MICHAEL CHISHOLM

Michael Donald Inglis Chisholm

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elected Fellow of the British Academy 2002

by

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Summary. Michael Chisholm was a pioneer in the development of Economic Geography as an analytical and quantitative sub-discipline from the 1960s and its use of location theory. He was also pre-eminent in developing its applications to practical policy, ranging from regional economic development to reforms of local government. In his later years he made a formidable contribution to Fenland history, demonstrating that navigation was as important as drainage to the Fens. He claimed to have re-written the assessment of the role of monasteries and the competence of Anglo-Saxon engineers in this development. He was widely recognised as a highly effective organiser able to focus on presenting academic arguments to wider communities. He was a leading figure in the move to have human geography accepted within the Social Science Research Council and became the first chair of its Geography Committee. He was president of the Institute of British Geographers, and played major roles as a commissioner in the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, the Development Commission (later called Rural Development Commission), and the Local Government Commission for England. He was also a member of the Conservators of the River Cam 1979–2007 and of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society 2012–19.

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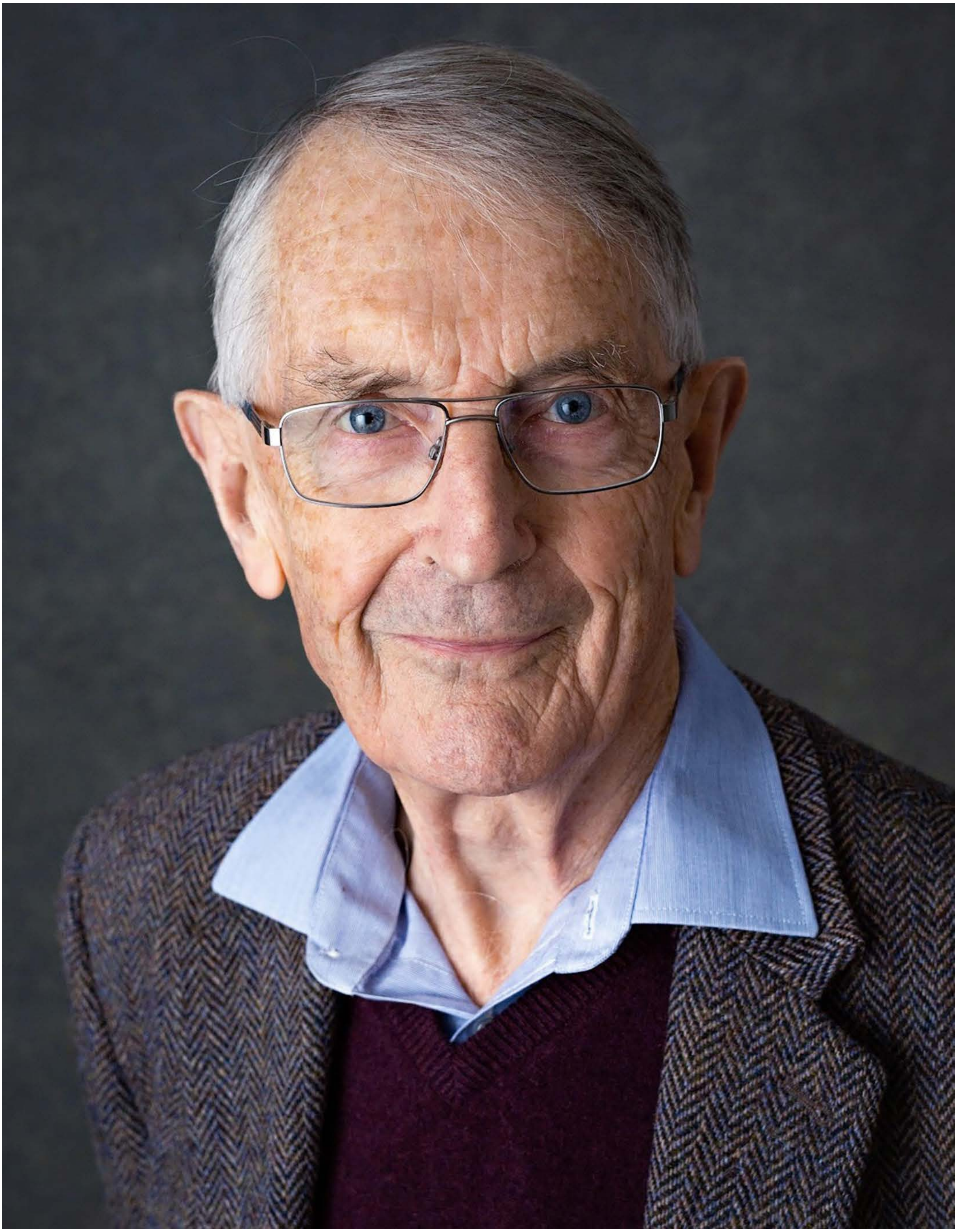

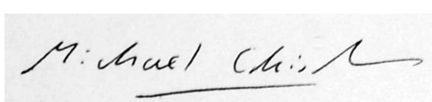

Michael Chisholm was a founding figure in location theory and the movement in Economic Geography towards analytical and quantitative analysis that developed from the 1960s. He was also pre-eminent in developing its application to public policy, ranging from regional economic development to reforms of local government. In his later years he also made a formidable contribution to Fenland history. He was quickly recognised as a highly effective organiser able to focus on presenting academic arguments to wider communities. He was a leading figure in the move to have human geography accepted within the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in 1967. He was president of the Institute of British Geographers 1979. He played major roles as a Commissioner in the Local Government Boundary Commission for England 1971–8, the Development Commission 1981–1990, and the Local Government Commission for England 1992–5. He also played roles as a member of the Conservators of the River Cam 1979–2007 (chair 1991–2007), and in the Spalding Gentlemen's Society 2012–19 (secretary 2013–6 and president 2016–9).

Michael's analytical approach owed much to his background at his school, to National Service in the Royal Engineers, as a student at St Catharine's College Cambridge, and his first post at Oxford. Those who Michael encountered soon became aware of his investigative mind, 'always asking questions', and always with great courtesy. As a member of various organisations and in university roles he was seldom content to accept inefficiencies and quickly saw ways to make improvements. He believed strongly in the importance of 'clarity of mind', 'integrity', and 'public service' – qualities which others readily recognised in him, but it led to some frustrations in his roles on some government bodies and as head of an academic department.

This memoir cannot do justice to all his work: he published over a period of 70 years, active to the end with three articles published posthumously. He authored or edited seventeen mainstream academic books, over 150 journal articles and chapters in books, many booklets and papers with research, official and policy bodies, and academic societies, and many book reviews. In 2002 he deposited with the British Academy notes on his work and early life. These give valuable insights, though Michael gave little away on his school and early career, which have been infilled from other sources. An updated full list of his publications has been made available via the British Academy's website.[1] The purpose of this biographical memoir is to examine how his main landmark work emerged, and how it interacted with his contributions to the research and the policy community.

