



OBITUARY: GEOFF EASTON (1943-2023)

It is with great sadness that we announce that Geoff Easton passed away peacefully at home on Sunday 5th March 2023.

Geoff's first degree was a BSc in Chemistry at the University of Bristol. He worked several years in the corporate world including a stint at Rank Xerox where he experienced and allegedly acquired a scepticism for corporate planning. He obtained a postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies at Manchester Business School in 1969 and subsequently embarked on a PhD at London Business School whilst teaching part-time at Kingston Polytechnic.

Geoff moved to Lancaster University as a Lecturer in Marketing in 1973, where he would spend the rest of his academic career. He completed his PhD in 1976 with a thesis entitled *Patterns of Industrial Buying*. In 1982, Prentice-Hall published his first book entitled *Learning from Case Studies* which remains a reference in case study pedagogy. In the same year, Geoff got hold a copy of the original IMP book soon after its publication. By the academic year 1982-83, the main ideas in the book were taught in a postgraduate course on Organizational Buying Behaviour.

In 1983 Geoff was awarded a large research grant by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to study the forming of a local supply network for a large offshore gas project, the Morecambe gas field. Two years later, together with two Lancaster colleagues, Geoff received another major ESRC

grant as part of a UK Competitiveness Initiative. A book entitled *Managers and Competition* came out of this project and was published by Blackwell in 1993.

Geoff first attended the IMP Conference in 1985, having missed the inaugural conference in September of 1984 as he had attended an Industrial Marketing Forum organised by the Stockholm School of Economics and the Marketing Technology Centre in Stockholm a month earlier. Geoff is known for his early work on industrial networks and was a co-editor with Björn Axelsson of *Industrial Networks; A New View of Reality* (Routledge, 1992). This landmark volume was republished in 2018 as part of the Routledge Revival series. Later Geoff pioneered a critical realist approach to understanding industrial networks, using the case research method to reveal the everyday practices of managers working to build relations and business-to-business markets.

Geoff barely missed an IMP conference between 1985 and 2010, the year of his retirement. He greatly enjoyed the conferences and enthused about their informal and supportive atmosphere. Geoff was an attentive and interested listener during conference sessions, always asking gently probing and encouraging questions. Geoff's supervision of doctoral students and support for early career researchers became legendary at Lancaster and further afield. Many of his doctoral students turned into regular attendees and organisers of IMP conferences and journal seminars. He described IMP as his 'intellectual home' and often collaborated with IMP colleagues in research and writing projects.

In early 1988 Geoff took up a short-term visiting position at the Stockholm School of Economics. That stay sparked a cycle of regular visits to the Nordic countries where he could often be found attending seminars or serving as opponent in doctoral dissertations. Geoff was just as enthusiastic a host as he was a visitor. Lancaster visitors were treated to the delights of the surrounding countryside, including remote pubs and beer festivals, or even introduced to fell walking in his beloved Lake District.

In the latter stages of his career Geoff received an Advanced Institute of Management (AIM) Fellowship to study the interaction between managers and management researchers and became a member of the Council of the Society of Advanced Management Studies (SAMS), a charity established to provide a governance structure for the *Journal of Management Studies*.

Geoff was an extraordinary academic and individual, who will be hugely missed by colleagues in the IMP community. Our lives were enriched for working, collaborating with, or simply having interacted with him. We will remember him as a scholar, a kind individual, and a loyal and trusted friend to many.

Luis Araujo, Lars-Erik Gadde, Debbie Harrison, Håkan Håkansson, Katy Mason and Lars-Gunnar Mattsson