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## Roy Ellen

### Paul Stirling and The Making of Anthropology at Kent

#### Introduction

Under the aegis of Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, Paul Stirling was in that group of post-war social anthropologists which first undertook serious fieldwork in the Mediterranean basin. The theoretical significance of this for anthropology was to be radical, all his peers having been – to use the words of John Davis (1977: 241) – “pitched into fields which had histories”. His monograph, *Turkish Village* (published in 1965) was a model of lucidity, and was to revolutionise the study of the Turkish countryside. In turn, Stirling was to contribute to the establishment of Mediterranean anthropology in the next generation, supervising the research of the philosopher and anthropologist Ernest Gellner, John Davis (later to become Warden of All Souls College Oxford), John and Marie Corbin, Margaret Kenna, Nevill Colclough, amongst others. He was an influential figure for young Turkish social scientists, of whom he trained a good many to PhD level,<sup>1</sup> and was Visiting Professor at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara between 1983 and 1986. Stirling read philosophy and classics at Oxford and went on to study social anthropology there with Evans-Pritchard. After defending his doctorate, he moved to the LSE to work with Raymond Firth, and in 1965 was appointed to a foundation professorship at the then new University of Kent at Canterbury. He remained at Kent beyond his official retirement in 1984 until his death.

Although we now have the Paul Stirling archive (in part lodged at the Royal Anthropological Institute, and virtually at <http://era.anthropology.ac.uk>), apart from the obituaries written in haste around the time of his death, there is little considered appreciation, correspondence or recorded interviews that might shed light in significant detail on his early intellectual life, and so the account presented here of how Stirling’s appointment to Kent shaped the way anthropology developed there has been pieced together from references in biographical and autobiographical accounts of others (see e.g. Anon 1987, Ellen 1998, Hann 1988, Kumar 2011, Stirling 1995) and from personal recollections (Kumar 2020). Paul was not a person you would expect to spend much time curating his back catalogue of ephemera.

#### Stirling and British Social Anthropology before Kent

After graduating in philosophy and classics at Oxford, although Stirling was single-minded in his determination to become an anthropologist, he felt that he was initiated into subject by Evans-Pritchard with immoderate haste. By April 1949 he was in Turkey, on his way to Kayseri and the villages of Sakultatan and Elbaşı. He felt little prepared for what he was to encounter

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<sup>1</sup> 1970 Altan Eserpek, 1982 Sencer Ayata, 1984 Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, 1986 Yıldız Ecevit, 1995 Hediye Sibel Kalaycıoğlu. In addition, Kayhan Delibaş worked as his research assistant but was supervised by Frank Furedi (2001), later working with Michael Fischer on the Paul Stirling archive.

in the field, and much concerned about the adequacy of his Turkish language skills (Shankland 2011: 18), as indeed he remained in later life. Nevertheless, he finished his PhD in 1951 within the time schedule stipulated by Oxford expectations of this period, and returned to Turkey with his young wife Margaret. While at Oxford he had amongst his fellow research students John Barnes, Clyde Mitchell, John Peristiany, Freddie Bailey and Mary Tew (Douglas), names that would recur during the Kent years because of a common background and shared interests.

In January 1952 Paul Stirling joined the anthropology teaching staff of the London School of Economics. He was to stay there for 12 years. In his personal recollections of the LSE, Stirling tended to emphasise the lowliness of his status there and the hierarchy of staff relations in the Department of Anthropology: a pyramid with Raymond Firth at the top. A story he repeated numerous times concerned his role in the production process of the LSE Social Anthropology monograph series before this was taken over by Athlone. His role was to wrap-up monographs in brown paper for distribution under the supervision of Firth, though Paul was later to go on to edit and manage the series himself (Firth 1966: 8). Coming from a very different angle, Paul's young colleague Robin (J.R.) Fox more overtly revealed his discomfort with the formalities of social relationships within the department, where "chaps" would call each other with false modesty 'Fox', 'Stirling' or 'Freedman' with its implicit nod to hierarchy and misogyny. Stirling was later also fond of pricking the pomposity of these senior colleagues, and deflating the intellectual status of those in his own peer group who would later become famous, such as Mary Douglas. But Paul's disdain for others was reciprocated in the reputation he himself acquired at the LSE for being slow to form an opinion. According to Robin Fox (2017: 299) ... "Paul Stirling was in a constant dither about whether to call the feuding units in his Turkish village 'lineages'," or not. However, in his defence, it is very clear from his published interview with David Shankland that the character of the Anatolian "lineage" was something that intellectually puzzled him, as did what constituted "groups", or why Radcliffe-Brown should insist that it was always the reality of "structure" that mattered. He remained highly sceptical of the generalisations made by sociologists of the X to Y kind, mainly because he always saw the heterogeneity in his own data (Shankland 2011: 11, 21). From philosophy, Stirling had acquired not only a concern for precise definitions regarding the meaning of analytical concepts, but also a passionate interest in causality and the role of knowledge in social systems; from Evans-Pritchard he had learned the importance of history. His insistence that one should seek to identify causal links, and his acknowledgement of the formidable problems in doing so, made him equally sceptical of simple-minded scientism and post-modern approaches. Although he was, in essence, a proponent of interdisciplinarity and "the project of social science", he was quick to recognise the limitations of both – as we shall see.

