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Michael John Wise 1918–2015

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Ron Johnston and Christopher Board

Education, Life and Work

Michael John Wise was born on 17 August 1918 in Stafford, West Midlands to Harry Cuthbert and Sarah Evelyn Wise. His father, who was severely wounded in the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and spent eleven months recovering in hospital, was a school-teacher, as later were Michael’s two sisters. The family moved to northeast Birmingham when Harry Wise was appointed headmaster of Garrison Lane Junior School there, moving later to the newly-opened Bierton Road School in Yardley; he was also a lay reader and keen cricket supporter. In 1929 Michael won a place at Saltley Secondary (later Grammar) School. By then he was already strongly committed to geography. In an essay that he wrote as an eight-year old (of which he read parts at a 90th birthday reception and dinner held for him at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 2008) he said that geography was his favourite lesson: ‘I will tell you why. It is because it teaches me all about the world and all the things upon it’; a longer excerpt from it was read out at the start of his LSE inaugural lecture (Wise 1960a, noting that his teacher gave him 20 out of 20 for what Michael termed his ‘inaugural essay’; at that early age he was already carefully filing and storing papers, a habit that he maintained virtually to the end of his life).

That commitment to geography stayed with him and in 1936 he entered the Honours School of Geography at the University of Birmingham, graduating three years later with an upper second class degree (first class degrees being a rarity in those days) and the Mercator Prize for his dissertation. Contemporaries there included P. N. O’Thorpe, later a planner, and Keith Buchanan, ‘one of the most brilliant geographers of his time’ in Wise’s estimation, and briefly a colleague at the LSE. With a further year’s study Wise gained the Diploma in Education with a first class mark and the Elizabeth M. Cadbury Prize. He was thereby qualified to teach in grammar schools, but geographical research proved attractive and, encouraged by his mentor, Professor R. H. Kinvig, he obtained a University Research Studentship to study for a PhD (again, a rarity in those days).

The Second World War intervened; Wise joined the Home Guard in 1940 and enlisted in 1941, serving first with the Royal Artillery and then with the Northamptonshire Regiment. On 4 May 1942 he married Barbara Mary Hodgetts at St Jude’s Church, Wolverhampton. She was a graduate botanist at the University of Birmingham and they met at a swimming pool when Barbara invited him to be one of her ‘victims’ as she practised for her life-saving

certificate. She became a biology teacher and gave him great support throughout his career, as recognised by Michael’s successor as President of the RGS (Geographical Journal 148 (1982), 417); but the early days of their marriage saw considerable disruption. Just fourteen days after their wedding Michael was sent by sea to Iraq and he and Barbara next met in May 1945.

Wise saw military service in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Italy and Austria, before being demobilised in 1946 with the rank of major. He was very reluctant to discuss his wartime experiences, though once confided that, while Iraq ‘was a bit of a holiday’ when his main responsibility was to stop his men getting bored, Italy ‘was a completely different affair’ and he struggled to keep his men alive (Andrés Rodriguez-Pose pers. comm.; John Wise pers. comm.). Wise was awarded the Military Cross for his conduct in the fierce battle of the Argenta Gap in April 1945 (see Jackson and Gleave 1988). His company’s forward ground was overrun by a surprise enemy attack and its headquarters were under threat. The citation for his medal refers to his ‘calm and confident bearing … [as] an inspiration to all members of his company, and his manner of dealing with a most difficult and dangerous situation is beyond praise’.

After the war, and unbeknown to him, the University of Birmingham applied for his early release from military service to enable him to ‘undertake work of urgent national importance in Birmingham, namely, a study of the historical geography of the West Midlands’ (Wise 2001b, 116) as the basis for planning for the region’s future. Demobilised in 1946 against the wishes of the army. (John Wise pers. comm. recalls that a senior officer told Michael that he was ‘too nice to make a good officer’, which Michael took as a compliment!) Wise returned to Birmingham as Assistant Lecturer in Geography and restarted the work for his PhD thesis. He was promoted Lecturer in 1949, by when he was busy editing and writing substantial sections of the handbook for the 1950 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS): Birmingham and its Regional Setting: a Scientific Survey (Wise, 1950a). For several decades these handbooks were major contributions to the regional history and geography of many UK cities and their environs, and Wise’s volume was a distinguished addition to the series. It was also, as his colleague Basil Johnson (pers. comm.) remembers, a ‘masterpiece’ of diplomacy, being produced under an editorial board comprising Wise and two professors who had not been on speaking terms for twenty years. At the conference itself Wise’s lectures and field excursions brought him to the attention of three professors from the Joint School of Geography at King’s College, London and the LSE: R. O. Buchanan and L. Dudley Stamp from the LSE and Sidney Wooldridge from King’s (see Geographers 12 (Stamp) and 8 (Wooldridge)). Stamp’s unpublished autobiography (copy in possession of Michael Wise) recalls that, ‘I found myself immensely impressed by the organisation and field leadership of Michael Wise’ and ‘determined’ to lure him to LSE. The LSE had a vacancy for an economic geographer and in 1951 Wise was appointed to a lectureship there. Stamp goes on to express hopes that the LSE would retain Wise whom he regarded as a rising star who ‘was clearly going to be tempted by chairs elsewhere’. Stamp’s hopes were realised and the LSE remained Wise’s academic home for the rest of his career.
and indeed his life. He was promoted to the Sir Ernest Cassel Readership in economic geography in 1954 and in 1958 was appointed to a chair in geography to replace Dudley Stamp on his retirement. (The other candidate was R. E. Dickinson, who records in his unpublished autobiography – a copy of which is held by the Royal Geographical Society – that he felt fortunate he did not get the post: Johnston, 2001.) Thus by the age of 40, and only twelve years after his first academic appointment, Wise occupied a leading position in one of the UK’s prominent geography departments with wide international links that he fostered until his retirement in 1983 and indeed beyond. He was head of department between 1961 and 1965, its convenor by rotation in 1965, 1972–5 and 1978–80, and, after retirement in 1983, successively its Pro-, Acting, and Interim Director.

After 1985 Wise remained a frequent visitor to the LSE for several years, enjoying conversations with colleagues and former students, and he maintained his research interests, notably in the history of geographical teaching. Over 25 publications appeared during the following decade, many of them obituaries which together make a substantial contribution to disciplinary history.

Michael Wise was a man of many talents and wide interests: a devoted husband to Barbara and father to Janet and John, a member of the Middlesex County Cricket Club, and an accomplished pianist and organist with excellent sight-reading skills. He occasionally played at the parish church in Whetstone, North London, where he worshipped for many decades; he played for Buchanan’s service of remembrance at St Clement Danes church just by the LSE; and he donated a new pipe for Birmingham’s Symphony Hall organ in 2001 in a gesture which combined his fondness for the city with his love of music. Basil Johnson (pers. comm.) recalled that during their years together at Birmingham Michael was an ‘entertainer/evangelist, singing and accompanying himself, belting out revivalist hymns on anybody’s piano left unattended’. John Wise (pers. comm.) recalls a visit by Sidney Wooldridge to the Wise family home in North Finchley to practice for his role as the Mikado in a forthcoming Geoids Amateur Dramatic Society production, accompanied by Michael on the piano. Wise wrote about the Geoids in a privately published 1980 booklet *The Joint School Story*, noting that it was founded as a consequence of the community singing that traditionally ended Joint School field trips (see also Baddeley 1980).

