

Annual General Meeting and Medals & Awards Celebration

7 June 2010

THE PRESIDENT, MICHAEL PALIN, IN THE CHAIR

Annual General Meeting

The President, Michael Palin CBE, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and invited Professor David Petley, Honorary Secretary (Expeditions and Fieldwork), to read the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 1 June 2009. The minutes were approved and signed.

The Director, Dr Rita Gardner, presented a summary of the Annual Review 2009. Setting the context for 2009 as a challenging year, she highlighted the continuing strong performance of the Society across the breadth of its activities. Against the backdrop of a recession, a special general meeting, the long planned programmes review, the need to sustain energy in delivering the ten new projects initiated in 2008, the President's appeal and other fundraising demands and the need to maintain staff morale, she illustrated the quality of delivery of the Society's core and project activities. She described another remarkable year citing, as examples, the 42 000 attendees at Society organised events; the 164 countries in which the Society's journals are read; the 850 000 users of the website; the £1.5 million extra funding to geography departments following lobbying of the Higher Education Funding Council of England; the 1 000 people trained by Geography Outdoors in fieldwork and expeditions; the appointment of Michael Palin as President; the annual academic conference held in Manchester and the Explore event in the Society in November; and the addition of the collections of John Noble and Captain John Noel to the Collections. Dr Gardner gratefully acknowledged all those who had contributed to the Society's success, including: engaged trustees, hard-working staff, donors for their commitment and support of what the Society does, and the Society's loyal members and Fellows. To close, she announced the launch of the website for a new project, Hidden Journeys (www.hiddenjourneys.co.uk), designed to explore, interactively, the beauty, diversity and geography of the Earth from the air as seen from international flight paths.

The RGS-IBG Annual Review 2009 is available from the RGS-IBG in print upon request and online at www.rgs.org/AnnualReview.

The Honorary Treasurer STEPHEN HENWOOD

The Honorary Treasurer, Stephen Henwood, presented the accounts for 2009. Describing a difficult year with many uncertainties, he outlined how with cautious budgeting, the removal of non-essential expenditure items, careful monitoring, effective mitigation strategies, and the excellent work of the finance team and all staff, the overall outcome was a small operating surplus on the General Fund. A similarly cautious approach is being pursued for 2010. After long and very careful deliberation, the Council had made the difficult decision to cease future service accrual in the Society's final salary pension scheme, and a consultation process is underway with those staff affected to consider the Council's proposals. Stephen Henwood concluded by thanking Professor Derek Diamond for his service as Chair of the Enterprises Board.

Attendees were invited to ask questions based on the Annual Review and the Financial Review. Questions were raised regarding the creation of new overseas branches; the commissionaires' tip bowl; the exact nature of the non-essential costs that had been removed from the Society's budget; any plans the Society had to research the volcanic ash cloud; how the Society would pay for the pension scheme deficit; and the opportunities for overseas Fellows and members to network and/or organise local geographical events.

Announcement of the elections to Council

The President then announced the outcomes of the elections to the Council. The candidates nominated for vacant Council positions who are returned unopposed are: Professor Michael Bradshaw as Vice-President for Research and Professor Stephen Daniels for Chair of Annual Conference 2010.

Elections were held for three positions. For Ordinary Councillor, Education, Jamie Buchanan-Dunlop

was elected with 52% of the vote. For Ordinary Councillor, Research, Professor Anthony Parsons was elected with 59% of the vote. For Ordinary Councillor, Fieldwork and Expeditions, Benedict Allen was elected with 71% of the vote.

Michael warmly thanked those who were completing their terms on the Council: Professor David Livingstone for his contributions as Vice-President for Research and as Co-Chair of the Programmes Review; Tony Thomas, Ordinary Councillor, Expeditions and Fieldwork; Sir Keith Ajegbo, Ordinary Councillor, Education; Professor Stuart Lane, Chair of Annual Conference 2009; and Professor Neil Roberts, Ordinary Councillor, Research.

Medals & Awards Celebration

The PRESIDENT

I would like to welcome you all to the Society's Medals and Awards presentations. This year we have broken with the tradition of absorbing the presentations into the rest of the AGM business, and created a separate event, solely dedicated to the awards which we hope you will all enjoy and which we hope will become the template for future occasions. Let no-one accuse us of not moving with the times. BAFTA beware! I think it is absolutely fitting that the Medals and Awards should be given their own time and space. They represent recognition of excellence in geography from what is the most active and – if the French hadn't beaten us to it by 6 months – the oldest learned Society for geography in the world.

