

CHIMERA
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“Storied of old in high immortal verse
Of dire chimeras and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to . . .”

(John Milton)

PREFACE

Chimera is the mysterious successor to *Axis 116* and *Platform* and completes a trinity of journal titles for the Student Geographical Society. Yet it too conjures up a whole series of images geographical. Like the origins of geography in the west, the winged hybrid Chimera reaches back to the myths of Classical Greece. The Chimera was, it appears, a direct descendant of the son of the Earth and the Sky, 'Oceanus' the source of all life the Great River which encircled the world and on whose outer margins lived a great variety of strange monsters and outlandish tribes. The rise of 'rational' geography in classical times reduced the significance of 'Oceanus' to the limiting geographical term 'Ocean' but the eternal chimera lived on along the frontiers between the known and the unknown. Not only on the fascinating fringes of early and medieval maps, but likewise today and indeed universally the advancing territory of the known is bounded by a threatening borderland — a *pays de chimeres* — where all fanciful, unfamiliar, awful beings, images and legends hold (temporary) sway. The ancient forms of the chimeras were the first to fall with the Age of Discovery but the explorers and the new maps themselves threw up many mysteries. New arrangements of land and sea and above all a whole array of new and apparently strange peoples, customs, beauties and terrors were revealed — and still continue to be revealed today. So the myth of the Chimera carries one of the central concerns of geography — exploration and understanding — of exploring the world the more fully to understand ourselves. The title also hints at the varied, hybrid and versatile nature of the subject geography. The Journal title might also be suggesting the re-emerging importance of metaphor and image in the discipline while, on the other hand, the older titles of *Axis 116* and *Platform* provide the necessary link with, and moorings to, a finite earth.

Chimera also challenges the myth that students today are only concerned with self-advancement and the rigours of lecture and examination hall. This year the Student Geographical Society has had a very active and successful programme of events culminating in the production of this worthwhile volume of essays. It is good to see articles from representatives of each of the undergraduate years as well as the lively precedent of a contribution from a former geography student now carrying out postgraduate research in a cognate discipline. But in a special way, this journal is very much a product of the energy, *esprit-de-corps* and enterprise of all the postgraduates in the department. In particular, the Secretary for this venture Catherine Ketch, has done trojan work over the year in getting all the contributions together. Thanks too to all the back-up staff in the department and to Brian Stewart and his team for their help. Orchestrating all these activities and providing firm if gentle leadership was the Editor, Jim MacLaughlin, who has done a marvellous job of work. To one and all, congratulations on the revitalisation of the student journal and wishing *Chimera* many seasons of adventuring into the borderlands between the known and unknown.

W. J. Smyth