

REFLECTIONS I: BIOGRAPHIES

GEOGRAPHERS BIOBIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES: AN AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

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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

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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.

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