



CLIFFORD DARBY

Henry Clifford Darby 1909–1992

CLIFFORD DARBY was a towering figure in British geography over a period straddling sixty years during the middle decades of this century, and in the first rank of scholars in the country. His name is indissolubly associated with the development and study of geography in general but with historical geography in particular, and especially with the study of the Domesday Book as a geographical source. His reputation was world-wide, and he became something of a legend in his own lifetime.

Henry Clifford Darby, or Clifford or HCD, as he liked to be known, was born on 7 February 1909, of humble origins in Resolven, a small coal mining village in the upper Neath Valley, in the South Wales coal field. He was the only child of Janet and Evan Darby, who was an engineer. His father was a tall, impressive man, largely self-taught, who soon established a reputation in the Vale of Neath giving lantern slide lectures to men's clubs and church groups on a variety of topics, and writing about Tenby where he was born.

The family love of learning was not lost on young Clifford, who travelled daily to Neath County School, twenty miles away. He was clearly a very bright pupil, as he went up to St Catharine's College, Cambridge on a State Scholarship at the early age of sixteen. Although his intention was to read English he transferred to Geography. Three years later he had graduated with First Class honours in both parts of the Geographical Tripos, and had been made a Scholar of St Catharine's. He published his first article on the architectural geography of southern

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Britain in the *Sociological Review* at the age of nineteen, another a year later on the migration of tinplate industry in his native valley, and presented a paper to the International Geographical Congress in Brussels. Thus began what he called his 'intellectual journey' that was to span another sixty-four years, which, with the exception of that of Carl Ortwin Sauer, an almost contemporaneous figure, can have few counterparts in Anglo-American geography. By the age of twenty-two he was awarded the first Ph.D. in Geography at Cambridge, and was appointed to a University Lectureship in the Geography Department. A year later he became an Ehrman Fellow of King's College, and then an Official Fellow, a position he retained until 1945.

By any standards it was a remarkable achievement. It takes a great effort of the imagination in these egalitarian days at Oxbridge to realise what an awesome transition into the unknown that journey from the parochial, though beautiful, milieu of the mountains and woodlands of the Vale of Neath, to the intellectually and socially cosmopolitan milieu of the featureless Fens of Cambridge, must have been for a sixteen-year old in the immediate post-World War I years. To have succeeded so eminently was a measure of the determination, dedication and unassuming brilliance that lay at the core of the man.

Little is known of his life in Cambridge but it must have been one of unstinting application to work and scholarship. He could not afford rooms in College, and from the time he went up and for the next six years he had to live by himself in lodgings. Therefore, the incident that purports to reveal his dedication was probably not true: the Master of St Catharine's, Colonel Portway, is said to have asked his tutor, Alfred Steers, 'How is your child prodigy getting on?' Steers replied, 'I've gated him.' 'Gated him?' responded the Master in surprise. 'Yes, I've gated him out. He has to be out of College after ten at least two nights a week.' But true or not, that the story ever arose, is not surprising.

Barely had he embarked on his Ph.D. than an unexpected invitation came to spend a lengthy time in Africa. Frank Debenham, the Professor of Geography and one-time companion of Scott on his 1910–13 expedition to the Antarctic, had been invited to southern Africa by the American Geographical Society to prepare a chapter for a book on pioneer settlement. Debenham was prevented by illness from going, but wrote to Isaiah Bowman, the Director of the Society, recommending that Clifford went in his place; 'He is by way of being a very remarkable young man, being a very deep thinker and an accomplished student of human geography . . . his observations and his method of writing

down his conclusions would be first class. . . .’ The fruits of those months of field work, interviews and observation in what were then North and South Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi) are revealed in his field notes. Two substantial chapters came out of the work in 1931 and 1932.

Southern Africa was an immense contrast to his life in Cambridge, and it was an experience he never repeated again, not, as has sometimes been said, because he did not like travel and was far happier in the archive and the library, but because the problems of pioneer settlers in that part of the world were simply not his main concern. Later on in life he did enjoy immensely a number of trips as Visiting Professor to the United States, where the variety and human fashioning of landscapes fascinated him. Twice he drove from the east to the west coast, once from eastern Canada to the Mississippi Delta and back again, and once from western Canada to Mexico. In later years he visited Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Algeria, Israel, China and Japan, and every European country except perhaps those of Scandinavia. He was not ‘the little Englander’ that some have divined from his academic work.