[1] https://doi.org/10.5871/mem/022.399-bibliography

Early life, academic foundations and career

Michael was born in North London on 10 June 1931. His father, Samuel Martin Chisholm (8 July 1900 – 23 June 1985), was a correspondent for the *Picture Post*, for Reuters during the Second World War, and then a freelance author for radio and later for television documentaries. He also had a strong interest in painting, silver work, cabinet making, and the Arts and Crafts Movement with friends among the Bloomsbury Group. Michael's paternal grandfather, Rev. W.C. Chisholm, was a minister in the Scottish Church, who had served in Lendal (York), Hamburg, and elsewhere.

His mother, Alice Winifred (née Lee) (11 November 1907 – 24 July 2001), had been a secretary involved in establishing and running Fortis Green School in the 1930s. During and after the Second World War she studied for a degree at LSE (evacuated to Cambridge), qualified in social work and subsequently worked in the DHSS, with posts in Maidstone and Stafford. Her father, Herbert Lee, was town clerk at Walsall.

Michael's parents divorced when he was two years old. He continued to live with Winifred in Hampstead, Fortis Green and Stepney. She remarried in 1939 to Vladimir Leon Kahan (15 July 1907 – 6 February 1981), a GP doctor in partnership with his father in Stepney. Vladimir's father was Russian-Jewish from Latvia, and mother a Polish professional musician. During the war Vladimir was initially in a Mobile Ambulance Unit active in the London blitz, but from 1942 was away as psychiatrist Medical Officer commanding RAMC units in Iraq, Persia and India, mainly tending airmen with psychiatric illness. Vladimir returned to a blitzed surgery, the practice gone, and his father dead.[2] The war and subsequent work locations separated them; they divorced in 1951. Winifred had moved in about 1940 to a rented thatched cottage at Weston, near Letchworth, from which Michael cycled the four miles to school, though he boarded for two terms over the winter 1949–50. They were fairly poor, but Martin Chisholm paid his school fees at St Christopher School, Letchworth where he studied 1940–50.

This school was unusual and had profound influence on Michael meriting more substantial analysis. 'It made him what he was', he confided to his second wife Judith. Although founded and managed by the Theosophical Society from 1915, in 1930 St Christopher was re-established by its then headmaster as non-denominational. This head, Lyn Harris, ran the school 1925–53 jointly with his wife Eleanor, all of the time Michael attended. He was a Quaker whose beliefs and principles shaped the School; the geography teacher was also Quaker. Michael always referred to it as Quaker; it had

[2] Leslie Teeman and others, *Vladimir Leon Kahan: Some biographical notes* (1981); unpublished, with Chisholm papers.

similarities of principles, but religion was not pushed.[3] Michael absorbed the principles but remained agnostic. It was co-educational, vegetarian, and promoted individual learning, brotherhood and community service. In the 6th form around twelve periods a week was in assignments: 'optionals' supported by staff, where pupils completed their work; it was an early training in individual research and organisation skills, critical to Michael's career. During Michael's time pupils participated in everything including labouring on school building works, grounds, the poultry pen and the Young Farmer's Club pens. The school had no punishment but promoted restitution and penance.

Michael was head boy Spring 1949 and chairman of the school Council Autumn 1948, roles elected by the pupils. The Council, of staff, 6th formers and an elected pupil from each tutor group, met fortnightly; it was described by the head in 1944 as for pupils and teachers 'to know the reason why'.[4] It acted in a judicial capacity, looking into misdemeanours and determining restitution to be made. It received formal motions, and discussed and firmed them up for decision by a whole school meeting.[5] Harris would speak on the pros and cons; he 'disaggregated the problem' – a favourite mantra of Michael's. During Michael's chairmanship the minutes show it had six meetings covering several 'judicial issues' about pupils who failed to do work for penance, design of a calendar for each term's events, dissolution and revival of the film society, securing lost property, and so on. David Cursons, Secretary of the school's alumni club, remarks that 'many pupils found experience of the school's self-government made running a committee meeting in later life a doddle'; it was clearly a critical foundation for Michael's many subsequent public roles, probably influencing being a stickler for procedure.

The school's history describes Harris as always open to the pupils; however, 'you did not go to him to be soothed, but to be challenged, to be more self-aware. He questioned, and he forced others to question'.[6] This could be a description of Michael. Harris was clearly a major role model, providing guidance and stimulus absent from his home. Michael was also keen on sport. He was captain of football and goalkeeper 1949–50. The school magazine recorded not only the teams, but 'criticisms': the school was all about self-evaluation! He was noted as 'much improved, but goal kicks need improving', and later 'has fine positional sense, extremely powerful attack, and very agile'. He was in the cricket first XI 1947–50, as fielder then wicket keeper: 'alert and active fielder', then 'uses his pads too much'. His co-author Jim Oeppen later found him a demon goalkeeper in the staff-student matches at Bristol.

[3] The school histories mention Quakerism only for Harris' life; R. Snell, *St Christopher School 1915–1975* (Letchworth: Aldine Press, 1975); C. McNab, *St Christopher School: a short history* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 2014).

[4] 'School government', *St Christopher Magazine*, July 1944; Snell, *School*, pp. 32, 154–5.

[5] Constitutions, in school archive; comments from David Cursons; also Snell and McNab, *School*.

[6] Snell, *School*, pp. 154–5.

Michael did geography, economics and Latin in the 6th form. Michael's notes mention as especially influential Oscar Backhouse in geography, and a maths teacher 'Humpy' (G.W. Humphrey). Backhouse had two others who became geography professors, David Harris FBA in the year below, and Anthony Young a contemporary. All followed Backhouse's love of the outdoors and tending towards Spartan approaches. He and 'Humpy' took the boys on trips, camping and rock climbing, which were frequent and often by bicycle (Michael's trips included going from school to Land's End by bike, another to Snowdonia). The school magazine records five youth hostelling trips by 'Humpy' over weekends in 1947. The war-time vegetarian diet and cycling contributed to Michael's lean stature; only 11.75 stone at 6 feet 0½ inch tall (school leaving report).

After school Michael had to undertake National Service. He initially found this traumatic; it was difficult to adapt after the culture of St Christopher. 'On Sunday evening he was in the study with the other servers [officers] having tea with Mrs Harris and me, and I thought of him the next night in the barrack dormitory'.[7] Michael hated that initial billet in Colchester. Harris counselled Michael to patience and adaptation to the disciplinary essentials; from someone imprisoned for over two years during the First World War, as an absolutist Quaker refusing service, the advice helped Michael's resolve. Once commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, and embarked on training with the Royal Engineers at Hermitage near Newbury, Michael became engaged and stimulated by the challenges of surveying. After training he was posted to a unit near Midhurst to teach two-week surveyor training refresher courses for Z-reserve personnel who were called up in 1951 for the Korean War. The skills of surveying remained an important part of his mind-set. He continued teaching these courses during long vacations whilst a student; this provided welcome funds for trips with student friends on bicycle and tandem with Peter Haggett and Gerald Manners to France, probably in 1952 (with Michael's long legs always the key motive power on the tandem), and hitch-hiking with Derek Brearley in Spain, probably in 1953.

