CONVERSATIONS IN GEOGRAPHY: JOURNEYING THROUGH FOUR DECADES OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical appraisal of institutionalised knowledge production and exchange on the history and philosophy of geography in the United Kingdom. We examine broad epistemic trends over 41 years (1981–2021) through an analysis of annual conference sessions and special events convened by the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG). We show how organisational, sociocultural, and epistemic changes were coproduced, as expressed by three significant findings. Organisationally, the group emerged through shared philosophical interests of two early career geographers at Queen's University Belfast in 1981 and received new impetus through its strategic plan 1995–1997, which inspired long-term research collaborations. Socioculturally, the group's activities contributed to national traditions of geographical thought and praxis in masculinist academic environments, with instances of internationalisation, increasing feminisation, and organisational cooperation. Epistemically, the group's events in the 1980s shaped contextualist, constructivist, and critical approaches, and coproduced new cultural geography, but the emphasis shifted from historically sensitive biographical, institutional, and geopolitical studies of geographical knowledges, via critical, postcolonial, and feminist geographies of knowledge-making practices in the 1990s, to more-than-human and more-than-representational geographies in the twenty-first century.

> It is a weak discipline, not a strong one, which refuses to confront its own history or fails to reflect critically upon its own concepts and practices, in all their "messiness". Once begun, these conversations must surely continue.[1]

Critical appraisals of Anglophone history and philosophy of geography often centre on publications that identify, contextualise, and question research findings, methods, and concepts. Such reviews diagnose past limitations and argue for remedies in current and future provisions, practices, and politics of research, teaching, and academic service.[2] This article aims to complement these foundational textual debates by identifying broad epistemic trends in geographical knowledge production and exchange at academic conferences. We offer a first analysis of annual conference session themes and special events facilitated by the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG, London) from 1981 to 2021.[3]

Drawing on work in interdisciplinary geographies of science and higher education, we contextualise the identified epistemic trends within both organisational and sociocultural

[1] Felix Driver, 'New Perspectives on the History and Philosophy of Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 18 (1994) 92–100 (p. 98).

[2] See, for example, the progress reports on the history and philosophy of geography in *Progress in Human Geography*; David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. by John A. Agnew and David N. Livingstone (London: SAGE, 2011); Pauline Couper, *A Student's Introduction to Geographical Thought: Theories, Philosophies, Methodologies* (London: SAGE, 2015); Ron Johnston and James D. Sidaway, *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945* (Seventh edition, New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); Tim Cresswell, *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2024).

[3] The event name changed from IBG Annual Conference, 1981–1995, via RGS-IBG Annual Conference, 1996–2002, to RGS-IBG Annual International Conference, 2003–2021.

changes in research group activities and wider academic and societal developments. We conceptualise the research group as an organisational node within the British academic system that bridges — through the group members' practices — geographical work conducted in universities and the discipline's professional body and learned society. Research groups may further reach out — through coevolving professional networks — beyond academic geography and beyond national borders. Our conceptual perspective is grounded in critically reflective constructivist, circulatory, and networked understandings of academic work that inform triadic thought as an alternative interpretative resource to binary thought.[4] By adopting such an inclusive transinstitutional, transnational, and transdisciplinary approach, we consider the places, people, and flows that constitute HPGRG events through the inflow, transformation, and outflow of participants and a variety of heterogeneous resources. Tracing these connections leads our analysis from London to many places in the United Kingdom and across the world.

Our reflections are guided by three historiographical research questions that we answer for the period 1981–2021: What was the context of the HPGRG's foundation and how did the group's early history unfold? What were the main organisational and sociocultural changes in HPGRG governance and activities? What themes did the HPGRG conference sessions and special events address and how did these relate to wider epistemic changes in geography? In the following sections, we discuss our research methodology and sources before examining history and philosophy of geography through the lens of HPGRG

[4] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 98–108; David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003); *Mobilities of Knowledge*, ed. by Heike Jöns, Peter Meusburger, and Michael Heffernan (Cham: Springer, 2017); Heike Jöns, 'Boundary-Crossing Academic Mobilities in Glocal Knowledge Economies: New Research Agendas Based on Triadic Thought', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 16 (2018) 151–161.

events across three periods of time: foundations, c.1981–1989; themed events and strategy, 1989–1999; and internationalising and pluralising histories and philosophies of geography, 2000–2021. The types of sources available mean that the first two sections are more detailed on organisation, speakers, and themes than the last section, which focuses on broad epistemic trends. Based on our critical analysis, we argue that practising the history and philosophy of geography in the context of the HPGRG has coproduced geographical knowledges, professional networks, and academic careers. Through conversations, communications, and events, these coproductions largely (re)produced Anglophone and national geographical traditions through the academic socialisation and inclusion of British and international researchers and academics into geography in the United Kingdom.

RESEARCHING INSTITUTIONALISED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE

Our study of HPGRG activities and events draws on a burgeoning interest of historical geographers in political and academic conferences. This research emphasises the learning, exchange, and coproduction of knowledge and information through geographical praxis rather than published geographical thought.[5] The nature of academic conferences as temporary centres of circulation shapes the places and spaces of event settings, academic networks, and epistemic cultures and thus offers a variety of geographical research perspectives. Our sources and methods directed the analytical focus on the interplay between epistemic, sociocultural, and organisational changes in HPGRG activities.

[5] Ruth Craggs and Martin Mahony, 'The Geographies of the Conference: Knowledge, Performance and Protest', *Geography Compass* 8 (2014) 414–430; *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. by Stephen Legg, Mike Heffernan, Jake Hodder, and Benjamin Thorpe (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Stephen Legg, *Round Table Conference Geographies: Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

We compare epistemic trends in geographical themes, approaches, and theories but do not spatialise the imaginative geographies of HPGRG conference papers due to the predominance of aspatial paper titles that point to a desire for creating universalising truth in hegemonic Anglo-American knowledge production. We emphasise Anglophone scholarship because English has been the only conference language of the IBG and RGS-IBG events. Since the IBG was a professional body and the RGS-IBG represents both a learned society and a professional body in the United Kingdom, our study focuses on geography as practiced in British universities. International perspectives result from international researchers and academics in British universities and the international conference visitors. Our own education and work experiences in different European countries and language contexts provides us with a multicultural European outlook on the history and philosophy of geography.

Writing Geographical Historiography

We write this account both as a group of individual scholars and collectively as members of the HPGRG. In 1991, amid a flare-up of British geography's perennial crisis of self-confidence, Ron Johnston wrote that the IBG study groups were 'major contributors' to the fragmentation of the discipline. Fragmentation, leading geographers had argued, risked geography's synthetic promise and its political-institutional wellbeing. Johnston's analysis of study group membership revealed a 'discipline without a core', comprised of clusters of specialisms with few links between them. He noted that the History and Philosophy of Geography Study Group (HPGSG) had the potential to operate as an integrative community (as well as the Quantitative and Higher Education Study Groups), but it was probably

considered too niche to fulfil that promise.[6] In the meantime, geography has not united around a core, but neither did the discipline devolve to some intellectually or institutionally moribund state. Instead, the spatial turn across associated disciplines and complex challenges such as climate change mitigation, environmental pollution, and the energy crisis, as well as environmental, economic, political, social, and cultural responsibility and inclusion across public and private spheres, require the expertise of both physical and human geographers.

Much has changed since 1991, and we suggest that the nature and purpose of RGS-IBG research groups have changed, too. Performance metrics and marketisation were in their infancy in 1991, whereas today the relentless competition over finite resources (students and various funding streams) often prevents cooperation between British geography departments. In this context, the RGS-IBG research groups offer one of the few formal venues for cross-institutional, disciplinary work. They also reflect the desires of RGS-IBG members (past and present) to cohere around specialisms not beholden to funding priorities or policies. We write, then, united by collective commitment to understanding the history and philosophy of geography and hope that our coauthorship demonstrates how research groups foster collaboration across institutions and career stages.

