



BILL MEAD

William Richard Mead

1915–2014

WILLIAM RICHARD MEAD, universally known as ‘Bill’, was the leading British expert on the geography of Northern Europe and a tireless advocate for enhancing British understanding of Scandinavia and Finland. His academic output of books and articles spanned three-quarters of a century. Elected a Senior Fellow of the British Academy in 1994, he was also a member of the academies of science and letters in Finland and Norway. Bill was very active in each of the three main societies promoting geography in the United Kingdom, and chaired the Anglo-Finnish Society for three decades. He was also a well-known figure in the Nordic diplomatic and business communities in London. He adopted Finland geographically and emotionally and was in turn adopted by scholars and friends throughout Northern Europe, who recognised him as their ‘travelling ambassador’. His writing powerfully evoked the landscapes and societies of the Nordic lands and revealed his affectionate commitment to their peoples.

Early years in Aylesbury

Bill was born on 29 July 1915, the first son of William Mead and Catherine Sarah (née Stevens). William senior came from a farming family in Stewkley in the Vale of Aylesbury and, as the fourth of seven sons, had to find other work. Catherine was also of farming stock. Together with his brother Leopold, William senior served apprenticeship with a corn chandler and the two men became master grocers and provision merchants, acquiring premises at 37 Buckingham Street, Aylesbury. Bill and his younger brother

John (always known as Jack) were born in the apartment over the shop.¹ Their mother died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, six months after giving birth to Jack. Initially, the boys were cared for by relatives but their father soon employed Jenny King who had looked after him and Leopold after their own mother died. Jenny became a surrogate mother figure to Bill and Jack, being still employed as housekeeper to the Mead family during the Second World War, long after William remarried in 1929. His new wife was a nurse who had cared for him in hospital and of whom Bill became very fond.² Long into retirement, he recalled how the shop and apartment in Aylesbury yielded various smells, declaring ‘best of all were those from the coffee mill, the tea bin and drawers containing cloves and peppercorns ... The odour of the occasional Italian gorgonzola was most powerful of all.’³

Bill did not start to read until he was seven but thereafter reading and writing became his passion. In addition to his academic work, he wrote long letters to relatives and friends, and recorded observations in notebooks and diaries, with ‘the habit of writing down impressions becoming well-nigh automatic’.⁴ His schooling began at the Temple School in Aylesbury where his rapid progress earned him prizes; a copy of *Heroes of England*, awarded in December 1924, survives to this day. Bill also learned much from weekend walks with his father and from more distant trips in a pony and trap to visit family in the Vale of Aylesbury and on the Chiltern Hills. In this way, ‘the town and its surroundings became a little *patrie* ... Walking the streets, roads, lanes and footpaths, with time to stand and stare and question [formed] a childhood education no less important than that received at school.’⁵ On long Sunday walks Bill came to recognise different soils, plants, flowers and animals, first learning their popular names and later acquiring their Latin nomenclature. One of his favourite weekend rides was on the northern side of the heavy clay vale where his father turned the pony off the gravelled track to cross the ‘switchback grassland’ that landscape historians would describe as ‘ridge and furrow’.

Many decades later, Bill declared in truly poetic terms his affection for his ‘little *patrie*’:

¹ W. R. Mead, ‘Autobiographical reflections in a geographical context’, in A. Buttimer (ed.), *The Practice of Geography* (London, 1983), p. 45.

² Information from Bill Willett, citing Bill’s diary for 1 April 1929.

³ W. R. Mead, *Aylesbury: a Personal Memoir from the 1920s* (Aylesbury, 1996), revised and expanded edition (Aston Clinton, 2009), p. 21.

⁴ Mead, ‘Autobiographical reflections’, p. 48.

⁵ Mead, *Aylesbury*, p. 85.

My green valley is a broad Vale. I can recall moments (recent as well as long ago) when time was suspended in it. It is a green vision, luminous in early June haze, best perceived floating downhill into the warmth of the Vale on a bicycle or riding along a bridle path with near-ripe grasses tapping the toes in the stirrup. It is just before the hay is mown [when] the sense of place is at its most personal.⁶

Such emotions were anticipated by novelist Georges Duhamel's attachment to his ancestral area in the Île-de-France, and whose words Bill cited with admiration:

To this narrow stretch of countryside I have bound myself through an intimate acquaintance with the trees, the seasons, the scents of the living earth, all sorts of tastes, joys and passions. From it, I have received my first and my most affecting impressions of the world . . . This is my fief, my personal possession, my very earth.⁷

At the age of eleven Bill moved to Aylesbury Grammar School that had about 250 pupils, with more boys than girls in attendance, most of whom paid a modest fee.⁸ He was attracted to botany, history, English Literature and French, rather than to mathematics and chemistry. In each case, the appeal of the teacher was of major importance. Lessons were complemented by botanical walks. He recalled that 'to stand in a green meadow and to begin to identify one or two of the more than a hundred different types of grasses was a revelation'.⁹ However, it was the teaching of English that most impressed Bill, 'because of the personality of the master and the elegance of his exegesis'.¹⁰ Latin was dropped in favour of French, a language that Bill enjoyed reading and that seemed to him to be 'the natural language of geography'.¹¹ He acquired the fundamentals of geography from a former naval officer who travelled widely during the First World War and made enthusiastic use of maps in his classes. Bill soon started to draw them for sheer pleasure. Private lessons in singing and piano playing added to musical instruction from the geography master.

After success in the School Certificate examinations Bill was one of only three pupils to move into the arts group of sixth formers. Teaching was on a tutorial basis, with scholars being required to read widely and to prepare a weekly essay for each subject. After having been read aloud, written work was criticised by the master and the other boys. By this time,

⁶ Mead, 'Autobiographical reflections', p. 47.

⁷ Ibid., citing G. Duhamel, *La géographie cordiale de l'Europe* (Paris, 1931), pp. 10–11.

⁸ Information from Keith Smith, former head of Aylesbury Grammar School.

⁹ Mead, *Aylesbury*, p. 61.

¹⁰ Mead, 'Autobiographical reflections', p. 48.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 47.

Bill felt that he was experiencing ‘words dancing on a page and print becoming alive’.¹² Creative writing, beyond what was required for sixth-form English, French and Geography, became an enjoyable pastime. A new master recently graduated from Nottingham University drew on his lecture notes to convey current ideas in geography. With Higher School Certificate examinations completed in 1934 and prizes received, Bill prepared to become a schoolmaster.

Higher education in London

Following medical examinations confirming physical fitness and excellent eyesight, Bill began a course of training at the College of St Mark and St John in Chelsea. Classes in teaching methods and the psychology of learning were complemented by classroom experience. He duly obtained his Teaching Certificate in 1936 but had already responded to the prospect of a frustrating life as a schoolmaster. He sought to study for a degree in English on a part-time basis, but the absence of Latin in his Higher School Certificate disqualified him from courses in arts faculties in English universities. An alternative route to a degree was possible through the external system of the University of London. In 1935 Bill registered to read for a B.Sc. Econ. qualification, working in his own time and without tuition. This wide-ranging programme comprised nine papers in the social sciences, embracing economics, political science, economic history, international history, commerce, currency, French and a special subject.¹³ Bill opted to specialise in geography and prepared to sit papers on economic geography and the regional geography of Europe. As well as social activities and supply teaching to raise funds, he attended evening lectures and weekend conferences at the London School of Economics (LSE), all on an informal basis. He devoured books on economics and history, and devised a distinctly personal strategy towards the geography of Europe. This involved avoiding textbooks and instead reading a work of fiction or poetry that related to each of the countries being considered.¹⁴ He attended concerts and theatrical performances each week, rapidly developing an enthusiasm for works by Nordic composers and playwrights. In this way, Bill conceived his own notion of geography, which was emphatically

¹² Mead, ‘Autobiographical reflections’, p. 48.