Michael went to St Catharine's College Cambridge in 1951, then the leading geography college, winning in 1950 the open Exhibition in Geography that the college had initiated in 1928. The college archives show he had applied in 1949 to St John's but did not win a State Scholarship so could not go; the St Catharine's exhibition was crucial; and after arrival in 1951 he was awarded a State Scholarship as well. He became secretary of the University Geographical Society, and gained a half blue in lacrosse. He wrote to the school to say he had 'given up soccer for lacrosse and was an active member of the university Labour Club'.[8] Cambridge teaching was then traditional, very

[7] Letter to Michael's mother from Lyn Harris, 30 September 1950.

[8] *St Christopher Magazine*, Spring (1953), 30; apparently Gerald Manners encouraged switching to lacrosse.

descriptive, regional courses in economic geography. He arrived at the college at the same time as their new fellow in geography, Augustus Caesar. After his National Service, Caesar had been a fellow at Selwyn since 1948, but was brought to St Catharine's by its other fellow, physical geographer Professor Alfred Steers. The influence of Caesar on a generation of geographers is well-chronicled.[9] This was, as David Keeble records, the remarkable impact of his college geography supervisions. Listening to essays read out weekly by his students he was able to dissect and improve his students' work in a clinical and supportive way, emphasising logical, substantiated argument. It was a different form of the questioning discipline already acquired at school. Michael's cohort of eight students was an exceptional peer group and mutually stimulated each other. Four remained lifelong friends, three of whom also became professors of geography: Peter Haggett FBA, Gerald Manners and Ken Warren; and Derek Brearley, with whom he shared a set of college rooms, became a leading school teacher and inspector. Sir Peter Hall FBA in the cohort a year earlier remained a long-term associate. His student days also gave early Fenland experience. Michael joined three coach-loads of St Catharine's student volunteers carrying sandbags to reinforce banks of the Ouse near King's Lynn over two days in the 1953 floods. Later, Alfred Steers organised re-surveying to establish the extent of coastal reshaping: Chisholm and Brearley were assigned Blakeney Point, and Haggett and John Small (at Queens' College, later professor at Southampton) got Scolt Head Island.[10]

After his degree Michael had been contemplating a PhD, but this was out of reach given the urgent need to earn a living. Caesar, perhaps influenced by Michael's third year undergraduate dissertation on land use,[11] drew his attention to an Oxford position for which he applied and was appointed for five years over 1954-9. It paid quarterly in arrears, which created a short time crisis. It was frequent at this time for 5-year assistant lectureships to be awarded without a PhD, the individual expected to develop research along the way. The Oxford position was as Departmental Demonstrator, Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics. This had focused on teaching, research and advising on agriculture and rural economy, but in 1945 had been turned into a university Institute with its own Director who, over 1952–69, was Colin Clark.[12] Michael found

[9] For example, D. Keeble, 'A. A. L. Caesar, A Memorial Address', *St Catharine's College Magazine* (1996), 24–7.

[10] *St Catharine's Magazine* (1953), 52; P. Haggett, *The Geographer's Art* (Blackwell, 1990), 46; results of re-survey J. A. Steers & A. T. Grove, *Transactions Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society*, 17 (1954), 322–6.

[11] M. Chisholm, *Cannock Chase: A problem of land use in the present and future*, submitted for the Part II Geographical Tripos (1953) [with Chisholm papers]. This was a relatively traditional local study, but had detailed economic assessment of future potential, balancing demands of water, gravel, forestry and recreation.

[12] *Institute of Agricultural Economics* (Bodleian Guide to manuscripts, revised, 2010).

him supportive and they both taught on the Institute's Diploma programme. Clark had no background in economics and Michael would have provided some economic heft, though none of Clark's writing acknowledges this. Oxford was Michael's first exposure to a research Institute, a far cry from the Cambridge tripos. Clark was controversial and stimulating, who sought to provoke debate in the 'Monday Seminar' for leading outside speakers: traits of personality which Michael shared. Beyond Clark the Institute's emphasis on theoretical foundations, empiricism, and policy engagement were key aspects mirrored in Michael's research style: de facto it was a research training, though he had to devote a lot of time to teaching. His first academic publications were all on farming. Over the 1950s these were mostly short, but there were substantial pieces on shipping and terms of trade, economies of scale in road transport, milk collection from farms, and two key early papers in the *Farm Economist* (1956) on marginal farming, and in *Oxford Economic Papers* (1961) on location and rent.

At Oxford Michael developed a stronger relationship with his step-father Vladimir who had remarried in 9 July 1955 to Barbara Joan (née Langridge). They lived at Cassington near Oxford and had no children of their own. Michael found it his first happy home and a source of 'stimulation, support and love' in his early years as a young lecturer. It was another questioning environment: both are noted for their refusal to take things for granted and, and both became celebrated experts on troubled children − Vladimir from research on mental illness in childhood, with a book of that title published in 1971 − and Barbara as one of the first Children's Officers under the 1948 Children's Act, first for Dudley, and then for Oxfordshire in 1950, authoring several books, and later chairing the National Children's Bureau.[13] It was at Oxford that Michael met and married his first wife Edith Gretchen Emma Hoof in 1959. They had two daughters Annabel Susan (b. 1960), Julia Clare (b. 1962), and one son Andrew John (b. 1966). They divorced in 1981. Michael remarried in 1986 to Judith Carola Shackleton who was a source of strong support in his later research, and has been most helpful with this memoir.

Michael moved from Oxford to Bedford College, London as Assistant Lecturer 1960–2 and then 1962–4 Lecturer in Geography. London opened up opportunities for wider connections in consultancy, mainly through Economic Associates 1965–77, which included being senior field economist to a World Bank study in Papua New Guinea for transport investment. He also became involved in the Institute of British Geographers and Royal Geographical Society from 1961. These were very much stepping stones. His publications shifted through transport and agriculture towards wider concerns with industrial concentration, and to UK regional planning, where three other St Catharine's

[13] Barbara Joan Kahan, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Kahan

geographers were also deeply engaged: Peter Hall and Gerald Manners as prime movers in the South East Regional Economic Planning Council, and Peter Haggett at Bristol in the South West Council. He held a Visiting Senior Lectureship in Geography at Ibadan, Nigeria, 1964–5, where he travelled a great deal and met many of the local academic geographers. This was a critical experience which left him with an abiding interest in Nigeria and Africa: he spent sabbaticals in Ibadan and Stellenbosch and often personally helped African graduate students who fell on hard times.

However, in many ways it was not until he became Lecturer at Bristol in 1965 that his career took off. The Head of Department, Ron Peel, who was also a skilled land surveyor, recognised the value of his work and was very supportive of the new analytical geography, making a number of inspired appointments in the 1960s. Michael was rapidly promoted to Reader (1967) and to a personal Professorship (1976; inaugural lecture 'All the world's a stage'); in 1970 he received the Gill Memorial Prize from the Royal Geographical Society for his early research on land use and transport. The Bristol years saw his publications rapidly expand, and his increasing involvement in major roles in public bodies and as a policy adviser. These public roles continued when he moved to the 1931 Professorship of Geography at Cambridge in 1976, the fourth incumbent of the position, and returned to St Catharine's as a Professorial Fellow. He was Head of Department in Geography 1976–84, and later became the initiator and director of the Department's first taught MPhil course, admitting its first cohort in 1990. He was president of the Institute of British Geographers in 1979, and received a ScD Cantab in 1996 based on his publications. He was elected FBA in 2002, and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 2012. He retired in 1996 with Emeritus positions in university and college. His FBA and FSA elections recognised his post-retirement output as well as his earlier career. He was still researching and publishing up to his death.