Analysing Epistemic Change

The research for this article draws on a multimethod grounded theory perspective to analyse quantitative and qualitative data sources. This methodological approach resonates with the constructivist understanding of academic work underlying the conceptual perspective of

[6] Ron J. Johnston, *A Question of Place: Exploring the Practice of Human Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), with the quotes on p. 17 and p. 13, respectively.

triadic thought.[7] Our study is centred on a database listing all sessions convened by the HPGRG and its predecessor groups at the IBG and RGS-IBG Annual (International) Conferences, 1981–2021. For the first fifteen years, the sessions were documented in two sources published in the journal *Area*: first, the group's conference session reports (1981, 1983–1996); and second, the group's annual reports (1986–1990, 1992–1993, 1995). We consulted the official IBG Annual Conference reports in *Area* in lieu of other sources for 1981–1993. Printed conference programmes could be accessed in the RGS-IBG Library and Archives for the IBG Annual Conferences 1994–1995 and the RGS-IBG Annual (International) Conferences 1996–2019. Online programmes were studied for 2020–2021.[8]

We analysed the HPGRG conference sessions database using a content analysis of session numbers and titles per year. For a comparative visualisation of changing session themes, we conducted a word cloud analysis of all 286 HPGRG session titles by decade (using the WordArt.com web interface). Critical discourse analysis also drew on several additional published and unpublished sources: the group's annual reports and/or Annual General Meeting (AGM) minutes (1986–2021); the Livingstone HPGRG papers documenting his seventeen years on the group's committee, 1981–1998; as well as face-to-face, online, and written conversations with four HPGRG chairs and secretaries of the first two decades: Richard Harrison (University of Edinburgh), David Livingstone (Queen's University Belfast), Elspeth Graham (University of St Andrews), and Felix Driver (Royal Holloway, University of

[7] LaDona G. Knigge, 'Grounded Theory', *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, ed. by Douglas Richardson et al. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0339; Heike Jöns, 'Dynamic Hybrids and the Geographies of Technoscience: Discussing Conceptual Resources Beyond the Human/Non-Human Binary', *Social & Cultural Geography* 7 (2006) 559–580; Couper, *A Student's Introduction to Geographical Thought*, pp. 95–98.

[8] Conference paper titles, authors, and abstracts are documented in the printed conference programmes, 1994–2002. From 2003 onwards, the abstracts were provided on CD until online links to the abstracts were printed in the session schedules (2011–2019). The entire conference programme went online in 2020.

London; hereafter, RHUL).[9] Among our team of authors, two entered the HPGRG committee in the group's third decade and six in the fourth.

We consider the following narrative to be a situated contribution to the charting of collective spaces of knowledge in the history and philosophy of geography, one that builds on documented institutionalised cooperation. Due to the partiality of all academic knowledge production, our narrative will contain inevitable biases, omissions, and exclusions, resulting from our authorial positionalities, research methods, and study sources.[10] Hence we are aware that there will be conference visitors, HPGRG members, and HPGRG committee members with different representations, readings, and recollections of the group's activities, but since the historiography of the HPGRG has not been examined before, we follow in the footsteps of other RGS-IBG research groups and mark our group's fortieth anniversary through this event-based historiographical analysis.[11]

[9] The HPGRG newsletters and annual reports are available in the virtual HPGRG archive held by the Research and Higher Education Division (RHED) of the RGS-IBG [hereafter, RHED archive]. The Livingstone HPGRG papers can be accessed in the RGS-IBG Library and Archives. A video-recorded message by Livingstone was shown at the HPGRG anniversary event, based on an online conversation about the group's early history with HPGRG chair Heike Jöns on 8 July 2021 (hereafter, Livingstone HPGRG conversation).

[10] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988) 575–599.

[11] For example, Robin A. Butlin, *The Historical Geography Research Group: A History* (Historical Geography Research Series 44, London: Historical Geographical Research Group, 2013).

FOUNDATIONS, C.1981–1989

The foundation of the IBG Working Party on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought (HPGTWP) in 1981 marks an important era of paradigmatic change in the discipline of geography. After the 1970s had been characterised by acrimony between positivist, radical, and humanist approaches to geography, the search for more accommodating conceptual commitments continued.[12] Since 1979, a series of critical interventions by the HPGTWP's cofounders, Harrison and Livingstone, who had been fellow PhD students at Queen's University of Belfast from 1976 to 1979, included an engagement with the latest social constructivist research perspectives. Together with burgeoning work on humanistic geography, phenomenological perspectives, and feminist geography, these social constructivist argumentations, which involved controversial exchanges with idealist geographer Leonard Guelke, contributed to an ongoing paradigmatic diversification in geography away from an epistemological overfocus on the positivist belief in an unbiased scientific objectivity.[13] In this wider epistemic context that encouraged the foundation of a new research group for new debates, the HPGTWP complemented international research groups, such as the Commission on the History of Geographical Thought of the International Geographical Union (IGU), by serving as a platform for academic networking and knowledge exchange in British universities.

[12] Ron J. Johnston, *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), provides a thorough review of the state of British geography in the late 1970s. See also Anne Buttimer, 'On People, Paradigms, and "Progress" in Geography', in *Geography, Ideology and Social Concern*, ed. by David R. Stoddart (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 81–98.

[13] For details, see Heike Jöns, Julian Brigstocke, Pauline Couper, and Federico Ferretti, 'History and Philosophy of Geography: Looking Back and Looking Forward', *Journal of Historical Geography* 85 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2024.06.003.

The Inaugural Conference Session at the IBG 1981, Leicester

On 3 July 1980, the early career researchers Harrison and Livingstone wrote a letter to about 30 potentially interested geographers with a call for expressions of interest in an IBG conference session and a new research group. They invited attendance at a meeting at the IBG Annual Conference 1981 (hereafter, IBG 1981) in Leicester, chaired by Professor Ron Johnston (University of Sheffield), 'to explore the possibility of establishing, in the first instance, a working party on the history and philosophy of geographical thought'. Noting 'the resurgence of interest in the history, methodology and philosophy of the discipline', they also provided a form for setting up a mailing list and invited written comments from those who would not be able to attend.[14]

In the summer of 1980, Harrison and Livingstone began to arrange this inaugural conference session for the group via IBG President Jim Bird, whom they had contacted on the advice of their PhD supervisor, Belfast's Head of Department Bill Kirk. Kirk had suggested that they should invite Ron Johnston as the chairman of their session.[15] For Livingstone, their main motivations for founding a new IBG working party were to get a group together 'to think about the history of geography as a discourse as much as a discipline' and to make a contribution, based on what they were reading and in response to frequent calls for ideas about conference sessions.[16] For Harrison, it was important to stress that their readings and

[14] Letter template signed by R.T. Harrison and D.N. Livingstone [hereafter, Harrison and Livingstone], 3 July 1980, Livingstone HPGRG papers, RGS-IBG Library and Archives, London [hereafter, RGS-IBG], Folder 1 (1980–1984) [hereafter, F1], 1.

[15] Harrison and Livingstone to R.J. Johnston, 2 June 1980, RGS-IBG, F1, 1.

[16] Livingstone HPGRG conversation, 8 July 2021.

publications on the philosophy of geography sheltered them from the harsh reality of the Northern Ireland Troubles in Belfast.[17]

The call for expressions of interest received 27 positive replies by geographers from across different career stages. David Lowenthal (University College London) thought this was a 'very important topic'; Peter Haggett (Bristol) regretted that he could not attend the meeting, but he offered his support, as did Ron Johnston (Sheffield), Sophie Bowlby (Reading), Denis Cosgrove (Loughborough), and Derek Gregory (Cambridge), who all planned to attend. The female geographer and cartographer Eila Campbell (Birkbeck College) suggested looking at 'the links with and borrowings from non-U.K. geographers, e.g. U.S.A., Sweden, Germany, France', adding that these would vary by subfield. Further responses arrived from the physical geographers Robert Beckinsale (Oxford), Richard Chorley (Cambridge), and Andrew Goudie (Oxford), as well as from human geographer Elspeth Graham (St Andrews), who became the group's first female chair (she was also the only person who had returned the form in 1981 and attended the HPGRG's anniversary event in 2021).[18] The early contributors to the HPGTWP included a mélange of human and physical geographers of different genders — early career, established, and retired — but this impressive diversity did not translate into the first conference session.

