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### Paul Bishop: recalling an academic life

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#### ABSTRACT

The rationale for this theme section of the journal on Paul Bishop. eminent physical geographer, earth scientist and researcher of human-environment relations, is explained. Paul Bishop (1949-2022), a long-time Professor of Geography at the University of Glasgow, was - indeed, still very much is - a major figure at the cutting-edge of research, scholarship, education and applications in the fields indicated. His academic work has been global in its focus - spanning four continents (Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe), including a substantial body of inquiries centred in Scotland – and has encompassed the time-spans of planetary history (and the geotectonics of long-term landscape change), human history (and the dynamics of environmental influence on human settlement, resource use and cultural practice) and human life-spans (including the histories and heritages of locality). Paul died, too soon, early in 2022. An event to commemorate his academic life and work was held in September 2022, and several contributions to that event have now been written through in substantially revised form for the present theme section. The current piece introduces this theme section, providing a sketch of Paul's biography, including notes on his time in Glasgow, and cross-referencing with the articles that follow. Appended is also a near-comprehensive bibliography of Paul's published outputs.

#### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

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#### **KEYWORDS**

Paul Bishop; history of earth sciences; history of physical geography; humanenvironment relations

#### Paul Bishop (1949–2022)

The following theme section commemorates and celebrates the academic life and work of the late Professor Paul Bishop (1949–2022: see Figure 1). Throughout this introduction to the theme section we will speak of Paul, rather than use the impersonal surname, since we knew Paul well in various capacities as colleague and friend. In the contributions that follow, authors will vary in whether they speak of Paul by first or surname depending on the precise context in which his academic life and work is being remembered and discussed. It should nonetheless be underlined that this theme section is intended as an aca*demic* endeavour, the objective being that – while for the most part lightly done without the heavy encumbrance of full academic framing or referencing - its various components will illuminate Paul's significant place within the histories to be written of physical geography, earth sciences and scholarly inquiry into human-environment relations.

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Figure 1. Paul Bishop in full flow, mid-2010s. (Source: Geraldine Perriam.)

Paul was undoubtedly a top-flight academic researcher and scholar, internationally known and respected, spanning and integrating the disciplinary fields of physical geography, earth sciences and environmental studies, while also reaching out into diverse other fields too (such as archaeology, history, philosophy of science, and more). Australian by birth and upbringing, Paul began his academic career by securing a First Class Honours degree in Physical Geography at Macquarie University, followed by PhD research at the same institution completed in 1984. He moved to a lecturing position at the University of Sydney in 1985, then to a post at Monash University in 1989. A further move occurred in 1998 when Paul was appointed as Professor of Geography in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK. For nearly a quarter of a century, Paul has been a leading academic figure publishing prolifically on physical geography, earth sciences and human-environmental themes from Scotland - drawing on research conducted across four continents (Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe) - and also about Scotland - concentrating on postglacial landscape evolution and the influences of physical landscapes on human settlement, industry and resource use in Scotland. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the Scottish Geographical Journal should carry this theme section dedicated to Paul's academic life and work.

In order to capture something of what comprises Paul's sizeable contribution and legacy, particularly in its Scottish manifestation, we can repeat the 'notice' that was published online by Paul's home department at the University of Glasgow very soon after his death.<sup>1.</sup>

It is with great sadness that the School acknowledges the death, on Tuesday 25th January 2022, of our deeply-respected colleague and friend Professor Paul Bishop. He died after a short illness, showing typical fortitude, dignity, and grace, supported throughout by the love and humour of his wife, Geraldine Perriam, and closest family members.

Paul was an immense figure in the recent history of the School, an inspirational and effective leader, as well as being a wonderful colleague with an unstinting willingness to engage with – and to assist – other scholars and students at a moment's notice.