¹³ Information from Professor Michael Wise.

¹⁴ Conversation with Jan Stølen, 1979.

literary, linguistic and cultural, set on the bedrock of economics and tempered with a personal appreciation of natural history.

Working independently placed him under much strain, and in the final year of his degree he collapsed in a corridor at the LSE. He was rushed to Charing Cross Hospital, where appendicitis was suspected but not diagnosed. He was driven home to Aylesbury to recover, but ‘recurrent bouts of shaking occurred, mostly by night for some weeks—and, indeed, at diminishing intervals for some months’.¹⁵ At this time, ‘music was the only source of relaxation, tennis companions had disappeared, and swimming had no appeal’, but after seeing riders on Wimbledon Common ‘a course of riding lessons was arranged’.¹⁶ Thereafter, horse riding provided Bill with physical exercise and a chance to think through whatever was on his mind.

With his degree completed in 1937, he decided to work toward a higher qualification, drawing on a bequest of £500 from an uncle. At the LSE he was attracted to the work of economic historian Eileen Power, but she was overburdened with students so he turned to the geographers.¹⁷ Under the headship of Professor Llewellyn Rodwell Jones, they comprised L. Dudley Stamp, Hilda Ormsby, Stanley Beaver and W. Gordon East. A growing interest in the literature and music of Finland, and its changing commercial relations since 1918, provided the spatial and thematic focus for his master’s dissertation. Dudley Stamp might have been the most appropriate advisor since he had visited Finland, but he was heavily committed to the Land Utilisation Survey.¹⁸ Bill turned for help to Hilda Ormsby, a specialist on France.¹⁹ Enjoying his status as an internal student he attended classes given by the geographers and entered into the social life of the graduate community. As well as reading in the library of the British Museum, he made use of trade statistics kept by the Royal Statistical Society and the London Chamber of Commerce. Together with a few friends Bill started to learn Swedish, enabling him to use bilingual publications on Finland. He already had a rudimentary knowledge of German acquired from reading for his first degree and this helped him to scrutinise summaries of geographical writing on Northern Europe. In these endeavours,

¹⁵ Undated note from W. R. Mead.

¹⁶ Undated note from W. R. Mead.

¹⁷ Eileen Power died on 8 August 1940, at the age of fifty-one.

¹⁸ L.D. Stamp, ‘Finland: Suomi’, *Geography*, 16 (1931), 284–97.

¹⁹ Through correspondence and occasional visits, he kept in close contact with Hilda Ormsby (who retired from the LSE in 1939) and with Gordon East, a subsequent mentor, for the rest of their lives; see, W. R. Mead, ‘William Gordon East, 1902–1998’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24 (1998), 352–5; R. J. Harrison Church, ‘Hilda Ormsby, 1877–1973’, *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies* 5 (1981), 95–7.

he made friends with younger members of the Finnish and Swedish communities in London.

In the summer of 1938, Bill made his first visit to Finland, travelling with his medical student brother aboard the *Aallotar* from Hull to Helsinki. The return fare was £10 per person, including meals. He recalled: 'Finland was smelled before it was seen [and] the strong scent of hay was succeeded by that of coniferous woodlands.'²⁰ Bill and Jack marvelled at the cheapness of pre-war Finland as they explored the streets of Helsinki, and made a reconnaissance trip around the country by train and ferry. Bill gathered information on trade and agriculture to assist his research; the brothers returned to Hull on the *SS Arcturus*. In the following year, Bill completed his M.Sc. Econ. dissertation entitled 'A geographical consideration of successive reorientations in the foreign trade of Finland'. It traced the physical and historical basis of the Finnish economy and then focused on commercial relations between Finland, the United Kingdom and Germany after 1918. The complementarity of trade between the three countries was presented in Bill's first academic publication.²¹

He planned to visit Iceland in 1939 but failed to obtain a berth. Instead, he spent the summer in Denmark, making a brief trip into southern Sweden. Making copious notes about the locations visited, Bill returned to London with material that he would use in early articles. His appetite for research was whetted and he registered for doctoral work as an internal student at the LSE. Academics and students of the School were soon evacuated to Cambridge, affording Bill the opportunity to read in the University Library, to draft several papers and to enjoy student life.²² In his own words: 'For one delightful, yet anxious year, I became an undergraduate in spirit.'²³ He recalled attending a concert in King's College Chapel on a bitterly cold evening 'with fierce draughts blowing the dripping wax from the candles into virtual wings on their lee side'.²⁴ The climax was an organ rendition of *Finlandia* 'with military trumpeters

²⁰ W. R. Mead, *Adopting Finland* (Helsinki, 2007) p. 14.

²¹ W. R. Mead, 'Anglo-Finnish commercial relations since 1918', *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries*, 2 (1939), 117–25.

²² W. R. Mead, 'Agriculture in Finland', *Economic Geography*, 15 (1939), 125–34, 217–34; W. R. Mead, 'Finland and the winter freeze', *Geography*, 24 (1939), 221–9; W. R. Mead, 'Finland in the sixteenth century', *Geographical Review*, 30 (1940), 400–11.

²³ Archive of the Royal Geographical Society: LMS M19: W. R. Mead (Undated letters from Canada). At this time Bill did not meet H. C. Darby who was working on Naval Intelligence activities; however, Darby was aware of his publications.

²⁴ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, p. 20.

sending other than winter shivers down the spine'.²⁵ With friends, he worked to raise funds for the Finnish Red Cross following the Soviet invasion of November 1939. One month earlier he volunteered to serve in the Royal Air Force but was not called up until June 1940.

Trans-Atlantic experiences

Despite physical fitness and excellent vision, Bill was not trained as a pilot but was directed to an administrative post in a navigation school. The reason for this decision is unknown, but his collapse at the LSE would have rung medical alarm bells. Bill's initial posting to a camp in Yorkshire was followed by three months at Helgafell in Iceland. After earlier disappointment, he was thrilled by the thought of going there and was 'probably the only happy man on the boat'.²⁶ Reykjavik 'glittered fascinatingly in the distance, but was out of bounds' to airmen.²⁷ After Iceland, he moved to Mount Hope near Hamilton, Ontario, where the navigation school was established. Bill provided administrative assistance to the camp commander and was responsible for drafting monthly reports on pilot training. His various tasks were accomplished expeditiously, allowing plenty of time for other activities. Bill's diaries and notebooks give a record of events, offer attractive accounts of the local environment and include passages of creative, fictional writing.²⁸ Letters to friends were typed faultlessly, single-spaced and often exceeded three or four sides.²⁹ Never dated, they avoided mention of work at the camp but they reveal how Bill engaged with the cultural life of Hamilton, attending concerts, plays and poetry readings, and even organising such events with local residents and like-minded airmen. Weekend leave was spent travelling by coach, train or as a hitch-hiker through rural Ontario. Bill also ventured into Quebec where he encountered Father Arthur Maheux, professor of history at Laval University, who gave him an entrée to French-speaking farming families. During an extended leave Bill travelled over the Prairies and through the Rockies to Vancouver Island. On another occasion he went

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Videotaped interview with Torsten Hägerstrand, 1979; A. Buttimer, 'Torsten Hägerstrand, 1916–2004', *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies*, 26 (2007), 119–57.

²⁷ Diary entry, 15 May 1941.

²⁸ The 'cold farm' notebooks have been given to Asustumuseo in Lapinlahti; other diaries and notebooks have been deposited in the Geography Department archive at UCL.

