

Somewhere downstairs: Re-animating a departmental geography collection

David Matless

School of Geography, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK



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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the re-animation of a geography departmental collection through a study of the archives and map collection of the School of Geography, University of Nottingham. The discussion is situated within parallel examples of work on geographical archives and map collections, and wider debates on engagement with archival sources. The paper considers how a previously dormant collection has been re-animated in recent years, conveys the range of source material involved, and discusses the possibilities of digitisation. The paper thereby raises questions which could be asked of the holdings of any academic department, from whatever time period.

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The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there ... And *nothing happens to this stuff, in the Archive*. It is indexed and catalogued, and some of it is not indexed and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised.

Carolyn Steedman ¹

Downstairs, in the Clive Granger Building of the University of Nottingham, within the School of Geography, an archive and maps. The relics of a department, a hundred years' worth of material, showing somewheres across the world. Somewhere downstairs, a departmental collection.

From the ground floor of the building, all this seems underground, accessible only by a downward staircase of 28 steps. Minimal signage arrows the Edwards Resource Centre. Once downstairs, however, there are windows looking up a slope to a car park, the space less a basement than a lower ground floor, the building's architecture navigating sloping topography. There is no lift; anyone unable to navigate a staircase must go via the car park, entering through the emergency exit. Downstairs, somewhere almost underground, but not quite.

Downstairs, history

Downstairs, then, lies history, and a brief history of the downstairs space will help frame the remit of this paper. Twenty years ago, the collections downstairs seemed dormant, the map collection and archival materials little used. The downstairs space was purpose-built as a map library in what was then the new Social Sciences building, opened in 1967 to house Geography and other social science departments.² Geography held a separate map collection since the combined Department of Geography and Geology was divided in 1934, and while map collections, once a standard fixture of university geography departments, have often been lost through institutional rationalisation, the Nottingham Geography map collection has remained largely intact.³ A full-time map curator, Janice Coppock, was appointed in 1979, but in 1992, after her retirement, the map library was adapted into a 'multi-purpose teaching room', with some free-standing map chests removed, computer facilities installed, and the map chests around

² The building was shared with Sociology and Economics. The Sociology department later moved into another building, the Social Sciences name was dropped, and the building renamed the Sir Clive Granger Building, after a Nobel Prize winning former member of Economics staff. The Department of Geography at Nottingham was re-designated a School of Geography in 1998, but for ease of historical discussion is here termed a 'department' throughout the paper.

³ R. B. Parry, 'Moving On: Where Should the University Map Collection be Going?', *The Cartographic Journal* 42 (2005) 197–201. The few other surviving geography map collections include those at the University of Birmingham and University College London.

E-mail address: David.Matless@Nottingham.ac.uk.

¹ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 68.

the walls locked, no longer open access. The room was relabelled from 'Map Library' to the 'Edwards Computer Laboratory', named for K. C. Edwards, Nottingham lecturer from 1926 and Head of the Department of Geography from 1934 to 1970. The computing function of the space was itself relocated after a few years, when a former laboratory in the building was converted to a computer room, and in 2000 the space became the 'Edwards Resource Centre', a space for student working and access to books and photocopied course materials, initially under the supervision of Senior Cartographer Chris Lewis, who occupied the former Map Librarian's office in the corner of the room.⁴ The titular resources were for student use, consisting primarily of photocopied readings in course boxes, rather than the archival resources stored in an overhead cupboard, or the maps filling the drawers around the walls. New acquisitions to the map collection had effectively ceased. Student users of the space were drawn by borrowable and copyable pre-digital reprographics on open shelves. In 2007, on Lewis's retirement, a Resource Centre Administrator, Carol Gilbourne, was appointed, overseeing student use, and also attending to the map collection as part of her role.

As computers came and went, and resources were read and photocopied, the map drawers along the walls of the Resource Centre remained. Cost, and challenges of engineering, ensured their retention, and along the walls they were not in anyone's way. In the only downstairs room in the building, the maps stayed, part of the furniture and occasionally used, if no longer central to geography's intellectual life. Since the mid-2010s, however, the map drawers have been opened more frequently, a webpage on the map collection made, and the former map librarian's office converted into an archive room; this paper considers the re-animation of the Nottingham Geography collections⁵ (Fig. 1).

What was dormant is again active, and Nottingham offers one example of what might be done with a department's old things, those objects in parts of buildings metaphorically and often literally deemed marginal; downstairs, under the stairs, in the attic. While the survival of a map collection is relatively unusual in a contemporary geography department, an archive in some form is not uncommon, and all departments carry traces of their past, however recent, which might warrant consideration, for reasons of politics, culture and institutional biography. Nottingham is therefore presented here to generate questions which might be asked of any archives and collections held by academic departments:

What geographical varieties might inhabit archives and collections?

How might departmental archives and collections become objects of general rather than marginal interest?

How might the engagement with historic materials navigate tensions between assertions of their relevance to present concerns, and the retention of a sense of intrigue and difference which might have accrued from their marginal status?



Fig. 1. The Edwards Resource Centre, School of Geography, University of Nottingham, May 2024. Map chests line the wall, and the Archive Room is in the far corner. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

How might pre-digital objects inhabit a digital world?

Parallel questions have been posed in relation to well-catalogued national resources, including those of the Royal Geographical Society, and such discussions are returned to later in this paper, but it is important to note that Nottingham's collections, like many other similar holdings, are only partially catalogued, and lack significant information on their acquisition. In many cases, we have little idea of how and why we hold these objects. The archive is rather unarchived, the non-cartographic holdings as much an accumulation as a collection. The map collection structure is clear, with a drawer-by-drawer geographical organisation of material, but reflects particular acquisition policies, and the country-by-country order includes countries no longer extant. Questions of cataloguing and archiving will be returned to below, but in 2024, for example, the USSR still lingers as an organising principle, downstairs in Nottingham.

This paper thus addresses a departmental collection and its re-animation. The next section reflects further on the qualities of this downstairs space, before Nottingham is situated within parallel reflections on university departmental geographical holdings in the UK and elsewhere, and connections are made to decolonial issues. Accounts specific to the Nottingham collections by former staff members are discussed, before an account is given of collection re-animation, prompted in part by the intellectual enthusiasm of current staff, in part by institutional review. The paper then gives selected stories from the archive and map collection, highlighted by recent engagement with the materials, before reflecting on the possibilities of digitisation, including of historic slide collections, and the prospects and sensibilities of future curation.

The qualities of the space

Carolyn Steedman, writing on the archive as a space of memory, and quoted at the head of this paper, comments that archival material 'just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativized'. This paper reflects on reading and using things, and making stories from them, but also on the just sitting there; both the 'sitting', and the 'there'. How have things not moved? How do they remain for scrutiny?

⁴ 'Reports (Historical)' file, School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive. In correspondence in the early 1990s the former Map Librarian's office is referred to as the 'Entwistle Reading Room', after a recently retired lecturer, Gary Entwistle, but this name seems to have lapsed soon after. The relocated computers occupied what would become the Ebdon Computing Laboratory, named after former lecturer David Ebdon, who died in 1999.

⁵ On archival animation see Claire Dwyer and Gail Davies, 'Qualitative Methods III: Animating Archives, Artful Interventions and Online Environments', *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (2010) 88–97; Sarah Mills, 'Cultural-Historical Geographies of the Archive: Fragments, Objects and Ghosts', *Geography Compass* 7 (2013) 701–713. Mills examines the 'animation' of archives through 'more creative, enlivened and imaginative geographies' (p. 701), some of which are echoed here, but the present paper is also concerned with more basic processes of re-animation after neglect.

Steedman highlights 'the psychical phenomenology of the Archive', including the untying of document bundles, never untied since they were first tied: 'alone in the Archive, in the counting house of dreams, the historian opens the bundles ...'.⁶ Downstairs in the department, strings are untied, boxes opened, slides held up to a light to see what somebody photographed decades ago. For Steedman the archive is both 'prosaic' and 'a place of dreams', and her analysis is alert to how these qualities often meet in one object.⁷ Steedman's phrase 'the counting house of dreams' captures the way in which archives hold items of bureaucracy and the materials of imagination. What spaces of memory form in a geography department?

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard reflects on the phenomenology of domestic spaces, and the ways in which rooms and corners, cupboards and crannies, become loci of memory and meaning.⁸ The emotional charge of an academic department hardly matches home for its shaping of identity, but the peculiarities of academic labour make for a workspace where meaning of varying intensity accretes. The individual office where work can be conducted alone, the common or meeting room, the teaching spaces revisited year on year, and the formal and informal spaces where old things are kept. For those fortunate enough to attain relative security of employment, the department, if it stays in the same building, can become a site of routine, even ritual, the daily and seasonal round producing emotional working geographies, from the large chunks of life spent in the space.

Bachelard writes of drawers, chests and cupboards as 'the houses of things ... What psychology lies behind their locks and keys! They bear within themselves a kind of aesthetics of hidden things'.⁹ The Nottingham geography department houses many things, but downstairs, in their drawers, live the maps, around 80,000, all locked up, tucked up and categorised. Bachelard criticises the use of the drawer as a metaphorical classificatory concept, instead asserting a phenomenological image of secrecy and intimacy: 'They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy'.¹⁰ In some ways, however, a map library cuts across Bachelard's concept/image distinction, conveying instead a phenomenological image of classification. Here are things hidden, but sorted according to geography, laid flat in the appropriate drawer, the drawer labelled, awaiting the key in the lock, to be handled, selected for view, or passed over in favour of another in the pile.

This paper is titled 'Somewhere Downstairs' in part to emphasise a physical space, reached via a downward staircase, but 'downstairs' also carries other connotations. There is the underground of a cellar, where things laid down mature, to be brought to light for special occasions. The collections could be viewed in part in this fashion, with maps brought upstairs for temporary thematic displays on the first-floor landing, before returning to their accustomed drawers.¹¹ There is also though the 'Downstairs' of service,

the space 'below stairs' where people worked to serve those upstairs, as captured in the influential 1970s UK Edwardian-set television drama *Upstairs, Downstairs*, first broadcast in 1971. Are these maps and collections our servant objects, to be put to work as required?