Michael's career spanned many diverse fields. An appreciation of his work by Cliff, Haggett and Martin appeared on his retirement mainly focused on economic geography.[14] His contributions are captured here within five themes: land use and transport; regional economic development; territorial administration; Fenland navigation; and his contributions to public service.

Land use and transport

Rural Settlement and Land Use published in 1962 was a landmark publication. It was one of the two books Michael was 'most proud of'. It was also one of his most influential,

[14] A. Cliff, P. Haggett & R. Martin, 'Michael Chisholm: An Appreciation', *Regional Studies*, 31 (1997), 205–10.

with three editions, a Japanese translation, and over 1,300 citations on Google Scholar by 2025, of which over 500 are post–2000. It was selected as one of the classics in human geography in 1994.[15] However, he was very unsure of it before sending it for publication and almost destroyed the manuscript.

Its impact has to be understood in the context of economic geography as it was in the 1950s. This was dominated by traditional descriptive studies, often focused around land use. There was still an active debate about the status of the 'region' as a unifying concept. *Rural Settlement* was radically different. It started from the economic theory of land rent. Its publisher Hutchinson started a geographical series in about 1948 that was the main source of modern systematic geography available in the 1950s and early 1960s. Early volumes were mostly titled '*Geography and ...*'. Michael's was unique in having a starting point of theory.

Michael makes no comment on his time at Oxford in his personal notes. However, in the preface to *Rural Settlement* he fulsomely acknowledged Caesar, Clark and former colleagues at the Oxford Institute. In Chapter 1 Michael explains how the broad range of students in the Institute's courses, many from abroad who subsequently mostly became involved in administration or policy advice in their countries, needed a clear 'exposition of the economics of land use … couched in terms of principles with a universal application, backed by suitable examples'. He believed that 'the economics of land use' had to be presented 'as problems of location, [and] of the competition between alternative users and uses to command a particular site' (p. 12); i.e. *relative location*.

Chapter 1 expounds an approach which he followed in much of his research, and indeed in his life: using analytical approaches to answer practical 'questions'. The radicalism of the book was to start in Chapter 2 with von Thünen's approach to land rent, not as a theory of location but as a method of analysis (p. 21). He called this an essay in *a priori* reasoning. Subsequent chapters introduced other principles of location, and examples at the level of farm and village, the region and the world, and lastly the role of technical change. The later chapters reversed the analysis by demonstrating how land use and rents affected settlements and transport. He used UK milk manufacture and food imports as examples of specialisation at the farm level, for national policy, and responses to challenges from international trade. This was close to the Oxford Institute operations: how to advise farmers, and what this meant for national policy.

[15] R. Munton, W. Moran & M. Chisholm, 'Classics in human geography revisited: Chisholm's "Rural Settlement and Land Use"', *Progress Human Geography*, 18 (1994), 59–64. Michael, typically, and correctly, at 62–4 found some of the comments 'odd'.

Michael extended von Thünen in scale and generality to integrate transport and trade, and introduce *relative location* to settlement studies. However, retracing Michael's journey is not easy. Thünen's book was published in 1826,[16] gaining attention in Germany from its second and improved edition in 1842. It was little known more widely until Michael's book and the English 'selective and modernised' translation by Peter Hall's wife in 1966. Hall's interest was stimulated by Michael; Peter opportunistically engaged his first wife who was German professional translator. Hall thanks Michael fulsomely: he 'read the entire manuscript with meticulous care and made countless corrections and suggestions', and also supplied the bibliographical references to von Thünen in English.[17] Mainstream economists had wholly ignored von Thünen's location theory. The leading text, Samuelson's *Economics* (1948, five editions by 1958), which Michael used, made no reference to location theory until much later. Marshall's *Principles of Economics* made six references to von Thünen, all in footnotes focusing on marginal analysis. Only one note mentions location, and that elliptically on p. 475 in the 1891 second edition, stating location rent as 'a type of a great many fanciful, but not uninstructive, problems which readily suggest themselves'. Although Marshall exchanged with Keynes on rent, neither thought location more than unnecessary complexity: 'fanciful', on the fringes of interest.[18] Krugman called this 'the exile of economic geography' from economics.[19]

With no translation of von Thünen (Michael could not read German), with typical perspicacity he translated a French translation.[20] He also used English-language sources. The select bibliography for Chapter 2 in *Rural Settlement* and his 1961 article in *Oxford Economic Papers* p. 344, n. 3 indicate seven main sources. For teaching on agricultural economics, probably most influential on Michael were Benedict's translation of Brinkman in 1935 and Dunn in 1954, although both were very abstract.[21] Grotewold's 1959 paper[22] and contacts with Haggett probably firmed up Michael's final draft. Relative location, Michael noted, only entered location theory with game-changing works by Isard in the early 1950s and the translation of Lösch in 1954 that both develop von

[16] J. H. von. Thünen, *Der Isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalokonomie* (Hamburg: Wiegant, Hempel & Parey, 1826)

[17] P. Hall (ed.), trans. Carla M. Wartenberg, *Von Thünen's Isolated state: an English edition* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1966), acknowledgements; Michael Batty FBA, personal communication.

[18] A. Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 9th variorum edn (London: Macmillan, 1961), vol. 2, p. 260, exchange with Keynes p. 184n in the first and second editions.

[19] P. Krugman, *Development, Geography and Economic Theory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), at p. 84.

[20] Michael's translation is undated. It is in one of his folders from the Oxford Institute; given his teaching of this material to students it is probably mid–1950s. It is selective, primarily for accurate quotations.

[21] E. Dunn, *The location of agricultural production* (University of Florida Press, 1954); E.T. Benedict, *Theodor Brinkmann's Economics of the Farm Business* (1935, translation).

[22] A. Grotewold, 'von Thünen in Retrospect', *Economic Geography*, 35 (1959), 346–55.

Thünen.[23] Haggett was first made aware of Lösch by Cambridge glaciologist Vaughan Lewis, who as a mathematician saw its potential for economic geography. This informed Haggett's postgraduate work 1954–5 at Cambridge, at UCL 1955–7, and at Cambridge 1958–66 where he introduced lectures on Isard's work.[24] Lösch profoundly influenced both: Michael's use of von Thünen for teaching agricultural economics, and Haggett's wider-ranging synthesis in *Locational Analysis in Human Geography* (1965).