²⁹ Undated letters in the Archive of the RGS, LMS M19: W. R. Mead (Letters from Canada).

to Washington DC where he was introduced to a senator who showed him the Scandinavian section of an official information department with an empty desk awaiting the appointment of an appropriate specialist. Despite Bill's interviews, essays and jottings, there is no way of knowing what his wartime duties really entailed.

Important contacts were made at McMaster University in Hamilton, where James Wreford Watson taught geography and sociology, having left Edinburgh with his wife in 1939 for a new life in Canada.³⁰ As well as shouldering a heavy teaching burden, Wreford Watson was undertaking doctoral research into the settlement and development of the Niagara peninsula, under the patronage of Professor T. Griffith Taylor at the University of Toronto. Bill became a life-long friend of the Watsons who offered him much scholarly support, not least in facilitating access to the library resources of McMaster. As well as exploring rural Ontario, Bill used some weekends to consult material in public libraries in Hamilton and Toronto. At first he focused his reading on Canada but soon turned to works on Northern Europe, with the preparation of his doctorate in mind.

Late in 1943, Bill returned to England and joined an educational unit based at a tented camp at Old Sarum in Wiltshire. Carbon copies of some of the letters that he sent to the Watsons and other friends in Ontario provide vivid descriptions of camp life, cultural activities in Salisbury, weekend visits to theatres and art galleries in London, and occasional periods of leave spent with his father and stepmother in Aylesbury. They reveal that his unit was charged with providing practical or scholarly training to help prepare airmen for civilian life. Trained teachers were identified to give classes, with Bill sharing responsibility for geography and history. Years later, in a couple of tantalising sentences in his conversation with Torsten Hägerstrand, he mentioned 'helping planning the invasion of Europe', and stressed that it was 'helpful to know about maps'; he did not elaborate.³¹ Throughout his time at Mount Hope and at Old Sarum, Bill drafted academic articles on Denmark and Finland that drew on earlier fieldwork and reading. An essay on Canada and the Northern countries soon appeared.³²

The interruption of the war years meant that Bill's registration at the University of London changed to external status. While he was still at

³⁰G. Robinson, 'James Wreford Watson, 1915–1990', *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies*, 17 (1997), 106–15.

³¹Videotaped interview with T. Hägerstrand, 1979.

³²W. R. Mead, 'Canada and the Northern Countries', *The Norseman*, 1 (1943), 438–43.

Cambridge he had proposed 'The geographical background to community of interests among the North European peoples' as a thesis title.³³ This was accepted by the external division of the University and two examiners were appointed. Unfortunately they required amendments to Bill's text and cartographic illustrations.³⁴ On learning this news, Wreford Watson wrote that he was:

astonished and distressed to hear of your misfortune. However, you must not take it to heart, because really you did a magnificent job considering the many limitations within which you laboured ... You have a unique skill with maps, and it was a real thrill to see them being developed. I think you were very unfortunate in your examiners, neither of whom has ever shown any imagination in illustrating their texts.³⁵

In February 1946 Bill was given early release from the RAF. Comparing his experience with that of many contemporaries, he acknowledged that 'the war years were kind to me'.³⁶ Together with his brother Jack, he lived near St Paul's Cathedral in an apartment block that rose up 'like the hull of a ship in the midst of a sea of ruins'.³⁷ Another room in the same building was occupied by a Norwegian student named Harald Meltzer who became a firm friend. Over the following months Bill met frequently with Gordon East as he prepared to resubmit his work, described by his mentor as 'a substantial and penetrating study [derived from] a study of its native literatures and direct observation'.³⁸ He broke away from rewriting to teach a summer school in Norway. With his thesis approaching completion, he needed to find work and was flattered to receive a telegram from Wreford Watson inviting him to join McMaster University.³⁹ Negotiations proceeded on courses, accommodation and salary, but Bill was reluctant to leave his ailing father and stepmother, and Gordon East advised against making a life in Canada. Bill was interviewed to fill a forthcoming Scandinavia vacancy at the Research Department of the Foreign Office and was offered the post starting in the autumn of 1947. Bill was unsure whether he would be suited to the civil service and was delighted when the British Council announced that a government scholarship from

³³ Diary entry for 28 January 1940.

³⁴ University of London, AC 8/24/2/1 Minutes of the Board of Studies in Geography, 9 October 1944; the examiners were Professors A. A. Miller (Reading) and C. B. Fawcett (UCL).

³⁵ Letter from James Wreford Watson, dated 14 August 1945.

³⁶ Mead, 'Autobiographical recollections', p. 50.

³⁷ Undated letter from W. R. Mead to friends in Canada.

³⁸ Letter from W. G. East, dated 14 August 1946.

³⁹ Telegram from J. Wreford Watson dated 18 February 1946.

Finland or Sweden could be his for the asking. He accepted the Swedish award that would enable him to visit Stockholm, Uppsala and Helsinki.

On 20 December 1946, examiners Austin Miller and Gordon East passed Bill's revised thesis following a spirited oral defence.⁴⁰ The date was recorded as 'the day of wrath' in his diary.⁴¹ Even before this event he had applied for teaching posts in the Universities of Liverpool and Southampton. Bill's thesis explored the physical, historical, economic and political conditions of the Nordic countries, and then sketched the characteristics of what he called 'the Fennoscandinavian community', contrasting processes of integration with those sustaining separate national identities. Many years later, Bill dismissed the thesis as 'a strange piece of work' that was 'not very good, really a kind of political, historical geography'.⁴² It was not published in its entirety, but served as the starting point for several essays.⁴³

From Liverpool to Finland

Professor Henry Clifford Darby FBA, former lecturer at Cambridge and recently appointed head of geography at Liverpool, requested Bill to meet with departmental colleagues prior to his interview on 3 December 1946.⁴⁴ With his doctorate awaiting examination and fifteen scholarly papers published, Bill was an attractive catch who was praised by his referees. Rodwell Jones noted his 'excellent character, pleasing personality, and considerable culture. He writes and speaks well, and has shown initiative and industry in his research.'⁴⁵ Hilda Ormsby declared: 'He has an original mind, great thoroughness and conscientiousness in his work as well as genuine enthusiasm.'⁴⁶ Gordon East stressed Bill's performance in

⁴⁰ University of London, AC 8/24/2/1 Minutes of the Board of Studies in Geography, Letter dated 5 December 1946 from E. C. Roberts to S. H. Beaver, Secretary of the Board, setting the date of the oral. C. B. Fawcett was teaching in the USA at that time.

⁴¹ Diary entry for 20 December 1946.

⁴² Interview with T. Hägerstrand, 1979.

⁴³ W. R. Mead, 'Scandinavia and the future of Scandinavianism', *The Norseman*, 4 (1946), 85–92; W. R. Mead, 'Problems of Scandinavia and Finland', in W. G. East and A. E. Moodie (eds.), *The Changing World* (London, 1955), pp. 138–61.

⁴⁴ Letter from H. C. Darby, dated 26 November 1946; M. Williams, 'Henry Clifford Darby, 1909–1992', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1995), 289–306; H. Clout, 'Henry Clifford Darby, 1909–1992', *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies*, 26 (2007), 79–97.

⁴⁵ Letter to Faculty of Arts, University of Liverpool, dated 28 November 1946.