Gillian Rose's critique of geography's predominantly masculinist habitus can be applied to the HPGTWP's inaugural conference session of 1981, as this event included female attendees but no female speakers. Rose had argued that men often did not integrate their female Other in the same way into professional activities as their more similar male

[17] Richard T. Harrison, 'Writing/Righting the World: Reflections on an Engaged History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Journal of Historical Geography* 85 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2024.03.006.

[18] The 27 returned forms, slightly smaller than A5, can be found in RGS-IBG, F1.

colleagues because this move would have required an acceptance of diversity as non-hierarchical difference.[19] Livingstone recalled his correspondences and interactions with Sophie Bowlby, Susan Smith, Elspeth Graham, Elspeth Lochhead, Liz Bondi, Avril Maddrell, Barbara Kennedy, Eila Campbell, and Anne Buttimer, but he was critically aware that

> we weren't particularly conscious of diversity in anything like the way that we have learned we should be now, but, you know — I mean — there were quite a number of women who were really involved and were enthusiastic as supporters.[20]

Convened by Harrison and Livingstone and chaired by Johnston, the inaugural conference session was held on 6 January 1981 and attended by more than 40 geographers.[21] The speakers had been asked to deliver ten-minute statements. They were all men and human geographers, who held positions of power in the discipline or were early career and mid-career geographers who had contributed to the philosophy of geography (Fig. 1). Their presentations emphasised the history and the philosophy of geography differently, resulting in two papers focussing more on the history and four papers more on the philosophy. As the first speaker, the outgoing IBG president Jim Bird (Southampton) showed his strong support, having written in the abstract with reference to Basil Bernstein's 'collection code' that 'the ''ultimate mystery" of a subject may not be revealed until very late

[19] Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography*, p. 9.

[20] Livingstone HPGRG conversation, 8 July 2021.

[21] Thomas W. Freeman to Harrison and Livingstone, 19 January 1980, RGS-IBG, F1, 1. Livingstone noted that the size of the session audiences varied depending on the papers but reached an average of about 50 attendees. David N. Livingstone [hereafter, Livingstone] on behalf of the History and Philosophy of Geography Working Party [a revised group name] of the IBG to the Study Groups and Research Committee of the IBG, Application for Study Group Status, 30 July 1984, RGS-IBG, F1, 1–2, 1.

in the curriculum'. He thought that many geographers developed an interest in the philosophy of geography only later in life because of 'the admitted fascination and profit of specialized research' — in his case seaports — and what he called 'the pressures of short-term pre-occupations'.[22] Therefore, we argue that one of the most significant impacts of the HPGTWP activities was that early career geographers began to focus on the history and philosophy of geography as their main research specialisms. This is exemplified by Livingstone's career as Professor of Geography and Intellectual History at Queen's University of Belfast (1993–2023). Harrison held different professorships in business and management studies in Scotland and Northern Ireland before serving (for the second time) as Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Edinburgh (2013–2021).

[Fig. 1 about here]

The second speaker was Thomas Walter Freeman, the secretary of the IGU's Commission on the History of Geographical Thought, who called for biographical and institutional histories at national and international scales. The organisers' PhD supervisor Bill Kirk (Belfast) then stressed the importance of a historical perspective in unravelling the nature of geographical knowledge and proposed ideas for a future curriculum based on 'the contextualisation, diffusion and evolution of geographical understanding about the world and the reconstruction of the behavioural environments of successive communities of

[22] James H. Bird, Summary, HPGTWP, Inaugural Meeting: Introduction, 1 December 1980, RGS-IBG, F1, 2.

geographical scholars'.[23] Derek Gregory (Cambridge) argued for 'a critical clarification of the relationship between geographical philosophy and praxis within the context of wider social theory', before John Silk (Reading) promoted a Marxist research perspective for considering the reproduction of ideologies through an 'investigation of the relationship between the products of mental life and the material practices which together constitute geographers' lived relationship to the world'.[24] Finally, Alan Hay (Sheffield) asked for an acknowledgement 'that all geographical studies have a latent philosophical content'. Like Silk, who referred to the convenors' latest *Area* publication when stressing the limiting nature of presuppositions, Hay also critically engaged with the organisers' proposal of a presuppositional approach by suggesting that they should differentiate between the presuppositional hierarchy of a discipline and an individual because individuals may be subjected to disciplinary paradigmatic pressures in their choice of a conceptual approach.[25]

This range of viewpoints reveals that from its origins the HPGTWP provided a forum for debating and developing broader currents concerning epistemic approaches to historical and geographical study. Livingstone had found Gregory's first book on *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* particularly refreshing and influential as a PhD student because he thought that it paved the way for a critical examination of geographical knowledge production through an engagement with social theory in the search of alternatives to

[23] Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Area* 13 (1981) 70. On the suggested presentation content, see also the speakers' summaries documented in letters bundled and labelled 'Abstracts of Inaugural Meeting Jan 1981', RGS-IBG, F1.

[24] Harrison and Livingstone, 'History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', p. 70.

[25] Alan Hay, The need to acknowledge latent philosophical positions in geographical studies, Contribution to discussion, IBG, Leicester, January 1981, enclosed in a note from Hay, 14 December 1980, RGS-IBG, F1, 1; John Silk, Ideology and problematic – two concepts for analysing geographic philosophy, thought and practice, enclosed in a letter to Harrison and Livingstone, 13 January 1981, RGS-IBG, F1, 1.

positivism.[26] Harrison and Livingstone cited Gregory's first book in their *Area* article on a presuppositional approach of 1980. They sent this article to Bird and others when organising the first HPGTWP meeting in Leicester, arguing that 'all scientific and philosophical thought needs to take explicit account of the pervasive influence of presuppositions'.[27] Like their critical interrogation of idealism in geography, this second joint article can also be regarded as an early social constructivist intervention in human geography, one that displayed close links to the reflections on the hermeneutic circle by German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (Heidelberg). Since the authors did not mention hermeneutics in their *Area* article, the intriguing question emerges how Anglophone debates about the presuppositional approach and the problem cycle that they discussed related to English and German debates about hermeneutic philosophy that Livingstone revisited in his later oeuvre.[28]

The IBG 1981 conference session sketched out the future emphasis of the HPGTWP on human geography, even if the role of physical geography was discussed.[29] At a time when 14 IBG study groups were in operation (2020–21: 31 RGS-IBG groups), the decision to establish a new working party was officially approved by the IBG Council in May 1981 and by the Research and Study Group Committee in October 1981.[30] Based on a vote at the group's AGM in 1984, HPGTWP secretary Livingstone applied successfully for study group status,

[26] Livingstone HPGRG conversation, 8 July 2021; Derek Gregory, *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* (London: Hutchinson, 1978). Gregory had been appointed to a University Assistant Lectureship at Cambridge in 1973, aged 22, and was about to be awarded his PhD in this university in 1981.

[27] Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Philosophy and Problems in Human Geography: A Presuppositional Approach', *Area* 12 (1980) 25–31 (p. 25).

[28] David N. Livingstone, *Science, Space and Hermeneutics* (Heidelberg: Department of Geography, University of Heidelberg, 2002).

[29] Harrison and Livingstone, 'History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', p. 70.

