PROFILE OF VICTOR MIDDLETON

In many ways Victor Middleton’s career provides a prime example of the diversity offered by tourism as a field of study and as a field of employment during its early development stages. His experience spans the public and private sectors, he has worked for large international companies, for government bodies and universities, and as an independent consultant, and his fields of interest have covered marketing, sustainability, museums and education. In all of these he has been a major contributor both to practice and to theory and the fact that he was one of the first to bring his expertise to tourism has meant that he very much contributed to the process of defining the field of study that we recognise today as tourism.

Background and Early Tourism Experiences

Tourism was a significant formative influence in Victor’s early life partly through being brought up in a small seaside hotel run by his parents in Lytham St Annes, and partly from living near Blackpool in the North West of England. Estimated to attract some 17 million holiday visitors annually in its heyday in Victor’s youth, Blackpool was one of the foremost British seaside resorts established over a century before with the dawn of the railway era. This background provided him with a firm appreciation of the practical business realities of tourism and provided him with a very distinctive approach later on as a scholar. He has never allowed theorising to obscure the reality of what the visitor economy means in practice and that greatly contributed to his reputation for being able to bridge theory and practice across the multiple sectors in tourism.

Educated at King Edward VII School before university education at the London School of Economics, where he graduated in Economics, Victor’s generation was required to undertake military National Service, which he completed in England, Germany and Italy, reaching the rank of Acting Captain on leaving in 1962. His first involvements with industry were with two leading international companies at the forefront of modern marketing practice, Procter & Gamble and Gillette Industries. In those years his academic training and exposure to a modern marketing culture in the UK and abroad provided a platform for his next career choice that brought him directly into tourism with the United Kingdom’s (UK) National Tourist Office.

A Career in Tourism - Linking Industry and Education

He joined the British Travel Association (shortly to become the statutory British Tourist Authority (BTA)) in 1968 as Marketing Research Manager, and later as Marketing Policy/Strategy Manager. Here he was responsible for strengthening the research and marketing base of the BTA at a time when tourism to the UK was rapidly expanding and, as he notes in his book about British Tourism published in 2005, (Middleton, 2005), tourism itself was being increasingly recognised as an important element of the economic activity of the country. In particular he was responsible for the BTA’s first marketing planning and he also organized the first British national conference on Tourism and the Environment held at the Royal Festival Hall in London in 1972.

At the same time as tourism was being increasingly recognised as an important activity for the UK it was also developing as a subject for serious academic study. The first tourism programmes at diploma level were created in the early 1960s, and in 1966, under the leadership of Rik Medlik (Airey, 2014), hospitality management and tourism were recognised as degree subjects at the newly created University of Surrey. Initially the University offered an undergraduate degree in Hotel and Catering Administration (with a tourism option). This was then followed in 1972 with the introduction of the first master degree programme specifically in Tourism. At this stage there was an obvious need for faculty to contribute to and support the development of this new field of study.
Victor’s academic background and experience made him ideally suited for this and in 1972 Professor Medlik persuaded him to join the team led by himself and supported by John Burkart and Gareth Richards, to develop the new programme. This was the team that effectively created tourism as a field of study at Surrey and gave Surrey a leadership position which it retains to this day. For some 13 years from 1972 Victor contributed to many different aspects of both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes but his real contribution came with the design and introduction of a marketing course specifically for students of hospitality management and tourism. His contribution to tourism marketing stands as one of his major achievements and through his publications and presentations, noted later in this profile, he established himself as one of the leading authorities in this field.

During this time Victor also made significant contributions to Surrey’s innovative management development programme designed to bring the work of the University closer to industry practitioners and in this way he retained his close links with the tourism sector. The University Annual Reports for this period also report his active involvement in tourism industry bodies such as the Travel Industry Marketing Group of the Institute of Marketing and the South East England Tourist Board as well as acting as consultant to the BTA and contributing to middle management training for the British Tourism Boards and to international Symposia. He also undertook several studies for the tourist boards and operators in tourism and he spent a semester as visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts. These close industry links were brought together in his work, with Professor Medlik, in arguing the case for and then leading the creation of the professional body for tourism in the UK, the first of its kind. The resulting Tourism Society was formally established in 1977 with Victor serving as its first Vice Chair. He was later to serve as Chairman of the Society and he was a member of the Board from the 1970s to the 1990s.