⁴⁶ Letter to Faculty of Arts, University of Liverpool, dated 3 December 1946.

graduate seminars ‘where he has shown liveliness of mind, facility in expressing his ideas, and considerable enthusiasm for the subject he wishes to teach ... He would, I am sure, make a congenial and cooperative colleague.’⁴⁷ Despite a much lower salary than that offered by the Foreign Office, Bill was strongly attracted to Liverpool and accepted the post, beginning on 1 January 1947. Sixty years later, he recalled:

Post-war Liverpool was very down-at-heel and the severe winter of 1947 did not help. Candles had to be purchased in anticipation of possible electricity failures, fingers were crossed in case the lowly flames of the gas fires petered out through lack of pressure, blankets were carried to unheated places of entertainment.⁴⁸

Clifford Darby encouraged Bill to develop his research in Scandinavia and on agricultural geography, and allocated classes on economic geography and North America for him to teach. As Bill later remarked, this was ‘a fate too good to be true’.⁴⁹ Darby revealed the scholarly significance of ‘ridge and furrow’, and also introduced Bill to the writings of Pehr Kalm, a disciple of Carl Linnaeus, who visited England in 1748 before travelling to North America. Bill was soon appointed assistant warden at Derby Hall, the principal hall of residence for men, where ‘something of the war-time camaraderie’ was found among young academics and the students, many of whom were ex-servicemen.⁵⁰ The University had a flourishing music society and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra performed in icily cold venues. Choral singing and tennis provided Bill with further enjoyment. He was elected to the University’s Roscoe Society and gave a paper on early British travellers to Finland, initiating a stream of publications on connections between Britain and the Nordic countries.⁵¹

During the spring vacation of 1947, Bill delivered lectures on the economic geography of Britain at the School of Economics in Stockholm and made contact with geographers at the Universities of Uppsala and Stockholm.⁵² Then he moved on to Helsinki where he joined Helmer Smeds on a visit to farming communities in the Vaasa area and in Savo province. With the hindsight of almost half a century, he reported:

⁴⁷ Letter to Faculty of Arts, University of Liverpool, dated 29 November 1946.

⁴⁸ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Mead, ‘Autobiographical recollections’, p. 51.

⁵⁰ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, p.24.

⁵¹ W. R. Mead, ‘The discovery of Finland by the British’, *The Norseman*, 7 (1949), 1–16.

⁵² W. R. Mead, *An Experience of Finland* (London, 1993), p. 12.

To return to post-war Finland was to enter a destitute country stripped of its many assets. Its youth had been decimated, it had lost a tenth of its territory, a tenth of its population were refugees, and an immense reparations programme, scheduled to last until 1952, had been imposed. Inflation was unavoidable. Marshall Aid did not extend to Finland ... Survival was the objective'.⁵³

In the summer of 1948, Bill visited war-torn northern Norway to witness the slow reconstruction of Finnmark, and then travelled south into Finland and thence to Stockholm.⁵⁴

Having returned to Liverpool, he was introduced to a representative of the Rockefeller Foundation's Social Science Programme that was funding a team working with Heikki Waris, professor of sociology in Helsinki, to investigate the resettlement of displaced farmers from eastern Karelia that had been annexed by the USSR. From his reading and visits to Finland, Bill displayed an impressive familiarity with the issue and obtained funding for research among Karelian families resettled in Lapinlahti parish. His enquiries were designed to mesh in with investigations undertaken by the sociologists.⁵⁵ Bill spent the greater part of the 1949–50 academic year living and working among the 'cold farmers', as they felled trees and broke in land for cultivation or improved grazing land. In his absence, Clifford Darby decided to leave Liverpool, and had important plans for his colleague.

Back in Finland, thirty farmers and their wives agreed to keep detailed work diaries for specified weeks over a period of nine months in which they noted their activity patterns. Bill recorded his own observations on the 'cold farms' in notebooks that provided a valuable source of information for half a dozen articles, but his proposed monograph was never written.⁵⁶ Many years later, he would deposit his 'cold farm' notebooks in Asustusmuseo in Lapinlahti. To complement his fieldwork, Bill spent several months in archives and libraries in Helsinki, where he made his first acquaintance with the records of the Finnish Economic Society and with the writings of historian Zachris Topelius, who pioneered geographical teaching in Finland. Before returning to England, Bill spoke at a confer-

⁵³ W. R. Mead, *An Experience of Finland* (London, 1993), p. 12.

⁵⁴ W. R. Mead, 'Finnmark: an historic-geographical study', *Canadian Geographical Journal*, 59 (1942), 240–7; W. R. Mead, 'Reconstruction in Finland', *The Norseman*, 5 (1947), 395–405.

⁵⁵ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, pp. 35–49.

⁵⁶ W. R. Mead, 'All chance, direction', *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis*, 63 (1998), 131–40, p. 139; W. R. Mead, 'The cold farm in Finland', *Geographical Review*, 44 (1951), 529–43; W. R. Mead, 'The changing geography of a Finnish lakeland parish', *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 30(1976), 93–101; W. R. Mead, 'Three generations: a long term study in the historical geography of Finland', *Geography*, 92 (2007), 294–8.

ence and taught English at a British Council summer school. In June 1950, he reported to the Rockefeller Foundation:

My stay has been most exhilarating [but] out in the field, my initially slight knowledge of Finnish was sorely tested. One does not take marked regional accents into account. Each visit into the country, however, makes me feel more at ease. Swedish has been mastered to the extent that I have been able to read a paper in it to the university geographical society.⁵⁷

Looking back on the experience sixty years later, he remarked:

The generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation was more than matched by that of the Finns. It resulted in a great new circle of friends and acquaintances—friends, indeed, for life. Even more important, it marked the beginning of Finland as a home from home.⁵⁸

Life at University College London

Bill expected to resume work in Liverpool but Clifford Darby's decision in March 1949 to accept a chair at University College London (UCL) would change his colleague's career. As he contemplated reorganising and expanding the geography department at UCL, Darby wrote to the Provost of the College requesting:

that a lecturer be appointed to deal with aspects of human and economic geography. I have in mind William Richard Mead. He has published many papers, and has just finished writing a book on the agricultural geography of Finland, where he has spent a good deal of time. He has been awarded a Rockefeller Research Fellowship to go to Finland again.⁵⁹

Having been informed of these developments, Bill was reluctant to leave his friends in Liverpool but he recognised that London had very much to offer.⁶⁰ The embassies of the Nordic countries and their related societies were all located in the capital. UCL had the largest concentration of Scandinavian specialists in the country, and the library resources of the British Museum were but a few minutes' walk away. The cultural life of London's theatres, concert halls and art galleries had a strong appeal. Bill's father and stepmother could be reached easily from central London,

⁵⁷ Letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, dated 9 June 1950; Bill continued to feel more comfortable speaking Swedish rather than Finnish.

⁵⁸ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, 49.

⁵⁹ Letter to the Provost of UCL, dated 17 May 1949.

⁶⁰ Letter to the University of Liverpool, dated 11 July 1949.

having moved from their apartment above the shop in Aylesbury to a bungalow in the nearby village of Aston Clinton, chosen because of its absence of stairs. Once he arrived at UCL, Bill established a routine that would stand for three decades. Each Friday lunchtime he boarded a Green Line coach that took him to his parental home, which was also his weekend retreat. The journey north was spent reading or drafting book reviews or letters. Two or three hours each Saturday and Sunday were devoted to horse riding, an activity that 'never failed to recharge the mental as well as the physical batteries'.⁶¹ Church was attended, with Bill singing in the choir and sometimes playing the organ. On Monday he returned to the apartment in Kensington that he rented from UCL and to his duties in the College.

Within the geography department Bill assumed responsibility for the small group of students taking the Economics and Geography joint degree, and lectured on the optional economic geography and North America courses. The latter course was shared with Eric Brown, who first met Bill at Mount Hope in 1942 while receiving advanced flying tuition.⁶² Their lectures were complemented by map classes, and the textbook they crafted from the course was distinguished by detailed case studies that brought general principles and regional discussions to life.⁶³ In addition to teaching, Bill produced a torrent of papers relating to resettled Karelians, the formation of geographical knowledge in Northern Europe, and the transfer of ideas and commodities between Britain and Scandinavia.⁶⁴ In 1951 this early work earned him the Gill Memorial Prize from the Royal Geographical Society. His research monograph on farming in Finland, started in Liverpool, was reaching completion.