In *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, her study of the relationship between modernist Bloomsbury writer Virginia Woolf and her servant women, Alison Light comments: 'without all the domestic care and hard work which servants provided there would have been no art, no writing, no "Bloomsbury"'.¹² For much of the twentieth century, without all the maps and technical devices downstairs, and indeed without the labour of associated cartographic and technical staff, would there have been any upstairs academic geography? The maps in the map library were the workhorse objects of teaching and research, if since put out to pedagogical grass with curriculum changes and digital learning. The lower status of 'downstairs' may indeed have shifted from service to anachronism, the place for out-of-date stuff usurped by new technologies, barely worth a nod. Would this all be better off put in a skip, an equivalent gesture to a bourgeois letting go of the servants when the kitchen gained mod cons? The re-engagement with the Nottingham collection seeks to sidestep such dismissal, to assert things as worthy of attention, yet we should not rush to discard the sense that, downstairs, you might still breathe the air of something out of time. The anachronistic qualities of objects underscore the significant differences they embody, and warrant appreciation.

The old things retained downstairs also mark out a complex emotional space. Light, in conveying how the human servant role denoted 'an emotional as well as an economic territory',¹³ indicates the complexities and insecurities of conservative affection:

Nothing is dearer to the conservative imagination, be it that of the master or the servant, than the figure of 'the family treasure', the old retainer become friend, or indeed 'almost a member of the family' (a great deal depends upon that 'almost'). Yet this nostalgic vision obscures how temporary and mobile a form of employment service actually was.¹⁴

Light's phrasing also captures something of the emotions felt around inanimate servant objects. Some of the things downstairs in Nottingham were made in Nottingham and have never left, though have moved between successive new buildings. Others were made elsewhere and never expected to be here, while others started here, went away and came back again. Downstairs (and upstairs) we find things which are all, in their ways, migratory objects, albeit fixtures for now, downstairs a space of provisional settlement.

Collections of geography, collections at Nottingham

In their 2008 report on a survey of geography department archives in the UK, Johnston and Withers noted that 30% of the 54 departments who responded had some form of departmental archive, 13% held in house, 17% elsewhere:

were anyone to want to write a history of 'modern' British geography ... it would not be possible to do so from the extant UK departmental archival record. At least, it would not be possible to do justice to the different institutional and biographical ex-

⁶ Steedman, *Dust*, p. 80–1.

⁷ Steedman, *Dust*, p. 69. On the archive see also Thomas Osborne, 'The Ordinarity of the Archive', *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) 51–64; Harriet Bradley, 'The Seductions of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found', *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) 107–122. Osborne emphasises the archive's ordinarity and mundanity, while Bradley stresses the phenomenological 'pleasures, seductions and illusions of archival work' (p. 109), but both can apply, with the ordinary potentially illusive, and the banal pleasurable.

⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969; first published in France 1958).

⁹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁰ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 78.

¹¹ Recent displays on the building's first-floor landing, curated by David Beckingham, have covered themes of global energy production and distribution, food and drink, and the European journeys of former staff member R. H. Osborne, whose archival material is discussed below.

¹² Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* (London, Penguin, 2007), p. xvii. Light's study is in part set in the era of *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

¹³ Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, p. 13.

periences that ought to be captured by any such history: to students' experiences, to the 'shaping' of the discipline in institutional context, to the lives lived by people called geographers in places called departments.¹⁵

This paper seeks to cast doubt on the second sentence in this assertion, if not the first. Johnston and Withers highlighted work in Edinburgh and Aberdeen revealing archives 'in formation', and Withers' own Edinburgh study recounted a 1998 university-funded project 'to help create a department archive for geography', organising records and interviewing former staff and students: 'we were giving meaning and value as we sought to give order'.¹⁶ In 2002 Lorimer and Spedding reported on excavating 'hidden spaces' in the Aberdeen geography department, including the historic 'Map Control' map room. The map collection had been 'scattered', but the room remained a fulcrum for departmental resources, and a social space.¹⁷ Lorimer and Spedding noted: 'reflexive research practice has rarely extended to the very spaces of academia in which we assume the status of professional geographers with greatest regularity and comfort: those centred on the department'.¹⁸ In 2009 Lorimer and Philo gave similar attention to the records of Glasgow geography, prompted by a departmental centenary, focusing on photograph albums of a 1930 field class, the grey literature of Occasional Papers and fieldwork reports, evidence from University Court minutes, and sets of examination questions, all materials paralleled in the Nottingham collections.¹⁹

None of these studies considers map collections, save for mentions of their dispersal, indeed notwithstanding work on map collections in significant libraries, there has been little attention given to those assembled by university geography departments.²⁰ In their *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* editorial 'In Defense of the Map Library', Marcy Bidney and Nathan Piekielek argue that 'map libraries and the print cartographic collections that they preserve remain relevant and irreplaceable even in a digital world'.²¹ Bidney and Piekielek's arguments for printed maps' ability to answer historical research questions, teach spatial literacy and substitute for unavailable digital resources, can be supplemented by an assertion of their value as historical material objects, worthy of scrutiny for their physical form as well as the worlds they depict, and this paper addresses such issues for Nottingham's map collection.

Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate's *Decolonising Geography?: disciplinary histories and the end of the British empire in Africa, 1948–1990* shows the value of scrutinising geography

departmental resources.²² Collections held in departments such as Makerere in Uganda, Ibadan in Nigeria and the University of Ghana near Accra, all initially set up after the war, and before independence, as colleges of the University of London, enable reflection on African decolonial process, and on the decolonisation of disciplinary history. Elements of the Nottingham departmental holdings work in parallel with Craggs and Neate's studies, and consideration here can act as a bridge to further discussion of Nottingham collections. The map collection's historic value indeed derives in part from combining the colonial and post-colonial, with, in Africa, the British Directorate of Overseas Surveys succeeded by the mapping agencies of newly independent countries. In drawers B185 and B186, Makerere University College in Kampala, one of Craggs and Neate's case studies, thus appears on a 1959 British-issued map, and on a 1963 map, published the year after Uganda's independence by the new Department of Lands and Surveys. Several copies of the 1963 map are held, with one annotated in crayon by an unknown hand, coloured boxes demarcating areas of Kampala and the University site by ethnic group; black for 'Af.', blue for 'Asian', red for 'Eur.'. A city crest on the reverse includes a book, an impala and a cotton plant, the explanatory text stating: 'the book alludes to Makerere College, the University College of East Africa'. Crayons trace differences which would become significant fractures, with the expulsion of the Ugandan Asian population in 1972.

If Nottingham maps indicate colonial and decolonial stories, archival student notes also convey geographical thoughts of empire. The collections include a donated set of degree notes by Arthur Clarke, who studied geography from 1935–38.²³ Clarke's notes are very thorough, covering all thematic and regional courses. What then did a 1930s geography student at University College Nottingham, whose degrees were awarded until 1948 by the University of London, learn of Africa? 'Economic Geography' included the study of tropical agriculture, global cotton production and the factors influencing 'white settlement', while the 'Africa' section of world 'Regions' begins with a general note on 'The Southern Continents': 'The chief feature in common is the emphasis on production of raw material by European capitalist enterprise'. Resources are detailed, and Clarke sketches mining areas and railway networks (Fig. 2 A/B).

Africa also featured in Clarke's subsidiary courses in the History department in Year 1, Term 3, on European History, and the Colonisation of the World. The latter began with New Zealand, then moved to 'W. Africa, the Slave Trade and the W. Indies', with a detailed account of slavery's geography, economy and brutality: 'Slaves were secured by open kidnapping ... masters were absolute autocrats. Whipping and maiming common'. The Colonisation course also covered 'Early Voyages of Discovery', 'American Colonies', and 'British Settlement in W. Indies'. A Nottingham geography student in the late 1930s received an account of things colonial, historical learning complimenting geographical accounts of resource extraction, in an education not uncritical. Clarke noted one reference for literature on West Africa and slavery, a

¹⁵ Ron Johnston and Charles W. J. Withers, 'Knowing Our Own History? Geography Department Archives in the UK', *Area* 40 (2008) 3–11 (p. 8).

¹⁶ Charles W. J. Withers, 'Constructing "the geographical archive"', *Area* 34 (2002), 303–311 (p. 306–7). The idea of an archive 'in formation', used in Johnston and Withers, 'Knowing Our Own History?', p. 5, is taken from Michael Lynch, 'Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails', *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) 65–87.

¹⁷ Hayden Lorimer and Nick Spedding, 'Excavating Geography's Hidden Spaces', *Area* 34 (2002), 294–302 (p. 299). On Aberdeen see also the 2019 paper, which does not cite Lorimer and Spedding's 2002 work, Lorna J. Philip and Kevin J. Edwards, 'Centenary of the Department of Geography, University of Aberdeen', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 135 (2019), 156–212.

¹⁸ Lorimer and Spedding, 'Excavating Geography's Hidden Spaces', p. 295.

¹⁹ Hayden Lorimer and Chris Philo, 'Disorderly Archives and Orderly Accounts: Reflections on the Occasion of Glasgow's Geographical Centenary', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 125 (2009), 227–255.

²⁰ J. B. Harley, 'The Map and the Development of the History of Cartography', in *The History of Cartography, Volume 1*, ed. by J. B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 1–42; Michael Heffernan, 'A Paper City: On History, Maps and Map Collections in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Imago Mundi* 66 (2014), 1–20.

²¹ Marcy Bidney and Nathan Piekielek, 'In Defense of the Map Library', *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* 14 (2018), 1–8 (p. 1).

²² Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate, *Decolonising Geography?: disciplinary histories and the end of the British empire in Africa, 1948–1990* (London, Wiley, 2024); also Gustav Visser and Ronnie Donaldson, eds, *The Origin and Growth of Geography as a Discipline at South African Universities* (Stellenbosch, Sun Press, 2016).

²³ Clarke's notebooks were donated after his death by his family in 1999, having been found in the loft of his house. They are housed in Boxes 4.1 and 4.2 in the departmental archive. The sketch maps reproduced here, and the geography notes on Africa, are found in 'Item H' within the boxes, while the History course notes are in 'Notebook F'. The mining map appears to be one part of a sketch map subsequently cut down and repurposed as a larger sheet enclosing Clarke's notes on regions of Great Britain and Ireland, as a label to this effect is fixed to the back of the map and the notes are folded within.