[30] James H. Bird to Harrison and Livingstone, 22 May 1980, RGS-IBG, F1, 1. On the decisions, see Judith Rees to Harrison and Livingstone, 30 July 1981, RGS-IBG, F1, 1.

mentioning 60 people on the group's mailing list.[31] Funded by the study group subventions from central IBG funds, the first HPGSG newsletter appeared in May 1986, including events, publications, and a membership survey form.[32] The group's first research register was circulated in 1988 and provided information on the research specialisms and institutional affiliations of 29 geographers, of which 25 were based in the United Kingdom (86%). The other members worked in Australia (Patrick Armstrong), the United States (John Brian Harley), Canada (Keith John Tinkler), and Ireland (Gordon L. Herries Davies). Since there were only three women listed — Elspeth Graham (St Andrews), Beryl Hamilton (Liverpool Institute of Higher Education), and Susan Smith (Glasgow) — the HPGTWP membership was, like the conference sessions, slightly more internationalised (14%) than feminised (10%).[33]

Early Conference Session Organisation, Speakers, and Themes

During this foundational period, an average of three conference sessions were convened by the group each year (Fig. 2). These sessions were well attended and facilitated lively and at times controversial discussions. There were only very few women speakers documented in the *Area* reports, namely Elspeth Lochhead, Amriah Buang, Elspeth Graham, and Karen de Bres, with Anne Buttimer chairing a film discussion. Diasporic and other international speakers worked in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, Ireland, France, and Sweden. Karen de Bres (Valparaiso, Illinois) served as the first US link on the HPGSG committee in the early 1990s. These early HPGTWP/HPGSG sessions contributed to the development of a

[31] Livingstone, 30 July 1984, RGS-IBG, F1, 1–2.

[32] Elspeth Graham, 'History and Philosophy of Geography Study Group', *Area* 18 (1986) 340–341 (p. 341); HPGSG, Newsletter, May 1986, RGS-IBG, F1.

[33] HPGSG, Register of members' research interests, 1988, RGS-IBG, Folder 2 (1988–2001) [hereafter, F2], brochure (A5 size). The Livingstone HPGRG papers contain further research registers for 1991 and 1996.

contextualist approach in the field, saw regular discussions about the relationship and integration of physical and human geography, and coproduced the emergence of new cultural geography. Papers discussing the history and philosophy of physical geography featured in conversations about Hutton's theory of the earth, the history of science, and different understandings of nature and the environment. Evolutionary theories, realism, social constructivism, critical theory, and structuration theory were some of the approaches discussed and developed. Many session and paper topics were revisited in later decades and thus became core research interests in geography that shaped the discipline's poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial turns.[34] These coproductions of organisational, sociocultural, and epistemic changes are vividly expressed in the group's conference session dynamics at the IBGs 1982–1989.

[Fig. 2 about here]

[34] For an early discussion of Michel Foucault's work in Anglophone geography, see Paul Claval, 'Epistemology and the History of Geographical Thought', *Progress in Human Geography* 4 (1980) 371–384. Many HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG committee members and session contributors engaged with social theory in the 1980s, such as Felix Driver, 'Power, Space, and the Body: A Critical Assessment of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 3 (1985) 425–446.

IBG 1982, Southampton [third order heading]

The newly established HPGTWP convened four IBG sessions, each featuring three speakers (Tab. 1).[35] Harrison and Livingstone organised the programme as joint secretaries but consulted with Johnston, the group's official chair, who regularly presented in HPGTWP sessions — in Southampton on the integration of physical and human geography in studies of resource management. Papers took 30–45 minutes, including discussions. The group's first female speaker was Elspeth Lochhead (Strathclyde), who discussed socioscientific circles in the history of British geography at the start of the third session. She had received her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1980, on a thesis entitled 'The Emergence of Academic Geography in Britain in its Historical Context'. After Lochhead, Brian Blouet (Nebraska-Lincoln), an international geographer born in Britain, educated at the University of Hull, and on a research visit to Oxford, addressed the origins of Halford Mackinder's geographical ideas. Jim Lewis (Durham) then discussed human geography and the work of critical theorists, which added to a broad spectrum of topics with contemporary resonance and continued the critical stance already present in the inaugural meeting.[36]

[Tab. 1 about here]

[35] The session timeslots were called modules until 2003. Session themes often straddled two or more modules and later subsessions. We address both modules and subsessions as sessions.

[36] I.B.G. Annual Conference, Southampton, 8 January 1982, Biology Lecture Theatre, Programme, bundled papers labelled 'Southampton IBG 1982', RGS-IBG, F1, 1.

IBG 1983, Edinburgh [third order heading]

The HPGTWP sessions of 1983 prompted Livingstone and Harrison to stress the importance of 'a contextualist approach to understanding the growth of knowledge—namely the view that the origins, development and communication of ideas and concepts are embedded in particular disciplinary, social, ideological and institutional contexts'.[37] Amriah Buang (National University of Malaysia) advocated a transcultural approach to geographical problems as well as 'a social theory genuinely informed by a geography liberated from existing conventional scientific norms'.[38] She later received her PhD for research on the geographies of wellbeing at the University of Manchester in 1986. Scottish-born geographer Neil Smith (Columbia University, United States) criticised asocial and ahistorical understandings of space as an abstraction instead of a production. Arild Holt-Jensen (Bergen) was in the audience, most likely not anticipating that he would deliver an HPGRG Keynote Lecture at the RGS-IBG 2019 (London) on the occasion of the fifth edition of *Geography: History and Concepts*.[39]

IBG 1984, Durham [third order heading]

In 1984, the pivotal question 'Can there be progress in geography?' was answered in the affirmative by Jim Bird (Southampton), 'but not in the form of movement towards ultimate truths'. Using a sports analogy, Bird argued that geographers had been 'building increasingly

[37] David N. Livingstone and Richard T. Harrison, 'History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Area* 15 (1983) 84–85 (p. 84).

[38] Livingstone and Harrison, 'History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', p. 85.

[39] Signed lists by session attendees, bundled papers labelled 'Edinburgh 1983', RGS-IBG, F1, 3; and footnote 66; Arild Holt-Jensen, *Geography: History and Concepts* (Fifth edition, London: SAGE, 2018).

bigger mental gymnasia in which to exercise.'[40] Roy P. Bradshaw (Nottingham) combined his criticism of Popper's take on the scientific method with a call for geographers to 'adopt an anarchistic view of methodology in which there is no exclusive method', whereas Derek Gregory (Cambridge) evaluated structuration theory as a social theory of particular relevance to geography. Neil Smith (Columbia University) critically engaged with the career and contributions of US geographer Isaiah Bowman to argue for a political future of political geography. Discussing *Geopolitik*, Smith presented in a session on 'German Social Geography' without contributions by German geographers but two other papers that underline the regional specialisms of British geographers at the time. J.A. Hellen (Newcastle) discussed an atlas of infectious diseases compiled by the Nazi regime in the early 1940s and T.H. Elkins (Sussex) spoke about the development of the largely disparate social geographical research traditions in Germany and Britain since the 1950s.[41]

IBG 1985, Leeds [third order heading]

Interdisciplinary conversations were introduced to the group in 1985, when the distinguished historian Roy Porter became a first research group guest. Porter was cosponsored by the IBG and the British Geomorphological Research Group (since 2006 the British Society for Geomorphology) and spoke on the bicentenary of James Hutton's first presentation of the paper 'The theory of the earth', delivered in Edinburgh in 1785. The second speaker was historian Gordon L. Herries Davies from Trinity College Dublin, who was

[40] Elspeth Lochhead and Elspeth Graham, 'The History and Philosophy of Geography', *Area* 16 (1984) 77–78 (p. 77).

[41] Lochhead and Graham, 'The History and Philosophy of Geography', p. 78.

friends with Livingstone and a member of the group.[42] The Leeds conference also saw the first session on 'The History of Geography and the History of Science', featuring papers on the Renaissance roots of holistic geographical thought by Denis Cosgrove (Loughborough) and the adoption of evolutionary thought in early twentieth century social and political geography by Livingstone. Both papers exemplified the importance of a broader history of science approach for engaging with the history *and* philosophy of geography together in order to develop contemporary philosophies such as geographical humanism, promote environmental humility at a time of ecological destruction and climate change, advance the history of unitary geography, and outline the challenges emerging when analogical thinking is replaced by literal thinking, as in the application of evolutionary ideas to society.[43]

IBG 1986, Reading [third order heading]

The first Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was conducted in 1986. This regular evaluation of research quality at British universities gradually shifted geography's publication culture in all subfields — as part of a wider neoliberalisation and commercialisation of higher education and research — from an emphasis on authored books to a focus on articles in international peer-reviewed journals. It also created the relentless pressure of publishing original research findings.[44] The RAE thus might have influenced the decision to publish the papers of the HPGRG sessions at the IBG 1986 in two journal special issues. The session 'The Unity in Geography' appeared in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (TIBG)

[42] Livingstone, 30 July 1984, RGS-IBG, F1, 1; Livingstone to Ron J. Johnston, 18 June 1984, RGS-IBG, F1, 1.