Having been fortunate to have had two inspirational geography teachers in my time, I have always regarded the subject as full of potential and possibility. During my schooldays in Sheffield it was the one subject that got us out of the building for a start, and my earliest experience of fieldwork was walking the beautiful river valleys outside the city, learning of their vital role in Sheffield's economy and having a picnic lunch. Later we were taken further afield to exotic locations like Nottingham, where we learnt how cigarettes were made. I can remember being distinctly underwhelmed that only the masters were given free fags. We were given ashtrays for our parents.

I was, sadly, never cut out to be a scientist, and despite gaining a good result in my Geography A Level, I was seduced away into the less technical world of English and then Modern History, which I read at university, before falling even further into intellectual disrepute by becoming a comedy scriptwriter and later a Knight who said, 'NI!'

Throughout this time, though, I remained interested in all those things which stamped me as a geographer when young: a love of books set in other countries and a love of atlases and maps, in any shape or form, something which I found I shared with the Dalai

Lama, when we met during the filming of my *Himalaya* series. A fascination, too, with travel and nature documentaries, usually featuring David Attenborough. David once told me how he was treated with enormous reverence, and his boat carried onto the shore by the local inhabitants of a remote, but devoutly monarchist Pacific Island. Only later did he realise that they'd confused the name David Attenborough with the Duke of Edinburgh.

My fondness for geography showed through in little ways – I was a prime mover in getting the Python team away from filming in the streets of Shepherd's Bush and up to great natural landscapes like the Pennines, and later, with *The Holy Grail*, to the magnificence of western Scotland. In 1980 I accepted an invitation to present one of the BBC's new *Great Railway Journeys of the World*. At last, I thought, Chile, Siberia, The Rockies. No, the director told me, *after* I'd signed the contract – there's only one left: London to Crewe.

As it turned out it was extended right across the country and directly led to my being asked, 8 years later, to present a new version of *Around The World In Eighty Days*. The great delight of seeing the world to a certain extent seduced me back from acting to what, quite unexpectedly, turned into a 20-year career in geography. Not, I hasten to add, on a par with those of our Medal and Award winners tonight, but nevertheless, one of real interest and extraordinary opportunities.

I fail to see why some, desperately misguided, people, see geography as boring. It explains so much. Not least the major stories of the last few months – the earthquake in Haiti; the oddly environmentally friendly volcanic ash cloud; and the implications of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico – but other issues, behind the headlines perhaps, but very much part of our everyday life. So many aspects of our lives involve geographical issues: from the siting of wind turbines to how we get to work in the morning; from what we eat to the location of the best coast for surfing or the best cliff for para-gliding. Then there are the bigger questions. How much of the mindset of the Taliban can be better understood if you know the physical geography of where they come from? How do pandemics move across the world? Why are the years getting warmer and what are the implications of the massive increases in levels of carbon dioxide and methane in our atmosphere? Suddenly geography becomes much more than just an option at school – it becomes the knowledge, the knowledge of the Earth and how it all works. Geography is about the living, breathing essence of the planet. It explains the past, illuminates the present and prepares us for the future.

So thank you, in advance, to all our winners tonight for your achievements and to many others out there who may not have won medals or awards this year but whose work is patiently adding to the sum of geographical knowledge.

Her Majesty the Queen has approved the awards of our two highest honours – the two Gold Medals of equal standing. This year the Founder's Medal is awarded to Professor Diana Liverman and the Patron's Medal to Jack Dangermond.

Founder's Medal

Professor Diana Liverman is recognised for encouraging, developing and promoting understanding of the human dimensions of climate change.

Diana has enjoyed a distinguished career as a scholar of climate change and its potential human impacts. Having trained as a climate modeller, she was involved in the first generation of climate change impacts modelling. She was at the forefront of the revolution to model and understand the impacts of future climate change and was instrumental in drawing the attention of the policy community to the human dimensions of global environmental change.

Key appointments with highly influential bodies, notably as Chair of the Human Dimensions of Climate Change Committee of the US National Academy of Sciences in the 1990s, have allowed her to play a prominent role in promoting the contributions of geography to the understanding of climate change. Her contributions to research in geography were recently recognised by her appointment to the new committee on 'America's Climate Choices' convened by the US National Academies at the request of the US Congress.

