



## Obituary

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The journal records the death at the age of 100 years of Professor H E Maude, variously a colonial administrator in the former Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (now Kiribati and Tuvalu) and official of the Western Pacific High Commission; employee of the South Pacific Commission in its formative years; and last, a historian at the Australian National University. In these capacities he was a staunch advocate of indigenous rights and scholarship.

To commemorate his life and work, we publish two tributes: the funeral oration given by his son Alaric, and an appreciation by historian of Kiribati, Dr Kambati Uriam.

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### HARRY MAUDE

1906–2006

Harry [Henry Evans] Maude was born at Bankipore in India on 1 October 1906, the last of six children. His father was a senior officer in the Indian Civil Service. After an intermittent and inadequate schooling in India, he was sent to his father's old school in London. There his academic record was undistinguished, to say the least, largely because of the deficiencies in his previous education. The headmaster wrote to Harry's father advising against sending him to university as, to quote from the biography by Susan Woodburn, 'when the good lord was distributing brains, I'm afraid that Harry must have been behind the door' (2003:14). But his father had more faith, and with tutorial help Harry managed to scrape into Jesus College, Cambridge. There he studied Economics and then Anthropology, graduating with a better class

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of Honours than had his old headmaster. The headmaster would have been even more astonished to learn, as I did only three weeks ago, that Harry is listed as one of Highgate School's famous old boys, sandwiched between a Lord and a cricketer who played for England.

In 1929, newly graduated, Harry was appointed to the British Colonial Service as a cadet in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (the only place he wanted to go), married my mother Honor, and set off for the Pacific. He remained in the Pacific, with posts in Fiji, Tonga and Pitcairn Island as well as the Gilberts, for most of the next 20 years, apart from an unhappy spell in Zanzibar. At the end of 1948 he joined the newly established South Pacific Commission, and within a year became head of the Social Development branch. He set up his office in Sydney, which is how we became Australians. In 1957 he joined the Department of Pacific History at the Australian National University, which is how we became Canberrans. After retirement in 1970 he continued to write and publish, and he and Honor worked together to produce a series of books on the Gilbert Islands, now Kiribati. Honor died in 2001, ending a remarkable partnership of over 71 years. His final years were spent at Jindalee Nursing Home, as scholar-in-residence, where his health improved with the care he received, and he became a much-loved person, despite constant, and successful, attempts to escape. [He liked to go for walks around the neighbourhood, which was a hazard because by then he was blind.]

What should we remember him for?

Robert Langdon, in a short biography of Harry published in 1978, called him 'shy proconsul and dedicated Pacific historian'. Doug Munro, in a yet-to-be published manuscript on Harry's place as a Pacific historian, describes him as 'loyal lieutenant and incurable romantic'. His biographer, Susan Woodburn, writes of his role as an academic as that of 'informant, model and mentor'. Many who sent messages on Harry's 100th birthday confirmed these qualities.

He was morally strong, and I think that this, along with my mother's influence, preserved him from the pitfalls and traps of colonial life.

In his professional life he was unfailingly helpful. He spent a lot of his time as an academic and in retirement helping students, colleagues and anyone with advice, information on sources and comments on their manuscripts. He was constantly answering correspondence from all over the world, all of it neatly



filed and preserved. On the occasion of his 100th birthday one former student wrote that 'you were the most generous of supervisors'; another, of the 'time and effort you took, gently encouraging me to persist and expand'; and yet another, that 'I have never stopped thanking you in my inner spirit for your confidence in me'.

He was modest. He was quietly proud of his achievements, but didn't expect anyone to take much notice of them. Yet they *were* recognised – by the comments I have just read, by the book of essays in his honour edited by Niel Gunson, by an Honorary Doctorate of the University of the South Pacific, by the Government of Kiribati's award of the Kiribati Independence Medal and the Ana Kamoamo Kiribati (Kiribati National Order), and by the fact that he is still remembered in those islands for his work both as an administrator and as a preserver and publisher of the record of its history and culture.

[It is appropriate here to add to the address the words Harry Maude wrote in 1987, in case he had to reply on the occasion of the presentation of his Honorary Doctorate at the USP. Susan Woodburn recorded them in his biography (2003:268), writing that they 'summed up the aims and convictions that had informed his work of the past thirty years'.

