

THE PRIMARY GEOGRAPHY

INTERVIEW

WENDY ATKINS (NÉE MORGAN)



Thirty years ago, Wendy became the first editor of Primary Geography (then Geographer). A consistent champion for geography in primary schools, she went on to chair the GA's primary committee, to represent the subject on the first National Curriculum Working Group, and to serve as GA President. Many readers will also know her as the co-writer of ground-breaking teaching materials on Castries, St Lucia, and Tocuaro, Mexico.

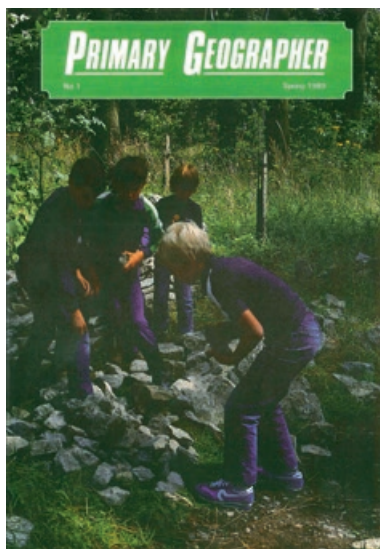
PG was launched in 1989. You fought for, initiated and edited this, supported by your primary committee. What are your memories of this time?

At the time, there were very few primary teacher members in the Geographical Association (GA) and this was an opportunity to reach out and help them. The first National Curriculum was about to happen, and we knew that geography was going to be included. Indeed, the GA had pushed for this. So, a group from Primary Committee and others who were interested in the primary sector met around the table and decided that a journal would be the best way of reaching teachers and profiling what else the GA could offer. I looked around the table and everyone else was very busy while I had recently retired, so I offered to become the first honorary editor.

Initially, the journal came out when we had enough material. This was not always easy as geography was often subsumed within topic work. Moreover, it was often teacher educators rather than practising teachers who wrote for it at first.



Wendy Morgan, First Editor of *Primary Geography*.



Issue 1 of *Primary Geographer* (renamed *Primary Geography* in 2011).

Why is geography important in the primary school?

It is just as important now as it was then that children should learn about their world: from the local to the distant, including people who are both like and unlike themselves: to learn about how people adjust to their environment and how that environment is affected by them; about issues that affect us as human beings. Issues and enquiry were very much at the heart of what we were about.

How did you get involved with the Geographical Association?

I wasn't a trained geographer. I did set out to be a geography graduate but was turned down because I didn't have Latin, so I wasn't able to pursue it that way.



Wendy was Editor from issue number 1 to issue number 23.

However, I was keen to teach in primary schools anyway. I made friends with a geography lecturer at the college and she encouraged me to attend a GA conference in the early 1960s, to see what the Primary Section was doing. In those days, the Primary Section comprised four men and one woman, who would meet together in the bowels of the London School of Economics. It was very much the Cinderella of the GA at that time. It proceeded from there and I became Chair after Ron Barker. Meanwhile, I became an assistant teacher in a leafy suburb of London and then head of Elmsett Primary School in Suffolk.

What can you tell us about the first National Curriculum Working Group?

That was 1989 to 1990. What a year! We ran concurrently with the History group but were permitted no contact with them.

The group was chaired by professional diplomat Sir Leslie Fielding, and the Deputy Chair who was the President of the Country Landowner's Association. We also had Trevor Bennett (HMI), Rex Walford, Michael Storm from ILEA, Eleanor Rawling, Keith Patterson, Kay Edwards (a secondary teacher from Wales) and me. There were no primary teacher trainers involved and all the geographers were really focused on secondary level (though Trevor and Michael had some overview of primary). There was also a guiding group of civil servants.

Underlying everything were the Attainment Targets, which had already been laid down. There had to be something that showed how children had achieved these targets. This was particularly difficult for the primary sector as we'd had no experience of anything like that before. We had never looked at how children progressed in geographical

understanding from a five-year-old to a seven-year-old: our focus had been more on introducing local studies and fieldwork.

Moreover, the first six months involved total secrecy, so I couldn't talk with colleagues in the GA who could have helped me enormously, and I was rapped over the knuckles when I tried to talk to someone in the History group. We said at the time that it would take an afternoon a week to deliver the National Curriculum for geography. Most schools would find this impossible with other constraints on the timetable.

One interesting thing for me was that for the next nine years I received a proliferation of requests to speak, to write for the GA and others, often with Bill Chambers, to lead INSET in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, to teach part-time at Homerton College and so on. With Vincent Bunce of WorldAware I was involved in expeditions to St Lucia and Mexico, which led to the locality study materials for the GA. I was rewarded with some very interesting experiences.

What do you remember about your year as President of the GA?

It was four years really, from becoming Junior Vice President, then Senior Vice President, a year as President, then a year as Past-President. As far as I am aware, I was the first primary teacher to be elected. There was a focus at my presidential conference on the Caribbean and St Lucia. Sadly, the end of my four years was clouded by Vincent Bunce's illness and premature death. One of the great things during my time with the GA was the appointment in 1993 of Fran Royle, who really lit *Primary Geographer* up in terms of its size, appearance... everything! We also battled during my four years to appoint the first Chief Executive at the GA, and succeeded in doing so. It was a demanding but ultimately rewarding experience.

Note

This issue of *PG* also carries a feature highlighting thirty great quotes from our *PG Interviews* – see page 30. We will be carrying interviews with *PG*'s other editors later this year as part of the 30th birthday celebrations.

WEB RESOURCES

For more on the history of the GA, see the chronology at:
www.geography.org.uk/download/GA%20Chronology.pdf
 Read Wendy's first PG Editorial:
www.geography.org.uk/pg