

# Journal of **Scottish Thought**

Research Articles

The Geddes Circle in Sociology: Ideas, Influence,  
and Decline

Authors: John Scott and Ray Bromley

Volume 5, Issue 1

Pp: 121-134

2012

Published on: 1st Jan 2012

CC Attribution 4.0

1 4 9 5



**ABERDEEN**  
**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

# The Geddes Circle in Sociology: Ideas, Influence, and Decline

John Scott and Ray Bromley

---

Patrick Geddes described himself as, amongst other things, a sociologist. He was central to the formation of a professional organisation and journal for British sociology and he was closely involved in the founding of the first Chair in the subject to be held in this country.<sup>1</sup> However, few sociologists today even recognise his name. Those that do tend to regard him as a geographer or as a minor contributor to urban studies.<sup>2</sup> In this paper we will explore this paradoxical disjunction between achievement and reputation.

Geddes attracted a number of intellectual followers who formed a collaborative circle of writers and practitioners who worked towards the development of the system of sociological ideas that Geddes produced and sought to make these the basis for a professional and academic organisation of sociologists and for the establishment of sociology as an intellectual discipline in Britain. Their efforts towards the establishment of sociology were intellectually productive but were, in the longer term, a largely unsuccessful venture. While their associated efforts in town planning and architecture have had a notable and lasting influence, their contributions to sociology have been largely forgotten and had no significant influence on the shaping of the discipline as it developed in the second half of the twentieth century.

## The Geddes Circle in Sociology

Key figures in the circle were recruited as students who had been inspired

---

<sup>1</sup> This argument of this paper draws on the argument set out at greater length and in a larger context in John Scott and R. Bromley *Envisioning Sociology: Victor Branford, Patrick Geddes, and the Quest for Social Reconstruction* (Albany, NY, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are Alex Law, 'The ghost of Patrick Geddes: Civics as applied sociology', *Sociological Research Online*, 10:2 (2005) <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/2/law.html>, and Maggie Studholme, 'Patrick Geddes: founder of environmental sociology', *Sociological Review*, 55:3 (2007), 441–59 and 'Patrick Geddes and the history of environmental sociology in Britain. A Cautionary Tale', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 8:3 (2008) 367–91.

by Geddes's idiosyncratic style of lecturing. Most notable among these was Victor Branford, an accountant and bankers' agent whose business activities were to produce the funds that financed the Sociological Society as a professional association for British sociologists and the *Sociological Review* as its professional journal. Branford was the practical and financial organiser of Geddes's chaotic professional life as well as producing some key theoretical statements of his own. Other members of the collaborative circle who contributed ideas to the evolving sociological framework included the cooperative researcher, and Branford's second wife, Sybella Gurney, educationalists Benchara Branford (Victor Branford's younger brother), Gilbert Slater, Theodora Thompson, Henry Caldwell Cook, Theodore Faithfull, and Dorothy Revel, eugenic psychologists Lionel Tayler, Caleb Saleeby, and John Slaughter, philosopher Mark Wenley, geographers Andrew Herbertson, Herbert Fleure, Charles Fawcett, Marion Newbigin, and Geddes's own son Arthur, archaeologist Harold Peake, physician Arthur Brock, community worker Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita), architect-planners Henry Lanchester, Raymond Unwin, Charles Ashbee and Patrick Abercrombie, and communitarian Romantic George Sandeman. Financially the circle was supported by the Dundee businessman Martin White, and the organisational work carried out by Branford was supported by that of Dorothy and Alexander Farquharson.

Members of the circle took a global view of the development of the subject and engaged closely with sociological work overseas. Especially important were the links that they had in the United States, where they were closely associated with Albion Small and Jane Addams at Chicago, with Small's student Charles Ellwood at Missouri, with Stanley Hall at Clark University, and with both William James and Thorstein Veblen. Ideas were shared with all of these and some, such as Ellwood and Hall, produced work that closely paralleled that of circle members. The most important intellectual influence in the United States, however, was Lewis Mumford, whose work from the 1920s on urbanism and the human condition elaborated on their central concerns.