[43] Elspeth Graham, 'The History and Philosophy of Geography', *Area* 17 (1985) 80 (p. 80).

[44] Noel Castree, 'Research Assessment and the Production of Geographical Knowledge', *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (2006) 747–782.

and concluded with a commentary by Graham (St Andrews), who identified three types of disciplinary unity: departmental unity within the university; integration of physical and human geography in applied geography; and disciplinary unity in research and policy-making on human-environment relations.[45] The session 'Re-Evaluation in Geopolitics' was documented in *Political Geography Quarterly* in 1987. Geopolitics became a more frequent HPGRG session theme than relations between physical and human geography, despite the collaborative potential offered by the challenges of climate change.

IBG 1987, Portsmouth, IBG 1988, Loughborough, and IBG 1989, Coventry [third order]

In 1987, a broader conference theme on *The Rise and Fall of Great Cities* was convened by the Historical, Urban, and Population Geography Study Groups. Towards the end of the Cold War, two HPGSG sessions discussed the revival of regional geography in France, in the German Democratic Republic, and in Anglo-American research contexts. The HPGSG membership had reached 86 geographers, who were not all members of the IBG.[46]

In 1988, the three HPGSG sessions on 'Biography and Realism' started with the innovation of a film presentation, featuring a biographical interview with urban geographer Michael R.G. Conzen (Newcastle), conducted by Terry Slater and Jeremy Whitehand (Birmingham), and a discussion chaired by Anne Buttimer (Lund). The third session saw the first mixed-gender HPGSG paper, by Graham and Livingstone, who had both studied philosophy at university and spoke on transcendental and metaphysical realism.[47]

[45] Elspeth Graham, 'The Unity of Geography: A Comment', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 11 (1986) 464–467.

[46] T.H. Elkins, 'The History and Philosophy of Geography: Regional Geography', *Area* 19 (1987) 186.

[47] Hugh Mason, 'Biography and Realism', *Area* 20 (1988) 191–192. This was only the second coauthored paper; the first had been delivered by Livingstone and Jonathan A. Campbell (Belfast) on Neo-Lamarckism in 1982.

The 1988 HPGSG sessions hosted at Loughborough University of Technology did not directly relate to the conference theme *Technology and Environmental Change*, but the 1989 motto *Managing the Environment* was linked to two sessions each on 'Approaches to the Environment' and 'Geography, Science and Magic'.[48] Overall, the epistemic foci of session themes in the 1980s, as well as the speakers and papers, illustrate that the group facilitated a variety of philosophical debates, including Marxist approaches and critical discussions of geographical imaginations, knowledges, discourses, and representations relating to nature and the environment, which coproduced the emergence of new cultural geography and more specifically its humanist research interests.[49]

THEMED EVENTS AND STRATEGY, 1989–1999

Achieving study group status and growth in membership enabled the HPGSG to organise more activities beyond the conference sessions. Based on successful applications for IBG special events funding, the group's foundational period gave way to a decade of themed events during the second term of the group's first female secretary (1985–1988) and chair (1988–1992), Elspeth Graham (St Andrews), who had been involved since the inaugural IBG session. She had been awarded her PhD at the University of Durham in 1978 for a thesis 'On the Nature and Limits of Explanation in Urban Geography: With Specific Reference to the Spatial Structure of Victorian Edinburgh', and she went on to publish about mental maps,

[48] Elspeth Graham, 'Approaches to Environment', *Area* 21 (1989) 193–194; Elspeth Graham, 'Geography, Science and Magic', *Area* 21 (1989) 194.

[49] For a foundational study informed by Marxist humanism, see Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984). See also Denis Cosgrove and Peter Jackson, 'New Directions in Cultural Geography', *Area* 19 (1987) 95–101; *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

population geography, and philosophies in geography.[50] After the HPGSG committee had cosponsored a first residential conference together with the IBG Medical Geography Study Group and the Wellcome Institute on 'Geography and the History of Medicine' in London in September 1987, Graham coorganised — together with Joe Doherty and Mo Malek — the St Andrews conference on 'Postmodernism and the Social Sciences' in August 1989. This interdisciplinary conference brought together scholars from across the social sciences and humanities and was the first of nine successive HPGSG/HPGRG-led landmark events on topical geographical themes (Tab. 2).

[Tab. 2 about here]

Organisational Change

The RGS and the IBG were transformed in important ways through their contested merger in January 1995, when the IBG, the professional representation of academic geographers at British universities founded in 1933, was incorporated into the RGS, the learned society founded in 1830 for advancing geographical knowledge production and exchange across different societal realms. Apart from the long-term impacts of related academic protests discussed further below, this institutional merger created an immediate desire to rename the IBG study groups into RGS-IBG research groups, mainly to differentiate their activities

[50] For example, Elspeth Graham, 'What is a Mental Map?', *Area* 8 (1976) 259–262; Elspeth Graham, 'Problems of Modelling Intra-Urban Migration', *Espace Populations Sociétés* (1985) 215–222; Allan M. Findlay and Elspeth Graham, 'The Challenge Facing Population Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 15 (1991) 149–162.

from geographical education in schools as a remit of the newly constituted RGS-IBG. The HPGSG changed its name to the HPGRG at the AGM in January 1996.[51]

The mid-1990s were a period of institutional change in British geography that had also seen the emergence of the HPGSG strategic plan 1995–1997, with the aim of providing strategic guidance and new impetus for the group's activities. This plan had been drafted by Charles W.J. Withers (Edinburgh), who had also taken the lead in formulating the strategic plan for the Historical Geography Study Group (HGSG) in 1992–1993. The HPGSG strategic plan, discussed at the AGMs in January 1994 and 1995, circulated to the group's membership in the Autumn 1994 newsletter, and revised at a strategy meeting in the RGS-IBG in April 1995, specified three main areas of activities:[52]

> promoting discussion through meetings and conferences; co-operation with cognate disciplines and organisations; and, publication of monographs, collected papers and discussion materials.[53]

The group's strategic plan encouraged improved financial planning based on regular applications for IBG and RGS-IBG funding and paved the way for several new initiatives in the group's third and fourth decades. These initiatives were also enabled through inspiration from other groups and repeated encouragement by colleagues facilitating the regular RHED Research Group Forums for committee members from all RGS-IBG research and working

[51] The research register of November 1996 listed 73 group members, an estimated forty percent of the HPGRG membership (c. 183 members). HPGRG, Register of members' interests, November 1996, RGS-IBG, F2; HPGRG, Newsletter, November 1996, RGS-IBG, F2, 12.

[52] HPGSG, Newsletter, Autumn 1994, RGS-IBG, F2, 1; HPGSG, Newsletter, May 1995, RGS-IBG, F2, 3.

