

Durham University and its role in Malta's development planning during the 1950s through applied research

Supplementary Material

This supplementary material comprises:

- a. summaries of the career trajectories of four British academics who led the Malta land-use and geology projects;
- b. an account of the role of the projects in the growth of the geography and geology departments in the University of Durham;
- c. a synopsis of the ways in which the projects were funded and
- d. a discussion of project personnel, how they were chosen and their backgrounds.

Malta projects: research leaders and career trajectories

In 1954, and while still in his thirties, William (Bill) Bayne Fisher (1916-1984 - Figure 1) was appointed to a readership and shortly afterwards in 1956 was promoted to become the first holder of the Chair of Geography at the University of Durham. Despite his comparative youth, Fisher had a wealth of experience to bring to his new post. Before the Second World War he obtained a first class degree in geography from the University of Manchester, followed this with a class one teaching certificate and successfully managed to obtain his *Doct. d' Univ* (with *avec mention très honorable* - with honourable mention) from the University of Paris just before the German invasion and occupation in 1940 (Fisher 1940).¹

¹ William Bayne Fisher was originally known as William Bayne Fish, changing his name by deed poll on 15 April 1946. His earlier publications and doctoral thesis use his former name (Anon 2019a). In this paper he is referred to as Fisher. Information on Fisher's early life is from Fisher (1953).

Both his thesis and early published research were strongly influenced by the 'French' school of regional geography, something he first encountered in Manchester under the tutelage of Professor H. J. Fleure. Herbert John Fleure (1877-1969) influenced a whole generation of British geographers first at Aberystwyth and later in Manchester. In addition to Fisher, these included Emyr Estyn Evans (1905-1989) and Emrys George Bowen (1900-1983) (Clout 2005). In common with Fleure, Fisher was a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Fisher pays an elaborate tribute to Fleure in the preface to his pioneer study of the Middle East: 'it is upon his teaching and example that much of this book is based, and, where possible, I should be proud to think that the following pages could convey even the slightest echo of the lofty thought, brilliance in interpretation, and warm humanism that are characteristic of Professor Fleure's approach to geography' (Fisher 1950, vii). In France Fisher was supervised by Albert Demangeon and Emmanuel Martonne and later again he pays glowing tributes, not only to these mentors, but also more generally to the Vidalian tradition (Vidal de la Blache 1903) with its focus on the ways in which landscape (*paysage*) is forged by people making the most of the possibilities afforded by their natural setting (*milieu*), to create distinctive ways of life (*genres de vie*) (Vidal de la Blache 1903). One area in particular developed by Fisher was the recognition of the importance of anthropology as a means of identifying regional land-use distinctiveness especially in rural settings and here the influence of Fleure, together with Jacques Weulersse (1905-1946), a geographer of both the French colonies and the Middle East more generally, is generously acknowledged.²

In 1947 Howard Bowen-Jones (1922-2015 - Figure 2) was appointed to a lectureship in geography after studying at Cambridge and war service (Clarke 2005). Bill Fisher and

² 'No better model could be found for the exposition of Middle Eastern geography than the remarkable studies of the late Professor Weulersse, in whose writings there is propounded the thesis that only a close integration of geography and history can full understanding of human society be achieved' Fisher 1950, v).

Howard Bowen-Jones in common with many British geographers of their generation, served as officers in the wartime armed forces: Fisher in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Bowen-Jones in the British army, and three decades later they noted that 'a number of geographers ... had spent various periods abroad in uniform, and we, in common with many others, were anxious to put this involuntary field experience to a more permanent use that would also display practicality and involvement relative to the problems of the time. We also had the clear view that geography could and ought to offer a novel approach to specific problems of economic and social development in various parts of the world; the Mediterranean, Middle East and points further east where our personal experience had lain' (Fisher and Bowen-Jones 1974, 454).³ In the 1950s applied geography was often justified - either implicitly or explicitly - by using arguments developed by American pragmatist philosophers especially those of John Dewey (1859-1952). It is notable that there are clear parallels between Fisher and Bowen-Jones' 'manifesto' for geography and three of pragmatism's key components: a recognition of human precariousness; the belief that research should focus on issues of development and human betterment and that enquiries should be informed by experience, rather than by overarching theory (Wescoat 1992; White 2002).

