

Reminiscing

1. I was practicing my hockey dribbling on the parade square in Aden ('yes' "Mad Mitch" and co, though I was in the more sober Royal Engineers) when a book arrived. It was an 'A to Z' of possible careers. I had always been interested in buildings but found the concern of architects, too narrow. 'M', 'N', 'O', 'P'; by now I was becoming despondent. Then 'T'; town planning. I read, re-read and re-re-read. This was the job for me! All I needed was more 'O' grades (I only had two) and Highers (I had none). I left the army "to get an education", studied intensively at Telford College in Edinburgh for a year, got three Highers and three more 'O' grades, applied for the only undergraduate town planning course in Scotland – Heriot-Watt (at that time there were only two others in Britain, in Newcastle and Manchester). Tony Travis and Ron Cameron interviewed me. I spoke of George Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London (urban poverty) as the reason I wanted to be a town planner. Months later, I was sitting in the lecture room in Manor Place, Tony Travis was delivering an introductory evening lecture on town planning, majestic in scope, difficult to comprehend at first, with pictures from Alexander's *Community and Privacy* among many others. I was riveted. Five years later, I got my 2:1 and was launched into the world of practice.



"No, not on the parade ground in Aden but instead, at the Grange cricket ground, behind Raeburn Place in Edinburgh, home of the hockey club, Edinburgh Northern. I played for Inverleith Nomads but this is about playing in the Scottish Eastern District trials."

2. Cockermouth and Maryport in West Cumbria are gems of towns. The former has a medieval central street pattern. Maryport is a grid-iron form. The former used to have Jennings Brewery in the lea of its modest castle. The latter was famed for sideways ship launching and later, to having the highest rate of unemployment during the inter-war depression. Conservation was being used to raise the image of both towns, as a seedbed to possible future private investment. One day, in Cockermouth's Prospect Park, I could see down, on to the scaffolding supporting the historic frontages of Market Place. Conservation grants were being used to reinforce the structure of the buildings while housing funds were paying for new accommodation, to give life back to this part of the town. It was an early (and successful) attempt to combine town planning with public expenditure decisions. Allerdale's chief planner, Frank Wilson, empowered his young town planners!

Conservation measures as a basis for local plans: the experience of Cockermouth and Maryport. Planning Outlook (1979) Vol. 22, pp 52-59. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00320717908711578>

3. I was driving in my Taylor Woodrow car from Sheffield back to home in Reading, called to check how things were... "You have a telegram from the Malawi High Commission." A Strathclyde MBA a decade after my 2:1 and four years of trying to break into the international development business had yielded my first DFID (then ODA) roster-based break. Two months after the contract was signed, we were flying to Africa, wondering what on earth we had given up (both full-time pensionable work) and what on earth we were letting ourselves in for professionally. I never knew at the time of appointment but it transpired that the three previous Malawian cities' town clerks had been arrested for alleged corruption charges, were dismissed after a weekend in jail, with all pension rights removed. The life president, HE Kamuzu Banda, then approached the British to provide new chief executives. I almost resigned after the first year (political resentment), realized how much had been achieved after leave and the birth of my first child (in Glasgow), continued for another two years and was invited to return for three years more, to replicate the Lilongwe 'urban management' model in the other two cities. I resigned after two, having started my PhD work in the light of the clear innovations in practice, was funded by DFID to complete the PhD studies full-time for a year, and graduated a decade after my MBA, again from Strathclyde. Two years later, the edited version of my PhD appeared as Institutional Development followed a decade later as a re-print; City Management.

Institutional development: a Third World city management perspective. St Martin's Press, New York, NY (January 1997) and Macmillan Press, Basingstoke (November 1996), 310 pp. <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781349250738>

4. The UN conveys an image of good intentions and mediocre management. I had been a freelance consultant for three years (which I hated but managed to work in India's Hyderabad, Nepal's Katmandu, Latvia's stunning Riga and Azerbaijan's beautiful old Baku), considering that at 50, I would "never get a proper job again". Yet another opportunity appeared, I applied, had to abort one telephone interview while in transit in New Delhi, managed to keep (by then) my four children out of the workroom (the rest born in Livingston), laced my second 'phone interview with hard edged evidence of practice and a little humour, to finally being stunned by a job offer, in New York! Whatever else, I was and remain eternally grateful to the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) for that rescue. Two months later (again), I was on the plane to New York City, found accommodation, and got the family in a couple months after that. Already I had been on missions to my first project formulation country, Eritrea!

5. "Don't I need a flak-jacket to go there?" I asked with a certain seriousness. "The peace treaty was signed last year. Don't worry!" I flew with bated breath. I found the plane from Frankfurt filled with Eritreans. It was the diaspora, returning to celebrate the first anniversary of peace with the Ethiopians. It was a particularly savage affair, that war. Approximately 3.5 million were fighting the potential of over 70 million Ethiopians. During a public meeting with stakeholders in Keren, the capital of the region that the programme of practical decentralisation, local government strengthening and community-supported local development was to take place, we were questioned about the concepts of participation being suggested. "But we can mobilize at any time" referring to their previous war effort. Later, drinking with some of the young officials from the regional administration, we heard about the battles over Keren Pass, how the Eritreans lay in their trenches, looking at the sun-kissed horizon, waiting for the Ethiopians to appear. They were sitting targets. They "kept coming, with such blind courage!". These young men, who just over a year ago, were fighting for their national survival, and recounting how their trigger fingers swelled because of the heat generated by the incessant firing, were now talking about community-supported local development and their ambitions for their region. The added poignancy was to go to the Italian and British war cemeteries in Keren, to see the ages and names of soldiers who fell in the previous battle of Keren Pass in World War II. Returning to Asmara, before flying back to New York, I walked around that beautiful little city. It's like a 1950s Mediterranean town, with a strong Italian architectural and urban design influence.



This was the UNCDF core team in Eritrea, with me second left. The Eritreans were utterly charming and managed to retain that character, despite the Draconian regime they lived under.

6. UNCDF is the only UN agency mandated to invest in the UN defined Least Developed Countries. There were 50 of them. UNCDF prides itself in generating innovative solutions to the intractable problem of local government capacity building and resulting local development. My contribution to such solutions was the advocacy and application of performance budgeting. **Achieving results: performance budgeting in the least developed countries**. United Nations Capital Development Fund, New York (2006), 234 pp. http://www.focusintl.com/RBM132-uncdf_pbb-july2006.pdf

In my eight years in New York, I had the pleasure to work in Tanzania (where I had lived and worked previously for three years) and among others, Bhutan, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Sudan, perversely, Armenia and ironically, Yemen! One time, in Sana'a airport, where the security checks can be rigorous, I clutched my blue UN passport. Coming through the security screen, the uniformed gentlemen asked me if I was in the UN? "Yes" I answered nervously, thinking I was about to be taken to one side and questioned. He didn't. He simply put his hand to his heart and acknowledged (by implication and smile) that I must be doing something good. It was a moving moment, one I shall never forget, not only because I retain a pride in knowing that I worked for the UN (despite all the nonsense associated with a massive bureaucracy, which there is, realizing that if the institution didn't exist, it would have to be invented) but also, that the 'moment' happened in Yemen, the country where I first read about town planning, after practicing my hockey dribbling, on that parade square in Aden.