Branford had developed a plan to establish an organisational base through which the circle could disseminate the ideas that Geddes was producing. Central to this was what they referred to as the Edinburgh School of Sociology. Although this had a tangible physical focus in Edinburgh for a short period, it was a term that Geddes and Branford used more broadly to describe the global sociological movement that they saw themselves as

building. The School was physically located for some time in the Outlook Tower under the official name of ‘The Edinburgh School for Promoting the Study of Ethical, Social, and Economic Subjects’. Geddes became President and the political economist Joseph Shield Nicholson and the ethical philosopher James Seth were appointed as Honorary Presidents to give the School academic credibility. The School became an organisational focus for the Summer Schools that Geddes had been holding for some years and a base for some of the university settlement work in which Geddes was involved. Despite efforts aimed at giving the School some financial security—such as launching a fund to establish a lectureship in sociology in Edinburgh University to be held by Geddes—the School did not have any longevity as a physical institution and Geddes and Branford concentrated their efforts on developing its work in London.

Branford convened a series of meetings in London in 1903 to launch the Sociological Society and carry forward the aims of the Edinburgh School. He produced a position paper on the origins of the word sociology<sup>3</sup> as the basis for the new Society. Members of the Geddes circle were prominent in the Society, though there was no one-to-one correspondence in membership. Nevertheless, the Sociological Society was the basis through which the diverse works of those in the Geddes circle were expected to develop into a unified paradigm of research. Some of this work was published between 1903 and 1907 in the annual *Sociological Papers*, and thereafter in its successor the *Sociological Review*. A number of other works appeared as pamphlets and books in series sponsored by the *Review* and the Society, and draft versions of many of these appeared in the *Review* itself.

Geddes’s aim had been to develop a comprehensive evolutionary and ecological approach to biological and social life. Though he produced a number of important biological works, largely due to the efforts of his collaborator Arthur Thomson, he never achieved a similarly complete statement of sociological principles. These sociological ideas were rooted in a combination of the environmental and regional perspective of Frédéric Le Play with the organicism of Auguste Comte and were nurtured early on through Geddes’s involvement in the Ethical and Positivist Societies of London. An initial statement of Geddes’s views on the relationship between the environment, labour, and social life was presented in two related papers to the Sociological

---

<sup>3</sup> Victor Branford, ‘On the origin and use of the word “sociology” and on the relationship of sociological to other studies and to practical problems’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 9:2 (1903), 145–62.

Society<sup>4</sup> and were subsequently elaborated in his book *Cities in Evolution* (London, 1915). He published a series of analytical essays while working as Professor of Sociology in India, outlining, in abstract form, a model of the social system<sup>5</sup> that he expanded slightly in some later essays.<sup>6</sup> These essays were all that he produced for the companion volume to his study in biology, which was to be called *Social Life: Outline of Sociology*, but he managed to produce only a slim and unsatisfactory appendix to his biological *magnum opus*, co-written with Arthur Thomson, *Life: Outlines of General Biology* (London, 1931).

Victor Branford's earliest publications in sociology were reviews of the history of the subject in the *American Journal of Sociology*<sup>7</sup> and, in later issues of the same journal, its relationship to practical action and citizenship.<sup>8</sup> A number of later lectures were collected together in his *Interpretations and Forecasts* (New York, 1914) and he produced a study in cognitive and moral developmental social psychology in the form of a biography of St. Columba (Edinburgh, 1912). The demands of his business interests lessened towards the end of the First World War and Branford undertook the completion of several joint works in which Geddes's social theory was applied to the development of contemporary societies such as their jointly authored *The Coming Polity* (London, 1919).<sup>9</sup> These later works also set out a political strategy of what they called the 'Third Way' or 'Third Alternative'. Geddes and Branford saw this as the only means of overcoming the contemporary crises of 'wardom' and revolution and as laying the foundations for peaceful social reconstruction. Branford himself went on to investigate contemporary culture and the 'spirituality' of modernity in *Science and Sanctity: A Study in the*

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Geddes, 'Civics as applied sociology, Part 1' (1904), 'Civics as applied sociology, Part 2' (1905) in H. Meller (ed.), *The Ideal City* (Leicester, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Geddes, 'Essentials of sociology in relation to economics. Part 1'. *Indian Journal of Economics*, 3:1 (1920), 1–56, and 'Essentials of sociology in relation to economics. Part 2'. *Indian Journal of Economics*, 3:3 (1920), 257–305.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Geddes, 'The mapping of life', *Sociological Review*, 16:3 (1924), 193–203; 'A proposed coordination of the social sciences', *Sociological Review*, 16:1 (1924), 54–65; 'The charting of life', *Sociological Review*, 19:1 (1927), 40–63; 'The Notation of Life (Condensed by Amelia Defries)', in A. Defries (ed.), *The Interpreter* (London, 1927).