Clifford Darby was keen to establish links with North American geographers and in 1952 he, Bill and Eric crossed the Atlantic on the *Queen Mary* to attend the seventeenth International Geographical Congress, held in early August in Washington DC. Bill delivered a paper on seasonal time use on Finland's pioneer farms.⁶⁵ Prior to the conference the three men travelled across the continent to California. Bill made a strong

⁶¹ Mead, 'All chance, direction', p. 139.

⁶² Information from Professor Eric Brown, 15 December 2014.

⁶³ W. R. Mead and E. H. Brown, *The United States and Canada* (London, 1962).

⁶⁴ A full list of publications is provided in Mead, *Adopting Finland*, 146–51, and W. R. Mead, *Towards a Commonplace Book* (Aston Clinton, 2015), 89–97.

⁶⁵ W. R. Mead, 'Seasonal time use on Finland's pioneer farms', in International Geographical Union, *Abstracts of Papers of the XVIIth International Geographical Congress*. (Washington DC, 1952), 55–6.

impression at the University of Minnesota and was invited to spend the following spring quarter there. Before Bill's departure aboard the *Île-de-France*, Darby initiated the process for promotion to a Readership. He specified that Bill's long list of publications represented 'a very substantial and important contribution to the subject', and argued that their author was 'one of the most successful teachers I have ever known'.⁶⁶ He continued: '[Mead] is generally recognised as one of the most active workers among English geographers, [occupying] a distinctive position as a specialist on Scandinavia ... From the point of view of the Department, it would be a calamity if he left us.' While in Minnesota, Bill investigated farming families of Finnish origin, using work diaries as he had done at Lapinlahti.⁶⁷ After returning to England, he spent the summer of 1953 undertaking research and visiting friends in Northern Europe. His monograph on farming in Finland appeared and was generally well received, but negative comments from some critics distressed him.⁶⁸ In December the title of Reader in Geography was conferred. Invitations to apply for chairs in Britain, Canada, the USA and Australia were declined politely, since UCL afforded a congenial environment to satisfy his academic and cultural interests. At this time he bought his first horse, 'on the understanding that, in exchange for [my] looking after it, it would be used by other paying riders'.⁶⁹

In September 1955, Bill delivered six lectures on Scandinavia at the Centre Universitaire des Hautes Études Européennes in Strasbourg. Articles on Finland and Scandinavia continued to flow and in 1958 his major book appeared on the economic geography of the Nordic countries.⁷⁰ It built on Lionel Robbins's definition of economic behaviour as 'the disposal of scarce means between alternate ends' and exemplified the notion of geography as 'a discipline in distance' proposed by Wreford Watson.⁷¹ Combining 'a general picture with very particular illustrations', the book drew upon Bill's fieldwork and his vast knowledge of the writings of Scandinavian colleagues.⁷² With typical modesty, he informed his

⁶⁶ Letter from H. C. Darby, dated 23 February 1953.

⁶⁷ W. R. Mead, 'A Finnish settlement in Minnesota', *Acta Geographica*, 13 (1954), 1–16.

⁶⁸ W. R. Mead, *Farming in Finland* (London, 1953); E. Van Cleef, 'Farming in Finland', *Economic Geography*, 30 (1954), 180–1; Mead, 'All chance, direction', p. 134.

⁶⁹ Undated note from W. R. Mead.

⁷⁰ W. R. Mead, *An Economic Geography of the Scandinavian States and Finland* (London, 1958).

⁷¹ L. Robbins, *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London, 1932), p. 16; J. W. Watson, 'Geography – a discipline in distance', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 71 (1955), 1–13.

⁷² Conversation with T. Hägerstrand, 1979.

old friend Torsten Hägerstrand that it was ‘not a very good book’, partly because the publisher insisted that it should appear, even though it was ‘not completed’. Despite uneven treatment of manufacturing and the lack of a consolidated bibliography, reviewers praised his injection of personal experience and the originality of his diagrams.⁷³ With the publication of this work Bill’s reputation as the leading British geographical expert on the Nordic countries was confirmed.

Working with unfailing support from Eric Brown, Bill proved himself an effective acting head of department when Darby spent study leave in the USA. Early in 1961 negotiations were begun for promotion to a personal chair, with Darby declaring: ‘If by any chance we did lose him, it would be a very great blow to our strength.’⁷⁴ He reiterated, ‘Dr. Mead is the leading authority in England on [the Nordic lands] and is a most successful teacher.’⁷⁵ Bill acquired a chair in September 1961, and despite many commitments, including being secretary of the Board of Studies in Geography for the University of London (without any clerical support), he continued to be highly productive. Books and articles continued to appear. In 1963 he launched a systematic course on the human geography of Northern Europe. Lectures were delivered without notes, as the spirit moved. They were replete with references to poetry, music, plays, works of fiction and even restaurants. Many undergraduates were not on Bill’s wavelength and lecture notes were brief, but they were made aware of potential linkages between seemingly disparate aspects of knowledge. At this time, the teaching of economic geography was allocated to others. As a supervisor of graduate students, Bill was probably at his best with mature candidates who comprehended his literary allusions, or with those who had the confidence to devise their own plan of work. Unlike historical geographer Darby and geomorphologist Eric Brown, Bill did not establish a ‘school’ of doctoral students.⁷⁶

In the summer of 1966, Clifford Darby returned to Cambridge.⁷⁷ Anticipating this event, Provost Ifor Evans had invited Bill to prepare to

⁷³H. Myklebost, ‘An economic geography of Norden’, *Geographical Journal*, 125 (1959), 411–13; G. Chabot, ‘Une géographie économique des états scandinaves et de la Finlande’, *Annales de Géographie*, 68 (1959), 356–68. A letter dated 16 December 1956 reveals that Bill planned to write two books, on Finland 1750–1850 and on Anglo-Finnish relations; these were never completed but much of the material appeared in articles.

⁷⁴Letter from H. C. Darby to Sir Ifor Evans, Provost of UCL, dated 14 February 1961.

⁷⁵Letter from H. C. Darby to Sir Ifor Evans, Provost of UCL, dated 9 May 1961.

⁷⁶His main protégés are Michael Jones, Michael Branch, Aileen Carpenter, Jim Bater, Oiva Saarinen, Elizabeth Kenworthy-Teather and Andrew Dawson.

⁷⁷H. Clout, *Geography at University College London: a Brief History* (London, 2003), p. 29.

move into the established chair and to head the geography department, being confident that ‘our colleagues will agree’.⁷⁸ Recalling the situation a quarter century later, Bill declared that he was ‘very alarmed when Clifford said he was going to Cambridge. I didn’t really want to take on the Department being happily established in my own personal chair.’⁷⁹ He feared that the added responsibilities would erode his time for research and learned societies.⁸⁰ Some wondered whether this horse-riding, European traveller would cope with the task of running a large and growing department but, as Eric Brown confided, ‘cometh the hour, cometh the man’.⁸¹ For the next fifteen years, Bill was a largely effective head who operated a discrete, some might say *laissez-faire*, management style totally different from that of Clifford Darby. Once an administrative task had been allocated to a colleague then that person was left to do their best. When it came to making new academic appointments, Bill always sought ‘the best one for the job’. Staff meetings under his chairmanship could be mystifying, since he assumed a high level of prior knowledge and tended to speak in parables. Senior departmental colleagues were sometimes irritated by his opaque style. New lecturers realised that it took time to crack his codes, and some never did. There was implicit encouragement but no career advice was offered. Nonetheless, Bill ran a happy department, with his laughter echoing along corridors. He inspired loyalty among his staff and friendly respect from his students. He invited undergraduates for light suppers at his flat, organised student parties and made unforgettable open sandwich lunches—often accompanied by strong Scandinavian spirits—for colleagues and visitors. Flowers for the secretaries were brought from his garden in Aston Clinton.

