

Rex was a man of so many parts but here I concentrate on geography and education

He achieved so much but Rex's special gift is not what he did but how he did it.

On leaving university in 1958 with a Divinity and a PGCE qualification Rex did not wish to follow his father into the Army. Rex could have entered the Church; followed his flourishing career as a part time journalist; have gone into broadcasting or theatre (but his mother was not keen); or entered teaching.

After a summer of cricket he found himself appointed to teach at St Mary's, Hendon – a secondary modern. The previous head of department had just taken ill and died, so on the very first morning of teaching Rex became Head of Geography.

In 1962, after a year in the US, Rex arrived at Maria Grey College to train teachers in geography and mathematics (it could equally have been history or education). Here, Rex's blend of talents came into play. His facility with numbers, his journalistic nous, his thespian tendencies, his fine sense of audience and his ability to marshal evidence to make a compelling case stood him in good stead.

Every new initiative landed on Rex's desk. One morning he found the stern figure of Chief Inspector for Geography, JH Morris, in his classroom and, having worked through some simulations and games with his students, Rex thought he was for the chop. Instead the Chief Inspector sent a 3 line whip to all geography inspectors to visit him at Twickenham to witness this exciting work.

About this time, co-incidentally, Dick Chorley and Peter Haggett were at the epicentre of changes shaking academic geography. They convened an historic conference at Madingley Hall in 1966. Rex and his young colleagues left that meeting transformed, and geography in schools was never to be the same again. Rote-learning and memorisation were out. New conceptual frameworks, enquiry and problem solving were in. At further conferences, notably at Madingley Hall and Charney Manor, and through informal publishing and countless meetings Rex kept the frontiers of geography moving forward.

Long before cyberspace, Rex was a social networker of the highest facility. Rex had huge organisational skill and turned much of the creative talent of his colleagues into novel resources for teachers. Joyously producing publications, models, games, simulations and roleplays for the classroom.

Rex's executive skills served so many of us well, in particular The Geographical Association (GA) and Royal Geographical Society –with Institute of British Geographers (RGS). But also - as a Governor, Non-Executive Director, Trustee, Adjudicator, Examiner, committee member or just as a colleague - various bodies and many other informal groups found Rex to be an organisational whizz kid. His skill in creating and energising initiatives together with his prodigious memory ensured colleagues were engaged and ideas were put into action.

Rex was an accomplished committee worker. He strove to overcome suspicion and break down barriers. He saw the big picture – he was influential in the strategic reviews of both the GA and the RGS - and was instrumental in forming The Council of British Geography (CoBRIG) a body uniting the education and academic interests of communities of geographers across Britain.

I first met Rex in 1973 when he arrived as a lecturer at the University of Cambridge, rising to become Head of Department in the School of Education. In 1988 he was appointed fellow of Wolfson College later Director of Studies at Emmanuel College and Director of Studies at Kings College.

Recently Rex signed my copy of one of his publications: To Chris with whom I've shared many publishing adventures. And adventures they were. Rex always made work exciting – fun.

Rex was an assiduous editor, never afraid to introduce new talent into whatever series he was editing. He was a prolific author of nearly 30 titles for pupils, teachers and academics. His readership like his influence was truly international.

In his scholarly sweep of education and geography, published in 2001, *Geography in British Schools 1850 – 2000* Rex's dedication reads:

To the postgraduate students whom I have taught... whose idealism about their vocation to teach geography and belief in the educational value of what they are doing has been a constantly heartening experience.

I believe those students, now teachers, would turn that dedication around. You see Rex was like a magnet - a strong force drawing colleagues in - but Rex did not hold us at the centre as others might. With deft skill he reversed the polarity and powered us outward. His nurture, empathy, inspiration, boundless energy, intellectual rigour, humour, gusto, verve, zest and sheer vitality reached everywhere.

His publications and academic research are of an unfailing high standard. Rex, ever modest, wore his brilliance lightly but his scholarship was superb. A senior colleague at Cambridge on reading Rex's Ph.D was heard to remark "...surprisingly readable". At whatever level, Rex constructed powerful argument and turned an elegant phrase.

Rex rose steadily to be the significant player in geography education, becoming President of The GA (in 1984) and Vice President of the RGS (from 1993-96). Rex made the Case for Geography and never tired in finding novel ways to convince often sceptical audiences. The government also benefited from his experience: he worked, at Kenneth Baker's request, on the National Curriculum for Geography. Not the happiest experience – but Rex was an optimist. I rarely saw him down (He had to be an optimist, he followed both Northants CCC, and Cambridge United FC).

When the GA moved its HQ building from leafy suburbs to the twilight zone of inner city Sheffield, Rex looked from the window onto an extraordinary urban scene. Perhaps being on a hill was enough to excite the man from Cambridge, however from this he conjured yet another imaginative initiative Geography Through the Window. This followed other GA pupil-focussed mass participation activities that Rex inspired: Worldwide Quiz; Land Use UK; and Geography Action Week.

Above all else Rex was a brilliant teacher – he won the Back Award from the RGS, was awarded the Pilkington Prize for teaching excellence by The University of Cambridge and of course, in 2000, The Order of the British Empire for his contribution to geographical scholarship.

As a tutor and mentor he gave his students everything, even after they left his tutelage. His students have testified to Rex's extraordinary ability to light the spark and generate enthusiasm. Rex, the man of many parts was for Dick Chorley the Andre Previn of geography and each of us will have our own special memories.

Professional colleagues, the RGS and the GA are planning to celebrate Rex's contribution to geography and teacher education, and details will be available soon.

Rex has enriched so many lives. In the subtitle of *Geography in British Schools* he wrote his own epitaph - Making a World of Difference

Rex certainly made the world of difference to so many of us.

This speech was given by Chris Kington at Rex's memorial service on 16 February 2011