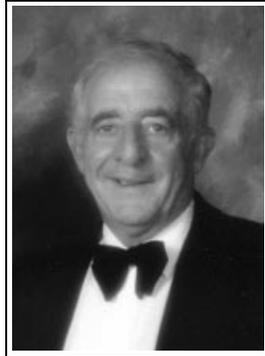


Obituary

John James Quilkey (1930–2001)



I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is ready for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.
(Winston Churchill, as quoted in John's funeral service booklet dated 16 July 2001)

Muhammed Ali once said, 'Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It's not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything.' John Quilkey was a friend to everyone, and was known affectionately as 'Quilkey', 'Quilks', 'JJQ' or 'JJ'.

John was an active member of AARES for most of his professional life. He was Honorary Secretary in 1964 and 1965, State Councillor for Victoria, 1974–1977 inclusive, Business Manager (a position he founded), 1974–1981 inclusive and President in 1983. He was made a Distinguished Fellow of the Society at its 2000 Annual Conference, an honour he cherished.

We met John 35 years ago when we were postgraduate students at the University of New England (UNE). He came from the Reserve Bank of Australia where he had been involved in various inquiries into rural matters and had gained knowledge of the agricultural economics profession. He thrived in his new environment at UNE. He used to boast that his previous education had been at 'Kumbalumba D Grade High'. In fact he had been to St Joseph's at Bulli and St Stanislaus at Bathurst, and was a Bachelor of Economics graduate from Sydney University (1958). He was awarded his PhD by the UNE in 1975 for his thesis titled, 'The Demand for Rice in Australia and its Relevance for Price and Promotion Policies'.

John loved his time in Armidale and he had many wonderful friends and colleagues there. However, La Trobe University needed someone with wide

experience in agricultural economics research who could also communicate with industry people. He was excellent at both and joined La Trobe in 1972. His research focused on agricultural marketing and price policy, with a particular emphasis on primary product promotion (the subject of his Presidential Address to the AARES) and (by virtue of his supervision of many graduate students from the developing world) agricultural price policies in developing countries. His wide variety of publications included papers on the impact of drought on the economy, spectral analysis as an analytical tool and the economics of the embargo on merino ram exports. He worked for a year at the International Wool Secretariat in London. Beyond the agricultural sector, John undertook research into tourism, the textile industry, and the contribution of immigration to the Australian motor vehicle industry.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students alike had the highest respect for John as a teacher and mentor. In our view, his work with students was his greatest contribution to the profession. He was a gold mine of research ideas and often supervised around ten postgraduate students at a time (some of whom wrote prize-winning dissertations) in addition to several undergraduate research projects. Few academics could match that performance. John's students invariably spoke of his generosity with his time, his painstaking attention to editorial detail and his eye for spotting loose economic prose. Many of his students went on to take senior positions in Australia and overseas, and they often came back to visit him. The success of the agricultural economics discipline at La Trobe was in large part due to the selfless efforts of John Quilkey.

After various administrative roles at La Trobe, John eventually became Dean of the School of Agriculture and was one of the best. He was astute at University politics without having to resort to underhand tactics. He was always ready to help people and gave his heart and soul to the University and its staff and students. Needless to say, he was, and is, widely respected in the University community. When La Trobe University brought in regulations against smoking in buildings, John, a smoker, quickly found a solution. A disused fume cupboard became his second office while he was Dean. He would sit there with his head in the cupboard, surrounded by his papers, enjoying his 'Camels' while the exhaust fan did its work.

John was the agricultural economics coordinator for the Australian Universities' International Development Program for approximately 4 years during the 1980s. He was most active in this role and, in particular, invested considerable energy in helping to develop agricultural economics curricula and research activity within the Indonesian university system. Examples of his efforts on this front included leading a team of senior Australian agricultural economists to Indonesia to deliver a 6-week short course on agricultural marketing and price analysis, and the establishment of a major

project on the economics of dried fish production. The Indonesians loved him and he loved going there. He was often to be seen wearing Indonesian shirts that had been presented to him by his hosts. In addition to his own visits, he arranged for several Australian agricultural economists to visit Indonesia to promote the agricultural economics discipline through short courses, curricula review and advice to individual researchers. For some of the visitors, this was their first experience at working in a developing country. He also arranged for several senior Indonesian academics to visit Australia.

Always a brilliant after-dinner speaker, John was sought out regularly for such occasions. Many of these talks were prepared only minutes before, usually on paper serviettes. He gave upwards of 50 invited talks to various industry and professional conferences while he was at La Trobe University. He made a lasting impression on people from rural industry and the general business community.

There are many stories about John that we haven't room to tell. Like the time at an Agricultural Economics conference when we persuaded him to take a flight over the New Zealand Alps in a single-engine Cessna and he threw himself prostrate on the ground upon his return. There was the occasion when the wind blew all his notes away in the middle of his presentation at a conference. He didn't bat an eyelid, and continued on as though nothing had happened. And then, of course, there are the numerous stories about his all-night bookings of the UNE computer to estimate demand functions for rice, dropping boxes of carefully sorted IBM cards, leaving saucers of milk out for the computer gremlins, and the like. Whilst never having the appearance of a sportsman, there are many who could vouch for his prowess on this front.

Above all else, John was truly one of nature's gentlemen, an endangered species these days. He didn't have a bad word to say about anyone. He leaves behind a strong legacy of respect for one's colleagues, appreciation of the needs of students, and teamwork. He will be long remembered within the agricultural economics profession with great respect and affection, and as someone who always looked for the positive before the negative.

John is survived by his wife Brenda and daughters Emma and Olivia.

I've led a protected life — I was 24 years of age before I knew that it was appropriate to call a woman by her first name.

(JJQ, various dates)

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