He arrived in Glasgow in the late-1990s with a compelling vision of how to embrace the interdisciplinary links between physical geography, earth sciences and a wider terrain of inquiry into human-environment relations, all gathered together in a passion for charting and modelling long-term landscape evolution. This vision fuelled a remarkable body of frontline research – traversing field, laboratory and computer – that fed through into influential publications and funded research programmes. It informed a wealth of collaborations with scientists from across the globe, and with colleagues and postdoctoral/postgraduate researchers based in Glasgow. It also informed his teaching and supervising of undergraduate students, always undertaken with energy and a rich spirit of collective endeavour. He was a gifted teacher and students always responded positively to his enthusiasm and encouragement.

Moreover, his vision was the pivot for Paul's central role in the mid-2000s merger of two previously separate departments to create the unified School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES), as well as his fostering of a productive new research alliance with the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC) at East Kilbride. Additionally, his holistic-analytical approach underpinned the creation of the cross-university Scotland Alliance for Geosciences, Environment and Society (SAGES). In all of these respects Paul was indeed a leader but also always a generous facilitator, looking to help others accomplish their goals as much as to pursue his own.

Glasgow Geographical and Earth Sciences is immeasurably lessened by his departure. Even though he had formally retired in 2016, he had continued (in an Emeritus position) to be a productive and engaged presence within and beyond GES. He will be sorely missed, academically, professionally and personally.

Aspects of this notice are elaborated in the articles that follow, several of which grow from a tribute day event held in Paul's Glasgow department on 8th September, 2022, specifically badged as 'A Commemoration of his Academic Life', including both inperson and virtual presentations and discussion. These articles will now be briefly introduced, interwoven with a skeletal outline of Paul's academic career and contributions, before brief reflections – drawing particularly on testimony from John Briggs – on Paul as colleague, teacher and institutional actor. Following a final few concluding words, we append a near-comprehensive bibliography of Paul's published academic works, for which big thanks are due to Iain Neill.

#### Outline biography and the articles that follow

A useful reference to which we will return several times during our remarks here is the obituary for Paul from the *Australian Geographer* authored by Bruce Thom, which starts by noting that 'Paul Bishop commenced his life in universities at Macquarie University in the School of Earth Sciences. He graduated with First Class Honours in Physical Geography and then went on to complete a PhD in 1984' (Thom, 2022, p. 237). Paul's undergraduate and immediate post-undergraduate years at Macquarie are discussed in this theme section by Martin Williams, who reports on both Paul's fourth-year Honours project on duplex soils in the Sydney Basin and his fieldwork with geoarchaeologists – providing vital environmental context information (on lake edges and gullies) – when investigating sites of prehistoric human cultures (Williams, 2023).

Both these bodies of research fed into subsequent publications, as well as arguably setting a pattern for Paul's subsequent inquiries in at least two regards. The most obvious is Paul's alertness to human-environment relations with a geoarchaeological flavour, in which respect Thom (2022, p. 238) comments on what 'occupied Paul's active mind when he ventured with teams to Thailand and Cambodia using his geoscience background to assist in archaeological studies. He developed a fascination for the Thai language and its ancient pottery, working to unravel signatures of environmental change with Dan Penny, Duncan Cook and others.' The latter-named scholars, Dan Penny and Duncan Cook, have contributed to this theme section (Penny & Cook, 2023), narrating and explaining the significance of what Paul brought to the formidable task of dating – and therefore interpreting – the environmental histories of ancient hydraulic societies.

A second regard is Paul's readiness to inquire into small-scale and short-term processes shaping 'superficial' earth features, as in his Honours project on the bioturbational reworking of soil profiles described by Martin Williams below (Williams, 2023). That latter readiness never left Paul, even as he turned to the large-scale and long-term questions of tectonically-forced landscape change. And this preparedness to jump scales – and, as it were, to leap from the ostensibly solid and enduring (the 'geology') to the more obviously mobile and impermanent (the 'geography') – was clearly expressed in what many at the 2022 commemorative event mentioned as Paul's most inspirational publication, that on 'Long-term landscape evolution: linking tectonics and surface processes' (Bishop, 2007), for which he was awarded the British Society of Geomorphology's Wiley Award (2007) for best paper published in *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* (see also Thom, 2022, p. 238). The centrality of cross-scalar thinking to Paul's whole approach is addressed at length by Trevor Hoey below, emphasising how it was such a potent source of inspiration for Paul – such a provocation for seeing diverse landscapes anew – but also something needing the most careful (even skeptical) rigour (Hoey, 2023).