Back in Cambridge he set to work on his dissertation, which was on the role of the Fenland in English history. It attempted to show, in the then conventional geographical approach of the day, how political history was influenced by the natural environment, particularly how the Fens acted as a barrier between East Anglia and Mercia, and as a place of refuge in times of turmoil. His supervisor was Bernard Manning, Fellow and Bursar of Jesus College. Manning was a lecturer in geography, but his heart was in medieval ecclesiastical history, to which Faculty he transferred in 1930. He was said to be a ‘soundly practical’ and ‘deeply spiritual’ man, with a passionate interest in the medieval world, the Wesleys and hymnology, and was an active ecumenical Congregationalist. Clifford attended Manning’s lectures, not only in historical geography but also in medieval Latin literature, and it would not be too fanciful to think that Manning stimulated his interest in the medieval world and the Domesday Book as a geographical source, which would dominate his subsequent professional life. Papers on the medieval sea state (1932), Domesday geographies (1934, 1935), the astrolabe (1935), and the geographical ideas of the Venerable Bede (1935), among many others, were an outcome of this period. Clifford had a high regard for Manning and dedicated his two Fenland monographs to him.

The Fenland dissertation was never published, although pieces did

appear in the *Victoria History of the County of Cambridgeshire* in 1948. As he himself admitted later, 'within a few years such a thesis on geographical history would certainly not be presented from a Department of Geography.' Its over-riding determinist reasoning was unsatisfactory; once the waterways had been opened up for trade and the causeways built to connect the new 'island' villages, the fenland became a meeting point and not a barrier. Rather than the environment affecting human activity it was human activity that was affecting the environment. Subsequently, he completely reworked the Fenland material in the light of other work that he was doing, and 'because it provided an outstanding example of the transformation of the landscape, and because it is near Cambridge.' The new work was published nearly a decade later in two outstanding regional volumes, *The Medieval Fenland* and *The Draining of the Fens*.

The intellectual problem posed by the early Fenland work was one that he was to wrestle with all his professional life, how to combine successfully place and time, geography and history; in other words, how to write a form of historical geography as opposed to a geographical history. The quest to understand the practical and methodological nuances of what he called so many times 'the intellectual borderland between history and geography' summarised his life's work. He recalled many years later that the prevailing view in the university was not encouraging. 'Tell me about historical geography' said the Provost of King's, Dr Sheppard, before his appointment to the Ehrman Fellowship, to which Clifford responded with some enthusiasm and at some length. 'Fascinating, my dear boy, absolutely fascinating,' responded the Provost. 'Just like the first chapter of a Scott novel' and then, after a pause, 'You know, the one one never reads.'

Sheppard's comment was ignorant and discouraging, but unwittingly he had touched upon an important point. Historical Geography as then written was often 'the first chapter' of many a historical work. Throughout the nineteenth and even early twentieth century historical geography usually meant the history of geographical exploration, the history of changes in political boundaries, or the influence of geographical conditions on the course of history, as in the influential work of Ellen Semple Churchill, or Ratzel. It was the servant of history, and subordinate to it. But during the early twentieth century a more independent and narrower role was being carved out for historical geography as it came increasingly to be associated with the geography of an area or region in the past. J. F. Unstead's cutting of 'historical

sections through time' or Sir Halford Mackinder's 'the historical present' were indications of this new-found independence. Clifford sought to build on these ideas and broaden and deepen the meaning and content of historical geography so that, in addition to the study of landscapes and regions at critical periods in the past, it came to be identified less with a methodology and more with an approach—that historical data could be used unashamedly to elucidate geographical methods and problems.

A turning point came for him during the 'The First International Congress of Historical Geography' held at Brussels in 1930. About 200 people attended, it was dominated by historians, and the over-riding theme was geography as the hand-maiden of history. Then the Brussels archivist, Charles Pergameni, gave a paper which put forward a plea to see historical geography 'as the human geography of the past' and drew on the work of Alfred Hettner on 'past geographies.' It was, said Clifford later, 'a fresh approach to one who was struggling with his doubts as he completed his Ph.D. thesis.'

In these days of robust higher education, academic liberalism and intellectual catholicity, it is difficult to appreciate the rigidity of disciplines and subject matter in the 1930s. In the minuscule university structure of the time many present subjects did not exist. Geography, though an ancient subject, was still battling for academic acceptance and was present in about a dozen departments only; its prospects were 'fragile and uncertain.' The concept of interdisciplinary studies that transcended the 'tariff frontiers' around academic subjects was not to be heard of until what Clifford himself called 'the swinging sixties' of academic life. It was against this institutional background that he laboured and proselytised with a missionary zeal to establish historical geography as a 'self-conscious' and distinctive subset of the discipline. To do that the 'new' historical geography had to be different from contemporary human geography, different from the powerful and long-established discipline of history, and different from the 'old' and discredited environmental determinism.

