

2017-10-23 Complete

## Michael Hebbert

**Hall, Sir Peter Geoffrey** (1932–2014), geographer and town planner, was born on 19 March 1932 in New End Hospital, Hampstead, London, the elder son of Arthur Vickers Hall (1885–1973), clerical officer with the Pensions Service, and his wife Bertha, *née* Keefe (1901–1979). At the time of his birth registration his parents lived at 51 Fairholme Road, West Kensington, but in 1940 the family relocated to Blackpool. Hall entered Blackpool Grammar School in 1943, winning a scholarship to St Catharine's College, Cambridge, in 1950. Having completed the geographical tripos in 1953 with double first-class honours he was awarded a further scholarship to pursue a PhD on the location of industry in London from 1851 to 1939, under the supervision of the historical geographer Clifford Thorpe Smith.

Hall left Cambridge before completing his doctoral thesis and spent a brief unhappy spell as a civil servant at the Board of Trade. It convinced him of his vocation as a professional geographer. In 1956 he joined the staff of Birkbeck College, University of London, teaching the geography of Germany and the British Isles in the evenings and working by day to complete his research on London industries in the Reading Room of the British Museum. His doctorate was awarded in 1959 and he went on to publish an updated version of the thesis as *The Industries of London Since 1861* (1962), the first of many explorations of regional economic change and its causality. Its coverage of London's postwar industrial location control and land use planning immediately developed into a second book, an essay in futurology. Written in his thirtieth year, *London 2000* (1963) gave several intimations of what was to come. From its title page to its novelistic conclusion, the monograph displayed the author's taste for plain English, and a literary fluency that he later ascribed to the discipline of writing weekly essays for the critical judgement of his Cambridge tutor A.A.L. (Gus) Caesar. He took it as a compliment to find the book reviewed as 'academic journalism' (*London 2000*, second edition, 1969, 15), for it launched Hall's parallel career as a public intellectual. He wrote weekly for *New Society* from its first issue in 1963 to its demise in 1987. Taking over the journal *Built Environment* in 1978, he transformed it into an illustrated quarterly offering an accessible digest of an issue of the day. He remained a regular provider of copy to weekly and monthly deadlines until his death.

## Career as planner

*London 2000* deployed geographical data and techniques to argue a case about town and country planning. The pursuit of applied geography—another principle Hall ascribed to Gus Caesar—led to a further career strand as expert planner. In 1966 he joined the South East Regional Planning Council, playing an active role until its abolition by Margaret Thatcher in 1979. He promoted the cause of spatial strategy as a founder-member of the Regional Studies Association in 1965 and founder-editor of its journal, *Regional Studies*, the following year. His book *World Cities* (1966) showed London and the home counties in a comparative light alongside other giant metropolises steered—advertently or otherwise—by strategic decisions on land use and transport. Another contribution to the nascent scientific literature was a first English translation of the seminal German locational theory of 1826, *Von Thünen's Isolated State* (1966).

This translation was made with his wife Carla Maria Wartenberg (b. 1934) during the amicable dissolution of their four-year marriage (the daughter of Frank Wartenberg, merchant, she had married Hall on 7 September 1962). On 13 February 1967 Hall married, secondly, Magdalena Mróz (b. 1940/1), a graduate in English philology (from Warsaw), philosophy (from Uppsala), and psychology (from University College, London), and daughter of Anthony Mróz, lawyer. Magda Hall would henceforth be a much-acknowledged collaborator in all his projects. There were no children of either marriage.

In 1966 Hall had left Birkbeck and joined the London School of Economics as reader in geography. Here he created an innovative one-year master's programme for a new breed of modern planner, grounded in economic, spatial, and policy analysis. On the research front he won funding from the Leverhulme Trust to direct a four-year investigation at Political and Economic Planning (PEP) into the operation and effectiveness of the system established under the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, linked to a parallel American study at Resources for the Future in Washington DC.

In 1968 Hall was awarded the Gill memorial prize of the Royal Geographical Society and appointed professor of geography and head of department at the University of Reading. He transformed this traditional discipline-based department into an internationally esteemed centre for applied research, leading from the front with his two-volume PEP project, *The Containment of Urban England* (1973), and the companion study, authored with Marion

Clawson, *Planning and Urban Growth: An Anglo-American Comparison* (1973). He brought in Michael Batty to build capability in computerised modelling of urban systems, while extending his own empirically grounded analysis to the continental geography of cities and regions in *Europe 2000* (1977), a book that won the Bentinck prize as an outstanding contribution to European integration.