The analytical approach and uncompromising use of a theoretical starting point mark *Rural Settlement* as a founding text of Locational Studies. Michael's use of locational competition processes and rent to understand economic decisions, then reversed to understand how cumulative economic decisions affected locations, was fundamental to how Haggett organised *Locational Analysis*. In its Preface Haggett thanked two people for reading drafts and clarifying his thinking, Michael and Brian Berry; he also acknowledged *Rural Settlement*, along with William Alonso's *Urban Land Market* (1960) and Bunge's *Theoretical Geography* (1962), as the three books that most helped his early thinking. For rural studies it was a leap forward from Stamp's Land Utilisation Survey of the 1930s which dominated much contemporary 'practical' geography. Although Stamp was fundamental to the subsequent UK planning regime, his mapping approach was almost devoid of any theoretical framework. Hence, *Rural Settlement*'s start from practical questions, then using theory to answer them, was in the vanguard of a key disciplinary shift.[25]

Rural Settlement also had profound influences beyond geography. It became a staple of farm and agricultural economics teaching. In planning it was used as a basis for understanding theories of settlement.[26] In archaeology, its concepts were taken up by Claudio Vita-Finzi FBA, Eric Higgs and others, using Michael's ideas for 'site catchment analysis': based on the accessibility around an archaeological site measured by walking-time distance.[27] Michael's notes record that Graeme Barker FBA discovered *Rural Settlemen*t in 1968 as a student, who drew it to Higgs attention. Site catchment analysis is now an

[23] Summarised in W. Isard, *Location and Space-Economy* (New York: MIT and John Wiley, 1956); August Lösch, trans. W.H. Woglom & W.F. Stolper, *The Economics of Location* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

[24] P. Haggett, 'The local shape of revolution: reflections on quantitative geography at Cambridge in the 1950s and 1960s', *Geographical Analysis*, 40 (2008), 336–52.

[25] As summarised in the British Academy's Centenary volume: R. Bennett & A. Wilson, 'Geography Applied', in R. Johnson & M. Williams (eds), *A Century of British Geography* (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 463–501.

[26] Michael Batty, personal communication; see also his British Academy memoir on Peter Hall.

[27] C. Vita-Finzi, E. Higgs, D. Sturdy, J. Harriss, A.J. Legge & H. Tippett, 'Prehistoric economy in the Mount Carmel area of Palestine: site catchment analysis', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 36 (1970), 1–37 at 7. Michael's contribution also recorded in tribute to Higgs, Royal Geographical Society, 1 September 2006.

established archaeological tool, with *Rural Settlement* widely cited for its theoretical foundations.[28] It clearly influenced demography and development economics through Colin Clark's use of location theory from the late 1960s. Several of his books use its ideas, and *Value of Agricultural Land* (1973) is almost identical to the format of *Rural Settlement*, although Michael's work is uncited.

Regional economic development and policy

The success and impact of *Rural Settlement* also had a profound impact on Michael. It reinforced his view of where his research should go, his methodological approach, and shaped his output for the next 10–15 years, and indeed subsequently. His sense that geography needed firmer intellectual grounding in location theory and the relevant aspects of economics led him to produce *Geography and Economics* (1966, 2nd edn 1970), completed while in Nigeria. This was, in effect, a generalisation of *Rural Settlement* to general location theory. It centred on the use of marginal analysis, for firm and farm. He also took much further his concerns to explain the development of the British economy in terms of its transport infrastructure. This led to two major books, both co-authored and based on two major research grants, from the SSRC and Nuffield Foundation, respectively, for *Freight Flows and Spatial Aspects of the British Economy* (1973, with Patrick. O'Sullivan), and *The Changing Pattern of Employment: Regional specialisation and industrial localisation in Britain* (1973, with Jim Oeppen).

Michael's transport projects led him into detailed evaluations of different regions' economic positions in the economy as a whole though their trade inputs and outputs, and they indicated that UK regions remained imbalanced with deep-seated differences in employment and opportunities. His transport studies provided a bridgehead which he used to develop a wider understanding of the challenges of UK national economic policy and its manifestation through regional economic policy. He had already embarked on one element of his re-focusing through a co-edited collection in 1971 with Gerald Manners on *Spatial Policy Problems of the British Economy*. In honour of Caesar, the contributors were all former students (David Keeble, Peter Haggett, Peter Hall, Ray Pahl, and Ken Warren), with royalties establishing a college geography prize fund.

Over the following years in many ways these forays were entering not only a crowded field with many others, following the stimulus of the regional policies of the Wilson governments 1964–70, but also where his attention was squeezed by his efforts to

[28] e.g. I. Hodder & C. Orton (eds), *Spatial Analysis in Archaeology* (Cambridge University Press, 1976); G. Barker, *Prehistoric farming in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); D. Clarke, *Analytical Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2014).

promote change in the discipline. He gave increasing priority to external roles in the 1970s in the Institute of British Geographers and the SSRC. When SSRC was established in 1965, human geography was excluded. Liverpool professor Robert Steel's personal initiative to argue the discipline's cause led to the convening of a group to make the case for its inclusion.[29] Michael acted as secretary to the group and prepared the detailed case, against some resistance from the discipline that wanted physical geography included, becoming the first chair of its Human Geography and Planning Committee 1967–72. He also began a long stint at the Local Government Boundary Commission in 1971. Over 1973–6 he was one of the prime movers with Peter Haggett and others in persuading the Department of the Environment to establish a School for Advanced Urban Studies at Bristol. He moved to Cambridge in 1976, immediately becoming its Head of Department. These took a lot of attention.

He disseminated the information he had acquired in public roles to encourage developments in the discipline. He produced a number of books and many papers in this period. The first was a book based on a series of articles he guest-edited for the *Geographical Magazine* in 1970: *Resources for Britain's Future*, reprinted in 1972 by Penguin. This was an important effort to disseminate to the general public as well as academia. Other efforts at wider dissemination were two books edited for the SSRC and published by Heinemann: *Research in Human Geography* (1971), where Michael argued that the real change from introducing quantitative analysis was 'substantial tightening up in logical rigour' (p. 2); and *Studies in Human Geography* (1973, co-edited with Bill Rodgers). This wider mission was pushed further in *Human Geography: evolution or revolution?* (1975). In the 1970s he also developed 'Topicards', an intriguing initiative with college friend Derek Brearley, who was by then a school teacher: 2-sided large-format cards with photos, maps, diagrams and text, published by Macmillan. Their blurb states they were for 'teachers to combine in whatever way they wished' to prepare lessons.

Michael maintained outputs on regional growth in an important chapter in a Nobel Symposium held at Stockholm in 1977, and his presidential address at the Institute of British Geographers in (*TIBG*, 1980). However, he really only returned to his own research agenda with *Modern World Development: A geographical perspective* (1982), and *Regions in Recession and Resurgence* (1990). In the first of these he explored economic growth theory, and the concepts of 'core-periphery' and 'North-South' to comment on the changes and prospects of the world economy. It marks a major effort to reformulate economic development policies: from theory to inevitable policy conclusions. He strongly emphasised supply-side developments. With *Regions in Recession and*

[29] Chisholm, 'SSRC: Personal reflections', *Area*, 2001; R.J. Johnston, 'Changing a discipline in universities and a subject in schools: British geography in the 1950s–1970s', *History of Education*, 48 (2019), 682-99.

Resurgence he widened his take on theories of regional economic development. In chapter 6 he developed a 'new way' intended to meet the criticisms of earlier theories and policy practice. He again emphasised the supply side, which was in keeping with aspects of political change at that time, and also demonstrated how the locational needs of firms, within the transport and trade structures of a globalised economy, challenged nationally-focused policy agendas. Transport was always the key!

