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David K Brown

It was with the greatest sadness that the Journal of Naval Engineering's production team learnt that the life of David Keith Brown. MEng, CEng, FRINA, RCNC had come to its end.

His Obituary is included in this edition of the Journal, but we should also note that for many, many years he was its mainstay for the highly popular Journal's book reviews, serving steadfastly as its principle book reviewer. I believe that the Journal of Naval Engineering would have been very much the poorer without his detailed knowledge and valuable contribution. His support for the JNE was extraordinary and, despite being a prolific and well respected author in his own right, such that he never failed to meet a publishing deadline and never provided anything other than meticulous and highly readable reviews which were notable both for their precision and humour.

He will be sorely missed.

Chris Hodge

Editor in Chief, Journal of Naval Engineering

OBITUARY – DAVID K BROWN

The attached obituary for D.K. Brown appeared in The Mariner's Mirror Vol. 94:3 (2008), pp.260-2

David Keith Brown. MEng, CEng, FRINA, RCNC 1928-2008

David Brown was a rare example of a professional engineer who used his knowledge of history to inform and enhance his work as a naval architect for the Admiralty – or Ministry of Defence from 1964. He had actually lived through some of the relevant history, using his knowledge of the war at sea in World War 2, especially in areas such as operational effectiveness, damage survival and seakeeping.

Although born in London in 1928, his family moved to Leeds where a schoolboy interest in warships developed. A high achiever academically, he took first class honours degree in naval architecture from Liverpool University, one of the last to do so before that university closed its course. That opened the door to join the then well paid Royal Corps of Naval Constructors, whose normal intake was bright dockyard apprentices. From 1949 he undertook the RCNC course at the Royal Naval College Greenwich, finishing with a First Class Certificate, Students' performance was carefully recorded and referred to in later years, often reckoned to be a guide as to who might reach the highest ranks. The training period included time at sea in a variety of warships, from which every naval architect benefits.

Appointed Assistant Constructor in 1953 at Bath (to which city the constructors had moved from London in 1940), his first job was concerned with design calculations on small vessels and the occasional ship trial. As with other RCNC staff, there followed a variety of posts and promotions, all building up experience – working on the Tribal class frigates in 1955 and propeller design in 1958 before becoming involved in highly confidential work on the UK's first nuclear propelled submarine, culminating in the 1963 trials (and troubles) of *Dreadnought*.

Much of his work was done at the wartime-built hutments at Foxhill, where in due course he was promoted to a room with a carpet – the RCNC being a Civil Service body not part of the Royal Navy. In 1967 he was appointed as Assistant Professor at Greenwich, lecturing on warship design and ship resistance & propulsion. At the same time he prepared for the move of the constructors' course to University College London. During this period, he met teacher Avis Pritchard and they married in 1968. The following year Katharine was born, now a successful lawyer. In 1971 Richard was born, now an officer in the Royal Engineers. David was always proud of his children, especially when they began to earn more than he did.

In 1970 he was appointed Chief Constructor (equivalent naval rank of RN Captain) at the Admiralty Experiment Works at Haslar near Portsmouth – not Experimental as David frequently had to point out. This posting coincided with the centenary of the Admiralty financed ship model towing tank developed by William Froude at Torquay. David set up an exhibition at Haslar, which still retained some of its Victorian equipment, as well as all the model test reports which David perused thoroughly. That prepared the ground for his centenary

history of the RCNC published in 1983 as “A Century of Naval Construction”. With his access to the records and serving and retired RCNC members, he produced a comprehensive history, although David did admit to pulling a few punches and not naming some individuals of whose actions he disapproved.

All the time, he remained a keen collector of naval photographs, although not taking many himself, being somewhat inhibited by security restrictions. In his published works, he was usually able to find a suitable illustration, sometimes obtained from official collections which were in process of being pruned or even thrown out. As a longstanding member of the World Ship Society, he was appointed a Vice President, a position held until his death. He helped start the annual series of WSS naval meetings in Bristol at which he was a frequent speaker. He continued a lifelong interest in motor racing, both with visits to race tracks and then watching on television. He later became interested in industrial archaeology, especially in the Avon area.