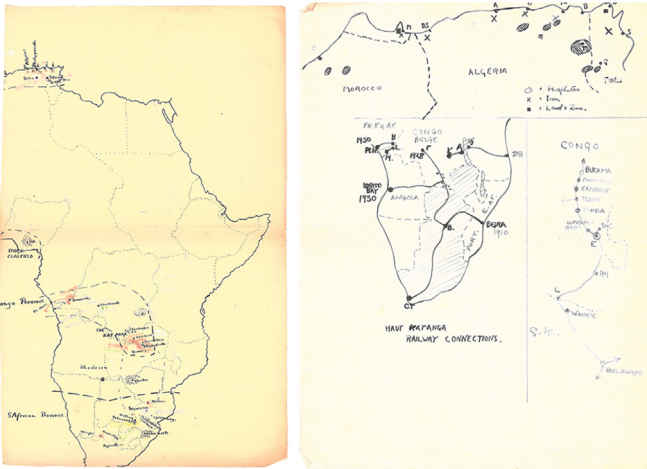


Fig. 2. A/B. Sketch maps by Arthur Clarke of African mining and railways. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

geographical writer who was at once celebratory and critical of colonialism: ‘Colonisation of Africa – H H Johnson’ [sic]. The 1930 printing of the 1913 edition of Harry Johnston’s *A History of the Colonisation of Africa by Alien Races*, first published in 1899, remains on the Nottingham library shelves, likely the same copy Clarke may have consulted, with its particular mixture of crude hierarchical racial judgement and critique of colonial practice, including on the ‘horrors of the slave trade’.²⁴ The book retains the ‘University College Library Nottingham’ label from its acquisition as library book number 17,418.

Clarke, from Cleethorpes in Lincolnshire, obtained a second class degree in 1938, his certificate issued by the University of London, who granted University College Nottingham students their degrees as ‘external students’. After war service, Clarke taught geography in secondary schools in Grimsby and Worksop. The University of Nottingham gained its degree-awarding charter in 1948; as the University of London ceased awarding degrees to Nottingham students, it began awarding them in Makerere, Ibadan and the Gold Coast.

Clarke’s notes, and the Uganda maps, have only recently been scrutinised for their stories of dependence and independence, but hints of the narratives within the Nottingham collections also appear in earlier studies by former staff members Philip Wheeler and John Cole. Neither achieved a wide geographical readership; Wheeler’s 1985 study of the Map Library appeared in the *Society of University Cartographers Bulletin*, while Cole’s 2000 history of the department between 1922 and 1970 was printed by the School of Geography and marked ‘For private circulation only’.²⁵ A close reading of both however draws out aspects of departmental life which match Johnston and Withers’ call for attention to ‘different institutional and biographical experiences that ought to be captured’.²⁶

²⁴ Sir Harry H. Johnston, *A History of the Colonisation of Africa by Alien Races* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp. 155–157.

²⁵ P. T. Wheeler, ‘A Survey of External Use of the Map Library, Department of Geography, University of Nottingham’, *Society of University Cartographers Bulletin* 19 (1985) 21–26; John Cole, *Geography at Nottingham, 1922–1970: a record* (Nottingham, School of Geography Nottingham University, 2000). Edwards also gave an account of the first decades of the department, and his own early career, in K. C. Edwards, ‘Geography in a University College (Nottingham)’, in *British Geography 1918–1945*, ed. by Robert Steel (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 90–99.

²⁶ Johnston and Withers, ‘Knowing Our Own History?’, p. 8.

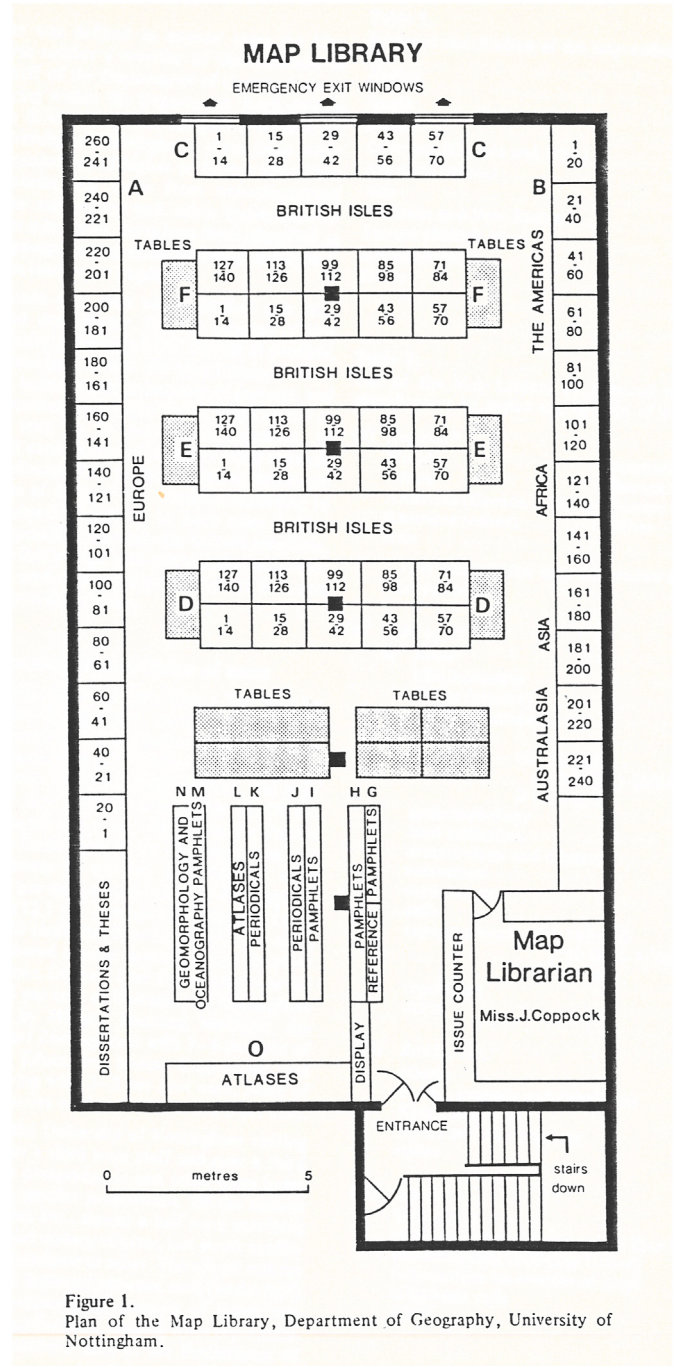


Figure 1. Plan of the Map Library, Department of Geography, University of Nottingham.

Fig. 3. ‘Plan of the Map Library, Department of Geography, University of Nottingham’, published in P. T. Wheeler, ‘A Survey of External Use of the Map Library, Department of Geography, University of Nottingham’, *Society of University Cartographers Bulletin* 19 (1985) 21–26 (p. 22). Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

Wheeler’s account included a plan of the Map Library as it then stood, measuring 278.8 m².²⁷ (Fig. 3). Since 1985 the space has shrunk, and the layout altered, with the central ‘British Isles’ map chests removed, the bottom left corner shown in 1985 as holding various documentary sources partitioned off for a separate teaching room focusing on learning technologies and spatial

²⁷ Wheeler, ‘Survey’, p. 22.

literacy, and the office of the 'Map Librarian' now an Archive Room. Wheeler identified around half of the map holdings as non-UK, with 25% covering continental Europe, and noted 'a working collection of 560 atlases, a complete set of undergraduate dissertations (1 695) and postgraduate theses (104)', plus various publications.²⁸ The atlases remain, but all of the undergraduate dissertations on the 1985 plan, and some of the postgraduate theses, were later disposed of.

Wheeler's paper focused on the use of the map library by external readers, 88.5% from within the University of Nottingham: 'During the 213 weeks recorded there were 1765 visits by outside users of the Map Library, averaging 8.3 visits a week'.²⁹ Who might the once-a-fortnight visitor from beyond the university have been? Wheeler gives a picture of the late twentieth century connections generated by a departmental collection:

However, from time to time the Map Library has assisted with more distant matters, such as the laying of pipe lines in North Africa, the choice and costing of heavy haulage routes in the Middle East, the identification (for a local textile firm) of certain industrial locations in Korea, or the layout of selected railway systems in the USA (for a model railway society). More local enquiries, such as the location on early Ordnance Survey plans of old mineral workings in Derbyshire suitable for re-exploitation, or the selection of routes for orienteering meets, are relatively commonplace. Perhaps the most satisfying request (in more ways than one) was when a local bakery firm needed assistance with the data on the Pennines used in an advertising campaign on Radio Nottingham, and presented the Map Curator with a very large iced cake by way of thanks!³⁰

Alongside the map collection, the Nottingham Geography archive reflects in part the labours of former Professor and Head of Department John Cole, who first arrived at Nottingham as an undergraduate in 1947, worked elsewhere after graduation and national service, and returned as a staff member in 1956. In his 2000 compilation *Geography at Nottingham, 1922–1970: a record*, Cole stated:

From the late 80s on, a large amount of material of various kinds was turned out of cupboards and moved off shelves in the Geography Department. Among this material were many documents and items saved from earlier decades. Thanks particularly to Chris Lewis, our chief cartographer since 1978, he and I were able to decide what should be saved and what thrown away. When I was about to retire in 1994 I proposed at a staff meeting that there should be some kind of record of what we still had from the past and a place in which material could be kept safely in spite of the pressure on space. My concern was more with things from the earlier decades of the life of the Department than with recent ones. The present record has grown to a size much greater than I envisaged when I was starting it.³¹

Cole's *Geography at Nottingham*, from the formation of the Geographical Society in 1922–23 to the 1970 retirement of Edwards, grew to 308 pages: 'I have the feeling that if I had not compiled it,

nobody else would have done so'.³² Cole's departmental archive, the things he and Lewis did not throw away, remains in an overhead cupboard, above some Europe map chests, box files numbered and labelled in his hand. Appendix 4A of Cole's record lists the 22 items of pre-1970s material, including university annual reports, Geographical Society minute books and magazines, pre- and post-war field course itineraries, educational postcards, student lecture and fieldwork notebooks, departmental and university publications, and building plans.³³

As a document 'Compiled by John Cole, 1998–2000', the style of *Geography at Nottingham* matched Cole's own characteristic mix of rigour and idiosyncrasy. Gathering material in his retirement, Cole offered 'a record', not *the* official record, but this was a rich digest of material, including personal testimonies from former staff and students. Cole also highlighted the work of non-academic departmental staff, acknowledging the help of Herbert Cartwright in compiling his record, and detailing his historical role. Cartwright joined the technical staff of the Department of Geology and Geography in 1926, and from 1934 acted as Geography Head Technician and effective map curator, with a break only for war service, until retirement in 1978. Cartwright indeed himself appears in the map collection, on two of the sheets for the 1930s Land Utilisation Survey, 'Nottingham' and 'The Dukeries'; production details on the maps list Edwards as map editor, with the maps 'reduced to the scale of one inch to one mile by H. F. Cartwright'.³⁴ A 1960 departmental newsletter reported Cartwright managing 24,000 map sheets on the move to a new building; by the 1967 newsletter and the move to the current building he is moving 32,000 thousand maps.³⁵ A '1967 Building' file includes a schedule envisaging 75,000 thousand maps eventually accommodated in the map library.³⁶ The 1968 departmental newsletter included Cartwright's account of the move, the maps (with another 4,000 by now added) and equipment shifted in four days in July:

But then the work started, all the maps 36,000 had been rolled, and each roll had been given a drawer number to fit in the new map library. After all the maps had been transferred (no fee) all the drawer numbers had to be deleted from each map, and the new drawer number put on. This process took almost the whole of the vacation. Incidentally there are 990 drawers in the new library.³⁷

The long-serving Cartwright played a key role alongside Edwards in shaping the Department, including in the design of the 1967 building, for which Edwards was chair of the Building

³² Cole, *Geography at Nottingham*, p. 2. Stephen Daniels, then Head of School, provided a foreword to Cole's 2000 publication.

