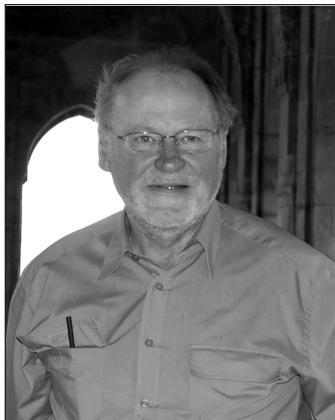


Obituary

Professor Graham Chapman



(1944 - 2014)

We are sorry to report the sudden death of Professor Graham Chapman on August 31st 2014. He was a great friend of India, known to many Indian geographers. We have lost a good friend and an outstanding geographer.

Graham was born in Croydon (South London) on 10-06-1944 and was the youngest of the three children of his parents Dorothy, a teacher, and Kenneth, a professional philatelist who worked for the firm Stanley Gibbons. He was admitted in the WHITGIFT school in Croydon where the an inspirational teacher in Geography motivated him to be a great Geographer. His hobbies were Water Polo - Rowing - Air Squadron (flying) - Stage Painting for dramatic performances.

He pursued his undergraduate studies at St. Catherine College, Cambridge and passed with double first. After graduating at

from Cambridge University he spent a year in the Geography Department at Edinburgh, then moved back to Cambridge as a junior lecturer in South Asian geography, alongside the great South Asian geographer, B.H. Farmer. In 1988, he moved to a professorial post at the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) before becoming Chair and Head of the Department of Geography at Lancaster in 1994, where he was based until his retirement – with emeritus professor status – in 2008. For many years, he was also Chairman of the British Association of South Asian Studies (BASAS).

In the early 1970s, Graham investigated how in northern India farmers used folklore and local calendars in their decision-making, and how their knowledge differed from that of outside experts. He developed, with his colleagues, innovative role-playing games to simulate the experiences of small-scale

farmers in the developing world, using real-life data from his field studies and from climate records. He invented the Green Revolution Game that simulated Indian agriculture and demographics in constantly changing iterations?. The game was eventually commercialised and used far-and-wide, from Indian agricultural universities to the World Bank. Later, he added a non-farm economy (also based on field evidence) and a town to the game. He called it ‘Exaction’ and it was also a powerful learning tool. While working in Africa, he collaborated in creation of another game ‘Africulture’ focusing on decision-making by small-scale farmers of Zambia. In this case, he took into account gender, intra-household relation and negotiation between men and women.

Throughout his career, Professor Chapman was disappointed that the two main branches of geography – physical and human – were increasingly separated, seemingly always in tension; that regional studies were being abandoned by geographers; and that students of geography were less and less encouraged to have real knowledge of geographical facts. In 2007, he published one paper entitled ‘Geography: the Remains of a British Discipline’ in an academic journal of Cambridge University.

Professor Chapman became a champion for of the holistic study of South Asia, writing prolifically about the region as a whole, its history, environment, agriculture, urbanisation and geopolitics. His definitive ‘Geopolitics of South Asia from the early empires to the nuclear age’ is into its third edition. He devoted himself to Area Studies through his long Presidency of BASAS, developing it as a professional association

that encourages young scholars in an atmosphere of informal and constructive collegiality, internationalism and multi-disciplinarity. He also made environment–development interactions a centrepiece of his South Asia research, and became a renowned authority on the geography of the Ganges and Brahmaputra water systems and the conflicts and politics involved in them.

In September 2000, a devastating flood marooned large part of Southern Bengal and Graham was stranded in Berhampur (Murshidabad district, West Bengal). He investigated the causes and effects of that deluge with Kalyan Rudra and the result was a paper titled “Water as Foe, Water as Friend: Lessons from Bengal’s Millennium Flood” which was published in Journal of South Asian Development. His specific contribution was focussing on the history of changes in the Ganga and its distributaries in Bengal. He had keen interest in the complex history of society and water in West Bengal combining extant historiography with the new knowledge. His last work with Kalyan Rudra, titled “Time Streams: History and Rivers in Bengal” is expected to be published shortly.

He was also a core consultant and occasional participant in “Ganga” a project that looked at the river Ganga holistically through both mythology and environmental science. Funded by the National Science Foundation, it produced both a six part radio documentary series broadcast on National Public Radio, as well as a book (published in India by Random House India). Graham and his wife Anne Gerd joined the expedition at Bhagalpur in Bihar and travelled down to Jangipur (West Bengal), enlivening it with wit, wisdom and good company.

In 2006-07, Professor Chapman collaborated with Mrs. Pat Saunders, an independent historical geographer, in the first phase of a project then entitled Human Intervention and Dynamic Environmental Change in Bengal funded by the British Academy and based in Lancaster University. Phase two of the project, now termed the Bengal Maps Project, (2007 to the present), continued at the University of Cambridge, with additional inputs from Professor Keith Richards, Dr. Kalyan Rudra, Dr. Maminul Haque Sarkar of Bangladesh and Mr. Hugh Brammer. It was Professor Chapman's enthusiasm for this work and his skill in finding the initial funding, which enabled this important research on the history of river changes in greater Bengal to take place.

Graham was a 'family man'; a scholar with original ideas who constantly collaborated and was fun to work with; a generous supervisor, much loved as well as somewhat feared by his students; a talented artist and photographer, with an eye not only for great sweeps of landscape but also for its

fine detail; someone with close family and professional ties with Scandinavia; and an accomplished fell- and mountain-walker. Above all, he was a person who took an interest in everyone he came across from flood-victims of West Bengal to Norwegian cruise-liner passengers.

Graham's scholarship was creative and unusually wide-ranging. With his enthusiasm for so much that life offers, he was 'larger than life'. His death is a huge loss to geography, especially to Indian Geography and those who knew him, and we send our deep sympathy to his wife Anne Gerd and their family.

(Based, on the obituary published by BASAS and Guardian (02.10.14.) and also information received from Anne Chapman.)

Kalyan Rudra

Chairman,
West Bengal
Pollution Control Board
Kolkata