Apart from the formal relationships Stirling established with his teachers, two crucial and enduring associations formed during the LSE period. The first was with Ernest Gellner. Unlike his relationship with other LSE colleagues this cut across the formal hierarchy. Gellner had made friends with Paul, who introduced him to social anthropology at the LSE. Here Gellner "found something of a home" (Hall 2003: 155) as a doctoral student, working on the Berbers of Morocco under the joint supervision of Paul and Raymond Firth. What appears to have appealed to Gellner about this arrangement was that it did not require him to split his sensibilities as a philosopher from those of being an anthropologist (Hall 2003: 160). The shared regard Stirling and Gellner had for both subjects does much to explain the way in which social anthropology took shape at Kent. In an interview with John Davis (1991: 66), Gellner stresses his indebtedness to Paul and reflects on his relationship with the two subjects:

And the paradox, the joke, is, having escaped from philosophy to anthropology partly, certainly not totally but partly, to escape from linguistic philosophy, I find in my old age that the thing I was escaping from is now almost dominating anthropology: the hermeneutic plague, as I call it, which is partly inspired by Wittgenstein.

Both Gellner and Stirling shared a robust antagonism towards linguistic philosophy in particular following their Oxford encounters as undergraduates. A little later in the same interview, we find the following reminiscence:

I remember a seminar at which Somalis and sanctity were discussed and someone present said, “It’s interesting that there seems to be much more inwardness about Somali Islam than about Berber Islam”, and Paul Stirling said, “It’s nothing to do with Somalis, it’s to do with the fact that the informant about Somalis is [B. W.] Andrzejewski and not Gellner”, and this I think is true. (Davis 1991: 71)

The other key relationship was with John Davis. When Davis moved to the LSE to become a graduate student, he met three individuals who were to mould his enduring preoccupations: Raymond Firth, Lucy Mair and Paul Stirling, who as we have already noted was at the time undertaking pioneer work in Mediterranean ethnography. In addition to his Turkish work, which continued over the years and developed into a classic longitudinal case study, Paul had also been working in southern Italy on land reform. Under Stirling's supervision Davis also undertook fieldwork there, while Mair was later to oversee the writing-up. Through an introduction from Paul, John was adopted and mentored by Manlio Rossi-Doria, an economist in Naples and Italian senator with considerable clout in cultural circles there (Dresch and Ellen 2018: 123). Paul found John a job as research assistant, which was better than the alternative of working part-time for the Post Office to make ends meet. John had been ill, but got a letter from Stirling:

It said in effect that he had no respect for people from Oxford since they thought themselves far too clever; he had no high expectations of anyone who had no training in anthropology; he didn’t really want to employ anyone who had only a second-class degree – but he needed someone who could speak Italian to be his research assistant, and he was (typical Paul Stirling) anxious to help someone who was sick and hospitalised. (J. Davis, Memoir A, p. 8. Quoted in Dresch and Ellen 2018: 124)

So, when Davis embarked on his anthropological work in Italy in 1963 it was with a six-month stint as Paul Stirling’s research assistant. Stirling, whom Davis liked a great deal, was hugely important to his subsequent progress. This was a decade in which the Mediterranean drew interest from anthropologists elsewhere. Monographs such as Julian Pitt-Rivers’ *People of the Sierra* (1954) had forced English-speaking anthropologists to pay attention. Although Stirling had worked in Turkey in the late 1940s, he was slow to publish: his *Turkish Village* would still have been in draft, although close to finished, when John was his assistant (Dresch and Ellen 2018: 127).

John and Paul became distant in later life, after Paul’s retirement and on John’s move from Kent to Oxford. While John studiously sought to impress and had an impeccable hand-writing generally executed with a fountain pen, Paul was scruffy, his hand-writing was barely readable and during his later years he produced endless illegible rough notes on scraps of paper. John came to be less tolerant of Stirling’s weaknesses, and to wonder more openly about his strengths. Typical was his imagining of an eventual Stirling festschrift or perhaps a work of

reminiscences which – he cruelly suggested – might be entitled “Doubt and Delay”. In a lengthy note, written in later life, Davis says much about the virtues of his old mentor and patron: “And yet he never made it to the top: he was not FBA; he was not an officer of the ASA or RAI, not of any international academic organisation, apart ... from an Anglo-Turkish association of one kind or another” (J. Davis, *Memoir B*, p. 40: quoted in Dresch and Ellen 2018: 138). This “getting to the top” plainly interested John far more than it had Paul. In 1989 John applied to Oxford, and then became President of the Royal Anthropological Institute. In short, he accomplished all the things he felt Paul failed to achieve but which Stirling himself probably thought irrelevant (Dresch and Ellen 2018: 142).

### **The founding of the University of Kent and the expansion of social science in the UK**

Kent was one of the ‘new universities’ founded during the nineteen-sixties in the United Kingdom, the so-called “plate-glass” universities rather than the “civic” or “red-brick” universities that had emerged to counter the dominance of Oxbridge. These included Sussex (1961), York and the University of East Anglia (1963), Lancaster (1964), Kent, Essex and Warwick (1965), Stirling (1967) and Ulster (1968). Strathclyde, Heriot-Watt and Dundee were to follow later. The red-brick universities had been parodied in the novels of Kingsley Amis and David Lodge, and in turn the plate-glass universities were to be satirised by Malcolm Bradbury. The redbrick universities were often accused of failure in a number of key areas: curricula were over-specialised, their departments were inflexible silos, they lacked a sense of community and suffered from poor staff-student relations (see e.g., Collini 2021). This was very much an Oxbridge view. The new plate-glass universities were part of a Labour government attempt to implement the recommendations of the Robbins Report, the expansion of UK higher education being in part a response to the post-war “baby boom”. However, at the same time, it was an opportunity to innovate new subjects and teaching methodologies. As part of this mid-1960s growth spurt in UK university provision, sociology and the social sciences in general were particularly favoured, although except in a few existing institutions (such as the LSE) sociology itself was still struggling to find an academic foothold.

