

FROM FIVE OF THE ORIGINAL TEAM OF GEOGRAPHERS AT OXFORD POLYTECHNIC  
(NOW BROOKES UNIVERSITY)

Inevitably, the many tributes to Denis Cosgrove, with the recording of his career achievements, tend to focus on the period since his move to Loughborough and the publication of his first book, in the early 1980s. However, there was a time, from 1972-80, when Denis made a different kind of contribution to the discipline of Geography in higher education, and also made many friends who remember him fondly today. That was his time at what was then the new HE institution of Oxford Polytechnic and is now Oxford Brookes University, and his contribution to the establishment of this new university was a significant one.

Denis began teaching Geography at the Poly as a part timer seconded from 'down the hill' (Oxford University), where he was putting the finishing touches to what became his doctoral thesis. In a few short years he progressed from full time lecturer to senior lecturer to principal lecturer – he was a 'rising star' and his intellectual authority and his quick and lively mind were soon recognized and valued by the new institution's senior management team, albeit they knew nothing about Geography! Denis quickly took a leading role in designing the new undergraduate programme in Geography, which formed part of the pioneering modular course (equivalent to the American credit system). This programme reflected the concerns of the discipline at the time and was forward-looking, giving considerable scope to cultural geography and to environmentalism (both of which became of growing academic interest to the Geography discipline as the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wore on). Denis also contributed to the experimentation in teaching methods which became a hallmark of that first team of half a dozen geographers who joined the Polytechnic. As a teacher he was stimulating, approachable and intellectually challenging, and the students very much respected him and liked to be in his classes.

As an academic colleague and friend, in those exciting days, his company was much sought after. To take a walk with him through the streets of London or some other city, and to see the urban landscape through his eyes (or indeed any rural landscape), was a hugely 'eye-opening experience'. To hear his thought-out and radical take on the politics and social issues of the time, and to join in conversation with (and perhaps pit your wits against) him always brought pleasure, and amusement. In line with the zeitgeist, perhaps, Denis never accepted conventional wisdom without questioning and challenging the premises on which this 'wisdom' was based, and he was, too, impelled by a deep sense of social justice (such dispositions were, rightly, carried over into his teaching). While he was not usually disrespectful to those in 'authority', he made it clear that he would not give them an easy ride if he thought their attitudes, ideas and plans were flawed and/or ideologically objectionable. Such serious mindedness, however, was never over intense, and Denis often displayed a relaxed approach to life, mulling things over a pint in the local pub, or retreating to his allotment where he applied his not inconsiderable talent for growing vegetables and flowers. And above all, he had a great sense of humour, and enjoyment of the good things of life. At times his humour could be intellectually sophisticated, and often caustic. However at other times he would enthusiastically share in the bouts of sheer daft-ness which often punctuated the day in the new Polytechnic.

Denis' achievements were many and distinguished, but he never seemed to let this place himself at a distance from others. And in his case that old cliché was genuinely true - that if you met him after a long interval, of perhaps years, it was as if you had not been apart at all. A kind, warm, fun person, whom we will all miss greatly.

David Pepper, Derek Elsom, John Gold, Alan Jenkins, Peter Keene.