

Introduction: Celebrating Phil Thomas at 80

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As this Special Supplement of the journal that he founded demonstrates, Phil Thomas has had an enduring influence on the socio-legal project in the United Kingdom and internationally. In part, this has been achieved by the establishment of a leading journal in the field, which for half a century has been responsible for publishing challenging articles and constantly enriching and disrupting accounts of its perimeters. Phil's commitment to the journal, and to running it out of a Welsh law school that he has done so much to mould, is unending. His ear for a good argument, his commitment to encouraging young scholars, and his interest in edgier critical pieces are all hallmarks of his custodianship of the *Journal of Law and Society (JLS)*. But Phil's scholarship also pervades many of the pieces in this collection, which engage with issues that he has explored throughout his career, most notably civil liberties and legal education. What is possibly less apparent from these academic essays is the general influence that Phil has had on the field and the scholars within it by sheer force of personality. At the same time as the individualizing effects of university changes take effect, the benefit of Phil's influence and his political and moral compass become ever more apparent.

We all came together in one way or another as a result of Phil's involvement. He enabled the launch of our careers by championing our work and the subjects that we chose to interrogate. We all published our first 'proper' journal article in the *JLS* – something for which we remain ever grateful. He provided us with other outlets for publishing our work including his

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Socio-Legal series with Dartmouth Publishing. For Dave, having sent a tentative book proposal to a large number of publishers early in his career, only Phil came back, offering thoughts on how it might proceed, and suggesting that an article might be submitted to the journal, resulting in one of his earliest published pieces. When the 1997 Cardiff Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA) conference was being organized, Phil suggested that it might be a moment to develop something like a group of housing scholars who might form a stream at the conference, giving papers and reflecting on the subject. That was but one example of Phil's championing of early-career scholars and subjects that had been marginalized in the academy or were regarded as 'new'. Lifelong friendships and working relationships were formed at that conference.

Capacity building has been a hallmark of Phil's career. When Linda started an annual methodology masterclass to support young scholars and tease out the stories of research projects that sit behind polished articles, Phil and the *JLS* supported her. And for Phil, that support took the form of so much more than financial sponsorship. He has attended every workshop held and stayed up late talking to and encouraging the early-career academics who have attended. In an era in which academics are often time-poor, Phil stands out as someone willing to share his experiences when others need advice or support. He was very generous in his support of the SLSA in its earliest years, both in terms of extending financial support from the Law School at Cardiff and the *JLS* and in generating ideas for the Association to pursue in consolidating the nascent socio-legal community. When we served as Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Association, he was always there to act as a sounding board. The first SLSA Postgraduate Conference was held at Cardiff at Phil's suggestion and has now become an annual feature of the SLSA programme. This reflects Phil's career-long commitment to developing the intellectual footprint of colleagues and socio-legal studies.

The articles in this collection reflect these and his many other achievements. They range across the subjects with which Phil has been associated and spent much of his life curating. Our collection begins with **Linda Mulcahy's** biography of Phil and the many beginnings of the socio-legal movement that he has been involved with – most notably, the Socio-Legal Group, the *JLS*, and the SLSA. These evidence his importance as a capacity builder, always keen to challenge anything that the elite dare to call an orthodoxy. Linda seeks to demonstrate how Phil's early life was crucial in appreciating his two key drivers: the imperative to be a political animal and his passionate commitment to Wales. Constant reflection on the politics of the academy has encouraged Phil to continually challenge what we teach and research, who we teach and research, and why we teach and research. The notion of an ivory tower has never been attractive to him, as his life as a public intellectual and political activist demonstrates. Rather than being additional roles that Phil has adopted, these are central to his conception of what it means to be an academic and a socialist.