In his piece for this theme section Martin Williams (2023) discusses Paul's challenging PhD inquiry – tackling the late-Cenozoic evolution of the upper Lachlan Valley in the Eastern Highlands of New South Wales, Australia – which 'focussed on aspects of longevity of the landscape, the role of lithology in the evolution of rivers, and centrally the importance of denudation isostatic rebound within intraplate highlands' (Thom, 2022, p. 237). Both Williams and Thom evidently detect here further clues about the direction that Paul was subsequently to take as he built out of his PhD into a more wide-ranging corpus of investigations anchored not only in rigorous fieldwork, but requiring increasing sophistication in the development and deployment of innovative geochronological measurements in the laboratory, increasingly supported by geocomputational capacity. As Thom (2022, p. 237) states – in a claim fleshed out at length by Trevor Hoey below (Hoey, 2023) – '[w]hat is impressive is that over the next three decades [Paul] elaborated, modified, and developed the analysis based on new evidence from the field, an increased understanding of tectonic processes, and the application of new earth surface dating techniques.'

Paul was absolutely no straightforward 'boots dirty' researcher, impatient to get to the field, or obsessive for laboratory and computer suite, unhappy if detained in library, study or classroom (see below). Rather, his scholarship was energised by attention to both philosophical problems – as when using Karl Popper's claims about 'falsifiability' to critique

still-influential Davisian 'cycle of erosion' thinking (Williams, 2023) – and the history of geomorphology<sup>2</sup> – necessitating a constant alertness to prior scholarship, its advances and intractabilities. Considering Paul's substantial paper reviewing the subject-matter of 'Landscape evolution and tectonics' (Bishop, 2011), Thom (2022, p. 238) remarks that:

This chapter expressed with great clarity the difficulties we face in answering major questions that underpinned the work of the greats of the discipline. He saw the need to tease out the detail of which geomorphic models are appropriate and in what settings. In this paper we also get to see how his own research contributes to explaining landscape longevity through an integration of tectonics, including isostatic rebound, and landscape response. Along the way the paper captures his optimistic view of the current situation where he argues we now have techniques (e.g. cosmogenic dating—he helped pioneer its application) and over-arching paradigms such as plate tectonics to refocus attention on landscape evolution.

Paul possessed an uncanny ability to appreciate the complex 'geometry' of landscape. He always sought to disentangle the fundamental spatial properties of how a physical landscape is formed and potentially deformed as its multiple strata, surfaces and boundaries are uplifted and eroded, always under the influence of interacting forces and phenomena (tectonic, geologic, climatic, pedogenetic, and more). And part of his approach in this regard was an acute capacity for thinking simultaneously in the abstract, through dynamic landscape models, and with the concrete or 'real', sensitive to the specifics of particular regional-environmental settings. In this theme section Trevor Hoey explores this problematic – of interfacing the abstract and the concrete or 'real', always alongside the above-mentioned crossing of spatial scales – with particular reference to Paul's contributions to the field of fluvial geomorphology (Hoey, 2023). At the same time, Hoey demonstrates the depth of Paul's engagement with fellow researchers, doctoral students included, on particular research projects run from the University of Glasgow.

In order better to 'constain' the parameters used in landscape evolution modelling, Paul was always seeking improved geochronologies, striving to find new and cross-calibrating ways of dating earth materials and quantifying rates of change. Noteworthy here, as Thom (2022, p. 238) alludes and as Trevor Hoey (2023) elaborates, was Paul's championing of cosmogenic dating methods dependent on measuring the decay of radionuclides in the top metre of rocks following their exposure at the Earth's surface, allowing the exposure age of rock surfaces to be dated and/or measurements to be made of how quickly a landscape has been eroded. Early in his career, Paul started to work with laboratory techniques for chronological analysis of field materials, and part of what attracted him to the University of Glasgow in the late-1990s was the opportunity to work with the world-leading facility at East Kilbride, the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC), which was already experimenting with measurement of cosmogenic radionuclides (to complement its expertise in other forms of geochronological work such as radiocarbon dating). The presence of SUERC was a crucial component in the SAGES initiative considered below by David Sugden and Tony Fallick (Sugden & Fallick, 2023).