³³ Cole, *Geography at Nottingham*, pp. 269–271.

³⁴ The 'Nottingham' and 'The Dukeries' sheets, surveyed from 1931 to 34, are held in drawer B50 in the map collection. On the Land Utilisation Survey, co-ordinated by Dudley Stamp from the London School of Economics, with school children acting as surveyors, and geography departments often playing a role in map compilation, see Simon Rycroft and Denis Cosgrove, 'Mapping the Modern Nation: Dudley Stamp and the Land Utilisation Survey', *History Workshop Journal* 40 (1995) 91–105.

³⁵ Cole, *Geography at Nottingham*, p. 117, p. 209. See also a copy of Cartwright's own notes in 'Reports (Historical)' file, School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, which discuss the growing size of the collection in successive buildings, with over 100 map drawers when the department was housed in temporary buildings, colloquially termed the 'Cow Sheds', from 1947 to 60, and 428 drawers in the new 1961 building.

³⁶ School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 11'.

³⁷ Cole, *Geography at Nottingham*, p. 220.

²⁸ Wheeler, 'Survey', p. 21.

²⁹ Wheeler, 'Survey', p. 23.

³⁰ Wheeler, 'Survey', p. 24–5.

³¹ Cole, *Geography at Nottingham*, p. v. Chris Lewis had joined the department as head cartographer in 1978, having previously worked in Geography at Cambridge and Lampeter. Lewis had first visited the University of Nottingham for a Society of University Cartographers conference in 1969. Interview with Chris Lewis, summer 2019.

Committee. Cole included portraits of Edwards and Cartwright, and biographical details, inside the front cover of his record.

Inertia, bureaucracy, re-animation, inheritance

The appearance of Cole's record, and his organisation of the archive, did not prompt an immediate revival in the use of material downstairs. The prevailing pre-millennial outlook is indicated by the closure in 1999 of the department's academic journal, *East Midland Geographer*, established in 1954. A valedictory issue, its cover replicating the original green cloth design with university crest, included past highlights and editorial commentary, reflecting on the publication's history and the region it conveyed.³⁸ *East Midland Geographer* had been put to sleep, and the maps and archival documents likewise rested, as the downstairs space turned to a resource centre. This section of the paper considers how and why, as the student resource centre wound down, the Nottingham collections were re-animated.

Inertia and bureaucracy tend to be seen as negative, but both played a positive role in the preservation and re-animation of the Nottingham departmental collections. When the map library was reconfigured in the late twentieth century, the central map chests could be removed with relative ease, but those around the walls would have presented other challenges. Here were things effectively part of the built structure, with heating ducts above the overhead cupboards, needing a different kind of effort and commitment should removal be proposed. And so, since 1967, they have stayed, easiest left inert in place.

The re-animation of the maps and the archive was prompted in part by bureaucracy. Every few years the University of Nottingham, via the relevant Faculty, undertakes a review of each School, including the space occupied. Spaces controlled by Schools, but seen as under-utilised, might be co-opted as shared Faculty or University spaces, their use subject to central timetabling. The 2017 School of Geography review identified the Edwards Resource Centre as an under-utilised space, and the current author was asked by the Head of School to prepare a report for the School Review Implementation Group, focusing on map collection use. A staff survey showed around 15% regularly used the collection for research and teaching, and in August 2017 it was noted that: 'The space itself has changed in the past two years from being a staffed space where a member of administrative staff could assist students in accessing materials, to being unstaffed. In the ERC the question of space is fundamentally linked to the map collection'.³⁹

Bureaucratic review thus prompted action to re-animate the map collection, ensure its retention, and retain the space under departmental control: 'The review provides an opportunity to make the collection a working asset for the School and University, while also contributing to a more effective use of the space within the Edwards Resource Centre (ERC) for teaching, study, meetings, events and receptions'.⁴⁰ Making the collection and the space a 'working asset' entailed in part the increased scheduling

of meetings and classes downstairs, but also reflection on the space's intellectual qualities, and its role as a source of departmental cultural identity. A Map Collection Working Group was established in November 2017, renamed the School Collections Group in December 2018 in order to include archival materials and historic equipment within its remit. Membership comprised academic staff with relevant research interests, the Head of School, and School cartographer Elaine Watts, who had managed the map collection since the ERC had become an unstaffed space, and who assumed the formal role of map curator within her wider cartographic responsibilities, also working to extend the ways in which a paper map collection might be used. Momentum came in part from meetings with Faculty officers, with the alternative futures occasionally mentioned galvanising the Group to assert the Collection's value. Thus in one meeting a faculty representative suggested that the resource centre space might be enhanced by the provision of a kitchenette, offering facilities for students to heat up food, make hot drinks, and store lunches in fridges. The microwave and the map collection, the kettle and the minute book, seemed unlikely and inappropriate space-sharers. The mooted kitchenette became a reference point for the Working Group as initiatives proceeded, signalling what might have been.

In 2018 the map collection achieved digital presence via a dedicated webpage within the School of Geography website, in the 'Map Services' part of the 'About Us' section.⁴¹ Maps appear as part of what we are. A short summary text accompanied a scanned selection, showing a variety of locations and cartographic styles. Re-animation entailed reflection on the historic object and the digital image, map scanning smoothing the texture of the paper object, any creases ironed out, yet making for vivid on-screen colour. Details of eleven maps were shown, with an option to download the original; from the University of Nottingham, 1967, with a blank space before the current building was constructed, via Nottingham, the trenches of World War One, Central Europe, New York, San Francisco, East Africa, Xinjiang, Afghanistan, and Tonga to a geological map of the Moon in 1970. The webpage hosted a 'Map of the Month' blog, staff from across the School selecting one map linked to their research concerns. From November 2018, eleven blogs appeared at almost monthly intervals, the timetable sometimes a little stretched, before the pandemic put a halt to things. The blog was renamed 'The Map Blog', with contributions continuing after lockdown, though on an intermittent basis; as of spring 2024 there were nineteen entries.⁴² The blog gave the collection a departmental presence, even for those not regular users. From downstairs came cartographic stories of war and peace, landscape, leisure, asylums, refugees, riverscapes, and the economic geographies of Czechoslovakia in 1966, all indicating the variety and quality of the collection.

Collection re-animation also came via initiatives beyond the university, staff members working with community groups, artists, primary schools and members of various publics, in initiatives led especially by David Beckingham, Elaine Watts and Gary Priestnall. Maps have been prominent, with aspects of present and past local life detectable in the collection. Loans have been made for exhibitions at the Nottingham Contemporary art gallery, and for educational activities associated with exhibits at the New Art Exchange in

³⁸ The final volume of *East Midland Geographer* was issued in 1999 as Volume 22, Part 2. The current author was the journal editor, acting also in effect as the journal's undertaker. The final issue gathered highlight *East Midland Geographer* articles within sections on 'Definitions', 'The Economic Landscape', 'The Historical Landscape', 'The Physical Landscape' and 'East Midlands Geography'. The compilation of the issue helped spark a line of interest running through to the present paper.

³⁹ 'School of Geography Map Collection: Report for School Review Implementation Group', August 2017, School of Geography, University of Nottingham. The role of the Resource Centre Administrator had disappeared in the University's restructuring and re-allocation of administrative roles, entitled 'Project Transform'.

⁴⁰ 'School of Geography Map Collection: Report for School Review Implementation Group', August 2017, School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

⁴¹ The Map Collection webpage is at: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/geography/about/map-services/map-collection/index.aspx>. Part of the map collection are now searchable at the level of content description on the University of Nottingham's Nusearch library system.

⁴² 'The Map Blog' appears at: <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/mapcollection/>.

Hyson Green in Nottingham. Maps have also been used in projects with the University's Lakeside Arts on local sense of place for senior citizens, and in displays for visiting school groups in association with Geographical Association lectures.

The re-animation of a collection is in part therefore a story of display, and of continuing ad hoc acquisition, but has also involved decisions on disposal. Not everything and anything can be kept, and questions of space preoccupy a School Collections Group as much as they do a Faculty review. Some material has been culled, including duplicate sets of maps, where multiple copies of the same location had been acquired for field teaching, and some undergraduate dissertations. Mette Bruinsma has asserted the archival value of the undergraduate dissertation, using 2500 produced at Glasgow from 1954 to 2014 to gain insights into disciplinary changes.⁴³ Nottingham held fewer surviving dissertations, save for a few older studies, randomly donated from the 1950s and 1960s, and a rolling programme of disposal meant that, up until the end of printed submissions in 2018, only the past few years were retained.⁴⁴ Until recently an understairs cupboard, on the way down to the resource centre, held several hundred of the last paper submissions, along with all masters dissertations submitted since the first MSc and MA courses were established in the late twentieth century. In 2023 the School Collections Group came to a judgement concerning space and intellectual/historical value, deciding that while all masters dissertations would be retained, only a selection of undergraduate work should be kept, chiefly those dissertations which had won internal prizes, or had won or been nominated for external prizes. These survive as a paper sample of what a good geography dissertation was like, in the last pre-digital days. The rest have gone.⁴⁵

The choice to retain or dispose of material is a matter of inheritance, of things passed down being passed on, or not. Inheritance also begs questions of intended readership, and whether the institutional deposits were ever meant to be read by successor institutional actors. For Steedman: 'The archive gives rise to particular practices of reading. If you are a historian, you nearly always read something that was not intended for your eyes'.⁴⁶ Steedman's historian encounters 'the message that was never a message to start with, never sent, and never sent to the historian: was just an entry in a ledger, a name on a list'.⁴⁷ In some cases the Nottingham geography collection matches Steedman's sense of meaning migrating across registers to the interpretive present historian; the maps made across the world for purposes far removed from Nottingham geography, the European postcards brought or sent home by travelling academics for reference. Other things downstairs might however have been made for our eyes. The minute books of the student Geographical Society were written both for the conduct of Society business, and as documents of record which might linger in the Department long after their authors

graduated, to be read by some future departmental historian. Likewise, former academics donating papers or slides to a Departmental collection might have hoped for their items to be viewed by successor staff. To return to Steedman's 'If you are a historian, you nearly always read something that was not intended for your eyes', parts of the departmental collection inhabit the space left by the 'nearly always'. Here lie deposits which hoped, even expected, to be read by future custodians; hoped not to be junked.

