

Passing of Michael J. Bannon, formerly professor of planning at UCD

Geographers, especially those of a certain age, will be sorry to learn that Professor Michael J. Bannon, formerly of the UCD planning department, died on 18 December 2019. A UCD Geography graduate of the mid-1960s, Michael was a long-time advocate and exponent of the links between Geography and Physical, especially regional, Planning. Having taken a master's degree at the University of Alberta, Michael returned to Ireland to join An Foras Forbartha, the national institute for physical planning and construction research that had been established in 1964. His early work at the institute included working as part of the team that drew up *Regional studies in Ireland*, the ill-fated report (1969) by Colin Buchanan and partners that was at one time intended to provide a framework for developing regional planning in the Republic of Ireland.

He subsequently embarked on pioneer research on the then-emerging quaternary sector in Ireland, being awarded his Ph.D by Trinity College Dublin in 1972 for his study of the significance and changing locational characteristics of the office sector in Dublin. A series of maps showed how the offices of various professions in Dublin had been migrating to new locations in the city in order to achieve both more space and, crucially, new possibilities for face to face contact. *Office location in Ireland: a study of central Dublin* was highly innovative when published by An Foras Forbartha in 1973.

At An Foras Forbartha Michael Bannon sought to show what Geography could offer planning and planners. His most significant initiative was fifty years ago this year when the Foras 'in association with the Geographical Society of Ireland' organised a public lecture by the Oxford geographer Jean Gottmann which was followed by a symposium on 'the application of geographical techniques to planning'. Chaired by P.J. Smith from Alberta and moderated by the urban geographer Harold Carter from Wales, this ambitious event marked an early, harmonious high point in the sometimes-fraught relations between Geography and Planning. The symposium is reported in *Irish Geography* for 1971 and the published report is reviewed in *IG* for 1972.

In 1974 Michael moved from the Foras to a lectureship in the then very small planning department at UCD. He spent the rest of his career there, becoming professor in the 1990s. Early on, he found himself drawn to the history of planning in Ireland, perhaps hoping that an understanding of its evolution would illuminate some of the unresolved issues of the present. Two edited books of essays followed: *The emergence of Irish planning 1880-1920* (1984) and *Planning: the Irish experience 1920-1988* (1989). Michael was especially interested in the Irish contributions of some of the great early twentieth century planners, Raymond Unwin, Patrick Geddes, Patrick Abercrombie and E.A. Aston.

While at UCD, Michael also wrote numerous articles and book chapters, and undertook various types of consultancy for both public and private bodies. He battled to promote planning on several fronts: notably within an indifferent institutional environment inside the college, and outside it to keep the flag of planning flying during the rise of the free market and neoliberalism. Michael was a particularly strong advocate of what he usually called the regional dimension, the largely-missing link between the national and the local. A measure of his success in a difficult period was that the UCD planning department emerged greatly reinforced and widely respected.

Michael's life neatly combined elements of the rural and the urban. A native of Bawnboy, west Cavan, he lived most of his working life in Clontarf. In retirement he divided his time between Clontarf and Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim. Those who knew him remember a gritty, cheerful and open person seriously committed to his work and his beliefs. He is survived by his wife, Pauline, and five now-adult children.

He will be remembered as one of the pillars of academic planning in the last quarter of the twentieth century. He was also, among other things, a long-time member of the Geographical Society of Ireland.

Arnold Horner