As his wife’s health declined Michael left home less frequently as he devotedly cared for her, but he remained in contact with colleagues, having learned to use word processing and e-mail in his 80s. After Barbara’s death in 2007 he spent the next eight years in their north London home, tending his much adored garden, hosting small lunch parties for old international colleagues and friends passing through London, taking a keen interest in his family’s activities and the progress of his grand- and great-grandchildren, maintaining his contacts generally and from time to time visiting the LSE and the Royal Geographical Society, and his daughter in Sweden, until late 2014. Michael died in Barnet Hospital London on 13 October 2015. His funeral was at All Saints’ Church, Whetstone, followed by cremation at New Southgate Cemetery and Crematorium.

Commented [2]: This is an important sideline of interest in the history of British geography, for which the obvious place was a footnote; since that has been removed, it must go in the text.

Commented [3]: Basil died a few years ago so I think this should be in the past tense.
Teaching

Wise was a skilled and dedicated (trained) teacher who carried a substantial, though slowly declining, load through his thirty-two years at the LSE, as the LSE’s Calendars show. He was a strong supporter of the Joint School with King’s College, and was sad when this arrangement ended after his retirement.

When Wise arrived in 1951 he understudied Buchanan in the BSc(Econ) second-year course ‘Advanced economic geography with special reference to industry’, giving lectures that the recipients recall as relaxed and engaging, containing readily-assimilated material. A favourite teaching trick was to go into a lecture theatre with a carousel of 35mm slides, ask a student to pick one at random, and start the lecture from there! In his fifth year he took charge of the course, with assistance from John Martin, Bob Estall and Ian Hamilton, until 1964 when he left the task to these three. In 1952 Wise began lecturing on an introductory course for all Joint School first year geographers, and he taught this, with breaks, into the 1970s (when he taught it with Emrys Jones: Johnston, 2008) as it kept him in touch with both BA and BSc undergraduates at LSE. Wise often organized the compulsory field courses for all years and timetabled the tutorials which accompanied the BSc (Econ) Part I ‘Introduction to geography’, with almost unalloyed success in persuading colleagues to take their share of the load; he strongly supported LSE’s tutorial system where tutors and individual students met to discuss aspects of geography after preparatory reading.

Second-year students in both LSE streams were exposed to his approaches in ‘Advanced regional geography: British Isles’, working with Tom Elkins, Jim Bird, and Ted Yates, new colleagues from King’s being carefully mentored by Wise as he drew them into the course to maintain the principle of including one King’s College member. As regional courses became less attractive, Wise’s love of the geography of his home region and country drew him to expound on current issues wherever he found them (with a shift in emphasis from West Midlands to London and south-east England).

In the mid-1950s Wise responded to the demand for courses on urban geography and for a decade led a second-year course on ‘Geography of settlement’ with Tom Elkins and Emrys Jones; a second course was made available inter-collegiately to all third-year University of London students. Alongside that his interest in planning and policy naturally drew him to take over Stamp’s ‘Applied geography’ as part of the BSc (Econ) until the arrival of Peter Hall (see Batty, 2016; Geographers 36). Wise lectured on ‘Historical geography’ from 1951 to 1956. Clifford Darby (see Geographers 26), arbiter of much work in historical geography then, thought highly of Wise and exceptionally had him elected to University College’s Macnochic Foundation, whose annual dinners Wise enjoyed (Hugh Clout pers. comm.).

Wise’s consistently substantial teaching loads illustrate the value he put on teaching, the satisfaction he gained from it, and his commitment to getting to know individual students. Many of his students recall with gratitude what they learned from him, the interest he showed in them, and the care he gave. Nothing was ever imposed, but all were welcome and time
was always found. To the end he kept his teaching current: his papers include an 84-page booklet prepared by him in 1999 for an ‘Economic geography I’ course for the University of London’s external programme: it was clearly up to date.

Wise was very active with graduate students, offering a graduate seminar in ‘Regional survey problems’ in the 1950s and supervising more than fifty PhD students, many of whom moved on to distinguished academic careers. In the 1960s when he was head, the LSE geography department quickly adopted taught master’s degrees. (On the development of the LSE’s graduate school then, see Glennerster, 1966.) The MSc (Econ) degree was one of a dozen fields of study offered from 1963-64 and the framework was refined and extended to other fields by 1964-65 with a compulsory module alongside a series of special options. Wise was a member of a small group that convinced the University Grants Committee (UGC) to fund an interdisciplinary degree in Urban and Regional Planning Studies at the LSE’s geography department. In 1966 he persuaded Peter Hall, with whom he shared interests in regional planning, to move from Birkbeck as a reader to establish the course which flourished after Hall’s departure two years later (Batty 2016).

Wise was committed to reaching the widest possible audience and, as well as his teaching of external university students and pieces for the Geographical Magazine, acted as consultant and contributor to the Atlas of Earth Resources (1979) and The Great Geographical Atlas (1982) as well as being a consultant on, and author of the substantial introduction to, The Ordnance Survey Atlas of Great Britain (1982).

Administration

Wise soon became involved in the LSE’s academic administration. In rare autobiographical comments written in a memoir for Jack Fisher, a colleague in economic history there, Wise recalled that he had been told the LSE was a

rather special place [but found] … an immediately perceptible general purpose and spirit in the place, a collegiate atmosphere, common themes and questions running in teaching and research in the different, but related, disciplines. At the personal level contacts were easy to make, thanks to the friendly, totally unforced, way in which a number of colleagues … took me in to the School and into their talk about its past, its current tasks and problems and, of course, about its personalities (Wise 1990, 37).

By 1954 he was chairman of the School’s Admissions Committee and, perhaps because of his military experience (as suggested by Alford, 2009), was asked to lead non-professorial staff in a potentially difficult meeting with a visiting UGC delegation in 1955. ‘[Michael’s] opening statement emphasised our high morale, collegiate spirit and pride in the School; it made a visibly good impression on the UGC members, indeed our whole team found it inspiring [and Wise was] called in by the Director to be congratulated on his leading role in [the meeting’s] success’ (Alford 2009, p.219). As well as serving on departmental and School committees Wise became more widely involved in the University of London: member
of its Academic Council (1971–81); Senior Treasurer of the University of London Union (1977–84); chairman (and strong supporter) of the Council for Extra-Mural Studies (1976–83); and chairman of the Court of Governors of Birkbeck College (1983–9). Another important role was as a distinguished Father Christmas at the LSE’s annual staff Christmas party (Patel 2004, 52). Wise was committed to the individuals and families in the school community and gave them much support in personal and family matters as well as academic.

Wise’s contribution to the LSE’s management was keenly appreciated in 1964 during abortive discussions about a move to a site in Croydon in south London. Wise, one of ‘the hard-headed senior members of the School’ (Dahrendorf 1995, 427), was appointed by Director Sydney Caine to a Special Research Group convened to consider the school’s future in light of the increase in student numbers expected after the Robbins report (Committee on Higher Education 1963). Superficially a move to Croydon on land offered by the local authority seemed an attractive solution to problems of overcrowding on the LSE’s small central London site. Wise examined the practicalities of the proposed new site and concluded that 200 acres of land could be needed in addition to that on offer. His report’s carefully-worded conclusion effectively sank the scheme and the potential move was defeated ‘almost unanimously’ by the Academic Board in 1965.

As vice-chairman of the School’s Academic Board Wise served on the selection committee that chose Walter Adams to replace Sydney Caine as Director in 1966 (Dahrendorf 1995). On his retirement in 1983 Wise became professor emeritus and Pro-Director of LSE. He was made Acting Director during the illness of Director Ralf Dahrendorf in 1983–4, and Interim Director between Dahrendorf’s resignation and the arrival of his successor I. G. Patel in late 1984, during which period he also served as mentor to the newly-appointed School Secretary (equivalent to a University Registrar) Christine Challis. As Dahrendorf wrote (1995, 505–6): ‘It was as well that one of the most senior and respected professors, Michael Wise, provided some continuity as Pro-Director’ (see also Patel, 2004, 19). All of this was carefully orchestrated by LSE’s chair of Governors, Sir Huw Wheldon, who considered Wise ‘someone experienced and respected [who] could hold the hand of a new Secretary and new Director’. Patel found Wise the ‘right kind of person’ who carried the ‘burden of sensitive posts’; ‘very indulgent and helpful and even after his retirement [he] remained one of my best friends and advisors’ (2004 19, 79). In his first annual Director’s report Patel said that what Wise ‘represents par excellence is the culture and traditions of all good men and good societies everywhere. His services to the School during thirty-five years of association are manifold; and the affection and regard in which he is held throughout the School was amply evident on many occasions on the eve of his handing over’ his post.

