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### **Editorial 2020 Part I : a tribute to Fiona Kirkby**

Stuart N. Lane

Many of today's geomorphologists were still at school or not even born when Jimmy Carter was President of the USA, Margaret Thatcher was on her way to being the U.K.'s first female Prime Minister, the Berlin Wall had more than a decade before its fall in Germany, the Cold War dominated preoccupations over European security and South Africa was still under Apartheid. This era, taken more precisely as 1978 for the purpose of this tribute, was when Fiona Kirkby took on the role of administrator to the newly-founded journal *Earth Surface Processes*, which became *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* in 1981. Fiona has now served in this role for 42 years, initially as Editorial Assistant, working with Mike Kirkby. She was promoted to Assistant Editor when I began editing the journal in 2008. At the end of 2019, she retired from this role, completing what can only be described as a truly remarkable service to the journal, to the discipline of geomorphology, to the British Society for Geomorphology and to academic publishing in the Earth and Environmental Sciences. For *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, this is the end of an era.

We can think about her contribution in simply quantitative terms. 42 years seems to be impressive. By the end of December 2019, she had assisted with the editing of almost 5000 scientific articles; she had communicated decisions to authors for somewhere between 10000 and 12000 manuscripts; and she had developed a knowledge of reviewers and of the community that would make her uniquely placed to write an historical geography of the discipline's scientists, one which could no doubt include anecdotes regarding the somewhat strange characteristics of academic geomorphologists.

It is this latter observation that reminds us that her contribution cannot be appreciated in quantitative terms alone. She has worked through the transition of publishing in geomorphology from an esoteric activity, the domain of a few active researchers, into the modern currency of the academy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When she started her role, in 1978, both e-mail and the internet were specialised tools that had not left computer laboratories. The first mass marketed personal computer had only just been launched (the Commodore PET in 1977 ... with up to 96kB of memory if you could afford it). Measurement in the field was a mechanical act (you had to write measurements down); GPS did not exist (we used something called a "plane table" or a mechanical theodolite to map); observation required you to be present physically (with some notable exceptions such as mechanical stage recorders); statistical analysis required you to punch holes into cards to be uploaded to computers; and numerical modelling was still primarily analytical based upon solving sets of equations manually and then using these solutions to explore geomorphic processes. Faced with interesting results, academics typed their manuscripts. Graphs were

drawn manually. Photographs were printed from negatives. To submit a manuscript to *Earth Surface Processes*, it had to be posted to Fiona Kirkby, at the School of Geography in the University of Leeds. Fiona would then post the manuscript out to reviewers, who would then post it back with written comments (perhaps after Fiona had telephoned them on a landline to remind them that they had not returned their review). After the journal's Editors has evaluated the reviews, Fiona would post a decision to authors; revisions would follow; and the whole cycle would continue. It is perhaps not surprising that national postal systems were so profitable.

Whilst Fiona worked in this fashion during the first two decades of her service, things were changing. The arrival of electronic communication (e-mail) in the late 1980s meant that academics could be reached more easily. Mobile "bricks" became mobile phones. During the 1990s, publishers began to appreciate the opportunities for alternative kinds of dissemination and, as with many other journals, ESPL went digital in 1997. That said, editorial practices remained largely unchanged until the dramatic developments of the mid 2000s. In 2005, ESPL moved to electronic on-line submission and it was Fiona that was central to leading this implementation. By the end of 2006, editing at ESPL had become fully electronic except for a few elements of the workflow, such as associated with copyright transfer agreements.

The effect on Fiona's workload was dramatic. As the publishing process became more rapid, submissions to ESPL grew from under 200 per year in 2006 to over 500 per year today. It is always tempting to imagine that the transition to a numerical society saves time, improving efficiency. My sense is that such a view is wrong: the time spent stuffing envelopes with manuscripts and posting them out has not been saved, but replaced with a whole new set of tasks. Electronic communications have become so easy that authors want to know what is happening more than before. Electronic manuscript handling requires very careful attention to the files that are being shared, their size and their fidelity. Graphics and images that are submitted on-line have to meet very strict criteria that need to be checked, transferring work from the production process, and typesetters and printers, into the editorial office. On-line publication has made plagiarism an easier offence to commit, but also easier to identify, again requiring new procedures to be introduced into the editorial office. Fiona's workload has grown not shrunk. At the same time, we increasingly expect everything to happen faster than it used to; faced with new external drivers (appointments, promotions, publications), our community seems to have less patience than before; and editing an academic journal is much more pressured than it once was. Whilst declining friction in communication may have speeded things up, it has increased and not decreased the volume of work that goes through the editorial office. It is this workload that Fiona has carried throughout.

In all of this, one thing hasn't changed. We rely on authors to choose ESPL to submit their best work; and reviewers to give their time in assessing it. Both authors and reviewers have to be appreciated. It is here where a focus on the quantitative detail of Fiona's service needs to be accompanied by an appreciation of what I believe is her major contribution to the journal. Whether being gently chastised on the telephone for failing to attend to a review in the 1980s and early 1990s; or receiving a prompt treatment of your article submission problems via e-mail at almost any hour of the day in the 2010s; Fiona has been the face of the journal for 42 years. Throughout this time, the clarity, thoroughness and timeliness of her work has been impeccable.

She has made a continued contribution to the strategic development of the journal, providing an ongoing reminder that the submission and scientific evaluation of manuscripts is only one part of ESPL's success.

At the end of an era for *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, it is now appropriate that we can mark Fiona's retirement. We were able to present her with a book of witness at her last Editorial Board meeting in November 2019, containing the personal testimony of over 150 geomorphologists. Such that her contribution to ESPL will always be acknowledged, ESPL's Editorial Board has decided, with the agreement of both Wiley and the British Society for Geomorphology, to rename from 2020 its annual award for excellence in reviewing. It will become the *Fiona Kirkby Award*. Celebrated at its Annual Meeting in Sheffield in September 2019, Fiona has been elected to a Fellowship of the British Society for Geomorphology. Fellows of the society are awarded to people who who have made significant contributions to the advancement of geomorphology. Through the quality of her work; the rigour, the attention to detail; the responsiveness; and above all the humanity with which she has served *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* over 42 years; she has made a clearly significant contribution to the advancement of geomorphology, one that it will be difficult to better.

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