

Alumni Newsletter

Spring 2024



Welcome to the Durham Geography alumni newsletter. This is another wonderful opportunity to engage with our alumni and to tell you about our exciting research initiatives, educational developments, and how the Department continues to transform lives. As always, we also continue to enjoy hearing from many of you about how being at Durham Geography has helped shape your careers.

This newsletter comes at a time when we are still dealing with some uncertainties, but also embracing some very exciting opportunities. The external context is forever shifting, and the next academic year will see continuing financial challenges to UK higher education. We are also needing to respond to the impacts of the crisis in the Middle East on research and teaching, as well as looking after our staff and students who have been directly affected.

Despite these challenges, there is still plenty to be positive about. In 2023, the Department has maintained or improved its position in global and national league tables, and we are proud to remain one of the very best geography departments in the world. The Department is home to world-leading research addressing climate change, with several of our colleagues attending COP28. Fortunately, some of the uncertainties concerning post-Brexit research funding and collaboration have abated with the news that as of 1 January 2024, the UK becomes an associated country to Horizon Europe. This means that researchers will be able to participate in the Horizon research and innovation programme of the EU on the same terms as researchers from other associated countries and will have access to Horizon Europe funding. This is great news for a department like Durham Geography, with our very strong track record of European research collaboration and funding. We are also pursuing several bilateral agreements with geography departments overseas that we hope will increase opportunities for our students to gain international experience. One of our main concerns as a department is to ensure that we continue to foster an inclusive environment in which all our students can thrive. Over the next year, we will be starting work to improve student voice within the department to ensure the concerns and ideas of students are fully embedded in our processes, especially in relation to teaching. Our field kit bursaries are helping students from low-income households purchase essential items for fieldwork such as coats, footwear, and rucksacks. We are also continuing to roll out our new carbon reduction policy to ensure that our fieldtrips, research, and other activities are environmentally sustainable.

We greatly appreciate the growing number of you who are supporting us in our work with fascinating and insightful employment talks to our undergraduates, with online profiles to give our current and future students a feel for the amazing things a Durham Geography degree makes possible, and with all the other forms of help that you contribute. Many thanks to all of you for continuing to make Durham Geography a wonderful community.



Professor Cheryl McEwan
Head of Department

The year ahead

Greetings from Durham as we come to the end of the autumn term.

Greetings from Durham at the end of the autumn term. Last academic year felt very much 'back to normal' with a full return to in-person teaching whether that be lectures, tutorials/supervisions including one to one dissertation meetings, practicals or fieldtrips (more on the latter below). The very large cohorts of undergraduate students related to the pandemic have now reduced to more normal and manageable levels although the last of our 'bulge' year cohorts are still with us in third year. We are in the process of recruiting for several new posts in human geography in order to maintain the delivery of our degree programme across all years.

Field Trips

We ran fieldtrips to a wide range of UK and international destinations across all three years of the programme last year. Indeed all of our scheduled fieldtrips ran. It is a real pleasure for both students and staff alike to be able to embark on these fieldtrips again rather than run the virtual alternatives which we had to do for a couple of years due to the pandemic. Our fieldtrips range from single day to residential trips lasting a week to variety of UK destinations (e.g., L2 Skye and Lake District) and even longer international fieldtrips in L3 (e.g., Nepal, Iceland, Arctic Norway, Copenhagen, Jerusalem). The L3 Mountain Hazards module fieldtrip was our first visit to Nepal since 2019. Many of our students comment that these fieldtrips are consistently one of the most memorable and enjoyable experiences of their time in Durham Geography. They also always generate significant interest from potential students during our pre-offer Open Days in the university.