A less orthodox contribution to the school was his part in getting a locomotive named ‘The London School of Economics’. Unveiled at Euston Station in October 1985 (Patel 2004, 56), the locomotive reflected Wise’s life-long love of railways, his paternal grandfather and great-
grandfather having both been railwaymen. Wise was made an Honorary Fellow of LSE in 1988.

Scientific Ideas and Geographical Thought

*The historical geography of industrial location in the West Midlands*

Wise’s scholarly reputation was built on the work that he did at Birmingham between 1936 and 1951, to which he returned several times. It began with a survey of Birmingham’s industries undertaken with P. N. O’Thorpe. In an unpublished paper on ‘Geographical contributions to planning themes and methods in the 1940s’ prepared for a meeting of the History of Planning Methodology Workshop in 1982, Wise records that:

> in 1937 I was sent for one day by my professor and handed a set of 25″ maps and told to go and make a survey of the industries of Birmingham, for there wasn’t one in existence… I got on my bicycle and disappeared into the smog of Birmingham in 1937, 1938. We did produce sets of maps, which were later taken up and used as evidence by the Royal Geographical Society to the Barlow Commission. … Later on, in 1945, they were reissued in a volume published by the Association of Planning and Regional Reconstruction

The maps produced in 1946 were drawn at Bourneville, the model town built by the Cadbury family for the workers in their chocolate factory. Wise reports that he was involved because the work was interesting, and brought the added reward of free ‘waste chocolate’—much appreciated during chocolate rationing! In his 2001 paper, Wise says that Kinvig asked him if he ‘would be interested’ in doing such a survey to provide evidence for the Barlow Commission via the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and that he recruited his friend and fellow student, O’Thorpe, who had attended the same secondary school as him and was a year behind him in the Birmingham department. That survey’s results were presented in a series of large-scale maps in Wise’s prizewinning undergraduate dissertation (a copy of which Michael retained), and undoubtedly encouraged Kinvig to persuade him to undertake doctoral research. The historical and contemporary maps were interpreted in the context of Birmingham’s growth as an industrial centre. In the inner city he identified the gun, jewellery, brass-foundering and ironworking quarters. For each of those, and for the new districts established during the early twentieth century, Wise sketched out the factors influencing their location, with particular focus on the city’s extensive canal, rail and, later, road networks, which reflected the underlying geology and topography.

When Wise resumed his research career after demobilisation in 1946 he returned to the subject of his BA dissertation, and extended its scope through wide ranging archival searches into the historical geography of Birmingham and parts of the adjacent Black Country, encouraged by his undergraduate supervisor R. A. Pelham (Wagstaffe 1996), and his mentor Kinvig (Kinvig, 1928 and 1962). Wise published his findings in a series of papers from 1948 (Wise, 1948c). His approach was typical of work at that time: the town’s location was analysed in the context of the local geology and its development discussed as a market town
and, increasingly, a centre of craft industries at the focus of an intricate canal network which gave access to local resources and a wide range of markets (and on which he wrote for the Victoria County History; Wise, 1967a). Those developments were traced in greater detail in a second paper (Wise 1949a), using the records of early entrepreneurs to establish Birmingham’s spheres of influence before the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century transport revolutions. Work with Basil Johnson reconstructed in map form the city’s growing built-up area and its internal regionalisation (Wise and Johnson 1950b), topics discussed in greater detail in unpublished chapters of his PhD thesis which comprised twelve published and unpublished papers with a brief preface.2 Much later, using material collected during doctoral research but not included in his thesis, Wise traced the influence of the Lunar Society on the development of Birmingham’s transport network, industrial concentrations and innovations, forms of economic organization and encouragement of science locally (Wise 1967c; Uglow 2003).

By far the most noteworthy of Wise’s early papers was on Birmingham’s most distinctive industrial districts, the jewellery and gun quarters (Wise 1949c), which was ‘one of the first serious and concerted attempts to unravel the perplexing interdependencies between industrial organization and intra-urban location’ coming from ‘what now seems essentially to be the proto-history of modern economic geography’ (Scott 1983, 233). It is still cited today (Google Scholar, accessed 20 June 2016). The maps produced in the 1930s were updated in 1948 to show the areas where gun and jewellery trades predominated, as a preliminary to discussion of their evolution as districts characterised by numerous small workshops linked by factors who distributed tasks to outworkers. The approach was wholly empirical in that there was an absence of theory—as Wise recorded elsewhere, that came to him a little later—but the appreciation of such intense clustering was clearly there. This paper, more than any other in his early career, presaged industrial geographers’ attention to industrial clustering.

Wise’s interest in Birmingham’s geography extended beyond its industries. He built on one of the chapters in the 1950 BAAS handbook to outline the district’s agricultural geography (Wise 1968), used records for a farm discovered in Birmingham City Library (1970a) to describe how industrialisation had stimulated agricultural decay, and explored the role of the Midland Reafforesting Association in the reclamation of derelict land (Wise 1962b). In his last contribution to the historical geography of his home region, he used the records of the Ideal Benefit Society to illustrate an early experiment in the development of suburban housing estates (Wise 1982a). He periodically returned to his research materials and wrote up essays, such as that in The Army Quarterly (Wise, 1954b) on some nineteenth-century army manoeuvres on Cannock Chase.

Although he continued to write about Birmingham and its industries using accumulated research materials, by the end of his first decade at the LSE Wise ceased active research in that aspect of economic geography. His inaugural lecture, ‘Industrial location’, delivered on 4 May 1959, was thus his main, but also in many ways his final statement on the subject on

2 The thesis is available at http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/view/awards/d=5Fph.html (accessed 5 April 2016)
which his academic career was built. In it he stressed how his Birmingham research involved watching ‘the drama of the rapidly changing landscape of the great mechanical revolution, the rising town, the transformed environments of millions of men and women; the appearance on the landscape of new areas of highly specialised industrial production superimposed upon earlier patterns’ (Wise 1960a, 5). He found order in those patterns new and old, based on the economic concepts of comparative costs and comparative advantage, patterns that could be discerned only from ‘the study of industrial distributions on the ground and in the factory’ (p.8).

From that appreciation came the next stage in Wise’s argument, and the theme that was to dominate the next decades of his career: ‘Cities and conurbations, to be planned and controlled, must first be understood … we must first recognise the forces that make for the co-location of industries in towns’ (p.9). Wise believed very strongly in the need for planning and control within the constraints of existing forces that had a momentum of their own, of cost structures that limited locational choices, and of transport infrastructure. Regional planners needed to understand those constraints, and geographers had a clear role in the ‘practical tasks of explanation and suggestion’ (p.14). Economic geographers, he thought, should survey and record industrial distributions and relate them to phenomena such as transport infrastructure. ‘Geographical distributions do not always speak for themselves and interpretation and clear presentation are essential’ (p.36). Such context-setting would facilitate appreciation of the

particular character of locations for various industries at various times, but the task is not simply one of description; it is one of diagnosis and prescription also. There is a burden … to apply the results of research work to the common good … to create a body of informed opinion which will view the impact of economic development in regional or areal terms. It is … [the geographer’s] duty to lead thought, to inspire … [those] whose preoccupations with practical day-to-day problems leave them little time to spare for the examination of general trends; to think ahead and to assist in providing lines of guidance for public policy (p.37).