In 1982, with his excellent contacts with industry, he moved to a part-time position at the University to develop an independent career in consultancy. This became full-time in 1985 when he relinquished his university position. Since then his industry-related work has ranged from projects for Ventures Consultancy, one of the leading such groups in the UK, as well as for various UK Tourist Boards (Wales Tourist Board, BTA, English Tourist Board, Jersey Tourism and Isle of Man Tourism), the Association of Independent Museums in the UK for whom he provided two influential reports (Middleton, 1990, 1998), and the British Resorts and Destinations Association. He was also involved in many countries internationally on aspects of marketing, management training and educational contributions and as a regular adviser to the variously named government departments responsible for UK tourism. For the government one of his major contributions related to his interest in the measurement of tourism which drew upon his earlier experiences with the BTA where he had had responsibility for the British national tourism surveys. He has always been a passionate advocate for the improvement of the measurement arrangements for tourism and in pursuit of this for many years he chaired several industry and academic groups and he was a consultant to the government department during the negotiations with the European Commission on a Tourism Statistics Directive. Subsequently he also served on the government Allnut Committee on the way ahead for national tourism statistics and a subsequent English national tourist board forum covering the same issues.

In making the conversion to consultancy however, Victor retained links with academia and he was sought by a number of universities to take up visiting and part-time professorships for example, Oxford Brookes University from 1991-2010 and University of Central Lancashire from 1994-2014, as well as short-term positions at Kuringai College (now University of Technology Sydney) in Australia, Guelph University in Canada and the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. At Oxford Brookes he also became the first Director of the World Travel and Tourism Environmental Research Centre
(WTTERC) sponsored by the World Travel and Tourism Council and in this position was involved in a number of international sustainable development conferences and United Nations sessions representing and lobbying for the international tourism sector.

Also, specifically related to education, he was in many ways the obvious choice to chair the national Review of Tourism Studies Degree Courses for the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAAD) which was the body responsible for English degree awards in institutions then outside the university system. The report from this review was published in 1993 (Council for National Academic Awards, 1993). This followed his continuing interest in education as chair of the Tourism Society’s Education and Training Committee and it also resulted from the rapid growth in tourism degree programmes. The review that he led sought to explore some of the questions and issues posed by this growth, including the nature and content of the curriculum for tourism. In doing this the report drew attention to the diversity in the curricula and expressed the need for a common core curriculum as well as the need for better links between education and the tourism industry. This subsequently led to the formation of the National Liaison Group for Tourism in UK Higher Education (NLG) which has now become the subject association under the name Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE). Victor was the instigator of the NLG, he oversaw its creation and served as its first chairman during which time it played an important role in agreeing a core curriculum for tourism (Holloway, 1995) which itself influenced the subsequent national benchmark statement for tourism degree programmes (Quality Assurance Agency, 2000). He also contributed to the NLG’s work in providing information about tourism courses and careers (Airey & Middleton, 1995) and he co-authored the first attempt at quantifying the scale of UK tourism education (Middleton & Ladkin, 1996).

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Victor’s career is its diversity covering a range of different sectors of employment and of different areas of expertise. Yet throughout there are some important common threads. Apart from the common thread of tourism itself, the first, and possibly the most important of these, is the continuous striving to link the world of academia and theory with the real world of tourism. This is prominent in his activities as a mainstream academic where he constantly reached out to industry; and it is equally true when he was working outside the university sector from where he engaged with and drew upon the world of academia (Middleton, 1974, 2007). In a context in which attention is so often drawn to the gap between academia and industry, Victor is an important exception and he provides an example from which many could learn. The second common theme is marketing. This is where his career began, he took it with him into tourism and into the University. It led him to produce a series of influential publications and reports as well as to ask questions about the adequacy of tourism statistics and definitions and it established his international reputation as a scholar. A third and fourth theme grew out of his response to the rapid growth of tourism during his working life and its implications for sustainability and for education. These two threads are reflected both in his publications and in his initiatives for example to create the NLG and to head the WTTERC. In brief although his career is diverse it represents the entirely coherent response of someone who recognised the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse sector. His response was to seek workable management solutions to the challenges.