[53] HPGSG, Strategic plan 1995–1997, May 1995, 4 pages, RGS-IBG, F2, 1.

groups. The strategic plan had envisaged the HPGRG postgraduate bursaries for conference attendance implemented in 2002; new online communication platforms, as realised by the HPGRG website from May 2008 and the HPGRG Twitter/X account from October 2013; and the job role descriptions for smooth committee membership transitions circulated in 2020–2021. New initiatives that were not mentioned in the HPGSG strategic plan 1995–1997 included the institutionalisation of the annual HPGRG Undergraduate Dissertation Prize in 2008 and the biannually awarded HPGRG Engagement Award in 2021.[54]

Epistemic Change

During the 1990s, HPGRG activities were instrumental in developing histories of geography and geopolitics, as well as critical, postcolonial, and feminist geographies. Livingstone had written *The Geographical Tradition* partly in response to the conversations within the group and its events.[55] The HPGSG strategic plan then encouraged the long-term collaboration between Livingstone, who led the group again as the chair from 1995–1998, and Withers, the HPGSG/HPGRG newsletter editor 1995–1998. Their HPGRG-led conference on 'Geography and Enlightenment' at the University of Edinburgh in 1996 was followed by two further events in Edinburgh in 2001 and 2007 and resulted in three coedited books

[54] HPGSG, Strategic plan 1995–1997, May 1995, RGS-IBG, F2, 2; Newsletters and annual reports, RHED archive. The AGM in Leicester on 6 January 1999 adopted the strategic plan's transformation into a statement of purpose that was added to the group's constitution. A new HPGRG constitution, in line with new RGS-IBG requirements, was voted for at the 2023 AGM. HPGRG, Annual report for 1999, January 2000, RHED archive, 2; HPGRG, Annual report for 2000, January 2001, RHED archive, 1; HPGRG, Unconfirmed minutes of the 2023 AGM, 15 September 2023, RHED archive, 3.

[55] Livingstone HPGRG conversation, 8 July 2021; Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*. The Livingstone HPGRG papers show that he was widely appreciated for regularly compiling informative lists of new publications for the group's newsletter, sourced from printed interdisciplinary bibliographies.

(Tab. 2).[56] This implementation of a systematic research agenda in response to HPGRG's strategic development through a focus on researching different eras in the history of geography, in close conversation with historical geographies of science, exemplifies how organisational and epistemic change were coproduced by HPGRG members to leverage the group's full potential. Moreover, these seminal works situated the importance of geography, conceived more broadly, in the history of science.

In the first half of the 1990s, new session themes were encouraged by the profound geopolitical change at the end of the Cold War in 1989–1990. At the IBG 1991 in Sheffield, the HPGSG and the Political Geography Study Group facilitated timely discussions on the contested historical and contemporary geographies of Europe by organising two sessions each. These study groups were flexible enough to address topical debates one year before *Europe into the Next Century* became the conference theme of the IBG 1992. Further new HPGSG session themes discussed: ethics and public responsibility (IBG 1992, Swansea); the history of geographical education — on the centenary of the Geographical Association (IBG 1993, Egham); the history and philosophy of maps (IBG 1994, Nottingham); and teaching the philosophy of geography (IBG 1995, Northumbria University, Newcastle). Session themes kept addressing the history and philosophy of geography in equal measure and were increasingly cosponsored with other IBG groups (Tab. 3).

[Tab. 3 about here]

[56] David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers, G*eography and Enlightenment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers, *Geography and Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers, *Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

The group's committee members of the 1990s created important platforms for the discussion of critical geography. Building on conversations about 'The Future of Critical Human Geography' during a one-day HPGSG seminar organised by Marcus Doel (Liverpool John Moores) and Martin Phillips (Coventry) at Coventry University in 1993, the HPGRG hosted four sessions on 'The Future of Critical Geography' at the RGS-IBG 1997 in Exeter. Three panel discussions among 16 geographers based in UK universities and an open discussion diversified the session format and underlined the growing importance of critical geographical scholarship. The sessions enabled controversial debates about the relationship between critical geographers and the merged RGS-IBG, centred on the RGS's challenging colonial and imperial history and controversial corporate benefactors. They also provided a platform for debating the newly founded Critical Geography Forum (Crit-Geog-Forum), set up by geographers who felt let down by the institutional merger. The Crit-Geog-Forum quickly became an online email list and network for all people interested in critical geographical research, teaching, and activism and the creation of equal opportunities.[57]

The most contested issue had been the RGS's corporate sponsorship by the Shell corporation, which critical geographers were campaigning against because of the company's impact on environmental destruction through oil extraction in Ogoniland, Nigeria, and the related violence against environmental and human rights activists by the Nigerian military regime in 1995.[58] The related opposition against Shell's sponsorship of the RGS involved motions to 'end the Shell Oil Company's position as corporate patron immediately' (passed

[57] Tim Cresswell and Steve Pile, Conference reports, The Future of Critical Geography, RGS-IBG Annual Conference, January 1997, HPGRG, Newsletter, May 1997, RGS-IBG, F2, 1.

[58] David Gilbert, 'Time to Shell out? Reflections on the RGS and Corporate Sponsorship', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 8 (2015) 521–529 (p. 522).

by 94% of the votes by mostly academic geographers at the RGS-IBG 1996 in the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow).[59] Yet, the RGS-IBG Council voted in June 1996 to continue the relationship, and the subsequent full RGS-IBG membership vote by postal ballot, cast among professional geographers and other interested parties, supported the Council's view through 72% of the votes, thus encouraging many academics to end their RGS-IBG membership.[60] This may have included an estimated sixth of the HPGRG members because by the time Livingstone stepped down from the HPGRG committee in 1998, the group membership had declined from c. 180 in 1996 to about 150 members (2020–21: 178 RGS-IBG members).[61]

The new focus on critical geography in British geography was also exemplified by an emphasis on critical geographies of knowledge and education (Tab. 2 & Tab. 3). Building on the development of new conceptual approaches in the history of science, the history of geography, and interdisciplinary science studies, these events were sensitive — in a Foucauldian sense — 'to the various ways in which geographical knowledge has been implicated in relationships of power'.[62] As an outcome of their 1995 HPGSG event on 'Geographical Education & Citizenship', Felix Driver (RHUL) and Avril Maddrell (Oxford) argued that 'the study of geographical thought is supplemented and enriched by new conceptions of geography as a social practice; if "cultures of geography" are to be the objects of our inquiry, the study of geographical education must necessarily come into

[59] Gilbert, Time to Shell out?, 523.

[60] Gilbert, Time to Shell out?, 524. According to the annual reviews of the RGS-IBG, the Shell corporation discontinued its role as a corporate benefactor in 2006 but continued to support different RGS-IBG projects in most years until 2015. Since 2016, Shell has not been listed among the RGS-IBG supporters anymore.

[61] List of members, RGS-IBG, F2; see also footnote 51; HPGRG, Unconfirmed minutes of the 2020 AGM, 3 September 2020, RHED archive, 4.

[62] Felix Driver, 'Geography's Empire: Histories of Geographical Knowledge', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992) 23–40 (p. 23).

view'.[63] Researching practices of geographical knowledge production and education complemented interests in the heterogeneity of geographical representations, discourses, knowledges, and imaginations.[64]

Critical geographical theory and praxis was also debated at the two-day HPGRG conference on 'Postcolonial Geographies', organised by Alison Blunt (Southampton) and Cheryl McEwan (Birmingham) in 1998 (Tab. 2). Feminist perspectives came to the fore in their three sessions on 'Feminisms and Geographies' at the RGS-IBG 1999 in Leicester. Cosponsored by the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG), these were the first HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG events that included only women as speakers, and thus they marked an increasing feminisation of British universities through more women geographers and a related sociocultural change among HPGRG event contributors. The growing engagement with feminist geography also proceeded through more research among all geographers embracing the concepts, approaches, and methods of feminist and gender studies. Hence, we feel it is important to stress that complex, changing, and fluid gender identities, behaviours, and capacities have shaped geography for much longer periods.

By the end of the 1990s, HPGRG session themes reflected a growing interest in material geographies, sociomaterial practices, and more-than-human research perspectives. Together with the 1999 HPGRG event on fieldwork in geography (Tab. 2), this new emphasis was prominent at the RGS-IBG 1998 in Kingston, with HPGRG sessions examining 'Darwinism and Geography' and 'Exploring the Geographies of Science, Technology and Nature', the latter jointly convened with the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group (SCGRG).

[63] Felix Driver and Avril M.C. Maddrell, 'Geographical Education and Citizenship: Introduction', *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 371–372 (p. 371).

[64] Driver, 'Geography's Empire'; David N. Livingstone, 'The Spaces of Knowledge: Contributions towards a Historical Geography of Science', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995) 5–34.