Edinburgh graduate John Dewdney (1929-2004) was younger than Fisher and Bowen-Jones, was too young for war service, but carried out National Service in the RAF between 1946 and 1948. Recruited by Bill Fisher in 1952 as a Demonstrator in Geography at the tender age of 24 (Dewdney 1952), a year later his appointment was confirmed when he was promoted to a lectureship (Clarke 2005). In common with Howard Bowen-Jones and many of

³ Fisher was commissioned in the RAF and in 1941 was posted abroad as an RAF meteorological and telecommunications officer. Stationed first in Eritrea, then in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Cyrenaica and the Lebanon. He also researched economic and social questions as conditions allowed. With his fluency in French and a flair for languages, after 1943 Fisher became senior RAF technical representative in Syria and Lebanon advising and supplying data for agricultural, fiscal and development programmes initiated by the British military authorities. Based on information in Fisher (1953).

his post-Second World War contemporaries in British geography but in contrast to Bill Fisher, John Dewdney did not hold a doctorate and the Malta Project represented the first major research programme in which he assumed a senior role.⁴

The head of the Geology Department, Professor K.C. (later Sir Kingsley) Dunham was also committed to applied studies, which he combined with pure research interests. Dunham did not serve in the armed forces, but was engaged in researching the mineral resources of Northern England in connection with the war effort.⁵

The growth of the Durham's Geography and Geology Departments

Within a decade of Fisher's appointment Durham had become, not just one of the largest geography departments in the United Kingdom, but also a major centre for research on the eastern Mediterranean and wider Middle East. This was achieved despite the fact that before the 1960s and with the exception of the Land Utilisation Survey of Britain carried out in the 1930s and 1940s and organised and led by Sir Lawrence Dudley-Stamp, there was a dearth of funding opportunities for geographers. This meant that large-scale research projects were difficult to launch (Johnston 2003)⁶. Oil company monies provided an easier funding route for university-based geologists. The manner in which funding for research in Malta was procured is discussed in the next section, but the rate of growth of the geography department within Durham University was remarkable.¹ In 1954/55 the department had four lecturers, including H. Bowen-Jones and J.C. Dewdney and one Reader (W.B. Fisher). By 1963/64 the

⁴ Bowen-Jones and Dewdney both had distinguished subsequent careers, eventually became professors in the Durham geography department. Howard Bowen-Jones continued to specialise in pure and applied research in Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. In addition to the Middle East and North Africa, Dewdney added demography in the United Kingdom and regional geography of former Soviet Union as research foci.

⁵ In 1955 during the course of the Malta project, Dunham was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (Johnson 2002).

⁶ Sir Lawrence Dudley-Stamp (1898-1966) was for many years based at the London School of Economic and Political Science. The work of the Land Utilisation Survey is summarised in Stamp (1948).

establishment had grown to twelve full time academic staff, including Bowen-Jones and Fisher, and funding for multi-disciplinary research in the Middle East was being provided by bodies which included the Rockefeller Foundation, oil companies and British and Foreign governments. When one of us, David Chester, applied for undergraduate admission in 1970, the department was proud to claim that 'a great deal of the geographical work undertaken at Durham may be described as "applied geography", and the staff act as consultants for the Ministry of Overseas Development and foreign governments' (Anon 1969, 73). In a retrospective review Bowen-Jones points out that, although the so-called Durham Colleges were the smaller United Kingdom division of the federal University of Durham with just one third of its student numbers the other two thirds being based in Newcastle, Sir James Duff - Warden and periodic Vice-Chancellor - 'could and did back winners' and was prepared to support the 'drive and totally committed dynamism which Bill Fisher injected' (Bowen-Jones 1988, 9).⁷ Other commentators have noted that, Fisher was 'a dedicated expansionist with great entrepreneurial flair and wide-ranging ability (and) he was undoubtedly instrumental in creating a large and highly productive department'. 'In those days of authoritarian heads, he was the decision-maker who asked for advice but was not consensual and (was) not to be crossed' (Clarke 2005, no page number). His headship was not for a fixed term as is usual today and has been described as being 'Prussian' in character (Sillitoe 2018, 259).