Thus

The economic geographer finds his justification not only in the depth and richness of his learning and the advancement of his subject but also in the application of that learning to problems affecting the lives and environments of his fellow men. … His duties go further than an understanding of today’s geography – they include some responsibility also for tomorrow’s. These are demanding tasks that require from him not only a mastery of his own subject, but an awareness of its place and role in the social sciences generally … They require from him an interest and a willingness to participate in public affairs (p.38).
The remainder of his career was spent in doing just that.

*Geography and planning*

Wise’s interest in planning was longstanding. His return to the University of Birmingham after the war was intended to put his knowledge of the historical geography of the West Midlands to use in planning the future of Birmingham itself and the Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire coalfields immediately to the north. In 1948 he contributed a substantial chapter on those areas to *Conurbation* – a book produced by the West Midland Group on Post-War Planning and Reconstruction (Wise 1948a). In his unpublished paper on ‘Geographical contributions to planning themes and methods in the 1940s’ Wise records that the work of the West Midland Group was ‘the product, very largely, of the enterprise of Paul Cadbury, with money from the Bournville Village Trust’. Wise’s lecture to the South Staffordshire and Warwickshire Institute of Mining Engineers on future planning of the Cannock Chase coalfield (Wise 1949b) addressed the issues facing areas where mining had ceased; where it was still active; and where it was likely to be extended. He recommended reorganizing ‘ugly, sprawling and inefficient settlement pattern[s]’ (p.20), reclamation of derelict land and the provision of better facilities for the residents, perhaps in new towns, with new industries catering for those, notably women, not working in the mines, industries on which a future could be built when mining ended. Nineteenth-century unplanned ‘confusion, sprawl and dereliction’ must be replaced by a ‘replanned, well-ordered landscape and … redeveloped, fully-equipped towns’ (p.5). Wise took advantage of the research material he gathered while working for the planning group to write several pieces on Cannock Chase, including a chapter in the 1950 BAAS handbook on the region (Wise, 1950e, 1951), which explored its historical development, and a detailed paper on one colliery in the nineteenth century based on archival sources (Wise 1954a).

Wise’s interest in planning continued after his move to the LSE and his involvement there with bodies like the Conservative Political Centre. In 1960 Wise was appointed (perhaps at Dudley Stamp’s suggestion) to a ‘committee to consider Town and Country Planning’ set up by R. A. Butler, chairman of the Conservative party’s Advisory Committee on Policy. Its report, ‘Change and challenge’ (Conservative Political Centre 1962), set out the case for land use planning in a ‘small island which supports a large population at a high standard of living’ (p.5). Much of it, including the maps, conveys a strong impression of Wise’s views and impact. It was almost certainly his membership of and contributions to that committee’s work that led to his being invited in 1963 to chair the Committee of Inquiry into Statutory Smallholdings.

At LSE he began to research the capital region’s economic geography, focusing on the contemporary situation (Wise 1956a, 1962a). In the latter essay he described London’s recent growth as creating a ‘city region that is now coming into being as a social and economic unit with a marked geographical pattern. At the heart lies London, its different parts becoming increasingly specialized in appearance and function; around it, and linked...
with it, grows its constellation of towns and villages’ (p.84). But his concern increasingly focused on the changed context for planning policies and he was one of the first to recognise the growing phenomenon of the city region and its place at the heart of national planning policies. Thus in 1959 his address to the Town Planning Institute on ‘Some economic trends influencing planning policies’ (Wise 1960b) identified three major themes—‘the rational use of natural resources, the allocation of scarce land between competing uses in both [town and country], and, as between town and countryside, … the provision of a reasonable balance of economic and social development between the various regions of Britain’ (p.30). His main focus was on the last of these, especially the increasingly national dominance of London and the south-east of England as older industries elsewhere declined. Current policies failed to check London’s growth or promote substantial development elsewhere. British planning was facing a crisis (Wise 1961b): ‘we can only plan successfully if we have in our minds the shape of the city region that we are planning for’ (p.183).

Other articles produced over the next few years, including those published in The Geographical Magazine which, under the editorship of Derek Weber and then Iain Bain, encouraged academics to write well illustrated pieces for its wide audience, extended this argument. Thus in two 1964 articles Wise examined ‘The pull of the south-east’, asking why London’s growing size and influence and the associated problems were treated as inevitable when they could be resolved by planning at the regional scale. Elsewhere he addressed issues likely to exacerbate some of those problems, such as the UK’s probable membership of the European Common Market (Wise 1963a, 1970b), the possible construction of a Channel tunnel (Wise 1965a), the reshaping of the British rail system after the Beeching Report (Wise 1963b) and proposals for a new local government structure (Wise 1964b). A Channel tunnel, for example, would accentuate London’s predominance; the population of the conurbation’s core would probably continue to decline absolutely as well as relatively, but the accompanying decentralisation would need greater planning of the region as a whole, not least of its transport infrastructure.

For Wise, the core of the planning problem—internationally as in the UK—was ‘excessive metropolitan growth’, as he told a United Nations Expert Group on Metropolitan Planning (Wise 1962c): ‘The forces making for the centralization, coupled with secondary dispersal of population around the main centres, may increase in power’ (pp.63–4). Planning was needed to ‘minimize congestion and social problems’ while ensuring ‘the most efficient patterns of location of economic enterprises consistent with the maintenance of high standards of physical environment and social life’. And the spatial unit for such planning must be the city region.

Wise worked over more than a decade from 1955 on a range of linked efforts to promote regional planning in the UK, serving on committees whose work he later wrote up (Wise 1989; see also Barnes 2004). His 1965 presidential address to Section E of the BAAS (Wise 1966) set out his case that the city region must, following Maurice Ash (1962), be accepted as ‘an essential urban form and planned constructively’ (p.574). City regions were emerging
worldwide, as centrifugal forces associated with greater individual mobility came to dominate over centripetal forces drawing activities and people together. He summarized the tensions thus:

The population distribution map is a restless one; the movements in it are often out of phase with the economic, technical and social changes that are the operating causes. A main task for planning is in achieving a process of smooth adjustment between economic change, population change and land use change; preventing too rapid congestion here, too great a rate of decay there; applying checks and balances to influence the relative rates of growth of city regions and their sub-areas. But accepting the facts of a regional pattern or urban life, and planning form its betterment. (p.585)

By the end of the 1960s Wise’s main tasks involved illuminating the big picture regarding city regions, drawing attention to their planning problems and needs, and promoting geography nationally and internationally as an applied discipline able to fill in the details of those changing big pictures, to identify the forces driving the changes, and to provide basic material for plan formulation:

the geographer interested in the study of urban and regional change cannot stand aside from the discussion of the causes and processes of change. Nor can he isolate himself from the discussion of policy, for it will be better informed for the contribution that geographical approaches to regional study can make. … Through the rigorous examination of trends and the identification of forces, through the development of new ideas about the use and organization of space, better paths to progress can be offered for discussion and choice (Wise 1986a, 44–5).

Wise’s work and that of others resulted in the establishment of the Regional Studies Association on the gestation of which he was able to report thanks to his habit of carefully filing important papers (Wise 1989a; see also Hopkins 2015). Wise was also Founding President of the Transport Studies Society, and in its 1976 A. E. T. Griffiths Memorial Lecture he used his similarly extensive papers to record the early history of British transport studies, and Griffiths’ role therein (Wise 1976).