Collection stories

From inertia, through bureaucracy, and with some winnowing, the Nottingham collections have stirred, re-connecting to departmental life, and to audiences beyond the academy. This section of the paper considers and illustrates some of the stories emerging from collection re-animation, with insights into student geographical lives, and the geographies in and of the maps.

One of Cole's archive boxes contains Nottingham Geographical Society student magazines, published annually from 1963 to 1969 (Fig. 4), and including some future academic geographers reporting on Geographical Society activities, as when in 1965 Roger Lee discussed 'A Visit to the Gotham Gypsum Mine', a contribution sandwiched between J. M. Shaw on 'Smiths Crisps Lincoln' and R. H. Williams on 'Shipstone's Brewery Visit'.⁴⁸ In 1969 Lee, by then at Queen Mary College, returned as a guest contributor to a symposium asking: 'Which Way Geography?'.⁴⁹ The box also includes magazines from other Departments in the 1940s and '50s, including Manchester, Leeds, Durham, Belfast, Edinburgh and Cambridge, all paralleling the Glasgow University student publication *Drumlin* discussed by Philo in 1998 as a notable 'semi-academic space'.⁵⁰ There is also *The Northern Universities Geographical Journal*, published from 1960 to 1964, linked to an annual Northern Universities' Geographical Conference, and issued through the host institution each year: 'The Journal provides a unique and useful outlet for student work on geographical subjects which can reach a wider readership than the individual Society magazines'.⁵¹ From the Nottingham archive comes a neglected source, giving insight into 1960s student intellectual life, student geographers becoming academic through conferencing and publication. Nottingham hosted the 1962 conference, the journal cover mapping the universities included across the Midlands, northern England and Scotland, from Birmingham to Glasgow, Hull to Liverpool (Fig. 5).

Inside, K. C. Edwards introduced Nottingham, and 'The Site and Setting of the University', followed by eight student contributions, some from names later familiar in academic geography: 'Some Problems concerned with the Graphical Representation of Climatic Data' by E. C. Barrett (University of Sheffield); 'The Brue Valley of Central Somerset' by R. A. Butlin (University College of North

⁴³ Mette Bruinsma, 'The Geographers in the Cupboard: Narrating the History of Geography using Undergraduate Dissertations', *Area* 53 (2021) 67–75; Mette Bruinsma, *Dissertating Geography: An Enquiry into the Making of Student Geographical Knowledge, 1950–2020* (London, Taylor and Francis, 2023); Mette Bruinsma, 'Fieldwork nearby and far away: Student-geographers and the expanded field in the history of geography', *Journal of Historical Geography*, published online 21 April 2024.

⁴⁴ For a few years before 2018, dissertations were submitted in both physical and electronic form.

⁴⁵ The space thereby cleared in the understairs cupboard enabled the movement of old departmental PhDs, and some runs of journals, from overhead cupboards where their weight was adversely affecting the ability to open some of the map drawers. The PhDs now share the understairs cupboard with the surviving undergraduate and masters dissertations.

⁴⁶ Steedman, *Dust*, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Steedman, *Dust*, p. 151.

⁴⁸ Nottingham University Geographical Society Magazine 3 (1965); School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 3'. We retain copies of all but the 1968 issue of the magazine. The same box file includes copies of the 1950s and 60s University of Nottingham magazine *Survey*, showcasing examples of current university research, to which Nottingham geography staff and postgraduates contributed.

⁴⁹ 'Which Way Geography?', Nottingham University Geographical Society Magazine 7 (1969); School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 3'.

⁵⁰ Chris Philo, 'Reading Drumlin: Academic Geography and a Student Geographical Magazine', *Progress in Human Geography* 22 (1998), 344–367 (p. 345).

⁵¹ 'Editorial', *The Northern Universities Geographical Journal* 3 (1962), 2; School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 3'.

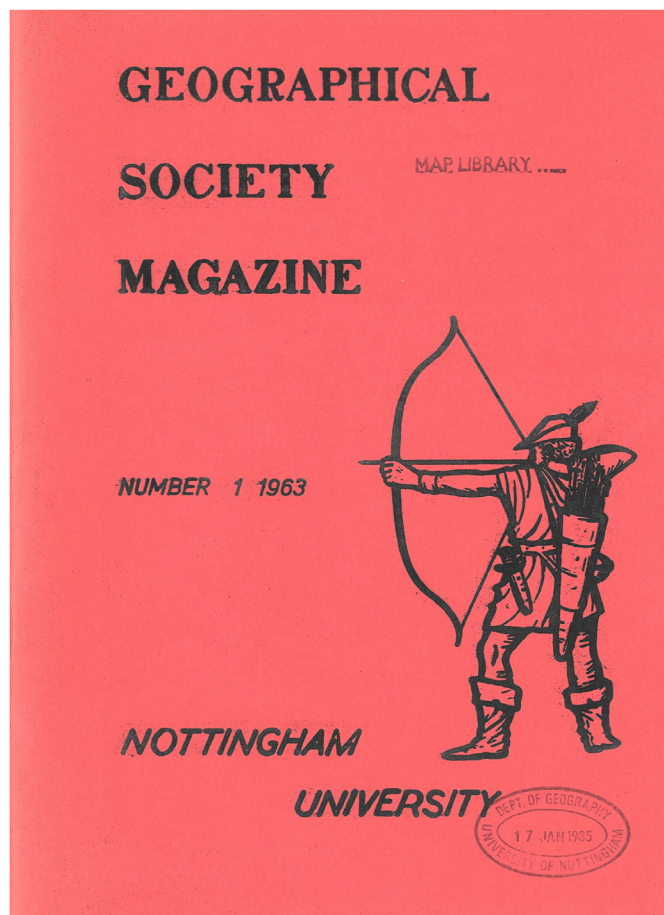


Fig. 4. Front cover of Nottingham University Geographical Society Magazine 1 (1963). Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

Staffordshire); 'The Italian and Indian Populations of Bedford – A Contrast in Assimilation' by D. Sibley (University of Liverpool).⁵² A poster (Fig. 6) advertised the conference, held on Friday 16 February 1962, beginning at 1pm, with lectures by W. R. Mead

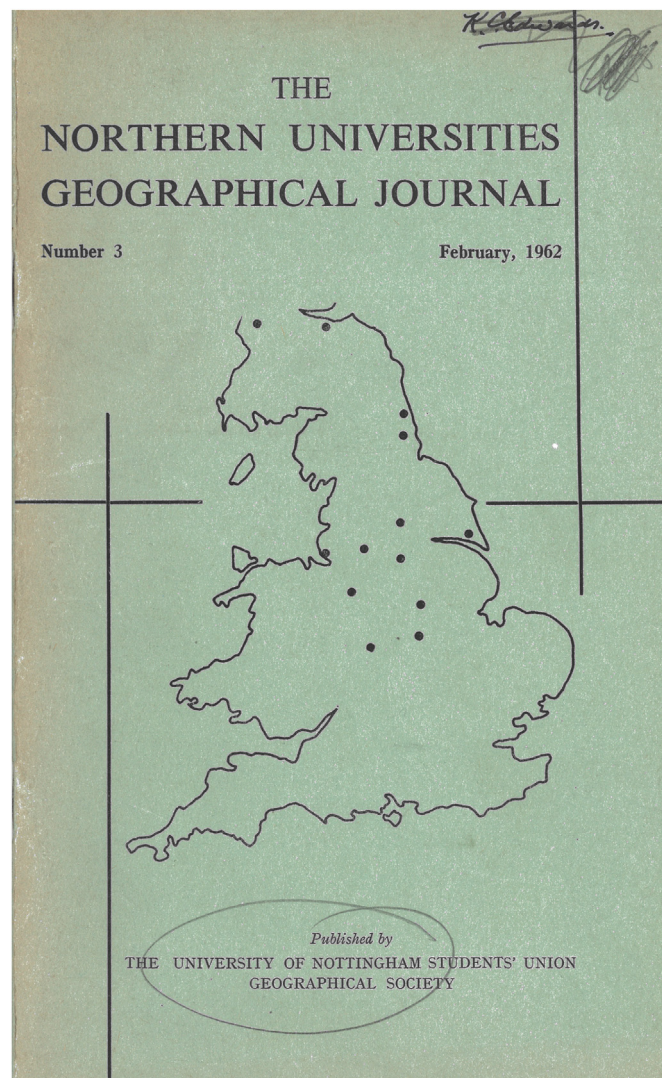


Fig. 5. Front cover of *The Northern Universities Geographical Journal* 3 (1962). Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

⁵² In discussion of the Nottingham archival holdings at the Historical Geography Research Group's fiftieth anniversary 'Practising Historical Geography' conference, held at Nottingham in November 2023, the current author showed the magazine to the in-person and online audience. The latter included Robin Butlin, who recalled that the article on the Brue Valley had derived from his undergraduate dissertation at the University of Liverpool. The North Staffordshire affiliation was a postgraduate one. K. C. Edwards would regularly act as an authoritative voice introducing the geography of Nottingham to a wider audience, as when Nottingham hosted the British Association for the Advancement of Science annual conference in 1966, and the geography department organised the associated publication, edited and introduced by Edwards. The acknowledgments thanked Maurice Cutler, 'draughtsman in the Department of Geography, for the skill and care he has devoted to the preparation of the maps and diagrams'; K. C. Edwards, ed, *Nottingham and its Region* (Nottingham, Nottingham Local Executive Committee of the British Association, 1966), p. vi. The University of Nottingham also holds archival material from Edwards' academic career in its Manuscripts and Special Collections department. A fuller investigation of such material, and the role of student conferences in shaping forms of geographical identity, could explore parallels with the wider culture and politics of twentieth century 'conferencing'; see Stephen Legg, Jake Hodder, Mike Heffernan and Benjamin Thorpe, eds, *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World* (London, Bloomsbury, 2021); Stephen Legg, *Round Table Conference Geographies: Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023).