Professor Kingsley Dunham in common with Fisher had ambitions for his department, was instrumental in planning Phases 1 and 2 of a new Geology and Chemistry Building and increased staff and student numbers from the 1950s onwards. As in his own research, so as departmental head, Kingsley Dunham maintained a balance between pure and applied research with investigations in Malta being an important element of the latter. Like Fisher, Kingsley Dunham was both authoritarian and paternalistic and in 1967 he left university-

⁷ Sir James Fitzjames Duff (1898-1970): Latinist; educationalist and academic administrator.

based academic life to become Director of the Geological Survey (then known as the Institute of Geological Sciences) (Johnson 2002, 63-64).

Funding the Durham-Malta projects

The principal reason why Sir James Duff was prepared to make monies available was to enable a strong academic case to be made for external funding (Bowen-Jones 1988, 9). Up to the Second World War economic and social science research in the British colonies had to operate with limited funds, which were provided either by universities and/or by charitable bodies such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Institute for the Universities of Scotland. Indeed, some of Bill Fisher's earliest research in Libya had been supported by the latter when he was employed by the University of Aberdeen. During the Second World War and under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1940 and 1945, new funding became available both for development projects in the colonies and research leading to the betterment of socio/economic conditions. Overseeing research was a Colonial Research Council under the chairmanship of the eminent civil servant, Lord Hailey, to advise the Secretary of State on matters of policy and, under the auspices of the Council, there were two grant awarding bodies: the Colonial Economic Research Committee (CERC) and the Colonial Social Science Research Committee (CSSRC), and it was from the former that the Geography Department and their Maltese partners sought their funds (Anon 1949; Fisher 1953; Chilver 1998).⁸

In the very different world of the mid 1950s, Sir James Duff felt able informally to lobby a senior Colonial Office civil servant, Mr (later Sir) Walter Adams (1906-1975), in advance of the submission of the research proposal and the progress of the application may

⁸ William Malcolm Hailey - First Baron Hailey (1872-1969) (Caroe 1969). The secretary to the Colonial Economic Research Committee was Elizabeth Millicent (Sally) Chilver (1914-2014), a distinguished war-time and post-war civil servant and later Principal of Bedford College, University of London (1964-1971) and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford (1971-1979) (Anon 2019c).

be traced through a CERC minute of the meeting held on 4th June 1955 (Duff 1954; Chilver 1955). The official minute indicates that the Royal University of Malta had already submitted an application some months earlier, but that this had been rejected because the sums requested were too large and that a new proposal was jointly tabled with the Durham Geography Department, being based on the reconnaissance survey that had been carried out in Spring. The proposal authored by Howard Bowen-Jones and the Revd. Renato Cirillo (Lecturer in Economics at the Royal University), was ambitious and envisaged, *inter alia*:-

- i. A compilation and analysis of all available statistics.
- ii A study of demography - historical aspects, life-course, fertility rates, infant mortality, impacts of population growth, fertility and mortality, the 'optimum population' and comparison with other countries with a 'white' (*sic*) population.
- iii. An analysis of emigration - historical aspects, causes, the 'successes' of Maltese expatriates, effects of emigration on the residual population of Malta and especially on the availability of skilled industrial labour and farm workers.
- iv. An in-depth study of the Maltese family – its size and characteristics in urban and rural areas, social status, views on education and juvenile delinquency (*sic*).
- v. The role of industrial development as a means of stemming emigration, capital investment, the possibilities of new industrial enterprises and the prospects and/or problems raised by local and foreign investment.
- vi. The agriculture of Malta - focusing on land-use mapping, detailed analysis of representative sample areas, a soil survey, studies of selected 'typical' farms, crop yields, tenures, rents, labour availability and fragmentation of holdings.
- vii. The nature of settlement, the urban hierarchy and the distribution of differing type of housing.
- viii. A regional land-use based study of Gozo.

ix. An economic survey - occupational structure, non-agricultural activities and employment, trade and urban/rural property values and rents.

