

# The Manchester Geographical Society, 1884-1984

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## The Early Years

In the high noon of Victorian prosperity thoughtful people realised that commercial expansion might be clouded by wars, by the competition of other countries or by failure to recognize and seize opportunities as they arose. Manchester had already experienced difficulties through the lack of raw cotton during the American Civil War of 1861-4 and the trade recession of the late 1870s. The hope of forming a Society of Commercial Geography was shown at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in 1879 when the Bishop of Salford, later widely revered as Cardinal Vaughan, and other speakers observed that France already had a society of commercial geography and that such a society could usefully be formed in Manchester.<sup>1</sup> In fact several new geographical societies had been founded in France during the 1870s, some of them with clearly defined aims such as the acquisition of colonies and the development of overseas settlement in North Africa and elsewhere (France d'Outre-Mer) as a recompense for the losses of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-1.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing came of the appeal to business firms and others in 1879 but in 1884 the Manchester Geographical Society was triumphantly launched at a meeting at which H. M. Stanley (1840-1904) gave a lecture on 'Central Africa and the Congo basin; or the importance of the scientific side of geography' on 21 October. [1 (1885) 6-25]\* §. He gave much the same address at Edinburgh on 3 December, just six weeks later, to launch the Scottish Geographical Society.<sup>3</sup> The key sentence in his speech was that 'geographical knowledge clears the way for commercial enterprise ... the beginnings of civilisation.' Stanley was a charismatic figure of the time, courted and feted everywhere despite his brash and bombastic speeches. He came to Manchester again in 1890 through the enterprise of the Society and the Manchester Atheneum. On June 20, 1890, he lectured in the Free Trade Hall, packed to capacity with the cream of Manchester's

commercial and intellectual society, and was introduced by the Chairman, the Rev. S. A. Steinthal, as one who 'by his courage, endurance and practical wisdom ... has been enabled to make invaluable contributions to geographical research, and to the cause of humanity and civilisation.' Later he received the freedom of the city, was given an almost royal progress as he toured through the glittering throng with the Lady Mayoress at a brilliant Town Hall reception and finally went in a carriage procession to his special train with the mayoral party, including the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable [6 (1890) 113-47].

Socially at least geography could make a stir, though the patrons of the rising geographical society were members of parliament, manufacturers, merchants, educationalists and clergy rather than the nobility sought and found by the Scottish society. The daily management of the Society was the concern of Eli Sowerbutts as full time secretary and editor from the foundation in 1884, and his devotion was expressed in a full programme of meetings with the publication every year of a journal of as many as 400 pages. In 1889, for example, the Council's chairman, Rev. S. A. Steinthal, reported that thirty-three meetings had been held at which talks and lectures had been given: most of these were expected to appeal to a large audience but a number were 'library meetings' at which papers of a specialized research character such as those of H. J. Mackinder and T. W. Sowerbutts discussed on page 5 were presented. [*Annual Report*, 6 (1890) 107-12]. There were also a number of visits to places of interest in and around Manchester, socially much appreciated but also definitely educational.

Virtually all the lectures given at the meetings were summarized in the Society's journal or in some cases, such as the orations of H. M. Stanley in 1884 and 1890, printed in full. Most of the lectures dealt with overseas territories, particularly Africa, and only occasionally was there any contribution on the local area, though in 1888 there was a lecture given by William Sherratt,

\* Indicates that the article is reprinted at the end of this volume.

§ References in the text are to the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, with the **volume number** (year or years of publication) and pages.

described as 'a member of the City Council and one of the members of the Council of the Society' on 'Water Supply to Large Towns', which dealt with the 'threatened water famine' of 1886 in the Manchester area and elsewhere. [4 (1888) 58-71]\* Great service was given to the society by the 'Victorians', established as a group of voluntary workers in 1887 and deriving their name from a wish to commemorate the Queen's jubilee. In the 1889 Report it was noted that they had prepared 'maps in illustration of lectures and papers read before the society' and also analyzed 'the contributions of foreign societies to geographical science which form so valuable a feature of our Journal.' From the beginning the Victorians provided a number of lectures and talks to a variety of societies, schools and other bodies in the district and this work still continues though the Victorians were disbanded in 1974.<sup>4</sup> Voluntary workers also met other needs, such as book reviewing, but though reviews appeared from the first publication of the journal the number published was always small.

One year's publication in the early period of the Society's work stands out. This was volume 6 (1890) which consisted of 466 pages. The variety of the world's geographical environments at least is shown by three consecutive papers, by Basil Thompson on Rossel island, where the main emphasis is on the cannibalistic nature of the inhabitants, by M. Stirrup, a geologist, on the *causses* of Languedoc and by Douglas Freshfield, then honorary secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, on the forests of Abkhasia, part of the Caucasus range which he had recently visited and on which he published a book in the same year, 1890. The Manchester society elected Mr. Freshfield as an honorary member. Relations with the Royal Geographical Society were cordial, for when the society was founded Lord Aberdare, president of the RGS from 1880-5 and again from 1886-7, had been most gracious, no doubt drawing on the political flair which had made him Home Secretary (as Mr. H. A. Bruce M.P. from 1868-73) and chairman of the Niger Company.<sup>5</sup> Eager to see a university for Wales, he was a man of wide educational aspirations. He wanted the records of explorers and others to be welded into a systematic body of knowledge and with others had arranged that part of the Royal Geographical Society's 'Exhibition of Geographical Educational Appliances' should be shown for one month, with some additional local material, at the Manchester Art Gallery in 1886. The addresses given in Manchester, including those by Rev. S. A. Steintal, stressed the massive support given to exploration and

other pioneer graphical work by the Royal Geographical Society. A century later it might seem that the Manchester Geographical Society was almost too eager to emulate the older and well endowed senior society in London rather than to consider its own home ground.

