

Herman Diederiks (1937–95)

For twenty years Herman Diederiks had been an overseas correspondent for *Urban History* and its predecessor, the *Urban History Yearbook*. His advice, enthusiasm and encouragement were always valued since he had an acute perception from various historical standpoints of the work on towns and cities which scholars were undertaking in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Herman himself identified closely with the study of urban history in the United Kingdom, not only by attending many of the meetings of the Urban History Group, contributing reviews of Dutch literature, and suggesting avenues for further development, but also in developing close personal friendships and professional links with urban historians in Britain. For many European and American historians Herman was the quintessential Flying Dutchman because of his unflagging attendance at international conferences associated with his extraordinary range of interests – social history, the history of crime, history and computing and, above all, urban history. From the mid-1970s Herman was a leading figure in the growth of international collaboration in European urban history. Enthusiastic, challenging in discussion, gifted with languages, writing papers on an astonishing variety of topics, constantly concerned to bring people together, supportive of young scholars, highly sociable and convivial, always welcoming new ideas and opportunities for collaboration, a man without pomposity or pretension, Herman was a powerful and energetic representative abroad of Dutch urban historians. During the 1980s he was prominent in the International Working Group on Urban History supported by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. With others, he helped in 1990 in the establishment of the European Association of Urban Historians and, in 1992, Herman and his colleagues from the Dutch Urban History Group organized the first international conference of the Association in Amsterdam. Herman's opening welcome to the conference, warm and relaxed, set the ideal informal tone for a highly successful conference, and with his wife, Hester, his generous hospitality for many of the participants at his family house was typical. Herman had long-standing links with the Economic and Social History Department and the Centre for Urban History at Leicester University. In the mid-1970s he hosted Jim Dyos' important visit to the Netherlands which did so much to promote urban history, and in 1978 he established with Leicester the first History exchange programme in the European Community, with its strong emphasis on the study of European cities; in 1990 Herman played a key role in extending that programme to include Poland and Hungary. In 1993 Herman collaborated with a number of European universities in setting up a large-scale EU-funded project on European Urbanization in the Modern and Contemporary period. And these were only some of his phenomenal range of activities – invariably carried out with good-humoured banter and bustle. It is important that Herman's achievements and the opportunities he has created for international co-operation are extended and built upon by his innumerable friends and colleagues.

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