In 1945 LSE was the only British university with a Department of Sociology, and was a principal source of trained sociologists. Anthropology pre-existed and was seen by some to occupy the intellectual and pedagogic space that might otherwise be reserved for sociology, and especially within the older universities of Oxford and Cambridge there had long been opposition to its expansion. However, the end of the Second World War, the national political mood for social engineering and radical reform, changed all that, and departments began to appear at Leeds, Leicester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Hull, with staff many of which had been trained at the LSE (Albrow 1989: 202).

Both anthropology and sociology were small subjects, and anthropologists and sociologists often had complex identities at this time, associating equally with both subjects depending on the context. Raymond Firth and Meyer Fortes had sponsored the formation of the British Sociological Association (BSA) in 1950 (Mills 2011: 63), while Paul Stirling later became a member of its education committee. Lucy Mair and Maurice Freedman were for a long time on the editorial board of the *British Journal of Sociology*, while Ronald Frankenburg for many years edited the *Sociological Review*. Firth also had a role in establishing the Social Science Research Council in 1965, and both he and Max Gluckman sought interdisciplinary dialogue

and looked to cooperate with other social sciences (Frankenberg 1988: 108). To some extent, and for some purposes, the subjects were accepted as interchangeable and overlapping. Michael Banton, for example, had been trained in LSE anthropology but went to a chair in sociology at Bristol. Indeed, in addition to his prominent role in editing the first four monographs of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) Banton later became president of the Royal Anthropological Institute. Joint departments of Sociology and Anthropology were established, for example at the School of Oriental and African Studies, employing individuals such as John Peel who was equally at home in both subjects. At Manchester, Max Gluckman had sought to form a joint department with himself holding the chair in social anthropology, while appointing Peter Worsley (another anthropologist) to a chair in sociology. This arrangement was not to last and the department eventually split into its two component subjects (Mills 2011: 93, 106).

Despite – perhaps also because of – this disciplinary fluidity and the pressure at government level to see sociology expand as the more relevant subject for British social policy, some anthropologists were anxious that their separate identity should not be lost. This was especially because within the existing anthropology departments and learned societies, the subset “social anthropology” was only now beginning to coalesce in distinction to physical anthropology, museum studies of material culture and prehistory. The Association of Social Anthropologists had just been established in 1946. As David Mills (2011: 17-18, 26) reminds us, “British” social anthropology in the 1950s was very much “an imagined scholarly community” and its practitioners were in several minds as to what best characterised its theory and practice (Gluckman and Eggan 1965). Indeed, distinct disciplines within the social sciences more widely had barely emerged when there was anxiety about their boundaries.

Kent took up the challenge to develop sociology (along with places like York, Sussex, Essex and Stirling), but at the same time sought to “liberate the subject silos” (Pellew and Taylor 2020: 4), to be radical, utopian and hybrid. In contrast to most other places, Kent adopted a collegiate system along Oxbridge lines, which in part no doubt hankered to the academic roots and sentiments of those who initially drew up the plans. This had some curious and reactionary consequences. When senior members of Eliot College held its first “high table” – arranged on a raised dais in front of a picture window giving views of Canterbury Cathedral – junior members sitting at tables in the main body of the dining hall stood up without prompting in deference to the procession of senior members. Traditions like this were instantly invented. So, although Kent sought to be part of a wider experiment in higher education, the attempt to mimic Oxbridge in customary behaviour and even architecture, reinforced some very conservative values. It was highly convenient that the college system could be intellectually justified by claiming that the cross-currents between subjects possible through multi-subject colleges (with their shared accommodation, shared dining, and junior and senior common rooms) were a fertile breeding ground for modern interdisciplinarity. And there is little doubt that it provided an environment that was simultaneously familiar and invigoratingly new, where anything seemed possible, where freedom to innovate was positively encouraged. Kent was later to modify the collegiate system, as financial problems kicked-in. With duplicated infrastructures, such as dining-halls and common rooms, colleges were expensive to maintain. Although it subsequently moved to a more conventional academic structure (“subject concentration” and later departmentalisation) interdisciplinarity remained a stated objective and had been important to Paul Stirling in his interpretation of his role and the development of teaching and research. Paul, no doubt at the time, but certainly much later, could see the irony in all of this.

## The beginnings of anthropology at Kent

Anthropology arrived at the University of Kent with the appointment of Paul Stirling as Professor of Sociology in 1965. After a brief sabbatical he started work in April that year, among other things appointing three other members of staff before the first students arrived in September (Shankland 2011: 13). This first batch included Nevill Colclough (like John Davis, an Italianist), Ray Pahl and Derek Allcorn. John Davis joined a year later. They were part of a group of other LSE staff and students who were to form the nucleus of a board of studies, later to become the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. From his own recollections, it sounds as though during this phase at least Paul did not much relish the challenge of establishing a subject and courses from scratch, given the absence of the essential resources for so doing (such as teachers and books). This goes against the conventional wisdom harking back to the halcyon days of the “new universities” when it is assumed a group of new institutions at the “peak of their confidence” between 1961 and 1967 shared in the exhilaration of common purpose. Stirling’s dislike of the turgid LSE formality and hierarchy no doubt influenced his style at Kent, where he adopted a self-deprecating informality and wry ironic sense of humour.