Many of the lectures given in 1890 were on areas then little known. Naturally Africa figured prominently for it had recently become the scene of immense colonial rivalry between the European powers. And despite government efforts since the eighteenth century, and the activity of the Anti-Slavery Society from 1823, Africa was notorious as a source of slave labour as a paper on 'Nyassaland and African exploration' [6 (1890) 287-96]\* published under the names of the Bishop of Manchester, two missionaries and Mr. J. W. Moir, manager of the African Lake Company, showed. Following the paper the Bishop, Rev. Dr. James Fraser, said that

'The natural condition of the negro savage was one of deep moral degeneration and unhappiness. The stronger were always oppressing, tormenting and destroying the weaker ... the Arab and semi-Arab Mussulman were turning the very richest and the most prosperous parts of Africa into a mere human hunting ground ... there was nothing at all in our recent experience to justify us in withdrawing from the philanthropic enterprise of introducing Christian civilisation into Africa and of trying to rid her of those thousand curses which were darkening and desolating her life.'

Were the British more likely to achieve this than others? Clearly they were eager to acquire as much of Africa as possible and the Society appears to have approved the cession of Heligoland to Germany, despite the fear that it might become a naval base, in exchange for Zanzibar and the mainland territory extending northward to Abyssinia. [6 (1890) 153].

There was continuing interest in the possibilities of trade, with or without colonial occupation, of areas other than Africa: for example an anonymous note 'by an English resident' [6 (1890) 38-40] is warmly optimistic on the wealth of the Amazon basin, in which 'various products (are) so freely scattered by nature's lavish hand upon this much favoured region'. The question of the resources of Amazonia still remains a subject of debate almost a century later. And A. Cook, in a paper on the recent development of British North Borneo, also struck a confident note [6 (1890) 63-75], for he concluded that

'Few people who have seen North Borneo as it was and as it is now can doubt the success of the undertaking in every way, and not the least is the civilising of a hitherto unknown country, and the extension of British trade and commerce.'

Indeed Mr. Cook was so enthusiastic an advocate that some readers might have felt inclined to sell up and go at once to live in North Borneo for

'I do not believe that there exists a civilised country where the taxes are so light ... There is no tax of any kind on food and clothing. Even the taxes on opium, spirits, wines, tobacco, matches and salt which exist, bear no comparison with other countries.'

The library lectures were intended to be of a more academic than popular character and some were, such as one by T. W. Sowerbutts, secretary from 1919-33, who in 1890 presented a translation from a German source of a study of Persian trade from 1633-40 [6 (1890) 30-4]. H. J. Mackinder, in his address given on 15 January 1890 [6 (1890) 1-6]\* suggested that education in commercial geography, so much needed, would be enriched by taking an historical approach and dealing with such subjects as Tunis and Sicily as the granary of Rome or the medieval overland trade between Constantinople and Venice. Some of the library lectures might by later standards be considered artless, such as that by Joseph Harding [6 (1890) 76-81], a Preston councillor, who drew attention to the different death rates in wards of his town. The idea was not new for almost fifty years earlier the famous *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Poor of Great Britain* (1842) had shown the average age of death of professional people and gentry was 38 in Manchester but 52 in Rutland; of mechanics, labourers and their families it was 17 in Manchester but 38 in Rutland [quoted by Asa Briggs in *Victorian Cities*, (1963) 98]. Mr. Harding observed that the most favoured area of Preston was the Christ Church ward in the southwest, with its parks in which one might watch cricket, 'a manly game which all sensible and intelligent Englishmen admire.' In accord with Mrs. Beeton of the famous cookery and household management classic, he favoured high ground for healthy living and said that 'the elevated lands of Penwortham point to the most healthy and eligible sites for residential properties in the early future.' Rambling and nostalgic as the observant councillor's talk was, in it there were issues that were to be treated academically and analyzed in detail in such works as D. Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* of 1973.

Along with commercial expansion there was a constant demand for educational advance. This was emphatically shown in the address by H. J. Mackinder, already noted [6 (1890) 1-6]\*, with the significant title 'On the necessity of thorough teaching in general geography as a preliminary to the teaching of commercial geography.' He stated that commercial geography was

'applied geography', dealing with such matters as mining, agriculture, raw materials, the sale of manufactured goods or retail trade. 'It is,' he said, 'for the merchants to state their demands – for the teachers to supply them' and an adequate commercial geography must be worked out with the advice of universities, Chambers of Commerce, the Royal Society of Arts, and other relevant sources of wisdom. As noted above he was prepared to include in such commercial geography historical studies, even those of a somewhat esoteric character. With such an education there could be merchants who were 'ready, accurate and imaginative.'

In the effort to improve geographical education in 1892 the Society, though well aware of the failure of the Royal Geographical Society's scheme abandoned in 1884, ran an examination for schools on the geography of India, with Boyd Dawkins, T. H. Core (respectively professors of geology and physics at Manchester University) and Rev. L. C. Casartelli of St. Bede's College as examiners. Over one hundred young people, with an average age of 15 years and 3 months, sat the examination and prizes were awarded for the best scripts. The candidates were drawn from schools, Mechanics Institutes and other educational institutions. A group of papers on India in the Society's journal [7 (1891) 201-63; 8 (1892) 76-82] probably helped the examinees and, even more, their teachers. On occasion the Society's journal had a group of papers on one part of the world but editors know that many readers may not be interested in an area or subject so treated: two years later the 1894 examination, with sixty candidates, was on the geography of Yorkshire [10 (1894) 141-8].