Beyond Geography, Bill was firmly committed to College life, serving as Vice-Dean and then Dean of the large Faculty of Arts, with two dozen departments. His tact and good humour proved very effective and he acquired a reputation for pouring oil on troubled waters and dealing with ‘difficult’ people. He served on many committees ranging from the Promotion of Scandinavian Studies, to Student Accommodation, Appointments and Promotions, and Technical Staff. He chaired the Pensions and Superannuation committee for twelve years, only stepping down when he retired. He declared that he hated dealing with money, but

⁷⁸ Letter from Sir Ifor Evans to W. R. Mead, dated 27 May 1965.

⁷⁹ Comment by W. R. Mead at a celebration in 1981 to mark his retirement.

⁸⁰ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, p. 71.

⁸¹ Comment from Professor Eric Brown to the author.

belonged to a small and very influential sub-committee of the Finance Committee that took crucial decisions affecting the future of the College.⁸² He greatly enjoyed membership of the Chamber Music Society, the Professor's Dining Club, the Crabtree Foundation and other gatherings at UCL. Among geographers, the Maconochie Foundation brought together colleagues and associates from further afield and continued to flourish during his benevolent regime. When Bill reached his sixtieth birthday, Provost Noël Annan sent a flattering handwritten note thanking him

for all the work you do in the College. You not only run the best department in the College, you also cement so many alliances and promote so much good fellowship, and oil so many wheels. No great institution can operate without one such as you ... You are held in the deepest respect and affection throughout the College.⁸³

For two decades Bill was also a member of the council of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, where Finnish was taught. Later, he was satisfied when this independent institute of the University of London, which he described as 'a wonderful place but also a nightmare of a place', joined UCL in 1999.⁸⁴

As well as teaching and administration at UCL and many external commitments, Bill remained remarkably productive, seeking to put pen to paper every day. From being appointed head of Geography to retirement fifteen years later, he brought out ten books, a dozen book chapters and twenty articles. A wide-ranging volume on the history and geography of Finland was complemented by a very original text, co-authored with Helmer Smeds, which analysed the significance of winter for human activity across the country, and two volumes on the Åland islands.⁸⁵ Bill was also collating material for a major book on the historical geography of the Nordic countries. In 1968, the University of London awarded him a higher doctorate (D.Sc. Econ.) for his corpus of published work.

As head of Geography, Bill was confronted by many challenges. The first was the fluctuating, indeed worsening financial situation in British universities, when the interests of Geography had to be defended fiercely at UCL. In this respect Bill used his friendly relations with influential colleagues to good advantage, being able to protect the department and

⁸² In conversation with Jan Stølen in 1979.

⁸³ Letter from Provost Noël Annan to W. R. Mead, dated 23 July 1975.

⁸⁴ Comment by W. R. Mead at a celebration held at UCL to commemorate his ninetieth birthday.

⁸⁵ W. R. Mead, *Finland* (London, 1968); W. R. Mead and H. Smeds, *Winter in Finland* (London, 1967); W. R. Mead (ed.), *Saltvik: Studies from an Åland Parish* (Nottingham, 1964); W. R. Mead and S. Jaatinen, *The Åland Islands* (Newton Abbot, 1975).

enabling it to grow, despite increased overcrowding in the Foster Court building. A second challenge came with the changing nature of geography, associated with the impact of the quantitative and theoretical 'revolutions'. Physical geographers at UCL required laboratories and equipment, and almost all members of the department needed computing facilities. A third challenge involved the appropriate specialisations of new appointees. Some senior colleagues favoured quantifiers, regional scientists and model builders, but Bill's preference was for those who would teach area studies. He was well aware of methodological innovations in Scandinavian geography but did not introduce them in his own work. In the late 1970s, when the southern part of the UCL site was scheduled for redevelopment, he accepted the relocation of Geography to a new building five minutes' walk away on Bedford Way as the only realistic solution to overcrowding and the need for new facilities. He remained head until September 1981, by which time his department was comfortably installed in spacious premises. Bill retired before the coming of teaching quality assessment, research evaluation, peer review of teaching, and scrutiny of impact factors. Such necessary evils were far removed from his human touch, and new blood was needed to cope with them.⁸⁶

Beyond the university

From his base in UCL and his apartment in Kensington (where a spare room accommodated Nordic visitors), Bill was very actively involved in geographical organisations and societies promoting links between Britain and Northern Europe. He joined the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), the Institute of British Geographers (IBG) and the Geographical Association (GA) in 1946 and eventually held senior office in each of these bodies. He was strongly committed to the IBG, and was elected President in 1971. His keynote lecture focused on the contributions of six 'luminaries of the North' (Conrad Malte-Brun, Adolf Erik Nordenskjöld, Fritjof Nansen, Zachris Topelius, Rudolf Kjellén, Sven Hedin) to geographical knowledge.⁸⁷ After participation in meetings and committees of the RGS, especially that concerned with the library and maps, Bill served as honorary secretary of the Society from 1967 to 1977, and then as Vice-President

⁸⁶ In the person, as his successor, of Professor [later Sir] Ronald Cooke, born in 1941.

⁸⁷ W. R. Mead, 'Luminaries of the North', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 57 (1972), 1–13.

until 1981. He played a strategic role as chair of the programme committee when HM the Queen and other members of the royal family visited the house of the RGS to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 1980. At that time Her Majesty approved the award of the Founder's Medal to Bill 'for contributions to geographical knowledge and, in particular, to the geography of Scandinavia'.⁸⁸ Other recognition had come with election to an Honorary Fellowship of the LSE in 1979. On behalf of the Geographical Association, Bill was a tireless speaker in schools and colleges, rarely refusing an invitation to talk about Scandinavia. In 1981 he was elected president of the GA and selected 'Europe' as the theme of its annual conference, choosing 'the discovery of Europe' for his plenary address.⁸⁹

Bill was very involved with Nordic societies in London, in particular the Anglo-Norse Society and the Anglo-Finnish Society (AFS). The latter association ceased operations during the Second World War and it was considered undiplomatic to revive it until Finland had completed payment of reparations. This was achieved in August 1952, and it was proposed to reconstitute the Society along the lines of the Anglo-Norse Society. This was accepted and Bill agreed to serve as honorary secretary. In the coming years, many administrative tasks in support of the AFS would be undertaken in his Kensington flat. He became chairman in the mid-1960s, retaining that position until 1995, when he became chairman emeritus. He was a frequent lecturer at AFS meetings and coordinated special study sessions with other Nordic societies concerning Zachris Topelius, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Frans Michael Franzén, Fridtjof Nansen and Sven Hedin.⁹⁰ The history of Scandinavian cartography, which he researched in retirement, proved to be a popular topic.

Bill took part in Anglo-Finnish commissions co-ordinated by the British Council and attended high-level symposia with representatives of the business, politics and academic worlds.⁹¹ He was involved in state visits by Finnish presidents and organised annual dinner dances to celebrate Finnish Independence Day. To mark its centenary in 2011 he wrote a history of the AFS.⁹² In recognition of his standing in Anglo-Finnish circles, he was made a Chevalier of the Order of the Lion of Finland in 1953 and a Commander ten years later, and subsequently a Commander of the White Rose of Finland in 1976. Bill was involved with the activities

⁸⁸ Anon., 'Meetings: Session 1979–80', *Geographical Journal*, 146 (1980), 478.

⁸⁹ W. R. Mead, 'The discovery of Europe', *Geography*, 67 (1982), 193–202.

⁹⁰ Mead, 'All chance, direction', p. 133.

