# Recollections of working with Edward (Ted) Nevin: January 1964 to August 1966

I first showed up in Aber to take up my Junior post on January 4th, 1964. I already knew the name of my soon-to be- boss -Ted Nevin – but possibly not for the reasons you might expect. Specifically, while an undergraduate at Leeds University I had really struggled to get my mind round the complexities of Economics – my A-level pass in the subject was poor having been taught by a botanist – Dr John Dony – best known for his book on the Flora and Fauna of Bedfordshire! Nor were the standard textbooks recommended to us proving very helpful (Samuelson and Cairncross). Fortunately, I stumbled across Nevin's a *Textbook of Economic Analysis* published in 1958.

At last, here was book that taught basic theory but linked in a seamless way with the big policy issues of the day and not least the UK's major balance of payment problems and its agonizing over the European Community. But equally important it was a "good read" - not just a technical treatise. It truly saved my bacon as an aspiring economist.

But at the time of taking up my post I had no idea of the incredible body of research that Ted – still less than 40 years old – already had under his belt. His major research outputs prior to 1964 were truly impressive but significantly they had little to do with Wales. I refer to his Aberystwyth MA dissertation on *The Market in Gilt-Edged Securities*, his Cambridge Ph.D. on *The Mechanism of Cheap Money: A Study of British Monetary Policy, 1931-1939;* and his inciteful reflections on his time in Jamaica as published in *Capital Funds in Underdeveloped Countries* in 1963. Anyone concerned about the UK's current economic and debt malaise, could do much worse than consult the important lessons that Ted drew from his analysis of the 1930s and 1940s. A few years later in Tanzania, I assisted in that country's transition from a colonial Currency Board to an independent Central Bank. I now realise that Ted's book based on Jamaica had addressed all the main issues that we later faced in that African country in 1966.

When I arrived in Aber in January 1964 Ted's work on the Welsh economy was resuming after the lengthy hiatus that had followed his previous time there and his work with the Welsh Economic Research Group (WERG) that he had led. That group - comprising George Peters and others - had published its first provisional Social Accounts of the Welsh economy[i] in 1956, and a revised set one year later. Later, I speculated about what had motivated Ted's interest in national accounting after his dedicated focus on monetary issues in his graduate studies. His stay in Cambridge must surely have been influential. During that time, the Keynesian revolution was still creating significant debate. Three of its major disciples-Richard Kahn (his supervisor), Joan and Austin Robinson were still active. So were the two architects of the UK's first National Income Accounts - Richard Stone and James Meade. John Hicks (who originated the phrase "social accounting") also showed up there occasionally. So, the young Edward Nevin would have encountered several of the pioneering giants of national income accounting. - three were later Nobel laureates. So, it is scarcely surprising that when based in Aber he saw an opportunity for his research to extend that pioneering work for the first time

to a region of the UK namely Wales. However, after the first burst of that activity in 1956/57 there then came the eight-year hiatus, explained in Michael Nevin's excellent biography, by Ted's prioritisation of his work on *Capital Funds* and his commitments in Dublin.

Whatever the reason for Ted choosing to return to the study of the Welsh economy, the timing of his decision was fortuitous. Later that year the longstanding Conservative Government – preoccupied with the Profumo Affair and much criticised for its stop-start economic policies – fell and the Harold Wilson's Labour government came into office. After the election the impetus to introduce formal economic planning for the UK rapidly emerged: a new Department of Economic Affairs under George Brown was created and we saw for the first time a dedicated Welsh Office. Ted himself was soon asked to join a newly established Welsh Regional Economic Council in Cardiff. So, this new national and regional institutional framework arrived as an ideal framework into which our work at Aber could conveniently fit – the impetus for getting on with it was now very strong!

My own reasonably strong training in commercial accounting – a component of my degree from Leeds - had equipped me reasonably well to deal with the extra demands of national income accounting. In the first few months, Ted and I had worked alone. But the earlier work by George Peters and others was a tremendous crutch on which the inexperienced me leant unashamedly. Initially, we merely sought to extend the earlier data set which had ended in 1956 to cover the full period 1948 to 1964. I was constantly grateful for Ted's guidance on my work and grateful to for encouraging me to embark on parallel study initially for a Phd: my topic being of *Personal Savings Patterns in Wales.*

My own limited efforts were greatly fortified in 1965 when the team, now renamed as the Economic Research Unit (ERU), was joined by Jeff Round. Jeff came with a strong mathematical background and more significantly experience in computer programming. So, we were able to move on from the limited task of producing national income data to the more demanding task of refining the input-output table that we had constructed, and using this for some primitive modelling of the Welsh economy in the context of the emerging planning for the UK.