As mentioned in the main text, the project as a whole concentrated on agricultural and land-use aspects, whilst individual researchers - especially research fellows and research students - addressed other aspects of the planned programme.

After the provision of detailed costings a generous grant was awarded, which covered the following: employment of research fellows and other post-graduate researchers; Maltese student expenses; visits to the islands by Durham staff and *vice-versa* and clerical assistance. The total sum awarded between 1st September 1955 and 31st March 1960 amounted to £9,235 (or approximately £250,000 at 2020 prices), which represents some 21% of all monies allocated by the CERC to universities (Anon 1960).

The project did not involve the unconditional provision of money, but the CERC insisted on a detailed administrative framework and regular reporting to ensure accountability. In this respect it may be argued that the research programme was ahead of its time. With overall responsibility was a joint committee comprising the *Rector Magnificus* of the Royal University and Sir James Duff, Warden of the Durham Colleges, with the day-to-day management being devolved to Professor Fisher and Rev. Renato Cirillo. There were also requirements, not only to produce published outputs, but also regular reports on progress to the Colonial Office and for senior academics to provide training to both Maltese and British students (Chilver 1955).⁹

Project Personnel

⁹ Some of the reports to the CERC were substantial documents. Examples include: Mitchell (1958); Beeley (1960).

In both the preliminary survey and the subsequent CERC funded field programme, it is notable that the majority of young staff and students later pursued distinguished careers, suggesting that Professors Fisher and Dunham were adept at assessing research potential, with field assistants being hand-picked from the student body. As Howard Bowen-Jones was later to write 'of the fifteen (geography) students who participated in the 1950s Malta project ten became distinguished academics, one a Permanent Under Secretary (Richardson), and one, Yaxley, the official 'Taipan; of Hong Kong's treasury' (Bowen-Jones 1988, 10).¹⁰ Indeed Table 1 is a roll call of geographers who were to distinguish themselves in coming decades in diverse fields ranging across development, demography and Middle Eastern and African studies. Brian Beeley and Bill Charlton, maintained long-standing research interests in Malta following the project (e.g. Charlton and Beeley 1987; Beeley and Charlton 1994). One feature from Table 1, which is based on information in *Malta: Background for Development* (Bowen-Jones et al. 1961a), is the notable imbalance between the naming of Durham-based research personnel, all of whom including students are listed in the introduction, and their Maltese partners, with not one student assistant being identified by name and where the acknowledgement of more senior collaborators is only partial. To some extent this is remedied by acknowledgements contained within other research outputs and doctoral theses, though the impression remains of marked colonial partiality. Two Maltese students went on to distinguished political careers: Edward (Eddie) Fenech-Adami, served as Prime Minister (1987-1992 and 1998-2003) and President (2004-2009); and Karmenu Mifsud-Bonnici as Prime Minister, from 1984 to 1987 (see the Table 1). An alternative explanation is voiced by Dr Brian Beeley who notes that in the 1950s higher education in Malta was biased towards professional training especially in law. Many students also found it difficult to commit

¹⁰ Peter K. Mitchell subsequently became an eminent scholar focusing his research on African development. John F. Yaxley C.B.E. became a senior official in the Foreign Office, spending much time in Hong Kong. There were actually 16 Durham undergraduate and post-graduate students (Table 1).

themselves fully to the project, although some did benefit from its training element (Bowen-Jones et al.1961a, 8-9; Fenech-Adami 2014, 8-9).