The Threads of Publications

In line with one of the main threads of his career, most of Victor Middleton’s published outputs relate in some way to marketing and as he puts it: "part of my objective to influence students and practitioners with a more holistic and cohesive understanding of the diversity of the visitor economy, was my choice to focus on writing books rather than aiming more narrowly on the
readership of academic journals, which full-time academics have to do." (pers. comm). His earliest work with Rik Medlik seeks to define the tourist product from the perspective that all tourists buy packages, whether or not they use travel agents or buy the components of their trip separately or as an inclusive tour (Medlik & Middleton, 1973a, 1973b). This has formed one of the planks of a great number of subsequent marketing studies. He later picked up this thinking in further explorations of the tourism product (Middleton, 1979, 1983, 1991, 1994). His work examines also market patterns and profiles (Middleton, 1975a, 1975b, 1977) as well as the markets for different components of tourism (Middleton, 1975d, 1980b, 1984b) and methods of carrying out marketing (Middleton, 1980a); the last very much designed for a sector coming to grips with modern marketing practices. Victor’s passionate concern about the adequacy of tourism statistics for effective destination management as well as marketing, also finds an early recognition in his publications with his call for marketing intelligence system for tourism (Middleton, 1975c) and later guidelines for the basic statistics of tourism (Middleton, 1984a) and concern about the need for data at a local level (Middleton, 1996).

He eventually brought his thinking about tourism marketing together in what would become the major tourism marketing textbook for nearly two decades, translated into several languages. The first edition of Marketing in Travel and Tourism appeared in 1989 (Middleton, 1989) with three more revised and updated editions in 1993, 2001, and 2009. All the editions of the book provide a comprehensive account of the theory and practice of marketing related to tourism, outlining strategy and tactics, the marketing tools and the application of marketing to the various sectors of tourism, all supported by case studies and examples.

Publications related to the thread of education first appeared at the end of the 1970s with the intention to explain the current education provision for tourism in the UK (Airey & Middleton, 1979) with a follow up in 1993 (Airey, Ladkin, & Middleton, 1993) and again in 1996 (Middleton & Ladkin, 1996). But his major and most influential output came with the report, to which reference has already been made, that he authored for the CNAA (Council for National Academic Awards, 1993). This review of tourism studies degree courses set an important agenda for the development of tourism as a subject for study at a time when the CNAA was disbanded and the new universities were being created in the UK, many of which offered tourism programmes. As has been noted it also provided the initiative to create the body that became the subject association for tourism.

Concern for the impact of tourism can also be seen in some of his early publications (Middleton, 1982) but it is an interest that quickened as tourism grew and its consequences became more evident and recognised in the 1990s (Middleton, 1996, 1997). His experience as Director of WITTERC at Oxford Brookes University provided the basis to collaborate on a book setting out the issues of sustainability, but from a marketing perspective (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998). Here he brings together two of the threads of his career, marketing and concern about what the growth of tourism means but does so in the context of a third, and key, thread, that whatever is proposed needs to be effectively managed in the real commercial and public sector world. As noted earlier it is this that is the real marker of his contribution.

Return to the North

As he edged toward retirement, although still involved and active in tourism in his late 70s, Victor moved to the North of England. To the surprise of many he settled down in the Lake District National Park and married at the age of 65 and now spends much time entertaining, cycling, hill walking, travelling in a large motor caravan and until recently he was regularly out in his helmet and leathers exercising a simple passion for motorbikes. Together he and his wife also run a successful,
gold award winning self-catering holiday let that keeps his focus on the realities of the visitor economy. As his father lived to be 104 and was still driving his car to the wedding at the age of 101, Victor is hoping the genes will be on his side.

Since 2012, he has been seeking to influence decision makers to identify tourism as the visitor economy – not tourism industry – (Middleton, 2015) and to recognise the vital role of public realm and Government/public sector involvement in it at all levels (Middleton, 2007). He says “it’s an uphill struggle...”

**Contributions and Legacies**

The legacies that Victor leaves for tourism can be divided into three parts. The first of these is the contribution that he made to the infrastructure for supporting tourism professionalism. The Tourism Society is now not far short of its 40th anniversary and is continuing to play a key role in bringing together the key elements of the visitor economy and academia as well as promoting dialogue, fostering exchange of ideas and generally aiding professionalism. Similarly the ATHE has for 20 years been the focal point for higher education in tourism in the UK, also engaging with industry. Victor was a prime mover in the creation of both these bodies and the fact that they still reflect many of his values is a lasting tribute to his work.