As always Mackinder stressed the relevance of the map in all geographical work. And in this he was supported by H. T. Crook [6 (1890) 228-38], who showed that there was a need for a thorough revision of the British Ordnance Survey maps, as indeed Sir Francis Galton had shown at the Brighton meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science eighteen years earlier, in 1872. The Manchester Society's delegate to the 1890 British Association meeting reported that the Committee of Section E (Geography) had sent a resolution to the Association's Council asking

'That the Council urge upon Government to take steps to hasten the completion of the Ordnance Survey and to afford the public greater facilities for the purchase of Ordnance Survey maps.'

It was fortunate that the Manchester Society established friendly relations with the British Association as the meetings of Section E were an occasion when geographers of widely varied interest and professional

involvement met for a concentrated week of meetings, social functions and excursions. In addition the Presidential address given at Section E was published in the journal on many occasions from 1887 onwards.

The case for geography was supported by many scholars of eminence, including Sir Alfred Hopkinson, vice-Chancellor of Manchester University from 1903-13, the Oxford classical scholar Sir John Myres and the Methodist biblical scholar, A. S. Peake (1865-1929), who held a chair in the University of Manchester from 1904. Without such support it would have been difficult to achieve the advance in the schools and universities. Another strong advocate for geography was Prince Pyotr Kropotkin, the 'gentle anarchist' who visited Manchester to give an address on 'What geography ought to be' reported in the Society's journal [5 (1889) 356-8]\*. He and others, notably H. J. Mackinder, well knew that geography teaching was firmly established in the German universities: however, geography had been taught in Manchester University by geologists and historians from 1885. Happily in 1892 Henry Yule Oldham (1865-1951) was appointed as Lecturer in Political and Commercial Geography though he moved to Cambridge University in 1893 and in 1894 was succeeded by Andrew John Herbertson (1865-1915), who left in 1896 to take up an appointment at the Heriot-Watt College in Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup> Both Oldham and Herbertson were paid £100 annually, contributed in equal shares by the Royal Geographical and the Manchester societies, but they found it difficult to live on such a salary with little opportunity of earning extra income. After Herbertson left various economists gave lectures in geography but in 1903 John McFarlane was appointed as Lecturer in Economic Geography, though he also lectured in economics to 1906, when he became Lecturer in Geography. A devoted worker in the university, he also gave fine service to examining boards: in 1906 he reported that 'I cannot but feel how much has still to be done before we can congratulate ourselves that the subject is properly taught' but in 1912 he noted that the teaching of geography for degree examinations had substantially improved.<sup>7</sup>

Fighting for a cause will give life to any voluntary society and the appointment of H. Yule Oldham to the university staff in 1892 was a source of great satisfaction. Nor was that all; in the Society's premises a library was growing and exhibits were gathered together for a museum of commercial geography. In 1893 the Society became a 'local centre' for the then newly founded Imperial Institute (now the Commonwealth Institute)

and Eli Sowerbutts wrote that this 'may, in the future, have important results, as from the collections of the Institute we may be able to obtain for exhibition small but complete collections of new and manufactured products from the various British colonies and dependencies' [9 (1893) 62]. The idea of making a geographical museum occurs rarely in our own day but it was favoured by Sir Patrick Geddes and others and the small museum collection at the Royal Geographical Society still attracts a considerable number of visitors, especially school parties. Geddes found the Paris Exhibition of 1900 helpful for

'the attempt has been worth something as showing a type of a new and still higher geographical movement in which all the different countries have co-operated in expressing their individuality and general character.' [17 (1901) 69-71]\*.

The Society's museum survived for many years and was not completely dispersed until 1971 when the remaining exhibits were sold or given away. The Society could not compete with the growing attraction of the Manchester Museum associated with the University. Another initial aim of the Society had been to provide information for merchants on overseas markets but this was increasingly well handled by the fine commercial section of the Manchester Public Libraries. On the educational side teachers found the Geographical Association founded in 1893 well adapted to their particular needs, especially when the Association's Manchester branch was established in 1908.

At times the officers of the Society had misgivings about their future success and prospects. Fortunately in 1893 [9, 58-62, annual report for 1892] Eli Sowerbutts noted that the Society had become a 'Corresponding Society' of the Royal Geographical Society, so that visitors to London could attend RGS meetings, use the library for reference purposes and buy RGS publications at a reduced rate. The Royal Geographical Society was interested in the other British societies, the Scottish (founded 1884), Tyneside (1887), Liverpool (1891) and Southampton (1897) all founded by the end of the century. Sir Clements Markham, a man of great power and enterprise at the RGS, called a meeting on June 6 1899 of these societies, attended by Rev. S. A. Steinthal and Eli Sowerbutts as delegates from Manchester.<sup>8</sup> Opening the meeting, in effect a conference of great potential value, Sir Clements hoped that the five provincial societies might join with RGS in encouraging Antarctic exploration, developing geographical exploration, arranging for the 'cheaper and easier' sale of Ordnance Survey maps for colleges and schools, assisting the scheme of the



Geographical Association for collecting lantern slides for educational purposes and finally increasing the provision for training in commercial geography.