<sup>7</sup> Victor Branford, 'On the origin and use of the word "sociology" and on the relationship of sociological to other studies and to practical problems', *American Journal of Sociology*, 9:2 (1903), 145–62, and 'The founders of sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 10:1 (1904), 94–126.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Branford, 'Sociology in some of its educational aspects', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11:1 (1905), 85–9, and 'Science and citizenship', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11:6 (1906), 721–62.

<sup>9</sup> See also Patrick Geddes and Gilbert Slater, *Ideas at War* (London, 1917).

*Scientific Approach to Unity* (London, 1923) and *Living Religions: A Plea For the Larger Modernism* (London, 1924).

## The Sociological Framework

The core ideas for sociological analysis were set out by Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford. The starting point for their work was the view that human activity had to be seen in the context of the particular ‘place’ in which it occurs, and this is the core of the ‘regional’ perspective taken over by Geddes and Branford from Le Play. All activity occurs within a definite environment, and the central human activity is labour, understood as a form of mechanical energy that involves the cultural transformation of environmental and metabolic factors and their translation into organised social practices.<sup>10</sup> Variations in these patterns of ‘work’ underpin the social structure of the ‘peoples’ of the world. This idea of the interplay of place, work, and people was taken from Le Play and was the basis of their view of social systems.

Social systems themselves were seen as combining ‘temporal’ (political and economic) and ‘spiritual’ (cultural) spheres of action. The balance between these two ‘hemispheres’ or subsystems was held to vary from place to place and over time, depending on the particular balance of class forces prevailing. In *The Coming Polity* (London, 1919) Geddes and Branford argued that the classes and elites that are formed within societies on the basis of differences in work relations are the agencies through which the various systemic forces are carried forward and have their effects on social development. In contemporary societies, they highlighted a conflict between the organising ‘chiefs’ within the temporal sphere—most particularly the financiers and state bureaucrats—and the intellectual and emotional elites that are organised around the principles of the spiritual sphere. The growth of the political economy in capitalist societies has strengthened the power of financiers and bureaucrats and has subordinated cultural concerns to the needs of the political economy. Financiers have espoused a utilitarian ideology that underpins the dominance of capitalist relations and has become the

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Geddes, *The Classification of Statistics and Its Results* (Edinburgh, 1881) and *An Analysis of the Principles of Economics* (London, 1884), both reprints from the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; Victor Branford, ‘On the calculation of national resources’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 64:3 (1901), 380–414 and *On the Correlation of Economics and Accountancy* (London, 1901), originally a lecture delivered at the London Economic Club.

over-riding cultural feature of contemporary societies. Geddes and Branford looked to scientists—and especially to the sociologists—to retake the lead in strengthening autonomous cultural concerns and ensuring a proper spiritual shaping of the overall social process.

The involvement of social scientists along with other intellectuals and ‘emotionals’ would result in a moral and aesthetic reconstruction of social life and was to be achieved through the political strategy of the Third Way. This strategy is neither individualist nor collectivist but, like guild socialism, the distributism of Belloc and Chesterton, and pluralism, stresses democracy, cooperation, and locality and is a direct expression of the ‘regionalism’ that Geddes and Branford placed at the heart of their sociological theory. They allied this view of small-scale politics with an argument that the financial system required reforms that would establish a form of ‘social credit’ that would make possible democratic and socially responsive investment in the improvement of the physical and social environment. The political project of the Third Alternative was seen as the means of avoiding the disturbances and dislocations of wardom, revolution, and bureaucratic centralism.