Agriculture and pressure on the land

One less remarked aspect of Wise’s work was his interest in the pressure on land. His unpublished 1971 paper on ‘Problems of limiting the growth of urban areas: the case of the Birmingham–Black Country conurbation’, to produce which he was re-recruited to the University of Birmingham in 1946, included a land use survey to underpin the creation of a green belt, as later proposed in the Abercrombie–Jackson (1948) plan for the area. Such plans limited urban sprawl, protected good agricultural land, and ensured reasonable access to the countryside for urban dwellers.
It was to promote such aims that Wise became involved with the Association of Agriculture, being chairman of its Executive Committee from 1973–84 (following on from his colleague R.O. Buchanan as set out in his 1980 obituary in the Association’s journal), building on his undergraduate reading of Zimmerman’s (1933) book on resources and his experiences advancing through Italy with the British army (Wise 1954c, 2001). In an article for the Association’s Review he argued for field studies in rural areas. Perhaps too much time was spent in the classroom studying ‘the history and geography of farming in, say, North America or North Australia and too little upon the life and work of the farmer in our own village’ (Wise 1953a, 5). Quoting Stamp, he argued that pressure on natural resources was the world’s most pressing problem, whose appreciation would be enhanced by ‘the study of land in the school community and by groups and individuals in the field’ (p. 12). Twenty-two years later in an unpublished presentation at the 1975 Cambridge Indo–British Geographical Seminar he outlined the Association’s origins in 1946 and praised its work to increase young people’s awareness of agriculture and farming systems, notably through its Farm Study Scheme which demonstrated the practical realities of farming and the countryside (Wise 1975b; Bostock 1954; Young et al. 1959). Wise’s foreword to Young’s (1977) booklet on farm visits pressed the Association’s claim that farm studies are an essential component of efforts to advance ‘better understanding between town and country’, and regretted that the Association was struggling to meet the demand and need for such activities. One farm study scheme at Chapmans Hill School Farm just outside his home city of Birmingham was run by an educational charity chaired by Wise’s friend, the industrialist Paul Cadbury. Wise wrote the foreword to a pamphlet detailing its activities (Cadbury and Cork 1974) and he and Cadbury reported on the implications for Cadbury’s company of a proposed development within the green belt (Cadbury and Wise 1968). Other members of the LSE Department of Geography were also involved in these activities, bringing them closely into touch with the producers of food and agricultural products, those responsible for distribution and marketing, the technologists who have devised the innovations that have transformed the industry, the planners of the countryside, conservationist groups and many others. All these groups have appreciated the value of a geographical approach. The need, in our rich and diverse land, is to intensify that approach (Wise 1981, 13).

He concluded that although the demand and need for such activities had not lessened in the three decades since the Association’s foundation, the charity was struggling to meet them financially. The Association had ceased to exist by 1994 and is not included in de Silva’s (2012) substantial list of organisations involved with agricultural education. Michael had a complete set of its Journal among his papers, and these were donated to Harper Adams University by his family.

Wise himself did little research on the issues tackled by the Association of Agriculture, but occasional essays, such as his address to the 1968 International Geographical Congress in celebration of Dudley Stamp’s life and work, returned to the theme of society’s pressure on...
its resource base (Wise 1969). He drew on the extensive work done for the Committee of Inquiry into Policy for Statutory Smallholdings (see below) to illustrate the historical background in the debates over whether farm workers should be given the opportunity to become owners or tenants of their own farms (Wise 1992b). It is unfortunate that Wise did not publish more material related to this committee’s work, which lies very largely forgotten as an important piece of applied geography.

*Geography, its history, people, nature and education*

Michael’s first and last published research papers (1948b, 1977) were on the teaching of geography. As a trained teacher, he placed great store on how geography was taught, as reflected in his commitment to the work of the Geographical Association (GA), and his presidential addresses to that body, the Institute of British Geographers (IBG), and the RGS. To the RGS in 1981 and 1982 he took the opportunity to promote geography as the ‘rewarding study of the rich mosaic of life and landscape’ (Wise 1982, 307).

Wise’s first paper emerged from his wide-ranging archival work on the history of Birmingham and the West Midlands (Wise 1948b). The City of Birmingham Reference Library holds an 1815 *Note-book on English Geography* – 190 pages with water-colour maps – by a pupil at a Birmingham school founded and run by three educational reformers, whose work on geography had previously been overlooked. Wise argued that the Note-book’s geography, which he believed derived from John Aikin’s (1790) *England Delineated*, ‘was still … little more than the art of description, and of physical geography there is little’ (1948b 19), and concluded that perhaps this was ‘a reasonably accurate reflection of the state of geographical science in 1815’ (p.20). Further, the selection of towns seemed arbitrary, with no mention of Birmingham! Several years later, one of the reformers, by then at a different school, published his principles, methods and syllabuses (Hill 1825): instruction started with map-making and map-reading, first of the classroom, then of the school, and then of its wider environment, followed by discussion of the local region, the British Isles, Europe, other continents, climate and physiography. This Wise observed was ‘a standard by which to measure our own progress and assess our achievements and failures’ (1948b, 21).

Wise returned to the subject four decades later in a paper reflecting on the centenary of the 1885 Scott Keltie report on the teaching of geography in schools and the RGS’s ‘crusade’ for its extension and improvement (Wise, 1986b). Detailed analysis of sources allowed him to evaluate the relative roles of Keltie and Freshfield in that crusade’s success: Freshfield providing the drive but Keltie producing the report on which others, not least Mackinder, based their campaigns. The GA, established by Mackinder and others in 1893 at the height of the crusade, continued the campaign over the next century, celebrated by Wise at its centenary (Wise 1993). He contributed substantially to those campaigns, as in his membership of a committee that considered the overlap between geography in school sixth-forms and university first years (GA 1962).
One of Keltie’s criticisms of geography teaching was the poverty of teaching aids, including maps. In his last research paper (1997) Wise surveyed atlases published between 1885 and 1915, and the work of a BAAS committee established in 1912 (regretted by the GA and Mackinder, in particular), to consider the ideal content and style of an affordable school atlas. Wise left open whether its report had any impact on future atlases.

Wise was a doughty campaigner for geography throughout the educational system, doing much work behind the scenes, in committees and other fora, as well as publishing papers such as that advocating geography’s role in technical education (1961a) which advanced his wider claim that geographers should (p.348):

base our arguments not on the side-door entry of geography as a general education for citizenship, and as a background subject but, through the front entrance, on geography as a disciplined, practical study with its own techniques and tools directly applicable to the problems and tasks of the day.

… Let us make geography a subject which does things, not merely one which reads about other people doing them.

And he wanted action to ensure that happened. A few years later, in his presidential address to the GA, he called for it to ‘involve itself more actively than it has done in the recent past in debate on educational matters’ (1977b, 249) in an ‘aggressive defence of our subject and its approaches’ (p.256). He noted that the discipline was changing rapidly in universities and wanted this recognised in schools, despite their need to cater not just for university entrants but also to ‘many groups of pupils with different ambitions, plans, and values’ (p.233). Steel (1983, 40 and 112) reports in his history of the IBG that Wise facilitated constructive engagement between the RGS and IBG councils in 1981, leading to the establishment of a Council of British Geographers (the two societies merged a decade later), and was instrumental in a far-reaching restructuring of the British National Committee for Geography, the body that, through the Royal Society, was responsible until 1990 for British geography’s links to international bodies such as the International Geographical Union and the International Cartographic Association (Anon. 1970; Geographical Journal 156, 1990, 350). Larger plans for a Council of British Geography, initiated by the GA, were unsuccessful then, and although a council was established a few years later it has not played a major role, having last met in November 2012 (http://www.cobrig.org.uk/ (accessed 20 May 2016)). During his RGS presidency Wise was also involved in the discussions that led to the establishment of the Association of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences, later the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences (http://www.the-academy.org.uk/ (accessed 20 May 2016)).