In 1932 a joint meeting of the Geographical Association and the Historical Association sought a fresh approach to the question, and the consensus was that a central aim was 'the reconstruction of the geographical conditions of past times' and that a succession of such reconstructions could constitute a total historical geography of a place. The landscape formed an incontestable and certain focus, related to, but not identical with geography, area or region, but which had the

approbation of historians. With this clearer understanding of the purpose of historical geography, Clifford and others laboured, as he said, with 'the dogmatic fervour of new converts to a faith.' The opportunity to put his ideas into practice came with his plan for the volume, *An Historical Geography of England before A.D.1800*, which was published in 1936. He discussed it one evening with John Clapham, who thought it 'an interesting idea', and, as a Syndic of the University Press, eased its birth the very next day. The volume was a collection of eleven successive cross-sections and geographical essays using historical sources, by a wide range of scholars, many senior and well-established, edited meticulously by a still young Clifford who was only twenty-four when the project began. It was an extraordinary accomplishment, both personally and intellectually, and it went through many reprints.

Clifford's early academic days in pre-war Cambridge were rich in experience and academic contact. He formed friendships with two other distinguished South Welshmen from not altogether dissimilar backgrounds, John (Hrothgar) Habakkuk and Glyn Daniel (both to become Fellows of the Academy), and went on a walking tour with them in Brittany in 1933. The Common Room at King's was stimulating and included the economists Keynes, Pigou, and Kahn, the physiologist Gray, the antiquary and biblical scholar, M. R. James, and above all, Sir John Clapham, the first Professor of Economic History in the University. Clapham believed in the interdependence of history and geography, being well aware of the work of Bloch, Lefebvre, and others writing in French human geography and history, and indeed, he had been one of Clifford's examiners for his Ph.D., and had contributed to the 1936 volume. Clapham wrote the Editorial Preface to the two Fenland volumes, which contained the memorable phrase that one senses Clifford took as his credo and justification, and most certainly treasured to the end: 'He is a very imperfect economic historian who is not a tolerable geographer; and I cannot picture to myself a useful historical geographer who has not a fair working knowledge of economic history.' Clapham had formed a high opinion of Clifford, who had won the University Prize for Economic History with his Fenland monograph, saying that he thought 'it likely that geographers with Dr Darby's technical equipment as a historian are rare.'

Two other significant events marked these early years, one professional, one personal. Like many would-be geographers he had an early fascination with maps, and so he was 'delighted' he said, 'when Mr

George Philip asked me to join him in editing a new atlas'. Thus began a long association with atlases, locational and historical. *The University Atlas* appeared in 1937 and went through twenty-two editions, in six languages. It was followed in 1938 by a sister publication, *The Library Atlas*, which was the *University Atlas* with an economic supplement and which ran to fifteen editions. Under the two titles, about 600,000 copies were produced. Many years later the Cambridge University Press asked him to edit an historical atlas to accompany the *New Cambridge Modern History*, and with the help of his co-editor, Mr Harold Fullard of George Philip and Sons, the *Atlas* appeared as Vol. XIV in 1970. It was reprinted in 1978, is still in print, and some 12,000 copies have been sold.

The significant personal event of these years was his meeting with Eva Darby (née Thomson) a Scholar of Girton College, and one of his students, whom he married in 1941, and who survives him, as do their two daughters, Jennifer and Sarah. For over fifty years Eva was his helper, companion, and confidante, and gave him support and stability in his rich and busy life. The importance of such a partnership can only be assessed by those fortunate enough to have experienced it.

Clifford's intellectual reputation and knowledge of Europe, and his record for meticulous and rigorous organisation and editing came to the fore during the Second World War when he was first commissioned into the Intelligence Corps, and then, in 1941, became the civilian head of the Admiralty's Geographical Handbook Centre in Cambridge as Editor-in-Chief, Kenneth Mason being his counterpart in Oxford. In all a total of about fifty geographers were employed in both Centres. In many ways, it was a geographer's dream. The remit was to produce information for the Navy about the countries caught up in the war, from Germany to the Pacific Islands, from Morocco to Finland. 'Handbook' was a misnomer; in nearly every case what might have been a bald compilation became a sophisticated regional geography (with much historical geography) of the countries concerned, liberally illustrated with maps, photographs and statistical appendices—France, for example, running into four volumes and 1000 pages. Although now dated, all volumes are still an excellent source of information, synthesis and interpretation. Between 1941 and 1945, thirty volumes were produced in Cambridge with a team of about twenty-five geographers, which sounded like a roll call of British post-war geography. Besides his overall editorial duties Clifford wrote sections of France, vols 2 and 3; Belgium; The Netherlands; Germany, vols 1 and 2; Jugoslavia, vol.