Regions in Recession and Resurgence was one of only three sources from the discipline of geography that Paul Krugman cited in his efforts to construct a view of 'new economic geography' from the perspective of economics. As noted above, Krugman sought in the 1990s to redress 'the exile of economic geography' from economics; he did this primarily using trade theory, which was also key to Michael's approach.[30] He found Chisholm's work engaging, but in general thought geographers' efforts at 'economic geography' flawed by being fragmented, lacking a unified micro-analytical theoretical approach. The retirement appreciation by Cliff, Haggett and Martin noted: 'Reputations depend crucially on timing' and that Michael's persistence in economic geography kept 'the light burning in difficult decades' within the discipline until rediscovered by Krugman and others. 'His early and persistent focus on the convergence between the economics of trade and economic geography may, in the long run turn out to be his most enduring legacy'.[31]

In *Britain on the Edge of Europe* (1995) he took some of this further. The motivation for the book was to assess one key question: whether Britain's EU peripherality was a disadvantage. He assessed developments in world trade, and if cumulative causation or neo-classical processes would dominate. He also assessed UK regional outcomes for ports, airports, and the new connectivity of the channel tunnel. His key conclusion was that, since transport costs were a small proportion of production costs in most industries, Britain and its regions would thrive as a globally integrated economy, despite relative peripherality in Europe. It was typical of his investigative instinct that this was a question he felt needed asking and answering. It followed a distinct line in his thinking on freight flows and trade, to his theoretical approach for assessing regional competitive advantage.

[30] P. Krugman, *Development*, at 84–8; the two other geographical sources quoted were P. Dicken & P. Lloyd, *Location in Space* (London: Harper & Row, 1972); and D. Keeble, P. Owen & C. Thompson, 'Regional accessibility and economic potential in the European community', *Regional Studies*, 16 (1982), 419–32.

[31] Cliff *et al.*, *Chisholm: An Appreciation*, 209.

Territorial administration

Little of Michael's work was conducted in academic isolation. This is nowhere more evident than in his writings on territorial administration where he served as Commissioner in three major Commissions concerned with reforms of local government, and rural development. In all these Michael drew from a basic view that as far as possible administrative and economic/social spaces should nest onto each other; to be 'truly bounded' to fit real communities. It was a possibly over-optimistic and idealistic view to take in highly politically charged processes. He found each Commission very demanding, but in different ways.

Michael's notes record that the Local Government Boundary Commission, on which he served 1971–8, involved numerous Commission meetings, local hearings and field visits, and receiving numerous representations and drafts, with 'homework' to be dealt with before the next week. It held 199 full meetings, produced 13 published reports, 311 reports submitted to the Home Secretary. He estimated it took about two days per week over most of his involvement. Initially it divided the English counties into districts. It then defined the wards for all counties and districts. These sought greater equality of electorates. He seems to have felt this exercise did a good job and he was reasonably satisfied with its outcomes. A chapter on 'academics and government' he published in 1976 during this time reflects on the tensions, but strikes a relatively optimistic note.[32]

On the Development Commission 1981-90, Michael was one of eight commissioners. It was established in 1910 as a permanent Royal Commission to advise and administer a Development Fund for rural economies in England. It amalgamated with the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, to form the Rural Development Commission in 1988. By 1971 most of its powers over planning, transport, farming and forestry, with most funds, were transferred to other bodies, but it retained grants for factories and workshops constructed by English Estates, grants to convert buildings for new employment, and advising on Rural Development Areas. Michael felt it had 'become moribund'. A new Social Advisory Panel was formed in 1986 to advise the Commission, with Michael the first chair. Its minutes and meeting notes record a revival of engagement with local community issues, close to Michael's beliefs in making things happen for ordinary people.[33] His notes are positive about the efforts by the chair Nigel Vinson and his fellow Commissioners to create a more professional and effective body with a higher public profile.

[32] In J.T. Coppock & W.R.D. Sewell (eds), *Spatial Dimensions of Public Policy* (Pergamon: Oxford, 1976), pp. 67–85.
[33] National Archives, D11/24–31.

Positive experiences did not result from his time on the Local Government Commission for England 1992–5. This was another major commitment. It reviewed, county by county, whether the existing two-tier structure should be replaced by a unitary structure. Michael had responsibility, along with co-Commissioner Clive Wilkinson, for Derbyshire, Hampshire and Surrey, with meetings in these counties and meetings in London. There were also 39 full meetings of the Commission in London, with 86 published reports to be considered and approved. Recommendations were made for each county. Apart from the three county volumes, which were a major part of his contribution, he had a major role in drafting the final report, *Renewing Local Government in the English Shires*.

The Act establishing the Commission was neutral regarding outcomes, but the only change it could recommend was from two-tier to a unitary structure. Michael was quite openly critical of this (*Regional Studies*, 1995). Moreover its recommendations could be accepted or rejected by the government; MPs and others could modify the outcomes at a late stage. Michael felt the whole process was 'asymmetric and inconsistent', with the independent Commissioners put in an impossible position (*Public Administration*, 1997). His notes concluded that 'I know for myself' that he was able to achieve some improvements and had positive impact on the reports and outcomes. A review and critique of the Commission by Ron Johnston *et al.* concludes that Michael and others seeking a rational outcome were bound to be frustrated, however well the task was done.[34]

Michael's frustration with the Commission boiled over into an unpublished document written in some anger over three days 7-9 July 1995, which he lodged with his will. It reveals the tensions between the Commissioners, with the chair John Banham, and between them and the politicians, both nationally and locally, and also what he considered shameful leaks of information. None of this is surprising nor previously unknown, but he was anxious his personal comments should be available.[35]

His frustrations also found an outlet in a broader book, *Structural Reform of British Local Government: Rhetoric and Reality* (2000). This was an attempt, he says, to use his experience to develop more 'constructive thinking' about the future of local government. He argued for greater financial freedom, and that structural reforms were not only costly but introduced multiple inefficiencies. The book is very carefully worded. A further book on later developments, *Botched Business: The damaging process of reorganising local government 2006–2008*, with Steve Leach took this further. He did not deviate from the view that unitary authorities were rarely the best solution and that a blend of local and

[34] R. Johnston, C. Pattie & D. Rossiter, 'The Organic or the Arithmetic: Independent Commissions and the Redrawing of the UK's Administrative Maps', *Regional Studies*, 31 (1997), 337–49.
[35] Lodged with the Chisholm papers and released when all those mentioned are dead.

larger scales offered preferable fits to communities. Michael would have been horrified with the government in 2025, soon after his death, deciding without any rational design concept or proper consultation, to move to even larger units based on joining multiple counties under a mayor – likely to be another 'Botched Business'?

After retirement in 1996, as well as these two books Michael produced over 30 other papers on local government reforms. Some of this was undertaken with the Local Government Information Unit and to a lesser extent with the Local Government Association. Derek Thomas, chief executive of Surrey County Council, and Paul Rigg at West Sussex County Council, were key collaborators over 1995–2002. He submitted a joint memorandum with Thomas to the House of Lords Committee on Environment, Transport and Rural Affairs, November 1998. He continued to comment critically on local government reforms in the main local government journals up to 2011, confronting Regional Development Agencies and the abortive idea of Regional Assemblies with questions of why another tier of government was needed. However, after 2011 he published no article on any topic other than the Fens.