He had become a member of the Institution of Naval Architects – now Royal – in student days, later becoming a Member of Council, its governing body, then becoming a Vice President, an accolade from his peers. He joined its Publications Committee, later becoming Chairman, soliciting and vetting technical papers and planning conferences. He would encourage younger members to submit papers, as well as offering some himself, usually associated with warship design aspects, past or present.

Back at Bath in 1974, he became at first responsible for ship related materials and safety equipment, before moving on to a post where his interests and experience could come to the fore – Head of Concept Design and Advanced Naval Vehicles. This included the preliminary design of the ships that became the Type 23 frigate, the helicopter carrier *Ocean*, minehunter *Sandown* and the Castle class offshore patrol vessel. This latter drew on his knowledge of performance of WW2 escorts, insisting on a length of at least 250ft (80m) for seakindliness. He was a regular visiting lecturer and external examiner at UCL.

The 1980s had the plus of his becoming an Assistant Director, dealing with ship design policy, so moving in the highest MoD circles. Having attended the Senior Officers War Course in 1973, he was well acquainted with the strategic background. He was given the title of Deputy Chief Naval Architect. But that period had the minuses of both the decline in the standing of professional engineers within the MoD in favour of systems analysts and accountants, and the decline in number of new naval vessels built. This culminated in the Government giving undue credence to the ‘short fat’ warship concept in the mid 1980s, in spite of the advice of the MoD’s professionals that it was a non-starter as a blue water frigate, both technically and economically. Only when a series of outside naval architects were brought in at great expense to evaluate the concept and come to the same conclusion was it finally admitted that the MoD staff were right all along.

While officially retiring in 1988 at the Civil Service milestone of 60, David began what was essentially a new career, that of author. But he saw this more as a labour of love than a supplement to his pension. For the next twenty years, David wrote prolifically on a wide range of subjects, from sailing navy performance, design and stability standards, to ship speed trials. A member of the Society for Nautical

Research, he became a member of its Council from 2001-04, as well as publishing a number of articles in *Mariners Mirror* including “The First Steam Battleship” in 1977. At one stage he applied for the post of Director of the National Maritime Museum, but given the semi-political nature of that post, he was probably relieved to get no further than the short list of candidates. Although highly capable in everything he did, he did not particularly seek the top of the (greasy) pole, being content to advise from a slightly lower position but one of authority.

He had articles published in almost every issue of “Warship”, first a quarterly then an annual publication. He did many book reviews for the *Journal of Naval Engineering* and other publications, which enabled him to extend his book collection at little cost. He wrote for “Warship International”, WSS “Warships” and “Interdisciplinary Science Review”, plus a huge number of official reports, many confidential. He was always pleased when he could show RN warship design as superior to some foreign navies, pointing out that the RN had never lost a destroyer of its own design due to deficient strength or stability. Although not particularly knowledgeable about merchant ships, he brought his naval architectural experience to investigations of the safety of roll-on/roll-off ferries and the loss of the *Titanic*.

To those outside the MoD, he will be best remembered for his series of five books on British warship design, from 1815 to 1985. These drew together his breadth of experience and depth of knowledge, explaining in layman’s terms how and why warship design features evolved in the Royal Navy, each supplemented with many informative appendices. His last book was “Atlantic Escorts” published in 2007. He realised that this was likely to be his last full length book, partly because he felt he had exhausted most of the subjects where he had detailed knowledge, but also because of failing health, perhaps exacerbated after being knocked down by a car in Bath. Separated, then divorced, from Avis, he lived alone in a flat in Bath from 1993, always pleased to welcome visitors, where he died on 15 April 2008. Thus passed a man of great intellect, of deep knowledge of his chosen field, whose reputation will endure; but a modest man withal.

Ian Buxton

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

The Editor in Chief, the JNE team and all the staff within the BMT Defence Division wish the Journal's readers a Peaceful Christmas and a Secure New Year.