Alumni Events

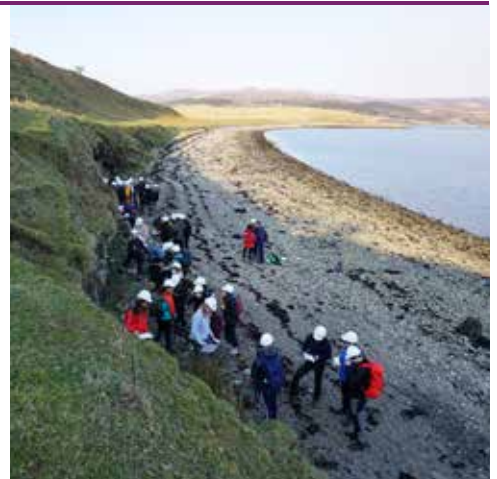
We held the first of our alumni careers talks events in November. Three alumni returned to the department to speak to our current cohort of undergraduate students about their career paths and experiences to date post-Durham Geography. Rois Smith (BA) graduated in 2020 and went on to do an MSc in Environmental Technology at Imperial College London and is now a Graduate Trainee Engineer at The National Grid. Alex Fraser (MSc) graduated in 2019 and is now a Senior Water Consultant working for Mott MacDonald and is also a trustee for Aire Rivers Trust. David Atkinson (BA) graduated in 2009 and works for the Civil Service as a Senior Policy Adviser at His Majesty's Treasury.

Our current students really value these talks and learn so much from them and this year was no exception with lots of questions both during and after the talks. This was great to see. The speakers all highlighted the transferrable skills they received from studying Geography at Durham and how these are so important for successful future careers.

If you are interested in speaking to our current students about your career then please do get in touch!

We always love to hear from you, and you can get in touch with us either through the website or by emailing gg-alumni@durham.ac.uk. Many thanks as always for all of your contributions to the Department!

Professor Colm O'Cofaigh
Deputy Head of Department and Alumni Lead



Field Trip Bursaries

For many of you, field trips were one of the most memorable parts of your time at Durham – a chance to see a new part of the world, to grapple with real-world problems, and to get to know staff and fellow students outside of the usual university setting. For some students, however, field trips are a source of stress and anxiety, especially around the additional (and often unanticipated) costs of securing adequate field kit. Even a waterproof jacket and boots – minimum essential equipment for a week in Skye or the Lake District in March – are beyond the means of some of our students. As a result, some students avoid field trip modules altogether, and give up altogether on the idea of a field-based dissertation, because they simply cannot afford the equipment.



To keep our field trips open for as many students as possible, the department recently agreed to arrange a field kit bursary for our most needy students. This provides a one-off payment of £200 to help cover the costs of basic field equipment for all of our students with a household income of less than £25,000 per year. At the moment, we have sufficient departmental funds to cover the costs of the bursary scheme for the foreseeable future. To make this sustainable in the longer term, however, we need your help.

If you have fond memories of Durham Geography field trips and want to ensure that future students can take similar advantage of those opportunities, please consider donating to help us continue the scheme by visiting <https://www.dunelm.org.uk/donations/geography>.

Even a small amount helps, and all donations will be used in full to support our most needy students. Many thanks in advance for any help that you can provide!



Department Achievements 2023

Durham University Observatory Meteorological Station has been successfully nominated as a World Meteorological Organisation Centennial Observing Station. Apart from the Radcliffe Observatory at Oxford, Durham University Observatory has the unbroken longest series of meteorological observations for any university in the UK. Daily records date from the late 1840s.

Today, the observations are made using an automatic weather station; this provides online data to the Meteorological Office and allows us to maintain our long records.



Tess Howard, Geography graduate (and current England/GB hockey player), was awarded the Changemaker Award in The Sunday Times Sportswomen of the Year Awards in October 2023. Tess successfully led a campaign for change in female sports kits after research she conducted for her undergraduate dissertation on the BA programme showed that many women and girls stop playing sport as a result of issues with the clothing.



[Tess Howard leading the way in hockey kit revolution \(thetimes.co.uk\)](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)
<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/apr/07/girls-put-off-sport-by-clothing-requirements-tess-howard>

Professor Louise Amoore has been elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy. This distinguished appointment is a very well-deserved tribute to Louise's sustained excellence and contributions to research in the broad field of the humanities and social sciences.