All these aspirations were in accord with those of the Manchester Society and indeed with its achievement by 1899, including the collection of lantern slides: there is for example a note in the journal for 1890 [6 (1890) 47] that at the first of their children's lectures 500 youngsters had been entertained with 150 'magic lantern' views. On 2 May 1900 the Manchester Society wrote to the RGS suggesting that the agenda of the next meeting should include two items, of which the first was that geographical societies could receive, free or at a nominal price, all Government books and Foreign Office papers related to geographical and commercial subjects. This was approved at a meeting on 22 May 1900 but no decision was taken on the second Manchester item, that geographical museums should be formed and commercial geography brought into the curriculum of the new secondary grammar schools then being planned. By this time both the Manchester and the Tyneside societies wanted further meetings to be held in the provinces and, having asked other societies to come to Manchester, the Society declined to attend the London meeting on 21 May 1901. Apart from a sparsely attended meeting on 12 November 1901, nothing more was arranged. The representatives from Edinburgh agreed with those from Manchester that there were no urgent problems needing attention and the Liverpool society apparently agreed while the Southampton society was 'paralysed' by the final illness of its president. With hindsight it would seem that a splendid chance of co-operative enterprise was cast aside and the societies were left to exist in unnecessary isolation.

Even so, throughout the 1890s the Society had continued to publish a substantial journal every year of over 300 pages but less than that in 1898 and 1899. Papers on foreign countries predominated but without the intense preoccupation with Africa of earlier years. Some of the papers were on recent travel, such as W. M. Steinthal's 'A peep at the land of the rising sun' on Japan in 1891, which concludes with the remark that 'risen sun' would be more appropriate [7 (1891) 277-94]. In some numbers of the journal there was a strange mixture of papers, as in 1892 when a serious paper by Delmar Morgan (a valued contributor of papers and notes to the *Geographical Journal*) on the early discovery of Australia [8 (1892) 238-44] followed an explanatory article on 'How a

lace curtain is made'. No doubt many people were glad to know.

There were two interesting developments of editorial policy in this decade. First, on occasion a long paper was published, such as J. V. Brower's 'Prehistoric man at the headquarters of the Mississippi' in 1895 [11 (1895) 1-80] which covers 80 pages. Other examples are, in 1899 [15 (1899) 75-122] J. R. Newby's 'Portugal, the Portuguese and the Vasco da Gama celebration, 1898' (of the fourth centenary of the voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to India) and the same author's 'Iceland and the Icelanders' in the following year [16 (1900) 115-77]: however both of these papers were travelogues rather than contributions to serious scholarship. The second useful development was the occasional publication of a series of cognate papers, of which a notable trio was on the relation of geography to astronomy by Thomas Weir (secretary of the northwest branch of the British Astronomical Association), to geology by Boyd Dawkins and to meteorology by T. H. Core [8 (1892) 221-37]. And in 1896 papers on Africa covered the first eighty-one pages of the journal and on Australia the next fifty-five. Then appropriately followed a paper on the Suez Canal and another on the proposed Nicaragua canal to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans: long controversy preceded the ultimate choice of the Panama route in 1902. This splendid enterprise was discussed in a paper by Sir Bosdin Leech, author of a classic work on the Manchester Ship Canal (1907) in 1911. [27 (1911) 1-18]\*

Some papers of the time are particularly interesting to read now and indeed of both topical and historical significance. Among these are W. Burnett Tracey's 'The Manchester Ship Canal: the story in brief from 1708 to 1896' [12 (1896) 204-36]\*, which includes a photograph of a huge shed full of cotton imported since the canal was opened on 1 January 1894. Boyd Dawkins' short essay on the Channel Tunnel [7 (1891) 81-3]\* at least shows how long the idea has been extant. But in general articles on the home area were few, and even those on Britain not numerous though mention should be made of 'The Shetland Islands' by E. J. Russell, later so well known as Sir John Russell of the Rothamsted Agricultural Station [13 (1897) 125-38]. The appeal of distant areas remained strong and in 1895 Sir Clements Markham came to Manchester to advocate Antarctic exploration, in which he hoped the 'Australasian colonies' would co-operate: in the same year the International Geographical Congress held in London was similarly eager for such discovery.

However, much was happening in the Arctic and in 1895 both Sir Clements Markham and Delmar Morgan spoke on northern polar activity [11 (1895), 159-63]. Further papers on the Arctic were given in 1897, when Dr Fridtjof Nansen dealt with the famous 'Fram' voyage, A. M. Brice on the Jackson-Harmsworth polar expedition and T. Weir on more accessible areas under the title 'Within the Arctic Circle with the Eclipse Expedition' during which the eclipse was successfully observed at Vadso in the north of Norway [14 (1898) 47-96].

The Society retained its interest in polar exploration and in 1905 published the text of a lecture given on 'The National Antarctic Expedition' by Captain R. F. Scott on 30 November with the Lord Mayor in the chair [21 (1905) 31-48]. Four years later (Sir) Ernest H. Shackleton's paper, 'The British Antarctic Expedition 1907-1909', originally published in the *Geographical Journal* was reprinted by the Society in its journal [25 (1909), 97-114] and a dinner was given in Shackleton's honour at which the Bishop of Salford and the Dean of Manchester were present. In 1910 Commodore Peary lectured to the Society on his successful journey to the north pole in the previous year [26 (1910) 105-10]\* and two years later Roald Amundsen's successful arrival at the south pole, a month before Scott, was described [28 (1912) 83-98]\*. In 1913 the sad story of the 'British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13' by E. R. G. R. Evans was published [29 (1913), 122-42]. Both the last two papers had originally appeared in the *Geographical Journal*.

### Towards a scientific geography

In the last years before the 1914-18 war a high proportion of the papers in the Society's journal dealt with travel and had a varying degree of scientific content. Some of these papers contain material of interest to later research workers and a few are of continuing significance such as Sven Hedin's 'Through Unknown Tibet', a shortened version of a lecture given to the Royal Geographical Society [25 (1909) 1-17], and Sir Harry Johnston's 'Dr Livingstone's explorations and their results', based on an address given at the centenary celebrations of the birth of Livingstone [29 (1913) 1-9]. It is hard to resist the impression that the Manchester Society was not developing much regional individuality at this time but was depending to a great extent for its success on the visits of celebrated explorers on their provincial tours.