The second legacy relates to his work in developing and explaining marketing for tourism, through his writings, especially his major textbook, through his many speeches and lectures and through his work with students. One former student who subsequently went on to complete a PhD under his supervision comments “His 1980s paper in *The Quarterly Review of Marketing* contributing to the then current services versus goods debate was one of the first to excite my interest in tourism marketing” and picking up on the ways in which his work relates to industry she also comments “With his knowledge honed by his work with the tourism industry, his books sold successfully throughout the world, criss-crossing the boundaries of academia and practitioners with dual appeal.” (Jackie Clarke, Reader, Oxford Brookes University).

The third legacy is simply his raising of the awareness of tourism and the questions, problems and issues that it creates and in pursuing management solutions. These range from his championing the reform of the statistics and definitions of tourism, to the need for a sustainable approach to tourism, and to the development of approaches to tourism education that are coherent and relevant both for students and for businesses and society at large. And in all of this he has always maintained a balance between the theoretical and the practical. As a former colleague and one his co-authors puts it “Victor Middleton combines a passion for tourism with an intuitive understanding of what makes the sector thrive and a great enthusiasm for tourism SME’s” and she describes him as “A man of huge vision and warmth, he has been at the vanguard of thinking about tourism marketing and sustainable tourism for decades” (Rebecca Hawkins, Rebecca Hawkins, Managing Director of RHP Ltd). The point about his ability to speak to a range of audiences is picked up by one of his consultancy colleagues who writes:

> His background in consumer marketing, then tourism statistics with the British Tourist Authority, and his pioneering academic work at the University of Surrey, formed the basis for his subsequent consultancy work in the commercial and public sectors - demonstrating the benefits that the combination of these competencies could bring - and bridging the often too wide gap between commerce and academia. (Ken Robinson CBE. former Chair, The Tourism Alliance and the Tourism Society).
And another of his former students who went on to establish a successful career as an international consultant comments:

In my view, Victor Middleton has been able to combine academic work and tourism management consulting with unique competence and distinction. I feel these two main parts of his career have been not only successfully balanced but also mutually reinforcing. Few if any other tourism professionals have been able to accomplish this feat with such consummate ease. As an academic and thinker, his keen intellect and considerable talent in writing and public speaking have been readily and widely admired. But his wide-ranging and deeply-rooted knowledge and experience of the industry have always impressed me. It is perhaps this grounding in the real world that has made him so effective and valued a consultant. (John Yacoumis, international consultant)

And in a similar vein one of his collaborators for sustainability writes that he:

“…. saw the need for green growth long before it became popular and was as skilled as making change happen as he was at writing and advocating for it. Victor was also a great educator, so when I wanted to set up an environment research centre for WTTC to advance the ideas from the Rio Earth Summit within the sector, he was the obvious partner and ideal collaborator. We never had any fundamental difference of view, nor any plan that he didn’t execute perfectly”. (Geoffrey Lipman, President, International Council of Tourism Partners, Belgium)

Informal recognition of his achievements have come from former students, work colleagues and from industry more generally, with one former student commenting that “As a doctoral supervisor, he was unfailingly supportive and generous with both his time and contacts and he had an unerring eye for writing style, precision and structure.” (Jackie Clarke). Another comments: “Whether as a student or colleague on one of his consulting assignments, involvement with Victor Middleton has always been an education” (John Yacoumis) and one of the UK’s leading tourism consultants says: “Victor and I have had the intellectually stimulating pleasure of working together on tourism projects for over 30 years, during which the three complementary parts of his tourism experience have been the springboard for innovative approaches and solutions” (Ken Robinson).

Formal recognition has come with his receipt of the Catey Award from the hospitality industry in 1995, the Cumbria Tourism Lifetime Award in 2004, recognising his contribution to his local area, and the civil honour of OBE awarded by HM The Queen in 2005 in recognition of his overall contribution to tourism – a fitting award for a major contributor to the theory and practice of tourism.

References


