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Father of political science in Ireland

Professor Basil Chubb, who died on May 8th aged 80, was an Englishman who transplanted himself to Ireland so effortlessly that - apart from the attractive West Country burr which burnished his accent - it almost seemed that he had been here forever.

In the process, he not only helped to lay the foundations for the study of political science in modern Ireland, but gave unstinting public service in many unsung, almost invisible ways to a range of important institutions.

Born in Branksome, Dorset, on December 8th 1921, Frederick Basil Chubb's university career began in Oxford but was interrupted by incident-filled military service. He joined the RAF, was shot down over Germany in 1944, and spent 15 months in a prisoner-of-war camp - the famous Stalag Luft 3, from which over 100 prisoners escaped through a tunnel dug from his hut.

After the war, he went back to Oxford, where he took his primary degree in 1946. A University of Dublin (TCD) MA followed in 1950. Further qualifications included a D.Phil from Oxford and a Litt.D from The University of Dublin.

His appointment as lecturer in political science in TCD in 1948 marked the beginning of a long and extraordinarily fruitful academic career. In a sense, he was exploring virgin territory. In later years, he refused to claim credit for this, pointing out that he was basically a mainstream political scientist. But the fact remains that when he began work at Trinity, the Irish political system was still largely unmapped, its workings and decision-making processes never spoken about in public, as if to do so were somehow indecent.

His ground-breaking book, *The Control of Public Expenditure* (1952) began a long overdue process of demystification which is

still not entirely complete. He was made a Fellow of Trinity in the same year. He was also associated with the early years of the Institute of Public Administration, brainchild of Tom Barrington, and was vice-president of the institute in 1958.

In 1960 Trinity created a new Chair in Political Science, and appointed Basil Chubb to it. His book, *A Source Book of Irish Government*, which appeared in 1964, was so simple, and so obvious, that people wondered why nobody had ever thought of it before: but behind the apparent simplicity lay a decade or more of hard work, of getting the facts right, of explaining the relationships clearly.

He became a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1969, and shortly afterwards published *The Government and Politics of Ireland* (1970), which in a sense put the icing on the cake. *The Politics of the Irish Constitution* (1991) completed a trilogy of books which will remain essential for students and aficionados of Irish politics alike for many years to come.

It was in the early 1970s that public service in a more particular sense began to beckon. The new Fianna Fáil government headed by Sean Lemass was strongly integrationist - some might even say corporatist - in its approach to national incomes, and in May 1970 Basil Chubb accepted the invitation of that Government to become head of a new body to be known as the Employer-Labour Conference.

This non-statutory body, the first step in the formulation of what the Government hoped would be a voluntary national prices and incomes policy, played a crucial role in national economic policy for many years. Although it was a non-statutory body, it carried substantial moral authority, not least because of the authority of its chairman. Although in its initial stages, as he admitted later, he tried to push too hard for decisions, it evolved into a valuable sounding board and conflict resolution mechanism, where Basil Chubb's equanimity, and his sense of fair play, often achieved a resolution of difficult situations.

This was followed in 1972 by his chairmanship of Comhairle na nOspidéal, in which he remained until his appointment was pointedly not renewed in 1979 by the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, who had different ideas about hospital planning.

His interest in politics was never solely academic, although his books were supplemented by a myriad of conference papers and journal articles. In his new role as Professor of Political Science in Trinity in the early 1960s, he rapidly became a household name through his participation in the television coverage of Irish elections, his calm assessments and quirky observations often putting more florid contributions into the shade. And he was always concerned, not only with the study of Irish politics, but with its improvement. As early as 1971 he was highlighting the democratic deficit in local government (another theme he shared with Tom Barrington, and which is being belatedly addressed). In 1978 he was arguing forcefully for a new Constitution. As early as 1983 he was campaigning for a Freedom of Information Act.

He became a naturalised Irish citizen in the early 1970s, but in truth this was no more than a ratification of what had already become obvious: his deep and long-lasting - though never uncritical - commitment to this country, its political culture and its institutions.

On the occasion of his retirement from TCD in 1993 he was presented with a Festschrift, *Modern Irish Democracy*.

In 1946 he married Margaret Raffther, who predeceased him. He subsequently married Orla Sheehan who along with their daughter Katie, his brother and sisters survive him.

Prof Basil Chubb: born 1921; died, May 2002