

Professor Sir Peter Hall:

Role Model

MICHAEL HEBBERT

In a guest-editorial introduction to the 'Built Environment' special issue in celebration of Peter Hall, Michael Hebbert reflects on the range and variety of his accomplishment. Diversity was a striking feature of the obituaries published after his death in 2014 and it shows through even more strongly in the present collection of papers from former students and collaborators. They reflect on his legacy in a very personal way. Here was a man who modelled many roles and touched many lives : easy to love, hard to emulate, impossible to forget.

'... we were having a very enjoyable lunch at the Garrick, when he [Terry Heiser, Permanent Secretary to the Department of the Environment] suddenly sprang a Heiser-type question: "Who are your role models?" It more or less completely floored me and the other guest, who has produced some notable movies in his time. I don't think either of us adequately rewarded Terry for that lunch. I've been thinking about the question ever since, and this is by way of recompense.'

Thus Peter Hall introduced the memorable inaugural lecture marking his professorial appointment to University College London in 1992. The lecture took

shape as an intellectual autobiography spanning the entire trajectory from boyhood in West Kensington through wartime years in Blackpool, undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Cambridge, journalism, teaching and policy engagements in swinging sixties London, his first youthful professorship at the University of Reading, the move to the University of California at Berkeley in 1980 and his return to England to take up the UCL chair at the age of 60. Peter updated his narrative two decades later in an 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua' written as a personal contribution to our 80th birthday festschrift *The Planning Imagination*. After his death it was reprinted in the August 2014 issue of *Town and Country Planning*.

So who were his role models ? It's a long roll-call but there are consistent patterns. As a writer he prized clarity and moral honesty, values learned from George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Frank Leavis, his Cambridge tutor Gus Caesar, and Paul Barker (editor of *New Society*) among others. As a geographer he admired social scientists who engaged with the evidence on the big scale: Alfred Marshall, Charles Booth, Beatrice Webb, Joseph Schumpeter. In his planning pantheon were decision-makers such as Frank Pick, Patrick Abercrombie, Michael Heseltine, Wulf Daseking, who similarly saw the big picture and - as he put it when thanking the Royal Town Planning Institute for their Gold Medal in 2003 - could walk the walk as well as talking the talk. He liked academics unafraid to engage with real-world challenges who could multi-task, dictating their correspondence and writing their books on the hoof - Maynard Keynes, Dudley Stamp, Richard Llewellyn-Davies. He enjoyed collaborations with salty characters with iconoclastic streaks - John Vaizey, Reyner

Banham, Michael Young, Manuel Castells, Colin Ward. He sniffed out pseudo-intellectualism and had no time for cultural affectations : it explains a certain estrangement from his parent discipline of geography, a sore topic for the 1992 inaugural, though less with the passage of years.

There's a sense of organic unity in Peter Hall's own telling of his career. The strands lead connectedly from childhood experiments in drawing Harry Beck's London Underground map with coloured crayons, through Blackpool Grammar School and St Catharine's Cambridge, to those first superb books of his early career, the historical *Industries of London* and the prophetic *London 2000*. Having succinctly captured the complexities of London's metropolitan geography he went on to do it for seven other capitals in the book *World Cities*. His analyses of outer metropolitan land use and travel patterns developed into the monumental *Containment of Urban England*, which in turn included a narrative of planning history that came to fruit in his texts *Urban & Regional Planning* and *Cities of Tomorrow*. That original intensive study of agglomeration and innovation in London's industrial structure re-emerged in his seminal American studies of sunbelt and gunbelt industry, silicon landscapes and technopolises, and lastly and most ambitiously in the thousand-page *Cities in Civilization*, which is as much a work of comparative economic geography as it is a homage to Lewis Mumford. His final cluster of projects on railway networks and sustainable, polycentric settlement patterns connected right back to Frank Pick, Harry Beck and those coloured crayons. So in his life as well as in his work Peter did

meet the precept of his undergraduate tutor Augustus Caesar: begin at the beginning and follow inexorably through logical argument to your final conclusions.

After Peter's death the obituaries had a different logic. There were some common elements - tribute to his encyclopaedic intelligence, personal charm, exceptional productivity - but beyond that, each emphasized a difference. Some highlighted his advocacy of free enterprise, others his championship of planning. He was remembered as the heir to Ebenezer Howard and the reviver of the decentralist garden cities movement, but also 'the most urbane of urbanists' (in the words of the *Financial Times*) and leading light of the big-city network Global Urban Development. His legacies were detected at the wide scale of regional structure or in the detail of transport networks. Historians hailed his genius in making sense of the past, technophiles his flair for futurology. He was remembered for big data-crunching projects and for pioneering the UK application of numerical modelling of land-use and transport systems, but also for commonsensical weekly journalism and the sort of readable scholarship embodied in this very journal, which he edited for 36 years. From one perspective he was the essential globalist, travelling astonishing numbers of miles each year and always comparing what he saw; but he was also deeply rooted and an effective local champion in his home territories of London, Blackpool and Manchester.