Professor Harriet Bulkeley has been awarded an honorary Doctorate in Science by the Faculty of Science at Lund University. The award is in recognition of Harriet's interdisciplinary work on climate change and the ways in which this has helped to foster an interdisciplinary research community in this area.

Professor Jeff Warburton has been awarded a Fellowship of the British Society of Geomorphology (with the post nominal FBSG). Jeff joins an esteemed group of around 55 Fellows, which include several former and current colleagues. Fellows of the BSG are members of the Society who have *made significant contributions* to the *advancement of geomorphology* through, inter alia, refereed research publications, professional practice which has produced influential reports and recommendations, influential pedagogic advances in learning and teaching, and service to the activities of the BSG.

Professor Rebecca Hodge was a recipient of a 2023 Fiona Kirkby Award from the journal *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*. The award is recognition of the outstanding support that Rebecca has not only given the journal, but also its authors through reviews that are timely, detailed, and constructive.

Amanda Hayton CSci, our Analytical Experimental Officer, gained professional recognition as a Chartered Scientist (<https://sciencecouncil.org/scientists-science-technicians/which-professional-award-is-right-for-me/csci/>).

Amanda sought professional accreditation on her own initiative, but with the full support of the Department. Amanda's success is a reflection of the outstanding quality of our technical staff. Amanda is now in a position to support other technical staff in the Department and the wider University who might wish to attain chartered status.

Condolences

Dr Janet Townsend

Dr Janet Townsend passed away peacefully in May 2023. Janet was a Reader in Geography at Durham University from 1970 until 2004, after which she held an honorary position in Geography at Newcastle University to work on a project on Post-Trafficking in Nepal. Janet's husband, Professor Alan Townsend, who was also a colleague in the department for many years, has kindly written a tribute to Janet (appended below).



Dr Janet Townsend was Reader in Geography to 2004. She was the Department's only woman member of the teaching staff (though not the first) during many years of continuous full-time service from her appointment in 1970, being promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1995 and to Reader in 2000.

She was a stalwart member of the teaching staff, being solely or jointly responsible for courses on three option subjects which were popular for many years. She was an assiduous and dedicated tutor and postgraduate supervisor, Director of Postgraduate Studies and joint founder of a new taught postgraduate course.

She was a feminist Geographer who engaged in participatory research with poor people in low income countries, particularly Colombia, Mexico and India. After a First Class degree at Oxford in Geography, she undertook her D. Phil. on *Land and Society in the middle Magdalena valley of Colombia*, and was appointed to a vacancy on Latin America. For many years she returned to undertake work in the continent, involving arduous fieldwork by canoe, on horseback and camping, latterly with women staff teams.

Her first research was with pioneers seeking to settle the rainforests and included quantitative survey methodology. Then she moved on to working with women among the pioneers, engaging in participatory research with them, leading to a distinctive publication, *Women's Voices from the Rainforest* (Routledge, 1995).

Within Geography, Janet co-edited the first book on *Geography of Gender* in poorer countries (Momsen and Townsend, 1987) which became internationally known. She wrote the first article in the field (*Geographical Journal*, 1991), initiated the first course on geography and gender to be given in this country, and joined the Steering Committee of the Geography and Gender Commission of the International Geographical Union (IGU).

Work with Mexican staff and peasant women led on to comparative work on nongovernment organisations (NGOs) extended with departmental colleagues in joint work in Mexico, Ghana and India, including publications for NGOs in Spanish and Indian languages.

In 2005, Janet was awarded the Edward Heath Prize of the Royal Geographical Society for geographical research in Women and Development. The department at Durham initiated the Janet Townsend Undergraduate Dissertation Award for Decolonizing Geography in 2021.

Peter Dixon

Peter-John Dixon passed away at the age of 79 in September 2023. Peter had a long association with Durham University, having studied Geography and Anthropology as an undergraduate in the 1960s as a member of Grey College. During his student days he played rugby, captaining the 1st teams and winning 'palatinates' and 'blues'. His achievements in the sport were the stuff of legend. He joined the Harlequins in Twickenham and was a regular starter for England, winning 22 caps. In 1971 Peter was called up for the British Lions on their tour to New Zealand, scoring a try to help the Lions to their first ever series victory over the All Blacks.