Topics included biogeography, landscape evolution, spatial planning, global climate change, farming, river restoration, human-animal relations, and geographies of wildlife. Geographers thus had begun to zoom in on human-environmental relations based on changed conceptual resources, as well as novel epistemological and ontological understandings, which had been developed, *inter alia*, by feminist sciences studies and actor-network theory.

INTERNATIONALISING AND PLURALISING HISTORIES AND PHILOSOPHIES OF GEOGRAPHY, 2000–2021

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw an internationalisation of British history and philosophy of geography. This change affected the wider discipline and was reflected in the renaming of the RGS-IBG Annual Conference to the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference in 2003. The RGS-IBG 2003 also implemented several additional changes. The event was for the first time held in the newly refurbished buildings of the RGS-IBG at Kensington Gore and had been moved from early January to early September, which ended frequent tales about sessions with speakers in winter coats, freezing accommodation, and challenging conference journeys hampered by snow. The event series has ever since been organised by the RHED team rather than local committees, and since the RGS-IBG 2009 in Manchester, it has alternated between two years in London and one year elsewhere in the United Kingdom. For the HPGRG, the first two decades of the twenty-first century marked a period of collaboration with external organisations and a pluralisation of histories and philosophies of geography.

International Perspectives

In 2004, the RGS-IBG hosted the 30th Congress of the IGU in Glasgow (IGC-UK 2004 Glasgow), four decades after hosting the 20th International Geographical Congress (IGC) in London in 1964. This joint congress, which incorporated the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference, spanned six days (15–20 August 2004) and featured more HPGRG sessions than any previous event (Fig. 2). In the twelve sessions coorganised by the HPGRG and the IGU Commission on the History of Geographical Thought, most papers considered the history and philosophy of geography together by situating geographical practices and ideas in their historical and geographical contexts. Since the paper authors were mostly based overseas (87%), the HPGRG session themes, speakers, and papers epitomised the IGU Commission's 'contextual, intercultural and international approach'.[65]

There were few other HPGRG sessions in the first two decades of the twenty-first century that focused on international perspectives. In the 2000s, the HPGRG sessions on 'International Perspectives on Gender and Geographical Knowledges' (cosponsored with the WGSG, London, 2006) and 'Intersections of English- and German-Speaking Social and Cultural Geographies 1 & 2' (with the SCGRG, Manchester, 2009) provided such an explicit international outlook. The subsequent decade saw a further three HPGRG sessions discussing 'Education and the State 2: International Perspectives' (with the Population Geography Research Group, London 2011), 'Historical Geographies of Internationalism: 1900s-1970s 2: Beyond the State' (London, 2013), and '60 Years in Geography: The

[65] *One Earth — Many Worlds: IGC-UK 2004 Glasgow: Programme* (Glasgow: IGU, 2004), p. 22. See also A *Geographical Century: Essays for the Centenary of the International Geographical Union*, ed. by Vladimir Kolosov, Jacobo García-Álvarez, Michael Heffernan, and Bruno Schelhaas (Cham: Springer, 2022).

Disciplinary Memory of a Norwegian Geographer', which was the HPGRG Keynote Lecture 2019 delivered by Arild Holt-Jensen (Bergen).[66]

Collaborations between the HPGRG and the IGU Commission on the History of Geographical Thought (since 2008 the IGU Commission on the History of Geography) have most frequently strengthened the group's international profile. In 2013, the HPGRG and the IGU Commission on the History of Geography coorganised a conference symposium on 'Geography and its Publics' at the 24th International Congress of History of Science, Technology and Medicine in Manchester, a quadrennial event of the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. This symposium consisted of six paper sessions, including keynote lectures by Charles Withers (Edinburgh) and Karen Morin (Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA) and international paper contributions from Brazil, Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Russia, the United States, and Iraq.

Epistemic Pluralism

The proliferation of geographical theory and praxis since the poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial turns in the 1980s and 1990s continued in the twenty-first century, going hand-in-hand with a steady increase in PhD researchers in British universities and the number of HPGRG conference sessions (Fig. 2). When considering that the PhD thesis of 1931 by the historical geographer H.C. Darby, the first written in geography at the University of Cambridge, built on a conceptual discussion of geodeterminism and possibilism, which led him to frame his research on the role of the Fenland in English history by a focus on individual personalities, general developments in society, and 'the geographical setting of events', history and philosophy of geography, as performed in the HPGRG conference

[66] Arlid Holt-Jensen, 'Transformations in the Discipline of Geography Experienced over 60 Years by a Norwegian Geographer, *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift — Norwegian Journal of Geography* 73 (2019) 229–244.

sessions from 1981 to 2021, experienced a considerable epistemic diversification (Fig. 3).[67] This pluralisation has added significance to questions about core texts, professional praxes, and disciplinary identities in geography, as discussed at the HPGRG workshop 'The Geographical Canon?', held in St. Catherine's College, Oxford, on 15 June 2012.[68]

Four main academic discourses shaped conversations on history and philosophy of geography at the RGS-IBG conferences, 2000–2021: first, an engagement with more-than-human and more-than-representational geographies; second, a pluralisation of key terms, such as histories (in HPGRG session titles used since 1995), philosophies, and geographies (both used since 1996), with geographies putting geography (the most used term in the 1980s and 1990s) into second place; third, an exploration of creative methods; and fourth, a shift towards the examination of a broader range of everyday practices (Fig. 3). These wider research agendas were pursued alongside continuing and renewing interests in critical examinations of the coproductions, transformations, and consequences of geographical knowledges, multiscalar power-relations, and everyday politics, ranging from medieval geographies via anti-colonialism and decolonisation to European geographers in World War II and from Arctic geographical traditions via relations between geography, archaeology, and anthropology to spatial biopolitics, subaltern studies, art practices, and human-environment relations in the Anthropocene. The pivotal question of how understandings of key terms that have shaped the field emerged, enlightened, and changed over the past four decades provides scope for future studies.

[Fig. 3 about here]

[67] H.C. Darby, 'The Rôle of the Fenland in English History', (unpublished PhD thesis, St Catherine's College, Cambridge, 1931), p. 8. This diversification is striking when compared to Cresswell, *Geographic Thought*.

[68] Richard C. Powell, 'Notes on a Geographical Canon? Measures, Models and Scholarly Enterprise', *Journal of Historical Geography* 49 (2015) 2–8 (p. 3).

From the perspective of HPGRG events, a notable year in this proliferation of conceptual perspectives was 2008. Four sessions entitled 'Where Species Meet and Mingle: Remaking and Tracing Biogeographies: Performing Kin and Kinds' were complemented by the first three HPGRG sessions on 'Non-Representational Geographies'. The latter coincided with the publication of Nigel Thrift's book *Non-Representational Theory* for the critical interrogation of non-discursive and lived experiences of everyday practices and bodily performances. From 2017 to 2021, seven further HPGRG-sponsored paper and panel sessions referred to the term 'non-representational' in the title, thus underlining a widespread interest in related philosophies, methodologies, and practices, discussed also in sessions on affects and atmospheres.[69]

Women geographers were honoured at the RGS-IBG 2013 in London through a series of events entitled '100+ — Celebrating More Than a Hundred Years of Women's Geographical Work' that marked the centenary of the admission of women to the Royal Geographical Society.[70] This series of events was organised by the Gender and Feminist Geography Research Group (GFGRG, formerly WGSG) and thus serves as an important reminder that this analysis can only provide an insight into the topics of sessions that the HPGRG committee members either organised or were approached about for session sponsorship. Throughout the HPGRG's third and fourth decades, there were several unsponsored sessions in the conference programmes that would have fitted the group's remit or could have been cosponsored with other groups. From 1981 to 2021, the

[69] Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008); Paul Simpson, *Non-Representational Theory* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[70] Sarah L. Evans, Innes M. Keighren, and Avril Maddrell, 'Coming of Age? Reflections on the Centenary of Women's Admission to the Royal Geographical Society', *The Geographical Journal* 179 (2013) 373–376.

HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG collaborated with more than twenty IBG and RGS-IBG groups, but by far the most conference sessions were cosponsored by the SCGRG and the HGRG.