Social systems and social transformations, Geddes and Branford argued, are the outcome of actions undertaken by individuals who are formed within particular places. Individuals are born with certain biological characteristics but, as Branford sought to show in *St. Columba: A Study of Social Inheritance and Spiritual Development* (Edinburgh, 1912), these are culturally shaped under the definite historical conditions and material circumstances of their social environment. It was for this reason that they saw the development of social psychology as an integral part of the development of a sociological understanding. Geddes and Branford pioneered the adoption of developmental and psychoanalytic ideas in constructing accounts of human socialisation. Their social psychology depicted the maturation of biological traits and capacities in response to evolving social experiences. They held that education had to be organised in such a way that it provided the opportunities for children to practice in play the skills and abilities that are required in adult life. Their social psychology placed particular emphasis on the need to relate gender differences to the places in which they developed, holding that that the ‘natural’ attributes of men and women are shaped by social factors. For this reason, as Geddes and Gilbert Slater argued in *Ideas at War* (London, 1917), they held that social reconstruction must stress ‘feminine’ values and so must enhance their opportunities for participation in employment and public life.

## The Wider Circle of Contributors

Other members of the circle worked on numerous issues raised within this broad regional and ecological framework of sociological analysis that Geddes and Branford had set out, though none showed the scope and analytical intent exhibited by these two in their published works.

Social psychological concerns were developed by a number of the key associates. Benchara Branford, a lecturer and educational administrator, wrote his first book on mathematics—*A Study of Mathematical Education* (London, 1908)—and drew on the developmental psychology of the American child psychologist Stanley Hall to devise teaching methods that take account of the gradual development of mathematical understanding in children and adolescents. His work anticipated some of the ideas that were later elaborated in the developmental psychology of Piaget. Theodora Thompson's *The World Without and the World Within* (London, 1928) explored spiritual development and mentality, using ideas from Geddes about the subjective 'world within'.<sup>11</sup> From a more strongly psychoanalytic viewpoint, complementary ideas were developed by Theodore Faithfull in her books *Bisexuality* (London, 1927) and *Psychological Foundations* (London, 1933) and by Dorothy Revel in *Cheiron's Cave. The School of the Future* (London, 1928), both of whom applied these ideas in teaching practice. Issues of gender development and the formation of character or 'temperament' were important concerns of those who were associated with eugenics and who showed varying degrees of radicalism on the nature of women's temperament and opportunities.<sup>12</sup> Arthur Brock, a psychiatrist who worked at Craiglockhart military hospital where he treated 'shell shock' during the First World War, saw psychological problems such as anxiety and depression as products of the social environment and in *Health and Conduct* (London, 1923) advocated sociological engagement with the environment as a means of treatment. More controversially, he suggested that physical health problems such as cancer had causes that are equally rooted in the social environment.

The educational implications of these psychological ideas were examined in *The Play Way* (London, 1917) by Henry Caldwell Cook, a teacher at the

---

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Geddes, *The World Without and the World Within: Sunday Talks with My Children* (Bournville, 1905).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, J. Lionel Tayler, *Aspects of Social Evolution. First Series: Temperaments* (London 1904) and *The Nature of Woman* (London, 1922); Caleb Williams Saleeby, *Parenthood and Race Culture* (London 1909) and *Woman and Womanhood: A Search for Principles* (London, 1911); John Willis Slaughter, 'Selection in marriage', *Eugenics Review*, 1 (1909–10), 150–62.

Perse School. Cook developed the idea of play as an essential element in learning and as a means of linking the world of the school with later adult experiences of work. He stressed the imaginative and practical exploration of adult activities as a central element in the educational process and employed methods of dramatisation in his own teaching. In *Janus and Vesta: A Study of the World Crisis and After* (London, 1916) and *A New Chapter in the Science of Government* (London, 1919), Benchara Branford took up ideas on university-level education and, in particular, the form of academic governance that this involved, seeing the university within its region and stressing the importance of a world university as the basis for an elite of intellectuals capable of social reconstruction. Geddes and Victor Branford had both written on the new disciplinary structure of research-oriented universities,<sup>13</sup> and Geddes had been involved in the planning of the new university in Jerusalem which Sybella Branford briefly discussed in one of her papers.<sup>14</sup>

It was the future of ‘community’ and rural life that Sybella Branford was especially concerned with. As Secretary of Labour Co-partnership, an organisation concerned with the promotion of cooperative housing schemes, she examined cooperative ideals in rural housing and saw similar principles in the Garden City movement, with which she was closely involved.<sup>15</sup> The ‘renewal’ of rural communities was also a principal concern for George Sandeman, the concerns of whose *Social Renewal* (London, 1913) were taken up in two books on work and creativity in communities written with his wife Frances, *The Community of Work* (London, 1919) and *Practical Community* (Fordingbridge, 1929).