Peter returned to north-east England in the early 1970s to serve as a foundation tutor at Collingwood College and to play Rugby Union for Gosforth, leading the team during the most successful period of their history, winning two John Player cups. Peter would have won more caps for the Lions but for his refusal to play in South Africa during the apartheid era. His principled stance against social and economic injustice was reflected in his academic work, in which he sought to bring indigenous knowledge and local perspectives to international development initiatives.

From the 1970s through to the 2000s Peter was affiliated with the Department of Anthropology, with a period serving as administrator of the Geography Department. In Durham he was firstly a Teaching Fellow in Anthropology, and later a Research Associate on a major project on land and water interfaces funded by the UK government's Overseas Development Agency in the 1990s, co-authoring a book on 'Indigenous Knowledge Inquiries' with Professor Paul Sillitoe.

He was a modest person, who rarely mentioned his achievements; the antithesis of a celebrity, he even said that he preferred a quiet life out of the limelight.

Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience (IHRR)

The Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience (IHRR) is a world-leading research institute in hazard, risk and resilience-based at Durham University. The Institute supports innovative research and training for use in policy and practice, collaborating directly with communities, NGOs and governments. It is committed to working with and learning from the widest possible range of stakeholders living with hazard and risk – empowering people, fostering resilience, and improving lives, both now and in the future.

The IHRR runs a series of seminars which are free to attend for anyone interested and can be attended in person or online.

Online registration is essential, and you can see the full list of events on their website.

IHRR Seminar Series 2023-24 -

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/hazard-risk-resilience/>

The IHRR also now offer merchandise for sale:

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/hazard-risk-resilience/about-us/merchandise/>



New Taught Postgraduate Programmes in Climate, Hazards, Politics & Risk

Have you ever thought about doing a postgraduate qualification?

This year, we refreshed and launched our new suite of taught masters programmes, expanding from three to six programmes. All of our programmes develop students' skills in evaluating risk, data analysis, critical thinking and governing through uncertainty.

Our **MA and MSc in Climate, Risk and Society** gives students focussed training in social, political and physical processes of climate change. Job offerings in climate-related fields are growing quickly and we train students to make evidence-based decisions in complex situations.

Our **MA and MSc in Environmental Hazards and Risk** offer students technical and analytical skills in risk analysis, hazard prediction and social vulnerability. Environmental consultancy and modelling remain key employers of our graduates and promises to remain a growing field, as well.

Our **MA in Risk, Security and Politics** explores how risky environments and people are governed, strategies for fostering resilience, and implications for vulnerably groups and social inequality. We continue to have high placement rates in consultancy, security, insurance, the public sector and further postgraduate study.

Our **Masters in Research Methods** offers in-depth training in social science methodology and provides an excellent foundation for PhD research and professional research posts.

To find out more, visit: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/postgraduate-study/>

History of the Department

A written history of the department, reflecting the diversity of intellectual themes that we have worked on (and often pioneered) and the range of people who have passed through the Department over the years was created by a team led by Professor Ian Simmons – very well known to many of you, who compiled and gathered not only his own experiences and memories, but those of many other past members or staff and students. We are very grateful for all the contributions made to help create this history.

If you have not already taken the opportunity to look at this work, please do explore the document via the following link:

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/alumni/the-department-through-time/department-history/>



Alumni Career Talks

Our Alumni Career Talks allow graduates of the department to come back and speak to current students and show them what they can do with their Geography degree. They also allow our alumni to show students how they have used their experiences at Durham to shape and direct their careers. The department have welcomed over 50 alumni back to the Durham since 2016 when these talks started.

We cannot run these talks with you, our alumni, getting involved. They are of huge benefit to our students who get so much direction and positivity from listening to the achievements of our alumni.