Presidential addresses given to Section E of the British Association introduced a more academic tone to the journal. Among these were A. J. Herbertson's 'Geography and some of its present needs,' given at

Sheffield in 1910 [26 (1910) 21-38], in which he explained that 'in the last decade' there had been marked progress, especially in exploration, oceanography, meteorology, and in the publication of several sheets of the new 1:1,000,000 map of the world, first advocated by Albrecht Penck at the International Geographical Congress of 1891 in Bern. Herbertson, like many more before him, wished to see all this new material intelligently used to provide a new synthetic study, in which five major approaches would be useful. Of these the first was to discern the meaning of terms used by geographers, 'the classifications and notations used in geomorphology etc.' This clearly refers to the long struggle of the Royal Geographical Society to provide a geographical glossary, begun in 1899 and achieved only in 1961 when L. D. Stamp's *Glossary of Geographical Terms* was published.<sup>9</sup> Herbertson's second point was that 'natural geographical units' (regions) should be discerned and his third that the collection of data, for example in hydrology, should be systematic, as it notably was in H. R. Mill's admirable British Rainfall Organization.<sup>10</sup> The fourth point was that local regional units should be defined, as in the papers by H. R. Mill of 1896 and 1900.<sup>11</sup> Finally there was a need to recognise 'the geographical factor in imperial problems.' Such a programme, Herbertson stressed, could only be achieved by 'the adequate endowment of geography at universities.' Unfortunately not all the Section E presidents at the British Association gave such a clear plan for the advance of geography and in the following year the delegate from the Society, J. H. Reed (then the secretary) was puzzled by the presidential address [27 (1911) 84-98, preceded by report of the meeting 69-83, and followed by criticism of address, 98-100] on 'the purpose and position of geography.'

Colonel C. F. Close (later Sir Charles Arden-Close) was the president troubling Mr. Reed, who was left 'in doubt as to the true opinions of the President as to the position of Geography as a science, its value as an educational study and of the position of those who have hitherto been regarded as geographers – must one also be an explorer?' Perhaps Mr. Reed, who died in 1916, might have found more satisfying fare in later presidential addresses to Section E of the British Association, including those of H. G. Lyons on the importance of geographical research [31 (1915) 52-70], of the somewhat idiosyncratic L. W. Lyde on 'The International Rivers of Europe' [35 (1919) 40-54] or, one year later, J. McFarlane's topical 'Rearrangement of European states' [36 (1920) 34-54]\* followed by D. J. Hogarth's 'Applied Geography' of 1921

and in 1922 by Marion Newbigin's splendid 'Human Geography: first principles and some aspirations' [the last two published in volume 37-8 (1924) 34-54, 175-90]. Some of the addresses dealt with current problems, such as those by Lyde and McFarlane, others with achievement and prospects in geography such as those by Lyons, Hogarth and Newbigin.

Although the Society gained much from its friendly relations with the British Association, it could not maintain the publication of its journal solely on presidential addresses along with occasional papers from the pages of the *Geographical Journal*. Whether this problem was considered at the time is of little interest now for the officials were successful in finding lecturers for meetings held at least weekly during the winter months and drawing good audiences, especially in relation to the number of members. Some societies rarely see the vast majority of their members, for they join to acquire publications or possibly because they are in general sympathetic to the Society's aims. Reading the Society's journal and, even more, studying past and present lecture programmes the appeal of the travel talk is obvious. However more serious academic lectures have been given on many occasions and in the journal there are some papers of lasting professional interest. Regrettably some of these were isolated and even unique studies of some particular theme, as in 1905 when C. E. Moss lectured on 'The Botanical Geography of a Pennine Stream' [21, 89-98]. This was an indication of the growing interest in plant associations in their local environment; developed under the inspiration of Professor Charles Flahault of the University of Montpellier, Sir Patrick Geddes, Marcel Hardy (author of two well known texts on plant geography) and a few others. It was a thorough and detailed study but it stands alone.

Essential for such work was an adequate supply of local maps and the redoubtable Colonel H. T. Crook, R.E., always a campaigner for better Ordnance Survey maps, drove home his point in a long review of Bartholomew's *Survey Atlas of England and Wales* published in 1904, with a text by H. R. Mill [20 (1904) 165-79] Crook said (p. 166) that

'The deficiencies in State cartography are necessarily more or less reflected in the work of private firms. Nothing completely satisfactory can be done, without great labour and expense, by private enterprise until the Government has provided a complete and uniform topographical survey of its territory ... the Ordnance Survey is as ever changing its style and methods.'

In the review some sharp criticism of Mill's commentary is given: for example Crook notes that Chorley, Blackburn, Southport, Wigan ... are shown as 'on the Cheshire Plain'

(p. 173) and he does not agree that 'coal mines determine the sites of all the important towns' (p. 174). He ridicules the idea that Kinderscout is a 'wild limestone plateau' as thoroughly as any walker experiencing the discomfort of its peaty surface might do. The case is marshalled with military zeal and the good colonel reaches the conclusion, which many had held before him, that (p. 178)

'In topographical education the map is the textbook, and in the provision of good maps we are still a long way below the standard to which some continental countries have attained.'