Fenland navigation

Michael produced two books and 19 papers on Fenland drainage, navigation and related material over 2003–25. These are all deeply empirically-based, using archives, on-site assessment of channels, archaeological and geological reports, and the historical literatures of the periods covered. They have made fundamental contributions to understanding Fenland history, and opened up a wider perspective on its transport, navigation and the role of its pre-dissolution monasteries. Many academics would be promoted to the title of professor on far less: although not intended, he successfully constructed an additional career in retirement.

As on other occasions his interest had been kindled by external involvements, when he became one of the Conservators of the River Cam in 1979. Initially his papers were empirical assessments of pieces of waterway, particular settlements, or specific archival sources. As he progressed, the more he believed there had been confusion over historical interpretations of the Fens. He sought to demonstrate that developments should be viewed as commercially-driven improvements to river navigation and not as by-products of drainage, with freight traffic continuing to flourish after the Fens had been drained (*Journal of Historical Geography*, 2006). He gave an impressive overview of his initial findings in a 2008 British Academy lecture (*Proceedings of the British Academy,* 2008), listing the 20 or so main sources either side of the conflicting arguments. He used 1745 as the starting point, when Labelye asserted that the Denver Sluice was treated with 'So little regard … to the inland navigation, that no lock was provided … to let the boats

pass'.[36] This statement, used by Clifford Darby FBA in his contribution to the *Victoria County History for Huntingdon*, he conjectured, may have been the primary source of the common belief that a sluice had no lock. His last paper, which he was completing on the day of his death, added Badeslade's 1725 book as a similar source of error. In characteristic style he was putting challenging views, based on a build-up of evidence, analytical foundations and logical argument, which would not be popular with previous authorities. Typical of Michael's character as a stickler for detail he engaged the *Oxford English Dictionary* in recognising that sluice included the passage of vessels, that the Dutch word 'sluis' justified this meaning, hence familiar to early drainers of the Fens, Vermuyden and others. He also engaged the *OED* on missing definitions of 'staunch' and 'thwart', and the origin of 'sasse' as a Fenland name for sluice as a navigational lock.[37]

After the 2008 Academy lecture his main focus moved to earlier periods and led to his first Fenland book*, In the Shadow of the Abbey: Crowland* (2013). This took a long view of one abbey, its town, and the navigation and drainage system on which it was based. It integrated material on post-glacial meltwater channels, pre-dissolution monastic development, archival and modern material, including information from current residents, and drew on his skills of surveying. As a 20,000 year history it is nothing if not ambitious. Subsequently, for Reach, he again sought to unravel the fundamental early monastic role in the transport system. But it was in his last book, *Anglo-Saxon Hydraulic Engineering in the Fens*, that he attempted a synthetic overview for the whole Fenland.

His two Fenland books are too recent to fully assess their reception and impact. However, by the time of completion of this memoir, two reviews of *Crowland*, six reviews of *Anglo-Saxon Hydraulic Engineering*, and several citations had appeared that allow important indications to be drawn. Given his challenges to the orthodoxy, where most Fenland channels have advocates of varying histories, it is not surprising that some reviewers had quibbles over particular drains or sites; and Michael made few concessions to readers – the books have to be followed step-by-step of argument. Hence, while he expressed satisfaction with the reviews, he found some 'grudging', 'a pattern' he reflected of reviews 'of publications that challenge orthodoxy'.[38] As always, he ploughed an independent furrow.

The reviewers of *Crowland* accepted that it convincingly established the importance of re-engineering the River Welland by the monks to link Crowland to the transport network and allow construction of the abbey. It was essentially reviewed as a local history,

[36] C. Labelye, *The Result of a View of the Great Level of the Fens* (London: George Woodfall, 1745).
[37] M. Chisholm, *Transactions of the Newcomen Society* (2005); *Journal of the Railway and Canal Historical Society* (2007); also his personal communications with *OED*, 2005–7.
[38] Recorded in emails with publisher Shaun Tyas.

but within this genre it provided an innovative 'model for research', 'a good example of how any local study needs a wider context'.[39]

In *Anglo-Saxon Hydraulic Engineering* Michael aimed to re-write the understanding of the whole area. Its preface outlines Michael's intellectual journey from his time as a Cam Conservator, and from *Rural Settlement* as a source for understanding the importance of relations between markets, settlement and land use, and the role of monastic transport investment. He also acknowledged how recent archaeological research amplified the case for his argument. The reviewers take Michael's argument as 'fully accepted', 'convincing', 'masterful': the monasteries were the driving force building the watercourses, responding to demand for transport and agricultural intensification. Barton states 'there can now no longer be any doubt' of the Anglo-Saxons' role. Falvey perhaps sums it up best: 'His conclusions, to which he leads the reader step by step, seem blindingly obvious, but only because he has drawn together and sifted through so much evidence to arrive at them. His arguments provide a new story of water management in both the silt and peat fens'.[40] Two critical chapters demonstrate the role of transport improvements from the 10th to the 14th centuries to take Barnack Stone from near Peterborough for the building of the five Fenland abbeys, and churches as far afield as Norwich and Bury St Edmunds. These were accepted as compelling by the reviewers, even if there were quibbles about some sites and buildings. Max Satchell, the expert on historical Fenland GIS at the Geography Department found the book 'revolutionary', and the Barnack Stone material especially compelling for explaining why churches which had no water access had no stone. The book was given an award for 'outstanding contribution to the county's history' by the Cambridgeshire Association for Local History in June 2024.

The book is likely to remain a fundamental reference book guiding the direction and interpretation of subsequent Fenland research. It was the book Michael was 'most proud of', together with his first, *Rural Settlement* published 60 years earlier. It led him to hope that it 'would be recognised as re-writing the history of the area, re-assessing the role of the monasteries, and the competence of the Anglo-Saxon engineers; but [he reflected] only time will tell'. The reviews suggest that hope is being realised.

[39] Reviews: John Jenkins, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 42 (2013), 215; Alan Rogers, *Local Historian*, 43:4 (November 2013), online review.

[40] Reviews: Catherine Hills, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 111 (2021), 206–7; Stephen Rippon, *Environment and History*, 28: 4 (2022), 677–8; Rory Naismith, *Landscape History*, 43:1 (2022), 144–5; Heather Falvey, *Local Historian*, 52:4 (October 2022), online review; Barry Barton, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology Journal*, 56 (2022); Mark Gardiner, *Antiquaries Journal*, 103 (2023), 448–9;

Contributions to public service

This memoir has already covered much of Michael's public service. He used his analytical and academic skills to contribute to many external organisations; and his experiences in them fed into his own intellectual development and publications. Amongst the most burdensome were the SSRC, the three commissions on which he served, and being Head of Department in Cambridge over 1976–84. He also played key roles in the Institute of British Geographers, Royal Geographical Society, and many Cambridge-area bodies. He had a lifelong interest in disseminating and improving the access of geography to the public and to schools, a willingness to undertake talks in far-flung locations, and he provided help to geographers in Nigeria. In this section a few further aspects are highlighted that have not been covered earlier.