(UCL), G. M. Howe (Aberystwyth) and A. Davies (Exeter), and ending with '8–11 p.m. DANCE (bar available)'.

Another box file records a national post-war inter-departmental event, Nottingham Geographical Society organising a five-day student Inter-Varsity Geographical Conference in March/April 1952. Applications for attendance include one from John Cole, then a Nottingham student.⁵³ (Fig. 7). A menu survives for the conference 'Inaugural Dinner', with tomato soup, roast pork, fruit trifle and cheese and biscuits, and toasts for 'The Queen', 'Our Guests' and

⁵³ School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 5'. Cole also left records of his own work in the archive, notably in a box labelled 'Ohio 1965', with materials from his attendance at the six-week US National Science Foundation Summer Institute in the Application of Quantitative Methods in Geography, held at Ohio State University in June–July 1965, which was significant in developing Cole's interest in quantification; School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file, 'Ohio 1965'. Cole would co-author a book on quantitative methods with his physical geography colleague Cuchlaine King; J. P. Cole and C. A. M. King, *Quantitative Geography* (London, John Wiley, 1968). Elsewhere, possibly unknown to Cole when he compiled the archive, is a postcard sent by him from Turin to K. C. Edwards while an undergraduate, reporting on his 1948 summer travels; School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 21.2 Postcards'.

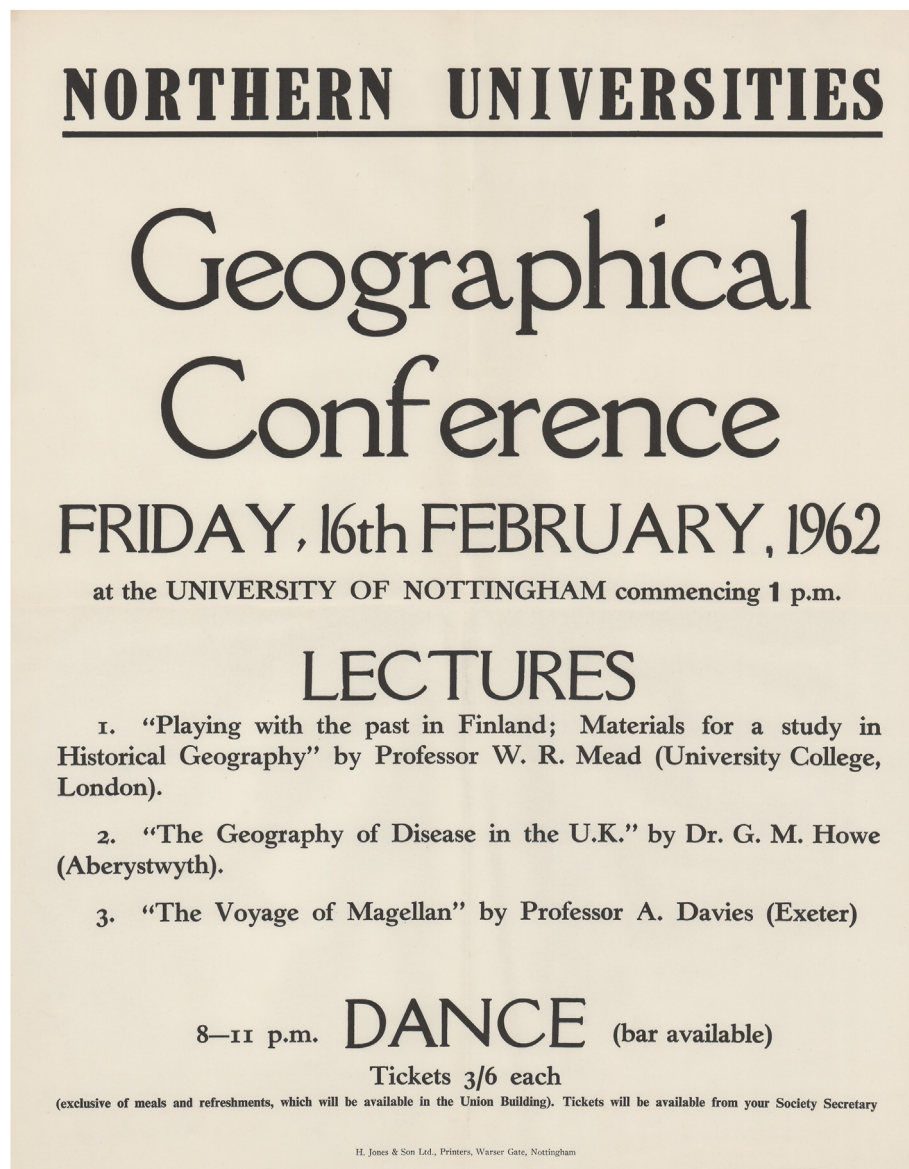


Fig. 6. Poster advertising the Northern Universities Geographical Conference, 1962. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

'The University' (Fig. 8 A/B). A picture of geography's post-war student life emerges, with meetings, publications, dinners and dances fostering a sense of regional and national geographical community, shaped by intra- and inter-institutional networks, boundaries and hierarchies.

Past student life also featured in the first collection exhibition in the Edwards Resource Centre, marking the 2023 centenary of the student Geographical Society (commonly known as Geog Soc). While a separate Geography Department was only formed in Nottingham in 1934, the Geographical Society was founded in February 1923, within the then Department of Geology and Geography. Newly purchased display boards and cases enabled a centenary display on Geog Soc's first ten years, compiled in summer 2022 and remaining on show through the centenary academic year and beyond (Fig. 9).

The chief source was the Society's minute books, showing an organisation whose officers in the early years were mainly female students, working closely with the one or two designated

Geography staff; K. C. Edwards made his first appearances in 1926. The display considered foundation and organisation, field excursions and social events, connections to the Geographical Association, the Land Utilisation Survey of Great Britain and 1920s Inter-Varsity Geographical Conferences, the hosting of internal and external speakers, and the staging of debates. The current author gave a presentation on the display near the centenary date on 8 February 2023, to around sixty staff and students, the talk hosted and promoted by the current Geog Soc. Students reflected on the parallels and differences of student life then and now. What archival trace would the current Geog Soc leave a hundred years on? How did debates then echo debates now? A display board covered the 1920s Geog Soc debate topics, including 'Is Geography an Art or a Science?' (15 February 1929, 'The voting was in favour of the Art side by a small margin'), 'That the League of Nations is justified geographically' (6 February 1924, the motion carried by twelve votes to eight), and 'That USA should permit the immigration of Asiatics' (defeated by fifteen votes to nine). The first Geog

NR

SECOND POST-WAR BRITISH INTER-VARSITY
GEOGRAPHICAL CONFERENCE
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE HALL, NOTTINGHAM
MARCH 31ST - APRIL 4TH, 1952.
REGISTRATION FORM
Please use Block Capital Letters

NAME JOHN PETER COLE
UNIVERSITY / COLLEGE NOTTINGHAM YEAR 5th Reserve
ADDRESS 21 VINSON CLOSE
ORPINGTON
KENT
ADDRESS during the week before the conference opens
Same

Are you willing to share a room? Staying in lodgings
Cash

I ENCLOSE* cheque/money order/postal order for £ : 5 s. - d.
being* { 5/- Registration Fee (non-returnable. Balance of £ 3-16s-6d. payable at the Conference).
£ 4-4s-0d., full Conference Fee (including Registration Fee).

Cheques etc. should be made payable to:
"Nottingham University Geographical Society"

Registration Forms, when completed, should be sent with the fee to the
CONFERENCE TREASURER,
GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY,
UNION OF STUDENTS,
THE UNIVERSITY,
NOTTINGHAM.

* Delete that which does not apply. Jan 24

Fig. 7. John Cole's application for attendance at the 1952 Inter-Varsity Geographical Conference in Nottingham. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

Soc debate, on 13 March 1923, asked whether 'A white Australia was detrimental in the interests of the White Race': 'A lively discussion followed the opening speeches and the motion was carried by a substantial majority'.⁵⁴ 1920s student geographers, like some today, argued over questions of art and science, geopolitics and race, and Geog Soc 2023 invited its members to hear about the displays:

From racist debates to questionable field trips, GeogSoc's transformation has been documented widely and is waiting for you to explore it all. Listen to a talk by David Matless about the display and look through the archived material for yourself, including original photographs and meeting notes.

As per GeogSoc's 2022/2023 tradition, we will be providing Domino's pizza to suit all dietary requirements!⁵⁵

Just as geopolitical stories shape Geog Soc minutes and memories, so they structure the map collection, with its relict classifications of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the USSR, and evidence of state and military map use and donation. A significant proportion of the collection was acquired in the mid-twentieth century, and maps which until recently might have been viewed as slightly out-of-date 'contemporary' documents attain a historical value as products and representations of geopolitical conflict and post-colonial transition. A University of Nottingham Postgraduate Placement conducted in 2019–20 by Philip Jagessar, then researching a PhD on historic maps of India, allowed a focus on African and Central and Eastern European holdings, and the cataloguing of relevant map drawers. Jagessar's spreadsheets convey dates of production and acquisition, and producer organisations. While sometimes it is unclear how maps ended up in Nottingham, others appeared through the purchase of sets through the Ordnance Survey and foreign mapping agencies, via purchase on staff travels, or through donations, notably when UK military holdings were distributed to academic collections in the decades after World War Two; Cartwright noted that in the 1950s there was a 'large intake' of Colonial Survey maps.⁵⁶

One example from the 80,000 maps illustrates how maps not only illustrate but also embody the geopolitical conflicts of the mid-twentieth century. In drawer A128, one of six devoted to Poland, maps show territorial battles and shifting borders, with stamps of ownership themselves telling of cartographic movement across frontiers (Fig. 10). Not all the maps of Poland were produced in Poland, and a 1:100000 Soviet map shows the area around Grodek, east of Bialystok, now near to the border of Poland and Belarus. The map was issued in the USSR in 1936, carries a German military ownership stamp from 19 October 1943, and then a UK Geographical Section of the General Staff Map Room stamp from 1 August 1945. Three states and three armies on, at an unspecified date a 'Department of Geography, University of Nottingham' stamp records the map settling into our possession.