Whereas the older universities had been slow to establish sociology, senior anthropologists within these same institutions (such as Raymond Firth) had also been reluctant to endorse the establishment of anthropology elsewhere. This was on the grounds that social anthropology was essentially a graduate subject, because it was considered (an elitist view) that expansion might somehow sully what was best in the subject, and because it was thought that the perceived demand could be met within those universities where it was already found. However, a shortage of senior sociologists to occupy advertised positions in the new universities, and an apparent surplus of well-qualified social anthropologists, led to the appointment of a series of anthropologists as professors of sociology: Max Marwick in Stirling, Peter Worsley in Manchester, Ronnie Frankenburg at Keele, Jaap van Velsen in Aberystwyth, and Bill Epstein and Freddie Bailey at Sussex. John Barnes went to Cambridge and Paul Stirling to Kent. On Stirling’s own admission Kent had difficulty finding a sociologist, and the first resigned after only a few months, leaving a way for his own appointment (Shankland 2011: 13). Moreover, it has been suggested that the position as head of sociology at Kent had first been offered to Robin (J.R.) Fox, who is supposed to have turned-down the position. Had he accepted, Kent anthropology might have been a very different creature than it subsequently became. In the late 1960s Fox was developing new courses at the LSE that drew strongly on animal ethology, Darwinism and human evolution, involving Michael Day and John Napier. He eventually left LSE for a post at Rutgers, where he continued to develop his style of evolutionary anthropology that anticipated later developments more generally in British anthropology, and which were to influence developments at Kent in the late 1990s and during the two decades of the 21st century.

The movement between anthropology and sociology was much in keeping with the ethos of British social anthropology at the time, in defining itself as that branch of sociology that specialized in non-industrial societies, while maintaining its distinctiveness in terms of methodology. Lucy Mair (1972: 1) in her *Introduction to Social Anthropology* had said quite explicitly that social anthropology was “a branch of sociology”, and at the LSE anthropology was long taught as an optional pathway in the BSc Sociology. There was also provision for social anthropology within a University of London intercollegiate degree in Anthropology, but within LSE it could also be taken as an option within the BSc (Economics) programme. It was therefore able to advertise its social science credentials, and demonstrated how the subjects might be integrated (Firth 1966: 6). The kind of social anthropology introduced by Paul to Kent

was therefore perfectly compatible with a particular strand of late 1960s sociology: comparative social systems with a main regional focus on the complex societies of southern Europe and the Mediterranean, and overlapping areas of pertinent theory and methodology. His work on Turkey and later Italy had been a core part of the post-war expansion in the social anthropology of complex societies with long histories. Both John Davis and Nevill Colclough had first degrees in history, and together with a researcher (Robert Rowlands) and a group of doctoral students (John Corbin, Paul and Barbara Littlewood, Margaret Kenna and Michael Lineton), were part of this ethnographic vanguard, later joined by Marie Corbin. Thus, Paul Stirling was remarkably successful in the manner in which he engineered an accommodation between sociology and social anthropology at Kent, and subsequently permitted both to flourish. One mark of this success was that by the end of the 1960s all of the first cohort of Kent social anthropology research students and researchers occupied positions as social anthropologists in mixed departments.

Stirling, as we have noted, had been trained by Firth and therefore had no direct connection with a broader holistic anthropology and was now predisposed to the “social science projects” of the LSE. However, the crisis of identity in British Social Anthropology was closely linked to the position of anthropology in general education, and as early as December 1964 Paul had taken the lead in organising a Wenner-Gren funded conference at the LSE on “The place of anthropology in general education”. Moreover, there were persistent arguments about who was qualified to be admitted to the Association of Social Anthropologists: should ASA membership be restricted to those trained as social anthropologists in the British (and by extension Commonwealth, i.e., colonial) tradition, or might the Association be opened up to the Americans? The debate was partly about disciplinary stewardship versus popularisation, which Paul memorably characterised as the “mandarin versus missionary positions”: should social anthropology be only for professionals or for the masses (Mills 2011: 150, 167)? It was argued, amongst other things, that social anthropology needed to be represented in teaching other than as a part of sociology. This activity was followed by the establishment of a ‘Committee on Anthropology in General Education’ which Stirling chaired, and which advocated close cooperation with the BSA. These were concerns that Stirling took with him to Kent, and which undoubtedly influenced the way in which he was to envisage developing the subject.

Meanwhile at Kent the Stirling group formed common purpose with the sociologists, some of whom had a specific interest and respect for anthropology: Ray Pahl (Cambridge then LSE, appointed 1965), Frank Parkin (appointed 1965, who had been taught anthropology by Paul at the LSE) and Derek Allcorn (Cambridge anthropology, PhD from Manchester, appointed 1966). All collaborated in the joint teaching of social theory. A good proportion of these new sociology members of staff had LSE connections even if they had no previous training in anthropology, for example Krishan Kumar (Political sociology at LSE, appointed Kent 1967) and Mary Evans (politics at LSE). Pahl and Davis were later to share an interest in the study of the informal economy of the UK. The courses taught at this time were part of integrated sociology degrees, with courses such as “non-industrial societies” and “peasant societies” being convened by the anthropologists. The links between social anthropology and sociology were also fostered through the appointment of external undergraduate examiners who had to demonstrate competence in both subjects. As a result, during this period Kent established close links with John Barnes, C.W. Williams, J. Clyde Mitchell, Joe Loudon and others, all teaching in sociology departments. Marie Corbin worked on research projects with both Ray Pahl and Derek Allcorn between 1968 and 1970, and both John and Marie Corbin had office space in the newly established CRISS, the Centre for Research in the Social Sciences. From the



beginning research students were part of the mix, some having transferred from the LSE. Some of the early PhD theses were registered as “Sociology”. By 1974, however, Kent was conferring social anthropology PhDs on candidates who had been registered as sociology students, the first of whom was John Corbin.