This commemorative issue of *Built Environment* continues the multiplication of narratives around Peter Hall's work and influence. Written by students and

colleagues, its theme is a truly surprising diversity: it seems we all knew the same individual yet each knew a different man. The fifteen contributors cover the entire span of his career from the moment he joined LSE in 1965 through to the intense research activity of his last summer months in 2014. It's extraordinary to be reminded of the scope of his life-work, the variety of roles he modelled for successive generations of students and colleagues, and the ramifications of his legacy. If the 'Apologia Pro Vita Sua' reveals Peter's own moral compass, this collection shows the many different points to which it led him - and us.

The volume's starting point is 1965 when Peter Hall arrived at the London School of Economics and John Goddard became one of his first PhD students, working on the London office boom and the efforts of government to regulate it. The topic combined methodological innovation in the latest techniques of quantitative geography with intense policy relevance, and the paper shows the brilliance with which Peter fostered both sets of connections. My own experience began four years later, in 1969. Newly graduated with a history degree (specialism: Later Roman Empire) I had visited Reyner Banham at UCL in search of advice on how to become a journalist specializing in urban issues. He sensibly directed me to the University of Reading where the newly installed Professor of Geography was a superb exponent of the craft - not that I acquired it, though I learned so much else, ending up forty years later as a Bartlett colleague. My Reading fellow-students are represented in this issue by Peter Williams and Ray Wyatt, both of whom joined in 1972. The former's investigation of gentrification in Islington launched a distinguished academic and

professional career as one of the UK's top housing experts, the latter was drawn from Australia by Reading's reputation as a hot spot for urban modelling, and his paper offers a quizzical account of the ups and downs of the field internationally, and Peter's lasting role as translator of computer output into policy input.

Next came California. Amy Glasmeier first met Peter Hall in London in the spring of 1978 when she was still a Berkeley undergraduate. Two years later she watched, and here most vividly describes, his induction to the University of California and the origins of the collaboration with Ann Markusen that launched what was, even by his standards of productivity, an outstandingly creative decade of work on the changing economic geography of the U.S. His collaborations involved a brilliant constellation of students and researchers whose work is explored here in joint-authored contributions from Sabina Deitrich with Scott Campbell, and Erica Schoenberger with Marc Weiss. Our Berkeley profiles are completed by Yuko Aoyama. She met Peter in 1990 when working for OECD Urban Affairs in Paris, and went to join his final Californian PhD cohort. Her paper's unexpected excursions into the social histories of blues and flamenco remind us how wide he could range.

Nick Green opens the final sequence as one of the first PhD students of the Bartlett. years, working on a cultural-spatial analysis of artists' studios in the East End of London. As with many other contributors, the doctoral project led into an extended research collaboration, contributing to the POLYNET project on European Spatial Structure from posts within the two non-profit organisations that became Peter's

principal policy vehicles after the turn of the century, Michael Young's Institute of Community Studies and the Town and Country Planning Association. Basak Demires joined the team as a doctoral student funded by the wondrous windfall from the Swiss Balzan Foundation, which named Peter as one of its 2005 prize-winners for his contributions to the history of the modern European city. Her task was to analyse the role of telecommunications in Europe's polycentric urban system, and her paper tells this story within a wider tribute to his contributions to location theory, in particular via translation, interpretation and application of Thünen's classic *Isolated State*.

Chia-Lin Chen commenced her PhD under Peter's supervision in 2008, working on the regional economic impacts of High Speed Rail (HSR). By a stroke of genius he encouraged her to study British Rail's introduction of Intercity 125 diesel sets in 1976 as a prototype HSR experiment, allowing longitudinal analysis and all but connecting the work of his final PhD student to John Goddard's investigations of London office decentralisation and relocation forty years earlier. The thesis led to early publications, had immediate policy impact in the debate over the extension of the HSR network north of London, and once again led straight into post-doctoral research collaboration. Chia-Lin Chen's paper offers a vivid and poignant account of the projects on which she, Peter and their team worked flat out until the moment of his death.

The last word of this special issue belongs to someone who knew Peter better than any of us - Ann Rudkin, Managing Editor of *Built Environment*, publisher with the Alexandrine Press, and editor of many of his books. She joined the journal when it was relaunched under Peter's direction in 1978, and has run it ever since. The journal's impressive run of back issues has perfectly realized his vision of a quarterly 'mag' in readable pocket format, each issue addressing a salient topic, well laid out and illustrated with photographs and (ideally) a cartoon from Louis Hellman. Ann's paper offers glimpses into Peter at work in editorial meetings, over lunch, in email correspondence, writing in manuscript margins. It leaves us with a picture of a role model who modelled many roles, but whose versatility was always shaped by a clear sense of purpose: easy to love, hard to emulate, impossible to forget.