As far as the geologists were concerned, Martin Bott and Michael House were appointed to chairs, the former at Durham the latter at Hull, with Bott also becoming an FRS. It is notable that despite departmental graduation photographs showing females comprised up to a quarter of geography undergraduates during the period 1954-1961, to the best of our knowledge no woman was included in either the geography or geology research teams. According to Brian Beeley, this was not the deliberate policy of the leaders, but merely reflected the 'climate of the time.'¹¹

Politics and religion contextualisation in the 1950s Malta

In the 1950s Maltese society and culture was very different from that encountered today, with politics and religion in particular providing a distinctive *milieu* in which the research took place. The two principal parties the Nationalist and Labour (Bowen-Jones et al. 1961b; Cassar 2000)¹², had pre-war roots but represented differing elements within Maltese society, the former led by scions of the professional and upper middle classes, relied on support from more rural areas and advocating economically centre right, though socially conservative, policies. The *Partit Nazzjonalista* was strongly influenced by the Catholic

¹¹ Peter Mitchell was, accompanied by his wife, but she was not a member of the research team. Dr Brian Beeley, Interview July 26, 2017.

¹² The two principal parties were and are: *Partit Nazzjonalista* and *Partit Laburista*. There were two additional parties in the pre-Independence period. From 1921 to 1945 and from 1950-1953 the *Constitutional Party* also had seats in the Legislative Assembly. Supported by the wealth and influence of its most prominent member, Lord Strickland (1861-1940), it strongly supported Catholicism and loyalty to the British Crown, but advocated dominion status for Malta to avoid any cultural assimilation or secularisation that integration with the United Kingdom would bring. It held a strict anti-communist line and drew most of its support from wealthy communities in Sliema and localities around Marsamxett Harbour (Fig. 1). The *Progressive Constitutional Party*, broke away in the post-Second World War era and had some success, but by 1962 held only one seat in the assembly. Its leader was Mabel Strickland (1899-1981), daughter of Lord Strickland and co-founder and sometime editor of the *Times of Malta* (Anon 2020 and other sources).

Church and felt threatened by declining Italian cultural and Papal influence. The *Partit Laburista* in contrast was socialist in its policies, drew much of its support from localities around the Grand Harbour, followed by communities in the vicinity of Marsamxett Harbour and the south of Malta more generally, was strongly grounded in the union movement and between 1949 and 1955 had to share its vote with the Malta Workers Party (MWP). This meant that the Nationalist Party initially held power sometimes in coalition, but in 1955 by which time the MWP was a spent force, Labour formed a government under Dom Mintoff (see Table 1). Initially the Labour Party's policy response to the inevitable decline in British defence-related expenditure was not to work towards independence, but rather to hold a referendum and seek full integration with the UK. A referendum on integration was held in February 1956. It was opposed by Nationalist Party and the church, yet was approved by 77% of those voting, but on a turnout of only 59%. The low turnout and eventually a lack of British interest, meant that integration did not occur. Labour held power until 1958 when Dom Mintoff resigned his government over the issue of large-scale redundancies in the naval dockyard, whereupon direct rule was re-imposed until 1962, with the Nationalists being once more in power when independence was declared 1964.

Whether ruled directly or by Labour or Nationalist governments, the period up to independence saw major social and welfare changes and the Durham Malta project should be viewed against this background.¹³ Mandatory school-based education, as opposed to compulsory attendance, became the norm in 1946 and in 1955 was made full-time until the age of fourteen, without charge and with free text books. Technical education was expanded, new school buildings were constructed and there were improvements in the provision of sewers, water supply, health services, electricity and milk pasteurisation. During the course of

¹³ The most significant piece of legislation, the National Assistance Act 1956 (*l-Att dwar l-Għajjnuna Nazzjonali*), was the first comprehensive social welfare provision in Malta.

the project the (First) *Development Plan for Malta* (1959-1964) was being developed and was enacted two years before the publication of *Malta: Background for Development*, and a year before the first project-related doctorate was awarded. Under this plan the British Government was to provide funds of approximately £28 million (over £780 million at 2020 values) with the object of creating full employment through, *inter alia*, industrial development, ship repairing, other port-related activities and tourism all geared towards export growth and foreign currency earning.¹⁴ This plan and its development defined a further context for the Durham research, as did its emphasis on how and in what ways Malta was to prosper following independence.