Unfortunately in the years before the 1914-18 war papers on local geography were rare. The Society was no longer able to publish the 400 or more pages a year that had been normal in its glowing early phase up to 1897, but in most years from then until 1914 there were at least 200 pages with a decline to 80 pages by 1917 and a slow recovery after the war. Occasionally there was a paper of interest to scholars such as T. Sheppard's 'Geography of East Yorkshire illustrated by chart and plan' [29 (1913) 73-94]: Mr Sheppard was curator of the Municipal Museum in Hull and in 1909 had been in touch with J. H. Reed of the Manchester Society about the possibility of founding a geographical society in Hull.<sup>12</sup> During the war the journal provided little material on current problems though A. Wilmore's 'Belgium the battleground of Europe' [30 (1914) 125-44] was of contemporary interest. By 1919 the outlook for geography in Manchester appeared to be bleak for John McFarlane left for Aberdeen and Alan G. Ogilvie stayed for only one year to 1920, when he joined the staff of the American Geographical Society. An interregnum followed in which some help was given by Dr R. N. Rudmose Brown of Sheffield but in 1922 W. H. Barker was appointed as Reader in Geography. At once he embarked on a forward-looking policy and an Honours School was established in the University in 1923.<sup>13</sup>

Now at last there was every hope of progress. Barker was a devoted student of the history of cartography and in 1923 an exhibition of maps was held, with the support of the University and the Society, in the Whitworth Hall. This included many old maps given to the University by Colonel Dudley Mills, long stored in the Department of Geography but eventually handed to the University library which had the staff to care adequately for such material. The catalogue of the 'exhibition of old maps' appeared as a supplement to vol. 39-40, published in 1925 and in the same volume a paper by Barker on the history of cartography appeared (1-17).

Another hopeful sign was the publication of four cognate papers by O. T. Jones (the geologist) on



the origin of the Manchester plain, H. W. Ogden on Cheshire villages, H. King on population in southwest Lancashire and H. Thomas on the alkali industry [39-40 (1925) 89-152]. Apart from the first-named these papers were originally given to the Society's Study Circle or as 'library lectures' held on the same evenings before the more popular general lectures. Continuing this work in 1928 the Society produced a special 'Lancastria number' of its journal, which after a short friendly introduction by its president, Colonel E. W. Greg, consisted of papers by H. W. Ogden on the 'Geographical basis of the Cotton Industry'\* (much read and respected though its conclusions were sharply debated for many years), by W. H. Barker on the towns of southeast Lancashire, by H. King (then a lecturer at Liverpool University) on the agricultural geography of Lancastria and by W. Fitzgerald (Manchester University) on the Ribble basin [43 (1928) 8-95]. Some of these papers were rather thin but even so they were manna in the wilderness.

In the volume prepared under the editorship of Alan G. Ogilvie for the 1928 International Geographical Congress, *Great Britain; essays in regional geography*, the chapter on Lancastria was written by W. Fitzgerald and H. King, later to be professors in Manchester and Hull respectively. By 1928 the outlook appeared to be bright for there was growing interest in the local area and W. H. Barker arranged for many leading geographers of the time to speak at Society meetings.<sup>14</sup> Geography was advancing rapidly in secondary schools though some of their pupils were permitted – even encouraged – to 'drop' geography in favour of another language or science early in their course, as H. W. Ogden, himself a secondary teacher of geography at the Central High School, noted in a letter to the Society: on this a conference was held in 1929.<sup>15</sup> Regrettably the efforts of the Society to increase the circulation of its journal [43 (1928)] had little success and after issuing one more volume (44) in 1929 publication ceased.<sup>16</sup>

### Changing fortunes from the 1930s

Regrettably W. H. Barker died on 19 June 1929 and the Society also lost many of its older members at this time. Forgotten now perhaps in another time of economic recession is the severity of the world depression fifty years ago and its effect on individuals, especially in an area so dependent on overseas trade as Manchester. But geographically there was new hope with the appointment of H. J. Fleure as the first Professor of Geography from 1930, though even with his apparently inexhaustible

energy behind a frail presence he was unable to accept the secretaryship of the society (held by Barker)<sup>17</sup> as his main immediate commitments were to the development of the Department of Geography and to the care of the Geographical Association of which the headquarters, brought from Aberystwyth, was to remain in Manchester until its removal to Sheffield in 1950. Walter Fitzgerald also felt unable to act as editor in 1930 so the future of the journal was uncertain. Happily the Society avoided the fate of its (rarely noticed) sister in Liverpool, which closed down in 1933. Fleure became the honorary secretary in 1933 (but only until 1935) and the Society decided to issue a Jubilee volume [45 (1934-5)] for which Fleure wrote in a foreword that

'A journal is essential for the prosperity of the Manchester Geographical Society, and it is therefore a great pleasure to state that after a lapse of a few years the Society is reviving its journal and had appointed Mrs M. C. Wright as Editor, with the idea of publishing contributions to geographical science.'

Mrs Wright (later Osborne), then working in the Geography Department of the University, edited two volumes of which the first [45 (1934-5)] included excellent papers by G. H. Tupling, famed as a local historian, on 'Old Manchester. A sketch of its growth to the end of the eighteenth century' (p. 1-23)\* and by W. H. Ogden on 'The geographical basis of the Irish linen industry' (p. 41-56). Volume 46 (1935-6) was less effective, though Dr. E. Gwyn Thomas wrote on the agriculture of the (then) Irish Free State (p. 3-15), and Irene Manton, the botanist, on 'incidents in the history of the grape vine' (p. 16-20). But it is unlikely that many readers cared much for twenty-seven pages on 'the Arabian and Bactrian camel' or for a somewhat slight paper on the historical geography of Sheffield. In 1936 a large group in the Council complained that the journal had become 'too academic' (this phrase sometimes means 'too dull'), so Mrs Wright resigned and was replaced by L. M. Angus Butterworth, one of the honorary secretaries, who was subject to an editorial committee. On this period T. N. L. Brown has much of interest to say.<sup>18</sup>

'The new generation of lay councillors were beginning to make their presence felt. During the next fifteen years, this group was ... to imperil the worth of the body which they governed. Certainly they nullified any influence which the Society exerted in the geographical world, and they left it little more than a travel club ... Fleure and the staff of his department would have given assistance even under such adverse conditions had an appeal been made to them but the 'new generation', acutely aware of their own geographical shortcomings and fearful of their own eclipse, would have as little connection as possible with the university, and a curious antagonism grew up which persisted until several years after the 1939-45 war.'