Thom (2022, p. 238) continues by commenting that '[a]n examination of [Paul's] publication record while at Glasgow shows why he was held in such high esteem as an earth scientist. He played a major role in the establishment and application in Scotland of geochronological tools used in earth sciences, leading him to contribute to a range of studies with colleagues'. Beyond the cosmogenic tools that he particularly championed in Scotland, his collaborative work with colleagues was often necessitated by the need to work closely with co-researchers whose technical skills, in geochronology or geocomputation, were sometimes superior to his own (Hoey, 2023). In this respect, Paul was an early convert to the 'big science' model of inquiry, one where he was often the key facilitator in stitching together scholars with rather different disciplinary backgrounds and technical skillsets. It is thus no surprise that Paul took a leading role in what might be termed the more organisational-institutional development of earth sciences in Scotland. One very pertinent instance of this involvement was with the Scottish Alliance for Geoscience, Environment and Society (SAGES), and in their contribution to this theme section, David Sudgen and Tony Fallick (2023) carefully unpick the gestation and eventual delivery of the SAGES research initiative from the early-2000s onwards, noting the importance of Paul's enthusiastic and strategic engagements.

One more remark from Thom (2022, p. 238) about Paul's time in Scotland is worth quoting:

And all the while that fertile mind was exploring the history and geomorphic setting of water mills in Scotland relying on one of his favourite themes in river studies, that of knickpoints [...]. This love of history continued in retirement helping to set up a local history group and securing funds for further research into the history of Scotland's mills (Thom, 2022, p. 238).

The knickpoint interest had long been the entry-point for Paul's thinking about the landscape geometries, as Trevor Hoey (2023) observes, and it was arguably also the entrypoint to what became a really quite different line of research inquiry for him on the historical geographies of water mills in the Scottish landscape. Paul became increasingly interested in how exploring environmental influences on mill location – knickpoints being a prime example – might potentially throw fresh light on debates by historical geographers, economic historians and others about the vexed dynamics of energy, climate and society. Indeed, he became convinced that contested claims about industrial revolution, steam power (ousting water power), carboniferous capitalism, climate change, and the Anthropocene might all be better informed by sustained substantive inquiry into matters of physical geography and human-environment relations. This emerging vision prompted Paul to seek funding for the ambitious research reported in this theme section by Tara Jonell and co-authors (Jonell et al., 2023).

Thom's mention of local history is also telling, in that Paul's energies, particularly after retirement, certainly were in part turned towards matters of local history and heritage. Fascinated by his immediate surroundings – not least in Baldernock, north of Glasgow – and by the overlapping textures of physical-environmental features and human activities, notably in the shape of mills (Jonell et al., 2023), estates, landscaping, plantings and more, Paul fostered a perspective that arguably became increasingly one of human geography as well as physical geography.<sup>3</sup> These fascinations, subject of Paul's later scholarship, are explored in this theme section by Geraldine Perriam, Paul's wife, with whom much of this passion was shared and advanced (Perriam, 2023). What she also underlines is the extent to which this later endeavour on Paul's part brought in what might be termed a 'darker' concern for suffering and exploitation: for how vulnerable peoples and places were roped into histories that often spanned the local and the global, not least through the countless links connecting the likes of industrial and estate landscapes in Scotland

to the landscapes of ship, plantation and colony constituting the transatlantic slave trade. Paul was a highly cultured individual, moreover, widely-read and not averse to seeing landscapes more imaginatively, even poetically, in which respect the last contribution to the theme section, by Gerard Carruthers, provides both a short reflection on how Paul caused him to think again about one poem by Robert Burns, commonly regarded as Scotland's 'national bard', while nodding to other ways in which Paul prompted reappraisal of environments in Scottish poetry (Carruthers, 2023).<sup>4</sup>.

