

## OBITUARY

WILLIAM BAYNE FISHER  
1916-1984



Professor Bill Fisher was head of the Department of Geography in the University of Durham for twenty-seven years, retiring in 1981. He came to Durham from the University of Aberdeen with a reputation as an active scholar with strong roots in the French tradition of human geography.

He completed a first degree at the University of Manchester under H. J. Fleure and took a doctorat de l'université with Professor Demangeon at the University of Paris just before the fall of France. With his fluency in the French language, Bill Fisher found himself as a liaison officer with French forces in the Levant and later a director of meteorology with Allied Land Forces, Middle East. This experience provided him with the opportunity to travel widely in the region and to acquaint himself with the human communities there. He was assiduous in formulating his ideas on man and environment in the Middle East into what was to become the standard geographical work, *The Middle East: a physical, social and regional geography*, first published in 1950 but, in revised form, remaining current to the present time.

When he took over the Department of Geography at Durham, Bill Fisher was the youngest head of department in that discipline in the United Kingdom. His achievements at Durham were considerable. He developed the small section he inherited into one of the largest and most accomplished teaching departments in the country. The research section in Geography became the best represented in systematic and regional studies in North Africa and the Middle East, while also deeply involved with regional interests in the north-east of England.

Outside Geography, Bill Fisher will perhaps be remembered most for his determined efforts to create at Durham a flourishing interest in Oriental Studies. The fruit of his many years of labour, with that of one or two others, was the establishment of the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in the university, blessed with financial and academic recognition in the Hayter Report of 1961; this established Durham, alongside SOAS and Oxford University, as the third centre for Middle Eastern studies in the United Kingdom.

Bill Fisher had a strong interest in Iran, where he travelled and lectured extensively before his retirement. He was closely associated with the British Institute of Persian Studies, serving as a member of the Governing Council from June 1964 until his death and rarely missing a meeting. His lecture on "Iranian Baluchistan: problems and perspectives" at the Institute's summer meeting in June 1982 will long be remembered as an outstanding performance. This far-sighted intellect and physically large man will be much missed by former pupils and colleagues alike.

KEITH McLACHLAN