



Members in Profile

July 2015

Jim Forrest

At Canterbury University College, then part of the University of New Zealand (it's that long ago!), I majored in both History and Geography, intending to proceed in history. But my interest in geography had been piqued by the opportunity to do a Masters' thesis in Historical Geography under the late Murray McCaskill, later professor at Flinders University, Adelaide, combining both disciplines. Which I did, on the Otago goldfields in southern New Zealand.



I was destined for a secondary school teaching career, but after a few weeks of Teacher Training College, I literally fell into an academic post in geography at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, where I taught and researched in historical, and, under the influence of the late Professor Leigh Pownall at Canterbury University College, urban geography until attracted to Macquarie University in Sydney as a social geographer (the influence of later Professor Arthur Brownlea at Macquarie University) after study leave there in 1974. Where I remained till my 'retirement' in early 2007. And where I've continued as an Honorary Fellow researching into two topic areas of particular interest over the past decade and a half: segregation/desegregation of ethnic immigrant groups, and racist attitudes and experience of racism in Australia.

This work is pre-eminently geographic, though a far cry from what many people might think of as 'geography'. Based on an 'everywhere different' approach to the spatial integration of minority ethnic groups, and both local and regional differences in racist attitudes and experience, depending on the social context, I have found this a particularly interesting and worthwhile development to my research career. Not least because it has emphasised the place of geography as one of the social sciences, producing its best work in cooperation and co-authorship with the other sciences. The value of that collaboration lies in the extraordinarily valuable insights provided by those in other social science disciplines, but also the equally valuable 'everywhere different' insights provided by geography itself.

The scope of this collaborative work into racism, led by Professor Kevin Dunn at the University of Western Sydney, has been the opportunity to work with sociologists, social psychologists, community planners and cultural studies experts, as well as social and cultural geographers in different part of Australia and overseas.

Similarly, the work on segregation/desegregation, led by Professor Ron Johnston at the University of Bristol in the UK, and my colleague Dr Michael Poulsen at Macquarie University, has more recently branched out into studies into the integration experience of different immigrant groups coming to Australia, increasingly with colleagues overseas whom I've met attending the Ethnic Studies Group meeting of the Association of American Geographers at their biennial meeting, and at annual meeting of the AAG.

A further major and most valuable outcome of this collaborative work has been the opportunity to appreciate not only the quantitative approach, which has long underpinned my work (I was a child of the quantitative revolution in geography in the later 1960s, though never an aficionado for lack of any formal training in statistics), but also the critical social theory approach of modern cultural geographers. And above all, to realise that one without the other – quantitative and qualitative – results in only a half-trained geographer. Unfortunately, such is the gulf in contemporary geography between the two approaches, that perhaps this is a gap unlikely to be closed in my academic lifetime, to the disadvantage in the thinking and skills capital development of our graduating geographers.

But above all, in a career now spanning some 50 years, and still counting, I have had the rare privilege of working in an area which has afforded me all the benefits of being able thoroughly to enjoy what I've been doing, in teaching and research. Eventually, perhaps, I'll be discovered, 'asleep' at my desk dreaming up my next geography research project in a more heavenly (or hellish!) environment. Being a geographer has that kind of effect.