2; and Greece, vols 1 and 3, of which portions of those on France, Greece and Yugoslavia were revised after the War as parts of 'a short history' of those countries. The war-time experience reinforced and perfected his already formidable editorial and organisational skills, put him in touch with promising geographers, and taught him how a large department should be supported and run. For his war-time service he was made an OBE.

In the years immediately after the War his life took a new turn, away from Cambridge. In 1945, and at the age of thirty-six, Clifford succeeded P. M. Roxby at Liverpool University and was appointed to the John Rankin Chair; four years later he became the Professor of Geography at University College London, a post which he relinquished in 1966 in order to return to Cambridge. In many ways these were his most productive years when his accomplishments tumbled over each other in abundance.

At University College London he inherited from C. B. Fawcett a tiny department of three members and within a few years had built it up to be one of the foremost geography departments in the country. It was by the sixties a period of growth in universities, but there is no doubt that his scholarly reputation and experience in running the Cambridge Centre during the War were now applied to perfection. Firm leadership, a clear vision of what a first class geography department needed in terms of support staff, and what seems to have been a free hand to do as he liked resulted by 1966, when he left for Cambridge, in a department of twenty-one members of staff, three research assistants and nine support staff.

The Geography Department at UCL during the 1960s was a stimulating place, intellectually and socially. There was a galaxy of stars, every one a name to be conjured with as a well-known expert in some branch or regional emphasis in geography. The weekly seminars on historical geography, guest speakers and a flow of overseas visitors (of which I was one) added to the excitement. It is probably invidious to single out names and I can only mention those with whom I came into close contact during 1966—Alan Baker, Eric Bird, Jim Bird, Eric Brown, Hugh Clout, Ron Cook, Tony French, Les Heathcote, David Harris, Bill Mead, Richard Munton, Hugh Prince, David Robinson, Caludio Vita-Finzi, Gerry Ward, and Paul Wheatley. It was like a roll-call of a large section of active British geography at the time. With few exceptions, Darby tended to appoint people rather young, and he made no pretence of trying to influence the direction of their

research. He wanted them to practise a broadly 'historical', if not overtly 'historical-geographical', approach to their subject (even the physical geographers were encouraged to study the conservation of nature or the human impact on the land), and he steered nearly everyone into a regional specialism. An average of two appointments were made in every year of his tenure and it was a measure of the calibre of the appointees that in time sixteen went on to hold chairs elsewhere.

He was undoubtedly an influential and powerful figure at UCL and greatly respected by scholars in other disciplines, but he declined administrative positions, preferring instead to devote his time to scholarship, building-up the department, proselytising the virtues of historical geography wherever possible. And there were other demands on his time during these years; he served with distinction on three government bodies. His most notable public service was his twenty-four years from 1953 to 1977 as a member of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), in which he took great pleasure and pride. His knowledge of the history of the English landscape led to his appointment to the National Parks Commission in 1958, and six years later, in 1964, he joined the Water Resources Board, where his vast knowledge of the human impacts on hydrological phenomena gained in his study of the Fens, and his knowledge of National Parks and of Wales made him a valuable and active member.

Another aspect of these years that cannot go without mention was his visits to the United States. The first was in 1952 and has been recounted with elegance and warmth by Donald Meinig. Then came the invitation in 1955 to participate in the Wenner-Gren symposium on *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* at Princeton, at which he gave a paper on the 'Clearing of the woodland in Europe' and first met Clarence Glacken and Carl Sauer who impressed him immensely. These visits opened his eyes to the wealth of sources, the scholarship, and opportunities for research in historical geography in North America, 'with topic after topic crying out for study.' He also found the vitality and openness of intellectual debate refreshing. He spent four periods in the USA as visiting professor, at the Universities of Chicago, Harvard (twice) and Washington. It was perhaps surprising that his quintessentially 'British' style impressed itself on his American colleagues, but impress it did, and offers came to head the Department at Berkeley after the retirement of Carl Sauer, and later to create a new centre of historical geography at Harvard where no geography had existed for forty years. One can only speculate on the current status of geography

in America if Clifford had been given a free hand in an 'Ivy League' institution. One senses that the Harvard offer was not declined without a great emotional tussle. One summer's evening in 1966, as we left UCL together and talked about his recently announced move to Cambridge, he said: 'It was either Cambridge, Mass. or Cambridge, Eng. I am sorry in many ways, America would have been wonderful but I think England would be best for me.' And then, ever the practical man, he talked of the problems of finding a 'decent' house in Cambridge within walking distance of King's and the Department. A few months later he moved back to his beloved Cambridge, on the retirement from the Chair of his old undergraduate tutor, Alfred Steers.

