

# **40 YEARS OF HPGRG – LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD**

A one-day symposium of the  
History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG)

Tuesday, 7 September 2021

## **PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME**

09:45	Arrival of the speakers and delegates
10:00	WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE HPGRG CHAIR
10:15	KNOWLEDGE, HOPE, POWER, AND RISK: 40 YEARS <i>Audrey Kobayashi, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada</i>
11:15	Coffee break
11:30	REFLECTIONS I: BIOGRAPHIES <i>RT Harrison, R Powell, H Clout, E Baigent, M Bruinsma, E Hayes</i>
13:00	Lunch break with optional interactive discussions and socialising
13:30	HOW GEOGRAPHIC THOUGHT HAPPENS <i>Tim Cresswell, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom</i>
14:30	Coffee break
14:45	REFLECTIONS II: PHILOSOPHIES <i>P Daley, M Doel, B Greenhough, J Brigstocke, M Van Meeteren</i>
16:00	Coffee break
16:15	REFLECTIONS III: IMPACTS <i>G Tobin with H Lorimer &amp; S Naylor, M Boyle, F Ferretti, P Couper, IM Keighren</i>
17:30	FAVOURITE BOOKS & FUTURE EVENTS <i>Small group discussions</i>
18:00	Close of the HPGRG anniversary symposium

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## **ABSTRACTS OF SPEAKERS**

### **KEYNOTE LECTURES**

#### **KNOWLEDGE, HOPE, POWER, AND RISK: 40 YEARS**

Audrey Kobayashi, Queen's University, Kingston

Four decades ago, the question of geographical knowledge arguably centred on the debates between so-called 'humanistic' and 'Marxian' approaches. This tension echoed both philosophical and sociopolitical issues of the time, particularly in continental Europe. The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, marked socio-politically by the effects of the end of some socialist regimes and the rise of neoliberalism, saw geographical knowledge become increasingly but unevenly politicized, Marxism, anti-racism, and feminism (most notably) lurching and receding, like jazz chords, sometimes in harmony, sometimes discordant, often unfinished. In the process, the quest for geographical knowledge in itself became less relevant than understanding how geographical knowledge is powerfully deployed. Most of our knowledge, after all, stems from the hubris of the Enlightenment, forms the basis of colonial dispossession and oppression, and has become commodified as a tool of neoliberalism. These observations do not imply that the quest either for knowledge or for understanding of knowledge has been forgotten by geographers; rather, it has become more and more difficult to emerge from the sheer weight of accumulated taken-for-granted knowledge (especially as technology pushes that accumulation exponentially), and more difficult to get past the political dilemmas that the power of knowledge mandates. The question emerges: in a time when it is more and more clear that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, is it worth asking whether it is more important to further epistemological questions about knowledge itself – especially when recent approaches push us to recognize the fungibility of knowledge according to geographical/political/social context – or, as some recent approaches suggest, should we be concerned with the more practical questions of understanding knowledge in action, the flux and movement of social actors in a world where nothing remains in place? Can or should we do both? Both approaches carry epistemological risks.

#### **HOW GEOGRAPHIC THOUGHT HAPPENS**

Tim Cresswell, University of Edinburgh

In the presentation I reflect on a series of moments when 'geographic thought' - or, possibly just, 'theory', has intersected with all the other things that form part of being this geographer (me) in particularly productive ways. I will make a case for geographic thought/theory as being an enlivening and meaning-making exercise through which our discipline is made to matter. Along the way I will share my encounters with humanistic geography, new cultural geography, post-modern geographies, and black geographies as well as the new mobilities paradigm and creative geo humanities - all of which occur in coffee shops, post-graduate offices, the living room of a tutor/mentor, departmental corridors, on trains, and over lunch at a conference. In other words, a kind of geography of geographical theory.

## CONVERSATIONS IN GEOGRAPHY

Heike Jöns, Loughborough University

The guiding dictum for my reflections as HPGRG chair is the observation by Ron Johnston and James Sidaway that 'we are making the future of geography as we practise it' (2016: 399). My commentary centres on three main themes to illustrate how conversations in geography have developed over time. The first theme discusses institutional networks—from the foundation of the History and Philosophy of Geography Working Party in 1981, via the group's elevation to a fully-fledged study group in 1985, to HPGRG's double anniversary in 2020-21. The second theme addresses research—argumentative-interpretative, empirical, experimental and/or theoretical, and preferably novel, creative, detailed, rigorous, critically reflective and well contextualised in order to enable 'progress' in geographical knowledge production, sometimes in rather surprising ways. The third theme reflects on theory and paradigmatic change—from the discussion of geodeterminism and possibilism in H.C. Darby's 1931 PhD thesis, the first in Geography in the University of Cambridge, to the proliferation of conceptual resources in what has evolved into a productive epistemological pluralism across sub-disciplinary specialisms, even if some geographers prefer conceptual orthodoxy within their own work. Looking back and looking forward therefore enables us from time to time to assess how institutional networks, research practices, and geographical writings have been shaped by and are shaping the making of geography, including the possibilities for future research on the history and philosophy of geography.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHY I: BIOGRAPHIES