Wise was not one to pontificate on the nature of geography, though he once held forth on the importance of field courses, not least for developing students’ ‘eye for the country’ (Wise 1957). The discipline changed massively—and more than once—during his career, and he did not resist those changes. He appreciated what was being argued for and promoted those who provided convincing rationales for particular types of work. Thus in 1977, quoting Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, he eschewed a disciplinary definition which would have become a
straitjacket, arguing that recent developments (identified as geography as ‘the science of spatial organization’ and ‘the ecosystem view’) had ‘brought fresh life to the great themes of the subject … [through] a greater range of ideas, wider choices of approach and method’ (1977b, 254). As new works appeared, their arguments were addressed and, where deemed relevant, assimilated: he writes (2001b) of learning during his five years on the staff at Birmingham about Christaller from Dickinson’s (1947) *City Region and Regionalism*, about industrial location from Hoover’s (1948) *The Location of Economic Activity* (‘the kind of book I had needed ten years earlier and was to provide a basic text for courses in the economic geography of industry for many years’ (p.118)) and about cities from a new edition of Patrick Geddes’s (1915) *Cities in Evolution*. In his retrospective on his student years (2001, 113) he notes that ‘Disquisitions on the theory of rent … and desultory reading of F. W. Taussig’s (1935) *Principles of Economics* also failed to inspire me in economics. We eventually arrived at Marshall and his Economics of Industry (1899) proved more interesting, But sound teaching by W. H. B. Court made economic history a pleasure … [the books he referred us to] had discussions of enterprise, technical change, resources, industrial societies and of the emergence of new landscapes, all fascinating to one whose early journeys by train through the Black Country had been lit up by flames from the furnaces and forges.’ Further he owed to G. C. Allen’s 1929 book ‘the beginnings of an understanding of the rise of manufacturing industries [in Birmingham and the Black Country] … and of the advantages and disadvantages of industrial agglomeration’ – which, of course, became the subject of his early research. The early section of Wise’s 2001 essay (2001b) indicates the breadth of his reading as an undergraduate. It is his only true autobiography, although his detailed appreciation of his three mentors at the joint school—Buchanan, Stamp and Wooldridge—conveys considerable autobiographical detail (Wise 1983).3 And a few years after he moved to the LSE he wrote a detailed review of Lösch’s (1954) *The Economics of Location*, recognising the challenges it posed to economic geographers (Wise 1956b).

Not given to pontificate, Wise stressed seven tasks rather than philosophies and/or approaches in his essay on *Geographical Futures* (King, 1985), though, despite the importance he placed on applied geography, he stressed

> the first quality [of any future work] is learning for its own sake. Attempts at usefulness will not succeed unless they are founded on scholarship of the highest order. If not well considered, the striving for usefulness may lead only to the following of fashion or to the pursuit of short term objectives and the neglect of longer term goals and standards. As a subject in the world of learning, what will command respect for geography is excellence of standards in all aspects of our work: research, writing, teaching and study,… The case for geography must be made … bringing out … critical insights into the

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3 A further indicator of the breadth of Wise’s knowledge is Dahrendorf’s (1995, 84) note in a discussion of whether Hitler was influenced by Halford Mackinder that ‘Michael Wise adduces evidence to show that Hitler’s mind, if it was ever influenced by others, was made up’ before his time in Landsberg Prison when he wrote *Mein Kampf*. 
thoughts of great men and women; developing the ability to frame questions for study, gather evidence and express findings clearly; introducing them to great themes and problems which have concerned civilised societies for well over 2,000 years (Wise 1985a, 5).

The main themes of any such work would be ‘Exploration, Explanation, Evaluation and, at all times, Excellence’ (p.6), and the seven tasks included identifying the opportunities and constraints posed by the physical environment. He set the latter within the ‘regional context, which deserves a renaissance of scholarship’. Wise never publicly bemoaned demise of regional geography, not least at LSE, despite its place at the centre of his own education and the framework for his only book-length publication, on the West Midlands (Wise 1958), but in this essay he argued that ‘experts’ in increasingly diverse and specialised of geographical research fields should be encouraged to relate their frontier developments to the discipline’s ‘core’ – the regional concept:

Specialisation and the diversity to which it seems to lead should not distress us. … The further development of good research is a condition of success for the future. [But] … There is, I agree, much to be said for the view that a return to regional studies should now be encouraged. … The regional concept has always been for me one of the binding strengths of our subject and requires just as much specialisation and devotion as the advancement of one particular branch. Some of the great books in our subject in the post-war period are regional studies and meet by any standards the qualities of excellence and usefulness with which we began. I hope that, in the future, we can encourage more (Wise 1985a, 9–10).

Would that be progress? In one of his rare ‘philosophical’ excursions) Wise (1977a) considered whether progress, as generally understood, was possible in a discipline such as human geography. He concluded characteristically that progress was not assured but that if ‘continued determination, effort and skill … through reasoned endeavour’ leads to a greater appreciation of the worlds we study, then we should ‘attain higher levels of intellectual, social and physical well-being’ for the societies we serve: ‘The main weapon in our hands is the advancement of our own science’ (p.10).

Wise forewarned criticism in print, except for once when he leapt to geography’s defence. He noted that his local public library (to which he took his children on most Saturdays) exemplified ‘the perennial complaint of the geographer, that modern geography receives scurvy treatment indeed from the modern librarian’ (1954d, 472). His main complaint was that geography was not recognised in the Dewey-Decimal or the Library of Congress classification schemes with the result that human and physical geography books were shelved separately and analytical geography books were ‘ipso facto…classified as non-geographic’ (p.473). He then counters this ‘woeful lack of awareness … of the rapid development and present state of modern Geography’ with a detailed discussion of the discipline’s recent
scholarship, concluding that it represents the sort of work ‘I should like to see readily and universally available at public libraries’ (p.476).

Over some fifty years Wise contributed to geography’s history through obituaries and memoirs, some unattributed. (All of those identified have been listed at the end of this memoir.) Even the short ones combined important factual detail with personal notes reflecting the warm companionship he had shared with colleagues at the LSE and in the various learned societies. Even when not close to the subject, he gave time to ensure that their lives and contributions were suitably recorded and assessed, and provide important material for later historians (as in his 1979 obituary for Alexander Hay, general secretary of the Association of Agriculture).

Alongside these many short pieces were more substantial memoirs in which the individuals’ contributions were introduced and evaluated. The subjects included his mentors at the LSE Dudley Stamp and Ogilvie Buchanan (Wise, 1973a); Stanley Beaver, his predecessor at LSE (1975); and Wilfred Smith, an economic geographer whose work he held in high regard (1968). His presidential address to the IBG was an encomium to an economic geographer, George Chisholm (Wise 1975c). He also wrote a lengthy Royal Society memoir for David Glass (1983), a demographer with geographical training at the LSE. He demonstrated a complete knowledge of his subjects’ writings and the contexts in which they were produced.