This early period, from 1966 through to about 1970, was one of intellectual fluidity and innovation at Kent. George Homans was a visiting professor during this period, and Marshall Sahlins spent time there during his Parisian sojourn, while he was working on themes that were to be published as *Stone Age Economics*. The transfer from LSE of a professor, two lecturers and a group of four PhD students all specialising in the Mediterranean immediately established Kent as a centre of research excellence in this field. This is a reputation it has maintained, though the actual numbers of Mediterraneanists have much fluctuated, and at one time seemed on course for extinction. A similar group at Sussex, specialising in the anthropology of Europe, under the tutelage of Freddy Bailey, were frequent guests at Kent seminars, and there early developed a fruitful “Kent-Sussex axis”. By 1966 Mediterranean anthropology was in full flow, still a newcomer to the discipline, bolstered by Stirling, John Davis, Pitt-Rivers, Freddy Bailey, Michael Kenny, Emrys Peters and John Peristiany. As Dresch and Ellen (2018: 125) put it, “Peristiany’s conferences in Athens were the highlight of the academic year for Mediterranean anthropologists, but Kent became a central place, and Mediterranean anthropology a kind of travelling house party”, a road show moving between dinners and social conferences in different evocative locations. In a tribute to John Davis, Michael Gilson observed how there was:

a real intellectual flowering and a kind of collective endeavour. Kent was the perfect setting ... Kent formed a kind of hub.

I don’t think that I have ever quite recaptured the atmosphere and stimulation of those conversations, meetings and conferences in Kent, Rome, Zaragoza, Galicia, so many places. Ernest Gellner added enormously to the engagements and felt a real link with Kent, Sydel Silverman and Eric Wolf became friends. Provocation, argument, and lots of food and drink, those were the rules. (M. Gilson, Memorial address, Oxford, 24 June 2017, p. 10: quoted in Dresch and Ellen 2018: 125)

The “hub” about which Gilson enthuses was arguably the initial creation of Stirling at Kent and Bailey at Sussex, connecting their respective Mediterraneanist and Europeanist research groups, but the organisational energy and zest for hospitality provided by John Davis made it work all the better. All told, the period initiated in 1965 at Kent might be said to represent the heyday of Mediterraneanist anthropology.

This then was the organisational and intellectual core, but developments in other parts of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kent were to augment this in interesting ways. John Kesby was appointed in 1971, having completed his D.Phil with Edwin Ardener at Oxford and having served three years teaching in Cambridge, for Kings’ and Newnham colleges. Kesby was the first appointment of an anthropologist (though still as a Lecturer in Sociology) who had experience of working in a tribal society, and in Africa, and who was not a Mediterraneanist. Having retired from the LSE several years previously, Lucy Mair also joined the team in 1971, teaching political anthropology, which she continued to do until her “second retirement” in 1980, largely co-teaching with first Davis and then Roy Ellen. It was partly in honour of “Lucy” that the Anthropology computing server was so named in 1986.

The decision by the Faculty of Social Sciences to develop interdisciplinary studies, consistent with the vision of the founding fathers, brought Henry Bernstein, a Marxist sociologist who had worked on Mau-Mau in Kenya. Another decision, to establish Southeast Asian studies, saw the arrival in 1971 of Jeremy Kemp. Kemp was another product of LSE, who specialised in rural social organisation in Thailand. Southeast Asian studies had been formally established several years earlier with the appointment of Dennis Duncanson, a Vietnam counter-insurgency expert, on the recommendation of Maurice Freedman, who had succeeded Firth as head of the Anthropology department at the LSE. This was in line with – though not funded by – the UK government Hayter scheme for strengthening regional studies. Bernstein and Kemp held half positions in sociology in addition to their specialist areas.

Not only was there a strong ethos of interdisciplinarity, there was also a great deal of cross-teaching which facilitated friendships with non-anthropologists. Although, to begin with, the anthropologists taught sociology courses that included components on non-industrial societies, the Board of Studies in Sociology (first established in 1971) began to teach separate social anthropology courses in 1972: Social Anthropology 1 (political and economic anthropology) and Social Anthropology 2 (ritual and belief). The Board officially became a Board of Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology (BOSSA) in 1973, and this coincided with the creation of specific degrees and courses in Social Anthropology and the establishment of more posts. Stirling initially chaired the BOSSA, followed by Nevill Colclough and John Davis, until Richard Scase took over in 1989. Given that the structure of the university gave these boards little strategic power or ability to allocate resources, the position of chairperson was widely regarded as a chore that research active senior members of staff might wish to avoid.