In the group's third and fourth decades, physical geographers rarely engaged with the group's events, but we argue that only the history of the HPGRG has been dominated by human geographers, not British history and philosophy of geography (Fig. 3).[71] Building on earlier 'Conversations Across the Divide' between physical and human geographers at the RGS-IBG conferences 2003 to 2007, collaborations between physical and human geographers featured in teaching-related HPGRG sessions: 'When Is a HEA Geographer Not a Geographer?' in 2012 and 'The Publication and Utilization of Geography Textbooks', a panel discussion, in 2016. This exemplifies that disciplinary unity often characterises the teaching of histories of geography, tutorials, research methods, and field courses, especially on environmental themes. The conference theme of the RGS-IBG 2015 in Exeter, *Geographies of the Anthropocene*, sketched many future opportunities for collaborations between physical and human geographers. HPGRG sessions reflected in creative ways on the Holocene, water worlds, wet geographies, and a 5th millennium 'Return to Earth' expedition, involving interactions with planners, designers, and artists.

The year 2017 saw significant critical interventions led by members of the Race, Culture and Equality Working Group (RACE) on decolonial perspectives in geography. They criticised that the RGS-IBG 2017 Chair's theme *Decolonising Geographical Knowledges: Opening Geography Out to the World* would be implicit in enduring European coloniality,

[71] For example, Robert Inkpen and Graham Wilson, *Science, Philosophy and Physical Geography* (Second edition, London: Routledge, 2013); Couper, *A Student's Introduction to Geographical Thought*; *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Physical Geography*, ed. by Rebecca Lave, Christine Biermann, and Stuart N. Lane (Cham: Springer, 2018); Andrew S. Goudie, Tim P. Burt, and Heather A. Viles, 'The Global Transformation of Geomorphology', *Geological Society Memoirs* 58 (2022) 1–17.

and they drew attention to the strong underrepresentation of researchers and academics from racialised ethnic minorities in British universities and at the RGS-IBG conferences.[72] At the 2017 London conference, HPGRG cosponsored a panel with RACE on a critical reappraisal of Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition*, in which he had identified and critically discussed practices of racist discrimination and stereotyping in the writings of US geographer Isaiah Bowman up until the 1920s.[73]

When the coronavirus pandemic changed the world in March 2020, it became soon clear that the RGS-IBG 2020 in London had to be postponed by one year. In the summer of 2021, geographers were then given the option to participate virtually in the RGS-IBG event. This enabled the circulation of a second call for sessions and resulted in the absolute peak of 21 HPGRG sessions in the dual mode RGS-IBG 2021 (Fig. 2). The 2021 HPGRG sessions and the group's fortieth anniversary online event on 7 September 2021 changed the mode of conversations about the history and philosophy of geography profoundly because these were part of a wider process towards making virtual event attendance an accepted norm on the international conference circuit.

Ron Johnston had submitted an abstract for the HPGRG anniversary event, originally scheduled on 1 September 2020, but he sadly passed away about two months after his 79th birthday on 29 May.[74] His ten-minute statement would have debated HPGRG's future by asking: 'perhaps the Group should celebrate its birthday by changing its name? "Histories

[72] James Esson, Patricia Noxolo, Richard Baxter, Patricia Daley, and Margaret Byron, 'The 2017 RGS-IBG Chair's Theme: Decolonising Geographical Knowledges, or Reproducing Coloniality?' *Area* 49 (2017) 384–388.

[73] Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, is discussed in *TIBG* 20 (1995) and *TIBG* 44 (2019).

[74] James D. Sidaway, Michiel van Meeteren, and Colin Flint, 'Ron Johnston (1941–2020): In Memoriam', *GeoJournal* 87 (2022) 343–345.

and philosophies" would be a better representation?'.[75] In the context of proliferating pluralism, we think that Johnston's questions will resonate in future debates about the nature of the HPGRG and wider geographical research (Fig. 3).

CONCLUSIONS

Researching the historiography of a research group on the history and philosophy of geography from the perspective of conferences has proven to be an effective bottom-up approach to understanding changes in geographical praxis. Our critical appraisal of HPGRG activities has revealed enormous creativity in the organisation of conference sessions and special events, with profound impacts on the emergence of new research topics, approaches, and theories that have shaped the wider discipline of geography. Historical perspectives inspired philosophical and methodological trends and new philosophies shaped the ways in which histories of geography and historical geographies have been written. Examining the coproduction of organisational, sociocultural, and epistemic developments linked to the HPGRG and its events can itself be regarded as an outcome of evolving critical interrogations that centre the geographies of conferences as temporary meeting spaces for understanding epistemic, social, and spatial change at different geographical scales.[76]

Our study has shown that the HPGRG emerged in 1981 on the initiative of two early career researchers, Harrison and Livingstone, in the context of their critical publications on philosophical approaches in geography during an important era of paradigmatic change and

[75] Ron Johnston, History & philosophy of geography: singular or plural?, Abstract for a ten-minute statement at the 35 years of HPGRG anniversary event, 26 March 2020.

[76] Craggs and Mahony, 'The Geographies of the Conference'; Kolosov, García-Álvarez, Heffernan, and Schelhaas, *A Geographical Century*; Legg, *Round Table Conference Geographies.*

that its activities have ever since inspired new research collaborations. The group and its events experienced sociocultural inclusion, encouraged by widening participation in British universities, especially for first-generation university students and women but also for international geographers, which has contributed significantly to a diversification of research perspectives in the field. We have noted a lack of involvement by physical geographers and geographers from Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority backgrounds, whom we hope to encourage engaging more often with the HPGRG and its events.

We have discussed how the HPGRG events contributed to the proliferation of epistemic pluralism in geography and encouraged experimentation with creative methods and multimethod approaches as part of a wider shift towards researching practices, thereby bringing histories, methodologies, and philosophies more closely together. As sites of inspiration, provocation, and controversies through presentations, discussions, and networking, conferences both reflect and contribute to epistemic change. Our analysis exposed that especially contextualist histories of geography and critical geographies of science, informed by different philosophies, emerged and evolved through the HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG events. These events also coproduced new cultural geography, whose expansive yet humanist universe partly spurred geographers' turns towards more-than-human and more-than-representational research approaches. Therefore, we argue that knowledge production and exchange at conferences need to be considered alongside publications when writing new histories of geography and new histories of science.

We conclude by pointing to the long-term social value of research on the history and philosophy of geography beyond short-sighted impact agendas of neoliberalising higher education. Remarkably, the research on the history of geography conducted by Livingstone in the 1980s has been drawn upon to justify anti-racist actions at Harvard University in 2020.

Livingstone had exposed racist thought in the work of Harvard palaeontologist Nathaniel Southgate Shaler (1841–1906) in his 1982 PhD thesis at Queen's University of Belfast. Almost four decades later, Livingstone's TIBG article of 1984 was cited as a main justification when PhD students and postdocs in Harvard's Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences actively confronted racist academic legacies.[77] They covered and removed busts and paintings of Shaler from public view to create a more inclusive academic environment through the decolonisation of Harvard's university spaces.[78] We are thus confident that histories and philosophies of geographies will remain fascinating, educational, and relevant.

[77] David N. Livingstone, 'Science and Society: Nathaniel S. Shaler and Racial Ideology', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 9 (1984) 181–210.

[78] Camille Hankel, Kaitlyn Loftus, Hannah Nesser, and Jonathan Proctor, DIB Subgroups & Action Items: Imagery, Signage, and History of Racism: Nathaniel S. Shaler, https://eps.harvard.edu/nathaniel-s-shaler-and-scientific-racism last accessed 8 October 2022.

Figure captions

Fig. 1. Programme of the HPGTWP's inaugural conference session, 6 January 1981, IBG Annual Conference, University of Leicester

Fig. 2. Number of HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG conference sessions at the IBG and RGS-IBG (International) Annual Conferences, 1981–2021

Fig. 3. Epistemic trends in HPGTWP/HPGSG/HPGRG conference session titles at the IBG and RGS-IBG (International) Annual Conferences, 1981–2021