

Peter Furley, who has died aged 84, had a distinguished career as a biogeographer in the Department of Geography at the University of Edinburgh between 1962 and 2001, being promoted to a Personal Chair in Biogeography in 1998. He had an international reputation in tropical biogeography and pedology, in particular for his work on the dynamics of savanna and tropical forest systems. He was awarded the President's Medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, chaired the British Biogeography Study Group for several years and among many publications co-authored *Geography of the Biosphere* (1983), a standard text in biogeography, and co-edited *Biogeography and Development in the Humid Tropics* (1988).

Peter Anthony Furley was born on 5th August 1935 and educated at Gravesend Grammar School. He won a scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford, which he took up after two years' National Service as a Flying Officer in the RAF. He graduated in geography and subsequently undertook a DPhil in soil science, also at Oxford. It was in Oxford that he met Margaret, who was following preparatory courses for university. They married on 23rd March 1963 at St. Mary's Battersea and would have four children: Niki, Andrew, Sara and Kirsten.

While at Oxford, Peter received the Vaughan Cornish Award, enabling him to work in Gran Canaria where the impact of volcanic processes on landforms could be seen in their effects on soils and vegetation. This research precipitated life-long interests in the plants and soils of the tropical world. Upon joining Edinburgh University's Geography Department, he established the first analytical laboratories in the Department, high up in an old building in High School Yards, much to the surprise of the University's Fire Warden. His Edinburgh position allowed him to become involved with overseas fieldwork. He was the Royal Scottish Geographical Society's Chair of Expeditions and in 1966 began work on the natural resources and development of Belize (British Honduras). Over the decades following, this underpinned long-running Departmental research programmes, and it was mainly as a result of Peter's activity and research leadership that Edinburgh became the leading British university concerned with Belize. Numerous papers, monographs and expedition reports followed. Peter's first expedition to British Honduras was in 1966; he would return in 1970, 1980, 1983 and 1986, and helped produce the first agricultural census of the country.

In 1976, Peter became one of four founding professors of ecology at the newly constructed University of Brasilia, where he started a long association with Brazil, and with Dr Jim Ratter, then Head of Tropical Biology at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. In 1977, Furley led a multi-disciplinary team assessing the natural resources of Brazil's centre-west regions, followed by similar work in Rondonia in the western Amazon. Using his RAF experience, Peter promoted the use of airborne radar in surveying these huge areas, forty years before radar surveys would become widely used. He returned to Brazil in the 1990s to head the Maraca Rain Forest Project – one of the largest scientific expeditions ever mounted in the Amazon.

From the 1980s Peter extended his interests and worked in Cameroon, northern Australia and in China as Visiting Professor of Soil Science at Yangling, Shaanxi Province. In 1996, he began a four-year link with the Laboratory of Tropical Resource Ecology at the University of Zimbabwe, teaching and researching fire and nutrient cycling in miombo woodlands. Latterly, Peter turned his attention to the conflict between conservation and development and to practical action to conserve forests. With John Burton from the World Land Trust and the 'Adopt an Acre' programme, he encouraged the collective purchase of parcels of forest land to ensure their conservation. Further Belize expeditions in 1988, 1991 and 1996 allowed him to undertake the first nationwide survey of the country's coastal mangroves, more than a decade before this became an issue of international concern. Peter worked tirelessly to promote the public understanding of science. He was deeply involved in the design of the 'Tropical Rainforest' exhibit for the Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, and with the Natural History Museum in London, which opened its field station in Belize in 1993. That year, Peter convened researchers at the

National Museum of Scotland for the first meeting of the UK- Belize Association – subsequently an annual gathering of academics, NGO staff and diplomats that continues today.

Peter retired from the University in 2001. As Professor Emeritus he continued researching, participating in expeditions, supervising students and publishing, including ‘Savannahs: a Short Introductory Guide (Oxford University Press, 2016) and a reference database of savanna soils for Belize in 2018. He remained President of the UK-Belize Association until 2014. Peter successfully underwent knee replacement surgery in 2019, but later that year a tumour was found that proved inoperable, and despite radiotherapy, Peter died peacefully on Friday 31 January this year. He is survived by his loving wife Margaret, their four children, and their family Cameron, Tom, Amelia, Jamie, Anna, Rowan, Luca, and Kieran. An inspiring teacher, passionate researcher and forceful advocate for forest conservation, Peter will be sorely missed by friends, former students, and colleagues for his intellect, his kindness, the generosity with which he always gave his time, and his enduringly positive outlook.

A memorial ceremony was held at Aberlady Church on Friday 21st February 2020 to celebrate Peter’s life, with a further commemorative event planned for the next meeting of the UK-Belize Association, which he founded.

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Neil Stuart and Charles Withers