The German stamp on the Grodek map states: 'Justus Perthes', along with the date and 'Kartensammlung' (card collection). In his 1949 *Geographical Review* article on 'Lessons from the Experience of the Map Information Section, OSS', Leonard Wilson noted the US Office of Strategic Services map teams reaching the Justus Perthes map plant in Gotha in April 1945, the city still partially occupied by German forces, the Red Army not yet there: 'Copies of all publications and maps, to the amount of nine tons, were removed'.⁵⁷ In their 2020 study of captured German maps from World War Two, Sweetkind-Singer and March note how maps were routed to the OSS London Map Division for distribution, either to the US or British Army Document Sections.⁵⁸ The Nottingham Grodek map is likely to have travelled this way, eventually transferred to UK academia, and coming to rest in drawer A128.

⁵⁶ 'Reports (Historical)' file, School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive. An interview conducted in summer 2019 with former cartographer Chris Lewis indicated the variety of ways in which maps came to Nottingham, the history of collection and the space it has occupied, and the culture of the departmental cartographic drawing office in the late twentieth century. On Jagessar's doctoral map work see Philip Jagessar, 'Correspondence, scale and the Linguistic Survey of India's colonial geographies of language, 1896–1928', *Journal of Historical Geography* 84 (2024), 1–13.

⁵⁷ Leonard Wilson, 'Lessons from the Experience of the Map Information Section, OSS', *Geographical Review* 39 (1949) 298–310, p. 306. See also Susan Powell and Heiko Muhr, 'Capturing the Complex Histories of German World War II Captured Maps', *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* 16 (2020) 166–193.

⁵⁸ Julie Sweetkind-Singer and Gregory March, 'Acquisition of World War II Captured Maps: A Case Study', *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* 16 (2020) 140–165.

⁵⁴ School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, box file: 'Geography Department Record Item 2'.

⁵⁵ Email sent to geography students by Geographical Society President Megan Mahoney, 7 February 2023.

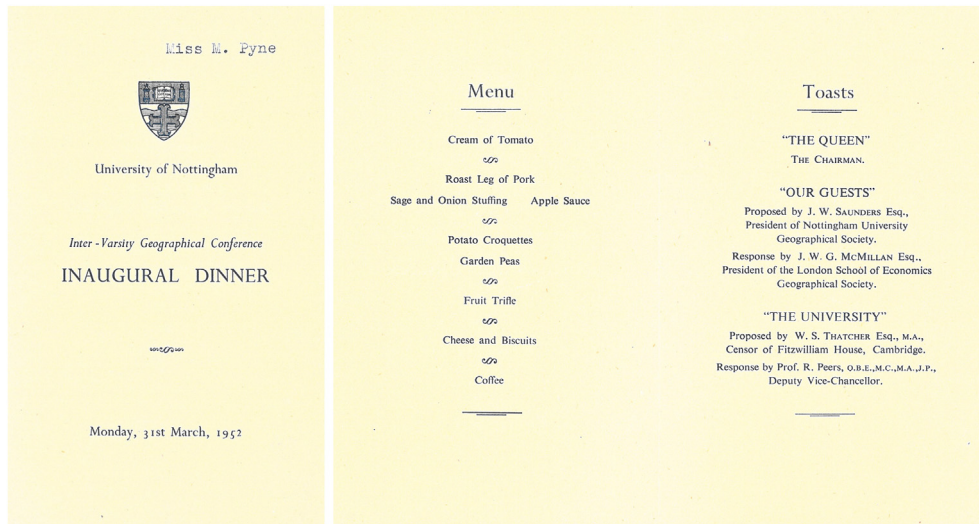


Fig. 8. A/B. Front cover and inside of menu for the Inaugural Dinner of the Inter-Varsity Geographical Conference, Nottingham, 1952. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.



Fig. 9. Photograph of exhibition marking the centenary of the University of Nottingham Geographical Society, 2023. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

As noted earlier, downstairs we find migratory objects, fixtures for now, their settlement provisional, coming to Nottingham via different geographies, trailing relations of power behind them, whether from student societies and conferences, or wartime capture. Their settlement is provisional in the sense of being always liable to change, the institutional future never really known, but also as provisions offering intellectual sustenance, food for thought for those within the Nottingham department and beyond.

For those unable to visit: The analogue and the digital

Displays of archival material, or guided access to the map collection, reach only those working in or visiting the department. The digitisation of material opens other possibilities. For those unable to visit, Nottingham material might be broadcast anywhere,

for those with internet access, and with no paywall. The collection is as yet largely undigitised, but how might digitisation allow the material to be, in Steedman's terms, narrativised? For all the 'potential for digital re-animation and exploration' examined by Kristine Ericson, Sarah Mills and others, would digitisation risk subtracting the material qualities of, say, a map or a slide?⁵⁹ Or could digital visualisation retain a sense of the object? Bundles might at least be photographed before strings are undone, slide cases pictured before they are opened.

Jake Hodder and David Beckingham, both Nottingham members of staff, have considered the 'recombinant historical geographies'

⁵⁹ Kristine G. Ericson, 'Re-animating the archive: encountering and transforming historical materials with digital design tools', *Cultural Geographies*, published online 23 January 2024; Mills, 'Cultural-Historical Geographies of the Archive'.



Fig. 10. Soviet map of Grodek, Poland, 1936, drawer A128, School of Geography map collection. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

generated by digitisation: 'The term digital archive is a misnomer, then. Research platforms are rarely archives in any actual sense'. The rendering of archive-as-platform, as for example in the digitisation of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) archive by Wiley Digital, 'denotes a demarcated, (pay)walled digital space; a foundation on which to build immersive and proprietary tools'.⁶⁰ Could another kind of platform be made, with permeable walls, without the pay, marking out the geographies downstairs, with the entry click the digital equivalent of the staircase? A local, uncommercial platform, on a digital branch line, one of the luxuries of the digital world being that branch lines tend to linger, whatever their traffic, as long as the track is maintained. What kinds of non-monetary, common value might thereby be unlocked?

Hodder and Beckingham add: 'digital archives cannot be separated from wider political struggles over the control and ownership of cultural memory'.⁶¹ The cultural memory of a geography department would be reconfigured through any digital archival space, with old objects achieving new presence, by virtue of their survival in physical form, and their selection for digitisation, while others remain undigitised.⁶² Other questions arise as to the future cultural memory of the digital present. At the Geog Soc centenary talk the question was asked, vis-à-vis the 1920s minute books, of how today's committee would leave any traces for their successors,

⁶⁰ Jake Hodder and David Beckingham, 'Digital Archives and Recombinant Historical Geographies', *Progress in Human Geography* 46 (2022), 1298–1310 (p. 1301).

⁶¹ Hodder and Beckingham, 'Digital Archives', p. 1303.

⁶² At the time of writing, questions of general collection digitisation remain open, but the purchase of a map scanner in summer 2023 will enable choices to be made as to which aspects of the collection might be presented in digital form, and how.

with digital minutes and agendas potentially inaccessible to any future archivists, technological change likely to render today's cutting edge obsolete. The 1920s book survives, the 2020s online discussion may not.

The possible styling of a digital archive can be explored through an ongoing project to scan elements of the departmental slide collection, notably post-war images of the East Midlands and Eastern Europe. Student placements in the University's Manuscripts and Special Collections department have enabled digitisation; East Midlands slides connect to the university's ongoing civic remit, and the eastern European slides to a staff bequest funding a research fellowship for central and eastern European scholars.⁶³ Around 550 East Midland and 800 East European slides have been scanned and put on a site accessible to relevant staff, with an archival spreadsheet giving subject matter, date, and an allocated serial number.⁶⁴ Digitisation might allow the compilation of slide show public photo essays by place or theme, a contemporary equivalent to the 'slidescapes' identified by Emily Hayes in her study of RGS collections and late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century lantern lectures by Vaughan Cornish.⁶⁵ For Cornish's talks, as for today's digitised slides, aesthetic judgements would inform a visual narrative, and several hands would be involved in the production; the original photographer, the scanner of the slide, the curatorial hand of contemporary geographers.

Annebella Pollen reflects on the status of analogue slides in a digital age in her analysis of the dismantled art history slide library at the University of Brighton, its 650,000-strong collection including photographs of Brighton's historic environment. Arguing that 'slides gain meaning from when and how they are apprehended', Pollen considers slides as documents of post-war worlds, and as things repurposed in contemporary art practice, where 'The slide is now an object to be looked at rather than through'.⁶⁶ The Nottingham collection offers a modest geographical equivalent for an art history slide library, reflecting the role played by such images in twentieth century teaching and the record of field journeys. Pollen salvaged 20,000 'Photographs' slides from Brighton's library: 'The slide library's devaluation at its point of deaccession, contrasts sharply with slides' recent revaluation in three locations: scholarly interests in photographic materialities and media archaeologies; the retro marketplace; and contemporary art practice'.⁶⁷ The Nottingham slides project likewise seeks to prevent object loss, and to view objects again, to look both through and at the slides, holding them up to the light to get a sense of what was photographed, prioritising some for scanning and leaving others to rest, and appreciating the material qualities of slides, drawers and storage boxes, as the former technologies of geographical learning.

What retro values lie in the Archive Room? Wooden cases hold glass slides showing photographic and cartographic images of locations around the world, with Eastern Europe featuring prominently. Such material was supplemented by a collection obtained

⁶³ On the bequest by R. H. Osborne funding Visiting Research Fellowships to Nottingham for scholars in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, see: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/geography/research/osborne-fellowship.aspx>.

⁶⁴ The scanning project was co-ordinated by Mark Bentley of the University's Manuscripts and Special Collections department. The students on the placement scheme for the East Midlands slides were Annabel Stubbs and Rita Figueiredo, the latter then a geography undergraduate, and for the Eastern Europe slides Samantha Brinded.

⁶⁵ Emily Hayes, 'Slidescapes: Three Royal Geographical Society Lantern Lectures by Vaughan Cornish', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 17 (2019) 71–88.

⁶⁶ Annebella Pollen, 'From Art History Pedagogic Resource to Post-Digital Art Medium: Shifting Cultural Values in a Dismantled Slide Library', *History of Photography* 47 (2023) 5–27, p. 22.

⁶⁷ Pollen, 'From Art History Pedagogic Resource to Post-Digital Art Medium', p. 7.



