

Victor TC Middleton OBE, FTS, 80, Pioneer of the Understanding and Management of Tourism



Victor Middleton was born to parents who ran a small hotel on the Fylde Coast of Lancashire, almost within earshot of Blackpool. So, it is perhaps not accidental he turned to tourism as a career. This came after King Edward VII School, Lytham St Annes and the London School of Economics, followed by National Service with the army and then stints with Proctor and Gamble and Gillette Industries, then at the very beginnings of modern marketing practice. In 1968 he put this marketing experience to good use when he moved into tourism with the British Travel Association, predecessor of Visit Britain, as Marketing Research Manager. Subsequently he went on, right up to the time when he died, to make an indelible mark on so many different aspects of UK tourism.

Victor's interest and expertise in the field began before the dawn of the mass international business that is tourism today, a development that he sets out so well in his 2005 book *British Tourism: the remarkable story of growth*. It is over this period, moving first to academia, at the University of Surrey, and then to independent consultancy, that he personally was involved in so many and varied initiatives, often as the pioneer, to transform the ways in which tourism developed and is understood and operated.

From his academic base, through his research, teaching and writing, he transformed many of the ways in which tourism is understood and taught. One of his great contributions was to bring modern marketing thinking and practice to tourism. His 1989 textbook *Marketing in Travel and Tourism*, for example, was the major tourism marketing textbook for nearly two decades, with a worldwide influence. He was also a pioneer in exploring the growing uneasy relationship between tourism and the environment. Here his leadership of the World Travel and Tourism Environmental Research Centre provided the base to co-author *Sustainable Tourism: a marketing perspective*. As an educator his longstanding interest in the growing education provision for tourism in the country made him the obvious choice to chair the National Review of Tourism Studies Degree Courses for the Council for National Academic Awards. The subsequent report not only had a major and long lasting influence on the provision of tourism programmes but also prompted him to lead an initiative to bring together the academic and business players in tourism. The resulting National Liaison Group, of which he served as first chair, subsequently was transformed into the national subject association for tourism in higher education, The Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE). This is now one of the key players for tourism education in the country.

Victor Middleton was a prime mover together with Professor Medlik in the initiative to create a national professional body for tourism, which resulted in the formation of the Tourism Society in 1977, bringing together the various sectors of tourism, including academia. The resulting Society was the first body of its kind and Victor served as its first Vice Chairman and subsequently as Chairman and Board member. Now in its 42nd year the Society continues 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.

Outside the university world, the hallmark of his career was the way in which his influence straddled both academia and business. During his many years as a consultant and adviser, he assisted the development not only of individual companies and organisations, including our national tourism bodies, museum bodies and destinations, but also more generally. One of his passions was for the development and use of tourism statistics. While statisticians were mainly concerned simply with measurement, he was always keen to show how the data could be interpreted to improve tourism for visitors, tourism businesses and host communities. He was also a strong advocate of the need for the accurate definition and measurement of tourism, at a time when many words were in common use without agreed meanings, so statistical measurement and comparison was inaccurate. 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.

Victor Middleton's career spanned the period during which tourism became well recognised as an important component of British commercial and cultural life. His legacy lies in his contribution to the infrastructure for supporting tourism professionalism, particularly in the Tourism Society and the Association for Tourism in Higher Education; in his explanations of the nature and characteristics of marketing for tourism which are now widely accepted and practiced; and in his raising of the awareness of tourism and the questions, problems and issues that it creates and in pursuing management solutions including the reform of the statistics and definitions of tourism. Formal recognition of his contribution came with several awards, most notably the civil honour of OBE in 2005 in recognition of his overall contribution to tourism – a fitting award for a major contributor to the theory and practice of tourism.

He died in Ulverston after a very short illness. He had moved from the south to the Lake District in the 1990s, and to Ulverston about 2 years ago where he lived with his wife Deborah. As an individual he was a man of boundless enthusiasm and energy, always ready with new ideas and initiatives and he brought these same characteristics to his leisure pursuits. He had a great sense of humour was a great communicator at all levels and he loved to travel and explore. He relished the outdoor life, walking, sailing, driving sports cars or his motorbike regardless of his advancing years, as well as exploring with their motorvan

At just over five feet tall he was physically rarely the most prominent member of any gathering, but on a platform as a speaker, as a participant in a discussion and as raconteur he stood head and shoulders above most others. He was a giant of the tourism world.

"Written by David Airey and Ken Robinson CBE" with the assistance of
Victor's widow Deborah Middleton