Influence

Michael Wise had a massive influence on geography, nationally and internationally. Though at least one of his early papers can readily be deemed a ‘classic’ and is still being cited in studies of industrial agglomeration, his main impact was through his administrative and leadership roles. Wise served as an officer of all of British geography’s major national learned societies. The first to benefit from his services was Section E (Geography) of the BAAS (Withers 2010); he was its Recorder from 1955 to 1960, and its President in 1965. He was then Secretary of the RGS for a decade (1963–73), its President for two years (1980–82), and subsequently an honorary Vice President until his death. He was Treasurer of the GA from 1967 to 1976, and its President from 1976 to 1977, and was President of the IBG in 1974, having previously served on its council and then as a Vice President; he was made an Honorary Member in 1989. He gave much time to all of these posts, taking good care of their resources and dispensing much quiet and sage advice, as he did also to the Dudley Stamp Memorial Trust, established after the 1964 London International Geographical Congress to provide grants to young scholars; he was its Secretary from 1966 to 1988, and then its Chair until 2005 (when he was made its honorary President). He was also the founding President of the Transport Studies Society and for ten years (1973–1984) chaired the Executive Committee of the Association of Agriculture and, although he held no office, he was much involved, as his unpublished 1992 paper shows, in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the Regional Studies Association.
Internationally, Wise was Programme Secretary for the quadrennial International Geographical Congress held in London in 1964, and served from 1968 to 1976 as one of the International Geographical Union’s Vice-Presidents. He was elected to its presidency at the Moscow Congress in 1976, and served until the next congress in Tokyo in 1980 and then again as a Vice-President for a further eight years. These roles involved much international travel: the stamps in his passport for the four years of his presidency show him visiting Sweden (twice), Hong Kong, Thailand, Bangladesh, France (twice), Hungary, Japan (six times), Poland, Nigeria, Greece, USA, China, the Netherlands, Taiwan and Norway. During his presidency he had to deal with many difficult international situations, telling Hugh Clout (pers. comm.) that he learned much about dealing with them from his French colleague, Jean Dresch (Clout, 2015).

Wise’s service beyond geography involved membership of the Social Studies Sub-committee of the University Grants Committee, responsible for oversight of social science disciplines in all British universities, 1975–82 and 1984–85. He was also a member of the Social Science Research Council from 1975–1982, co-chairing its Geography and Planning Committee until 1979 and then (1979–1982) its Research Board. In both roles he did much to advance his discipline’s interests, not least in its relevance to major inter-disciplinary projects such as that on ‘Inner cities in context’ (Hall 1981). One of his achievements at SSRC was the establishment of a fellowship at the LSE to study the country’s changing industrial geography as a consequence of the economic policies of the first Thatcher government. The fellow, Doreen Massey (see Castree, 2016; Kitchin, 2016), produced two path-breaking books during that period (Massey 1984; Massey and Meegan 1982) before being appointed to a chair at the Open University; Wise was particularly proud of his role in supporting Massey then (Andrés Rodriguez-Pose pers. comm.) He was a governor of Birkbeck College, University of London, from 1968 to 1989; chair of its Court of Governors for the last six years; a member of the Hong Kong University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (1966–1973) and of the Rector’s Advisory Committee (1976–1982) of the United Nations University.

In 1963 the UK government invited Wise to chair a Committee of Inquiry into Statutory Smallholdings for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Michael drafted much of the two substantial reports produced over four years (Departmental Committee of Inquiry, 1966, 1967; http://archiveshub.ac.uk/data/gb97-smallholdings accessed 10 May 2016). Smallholdings were already established in law, but supply could not keep pace with demand, and the committee was asked to review the current position and make recommendations for future policy. After much research the First Report (Departmental Committee, 1966) concluded that ‘The objectives of Part IV of the Agriculture Act, 1947 [the section dealing with smallholdings], are no longer relevant to the needs of agriculture’, hence the need for a new policy. The Final Report (Departmental Committee 1967) on smallholdings provided by the ministry and local authorities (the Land Settlement Association Scheme initiated in the 1930s to alleviate unemployment) came to a similar conclusion, and recommended that the scheme be wound up and replaced by a smaller one focusing on horticulture. The legislation was amended in 1970, which introduced the concept of ‘county farms’, and an annual report
on its implementation is delivered to parliament by the relevant department (e.g. DEFRA, 2016).

In 1971 Wise joined a Department of Transport Landscape Advisory Committee, which gave advice on the landscaping of motorway and major road schemes. Closely associated with the Institute of Transport Studies, he had published a substantial article in *The Geographical Magazine* evaluating the five proposed routes for the M4 motorway which included a discussion of their landscape impacts (1963). He chaired the committee from 1981 until 1990 and summarized its work when his tenure ended (Wise 1990). He made about 200 site visits during his fifteen years as a member, and drafted some 50 reports (Clark 2011). Four years after his chairmanship ended the committee was abolished, despite Wise’s letter of protest (*The Times* 1 April 1994).^4

Simple listing of the offices an individual has held says nothing of his commitment or the quality of his contributions. Michael Wise was deeply committed to each body and activity with which he became involved. A fellow member of the Landscape Advisory Committee, for example, described Wise as ‘a marvellous colleague’ and chairman (Clark 2011).

His courtesy and patience sometimes belied his critical sense, but he believed in giving everybody a good say without letting the subject get out of hand. Most impressive were his summations. He brought on board all the criticisms and advocacies which had been important to the debate, sometimes bearing down relentlessly on the project engineers (like a judge’s summation), and then, having been rather devastating on any insensitive advice we had been offered by the engineers ended with “we are MOST grateful, Mr Smith, for all the work and trouble you have put into preparing this scheme”. Thus was any bruising assuaged. Michael’s special contributions to inspections which he joined were a sharp “eye to perceive” and a large bag of aniseed balls to keep us going until lunchtime.^5

Many other of Michael’s colleagues have made similar comments: courtesy, patience, and critical sense were hallmarks of his conduct: all were treated with respect, whatever their status, they were listened to carefully, positions were neutrally summarised, and options for action set out. He was fair but firm, and personal shortcomings were raised privately, and kindly, not in front of others (Ian Stephenson and Jim Thomas, pers. comm.). In the notice of his death on the Institute of Environmental Science’s website (he was made an Honorary Fellow in 1980 for his contributions) he was described as ‘a big man with a kind heart and every bit a gentleman’;^6 a former colleague spoke of his ‘air of authority, charm and calming style [that] provided assurance to those around him’; another said that ‘he never told us what

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^4 The committee’s papers are in the National Archives (http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/NI3757727 accessed 21 May 2016)
^5 Michael also consumed large quantities of Fisherman’s Friends lozenges!
to do, but he always got his way". The live-in carer who helped Michael in his last year recalled a kind and considerate gentleman with whom she had shared a nightly glass of sherry.

Many other of Michael’s activities and influences are unrecorded, save in private memories and correspondence files (of which he retained many). He gave quiet advice and assurance to many undergraduates, postgraduates, and young colleagues. Those recruited to the School had their career developments carefully mentored: John Goddard (pers. comm.) recalls that Michael arranged for his work on taxi flows within London to be linked to a commission on the regulation of the taxi trade being chaired by the School’s Pro-Director, Alan Day, which led to John’s appointment to a lectureship at the LSE; Michael later assisted him in setting up CURDS with SSRC money at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. More senior colleagues also sought his advice, often dispensed with a glass of sherry or a half of bitter. Derek Gregory (pers. comm.) records Michael taking him aside after his first-ever presentation at a major conference, offering much sage, entirely positive, advice on his work and its presentation. Wise listened quietly, summed up the pros and cons of any course of action, but never pressed his view: you heard it and then reached your own conclusion at the time and, especially, later realising the wisdom and clarity of what you had heard.

People acted on Wise’s advice: on his advice the Department of Geography at King’s London continued as part of the Joint School with the LSE after Wooldridge’s death in 1963, and his support for the University of Leeds’ Department of Geography helped it avoid threatened closure (Butlin 2015). Although he did not contribute directly to the new directions his discipline was taking, Michael did all he could to facilitate their success in his beloved department at the LSE (whose history he wrote with his colleague, Bob Estall: Wise 2001a) and more generally through the learned societies and other bodies he served.