Geddes had a long interest in Eastern religions and Geddes spent much of the decade from 1914 till 1924 in India. He held a Chair of Sociology, the only

---

<sup>13</sup> See Patrick Geddes, ‘Scottish university needs and aims’, *Scots Magazine*, August 1890, and ‘University studies and university residence’, *University Review*, July 1906; Victor Branford, ‘The organisation of economic and political studies in American universities’, *Economic Journal*, 12:48 (1902), 535–47 and *Interpretations and Forecasts: A Study of the Survivals and Tendencies in Contemporary Societies* (New York, 1914).

<sup>14</sup> Geddes’s plans are discussed in his *Jerusalem Actual and Possible: a preliminary report to the chief administrator of Palestine and the Military Governor of Jerusalem on Town Planning and City Improvements*. (Jerusalem, 1919). See also Sybella Branford, ‘The new Jerusalem’, *Sociological Review*, 11:2 (1919), 141.

<sup>15</sup> Sybella Gurney, ‘Civic Reconstruction and the Garden City Movement’, *Sociological Review*, 3:1 (1910), 35–43; Sybella Branford, ‘In defence of the English cottage’, *Town Planning Review*, 9:1 (1921), 41–6; see also ‘Labour Co-partnership and the guild movement’, *Co-partnership*, March 1923, 36–7, 44, and ‘Co-operators and the community’, *Sociological Review*, 19 (1927), 228–33.

Chair in the subject that he ever held, though he insisted on the title Professor of Sociology and Civics. This was the founding chair at the University of Bombay and the first such Chair in India. Before, during and after this period some of his associates produced significant studies of Indian community and society. Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) made a study of Indian village life, *The Web of Indian Life* (London, 1904); Gilbert Slater, who also worked in India between 1915 and 1922, investigated village communities and the Brahminic cultural context of Indian society in *Some South Indian Villages* (Oxford, 1918) and *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture* (London, 1924); H. V. Lanchester did numerous planning studies and architectural designs—see, for example, his *Town Planning in Madras* (London, 1918)—while Arthur Geddes's *Au pays de Tagore: la civilisation rurale du Bengale occidental et ses facteurs géographiques* (Paris, 1927) represented a major regional study of India.

Broader issues of the structure of urban life and regionalism figured centrally in the work of the many geographers who were inspired by Geddes. Andrew Herbertson, teaching in Dundee and then at Oxford, produced with his wife Dorothy a major contribution to regional and human geography in 1899—*Man and His Work: An Introduction to Human Geography* (London, 1899),<sup>16</sup> and drew out the analytical implications of the regional perspective in essays such as ‘The Major Natural Regions’ published in the *Geographical Journal*.<sup>17</sup> The methodology of the regional survey through which such regional accounts could be produced was elaborated in *The Life of Frederic Le Play*, published by Dorothy Herbertson between 1897–9, and in a handbook by Sybella Branford and Alexander Farquharson entitled *An Introduction to Regional Surveys* (London, 1924). This approach to regionalism was expanded and applied in Herbert Fleure's book on the human geography of western Europe, *Human Geography in Western Europe: A study in appreciation* (London, 1918), and, working with Harold Peake, Fleure also produced a series of studies in social evolution, *The Corridors of Time, 10 Volumes* (Oxford, 1927–56), in which the causal effects of the environment were emphasised. Herbertson's student Charles Fawcett undertook an investigation into the frontiers and boundaries of regions, *Frontiers: A Study in Political Geography* (Oxford, 1918) and applied this in a classification of the major regions of

---

<sup>16</sup> See also Marion Newbiggin, *Man and His Work: An Introduction to Human Geography* (London, 1899) and *The British Empire Beyond the Seas: An Introduction to World Geography* (London, 1914).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew John Herbertson, ‘The major natural regions,’ *Geographical Journal*, 25 (1905), 300–12.

Britain and their relationship to the developing conurbations in *The Provinces of England* (London, 1919). Perhaps the crucial contribution to the study of urbanism, however, was that of Lewis Mumford in a series of books on the evolution of city life and the future of the regional city which included *The Story of Utopias* (New York, 1934), *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1944) and *The City in History* (London, 1961).