## Consolidation

Roy Ellen was appointed in 1973, Nanneke Redclift in 1974 and Jerry Eades in 1976, all to positions in social anthropology rather than sociology. The ethos of the founding fathers at Kent had been to form broad faculties as administrative and budgetary units. Within these were loose “Boards of Study” which organised teaching, and with staff distributed across the colleges in an interdisciplinary mix – each “a microcosm of the whole University” (Martin 1990: 130). With the expansion of Kent this became increasingly inconvenient, and Paul Stirling with the help of its then Master, Alec Whitehouse, engineered the gradual transfer of sociology and anthropology staff to Eliot College from the other colleges. The operative phrase was “subject concentration”.

These years were the golden period of cross-subject collaboration. Specific courses were designed and co-taught in research methods (with Ellen, Pahl and later Will Tyler, Marie Corbin and Nadia Lovell), urban anthropology and sociology (with Eades, Pahl, and Chris Pickvance), medical anthropology and sociology (with John Corbin and David Morgan) and development (Bernstein with various anthropologists). John Jervis, a sociologist whose postgraduate research had been on structuralism, regularly taught the course on ritual and belief during the late 1970s and 1980s. The Board of Studies also pioneered bridge courses with history (Davis, Colclough and Andrew Butcher) and with philosophy – “Understanding other cultures” (Davis, Anne Sellars and John Bousfield, but the brainchild of Paul Stirling). At the same time, the permissive teaching framework allowed for specialist curiosities such as John Davis’s “l’Année Sociologique” (required reading: *l’Année Sociologique*). Major research initiatives such as Ray Pahl’s project on the informal economy of Sheppey brought together

both anthropologists and sociologists (such as Nikki Goward and Claire Wallace), and the group displayed substantial evidence of serious scholarship and research across its specialist interests.

There was also time for levity. The intellectual gravity of all those efforts in subject-building were tempered by the occasional joint research seminar where colleagues were entertained by Derek Allcorn presenting advanced re-interpretations of Marx's *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in which "small-holding peasants" effortlessly became "Small-minded pedants", while Ernest Gellner, then editor of the *European Journal of Sociology*, could hold the press deadline to accommodate a faux-Marxist analysis of Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit and the Grundrisse*, by "Rosa and Charlie Parkin", for which it was claimed there could be no such thing as "an innocent reading". Frank Parkin, Rosa and Charlie's father, was later to draw on a caricature of the Kent anthropology scene when writing his comic novel *Krippendorf's Tribe* (1985), subsequently turned into a film, a story that incorporates characters loosely based on some of his erstwhile colleagues. John Davis also devised the simulation game "Potlatch" during the 1980s which instructively amused several cohorts of students. It was widely accepted at this time that Kent comprised a happy crew, had established a distinctive style, and had in some small way "made interdisciplinarity work". This was largely down to Paul's relaxed, generous and intelligent management style.

The retrenchment of the 1980s and the Thatcher years brought both advantages and disadvantages for anthropology at Kent. The Centre for Southeast Asian studies closed in 1988. This was largely due to the drop in the number of students wishing to study the subject, and withdrawal of government and university support as strategic interest in the region as a site of Cold War confrontation receded. Closure of the Centre brought Kemp wholly within the anthropology group, which also extended a welcome to Bill Watson. Watson had been appointed to Southeast Asian Studies in 1981 on the strength of his cross-disciplinary credentials, and an interest in history and literature, but thereafter brought these skills into anthropology. Meanwhile, cuts being made elsewhere in the university sector were to be of benefit. Kent anthropology performed well in the first national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which allowed it to successfully bid for staff transfers under the Thatcherite rationalisation programme. This led in 1989 to the return of John and Marie Corbin from the University of East Anglia. John transferred into a permanent position, while Marie chose a part-time option. Both sides of the Board of Studies expanded despite retrenchment because of their excellence in research, and to that extent the historic accommodation between social anthropology and sociology set in motion and overseen by Paul Stirling in the early years was still seen to be operating.

Another major development during these years was the establishment of the Centre for Computing and Social Anthropology (CSAC) in 1986 by John Davis, which for a while placed Kent at the forefront of innovations in computing applications that have now become standard throughout academia. Paul had for some time been interested in the potential of computing, but always reckoned that his own use of computers had been "a mess" (Shankland 2011: 20). Kent Anthropology had early (1969-72) initiated ground-breaking work in the area of computer applications, in an SSRC funded project "Computer applications to the analysis of local census materials in Southern Spain", in which Marie Corbin and Paul Stirling on the back of an SSRC grant had used the facilities of the Atlas Computer Centre at Didcot to reconstruct family and kinship data from census records. A decade later John Davis spent a year in Berkeley where he had been much impressed by the work of the Language Behavior Laboratory under the direction of Brent Berlin. He followed through this interest by appointing Michael Fischer in

1985 as Lecturer in Computing and Anthropology, tasked with putting Kent anthropology on the map of anthropological IT. During this period Kent Anthropology pioneered applications, both within the university and more broadly, that were later to become commonplace (bibliographic databases, email communication, text production) as well as specialist programs for handling kinship data. The first internet service began in November 1986 (three years before Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the World Wide Web), and the first web site was launched in May 1993, one of the first 400 web sites in the world. Much of this early work was reported in BICA, a "Bulletin of Information on Computing and Anthropology" (1984-1992), and CSAC was also to be involved in electronic publishing initiatives, such as the CSAC Monograph series (1990–2001). With the departure of Davis in 1990, Fischer succeeded as director of CSAC (later to be appointed Professor of Anthropological Sciences), and the work of the Centre was much invigorated with the arrival of David Zeitlyn in 1995. At this time, CSAC led a consortium of UK universities developing the HEFCE-funded "Experience-rich Anthropology" (ERA) project to enhance the teaching and learning of the subject through the provision of a variety of online materials and applications. In hindsight it is difficult to grasp the significance of these initiatives, which were considered obscure and nerdy by many during the mid-1980s, but are now taken so much for granted.