On its next appearance the journal included a few articles of an academic character, such as 'The ex-German Empire in Tropical Africa' by Walter Fitzgerald [48 (1937- 8) 11-18] which was of political interest at a time when Germany was arguing that her former African territories should be returned. But the same journal includes an article on 'Touring France in an Austin Seven', not a particularly original enterprise at the time. In the following year Norman Pye gave an account of observations made during an expedition to Spitzbergen [49 (1938-9) 26-47] but the rest of the journal was given to travel or, more seriously, questions like the prospects of white settlement in Kenya. The contributions made to the journal during the war years were in general slight though afterwards Pye gave a talk at the annual meeting in 1947 on 'The nature of geography and the role of the local Society' [53 (1945-7) 20-5] and H. J. Fleure provided a short paper on 'The U.S.A. and its diversities' (p. 26-30).

In 1950 Major William Cross, editor from 1945, was succeeded by T. N. L. Brown who produced two volumes. Of these the first [55 (1949-50)] includes a study by W. A. Singleton of 'Traditional dwellings in the South Manchester area,' D. L. Linton's 'Scenery of the Cairngorm mountains' and a microclimatological study of Bath by W. G. V. Balchin and N. Pye, 'Temperature and humidity variations in an urban area of diversified relief.' Volume 56 (1950-52), with the sad note that 'It is over two years since the last journal appeared', includes the second part of the significant work of Dr Singleton and Mr Brown's own study of the problems of southern Italy. Another two years elapsed before volume 57 (1952-4) appeared, edited by Geoffrey North, with four interesting articles, two of them on New Zealand by J. S. Duncan and Eila M. J. Campbell, another on the German refugee problem by R. E. H. Mellor and Brown's fascinating study of the abortive efforts to found a Manchester Society of Commercial Geography in 1879.\*<sup>19</sup>

Once again financial stringency prevented publication but in 1962, when the British Association meeting was held in Manchester, volume 58, also edited by Geoffrey North, was published. It contained four papers: H. B. Rodgers wrote on Victorian Manchester\* and combined with Mr Brown and Mrs Vera Chapman to show the finding survey carried out in Lymm from 1956 by the 'study circle' in an area threatened by overspill. R. H. Johnson discussed the glaciation of the Aber-Glaslyn Nant Gwynant valley in North Wales and Geoffrey North gave an engaging account of his native Rossendale. There was no more publication until 1980 when the journal

re-emerged as *The Manchester Geographer*, its old name relegated to sub-title status.

At last, it would seem, the academic had won though there is a wider range of papers than in some now well-established journals, such as *Irish Geography* which publishes only papers on Ireland or the *East Midland Geographer*, which consists of papers on its own region. Editorial policy shows a preference for authors dealing with the Northwest and living there also, though papers on other parts of the world or aspects of geography by writers in the Northwest are welcome. The clear hope is that the *Manchester Geographer* will be an inspiration to members of the Society and to other readers and that eager authors will be found. They are likely to arise in the four universities of Lancaster, Liverpool Manchester and Salford (alphabetical order) and no doubt Keele also in its marginal position close to Stoke-on-Trent. And with the universities there are also potential authors in polytechnics, colleges of education, schools and other educational institutions as well as among the general public.

### From the past to the future<sup>20</sup>

For a geographical society to survive in England, particularly if located outside London, is no mean achievement: most have failed to do so. As it happens the Royal Scottish Geographical Society is also celebrating its centenary and the Geographical Society of Ireland its jubilee in 1984.<sup>21</sup> There was never any serious possibility that the Royal Geographical Society would establish branches outside London though the Geographical Association has relied largely on local branches from which members gather together for annual conferences: naturally some branches flourish for a while and then disappear while others, as in Manchester, have been consistently successful. Another form of geographical organization is shown by the Institute of British Geographers (formed in 1933) which has a central office in London, an annual conference held in various university towns, and occasional residential or day meetings for specialist interest groups.

Slowly it has been realised that competition between these bodies is absurd, for each has its own ethos and opportunities. One happy expression of the accord between the Manchester Society, the Manchester branch of the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society has been the joint meetings from 1976 onwards when a speaker from the RGS has appeared in Manchester: of these meetings a notable example

was the visit in 1978 of Commander J. R. Furse, of the United Services Expedition to Elephant Island, 'truly a memorable evening' says the Annual Report. So far these joint meetings have preserved the old tradition of geography and exploration, but exploration of a modern scientific character.

Some former activities of the Society have been discarded. When the Society left its premises in St Mary's Parsonage in 1972 it was decided to discontinue the children's lectures as 'there is no longer a great need for lectures to secondary pupils because schools are so well provided with visual aids.' And in 1974 it was decided to disband the Victorians as the demand for their services appeared to be minimal in some years. Nevertheless their work has been continued as the 'activities and external lectures' section of the Council and there appears to be a continuing demand for talks from various local societies, such as the Leigh Literary Society, townswomen's guilds, church organisations and the Bury Metro Arts series of lunch hour travel lectures. Excursions for Society members are not now as frequent as in earlier times but they too are appreciated. It is still a sad fact that few people realise how interesting their own local area can be.