#### Paul Bishop as colleague, teacher and institutional actor

Paul was appointed Professor of Geography in 1998 at the University of Glasgow, with the specific remit to lead the grouping of physical geographers in the department. When Paul arrived, he added straightaway to the energy of the place, bringing infectious enthusiasm and a 'can-do' spirit. He immediately led from the front in his new role, bringing in research students and postdoctoral fellows with whom he worked closely, as evidenced by Trevor Hoey (2023). Paul launched funded research programmes in long-term landscape evolution, and he contributed with his huge intellectual ability to the development of the subdiscipline of physical geography, serving to put Glasgow – and a distinctive blending of physical geography and earth sciences – securely on the Scottish, UK and, even more importantly, international stages.

Elements of that story have already been outlined, but it is essential to underline that Paul was not just a researcher, but was also an extremely inspiring teacher who was generous with his time for students. Moreover, he was in his element when he was out in the field, where his enthusiasm, energy and love for landscape came to the fore, and watching him explain Mediterranean *terra rossa* soils in Spain to an undergraduate field programme was a masterclass in how to engage students in what might, to many students, seem like one of the dullest topics imaginable. (Martin Williams (2023) reminds us that soils were a significant feature of Paul's own student studies.) There can be no doubt that Paul was nothing if not a passionate teacher, whether in the field, the classroom, or the laboratory.

It is well-known that Paul made so much time for the department's postgraduate students, as he was very aware of the need to nurture the next generation of researchers and teachers. He had high standards, to be sure, and he expected much of his students. We recall an unnamed colleague once tipping off a new research student that they should remain focused and keep to the point in supervisory sessions with Paul because 'Paul doesn't do patience'. For those who met Paul's exacting expectations, he was a wonderful mentor. Notwithstanding (or even because of) these standards, he was also a deeplyrespected and much-liked teacher at undergraduate level, evidenced by affectionate representations of him in the long-running student geographical magazine, Drumlin, that appeared annually in Glasgow from the 1950s through to the first decade of the 2000s (Philo, 1998). Somewhat implausibly, Paul was depicted on one cover - casting staff members as characters from The Lord of the Rings - as a hobbit: we feel that Gandalf the Wise would have been more appropriate. Elsewhere he became Lucy (the clever one) from The Simpsons and, on another occasion, Herbert Garrison, a teacher with a degree in mechanical engineering at the secondary school attended by the fourthgraders in South Park. Most memorably perhaps, he appeared as the 'Big Friendly

Giant' (the 'BFG') in a spoof advertisement for the film of the same name based on the Roald Dahl book (see Figure 2). The 'BFG' attribution acquires an entirely coincidental poignancy in how Trevor Hoey (2023) below appraises Paul's career against shifts in scientific practice and the climatic-environmental changes currently besetting our planet.

Another aspect of Paul's endeavour beyond the strictly research-based and scholarly arose in what we term here his work as an 'institutional actor'. When the then Department of Geology and Applied Geology at the University of Glasgow was faced with closure in the late-1990s, for instance, Paul made a convincing case for the importance of retaining at least an earth science presence in the University as an important ally of physical geography. His persuasion worked, and the Division of Earth Sciences came into being, initially as a division within the Department of Geography and Topographic Science (itself soon renamed Geography and Geomatics), before eventually the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences came into being. Paul's role in this context of institutional restructuring cannot be under-estimated, as both leader and facilitative 'lieute-nant', and nor can his role in the establishment of SAGES – as detailed by David Sugden and Tony Fallick (2023) – be underplayed either. Paul's vision, dynamism and drive, along with colleagues from other Scottish universities and SUERC – again see Sugden and Fallick (2023) – was fundamental to the success of this venture, conjoining both Paul's intellectual pre-eminence and his grasp of policy and *realpolitik*.