Conclusion

Some geographers have a major influence on their discipline’s progress through their published works and advocacy for approaches and methods. Michael Wise wrote about progress in geography (Wise 1977a), but his major contributions were of a different type, although his published output was far from insubstantial. Those other contributions—as administrator and statesman—created a strong, well-resourced academic culture that enabled scholars to flourish as teachers and researchers. There can be little doubt that the important department at LSE flourished because Michael embraced the major disciplinary changes of the next two decades: through careful staff appointments and much quiet encouragement, and provision of scarce resources, he facilitated change and success.

It was the same too with the learned societies that he served. Michael believed they had important roles to play in promoting the discipline’s health, and that of individual members, through their various activities, and his careful stewardship of their assets and promotion of their work ensured that they grew and flourished. (In that he was selfless: on two occasions

7 After his death she asked for a pair of sherry glasses as a memento of her time with him.
he encouraged his then secretary at LSE to seek advancement as IBG administrator, and helped them to get and then succeed in the new job.) Christine Challis (pers. comm.), who became Secretary of the LSE then, recalls helpful discussions over sherry at the end of each day when Michael was Interim Director at the LSE. And there were many other individuals whose careers benefited from his advice and assistance.

It was probably Gus Caesar who remarked that Michael Wise met all the criteria for appointment as either a diplomat or a bishop (Peter Haggett pers. comm.) Fortunately he became a geographer and never wanted to be anything else (though he was interviewed for at least one university vice-chancellorship) and left his mark on the late-twentieth century discipline. Not surprisingly, those many substantial contributions led to a large number of honours; an Honorary Fellowship of the LSE (1988) and a DSc from his alma mater at Birmingham (1982) meant much to him, as did being appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1980. His Honorary DUniv from the Open University (1978) recognised his support of that institution. The RGS awarded him the Gill Memorial Award in 1958 for his ‘studies in economic geography, covering especially Birmingham and the Midlands region’; in his reply Michael linked understanding the country’s industrial geography to ‘replanning our towns, cities and industrial districts, to provide a worthy environment for the millions of our fellow citizens who live in them’ (Wise 1958, 428). Nineteen years later he was awarded the RGS’s Founder’s Medal for ‘economic geography and contributions to international understanding in geographical education’. He also received medals from the Societatea de Stiinte din Republica Socialista Romania (1976), the Hungarian Geographical Society (1980), and the Tokyo Geographical Society (1981), and was made an Honorary Member of the Geographical Societies of Japan, Mexico, Paris, Poland, and the USSR. In 1984 he received the highest award of the International Geographical Union, its Lauréat d’Honneur, the first of only three UK-based geographers to be so honoured. All these recognised the esteem in which this modest, self-effacing scholar–administrator–statesman was held, reflecting his ever-willingness to help others and to promote the discipline he served with such distinction.8 Michael was a big man with a deep voice and always dressed formally, but there was a strong sense of fun and playfulness in his outlook on work and life, and a frequent twinkle in his eye. He was always approachable, but played the role of statesman when necessary.

In his obituary for his teacher and mentor at the University of Birmingham, Michael wrote that Kinvig’s concern as departmental head was ‘to provide opportunities for his colleagues and students and the department became a happy and active centre of geographical studies’. Kinvig himself was a ‘shy and self-effacing man’ and ‘quietly and without flourish, the rewards of his wide reading and travel were made available’: he was ‘a modest, quiet and kindly man…His life was bound up in the teaching of geography’ (Wise 1969, 486–487).

Three years earlier he had written of Dudley Stamp who ‘served loyally societies great and

8 The story is told of Michael’s preparing some remarks for a meeting in Japan in Japanese. The chairman noted how it was typical of his international outlook that he should address them in German!
small … kind, always generous [who loved] to meet colleagues, to discuss affairs, to make friends, to promote research’ (Wise 1966, 594). And of his predecessor as head of the LSE Department of Geography, R. Ogilvie Buchanan, he wrote that his ‘qualities of mind and calmness of judgement made him the ideal university administrator. He ran his department … firmly yet easily, bringing on others to take his place. … The keynote of Buchanan’s life was service … [he] found his best rewards in the successes of his pupils and younger colleagues’ (Wise 1980, 137). Michael could have been writing about himself. His career was so clearly based on the fifteen years he spent at Birmingham, observing and working with Kinvig, and then the examples set by his two senior colleagues when he moved to the LSE, while the care he showed to his fellow staff and the many others whose lives he later influenced was undoubtedly affected by his army years and the responsibilities he carried, as a young officer, for the men from a wide range of backgrounds under his charge and command. A decade later, he wrote of his colleague Jack Fisher, that

All who served the School were equal in Jack’s eyes: he was a man who bound others to him, who represented an institution in which they could feel a part and be at home. Jack was an embodiment of the spirit of the place (Wise 1990, 39).

Exactly the same could be written about Michael.

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1957 ‘The role of fieldwork in the university teaching of geography’, Tydskrif vir Aadrykskunde 1, 17–23.
1965b  ‘Regional planning problems in Great Britain; a general introduction’, The Advancement of Science 21, 177–85.


1969  ‘On the utilisation of resources’, Geography 54, 257–70.


1975a  ‘Environmental studies and the contributory disciplines’, Environmental Education 4, 46–52.


1977a  ‘On progress and geography’, Progress in Human Geography 1, 1–11.

1977b  ‘Geography in universities and schools (Presidential Address)’, Geography 62, 249–58.


Obituaries and memoirs
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1963  ‘The South Wales motorway’ (December), 435–46.
1964  ‘The pull of the south-east’ (January), 62–72 and (June), 124–35.
1970  ‘Britain on the brink of Europe’ (April), 508–15. (This was reprinted in Chisholm, 1970.)
1972  ‘Prescription for man’s habitat’ (August), 782–3.
1978  ‘Devolution in the UK’ (June), 591–3.

Chronology
1918  Born in Stafford, 17 August
1936  Matriculated at University of Birmingham
1939  Graduated Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in geography and awarded the Mercator Prize
1940  Awarded a Diploma in Education and the Elizabeth M. Cadbury Prize
1940  Awarded a University of Birmingham research studentship
1941–1946  War service with the Royal Artillery and the Northamptonshire Regiment, serving in the Middle East, Italy and Austria; demobilised with the rank of major
1942  Married Barbara Mary Hodgetts at St Jude’s Church, Wolverhampton, 4 May
1945  Awarded the Military Cross
1946  Appointed Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Geography at the University of Birmingham
1948  Promoted Lecturer
1951  Appointed Lecturer in the Department of Geography at the London School of Economics and Political Science
1954  Promoted Sir Ernest Cassel Reader in economic geography
1958  Appointed Professor of geography
1958  Awarded the Gill Memorial Award, Royal Geographical Society
1963–1967  Chairman, Committee of Inquiry into Statutory Smallholdings for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
1965  President, Section E, British Association for the Advancement of Science
1968–1976  Vice-President, International Geographical Union
1973–1984  Chairman of the Executive Committee, Association for Agriculture
1970      Erskine Fellow, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
1974–1975  President, Institute of British Geographers
1977      Awarded the Founder’s Medal, Royal Geographical Society
1978      Awarded Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University, Open University
1979–1982  Chairman of the Research Board, Social Science Research Council
1980      Appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire
1980      Made Fellow of the Institute of Environmental Science
1980–1982  President, Royal Geographical Society
1980–1984  Vice-President, International Geographical Union
1981–1990  Chairman, Landscape Advisory Committee, Department of Transport
1982      Awarded Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science, University of Birmingham
1983–1985  Pro-Director, Acting Director and Interim Director, London School of Economics and Political Science
1983–1989  Chairman of the Court of Governors, Birkbeck College, University of London
1984      Awarded the Lauréat d’Honneur, International Geographical Union
1988–2005  Chair, Dudley Stamp Memorial Trust
2015      Died, London, 13 October