Fig. 11. Slide of Havířov, Czechoslovakia, photograph by R. H. Osborne, November 1967. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

after the death of R. H. Osborne (1925–2018), former Professor and Head of Department, who had travelled extensively in the former eastern bloc. Osborne had engaged with Edwards in Institute of British Geographers initiatives for joint seminars with eastern bloc geographers, notably in Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, and in 1967 published *East-Central Europe: A Geographical Introduction to Seven Socialist States*.⁶⁸ Specialist publications and travel ephemera accompany Osborne's extensive and well-organised slide collection, each country having labelled carrying cases, with locations of images on labels, and sometimes accompanying notes for lecture use. Around 800 of Osborne's slides have so far been digitised; future viewers might replicate the kind of slide show delivered by Osborne on his return from travels, journeying through 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Albania.

Osborne's images carry a retro value in their documentation of sites from another time, their insight into what a geographer thought worthy of record, and their aesthetic qualities as carefully captured images of the state socialist world (Fig. 11). To give one example, in late 1967, probably in November given that slides from similar locations carry a specific November date, Osborne stood on a street in Havířov, a new industrial city near Ostrava in Czechoslovakia, not far from the Polish border, and took a picture.⁶⁹ Children, probably from a kindergarten, take a walk, two attendants guiding the roped-together group, all but one in uniform red.

Looking at the image, one of the attendants, and some of the children, have spotted Osborne. Can they know that the man with the camera is a British geographer? Osborne's slides, in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere, often show patterns of land use, industrial sites, towns and villages, reservoirs and highways, the scenes of modernity which typically caught the eye of a mid-twentieth century geographer in the field. But they also show street scenes urban and rural, wedding parties and parades, beaches and stadia, and people going about their socialist everyday. The Havířov children walk, wrapped against the coming central European winter, a few months before the Prague spring.

Several slide cases in the Archive Room are devoted to the East Midlands, most, like Osborne's eastern European images, from the 1960s and '70s, a time of urban renewal and industrial transformation, including the decline of regional extractive and manufacturing industries. Digitisation here displays past geographies, but also heightens the quality of old photographic colour, memory filtered through the particular technologies picturing place.⁷⁰ As the region changes in the twenty-first century, and the University claims an active contemporary role, here are pictures from an earlier cusp of modernity. Nottingham geographers, like Pollen's photographers documenting twentieth century Brighton, acted 'as cultural producers and commentators on regeneration and conservation matters', and the viewer might via these images tour the post-war region.⁷¹ Thus on Boxing Day 1968, a geographer takes a break from festivities to photograph part of Nottingham's new inner ring road, Maid Marian Way, a legendary name attached to modernist urban brutalism, traffic free on a Christmas bank holiday⁷² (Fig. 12).

⁶⁸ R. H. Osborne, *East-Central Europe: A Geographical Introduction to Seven Socialist States* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1967). On Osborne, Edwards and other British geographers journeying to the eastern bloc see David Matless, Jonathan Oldfield and Adam Swain, 'Geographically Touring the Eastern Bloc: British Geography, Travel Cultures and the Cold War', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33 (2008) 354–375, where four slides from the collection showing field excursions in Poland at the 1959 Anglo-Polish geographical seminar are reproduced. Shelves in the Archive Room also hold specialist historical publications from the collections of retired staff, including John Cole and Adam Swain, reflecting their research interests in the former USSR and Hungary.

⁶⁹ School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, slide scan: 24–71426 m Temp Acc 90/13/17.

⁷⁰ On the geographies presented via photographic technology see Joan Schwartz and James Ryan, eds, *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2003).

⁷¹ Pollen, 'From Art History Pedagogic Resource to Post-Digital Art Medium', p. 18.

⁷² School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, slide scan: 20–29248 Temp Acc 60/10/6.



Fig. 12. Slide of Maid Marian Way, Nottingham, 1968. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

The modern expansion of the University of Nottingham was also a matter for photographic festive record, one slide showing the new Social Sciences Building, a lone car parked outside at Christmas 1967.⁷³ (Fig. 13). In May 2020, when the first pandemic lockdown was imposed, and the building was out of bounds to staff and students, a 'Map of the Month' blog used this and other 'Workplace Views' to present a place of shared meaning, no longer accessible:

Any reader who has studied or worked in this building will have memories of daily entry and exit, whether through key-locked doors or the automatic doors installed around forty years after this image was captured. Any current worker or student will for now only have memories. The unpopulated Christmas 1967 view matches today. For the building, at present, every day is like Christmas.⁷⁴

Digitised holdings here shaped a piece of therapeutic writing, the archival inheritance, scanned the year before, keeping a workplace in view.

Sensibilities of re-animation

This paper has sought to indicate the geographical varieties within the Nottingham geography collections, to show how interest in such materials might be cultivated, and to examine the possibilities of digitisation, bringing old things into the present while retaining their qualities of difference and anachronism. Arthur Clarke's notes, maps of Kampala and Grodek, the Inter-Varsity menu, the Havirov children, Maid Marian Way, give flavours of what might emerge from a formerly neglected departmental geographical collection. The paper concludes with future prospects, and the sensibilities involved in re-animation.

In 2008 Johnston and Withers commented on their survey of UK geography: 'Two departments had a department archivist: in both cases the title is honorific, with neither person having training in archive management'.⁷⁵ There is no prospect of, and perhaps no need for, a paid archivist for Nottingham geography. The map curator facilitates access to the map collection, but for the wider archive, the School Collections Group considers how to manage the material. The University's Manuscripts and Special Collections department have given valuable support, notably in digitisation, but cannot take formal responsibility, and any transfer of materials away from geography would diminish the collection. These are things which gain value from being in situ, as long as the building put up in 1967 remains, and Geography remains within it, both of course circumstances potentially subject to change. For now though, these geographical materials can be found downstairs, working in their local fashion, and gaining a wider reputation, to which this piece of writing contributes.

The current custodians follow their predecessors who organised the map library and gathered the archive, respecting the orders generated, and developing the collections as what Thomas Osborne terms 'a centre of interpretation'.⁷⁶ Items may still accrue, whether bequests from the retired or deceased, or from events associated with the collection. In 2023 the Geog Soc centenary exhibition included a display case showing Society sporting activities, with the centrepiece a colourful blazer, donated at an unknown date by Gwynneth Enoch, who graduated in 1949. To mark their hundred years, Geog Soc 2023 decided to produce centenary hoodies, and Vice-President Max Harries contacted the present author to offer one for the collection: 'I thought it could be nice to be put in the GeogSoc archive alongside the stripey sports blazer, or if you just want to look cool wearing it around campus!'⁷⁷ The choice was made to archive, perhaps for display alongside the blazer on a future anniversary, showing the ways in which student geographers have clothed themselves in different fashion.

⁷³ School of Geography, University of Nottingham Archive, slide scan: 20–39271 m Temp Acc 60/10/29; A. Peter Fawcett and Neil Jackson, *Campus Critique: The Architecture of the University of Nottingham* (Nottingham, University of Nottingham, 1998).

⁷⁴ 'Workplace Views', by David Matless, at: <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/mapcollection/2020/05/12/workplace-views/>.

⁷⁵ Johnston and Withers, 'Knowing Our Own History?', p. 6.

⁷⁶ Osbourne, 'The Ordinarity of the Archive', p. 52.

⁷⁷ Email, Max Harries to David Matless, 31 May 2023.



Fig. 13. Slide of the main entrance to the new Social Sciences building, University of Nottingham, Christmas 1967. Source: School of Geography, University of Nottingham.

The re-animation of a collection shuttles between asserting relevance and appreciating anachronism, with contrasting cultural and political sensibilities enacted. The motivation may be radical, to excavate hidden stories hitherto unvoiced, or conservative, to maintain a monument to a disciplinary past, under threat from change. Contemporary academic historiographic convention tends to the former against the latter, with archival studies committed to the subaltern, as in Felix Driver and Lowri Jones' 2009 RGS-IBG exhibition on 'Hidden Histories of Exploration', bringing indigenous figures and expedition intermediaries to the foreground of retrospective display.⁷⁸ The Nottingham holdings can be read in a parallel manner, decentring attention from past departmental heads such as Edwards, Osborne and Cole, indeed Cole's own account in *Geography at Nottingham* gathers a range of past student and staff voices, as did the Geographical Society centenary display. Re-animation can also though appeal to a culturally conservative sensibility. Downstairs, the markers of identity, to be highlighted for collegiate pride, or the open-day promotion of somewhere with a past to rival or trump competitor institutions, a sign of continuity and relative stability. Sensibilities radical and conservative circle the Nottingham material, and any project of re-animation might productively admit both; to admit in terms of allowing both their space, and in admitting that both might be felt, and indeed might intertwine. To find unsettling stories from the past, or to find signs of family resemblance in old geographical things; sometimes the same object may admit both feelings.

To conclude where this paper began, with naming. This paper has taken the title 'Somewhere Downstairs' to convey the architectural place of the collections, and to capture the sense of material appearing both foundational and peripheral to today's subject, but 'Downstairs' doesn't quite work as a space name. Signage is currently minimal, pointing to a Resource Centre which no longer

really functions as a resource centre, or at least no longer houses resources aimed primarily at student use. Should re-animation prompt re-naming? Or a re-calibration of what constitutes a resource? The School Collections Group will give the matter due consideration, but asking the question prompts a doubling-back on the history of names, and the institutional memory carried by different staff. Long servers might still habitually think 'Map Library', shorter servers the 'resource centre', the 'Edwards Resource Centre' or a shorthand 'ERC'. Some might wonder who Edwards was, and where or what exactly the resources are, having never seen the room staffed and full of students reading photocopies or offprints of course material, an everyday scene itself rendered historic by electronic library resources, and never photographed for posterity. For those who rarely use the facility, venturing down only when a staff meeting is held there, perhaps 'downstairs' does suffice, as a practical directional label.

Nomenclatural variation indicates both instability and stability; a space carrying different labels and never quite firmly established in identity, yet also a space resilient through its restructuring and renaming. A new name might be allotted, and new signage made, but downstairs will remain downstairs, and re-animating the collection makes it more of a destination, somewhere to go, still there after six decades.

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⁷⁸ Felix Driver and Lowri Jones, *Hidden Histories of Exploration* (London, Royal Holloway/RGS-IBG, 2009); Felix Driver, 'Hidden Histories Made Visible? Reflections on a Geographical Exhibition', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (2013) 420–435.