Paul Stirling himself was not a natural when it came to the new technologies of scholarship, but his sound judgment of their potential curiously placed him in the vanguard. His films for the Open University were exemplary of their kind, not aesthetically modulated "ethnographic films", but an extremely effective use of the medium to produce clear pedagogic instruments. We have seen how, in the early seventies, he collaborated with Marie Corbin on the computer analysis of census materials; and after he retired, he worked increasingly closely with Michael Fischer on the Stirling CD-ROM. Inspired by Firth's assertion of the importance of the 'anthropological record', Stirling took this one step further to produce a fully-contextualised multi-media package of his entire Turkish output: films, photographs, fieldnotes and published work. The finished result will be a technically innovative and eminently fitting memorial.

In retrospect, one of Stirling's major contributions to the analysis of rural society was in relation to social change and what we might now call "complexity theory". This had long been an interest of his, relating to his problems in locating "structure" and causality, but it was not until the dust had settled after his work in establishing sociology and anthropology at Kent, and when he had the time for more fieldwork in 1970, that he was in a position to reflect on the speed of change in his Turkish villages, and the new set of analytical issues that this engendered (Shankland 2011: 15). These he explored further in joint fieldwork with Emine İncirlioğlu and Mehmet Arıkan in 1985 and through reflections which were to pre-occupy him for the rest of his life, which were rehearsed in a key essay published by him in a festschrift to honour Lucy Mair (Stirling 1974), itself the leitmotif for a volume of celebratory essays edited by Chris Hann (1994). But Paul's interest in social change was never purely academic. It translated, almost instinctively — catalysed by a humanist temperament and self-identification as a non-Marxist "left wing" "do-gooder"— into a concern for applied anthropology. This may in part have hampered his preferment professionally. Though not a career development consultant, he insisted on forging links between policy-makers, planners and anthropologists, even when it was politically incorrect to do so. He was the energy and moral presence behind the professionalisation of applied anthropology in the UK, founding and inspiring the Group for Anthropology in Policy and Practice (GAPP) in the early eighties (e.g., Stirling 1983), and overseeing its transformation in 1988 into the British Association for Anthropology in Policy and Practice (Mills 2011: 128). An abiding concern of Paul's was with anthropologists unable to find academic posts. GAPP provided a focus for revitalising old debates about application

and nurtured new sub-disciplinary fields (see e.g., Grillo 1994, Pink 2006, Wright 2006). Given these examples, we should perhaps note that both Ralph Grillo and Sue Wright had long been close associates of Stirling, while Sarah Pink was a student and researcher at Kent working with John Corbin and Ray Pahl.

### **Changing departmental structures: cracks in the Stirling model**

Paul Stirling retired in 1984 and died in 1998. During this period the growth of both anthropology and sociology, staff departures and the tragic and untimely deaths of close sociology colleagues (Derek Allcorn, Steven Box and Christine Marsh), as well as new arrivals, began to fundamentally alter the character of Kent Anthropology. Frank Parkin moved to Magdalene College Oxford to teach political sociology with Stephen Lukes, Ray Pahl moved to Essex as a research professor, Richard Scase into the new Kent Business School, and Henry Bernstein to the School of Oriental and African Studies and thereafter to the Open University. In 1990 John Davis, who had by then been elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy, left to succeed Rodney Needham as Professor of Anthropology at Oxford and to head the Institute of Social Anthropology. Davis, who later went on to become Warden of All Souls College, claimed to have been “made at Kent”. At an institutional level too, 1960s interdisciplinarity was beginning to look tired. It was stretching at the seams, and was out of kilter with a renewed political emphasis on disciplines required as part of emerging forms of audit culture in higher education nationally. Kent, therefore, began a process of full “departmentalisation”. Interdisciplinary studies at Kent, as a consequence, finally collapsed as a subject and as a pedagogic ideal, not under the weight of its inner intellectual contradictions and conflicting virtues (methodological or otherwise), but because students were not attracted to its superficial amorphousness and perceived deficit of “rigour” (would it get them a job?). At the same time, interdisciplinary studies defied convenient administration at the university level, while for the UK government it was problematic given the straight-jacket imposed by politically-driven research assessment (Reason 1977, Strathern 2004).

The Board of Studies of Sociology and Social Anthropology was replaced in 1993 by a Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, and its foundation more-or-less coincided with the arrival of John Davis’ professorial successor – Chris Hann. These developments immediately provided the basis for new teaching and research initiatives. Hann, an admirer of the Stirling legacy, sought its continuation, and indeed in 1994 the Department launched the inaugural Stirling lecture series in Paul’s honour. The 1990s also saw the establishment of undergraduate degrees involving exchanges with universities in Spain, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, reflecting the university’s claim to being the UK’s “European University”. In a different vein, Roy Ellen’s work in ecological and environmental anthropology during the 1980s, and the appointment of Laura Rival in 1994, provided the capacity to initiate new graduate programmes in this area, and research focussed on the Centre for Biocultural Diversity, especially in ethnobotany through collaboration with the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. The establishment of the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) in 1989 led to some joint teaching, and this would provide one of the rationales for the subsequent merger of the two groups.