But the Cambridge of 1966 did not provide the promise of UCL in 1949; he had come during a period of financial restraint and not one of financial largesse, and he inherited a large department with a high reputation and not a small and largely unknown one of three. Terry Coppock put it well when he said the difference could be likened to the contrast between being 'absolute monarch' and 'medieval king surrounded by powerful barons', though as a man steeped in the Cambridge tradition Clifford should not have been too surprised about that. Moreover, geography was changing and his historical/regional emphasis was being challenged by positivist/humanist modes of explanation. Thus with a less malleable staff and a more diverse subject the years did not fulfil the promise that perhaps he had expected, though at least half a dozen appointments were made of young people with a broadly historical geographical interest including Alan Baker, Mark Billinge, Robin Donkin, Robin Glasscock, Derek Gregory and Richard Smith.

Academically, during the long journey from Liverpool to Cambridge, his foremost project was the revival and near completion of his work on the Domesday Book. His early forays into the Domesday material during the mid-1930s had convinced him that the source was amenable to geographical analysis but that the task was too vast and varied for one person to handle. Yet, even then, in the midst of all his other accomplishments, he had tentatively planned a collaborative venture with other scholars in which the geography of England could be reconstructed from the Book. The identification of places and the interpretation and mapping of the entries were the key to unlocking the secrets of the Book, and after the War he persuaded the Leverhulme Trust to fund a cartographer for two years to work on the Domesday maps. In Appendix 21 to the final volume in 1977 he describes how the idea and the work developed. With the help of sixteen other scholars,

the original plan of two volumes was expanded to seven; five were regional volumes (the first on East Anglia which he wrote himself and the following four he edited) which were published between 1952 and 1967; the sixth was a gazetteer prepared with Roy Versey, who was his cartographer and assistant throughout most of the project, and was completed in 1975. The final volume, which was an overview and synthesis of all the evidence and which he wrote entirely by himself, appeared in 1977. The single-mindedness of purpose and sustained effort devoted to one topic and its scholarly achievement, often in the face of criticism by reviewers that other eleventh century sources were ignored, has rarely been equalled in academic life in Britain. Once in Oriol College, when looking at the portrait of V. H. Galbraith, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford and author of *The Making of Domesday Book*, he said that when he began work on the book he had had 'no idea of its complexity' and that his task of interpretation had been eased by Galbraith's suggestion that Domesday Book was really seven 'Little Domesday Books'. But in spite of this, he continued, 'I wondered at times if I would ever see light on the horizon.'

The monumental Domesday septet was undoubtedly Clifford's greatest intellectual legacy and the product for which he will be most remembered, which, in some ways is a pity as his work was far more diverse, innovative, and provocative than the seven volumes and associated papers would suggest. Nonetheless, the example presented by the Domesday volumes of sustained and impeccable scholarship, the scrupulous evaluation of an historical source, the demonstration that it could be mapped and interpreted geographically, and the attention to a clear literary style, was an approach that was emulated by generations of historical geographers for materials as wide apart as the Tithe surveys, enclosure awards, field systems, medieval lay subsidies, and nineteenth-century census material, about almost all of which Clifford himself had published a piece at some time.

Success breeds not only success but also criticism, so it was almost inevitable that a reaction set in and his approach was criticised, particularly during the 1960s when many new and different emphases began to run through academic life as a whole. His work was seen, erroneously, as essentially empirical and pragmatic, and was held up and evaluated against, in particular, the application of theoretical concepts and quantitative techniques of locational analysis of historical data, and more latterly, against the study of the reciprocal relations between human agency and social structure. Thus his work was

criticised by various people as 'bloodless', bereft of people, *narrowly economic . . .*, 'Whiggish', 'separatist and pragmatic', and, the ultimate accolade, 'materialist and bourgeois'. It was also suggested that the object of his work had been for the most part 'to establish disciplinary boundaries and in some measure to police them', and that he disdained methodological discussion. But these criticisms missed the point and can be seen as merely manifestations of what some have called pithily, 'paradigm-bashing' merely in order to build another. If Clifford could be accused of creating an orthodoxy of approach, then his critics might be accused of creating a tyranny of criticism that has possibly dissuaded would-be historical geographers from involving themselves in the subject and thereby developing new methods and techniques of investigation. Nor was it true that he did not consider some of the more humanistic approaches to landscape. An examination of his prescient and provocative paper of 1962 on 'The Problem of Geographical Description' reveals a discussion of the soul of the landscape, the landscape as symbol, and the role of perception, metaphor and imagination, as well as the aesthetics of landscape. The pity was that these topics were never high on his research agenda which was completely dominated by the great Domesday project.