*The degree just conferred by your University is deeply appreciated by me – the more so because I came into the academic world not direct to the quarter-deck, like most of my colleagues, but up the hawse-pipe at the age of 50, when many these days, at least in Australia, are thinking of their retirement. Furthermore, history was not a subject I had studied at my own University, but one that was chosen after several years of living in the islands as being untaught in the schools and yet vitally needed for the rehabilitation of the islanders. By history I mean their own history – what is sometimes called island or indigenous or local history – and not what is usually meant by the term Pacific History, which, I found to my surprise when I first joined the National University in Canberra, is almost invariably the history of European contact with Pacific peoples . . . This is not to say for a minute that the story of culture contact is unimportant, but its importance lies in the effects it has on the mainstream of a country's history, which progresses from generation to generation with changes more often due to internal than to external factors . . . May I conclude then with a plea that this University may be willing to take*



*the lead in studying the historical development of its member countries, using the modern techniques of researchers in oral tradition, archaeology, prehistory, linguistics, anthropology and other related disciplines. By this means your students on graduation will be enabled to spread a rightful pride in their own islands and their own ancestral heritage by being provided with a secure historical base from which to play their part as responsible citizens of their newly independent nations.]*

Harry Maude was a product of the Enlightenment, believing in the power of reason and rational thought. At various times he claimed to be (but you could never be quite sure) an atheist, an agnostic, and a humanist. But he was also drawn to both Unitarianism, for its theological simplicity, and high church Anglicanism, for its pomp and ceremony. In his last years he clearly had a faith, which he carried with quiet conviction, and enjoyed the regular Anglican services at Jindalee.

In his attitudes and actions he was progressive. At university he joined the Freedom group of the British Anarchists, from which he resigned only in his eighties. In the Pacific he supported the interests of the indigenous peoples (which he told me was an attitude he got from his father who had supported the Indianisation of government in India). He sometimes clashed with the missions and his superiors over his defence of Gilbertese custom. He once told me that he thought his greatest contribution to human happiness had been to remove from Gilbertese law some 130 draconian regulations inspired by the missions, the traders and British officials. In his research into Pacific history, to which he dedicated the second half of his life, he wanted to tell the story of the Pacific peoples, which he called mainstream history, and not that of the colonial powers.

He was definitely a romantic. He was drawn to the Central Pacific by the literature of Robert Louis Stevenson, and wrote that his and Honor's first view of a coral atoll was 'a picture of such beauty, peace and solitude that it has been engraved on our memory ever since. We were captivated once and forever by the magic of the South Sea Islands' (quoted in Woodburn 2003: 40). The other side of this was that he wasn't very practical – as my mother could have told you at some length.



But in historical research he *was* very practical, a true craftsman. He was passionate about locating and preserving the source materials of Pacific History [which led to his role in the founding of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau in the Pacific History Department of the Australian National University]. He knew where to find information on the most obscure topics, and loved filling in the details of historical events, rather like in a crossword puzzle. His favourite amongst his publications, *Slavers in Paradise*, was described by the reviewers as ‘a masterpiece’ and ‘a gem’, and involved detective work in three languages (English, French and Spanish) and many archives. He combined this meticulous scholarship with an equal determination to tell a good story in good prose. For Harry history was literature. Here is an example, drawn to my attention by his grandson Richard. It comes at the end of his essay on beachcombers and castaways, Europeans who lived unprotected and uncertain lives in the islands long before the colonial period:

... in the beachcomber era ... there was as yet no trader to interfere with the economic life of the islander, no missionary dedicated to changing his religion, no planter demanding his labour, and no government official his freedom. There was only the beachcomber and the castaway to represent what was to come; often drunken, profligate and quarrelsome, but still essentially human and tolerant, and wishing to change no one. (Maude 1964:280)

Finally, we should remember him for his sense of humour. You could always get a smile and a laugh from him, and he rejoiced in the occasional absurdity of life, whether in the middle of the Pacific, in a university or in a nursing home. I came across this passage in his biography in which a colleague, describing Harry’s South Pacific Commission office in Sydney in the 1950s, wrote:

Maude directed and guided us by suggestion, discussion and laughter; a sense of humour was essential in that office, together with a slightly mad streak and a willingness to work peculiar hours. (Nancy Phelan, quoted in Woodburn 2003:224)

We should not regret his passing. He lived a full and productive life. He achieved just about everything he wanted to achieve, and lived to see his work recognised by others. He had a successful and lasting marriage, though not one without its ups and downs. He lived to enjoy his 100th birthday and the messages he received. But he was ready to move on. He once complained to his grandson James (as he did to many of you here) about his inability to die and said that it was like being at a bus stop. Everyone else seemed to catch the bus but he kept missing it. This time he caught the bus.

*Alaric Maude*  
9 November 2006

#### Note

This address was delivered at the service in Canberra. Passages enclosed in square brackets, and some bibliographic references, have been added for this published version.