Please do get in touch with us if you would like to get involved as we run these talks 2-3 times per academic year if possible and if we have the support from our alumni.

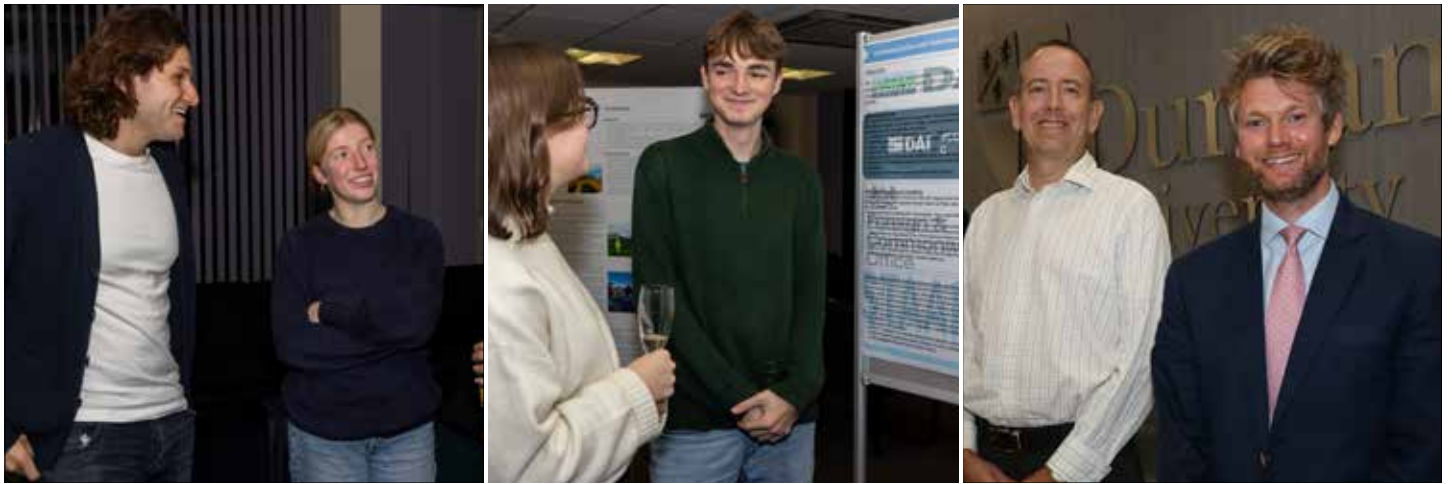
You could also get involved by pre-recording your experiences on video and we can then show this to students at one of our talks as part of the event, so a great way to get involved even if you cannot make it on the day due to commitments or perhaps time differences around the globe.



Stay in touch

We love hearing from our alumni and there are many ways you can get involved. Please get in touch with our alumni team (gg-alumni@durham.ac.uk) to find out more about how you can continue to be involved in the Department

- **Alumni Careers Talks** – tell us how has your Geography degree helped your career? Come back to the Department (whether in person or virtually) and speak to our students about your experiences.
- **Alumni Lecture Series** – a series of online events giving an opportunity to hear one of our world renowned Durham academics speak about their research.
- **Student Employability Mentoring** – individual mentoring for students who need career advice.



- **Internships and Placements** – make students aware of placements or other opportunities within your organisation.
- **Research and Projects** – get students involved in specific projects to make use of their skills and help them develop new ones.
- **Apprenticeships** – let students know about apprentice places or sponsorship of apprentice places within your organisation.
- **Alumni profiles** – answer a few questions about your time at the Geography Department and where your degree has taken you in your career, and join our other alumni in the profile section of our website. This can be in written form, or why not create a short video of yourself and give us a tour of your work place?
- **Reminiscing** – do you have any old stories or anecdotes and even some old photographs that you would like to share and we can include on our website and social media?

Contact Details

www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/alumni/

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Please ensure we have your up to date contact details and email address so we can stay in touch.
Please let us know if you would prefer not to receive any further mailings from us.