## WRITING THE WORLD: REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

Richard T Harrison, University of Edinburgh

*The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there*  
(LP Hartley 1953/2015)

When the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group was originally conceived and established in 1985 it was based on two arguments. First, the descriptive argument was that there was already an emerging, if highly diffuse, interest in the history and philosophy of the discipline. This was reflected in the inclusion in Progress in Human Geography of a 'Progress Report' on Methodology and Philosophy from volume 1 of the journal, renamed 'History and Philosophy of Geography' from volume 4. Institutionally, the IGU had established a Commission on the History of Geographical Thought in 1968, renamed the Working Group on the History of Geographical Thought in 1980. Second, the normative argument was that there ought to be a more formalised focus on the history and philosophy of the discipline, based on the view that knowledge and knowledge production was highly contextual. This was both in terms of the ontological and epistemological role of the 'hand of time' in shaping what we know and how we come to know it, and in terms of the impact, actual and potential, of developments in the theoretical and philosophical adventurings in cognate disciplines. Thirty-five years later, while these issues are still germane, the brave new world of hyperobjects and wicked problems suggests that there is merit in re-examining the place of history and philosophy in geographical thought. In the remainder of this paper we articulate this around six core imperatives: the importance of polyvocality and the heterodox; the explication of the institutionalization and socialization processes, then and now, in the discipline; the pursuit of the implications of the contextualization of knowledge at the individual and the discipline level; the erosion of essentialist and internalist accounts of the history of the discipline (the 'manifest destiny' of the subject); the integration of and response to the voice of the Global South in a decolonialised geography; and the end of 'his-story' as the basis for the discipline's historiography.

## GEOGRAPHERS BIOBIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES: AN AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

Hugh Clout, University College London

My very fortunate 40-year career at UCL involved commitment to teaching and researching the contemporary and historical geography of France, among other things. As a result, I was immersed in French geographical literature held in the College library and at the RGS. With retirement approaching,

I was asked to write a departmental history and to draft a couple of essays about H.C. Darby, who met French geographer Albert Demangeon at the Paris International Geographical Congress in 1931. I like to think that meeting had an important influence on shaping Darby's conception of historical geography as the study of changing cultural landscapes. An archive in France was made available to me that contained letters received by Demangeon prior to and during World War I from fellow academics, students, and their parents. This valuable discovery shed important light on many personalities and triggered my enthusiasm for investigating the lives and works of French geographers (especially their regional monographs) and of scholars associated with UCL. A variety of sources was duly employed in researching subsequent contributions to GBS: archival, literary, reviews, obituaries, funeral orations, interviews, even fieldwork abroad. Unsurprisingly, most essays are about male geographers, but six female scholars figure on my list. Most biographies discuss single academics but a few deal with husband and wife, father and son, father and daughter, teams of authors, and departmental colleagues. As well as university teachers,

I have written about historians of cartography, explorers and scholars who operated beyond higher education. If I were to re-do some of my early GBS essays, I would make their structure more flexible structures and would introduce further criticism of publications drawing on reviews that are now readily accessible on-line. That the GBS series is so expensive and held by few libraries is a serious regret.

## GEOGRAPHY'S LIFE TOLD THROUGH GEOGRAPHERS' LIVES

Elizabeth Baigent, University of Oxford

Biography is flourishing in its traditional guises of literary biography and its film and television counterparts, and of historical biography, and is reaching beyond the human to the world of things: the lives of objects illuminate the societies in which the objects were commissioned, made, circulated, and used. Sub genres such as national biography are resurgent, 'life-writing' opens new possibilities beyond the traditional formal grammar of the genre, and digital connectedness broadens scope for finding connections in lives.