⁹¹ Mead, *Adopting Finland*, 101–17.

⁹² W. R. Mead, *The Anglo-Finnish Society, 1911–2011* (London, 2011).

of the Finnish church in London, and with many Swedish, Danish and Norwegian organisations. In recognition of his immense commitment to Scandinavian causes he was made a Chevalier of the Swedish Order of Vasa (1962) and a Commander of the Order of the Polar Star of Sweden (1977). In 1988 gold medals were awarded to him by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography, and by the Finnish Geographical Society. As one of his oldest friends declared after Bill's death, his remarkable level of involvement was only possible because he never married and had no children.⁹³

Three decades of retirement

Having seen his department move to Bedford Way, Bill retired from UCL in September 1981, leaving his rented apartment in Kensington for the bungalow in Aston Clinton. During much of his retirement he took public transport to central London in order to meet colleagues at UCL, attend concerts or the theatre, or participate in meetings of the RGS, the Anglo-Finnish Society or the British Academy, to which he was elected a Senior Fellow in 1994. Bill enjoyed good health until a very advanced age and was academically productive to the last. As the years passed, his hearing deteriorated and he no longer enjoyed large gatherings that had been so important in his social life. His eyesight remained excellent and letter writing was still a favoured activity. His annual travels to Canada ceased as wartime friends died, but regular trips to Scandinavia continued, being moved from the long vacation, when friends were away in summer cottages, to November when they were at home and libraries and archives were open. Visits with Eric Brown to former colleagues with a second home in southern France added a new feature to Bill's annual round. Never owning a television, record player, tape recorder or computer, he derived great pleasure from reading a wide range of literature in several languages and listening to classical music on Radio 3. He gave up driving in middle age, but his passion for horse riding continued and he cycled out to the stables a couple of times each week, greeting residents as he passed.⁹⁴ He told Anne Buttimer: 'I am happier on a horse than in the pressed steel box of an automobile.'⁹⁵

⁹³This lady had been a student of economic historian Professor Eino Jutikkala (1907–2006), one of Bill's oldest friends in Finland and another very productive bachelor.

⁹⁴Information from his friend Bill Willett.

⁹⁵Mead, 'Autobiographical reflections', p. 58.

Bill purchased his last horse when he was over ninety years of age, but this new mare stumbled and fell, dismounting him and causing Bill to suffer a broken foot. The accident shook his physical vigour and brought his riding days to a close.

Bill's decades of retirement were a time of continued productivity. After prolonged gestation, the appearance in 1981 of his book on the historical geography of Scandinavia heralded the final third of his life.⁹⁶ Adopting a similar structure to that employed by Clifford Darby in his edited volume on the historical geography of England, successive chapters provided accounts of the human geography of Scandinavia at selected times in the past, alternating with reviews of intervening socio-economic changes.⁹⁷ Presenting themes that Bill had explored over many years, the book was praised for its breadth of coverage and the wide range of information used. It was judged to be 'profoundly original [and] the first of its kind for the northern countries as a whole'.⁹⁸ By virtue of its specialised topic, this work had rather limited appeal but was required reading for students taking degrees in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Minnesota.⁹⁹

Bill often remarked that his attachment to Finland was for work while that to Norway was for fun, evoking the hospitality provided by Harald Meltzer and his family in Oslo, the mountain walking they enjoyed and their long trips to the far north of Norway.¹⁰⁰ Yet Bill admitted that sometimes the relationship was reversed, with trips to Finland becoming pure enjoyment and visits to Norway focusing on academic work. Written in retirement, a cluster of intensely autobiographical books evoked the landscapes and societies of the Nordic lands, and explored his scholarly and affectionate commitment to their people. Having reviewed the reactions of several French writers to Norwegian scenery, he declared:

There is something archetypal about mountainous Norway. In horizontal profiles can be imagined the limbs of sleeping giants. Travelling along beside the mountain flanks the outlines of monumental heads can appear and disappear. Sometimes the immense exfoliation domes, darker than threatening skies, have the appearance of monstrous pachyderms in repose. Sometimes they suggest

⁹⁶ W. R. Mead, *An Historical Geography of Scandinavia* (London, 1981). His course on Northern Europe became increasingly historical during the 1970s.

⁹⁷ H. C. Darby (ed.), *A New Historical Geography of England* (Cambridge, 1973).

⁹⁸ M. Cabouret, 'Une géographie historique de la Scandinavie', *Annales de Géographie*, 93 (1984), 749–50.

⁹⁹ Undated note from Bill Mead.

¹⁰⁰ Bill wrote a book for schoolchildren entitled *How People Live in Norway* (London, 1959) with younger members of the Meltzer family in mind.

camelious humps. Along the coastal fringes ... the configuration of the mountain peaks [may] resemble the backbone of an immense fish.¹⁰¹

A Celebration of Norway was preceded by *An Experience of Finland* and followed by *The Adoption of Finland*, which was soon expanded as *Adopting Finland*.¹⁰² Thanking Bill for sending a copy of *An Experience of Finland*, Torsten Hägerstrand remarked: 'If I still had students, I would ask them to read your book in order to understand how open-minded and open-sensed and limitlessly curious about the world a good geographer has to be.'¹⁰³ A new project for 'The History of Cartography' series absorbed much of Bill's time in the middle years of retirement, requiring completely new archival and library research. Only the first half of his text, dealing with Scandinavian Renaissance map making, was published, much to his chagrin.¹⁰⁴ An outlet for the remaining part remains to be identified. In very different vein, Bill drafted books for a general readership and was even associated with a popular atlas.¹⁰⁵ These ventures yielded welcome income that was used to fund cartographic investigations in the Nordic countries.

With academic pressures removed, Bill published his translation of the diaries of Pehr Kalm. As he told Anne Buttimer, Kalm was 'one of my great integrators', embracing Northern Europe, the English countryside and North America.¹⁰⁶ Student excursions since the mid-1950s anticipated the field trip that Bill devoted to Pehr Kalm in the Chilterns on the occasion of the twentieth International Geographical Congress in 1964, an event that made Bill many new friends.¹⁰⁷ The bulk of the translation work was undertaken later in the early 1970s as Bill travelled nightly between London and Stoke Mandeville in order to visit his father in hospital. At this time, he felt that he could not turn his mind to anything more creative.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ W. R. Mead, *A Celebration of Norway* (London, 2002), p. 30.

¹⁰² W. R. Mead, *An Experience of Finland* (London, 1993); W. R. Mead, *A Celebration of Norway; The Adoption of Finland* (London, 2005); W. R. Mead, *Adopting Finland* (Helsinki, 2007).

¹⁰³ Letter from Torsten Hägerstrand to W. R. Mead, dated 3 December 1993.

¹⁰⁴ W. R. Mead, 'Scandinavian Renaissance cartography, in D. Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography, Volume 3(2)* (Chicago, IL, 2007), pp.1781–805.

¹⁰⁵ W. R. Mead, *Sweden: Land of Many Dreams* (New York, 1985); W. R. Mead, *Pictorial Atlas of the World* (Baltimore, MD, 1993); W. R. Mead, with W. Hall, *Scandinavia* (London, 1972); Mead, 'All chance, direction', p. 137.

¹⁰⁶ Mead, 'Autobiographical recollections', 52.

¹⁰⁷ W. R. Mead, 'Pehr Kalm in the Chilterns', *Acta Geographica*, 17 (1962), 1–33; W. R. Mead, 'The Chilterns: an eighteenth-century appraisal of the cultural landscape', in K.M. Clayton (ed.), *Guide to London Excursions* (London, 1964), pp. 110–13.