Some circle members also contributed to the philosophy and politics of the Third Way through which Geddes and Branford sought to reconstruct human societies. Sybella Branford contributed some reflections on social credit as a form of finance,<sup>18</sup> while detailed blueprints for a future form of government, based on democratic, cooperative, and federal principles, were set out and promoted by Benchara Branford in his *A New Chapter in the Science of Government* (London, 1919). However, it was Lewis Mumford who set out the broadest philosophical framework for social reconstruction in his *The Story of Utopias* (New York, 1922), taking up the Comtean view of Geddes and Branford that social reconstruction had to rest on a vision of the future that was fundamentally different from—and better than—the present but was also realistically achievable on the basis of a sociological understanding of present conditions and the possibilities inherent in them.

Geddes had a similar influence on a number of the early Indian sociologists, most notably Govind S. Ghurye (1893–1983), his successor as Professor of Sociology in Bombay, and Head of Department till his retirement in 1959, and Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968), Professor of Economics and Sociology, and later Vice Chancellor, at the University of Lucknow. Ghurye became a prolific author on caste, ethnicity, work, religion and urbanism in India, including *Caste, Class and Occupation* (Bombay, 1961), *Cities and Civilization* (Bombay 1962), *Gods and Men* (Bombay, 1962), and *Social Tensions in India* (Bombay, 1968). He was the founding President of the Indian Sociological Society in 1951, and he was re-elected President in 1966. Mukerjee was an important advocate of Indian Independence, and he published extensively on population, poverty, religion, planning and city surveys in books such as *Borderlands of Economics* (London, 1925), *The Theory and Art of Mysticism* (London, 1960), and *Social Profiles of a Metropolis* (London, 1961). Both Ghurye and Mukerjee researched, wrote, and in Mukerjee's case engaged in planning, adult education and social activism, in a very Geddesian

---

<sup>18</sup> Sybella Branford, 'The Relation of Capital to Credit', *Sociological Review*, 8:1 (1915), 48–51; 'Social credit', *Sociological Review*, 16:1 (1924), 126–30; 'The red peril – or the peril of big words?', *The Crusader*, October 30, 1925, 692–3.

style. As he notes in *India: The Dawn of a New Era: An Autobiography* (New Delhi, 1997), Mukerjee worked with Geddes in Calcutta in 1914–15, and he had close ties with Geddes's other leading Indian associates, the great humanist Rabindranath Tagore, and the leading scientist Jagadis C. Bose, the subject of Geddes's only biographical book, *An Indian Pioneer of Science: The Life and Work of Sir Jagadis C. Bose* (London, 1920).

Through Ghurye, Mukerjee, and some of his other former colleagues and students, Geddes had a formative impact on Indian sociology, but that impact was limited by the relatively short time that he was based in India (1914–1924), by his frequent travels outside India, by his focus on writing city planning reports, and by the traumatic nature of the 1914–1948 period for India, marked by two world wars, the influenza pandemic, the Great Depression, the long struggle for Independence, and the agonies of Partition and war with Pakistan. By the time that sociology could really grow and prosper in the 1950s and 1960s, Geddes was a distant memory, the scholars he influenced were retiring, and modernism, developmentalism and Marxism had taken centre stage.

### **The reasons for failure**

The members of the Geddes circle produced a wide range of interesting and important sociological ideas, yet their lasting influence was rather limited. They had a degree of influence in the emergence and consolidation of urban studies as a distinct discipline by sociologists, geographers, and planners interested in the city, and their commitment to the importance of systematic social surveys had some resonance as fieldwork and statistical surveys became an established feature of the social sciences. In the mainstream of sociology, however, they have been largely forgotten and their ideas have been ignored or unrecognised. Why was there this patchy reception and overall failure to establish the intellectual programme at which they had worked so hard?

One reason is undoubtedly the poor quality of their writing and the unfinished character of many of Geddes's own contributions. However, the fact that they wrote badly and produced texts that were dense and impenetrable cannot be a complete explanation, as many sociologists with equally bad (or even worse) writing styles have been avidly read and extremely influential. It is, of course, possible that their ideas were simply wrong or misguided. If this is the case, a lack of influence would not be surprising—

though, again, it is not unprecedented in social science for misguided ideas to have a huge influence! We would argue, however, that, for all their eccentricities and oddities, their leading ideas were fundamentally sound and were, in many respects, ahead of their time. Many of the ideas that they developed and advocated have recently been promoted as new and novel, though without any recognition that they were being advocated by the Geddes circle a century ago. We must therefore ask why it was that a productive collaborative circle with such a clear vision and a strong organisational base had so little practical success.