In some small way Clifford reflected on these points in later years. 'Looking back from the 1980s, it is difficult to realise how fragile and uncertain were the prospects for the subject,' he wrote, and he was proud of his long battle to establish historical geography. On the questions of changing emphases he commented that he was glad that they had occurred, but thought that the nature of historical geography was such that the upheaval caused by the 'great earthquake' of positivism during the 1960s probably affected it less than other parts of the discipline, perhaps registering only 3 or 2 on the Richter Scale. The 1970s brought 'unsettled weather' in the form of 'ideological winds and philosophical breezes' which some found bracing and inspiring, but which for those who had already grappled with the relations of geography to history and sociology were not particularly 'fresh air'. All in all, he was aware and open-minded about developments in historical geography but cautious and sceptical that abstract concepts could alter concrete evidence, approving of the remark of J. H. Andrews that 'If theory fails to match reality, there is no need for alarm: the past will still have happened.' As for the remark that he had affected a disdain for methodological discussion he could only recall the numerous methodological seminars he had held wherever he had been in England and

the United States. 'I have always been interested in the methodology that springs from practice rather than from theory. I can only repeat those memorable words of Mr Bertie Wooster: "Well, I mean to say, dash it".' Of one thing he was certain, his critics, like himself four or five decades before, were 'prisoners of their own time and of their own cultural and intellectual world'.

Away from Domesday there were many other significant writings, of which two might be mentioned at length as they exemplified his concern for the 'methodology that springs from practice rather than from theory'. He was not satisfied with his pioneering *Historical Geography of England before A.D.1800* of 1936, with its organisational method of successive cross-sections. He saw that a practical problem was that the different elements that made up a landscape did not change at the same rate nor at the same time. Consequently information had to be repeated in successive cross-sections and the approach lacked what Derwent Whittlesey called 'the compelling time sequence of related events which is the vital spark of history'. There were at least two possible solutions to this problem. In 1960 he proposed interposing between the past 'horizontal' geographies linking narrative accounts of the processes that had created them. This approach was brought to fruition in another monumental work which he now edited, the *New Historical Geography of England*, which was published in 1973 and reprinted in two parts in 1976. The other was to pursue themes of change in the landscape, 'vertically' through time, so to speak, so that the study of the transforming hand of humankind in making and fashioning the landscape was a legitimate focus of historical geographical study.

He tried out the approach in 1951 in a brief article entitled 'The Changing English Landscape'. It caused few flutters in the geographical world, and was dismissed by many as a slight variation on the theme of the cosy English rural scene. Few realised that it was, in fact, a radical departure. In it Clifford sought to integrate people and the world they inhabited; the human use of the earth was a bond or relationship between society and land, and the processes of alteration were the focus of the study, emphasising, sometimes the results of the processes, sometimes the processes themselves, and sometimes the social and technical ideas behind the processes. The article was also significant because in a sense it freed the historical geographer from the static, source-bound nature of the cross-section, and also from the interminable and destructive question, 'But is it geography?'

The rationale for the approach was threefold. First, the line between present and past was so blurred and uncertain that contemporary geography imperceptibly became historical geography. 'All geography is historical geography, either actual or potential,' he once wrote. Secondly, human activity altered the natural world so that 'Art as well as Nature' has gone into the making of most landscapes which were not a static arrangement of objects. Although he never explicitly said so, but demonstrated implicitly, there was a third reason why the landscape had to be examined through time. It was not merely an artefact but an expression of human ideas, attitudes and aesthetics, of which the English landscape garden was the perfect example.

Much of this material was the subject of one of his celebrated first-year lecture courses which investigated the major themes of clearing the woods, draining the marshes, reclaiming the heaths, improvement in agriculture, developing industries, and the building of towns and cities. It attracted large audiences of students and scholars from both inside and outside geography as he was touching a vein of inquiry that was in time to prove immensely popular — as exemplified in W. G. Hoskins's *The Making of the English Landscape* in 1955. Perhaps wisely, he did not seek the attention of the media: it simply would not have been his style. He had originally intended to publish his lectures as a book but other things had priority, and parts of their content appeared elsewhere.