In 1958 Catholic Archbishop Mikiel Gonzi stressed the importance of large families in spite of the ever-present demographic issues discussed above (Bowen-Jones et al 1961b). In the 1950s and 1960s, the Catholic Church projected a strong and socially conservative agenda on to Maltese society, and Labour Party politicians and supporters were estranged from the Catholic Church and its sacraments. Eventually the papacy softened its line and this, together with the return to power of Labour in 1971, led to a decline in the ability of the Church to shape the social and political agendas. In the 1950s, the guiding hand of Catholicism was particularly strong in rural Malta the areas in which most of the field work associated with the project was carried out.¹⁵

References

¹⁴ A detailed breakdown of investments under the plan shows: Services (e.g. water, telephones and roads), 15%; social services (e.g. housing, education, sewers and health), 23%; 60% - economic development (e.g. industrial stimulation and port development) and with smaller allotments to technical education, tourism, agriculture and fisheries (Young 1963).

¹⁵ From the mid-1950s there was much animosity between the Catholic hierarchy (especially Archbishop Gonzi) and the leadership of the Maltese Labour Party (especially its leader Dom Mintoff). In some case Labour supporters were denied marriage and burial rites, interdicts were issued against the leadership and voting for Labour was deemed a moral sin (Smith 2014). In the 2011 referendum on divorce and to widespread surprise, over 52% of the population voted in favour, with the Bishops later issuing a pastoral letter which raised concerns about the church losing its influence on Maltese society. A survey in 2005 showed that only half the population attended mass on Sunday (Bowen-Jones et al. 1961b; Fenech 2012).

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Table 1

Person	Years carrying out research in Malta	Role
British Personnel		
William B. (Bill) Fisher	1946 1952 1953 1957 1958	General Director of the project.
Howard Bowen-Jones	1955 1956 1957 1958	Director of fieldwork and land use survey.
John C. Dewdney	1955 1956 1957 1958	Director of fieldwork and land use survey.
Peter K. Mitchell	1956 1957 1958	CERC research fellow and Ph.D. student. Research theme: Maltese agriculture. He later produced a Ph.D. on the historical geography of Cumberland (England).
Brian W. Beeley	1956 1957 1958 and years following the project	CERC research fellow and research student. Research theme: strongly anthropologically based study of rural society and families.
William (Bill) A. Charlton	1955 1956 1957 and years following the project	Postgraduate research student. Research theme: economic geography.
Michael Richardson	1955 1956 1957	Postgraduate research student. Research theme: demography.
Roy W. Hill	1957	Postgraduate research student. An economic geographer, Roy Hill worked in Malta, but his Ph.D was focused on Libya.
Student Field Assistants		
F.H. Andreason-Aalen	1955	Student land use surveyor
J.A. Allen	1956	Student land use surveyor
B. P. Birch	1957	Student land use surveyor
K.S. MacLachlan	1956	Student land use surveyor
B.E. Roberts	1955 1956	Student land use surveyor
A.R. Taylor	1957	Student land use surveyor
S.A. Taylor	1955	Student land use surveyor
I.B. Thompson	1956	Student land use surveyor
K.G. Wardhaugh	1956 1957	Student land use surveyor
B.F. Wooten	1957	Student land use surveyor
J.F. Yaxley	1956	Student land use surveyor
D.M. Lang	/	Soil Surveyor
Maltese Personnel		
Revd. Renato Cirillo		Joint General Director of the project. Was subsequently Professor of Economics in the University of Malta.
Joseph Aquilina		Maltese language assistance. He was later Dean of Arts in the University of Malta and a distinguished literary figure.
Brother Leo Barrington		General academic assistance.
Tony Bilocca		Milk Marketing Undertaking - 'loaned' to the project and acted as a guide and interpreter to CREC research fellows: Brian Beeley and Peter Mitchell (see above).
John J. Cole		Minister of Agriculture. Earlier he had been the minister responsible from emigration and later emigrated to Australia with his family.
George Farrugia		Ministry of Agriculture on Gozo.