There were, in fact, serious organisational difficulties. The circle was held together by the intense and personal devotion that its members felt for Geddes and the perceived genius of his ideas. For his part, Geddes was unwilling, and perhaps unable, to put his mind to effective leadership in anything other than an inspirational sense. The unity of the circle, being dependent on the devotion of disciples to a charismatic master was an insecure basis for any significant intellectual influence beyond the circle itself. Geddes's personality and style of teaching, combined with a claim to be in possession of a complete and comprehensive theoretical system, attracted those who were seeking 'answers' to fundamental questions. This was particularly the case for Victor Branford and his brothers, who had experienced serious personal failings in their father, a prominent and scientific veterinary surgeon of eccentric character and deeply flawed in his behaviour. They saw in Geddes the intellectual father-figure that had been lacking in their own lives. They attached themselves almost unquestioningly to Geddes and felt absolutely committed to furthering his work. Geddes's charisma was such that, once ensnared, his followers regarded themselves as disciples who had discovered 'the truth' and had a religious obligation to proselytise on his behalf. They felt that this could be achieved simply by setting out his ideas didactically for others to discover: all readers, it was assumed, would share the same immediate attraction and intellectual conversion that they had experienced. For this reason, they paid little attention to the normal methods of academic argument and persuasion through public debate.

This failing was exacerbated by the wider organisational structure of sociology as a discipline. Members of the circle were not, in general, holders of mainstream academic positions and were set apart from the mainstream consolidation of sociology as a university discipline. Until his move to India, Geddes held only a part-time post in botany, having failed to gain the Chair in Sociology at the LSE that had been endowed by his friend and associate

Martin White. Branford had applied for chairs in Commerce or Social Science at Birmingham and Manchester, where he would have been responsible for the teaching of social studies, but he spent most of his adult life in business and was, for much of this time, unable to participate in mainstream sociological activities.

Nor could the Sociological Society be an effective vehicle for promoting Geddes's ideas. The Society was, from the beginning, beset by significant intellectual differences. Many members of the Society, and especially those at the heart of the emerging discipline in the London School of Economics, felt that Branford and the other leading members of the Society were aiming to establish the intellectual dominance of Geddes within the Society and the discipline. The Geddes circle's closed attachment to Geddes and their unwillingness to debate the relative merits of their own and other people's ideas fanned this suspicion and generated an intense hostility that led to the eventual demise of the Society. As the circle became increasingly inward looking, the significance of the works of lesser members of the group was over-stated, which served only to further undermine their credibility with others. The collaborative circle around Geddes could not therefore rely on the Society and its journal to disseminate and popularise their ideas.

From 1914 onwards, Geddes was merely an occasional visitor to Britain, resident in India and then in France. His absence, combined with the difficult world circumstances associated with World War I and the Great Depression, made it difficult to promote Geddesian sociology. Most scholarly publications had limited circulation, academic work opportunities in sociology were scarce, and immediate crises often pre-empted long range visions of social reconstruction. Geddes's multi-disciplinarity added additional complications, as he insisted on contributing to Biology, City Planning and the Arts, further reducing the time he could spend on sociological teaching, writing and professional organizations. Given Britain's gradual fall in the twentieth century from pre-eminent superpower to important ally of the United States, his internationalism was prescient, but his final focus on France was questionable. By the late 1920s, Geddes had been largely forgotten in U.S. sociology, the struggle for Indian Independence was gathering momentum, and Europe was increasingly traumatized by the inevitability of a Second World War.

Over the same period in the 1920s and 1930s, the establishment of sociology within the London University system and in social work and teacher training in both London and the provinces occurred without any significant

input from the members of the Geddes circle. The Geddesians preferred to talk only amongst themselves and to those on the fringes of academic and political life, and their limited influence was obviously bound to weaken as the members of the circle aged and died.

*Plymouth University and University of Albany, SUNY*