Biography has played an increasing role in telling the history of British geography, primarily through memoirs of its human exponents, but also of accounts of its institutions and sometimes of its objects: its maps and instruments for example. This paper explores how biography has shaped our understanding of geography's past: its priorities, the constraints on it, its contribution to academic discussion, its aims. Some vehicles, most obviously the *International Geographical Union's Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies*, are views of geographers by geographers. Other, such as the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, impose an external grammar on geographical biography and oblige comparison between geographers' achievements and priorities and those of others. Yet other vehicles, such as memoirs of British Academy fellows published in that institution's Proceedings, are by and of geographical academicians, writing soon after the subject's death, compounding challenges of internalism but allowing expansive treatment. Meanwhile, geography's institutions – the Royal Geographical Society and increasing number of geography departments – commission or find themselves the subject of their own life stories, sometimes celebratory, sometimes rather counter cultural.

I share some insights into biography and geography from my time as Research Director of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, editor of *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies*, and author of a recent rather subversive collective biography of women in Oxford's School of Geography.

## **GEOGRAPHERS-IN-THE-MAKING GOING 'INTO THE FIELD': TRAVELS, NETWORKS AND QUESTIONS OF SCALE IN THE UNDERGRADUATE GEOGRAPHY DISSERTATION**

Mette Bruinsma, University of Glasgow

Disciplinary histories of geography often emphasise the works of established academic geographers. Their work takes place in grand 'scholarly' spaces (journals, conferences). Students who complete geography undergraduate degree studies vastly outnumber professional academic geographers. Yet, the student experience, and students' contribution to disciplinary knowledge production, is given scant regard in conventional historiographies of geography. The School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, holds a collection of undergraduate dissertations (dating from 1950s-present). Using these archival sources, I will explore changes in the practicalities and travels of geography students conducting their first independent research project for their undergraduate dissertation: where did geography students travel? What role do supervisors, family members, friends and peer have in the dissertation studies? How do students position themselves in 'the geographical field'? The undergraduate geography dissertation can be seen as a shared experience of becoming-a-geographer, offering insights in disciplinary changes, traditions and relationships. This paper explores one of the perspectives that can be taken in studying the history and philosophy of geography: the student experience.

## **SYNOPTIC SUBJECTS? THE SCOPE AND METHODS OF PHILOSOPHY, GEOGRAPHY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

Emily Hayes, Oxford Brookes University

Halford Mackinder is famous for, amongst other things, his lantern slide lecture 'On the Scope and Methods of Geography', delivered at the Royal Geographical Society in 1887. This talk explores connections between shifting synoptic methodological practices which predate that lecture and the recurrence in the fin de siècle and early decades of the twentieth century of the expression 'the scope and methods' in a number of key lectures (and subsequent publications) in the fields of philosophy and anthropology as well as geography. In so doing I connect hypothetical lines of projection between these works, their authors and the disciplines with which they are traditionally associated in historical geographical scholarship.

## **AND THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER**

Marcus Doel, University of Swansea

In this presentation I want to consider the fate of antagonism, hostility, and opposition in the history and philosophy of Geography, and to rekindle some of the animosity and enmity that once heralded the arrival of a host of disagreeable characters from yesteryear, such as my old chums Anti-humanism, Deconstruction, Postmodernism, and Poststructuralism.

## **SITUATING KNOWLEDGES, TELLING STORIES AND MAKING KIN: GEOGRAPHICAL ENCOUNTERS WITH DONNA J HARAWAY**

Beth Greenhough, University of Oxford

Donna Haraway has been a constant presence in geographical thought and practice over the past 40 years. From her early and very influential essay on Situated Knowledges, to her more recent engagements with the Anthropocene in 'Staying with the Trouble', her work has become a key reference point for questioning the production of geographical knowledge. In this brief reflection I want to trace the influence of Haraway's thought on geographical scholarship, exploring how it both shapes our disciplinary histories and provides a critical lens upon them. I will examine the impact of her philosophy on feminist, postcolonial and more-than-human scholarship, considering how geographers have been drawn to particular elements of her approach and perhaps neglected others. I will further use the example of Haraway to emphasise how in many ways the history and philosophy of Geography is always a multi-disciplinary exercise, shaped as much by thought and practice from beyond our disciplinary boundaries as it is by key 'canonical' thinkers found within them. Furthermore, such boundary crossings are key if we are to respond to calls for more pluralist histories of geographies, sensitive to other-than-Anglo-American voices and non-human agencies in shaping how we encounter and engage with disciplinary pasts. As Haraway (2016) herself recently wrote, 'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.'