It is worth adding that Paul contributed fully to the work of the University of Glasgow outside the confines of department and school. He did his share of committee work as a senior professor, was active in Senate and elsewhere, and served for a good number of years as a Senate Assessor for Student Conduct, and then Senior Senate Assessor, a hugely important, sensitive and challenging role. Despite some of the very difficult

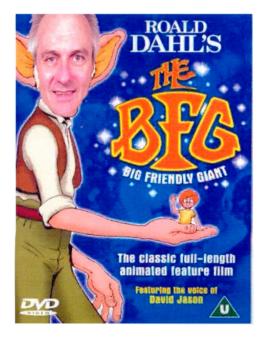


Figure 2. Paul Bishop as the BFG. (Source: early-2000s issue of Drumlin in Chris Philo's collection.)

cases with which he had to deal, Paul always maintained positivity and sound judgement, and indicative here is the fact that members of the Senate Office were keen to turn up and speak at the commemoration event mentioned earlier.

#### An enduring contribution and legacy

There is so much to be said about Paul as pioneer with countless impressive achievements and contributions to his name, and the present theme section can only scratch the surface of what might be covered and recalled. During the commemoration day for Paul at which the papers forming this volume were presented, three common messages chimed across (echoed now in the published versions below). Firstly, Paul commanded not only huge respect but also huge affection from his colleagues: the number of times during the day that we heard someone say that working with Paul was 'fun' was very telling. Secondly, Paul was an inspirational figure, generous with his time and ideas, stimulating to be with, and setting 'intellectual hares' running, as challenges for everyone - from long-in-the-tooth professor to first-year undergraduate - who came into the orbit of his intellectual reach, range and enthusiasm. Thirdly, the breadth of research interests that Paul developed, from long-term landscape evolution through fluvial geomorphology and hydrology to historical and cultural landscapes, was hugely impressive, and perhaps even more so was the depth and charge of his vision for integrating - and applying - physical geography, earth sciences and research on human-environment relations. In sum, then, the hope is that this theme section can be a fitting tribute - one amongst many, some published, others spoken, some just quietly thought - for someone who constantly endeavoured with great enthusiasm, intelligence, imagination, rigour, and generosity of spirit, to live the best of academic lives.

#### Notes

- 1. This notice was drafted by Chris Philo with input from Geraldine Perriam.
- 2. Paul's one (co-authored) article-length contribution to the *Scottish Geographical Journal* considered the role played by geologist and geomorphologist J.W. Gregory in the inauguration and subsequent practices of Geography instruction at the University of Glasgow (Leake & Bishop, 2009). As explicitly noted in this paper, Paul was perfectly aware of how some writings by Gregory on matters of environment, race, migration, colonisation and 'development' (in Australia and Africa) might now be regarded highly critically.
- 3. That this was the case is perhaps a shade unexpected given a claim that he once made to the effect in a trenchant book review published in the *Scottish Geographical Journal* that 'I and many other physical geographers quite simply do not wish to become involved in the cultural side of geography' (Bishop, 2003, p. 64). This claim arguably reflected a narrower position than it initially suggests: namely, a wish to avoid the 'cultural' concerns emerging *specifically* within the disciplinary terrain of (human) geography, rather than a distancing from matters of culture and humanity *per se* (which had of course already figured large in his own geoarchaeological work). Even so, the case can be made that his water mills and local history interests, maturing after 2003, *did* subsequently bring him into the orbit of culture as tackled by human geographers, historians and others, as Geraldine Perriam (2023) makes plain below. At various points in his career, he happily co-researched, co-supervised and co-taught with human geographers.

4. This article was initially a preamble to a reading of the Burns poem in question at a formal dinner held after the tribute day event in September 2022. It was suggested that it might be enlarged into a short closing piece for this theme section, and we are delighted that Gerard - Carruthers agreed.

#### Acknowledgements

Huge thanks are due to all of the participants who presented and attended on the day of our Paul Bishop commemoration event on 8th September, 2022, and notably to those who were able to turn their presentations into the articles that follow in this theme section below. Thanks as well to the invaluable assistance of Benedikt Frankland, Daniel McAllister and Dawn Bradshaw in helping to ensure the smooth running of the event. Crucially too, thanks are warranted to the reviewers of the contributions that follow. Particular thanks are also due to Martin Hurst and Rhian Thomas for their careful reading and suggestions about both overall content and specific wording of this introductory piece.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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