Hall also worked at several levels on the theory of planning in a mixed economy, authoring both a standard textbook, *Urban and Regional Planning* (1974), and a quirky analysis of policy failure, *Great Planning Disasters* (1980). As an authority on the entrepreneurial industries of nineteenth-century London, Hall was alert to the rôle of laissez-faire in economic growth, recognizing the absence of private enterprise as a factor in the economic and demographic decline of Britain's industrial cities. His remedy—regeneration through enterprise zones—would be implemented after 1979 by the incoming Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher.

Hall's international research for *Great Planning Disasters* had taken him to the University of California at Berkeley, where he established an immediate rapport with the Department of City and Regional Planning. In 1980, while continuing to hold Reading's headship of geography, he accepted an appointment to Berkeley's chair in planning. This unusual arrangement, involving six-month sojourns on either side of the Atlantic, stimulated some of his greatest work. Lectures to city planning students within the Berkeley College of Environmental Design crystallised into his most popular teaching text, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (1988). The seethingly innovative environment around the Californian campus reactivated his original fascination with economic geography: *Silicon Landscapes* (1985), edited with Ann Markusen, addressed ~~investigated~~ the agglomeration effect of science parks; he collaborated with Ann Markusen and Amy Glasmeier in *High-Tech America: The What, How, Where and Why of the Sunrise Industries* (1986), and with Scott Campbell and Sabine Dietrich in *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (1991). The shifting geography of American industry presaged wider changes in the world economy. With his Reading colleagues Hall undertook parallel studies along the M4 corridor west of London, published as *Western Sunrise: Genesis and Growth of Britain's High Tech Corridor* (1987). A collaboration with his Berkeley colleague Manuel Castels went some way towards a global study of emerging information technology clusters, *Technopoles of the World* (1994). As always, he was looking for patterns in time as well as space, revisiting the historical-cycle

theories of Nikolai Kondratieff and Joseph Schumpeter in his book *The Carrier Wave* (1988) with Paschal Preston, and the evolutionary perspective of Lewis Mumford in his largest and most ambitious work, a study of the urban milieu of innovation through 2,500 years of human history, *Cities in Civilization* (1996). But where Mumford had echoed the pessimism of Oswald Spengler, Hall's narrative was written in celebration of the continual rebirth of creativity in the world's great cities.

Hall had left Berkeley in 1992, four years before *Cities in Civilization* was published. Back in London he had taken on leadership—as chairman then president—within the long-established pressure group, the Town and Country Planning Association, as well as a national policy role in the UK as special adviser to Michael Heseltine, Conservative secretary of state for the environment, shaping government policy towards London's Docklands, the industrial and port corridor of the Thames estuary, and the imminent high-speed rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel. Knighted in 1998, he had become the nation's best-known town planner. His academic position on returning to Britain at the age of sixty was not in a department of geography but the chair of planning in the Bartlett School at University College, London, formerly held by (among others) Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Sir William Holford.

## **Later works**

Establishment status did not blunt Hall's critical faculties or policy radicalism. He was uncompromisingly averse to what architects and developers might term 'intensification' but which he called 'town cramming'. He held firm to the view first articulated in *London 2000* (1963) that the growth of a great metropolitan area is best managed at a regional scale by a combination of controls and incentives, so that settlements of liveable density take shape as beads on the string of transport infrastructure. He collaborated with the anarchist writer Colin Ward to update Sir Ebenezer Howard's Garden City manifesto for modern times in *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (1998). His advocacy was supported by renewed research into the towns and cities of continental Europe, a topic he had previously investigated at Reading in *Growth Centres in the European Urban System* (1980), with Dennis Hay. With funding from the European Commission he undertook a substantial comparative study of mega-city regions joint-authored with Kathryn Pain as *The Polycentric Metropolis* (2006). This line of work was to culminate in one of his last books, the

evocatively-titled *Good Cities, Better Lives: How Europe Rediscovered the Lost Art of Urbanism* (2014).

Meanwhile Hall had also renewed his original research interest in London. Funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and research collaborations with the London School of Economics and the University of Essex resulted in two works, the empirically-based *Working Capital* (2002, edited by Nick Buck) and a powerful compilation of oral testimonies, *London Voices, London Lives* (2007). Over the years Hall's greatest practical influence on his own home town had been through the transport infrastructures he helped to conceive and deliver—the M25, the channel tunnel rail link, the overground, and Crossrail. Much of the research activity of his last two decades related to transport infrastructure and its potential as—in a favourite phrase borrowed from the statistician Colin Clark—‘the maker and breaker of cities’. Among many other topics, Hall investigated the contribution of mobility to polycentric urban patterns; the transformative effect of Europe's growing high-speed rail network; and the railways' part in the contrasted histories of London and Paris. His last funded research project was a €24.4 million study of the integration of trams with trains in five regions of northern Europe, and his final published paper was a cross-channel comparison of British and French high-speed trains.

