoured to pay tribute to Eddie Cass, but daunted by the challenge of covering the whole range of his work, activities and interests. Surely he was the only man to make successful careers in coal mining, banking and academia. Eddie was the ultimate polymath but ever modest, you could know him for years and it would just slip out, that, for instance, he was one of the UK's experts on the history of playing cards. So apologies for missing things out.

There's only one place to start: Manchester, Eddie's favourite city and the centre of the universe. (Though Sheila would make a good case for Salford for that honour.) Eddie was born here and apart from a few years in Birmingham, lived here all his life. He grew up in wartime east Manchester, then its most industrial part, and went to the Central school in what is now Sheena Simon College (where years later he served as governor). His first job was as a coal miner in Bradford Colliery, where he formed an attachment to the National Union of Mineworkers (though not always its leadership) and became friends with Jim Allen, the future playwright. [They would bunk off shifts to discuss politics.] I think he left mining under rather a cloud, something to do with explosives and a court case and in those days of full employment, turned to banking. As a bank clerk for Williams Deacon's and then the Royal Bank of Scotland, he also studied part time at Manchester College of Commerce, in the old Mechanics Institute, a building he got to know later in a different context. Manchester in Eddie's world in the early 1960s was duffle coats, the Kardomah Cafe, frothy coffee, jazz bands and folk clubs and in that milieu he met, courted and married Sheila – the rock and mainstay of his life - and they went on to raise 3 sons. Eddie was a successful banker but he maintained a thirst for knowledge and an insatiable curiosity for a variety of subjects which coalesced around the history of his home town but also encompassed industrial archaeology, architecture, canals, food and art history. Book collecting on a major scale turned him into a bibliophile and he studied part time for an MA in the Manchester Studies department of Manchester Polytechnic.

But though bookish, he was no dry as dust scholar. Eddie was the most clubbable man I've ever known. The first time we met he took me into a Chinese restaurant, we were greeted from half a dozen of the tables in the room by: 'Hello Eddie'. He had a wonderful gift for making friends and used his powerful intellectual and organisational skills to give something back to the Manchester cultural institutions, from which he and Sheila derived so much pleasure. These included Cornerhouse, John Rylands Library, the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, the Lit and Phil, his beloved Portico Library, the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester University, the North West Labour History Society, and the Royal Exchange Theatre and many more, including the British Association for Friends of Museums, on which he represented the northwest.

I knew him best when he became Company Secretary of the National Museum of Labour History (now People's History Museum), where he was a constant source of support in some difficult times. Joining a formidable board of trustees, including Jack Jones, Michael Foot,

John Monks, and Graham Stringer, he rapidly gained their respect and admiration for wise negotiation and for helping solve difficult problems.

Eddie took early retirement in the mid '90s and embarked on an academic career. In quick succession he finished a PhD on Lancashire cotton culture and curated a series of exhibitions on subjects as diverse as the *Cotton Factory Times* newspaper and Elizabeth David, the food writer. His research now focussed on Lancashire folk life, he lectured and published widely and broadcast on the radio. He wrote the definitive book on Lancashire Pace Egg plays and was employed as a research fellow by Aberdeen University in a project which took him to the USA. (He also lectured and curated in Germany for his good friend, the late Detlef Hoffman.) Eddie became active in the Folklore Society and the Society for Folk Life Studies and uniquely served as national president of both learned bodies. He was very recently honoured with the Coote Lake Medal of the Folk Life Society. Awarded for 'outstanding research and scholarship', he joins an illustrious list which includes Christina Hole, and Iona and Peter Opie.

Eddie's priceless geniality and downright decency generated enormous love and loyalty from all those around him, we all mourn him and will all miss him immeasurably.

Nick Mansfield, 24.9.14

Note: This tribute was read by Nick Mansfield at Eddie's funeral and is reproduced here with permission. Dr Nick Mansfield is Senior Research Fellow in History at UCLan in Preston. He was Director of the People's History Museum in Manchester between 1989 and 2010. Eddie was Company Secretary for many years and then a trustee of the museum until 2010.