

OBITUARY

Brian Robson OBE (50-58), Emeritus Professor of Geography and co-director of the Spatial Policy Analysis Lab at The University of Manchester, died on 5th June 2020, aged 81. He had a long and distinguished career as an urban geographer. He was awarded a scholarship to the RGS and from there, he moved as an Exhibitioner to St Catharine's College, Cambridge, in 1958. After completing his BA, he stayed on at Cambridge for his PhD. In 1964, Brian moved to his first academic position at The (then) University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. With a leading Geography Department, Brian spent three years there as a young lecturer. Then came a year at the interdisciplinary Center for Urban Studies in Chicago. An opportunity arose after a year to return to Cambridge and Brian became a University Lecturer in Geography and Fellow of Fitzwilliam College in 1968 where he remained for almost a decade, helping Cambridge Geography to consolidate its reputation as an international powerhouse for research and teaching. Here he applied quantitative methods to urban geography, particularly regarding social differentiation and published several monographs and books over the following years, which marked a period of great dynamism and excitement in urban geography.

By the mid-1970s, Brian was thus a leading researcher in urban geography at home and overseas. In 1977, he was appointed Professor of Geography at Manchester University, where he was to spend the rest of his academic career. It was a move from a medieval town of rare beauty to what, he told one colleague, was a 'muscular city'. Much of his focus was on neighbourhoods in Manchester, such as Moss Side and Hulme (there had been widespread rioting in British cities in 1981, which shocked the nation); the question of a 'North-South divide' also resurfaced in national politics. A desire to influence UK public policy agendas became central to Brian's work and in 1983 he founded the Centre for Urban Policy Studies. Underpinning Brian's research was a frustration that the social, cultural and economic value of cities had been underappreciated. '*No City, No Civilization*' was the title of Brian's address to his academic peers in 1993, marking his presidency of the Institute of British Geographers. After serving twice as Head of the School of Geography, in 1988 he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Arts. From 1993-97, he was Pro-Vice Chancellor with responsibility for external affairs, In 2000, he was awarded the Royal Geographical Society's Founder's Gold Medal for his services to urban geography, something which he wrote about to the School. He was a Lifetime Honorary Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, a Fellow of the British Academy of Social Sciences, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. In 2010, he was awarded an OBE for his work on understanding the impact and effectiveness of urban policy.

At the time of his death he was actively writing a new book on the history of Newcastle, told through maps. Outside the university, Brian was a passionate advocate of voluntary service. He was a supporter of a number of local charities, serving as chair of the Manchester Council for Voluntary Services and the Manchester Settlement and was an active and regular supporter of the RGS Bursary Campaign, He will be greatly missed by those all who knew him. Brian died peacefully at home in the arms of his wife of many years, Glenna.

With acknowledgement to the University of Manchester, from whose obituary this has been adapted.