Memorial for John Brian Harley, Professor of Geography, UW-Milwaukee

John Brian Harley was born on July 4, 1932, in Bristol, England and died of a massive heart attack on December 20, 1991. He had been a member of the UW-Milwaukee faculty and the Geography Department since August 1986. Prior to joining our faculty Brian held academic positions at the Universities of Birmingham, Liverpool, and Exeter, England.

Brian, who preferred to use his middle name, was both a highly respected and internationally recognized scholar in the field of the History of Cartography, and a dynamic and warm individual, who loved and enjoyed life to its fullest and who had a passion for research.

Brian’s academic background included a BA, Ph.D. and a Doctor of Letters degrees from the University of Birmingham, and a Diploma in Education from Oxford University. He was a recipient of numerous honors including the Cadbury Prize in Geography, and the Medal of the British Cartographic Society "For Contributions to Cartography." He was also the holder of a number of prestigious fellowships. Among the more notable were elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London; Post Doctoral Fellow at the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University; Fellow at the Herman Dunlap Smith Center for the History of Cartography, Newberry Library, Chicago; Daniels Research Fellowship of the American Antiquarian Society; and Fellow at the Center for Twentieth Century Studies at UW-Milwaukee.

The importance and originality of Brian’s scholarship was recognized through numerous personal research grants and attested to by being the recipient of research grants from the British Academy; the Social Science Research Council; the Marc Fitch Fund; the Ordnance Survey; the Royal Commission on Historical Movements; the Royal Society; the British Council; the Waldorf Astor Trust; and the Research Funds of the Universities of Liverpool and Exeter.

The most extensive research project in which Brian was involved at the time of his death was the six volume History of Cartography, of which he was co-author with Professor David Woodward of UW-Madison. As co-author Brian, in his own words, "shared in the conceptualisation" of the History of Cartography. He was also involved in the acquisition of research grants which for the first two volumes exceeded two million dollars. The sources of those funds were NEH; NSF; the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the National Geographic Society; the Henry Luce Foundation; the Japan Foundation and others.

When Brian arrived in 1986, he brought the History of Cartography project to UW-Milwaukee. Soon he initiated new projects drawing on the rich research materials found in the UW-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Collection. These included the Columbus project (funded by NEH, the Spanish Cultural Foundation, Rand McNally, and UW-Milwaukee Foundation), and the Indian and Inuit Maps project (funded by NEH). He then established the Office of Map History to coordinate the various research projects. He also continued his earlier work on Maps as Ideology, and on new volumes of the ten-volume edition of the Ordnance Survey Old Series Maps of England and Wales 1805-1870 (the first five volumes having been published already).
Judging Brian only in terms of his work at UW-Milwaukee, it is fair to say that he was so tremendously productive that he accomplished more in these five years than many people do in their lifetimes.

As an established scholar, Brian was always called upon to render professional service. He served as editor, consultant editor, member of editorial boards, or consultant for over 20 publications and organizations, including: Cambridge Studies in Historical Society Handbook on Maps; The Map Collector; North American Exploration (a ten volume collection of original essays); Terra Cognita (a Washington based TV consortium, producing a program on "The Mapping of North America"); and Imago Mundi, Ltd. (as director) which manages the Journal of the International Society for the History of Cartography, etc. He also served as officer or member of some 15 professional organizations in Europe and North America.

Brian's most important achievements have been left for future generations in his publications. In total, Brian authored or co-authored about 140 articles, most in prestigious or highly specialized journals, and numerous manuscripts, including about a dozen on British Ordnance Survey Maps; he also coedited 30 articles in Historical Geography and Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography and wrote over 90 book reviews. His most recent publications include the first volume of the History of Cartography, which received the "Best Book in the Humanities" award for 1987; the second volume coming out in two parts this spring; and the recently published Maps and the Columbian Encounter (UW-Milwaukee, Golda Meir Library).

Scholarly achievements of this scope are hard to match or replace. So Brian's death is an enormous loss to the field of Geography and the History of Cartography. It also leaves a great void at UW-Milwaukee and in the AGS collection, which provided rich research materials for Brian and his students.

Having recognized Brian's achievements as a scholar, a few words need to be said about him as a person. Brian spent his entire life, until 1986, in England and he retained very close ties to his homeland, returned there as often as he could, and showed no signs of losing either his English accent, nor the mannerisms of an Englishman. He maintained especially close ties to the county of Devonshire, where he spent many years of his life. He loved the English countryside, and English poetry, literature, and regional "folk" music.

For us, he was a colleague with a dynamic personality, who readily shared his great knowledge and his deep intellect, as well as his warm personality and sense of humor. Though highly recognized and respected, he did not have an inflated sense of his own importance and disliked pompousness. He enlivened the department and we enjoyed and appreciated him for who he was and what he was doing. Brian will be greatly missed not only by his colleagues and friends, but also by his students, because he truly cared for them, both professionally and personally, and treated them as friends. He was an inspiration to them, as he was to anyone who met him.

Prof. Sona Andrews
Prof. Barbara Borowiecki
Prof. Michael Day