Sally Wheeler uses her article to consider how socio-legal studies has developed since a chapter she wrote with Phil, in which they examined whether socio-legal studies is a paradigm or a movement. Reflecting on how much has changed, we might say that we have moved beyond the definitional phase and on to more important questions about the modesty of socio-legal research. Sally draws on social ecology studies to ask whether our claims in socio-legal studies should be grander, and makes an important point about what is termed the 'hyphen-space' as a social ecology in its own right. In doing so, Sally re-reads three classic texts to demonstrate how this social ecology can operate to explain how actors and issues at different levels and scales relate to each other both co-operatively and competitively.

Anthony Bradney and Fiona Cownie consider the ways in which universities have changed over Phil's lifetime. The changes that they discuss include the new focus on a doctorate as an entry-level qualification, the introduction of teacher training, new incentives to research, and a focus on regular appraisals. Acknowledging that not all of the changes in the higher education sector have been bad, they nonetheless offer a nuanced account that challenges us to consider the extent to which academics have morphed from professionals into a new form of proletariat.

Richard Collier also reflects on the significance of the *JLS* and critical socio-legal work in the context of changes in the political economy of universities and socio-legal studies. Richard uses a central and particularly pertinent example of academic well-being, especially in this moment, to demonstrate the continuing pertinence of the left critique of universities. Rather than being 'left pessimists' in 'rose coloured glasses', as a recent critique suggests, Richard argues for the continuing significance of looking inwards and outwards, to develop an appreciation of the political economy of the university and the law school in both its public and private lives. Richard ends with a *cri de coeur* – we are not 'left pessimists' but, as Phil would undoubtedly shout out, engaging in public education and research as a public good.

Sarah Nason and Huw Pritchard weave a study of administrative justice in Wales around some of the key themes in Phil's own academic biography – a focus on Wales, on the small spaces (in this case, of administrative justice), and raising concerns about how administrative justice in Wales is being operationalized in a context of lack of knowledge and shortfalls in public funding of legal aid. The article deftly weaves Phil's academic journey into these issues, and demonstrates how the concerns that have animated his scholarship and work remain as pressing today as they ever have done.

Lydia Morgan begins her piece with a biographical reflection on how growing up as the child of two legal academics but choosing to read Philosophy and Cultural Studies for her first degree, before coming to law as a postgraduate, makes her both an outsider and an insider. She extends this observation to our experience of the legal system – embedded within it as a system but an outsider to its formal working; for her, we are embedded

outsiders. She uses this status to consider what our understanding of civil liberties and human rights would be without the contribution that socio-legal studies has made. Her project is executed by looking at these areas through the lens of the *JLS*'s back catalogue.

Edward Kirton-Darling, Helen Carr, and Tracey Varnava contribute an article that reflects on the Coronavirus Act 2020, as it impacts on three particular areas: open justice, adult social care, and Business Improvement Districts. They raise yet another part of Phil's career, which is removed from our narrow academic concerns: his involvement with Legal Action Group, with which they are also engaged, as well as his concerns with interdisciplinarity. Their argument is a rather neat one which eschews reliance on hierarchical or left/right critiques of power. Instead, they focus on the potentially productive concept of statelessness, drawn from studies in public policy, and thus emphasize the cross-disciplinary engagement that is part and parcel of what we might term 'being socio-legal'. They do not stop with that drawing-in of concepts, though, because they use their case studies to develop a challenge to this postish scholarship.

Finally, **Rhiannon Craft**, a doctoral research student at Cardiff, begins her piece on vehicle dwellers with a reflection on Phil's work setting up a legal advice service for Travellers, as well as the way in which the *JLS* has pioneered scholarship in this field. Rhiannon, who is a vehicle dweller herself, uses her data to articulate familiar sentiments about freedom, home, and a sense of place, in the context of increasing incursions on civil liberties and those freedoms. She argues that labels are important, partly because they open up and close off resources. She notes – perhaps with Phil's love of Wales in mind – that Wales and other European states, such as Portugal, provide a much warmer welcome and space for diverse Travellers.

It has been a genuine pleasure to put together a collection of essays celebrating the work of such an important academic, activist, mentor, and friend.