## **FORM, STYLE AND THE POETICS OF KNOWLEDGE: TURBULENT TIMES AND CONCEPTS IN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHICAL WRITING**

Julian Brigstocke, Cardiff University

This talk explores the relationships between form, style, and philosophies of temporality in geographical writing. We are seeing a significant growth of interest in geographical writing that experiments with form and style. Such writing raises the issue of how social scientists translate unruly experience into authoritative text (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). It also raises the question of what Jacques Ranciere calls the poetics of knowledge: the literary devices through which a discourse gives itself the status of authoritative knowledge; or the ways in which a discourse that lays claim to knowledge arranges a place for itself in a space of tension between scientific, literary, and political authority. Much recent writing on space, place and landscape offers a refreshing stream of work that experiments with form in order to express aspects of life that evade or exceed conventional representation. Experiments with form and style do not necessarily escape, evade, challenge, or subvert authority. But they do offer opportunities to foreground and reflect upon a text's claims to authoritative discourse. Historical geographical writing occupies a distinctive and important place within this field. In this talk, I work through these ideas via a discussion of a project on experimental ways of writing the historical geographies of sand mining in Hong Kong, in order to question the relations between form, affect, and turbulent spatio-temporalities.

## **OVERCOMING THE SILEOING OF GEOGRAPHY: NECESSITIES OF STRUCTURE IN AN ENGAGED PLURALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT**

Michiel Van Meeteren, Loughborough University

A recurring pattern when discussing the epistemology of geography is that geographical knowledge is by definition situated. Instead of producing facts independent of time and space, geographical scholarship collates information in ways that are situationally useful. That does not mean that older geographical scholarship is per definition irrelevant to the future. For instance, recent years have compelled geographers to revisit some of the lessons from the quantitative revolution in order to find an appropriate strategy to deal with 'big data'. Also one can imagine that in the age of climate change and natural disasters, older work on human-environment relations all of a sudden stand on the forefront. However, contemporary geography seems ill-suited to find and cherish these insights from the disciplinary past. Observers, such as Ron Johnston, have noted that geography has fragmented into self-referential paradigmatic siloes that tend only to interact with its Others to boost their own case. Trevor Barnes and Eric Sheppard have therefore called for an 'engaged pluralist' geography to replace such centrifugal 'polemic pluralism'. Nevertheless, a contemporary engaged pluralist geography also requires an engaged pluralist approach to geography's historiography. Too long have geographers written their history as cautious tales of paradigmatic change, disincentivizing scholars to search the discipline's history for useful concepts, methods and theories. Approvingly surveying recent developments in the discipline's historiography, this contribution outlines some ideas on the necessary practices and structures that we need to create for an engaged pluralist historiography. How can we make the sprawling archive of past geographical work accessible and navigable for contemporary geographers who want to get inspired as much as to learn from the discipline's past?

## THE ART OF EARTH-BUILDING: PLACING RELIEF MODELS IN THE CULTURE OF MODERN GEOGRAPHY

George Tobin, University of Glasgow, Hayden Lorimer, University of Edinburgh, Simon Naylor, University of Glasgow

Our talk takes the physical relief model as its principal object of concern, variously considered as a catalyst for geographical knowledge production, scientific education and public communication.

Most versions of geography's intellectual history give primacy to ideas and theories conveyed by the written word. Recent scholarship has supplemented these approaches with a focus on the embodied practices of geography, notably how disciplinary knowledge is forged, performed and contested through fieldwork, and how the field-class operates as a landmark event in undergraduate degree studies. A further approach has considered the discipline's material culture. While recent work has studied geographical instruments and the objects of exploration, the physical relief model remains largely under-examined. Once a staple of geographical teaching and learning, of explanation and experimentation, the relief model demands further historiographical consideration. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it developed alongside a repertoire of techniques for diagrammatic, photographic and cartographic reproduction. As an educational and instructional aid models have been differently deployed: to illustrate the emergence (and denudation) of surface landforms; to explain the nature of geophysical, hydrological, fluvial and coastal processes; to reveal subsurface geological structures; and, to show differing kinds of human response to environmental setting.

Drawing on research inquiries from an AHRC-funded PhD studentship undertaken in collaboration with RGS-IBG, our talk will be supported by a digital display of relief models held in the Society's collections. The display models were the original work of sculptor-artist Mr. T. Bayley, commissioned specifically for the purposes of photo-illustrating *The Earth's Crust: A New Approach to Physical Geography and Geology* (1951), a general interest book by Sir L. Dudley Stamp (RGS President, 1964-6). We will use the story of the book's provenance and production to, briefly, explore the art of earth-building, and the place of the relief model in changing disciplinary cultures.