Michael's experience as Head of Department at Cambridge was demanding. His predecessor Clifford Darby had essentially delegated to Roy Versey, the senior cartographer who worked most of the time on Darby's maps and analysis for the *Doomsday Geography*; he also kept the Departmental accounts. Michael's notes record that 'virtually the whole of the Departmental administration had to be built from scratch'. Michael inherited a traditional system tuned to leisurely former times, years behind other universities. It was his first spell as a Department Head and inevitably he had some bumps on the way. It also coincided with the breakup of his marriage and divorce in 1981 making the period very stressful. The role relies on collegiality, management authority, and backing from the university. All these conditions could fail. Many colleagues offered little collegiality outside of their own colleges, support could be cut-off by internal machinations, and the university could fail to support the strong actions needed. Darby's experience was similar: like a 'medieval king surrounded by powerful barons … [it] did not fulfil the promise he perhaps expected'.[41] Despite these difficulties, Michael made major contributions to changing the Tripos from the first year as a Prelim and Part 1, to a Part 1A – Part 1B structure with more course choice for students; improving cartographic, IT and computer support; increasing the Department's equipment budget; refurbishing the lecture theatres and laboratories; and building a new third floor for offices with IT teaching above. He made some outstanding new academic appointments. Although initially reluctant, he initiated a rotating Head of Department position.

Relinquishing the headship in 1984, he immediately used a sabbatical to travel to North America. On return he took a lead on graduate studies. Most significant, he was the initiator and course director of the Department's first taught MPhil course, admitting its first cohort in 1990: in Environment and Development. The idea of combining development studies and environmental sustainability, with collaborative teaching between

[41] M. Williams, 'Henry Clifford Darby, 1909–1992', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1994), 298.

physical and human geographers, was novel though much copied later. Bill Adams, a close colleague in this course, stated at Michael's celebratory event in October 2024 that he thought Michael 'loved the experience. … With young people without disciplinary blinkers, diverse experiences and open minds. His blend of independent thought, innate kindness, and ability to focus on problems were ideal. The course flourished'.

Bill Adams also captured a further aspect of Michael, to help people in academic difficulty. Mike Mortimore, a British academic in Nigeria whom Michael had met in 1964–5 had been forced to take premature retirement by British Council cuts in about 1990. Michael decided that 'something should be done for Mortimore'. Chisholm, Adams and Mortimore successfully worked up two projects, funded over seven years by the ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, and the Natural Resources Institute; the first big British commitment to research on sustainability. Based in the dryland societies in northern Nigeria, Mortimore designed the research plan and led the fieldwork. Adams notes Michael declined to be involved in the book published in 1999, *Working the Sahel*, but held the projects together; his input typical – to get things moving and solve a problem.

Michael made contributions as a trustee of various local bodies in Cambridge, including its Preservation Society, the Cambridgeshire Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE), and with great significance on his subsequent research as one of the Conservators of the River Cam 1979–2007. He found the Conservators 'moribund', and as chair over the remarkably long period 1991–2007 saw the main task as rebuilding proper management. He chaired many difficult meetings with competing river users who objected to rises in fees from derisory sums to more reasonable charges, and took on the local councils for neglecting proper supervision of houseboat moorings and their polluting discharges. He reported on the process in a tercentenary history in 2003; his first paper related to the Fens (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 2003).

Michael also made significant contributions to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society. Over about 2009–11, when he was seriously engaging with Fenland research, at 9.00–12.00 on Monday mornings he travelled to take advantage of the Society's only library opening period. He was co-opted to its council in 2012, becoming secretary 2013–6 and president 2016-9. The Society was already evolving, but typically Michael perceived the need for a more fundamental new vision; his notes indicate he only agreed to join the council if it 'developed a proper business plan'. He led this process. An important step was Michael's initiative to invite Tim Knox (at the Fitzwilliam Museum.; later Director of the Royal Collection) to bring a group of advisors to help the Society plan for future survival, leading to an Away Day in October 2013. As President he helped the trustees resolve longstanding building issues and guided them through an options appraisal with external consultants.[42] Dustin Frazier Wood, Head of Collections & Operations at the

[42] D. & M. Honeybone, *Against the Odds: the survival of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society* (Spalding Gentlemen's Society, 2019), pp. 48-9.

Society, stated at Michael's celebratory event in October 2024 that without Michael 'the Society might well no longer exist. … His great strength was seeing the potential to be a membership society, a learned society, an Arts Council accredited museum/library/archive, a community hub, and a force for positive change in Spalding and region'. Dustin noted the final sentence of its new vison statement encapsulated Michael's ideas about what the Society could and should be: 'We believe that curiosity, discovery and the search for knowledge can and should be nurtured and open to all.'

One public contribution that Michael found very moving derived from Barbara Kahan, the widow of Vladimir, his stepfather. She left an estate in 2000 of about £2 million in trust for the benefit of disadvantaged children and young adults. As it was relatively small, the trustees decided to disburse it through grants, mainly transferred to Barnardos and the Buttle Trust to spend in equal annual instalments over ten years. Michael sat as the Vladimir and Barbara Kahan Trustee on two of the Buttle committees until 2010: a School Fees Committee for grants for children not coping with state schooling to pay suitable private schools; and the Reynolds Committee for grants to students needing help with costs or lodgings. He found reports of the recipients' needs by the officers very distressing.

Michael had a long and highly productive career. His many contributions to public service moved important organisations forward: he rarely left a role without changing it. However, he was driven throughout his life primarily by intellectual questions and challenges, finding his research the most satisfying. His research is now embedded in the modern economics of trade through Krugman and others; and *Rural Settlement* remains a founding text and 'classic' of locational studies. Michael's subsequent 'career' in Fenland research introduced a fundamental new vision. He continued to ask questions!

In the years up to his death Michael helped plant literally thousands of trees to reforest an upland farm in North West Cumberland owned by one of Judith's family friends. It was a return to farm economics and to vigorous physical exercise in the landscape. He remained a geographer rooted in the outdoors and in trying to make a difference.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for comments and reflections on Michael from many who offered their advice on this memoir, cited where specifically quoted. I am most grateful for access to Michael's notes provided by his wife Judith, and for her briefings on Michael's thinking at crucial stages of his life. She is arranging deposit of some of Michael's papers at the University Library. I am deeply grateful to her and Andy Cliff FBA for reading this memoir in draft, for Catherine Hills for specific guidance on Fens archaeology, and advice and information from the David Cursons, secretary of the St Christopher School alumni club. Comments from Bill Adams and Dustin Frazier Wood presented at a

Celebration Gathering for Michael at St Catharine's in October 2024, and from Michael's publisher Shaun Tyas, are quoted with their permission. The photograph is by Mike Thornton, Cambridge.

Note on the author: Robert Bennett is Emeritus Professor of Geography, University of Cambridge; he was a colleague of Michael Chisholm at Cambridge 1978–85, and succeeded him to the 1931 Chair of Geography in 1996. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991.

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