#### **H E Maude**

#### **Our *Unimane* and Friend 1906–2006**

It was in 1990 that my family finally had the privilege of meeting Harry and Honor Maude when they came for tea in our home in Hughes, ACT. ‘So you made it to the house,’ I said to Harry and Honor as they entered into the house from the kitchen. ‘This one here drives us around,’ Harry replied, looking across at Honor. ‘She’s almost 90 years, and I can’t understand why the police keep issuing her with a driver’s licence. She’s a dangerous driver!’ ‘I passed all the tests,’ said Honor, who was now busy with Neina and the children. ‘And I always drive carefully,’ she added.

I had first met Harry in person in the PHA (Pacific History Association) conference in Suva in 1985. We were both speakers in the historiography



session of the conference: Harry, giving an outline and direction in the writing of Kiribati history using oral tradition and I, talking on the nature and the types of oral traditions in Kiribati. During Harry's presentation, I kept looking around at the people in the room and wondering how many of them actually believed in Harry's outline of Kiribati history beyond the boundary set by European contact, and whether that outline he proposed was achievable. When I met up with Harry again in Canberra in 1990, he was working on the third project on Kiribati history, this time on Karongoa Traditions. That manuscript was published in the following year.

'I have a few more projects to complete on the outline of Kiribati history I proposed in that PHA conference in Suva,' he announced to me one day during one of our family visits to their home in Mirinjani. 'After that, I leave it with you and scholars from Kiribati to fill in the details, and I can enjoy my retirement.' 'But what about the critics and the sceptics of that outline and of your sources?' I replied. 'What do they know of *te karaki* (oral tradition)?' he said dismissively. 'You remind me of what Professor Jim Davidson said during the launching of my essay, *te Boti*, at the University. "Harry, you have finally made yourself totally incomprehensible!" The book sold only a few copies that year outside Kiribati, but it didn't worry me, for it was well received by the I-Kiribati.'

Harry and I had two things in common: we were both interested in Kiribati oral traditions, believing that these materials can be used as sources to extend Kiribati history back beyond European contacts; and we had both entered the discipline of history through the 'back door', as Harry often puts it, Harry through anthropology and I, via theology. He once commented, 'I enjoyed reading anthropology at Cambridge, but it is the complicated language and the ideas of anthropologists that made me move towards history. I believe I'm doing fine as a historian.'

I could not agree more. Harry certainly proved himself a great historian of the Pacific, with special interest in the history of the people of Kiribati. Furthermore, many historians and anthropologists benefited greatly from the advice and help of Professor Harry Maude. I myself benefited greatly from his advice and help during my student days at the Australian National University. His generosity with his materials and documents, some of which



I had with me for the whole duration of my time at the university, led to some important discoveries (the existence of the Kiribati canon of traditions), revisions (of dates of epochal events in Kiribati history) and methods of reading and dating Kiribati traditions (allowing 30 years for a generation). Harry's greatest joy was to see young scholars, especially Pacific Islanders, achieve their goal at university, and to get the finished product of their research published. My book, *In their own words: history and society in Kiribati oral tradition*, was the result of the support and encouragement of many people, including Harry, who wrote the blurb and the Preface to the book.

Miti Mauta, (the name Harry is known by in Kiribati) is identified with *kaini kawai* (the ancients), who include Rev. George Eastman and Sir Arthur Grimble, architects of modern Kiribati society. In Kiribati one is regarded as educated and *kaini Kiribati ni koaua* (truly I-Kiribati) if one can show that one is familiar with the works of any of the three. This is because to be *reireiaki* (properly nurtured and educated) in Kiribati is to be well versed in *te katei ni Kiribati* (culture and traditions) which are found in the works of these men. Of the three, Harry is better known and more read, and in 2004 the Kiribati government, during the annual Independence celebration, honoured Harry Maude with the medal, *Ana Kamoamo Kiribati*, the highest award for the non-I-Kiribati category, in recognition of his contribution to Kiribati history and culture. But the people in Kiribati remember Harry fondly, not just because of his writings; they are thankful to him for recognising I-Kiribati traditional leadership and wisdom, and for extending the boundaries of the British administration during the Colonial days to include the Phoenix Islands, which became part of the Republic of Kiribati.

Harry Maude had a humble and generous Christian character, and what he has done and written for the people of Kiribati is because of his great fondness of and love for the people. It was indeed a great honour and a privilege to know Harry and Nei Honor personally. In my own family, Harry is called by my children *te Unimane* (wise old man) and friend.

'I think I went to Church in Kiribati a couple of times, and the people were surprised when they saw me in Church,' Harry related to me once. '*Te koraki* (people) thought I was a *beekan* (pagan). I hope God will accept my work and





my writings in preserving and giving back to the people of Kiribati their traditions and their history as my worship acceptable in his sight.’

Indeed, Harry Maude’s work and life is worth a thousand praises and hosannas.

*Kambati Uriam  
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