## GEOGRAPHY AND PUBLIC POLICY: REAPPRAISING THE EARLY 1970S DEBATES IN THE AGE OF IMPACT

Mark Boyle, University of Liverpool

A wide range of debates on 'applied,' 'useful,' and 'relevant' geography were reanimated by Anglophone geographers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But competing approaches ciphered the meaning and implications of this rapprochement variously. As titles go, few are as arresting or as recited as Harvey's 'What kind of Geography for What Kind of Public Policy?'. It was sparked by Terry Coppock's Presidential Address at the Annual IBG Conference held at the University of East Anglia (Norwich) in January 1974 and subsequently published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* in November 1974, entitled 'Geography and public policy: challenges, opportunities and implications'. Across the Atlantic, American geographers like Ackerman and Gilbert F White were already involved in state-led flood protection schemes, power generation, and regional economic development. The 1971 Association of American Geographers (AAG) meeting in Boston began the task of codifying and advancing such efforts. Subsequently, in 1972 Gilbert F White published a paper in *The Professional Geographer* with the similar title 'Geography and Public Policy' but embodying a different spirit, leading to a public rebuke by Glenn Trewartha in the same journal for its partisanship. White had spent a lifetime researching vulnerability to natural hazards and in time received US presidential decoration for his applied geographical research on hazards and flood insurance. The AAG subsequently introduced a Gilbert F White Public Service Honors award. White's focus was upon the public work that geographers ought to aspire to, and variants of applied geography informed by complex traditions of humanism, by theological concerns and by philosophies such as pragmatism. This intervention reflects upon these early 1970s debates and comments upon their legacies and considers their ongoing capacity to instruct current interest in the means and ends of scholarly in the age of impact.

## **WHY THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHY MATTER**

Federico Ferretti, University of Bologna

In this short talk, I quit for a moment the sources, archives and rigorous scholarship to which we HPGRG members are accustomed, for launching a militant plea. My plea is at the same time an endorsement for historical and theoretical approaches to geography and a liberating challenge to the panoply of counter-arguments that historical and cultural geographers, historians of geography and critical scholars in general face daily in most geography departments around the world. Explicitly or implicitly, we are constantly told that we are irrelevant, that we only do chatter while the real income comes from others doing 'concrete' things such as GIS, mapping, planning and environmental businesses, that nobody understands what we say and that, at best, what we do is 'nice', 'interesting', but finally a luxury that the neoliberal university cannot afford. In my plea, I say stop all that: it is time that we restart to say boldly that, if all our overt or implicit detractors are where they are, it is because once someone fought to render geography a scholarly discipline with its epistemological statutes and its prestigious genealogies. I argue that the relevance of geography, today, is not to please marketing logics by offering mediocre notions of 'employability' for paying customers in our classes: the relevance of geography is in its capacity to foster consciousness of social issues and to help individuals in acquiring their own critical tools to transform society and to gain more justice, equality and inclusion. For this, theory and history of geography are indispensable, because radical and critical approaches would not make sense without theoretical and historical consciousness, and geography would become an uncritical learning of technical skills. My final argument is that only through this consciousness we can make sense of 'what geography ought to be', to quote old Peter Kropotkin.

## **THE FIRST DECADE OF THE HPGRG UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION PRIZE**

Pauline Couper, York St John University

This paper offers reflections on the first decade (more specifically, 2008-2019) of the HPGRG Undergraduate Dissertation Prize Panel. The works submitted exhibit focal and epistemological diversity, spanning both history and philosophy of geography, and human/environmental/physical geography. Yet through this diversity perhaps a common thread can be identified, in a concern with the question: what is geography? How might that question have been answered in the past? What are our answers now? And what possibilities exist for the future? I also consider the challenge of making a comparative (competitive) assessment of the quality of work across the history and philosophy of geography, and what that might reveal about the values at work in contemporary academic geography.

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? REFLECTIONS ON THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN THE HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHY**

Innes M. Keighren, Royal Holloway, University of London

In this paper I reflect on my recent experience of writing three progress reports on the history and philosophy of geography for Progress in Human Geography. I do so in order to consider how we might identify coherence and narrate progress in a sub-disciplinary specialism that is often defined by diversity in its empirical and epistemological foci. I go on to propose five possible priorities for future research in the history of geography: 1) promoting inclusivity of voice by building on existing work on the gendered and hidden histories of geography; 2) making connections across scale that link local and global histories of geography; 3) rupturing the disciplinary silo by incorporating non-academic and public histories of geography; 4) employing the technologies of the digital humanities to investigate and narrate new histories of geography; 5) identifying novel mechanisms of archival preservation that are equipped to capture the disciplinary present. I argue that these priorities, taken together, are a helpful basis to defining the progress that we might wish to make as we consider the future of the history of geography.