The work of Ellen in human ecology, and the strong “four field” interests of Michael Fischer and John Corbin also led to a momentous decision during the 1990s to broaden the scope of Kent anthropology, by introducing a BSc programme. Ellen had been teaching a course on

“Ecology and evolution” since 1987, and the combination of Fischer’s teaching of quantitative and scientific approaches and the development of an entirely new Part 1 course on “The foundations of human culture” served as a plausible basis to get this off the ground. Available teaching competence was augmented by part-time staff, in much the same way as Robin Fox had introduced part-time teachers such as Michael Day and John Napier at the LSE in the late 1960s. However, this programme was not on a completely firm footing until the appointment of Sarah Elton in 1999. Indeed, it was a struggle to staff this programme in the early years, but there was a major step-change in 2003 when although Kent lost Sarah Elton to the York-Hull Medical School and then Durham, it was able to make more appointments in the area of evolutionary and biological anthropology.

Changes in the composition of the Department had by 1997 created tensions between sociology and anthropology, and a place that had previously acquired a strong reputation as a “happy” department was now less so. By this time Hann was on leave of absence at Halle where he would take up the position as Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, and a disappointing performance in the 1997 RAE provided another opportunity for a radical change. This came in the form of the departure of the sociology group to form a new department with Social Policy, and a merger of the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) with the Anthropology group, to create an entirely new and innovative entity, in the form of the Department of Anthropology. Thus, although at a stroke this undermined a major plank in the Stirling vision, for the first time since its appearance at Kent in the mid-1960s Anthropology had the visibility of an independent organisational unit. In the years preceding this move, the development of a strong interest in environmental issues gave a natural overlap with the mission of DICE. DICE’s founding ethos accepted that effective conservation initiatives necessitated a role for social science, as well as sound biological groundwork. At the same time, there was a shared strong fieldwork ethos in both units, an orientation that had strained DICE’s relations with Biosciences (of which it had previously been part).

There were changes too within social anthropology at this time. The brief incumbency of John Clammer as a replacement for Chris Hann was swiftly followed by the appointment of Roger Just, who moved to Kent from Melbourne. With the arrival of Just, Southern Europe and the Mediterranean returned as a significant area of interest. As part of other organisational rationalisations within the university, Glenn Bowman moved into Anthropology in 1998 from Humanities, where he had been a lecturer in communications and image studies since 1990.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century Kent anthropology consolidated its position in terms of three broad groupings: social and cultural anthropology, ethnobiology and environmental anthropology, and biological anthropology. By 2013 these had morphed into three organisational “pillars”: socio-cultural anthropology, human ecology (to link with the conservation social science emphasis of DICE) and biological anthropology. Significant investments had been made in other areas, for example in establishing a cross-disciplinary Centre for Ethnographic Research. Academic staff expansion continued. The arrival of Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, Matt Hodges, David Henig, and subsequently João de Pina-Cabral from Lisbon in 2012 as Professor of Social Anthropology and Head of School, reinforced further the position of Kent in the field of Southern European anthropology. The Mediterranean tradition was maintained, but by then this core focus in the Department had ended.

As a founding father of the University of Kent, Paul Stirling was in the enviable position of being able to more-or-less create sociology and anthropology in his own image. As we have seen, the history of Kent anthropology is largely the history of decisions made by Paul in the

early days and their consequences. Indeed, his vision of humane, sceptical and empirically-based enquiry shaped the subjects as they developed at that institution. However, although the composition and ethos of early anthropology at Kent reflected Stirling's vision and personal qualities, there were inner contradictions. The consequences of his own open-minded approach to appointments and tolerance of opposing views might be seen as a weakness, especially when combined with the trajectory whereby new generations seemingly devour those who appoint them. At the same time, the vision was obstructed by periodic top-down university organisational restructuring in response to financial and academic accounting. This ultimately led to the creation of a very different kind of anthropology, but nevertheless one which could respect the values and norms that made it possible.

In this paper, as well as paying homage to the work and influence of Paul Stirling, I have tried to show how a minority and fringe subject could develop within the atmosphere of the new British universities of the 1960s, and how networking and personal influence could modulate the character of a department and academic community. It is difficult to imagine how much of this would be possible today in an era of audit culture, large faceless appointment committees, and university bureaucracies bound by rules of ethical procedure to mitigate bias, such as deliberate and routine anonymisation. Stirling's academic world (arguably appropriate for a social anthropologist researching a small-scale society) was itself to a considerable extent a small-scale oral community and uncompromisingly negotiated through personal interaction. Deprecating in the extreme and full of doubts about his own research and writing, and suffering bouts of depression, Stirling was a conscientious intellectual and personal mentor to staff he appointed, but might have found it difficult to survive the newest UK university dispensation himself. Scrupulously honest, he speaks to us today with a candour rare amongst those who have reputations to protect, and this honesty may well have become a liability which biased the judgment of those around him and hampered his own academic career. Always a healthy sceptical presence in seminars, he condemned dogma of all kinds and was a fully paid-up member of the awkward squad. More than anything else perhaps, he constantly reminded us that there was a real world outside the Academy. It might seem strange that someone like myself has written this account, perhaps especially because I have subsequently moved into fields of enquiry in which Stirling asserted his incompetence — cultural cognition on the one hand and human ecology on the other — but I am grateful to Paul for providing me with a comfort-zone in which I could explore my own doubts at a time when I was establishing my own career.

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