Of all the recent changes in the Society none is more crucial than the transfer of the library in 1970, as an entity, to the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester and the sale of a number of rare atlases. When the premises in St Mary's Parsonage were sold in 1973 the Society acquired a capital sum of which the income could be used for various purposes, including the publication of this journal. Benefactions to others include the gift of books to the libraries of the Geography Departments in the Universities of Manchester and Salford and grants for various expeditions. These have included, in 1981, support for two Durham University expeditions to Western Australia and Iceland and a Cambridge University project in New Zealand as well as a gift to the Venture Scout Association in Manchester for a kayak expedition in Norway. In 1980 a considerable sum was given to the medieval village excavation in Tatton Park, Knutsford. Those who regret the loss of the Society's premises must realise that it lacked the means to deal adequately with its library, museum and atlas collection. But problems remain. Of these perhaps the least is finding somewhere to meet for halls are available in the central area of Manchester and its University gives generous hospitality for smaller meetings. The real problem is that meetings have to compete with attractive television programmes, with the increasing dispersal of

the members through the suburbs and even with the reluctance of some people to journey forth on winter evenings.

Some past battles have been won, particularly the long struggle for the adequate recognition of geography in the universities, other colleges and schools. And there is every reason to expect that the Society will publish its journal regularly and so become known internationally, especially if the journal has its own originality for it cannot be permanently successful if its pages are largely filled, as was the case in some earlier times, with reports of meetings or even papers already published by the Royal Geographical Society or the British Association. Reviews are ephemeral and either best avoided or perhaps restricted to works dealing with the Northwest: none has yet appeared in the new journal. Accounts of the year's activities are of interest, both at the time and for later historians.

A century ago the main concerns of the Society and readers of its journal lay in possible markets for their products, the growth of the British Empire, the abolition of slavery, the spread of Christian missionary enterprise and, just occasionally and almost apologetically, the conditions of living for the people of the Northwest. Now things are different. Economically the Northwest no longer has the world significance it possessed in the 1880s but it is still the home ground of several million people, living in cleaner air, less crowded towns with better schools and recreational opportunities of every description, and quicker transport both by road and by the surviving railway network. Despite all the changes the Northwest still has its own fascinating personality, even with its newly emerging problems of replanning, particularly since the 1939-45 war. Therefore the author of this paper, having lived for almost thirty years in the Northwest, would suggest that the Society should devote some-not all-of its enterprise to a study of the problems of the Northwest. What light can the geographer shed on the social problems of its large towns? Or even its smaller towns? How successful is its agricultural life, brought to great productivity through growing urban demand during the past two hundred years? What use is made of its railways and to what extent can they survive? Knowing that canals, having lost the trade they were designed to carry, have acquired a new recreational value, can this be so guarded and directed that they become part of a more aesthetically pleasing landscape? Modern studies of perception could well be applied to the landscape, and particularly to the interpenetration of

agriculture and industry, of town, village and hamlet with the countryside of moors, plains, coasts and valleys.

As the years roll on new problems emerge: for example at present there are signs that the local government units established in 1974 are sharply criticized as unrealistic and expensive to run. Large cities, such as Manchester, are threatened by disintegration while smaller towns appears to be retaining their cohesion, even strengthening it, because people, particularly the elderly but others also, find it convenient and interesting to live near central areas for shopping, entertainment and other services. And as if this were not enough there will always be specialist studies of interest to large numbers of people, if attractively presented. Cartography, historical geography, landscape evolution, the use of land for agriculture, recreation, industry and residence, all appeal. It used to be said that geography could only be understood by experience and at all

stages of education field trips were essential to provide opportunities for observation. Professor S. W. Wooldridge often said that we forgot most of what we hear in lectures but of what we see in the field the vision remains. Some cynics in the early days of the Manchester Society spoke deprecatingly of 'Sowerbutts' picnics' and maybe the attraction to some people of excursions was the elegantly served tea in affluent surroundings though to others new doors of understanding were opened. The better we understand the environment of our home area the better we shall understand the rest of the world. And the converse is also true, for as T. S. Eliot expressed it in 'Burnt Norton'

'We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.'

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10. The British Rainfall Organization was founded in 1861 and on January 1 1901. H. R. Mill became its Director. Among its publications was the annual *British Rainfall*. Mill remained as Director to 1919, when the Organization was merged with the Meteorological Office of the Air Ministry. See Freeman, T. W., 'Hugh Robert Mill, 1861-1950, *Geographers' biobibliographical studies*, **1**, (1977), 73-8.
11. Mill, H. R. (1896), 'Proposed geographical description of the British Islands based on the Ordnance Survey', *Geogr. J.*, **7**, 345-65 and (1900) 'A fragment of the geography of England: southwest Sussex', *Geogr. J.*, **15**, 205-27, 353-78. Mill wanted to establish a regional description of every 1:63,360 topographical map of the Ordnance Survey comparable to those of each sheet of the Geological Survey and his paper published in two parts in 1900 showed the possible range of such an enterprise. The local work could form a basis for synthetic regional studies, for example of the Weald or the Lake District. In the paper listed as ref. 10 it is noted that Mill 'was bitterly disappointed that nothing happened until comparable work was done by the Land Utilisation Survey of the 1930s.'
12. RGS archives, Hull Geographical Society. Major Leonard Darwin, as president of R.G.S., wrote to Mr R. C. Bellamy, an accountant working to establish the Hull society, suggesting that the geographical societies of the north of England should form some kind of association.
13. See note 6.
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20. Some of the material used in this section of the paper has been drawn from the Society's *Annual Reports*.
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Professor Emeritus T. W. Freeman retired from a Chair of Geography at the University of Manchester in 1976.

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