Defying prostate cancer, Hall kept up a full programme of research, writing, and speaking until the week of his death from a sudden heart infection at University College Hospital on 30 July 2014. His body was cremated after a secular celebration of his life at Mortlake Crematorium, to musical interludes of his own choosing. The ashes were buried in Highgate Cemetery. He was survived by Magda, his wife and collaborator.

Peter Hall was remembered for being exceptionally cogent and prolific in every register—books, reports, scholarly papers, popular journalism. His writings were extensively reprinted and translated. Colleagues also recalled his engaging presence as a speaker, whether to his fortunate students at home or to audiences around the world. An avid traveller, he once estimated that he was averaging 70,000 miles a year. His seminal contributions to geography and planning were rewarded in fourteen honorary doctorates as well as fellowships of the Royal Town Planning Institute (1975), the British Academy (1983), and the Royal Institute of British Architects (2000), the Town and Country Planning Association's Ebenezer Howard memorial medal (1999), and the Prix Vautrin Lud of the International Geography Festival (2001). The honour of highest financial value was the Balzan prize awarded by the

Fondazione Internazionale Balzan for his work on the 'social and cultural history of cities since the beginning of the 16th century' (2005). After his death his endlessly knowledgeable advocacy of rail travel received a fitting accolade in the naming of a London Overground five-car train set as 'Professor Sir Peter Hall'. In the concluding words of his *Financial Times* obituary (1 Aug 2014), 'humane, humorous, hugely knowledgeable and internationally respected, Hall was the urbanest of urbanists'.

## Sources

*Guardian* (21 June 2007)

obituary, UCL website, 31 July 2014, [www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0714/Peter\\_Hall](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0714/Peter_Hall), accessed 13 Sept 2017

obituary, Building Design online, 31 July 2014, [www.bdonline.co.uk/peter-hall-\(1932-2014\)/5070094.article](http://www.bdonline.co.uk/peter-hall-(1932-2014)/5070094.article), accessed 13 Sept 2017

*Financial Times* (1 Aug 2014)

*The Guardian* (1 Aug 2014); (6 Aug 2014)

*Daily Telegraph* (4 Aug 2014)

*The Times* (5 Aug 2014); (11 Aug 2014)

*New York Times* (6 Aug 2014)

*The Economist* (9 Aug 2014)

D. Lock, 'Professor Sir Peter Hall', *Town and Country Planning* (Aug 2014), 312–16

M. Hebbert, 'Sir Peter Hall - a life at the coal-face', *Planning* (29 Aug 2014), 14–15

M. Batty, 'Obituary – Peter Hall', *Environment and Planning A*, 46 (2014), 2263–7

M. Tewdwr-Jones, N. Phelps and R. Freestone, eds. *The planning imagination: Peter Hall and the study of urban and regional planning* (2014)

M. Hebbert, ed. 'Professor Sir Peter Hall: role model', *Built Environment*, 41/1 (2015), 1–130

R. Freestone, 'An "old fashioned" geographer: an appreciation of Peter Hall', *Progress in Human Geography*, 39/1 (2015), 103–14

R. Freestone, 'Peter Hall's planning history', *Planning Perspectives*, 30/1 (2015), 11–15

R. Johnston, 'Obituary: Sir Peter Geoffrey Hall', *Geographical Journal*, 181/2 (June 2015), 187–9

R. D. Knowles and C. Rozenblat, eds., *Sir Peter Hall: pioneer in regional planning, transport and urban geography* (2016)

WW (2014)

*Burke P*

personal knowledge (2018)

private information (2018)

b. cert.

m. certs.

d. cert.

## **Film**

'Town planning: Sir Peter Hall, ULC', 13 May 2008, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwc-WEDKMdk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwc-WEDKMdk)

'Interview with Sir Peter Hall', 10 Sept 2012, [www.ifhp.org/ifhp-blog/interview-sir-peter-hall](http://www.ifhp.org/ifhp-blog/interview-sir-peter-hall)

## **Sound**

documentary and interview recordings, BL NSA

## **Likenesses**

two photographs, outside the British Museum, 1980, Getty Images

G. Turner, photograph, 2007, repro. in *The Guardian* (31 July 2014)

G. Turner, photograph, repro. in *The Guardian* (1 Oct 2014)

photograph, *Planning Magazine*, repro. by University College London,  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0714/Peter\\_Hall](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0714/Peter_Hall), Accessed 18 July 2017

photograph, repro. in *The Planner*, [www.theplanner.co.uk/news/rtpi-names-research-award-after-sir-peter-hall](http://www.theplanner.co.uk/news/rtpi-names-research-award-after-sir-peter-hall), Accessed 18 July 2017

photograph, repro. in *Financial Times* (31 July 2014)

photograph, repro. in *Built Environment*, Vol. 41 No. 1