There was one important off-shoot of this work. Humankind was clearly the agent of these landscape changes. Clifford commented on the fact that neither George Perkins Marsh's pioneer work, *Man and Nature: or The Earth as modified by Human Action* (1864), which explored the theme of man as an agent of both beneficial and deleterious change, nor R. Sherlock's *Man and the Earth* (1905) had been followed-up by geographers, and this, it is to be noted, was all of three years before the publication of *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, which is often heralded as being the resuscitation of Marsh's ideas and a major factor in the rise of environmental awareness. With hindsight we can only bemoan the neglect by geographers of this theme for while their attention was elsewhere, interest in, and the study of the 'environment' gathered momentum, and the neglected orphan of the geographers was adopted by other disciplines, much to the detriment of geography as a whole. For Clifford, such studies were the history behind geography which would never tip over into economic history provided 'an understanding of the landscape' was the aim in view.

His retirement in 1976 was active and productive, and he was an almost daily visitor to the University Library and King's College. The nine-hundredth anniversary of Domesday provided him with the stimulus to write another batch of papers on the Book, and he also reviewed the early development of geography and historical geography and his part in that campaign. Most outstanding was the appearance in 1983 of *The Changing Fenland*, in which the story of the draining of the Fens was rearranged and rewritten, and all the new evidence about the past and the new developments in draining that had occurred during the intervening forty years were included. It is an outstanding regional monograph, and a journey from beginnings to endings.

Clifford exhibited an almost puritanical dedication to work and paid enormous attention to the communication of what historical geography was about and how to do it. He revised and honed sentences and paragraphs for both lectures and written works until they were brief, clear, and said exactly what he wanted them to say, many phrases having an almost poetic balance and rhythm. Donald Meinig put it well when he said that the 'how to do it' was

not so much a research methodology (our usual professional obsession), but how to write it, how to structure and present the changes of and in areas through time. . . . I still find the qualities of his writing on these basic practical matters refreshing: the clear jargon-free prose and almost conversational tone (in the best sense)—the kind of conversation rarely experienced); the easy matter-of-fact placing of modern geography within a much larger body of literature, the common sense discussions of how to write historical geography based on years of experience of actually doing it.

These aims of clarity, economy and empathy were also conveyed to others through his role as editor, which was, according to those affected, a humbling and rewarding experience.

I have had occasion to look again at some of his work on woodland clearing in Europe and wetland draining in England. He would review a great body of evidence, and his conclusions would seem to be, on the face of it, bland, sweeping, and even vaguely unsatisfactory. But when reviewing the evidence and pressed to come up with something better one simply cannot; his conclusions are essentially correct and expressed succinctly and elegantly.

His written was matched by his verbal style, and his lectures were carefully prepared, clearly structured, and logically argued, and delivered almost with a sense of theatre. I am inclined to believe that like his fellow countryman, E. G. Bowen, he thought that a well-delivered

lecture deserved all the attention given to a well-delivered sermon. Certainly there was some *hwyl* in his delivery, and one felt that for a short while the platform had become a pulpit or a stage, and that this composed and contained personality had become passionate.

Clifford's academic distinction was recognised in many ways. In addition to his membership of public bodies, he was President of the Institute of British Geographers in 1961 and of section E (Geography) of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1963, and Chairman of the British National Committee for Geography from 1973 to 1978. But undoubtedly, of all these he was most proud of his election in 1967 as the first geographer to the Fellowship of the British Academy. He devoted himself to the affairs of the Academy, serving on the Council from 1971 to 1973 and being a Vice-President in 1972 and 1973. Privately, he thought his election was the culmination of his life's work as it brought geography into the wider fold of academic life in the country. He worked hard to secure the recognition of geography within the Academy and saw the number of geographers rise to eight. He received honorary degrees from the universities of Chicago, Liverpool, Durham, Hull, Ulster, Wales and London. He held honorary fellowships at St Catharine's and King's Colleges, Cambridge, and University College London. He was the recipient of the Victoria Medal of the Royal Geographical Society (and made one of its handful of Honorary Members in 1975), the Daly Medal of the American Geographical Society, and the Honors Award of the Association of American Geographers. In 1991 he was elected to the *Academia Europea*. In 1978 he was created a CBE and in 1988 knighted for his 'services to the study of historical geography', the first geographer to be so honoured on the grounds of scholarship.