Domenico (Dom) Mintoff

Brother Leo Barrington
Many student Assistants

Prime Minister 1955-1958, facilitated ministerial and Civil Service contacts and arranged transport in the field. Later he was Prime Minister between 1971 and 1981. General academic assistance.

Land use surveyors.

These included:-

- a. Mr (later His Excellency) Edward (Eddie) Fenech-Adami, who later served as both Prime Minister (1987-1992 and 1998-2003) President (2004-2009).
 - b. Dr Karmenu Mifsud-Bonnici, who served as Prime Minister from 1984-1987.
 - c. Dr Paul Xuereb (future lawyer and Librarian of the University of Malta).
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Fig.1



Fig. 2

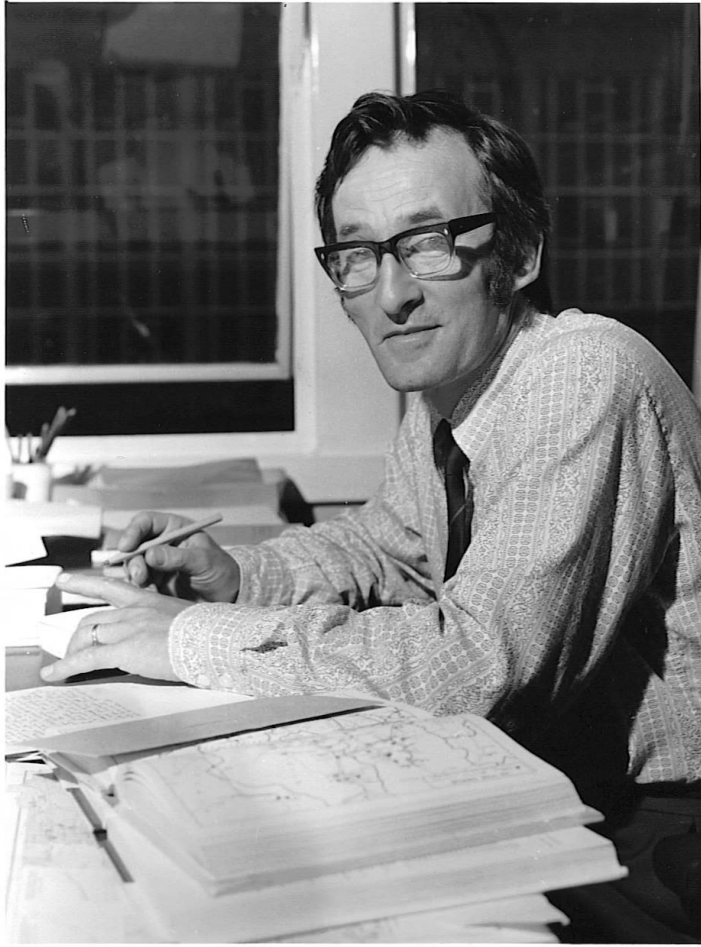


Fig. 3

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Table 1: The staff involved in the Malta project.

Figure 1: William Bayne Fisher, sketched in the 1970s (reproduced with the permission of the Department of Geography, University of Durham).

Figure 2: Howard Bowen-Jones, photographed in the 1970s (reproduced with the permission of the Department of Geography, University of Durham).

Figure 3: John Dewdney, photographed in the 1970s (reproduced with the permission of the Department of Geography, University of Durham).