Jeff Round will say more about this in a moment.

Our Unit was given offices in an old building called Pen Roc- literally a stone's throw from the town's pier. Although dishevelled, dark and a bit cold, these offices had a splendid 2nd floor view over the ocean and along the main promenade of the town. The small group quickly gelled socially – most were young and unmarried and so anxious for a decent social life as well as the work experience. Ted Nevin himself was still young enough at that time to maintain a relaxed approach to our goings-on and indeed was occasionally the instigator of activities. He frequently suggested shifting their day's work to one of the many pubs in the area, or even to a more distant village such as Talybont. Such excursions were always enjoyable and sometimes productive of new ideas! Ted had a daunting intellect that we all marvelled at, and he was always treated with great respect as the "boss" but he never distanced himself from the group in any sort of hierarchical manner!

Jeff will tell you a bit more about our significant technical discussions in the ERU offices on the Welsh Economy with Mr Gwynfor Evans of Plaid Cymru. I recall the role I was asked to play by Ted as a junior member of his staff sometime during my stay at Aber. Specifically, he contacted me early one morning with the exciting news that Gwynfor Evans had just been elected as the first ever *Plaid Cymru* M.P.[1] But BBC Wales (for whom he occasionally worked as a commentator and in other capacities) had asked Ted to get down to Carmarthen pronto to join the teams interviewing Gwynfor and others about this historic Welsh event. He needed a driver in a hurry so that he could use the trip to prepare. I happily agreed to take on this role – enjoying the relative luxury of driving Ted's A55 car - and then spent an amazing day with the large crowds in Carmarthen imbibing the euphoric atmosphere that surrounded the Plaid victory!

Ted was clearly not slow to use his young researchers to take on tasks that had little connection to their research duties. Michael's biography of his father recalls the occasion when Ted Davis another young Aber colleague, was "pressed ganged" into rescuing him (Michael) from the mountains of Cader Idris when he had lost contact with his school party. I remember one other chore namely to drive to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire to deliver some package to another member of the Nevin clan. Today's "snowflake" generation might regard such treatment as exploitation. We for our part accepted it in good spirit – Ted was a warm -hearted boss and we enjoyed doing these little extraneous things for him from time to time. The one possible exception was occasionally being dragged round Marks and Spencer's in Cardiff after a meeting at the Welsh Office, to buy some clothes item for Mrs Nevin!

Finally, a personal digression that illustrates another aspect of my gratitude to Ted. This anecdote is also linked to the new Harold Wilson government of 1964. Another new institution he quickly established was the Ministry of Overseas Development – formerly a department of the Foreign Office. Barbara Castle was appointed as its first Minster. She visited Tanzania late in 1964, met its first post-Independence President Julius Nyerere and offered him a UK team of experts to help him develop Tanzania's first Five Year Plan. George Clayton -Ted's colleague at Aber - was asked to join that team as its Financial Sector expert that but agreed to do so only if he could take his research assistant. George and Ted then had something of a stand-off, but Ted eventually and graciously allowed me to make the trip. So, George and myself boarded a VC 10 to Tanzania in May 1965, and 36 hours later I found myself, with the team meeting Julius Nyerere in State House Dar es Salaam. George stayed in Tanzania only two weeks, but I was left holding the fort for the expert team for four long months thereby neglecting my work on the Welsh economy. But it was great experience for me that was very influential in shaping my later. But fortunately, Jeff and Ted held the fort gamely so that on my return to Wales we were quickly able to complete the publication that recorded our work, Nevin, Roe and Round, *The Structure of the Welsh Economy*. I remain grateful to this day for the opportunity I had, as a very green beginner to work on this and ever grateful to Ted also for allowing

[1] elected after the death of Lady Megan Lloyd George, Labour (and former Liberal) MP and daughter of David Lloyd George. Gwynfor Evans had later become a keen follower of their research on Wales- although he occasionally misrepresented the economic results to help advance the nationalist cause.

me to make the trip to Tanzania – an experience that cemented my career long commitment to development issues.

[i] Edward Nevin (ed.), The Social Accounts of the Welsh Economy, 1948 to 1952, prepared by the Welsh Economic Research Group, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Welsh Economic Studies No 1, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1956