¹⁰⁸ H. Clout, 'Pehr Kalm: a Finnish visitor to the Chilterns', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004), 205–6; H. Clout, 'Textbooks that moved generations: W. R. Mead, *An Economic*

A copy of the translation was deposited with the Linnaean Society in London, but he set aside the idea of publication. Eventually, Bill brought out two attractive volumes at his own expense. The first, dealing with Kalm in the Chilterns, appeared in 2003 to coincide with the centenary of the continuous teaching of geography at UCL.¹⁰⁹ Despite ill health Bill managed to complete the second, on Kalm in London, with the help of John Smith.¹¹⁰ Another project yielded a slim introduction to the geography of Finland around the start of the nineteenth century, derived from archival materials in Åbo Akademi.¹¹¹ From the mid-1990s onwards Bill devoted more energy to his home community. He assembled an attractive set of recollections of Aylesbury in the 1920s, and then wrote a history of Aylesbury Grammar School to commemorate its fourth centennial.¹¹² This drew upon his many years of activity in the Old Aylesburian Association and, from 1981, his service as a governor of the school. Subsequently, Bill published detailed studies of the travels of a local personality, Dr John Lee of Hartwell, who visited Sweden and Finland in 1807–9.¹¹³ After decades of delivering lectures on local history and leading fieldtrips, Bill chaired the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society from 2001 to 2008.¹¹⁴

On the Adoption of Other Lands

Bill was a remarkably productive scholar who wrote two dozen books, contributed thirty chapters to edited volumes and published 120 articles. Unsurprisingly, his pattern of output over three-quarters of a century seems unusual to modern eyes. Between 1939 and 1947, six papers appeared in *Economic Geography*, a top-level North American journal, but thereafter Bill placed his work in periodicals that he considered appropriate, rather than in those commanding greatest attention among academic

Geography of the Scandinavian States and Finland, *Progress in Human Geography*, 28 (2004), 117–21.

¹⁰⁹ W. R. Mead, *Pehr Kalm, a Finnish Visitor to the Chilterns in 1748* (Aston Clinton, 2003).

¹¹⁰ W. R. Mead, *Pehr Kalm – His London Diary, 1748* (Aston Clinton, 2013).

¹¹¹ W. R. Mead, *Introducing the Finnish Economic Society* (London, 2013).

¹¹² Mead, *Aylesbury*; W. R. Mead, *Aylesbury Grammar School, 1598–1998* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹¹³ W. R. Mead, 'The Finnish journey of Dr John Lee in 1808', *Publications Instituto Geografico Universitatis Turkuensis*, 164 (2001), 145–52; W. R. Mead, 'Dr John Lee of Hartwell and his Swedish journey, 1807–1809', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 43 (2003), 9–16.

¹¹⁴ W. R. Mead, 'Ridge and furrow in Buckinghamshire', *Geographical Journal*, 120 (1954), 34–42; W. R. Mead, 'The study of field boundaries', *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 54 (1966), 101–17; W. R. Mead, 'The changing landscape of the central Chilterns', *Svensk Geografisk Årsbok*, 70 (1994), 10–19. To assist his local studies, Bill had a complete set of aerial photographs for Buckinghamshire and surrounding areas, a fact that greatly interested the police at the time of 'the great train robbery' near Aylesbury on 8 August 1963.

geographers.¹¹⁵ He never published research in the main historical geography journal, and less than a score of his papers appeared in the five leading geographical periodicals of the Nordic countries. Judged by number of titles, his commitment to *Geography*, a journal for schoolteachers, was double that to the *Geographical Journal*, the long-established periodical of the RGS. A similar concern for 'the appropriate place' may well have conditioned his decision to self-publish his last books for distribution among friends. This confidential approach, involving very small print runs, has reduced the accessibility of his work. Despite his disciplinary affiliation it seems likely that the contribution of Bill Mead to Finnish studies, and to Scandinavian studies in general, will command more sustained recognition than his contribution to geography.

He rarely articulated views on methodology, preferring to demonstrate his position in print.¹¹⁶ An impressive exception came in his lecture on 'The adoption of other lands' that he gave to a combined meeting of the RGS, the IBG and the GA.¹¹⁷ Drawing on his experience of Finland, he stressed that scholars devoting themselves to research abroad must learn to accept and work within mind sets that differed from their own. They must learn languages, read extensively about the new land(s) and, in so doing, must venture far beyond the discipline of geography. They must spend frequent and even prolonged periods of time away from home and family, and be prepared to be out of pocket. Total immersion in the culture of the country of adoption is essential. And, over the years, Bill dripped further requirements into the conversations we shared. He made it clear that those who had serious academic aspirations must acquire scholarly qualifications in their adopted country, and publish in its journals using the appropriate foreign language. They must serve on foreign editorial boards, doctoral juries and appointment committees. As all these commitments are made, he argued that a deep affection for the adopted country and its people may well develop and 'in the final instance, the other land will very likely adopt them'.¹¹⁸ In his own case, Bill fashioned an accommodation with Northern Europe that shaped his research themes, his pattern of publication, and his numerous friendships. Colleagues recounted that just to mention his name during visits to Nordic countries elicited smiles of recognition and enquiries about his health, and also opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed.

¹¹⁵ For example, he published fourteen papers in *The Norseman* (Oslo) and eight in *Finsk Tidskrift* (Åbo).

¹¹⁶ W. R. Mead, 'Regional geography: reassessment and reaffirmation', *Ymer*, 107 (1987), 93–101.

¹¹⁷ W. R. Mead, 'The adoption of other lands: experiences in a Finnish context', *Geography*, 48 (1963), 241–54.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Professor Bill Mead remained living at home with devoted support from a live-in carer and regular respite breaks in a retirement home. He maintained contacts with his friends around the world, using Skype—with the help of his carer—when writing became no longer possible after a stroke. Bill Mead will be remembered as a kind and generous man, whose laughter and twinkling eyes belied his great culture and deep erudition. Anne Buttimer recalls how ‘a sense of temporality, historical depth and aesthetic temporality rings through his work. And his spoken and written word has lured many to geographical awareness.’¹¹⁹ Bill possessed ‘the old-fashioned virtues of unfailing courtesy, a love of foreign lands, and a knowledge of foreign languages, and had a fund of never malicious gossip’.¹²⁰ He died on 20 July 2014, nine days before his ninety-ninth birthday. His funeral was held on 12 August at the Church of St Michael and All Angels in Aston Clinton before a packed congregation. Bill requested that this occasion should be joyous rather than lachrymose, and so it was, as relatives, friends and colleagues recalled his many kindnesses with profound gratitude. At the conclusion of the service, his body was buried adjacent to his father and stepmother in the grounds of Buckland Church nearby, where he had often worshipped. On 31 October, a hundred friends and former students celebrated his life and work at the house of the RGS, a place that he always held in highest affection.¹²¹

HUGH CLOUT

Fellow of the Academy

Note. In preparing this memoir I have drawn on Bill’s autobiographical writings and the hour-long interview videotaped with Torsten Hägerstrand in 1979, which was part of the Dialogues Project co-ordinated with Anne Buttimer. Aware of my interest in the history of the Department of Geography at UCL, Bill allowed me to record an interview with him, and supplied me with copies of letters and handwritten, undated notes on various topics. For advice, information and criticism, I extend my thanks to Eric Brown, Anne Buttimer, John Cragg, Ron Johnston, Richard Munton, John Salt, Iain Stevenson, Bill Willett, Michael Wise and Peter Wood.

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¹¹⁹ Anne Buttimer, Tribute to Bill Mead, 31 October 2014.

¹²⁰ Letter from Michael Barbour, a former colleague at UCL, dated 20 June 1981.

¹²¹ His final work, published posthumously, was W. R. Mead, *Towards a Commonplace Book* (Aston Clinton, 2015).