

Franklin Jan Aart Broeze (1945–2001)

Frank Broeze was born in the Netherlands in August 1945, and died in Perth on 4 April 2001. Fellows of the Academy will remember him as one of the organisers of the meetings in Perth in November 2000, though by this time the illness that killed him was well advanced.

He was a prodigious scholar in the very broadly defined field of maritime history, producing over a 100 articles in a wide range of periodicals, among them very prestigious ones, and some dozen books. Among these were *Brides of the Sea* (1989), *Gateways of Asia* (1997), *Mr Brooks and the Australian Trade* (1993), *Maritime History at the Crossroads* (1995), and *Island Nation, A History of Australians and the Sea* (1998). This last title was generally considered to be the most successful attempt yet at an ‘amphibious’ history, that is one that moved easily between land and sea. At the time of his death he had made considerable progress in researching a general history of the Pacific Ocean as part of a series called ‘The Seas in History,’ commissioned by Routledge in London. This output is all the more remarkable in that Frank’s health was precarious for more than a decade before his death.

Broeze was notable not only for the volume of his publications, but also the very wide range of his interests. He was an outstanding economic historian, he wrote seminal work on the Atlantic and Indian oceans, he contributed massively to Australian history in general, and more particularly to the maritime history of Western Australia.

Despite this range, Broeze’s most important contribution was to advance the cause of maritime history. He saw this field as going far beyond a concern with ships and navigation. All of his work was concerned with general historical themes; he thus rescued maritime history from the hint of antiquarianism which had relegated it to the margins of academic research.

Frank Broeze found time to engage in a host of service activities. At the local level, apart from numerous and vigorous contributions to the press and radio, he served on the Board of the West Australian Maritime Museum for many years, and was its deputy chairman from 1994 until his death. In the national arena, he was one of the founders of the Australian Association for Maritime History, and from 1978 to 1986 was founding editor of its journal, the *Great Circle*. He played a large and much appreciated role on the international stage also, being from 1990 to 1995 President of the International Commission of Maritime History and from 1994 onwards was Vice-President of the International Maritime Economic History Association. Most specialists in the field of maritime history would agree that he was the most important scholar in the world in his field.

Frank occasionally could be irascible — indeed at times he seemed to be unable to realise that other people did not necessarily share his daunting work ethic, or possess the vast range of knowledge which he could marshal. His editorship of the *Great Circle* required firm decision making, and this he was

always ready to do. Yet he could also be the most charming of hosts, a bon vivant who could keep a table enthralled for hours. His visits to Sydney were occasions for good talk and good living for myself and a wide range of other friends.

Recognition came to him rather belatedly. He was promoted to full professor at the University of Western Australia, and elected to a Fellowship of our Academy, only in 1998. The Academy has lost, all too early, one of its newest Fellows who would have contributed much. The world of scholarship has lost a very major figure.

*Michael Pearson**

*This obituary draws on an extensive and moving tribute published in the *Australian* on 2 May 2001, written by Broeze's colleague Anthony Barker.