Never having been either a pupil, or a colleague of Clifford's, nor a contributor to one of his many edited works, my experience of him was very much as an outsider to the main stream of his academic and professional life. In a way, one could say that he touched me lightly so that my experience of him was not one bound up with career, position, or academic reputation. We conferred and corresponded more as people with a common background and a shared interest — one very senior, the other very junior — and ultimately, I would like to think, as friends. It has been said by those who worked with him that he was not an easy person to know, and I suspect that that was true. He was an intensely private person, which was one of the reasons why there was so much speculation about him, about the 'real' HCD. He was an

impressive, even slightly austere, figure, always dressed sombrely in dark suit and sober tie. No matter when you happened to enter his office his desk top was bare except for a blotter, a calendar, some blank paper, and a single document or book, and one wondered if he had a great bag behind the desk into which he swept the usual academic debris when there was a knock on the door. Was he really that organised? It was impressive. Sometimes when he talked on the phone he would stop almost in mid-sentence and suddenly say, 'Good-bye', and the conversation was over. It was never discourteous or brusque, but one inevitably pondered why the conversation had ended. Had one been wasting his time or talking trivia? In time, I came to the conclusion that, like everyone else, he was a curious mixture. On the one hand he was acutely aware of what he wanted to achieve and was not one to waste time, on the other hand he could be unusually generous with his time on occasions. His awesome reputation preceded him, and whether he was conscious of it or not (and I am inclined to think that on the whole he was unaware of it) it coloured the reactions of those with whom he came into contact, including myself, but he was also probably a very shy person.

When asked what his recreations were he was said to have replied 'Domesday Geography' or 'counting Domesday swine', and in a sense that was true as work well done was a relaxation. In his early Cambridge years he had indulged a little in riding, golf and fishing but they really were not for him. He travelled a great deal, and particularly loved Tenby on the Pembrokeshire coast, the home of his forbears, and the Chilterns and Cotswolds. He read voraciously, and he had a special affection for the works of Daniel Defoe, William Cobbett, Arthur Young, William Marshall and a handful of other agricultural writers. The shelves of his study were full of the novels of the 'classic' English novelists, and he had a 'formidable knowledge' of the works of Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust and Thomas Hardy. Hardy entered into his professional work and he wrote a penetrating and innovative article on the geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex that was a precursor to dozens of pieces by other geographers on the descriptive and geographical ideas of literary figures. He wondered if he was the only person who 'had ever persevered to the end of *The Hand of Ethelberta*'. No half measures for HCD. Once when we were talking about writing and leisure he suddenly turned to me and asked 'Do you know what the ultimate relaxation is?' to which I shook my head. 'Getting up a little later than usual,' he confided, 'having a leisurely hot bath, staying in my

dressing gown, pyjamas and slippers, and having a few cups of tea and toast while reading "The Times" at the breakfast table.' A very normal, ordinary action of a busy man.

Clifford's career was a distinguished one and spanned sixty-four years as a productive and innovative scholar, during which time he contributed significantly to giving geography a 'respectability' and a prominent status in the academic and practical affairs of the country. Within historical geography he promoted interest in the landscape as changed by man, now a major concern of many within geography and of other disciplines beyond, and his insistence on the historical element in geography helped keep the study of the human past and of history within geography open and alive to geographers during difficult years. Finally, by meticulous scholarship he provided an intellectual framework of studies within which the hundred and fifty or so historical geographers who are currently working in the United Kingdom can adopt, modify, reject, or weave new patterns and seek new departures. Perhaps the fact that they exist at all as historical geographers and are able to build new and better structures is Clifford's greatest achievement.

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

Fellow of the Academy

Note. In the preparation of this Memoir I have drawn on Clifford's own recollections, particularly in his 'Academic geography in Britain: 1918–1946' and 'Historical geography in Britain, 1920–80', in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 8 (1983) 14–26 and 8 (1983) 421–8 respectively. Also useful was some of my own previously published work in the January issue of the *Journal of Historical Geography* (1989), which celebrated Clifford's eightieth birthday, and also the pieces by R. Lawton and R. Butlin, and D. W. Meinig in the same issue. I have benefitted enormously from the appreciations by H. Prince, A. H. R. Baker, and particularly that of J. T. Coppock, who also commented on this Memoir. I am grateful for their help and permission to draw on some ideas in their work.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to Lady (Eva) Darby who kindly read this Memoir and offered many insights and comments that I have happily included.

A full bibliography of Clifford Darby's published works appeared in the *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989) 5–13.