Today Diana is recognised as a very special member of the geographical community with the award of the Founder's Medal – for her research, leadership and good counsel and for her energy, her intelligence and her commitment to advancing geography.

PROFESSOR DIANA LIVERMAN

Thank you so much for this honour. It came as a lovely surprise and I am very grateful to the Society for the award. There are many people and institutions to acknowledge in encouraging my professional career. Above all my parents fostered a love of reading and of geography with a house full of books, holidays in national parks, and full support for my migrations that took me from London to universities across North America and to fieldwork around the world. Newly married, they uprooted themselves to Ghana to work on the Volta project, bringing me into the world in Africa and to my long-term interest in the developing world (and a lifelong love of Ghana's exports – in the form of chocolate!). I wish they were still here and I am grateful to Oxford University who brought me back to the UK so I could be closer to them at the end of their lives.

Among my mentors I want to especially acknowledge the geographers who taught me as an under-

graduate geographer at University College London – John Adams, Bob Bennett, Jacquie Burgess, Ron Cooke, David Lowenthal, Richard Munton, John Thornes, Claudio Vita Finzi and Anne Whyte – who taught me to think critically and sparked my interest in research, and gave me the confidence that my gender was no barrier to success at a time when few women were found in academic geography. Anne whisked me off to Toronto for postgraduate work on natural hazards, bringing me into a network of North American environmental scholars who became teachers, collaborators and friends. People like Ian Burton, Margaret FitzSimmons, Ken Hare, Bob Kates and Gilbert White were major influences and I am forever grateful to climate scientist Steve Schneider who supervised my PhD and who has always pushed me to take risks, speak out, publish and link my work to policy.

You have honoured me for my contributions to encouraging, developing and promoting understanding of the human dimensions of climate change. In the past year, climate change research has seen some of the greatest highs and lows of the last three decades. From Copenhagen – where thousands of scientists, activists and world leaders came together to try and negotiate an agreement to avoid dangerous anthropogenic climate change – to 'Climategate' – where sceptics and media tried to discredit climate science and shift public opinion against action, we have seen unprecedented attention to the risks of climate change and unparalleled attempts to deny them. In the US National Academies America's Climate Choices reports (www.americasclimatechoices.org) we stand by the climate science with evidence that the climate is changing, that it is primarily caused by human activity, and poses serious risks to people and ecosystems – and call for serious attention to limiting greenhouse gas emissions and to planning for adapting to the climate changes that are already underway.

We are less sure about how to restore public confidence in climate science or the most appropriate ways to frame the climate challenge for policy makers. Some recent survey results suggest that the framing and public perceptions of the need to act on climate change are already changing in the face of the Gulf oil disaster in the USA and reports of extreme weather events. Geographers can make a real difference in rethinking approaches to communicating climate change, including a new language that replaces words like uncertainty (where the public thinks we are saying we don't know) with terms like range of possibilities and work that focuses on local observations and impacts rather than global averages.

I have long argued that the social sciences are critical to understanding climate change – its causes in human activity, its impacts on people, and the choices about how to respond to it. Yet research budgets for the social sciences – both in the UK and USA – are inadequate to the challenge. We especially need support for careful comparative work on impacts,

mitigation and adaptation at the local level that can be used to understand vulnerability and the attitudinal, behavioural, economic, technological and political barriers to climate change policies in the context of other stresses.

The human dimensions of climate change are not just academic. There are millions of people at risk. For more than 30 years I have been concerned about vulnerability to drought and how it might interact with increasing levels of greenhouse gases. Drought destroys lives, livelihoods and landscapes – and although people have many ingenious ways to adapt to drought, global changes – both physical and human – are increasing drought vulnerability in many parts of the world. Although agronomists work to increase crop yields, economic crises and the withdrawal of government support systems have made it harder for many farmers to obtain the water, fertiliser and prices they need to produce food. Food security has also been undermined by price speculation, shifts to bio-fuels, and increasing demand, with more than 100 million extra people added to the ranks of the hungry during the food price increases in 2007. Overshadowing these vulnerabilities is the likelihood that climate change will mean more intense droughts in many regions, undermining decades of development assistance and community investments in improved health, water supplies, agriculture, and poverty alleviation. The estimates for helping the developing world adapt to climate change exceed US\$100 billion a year.

This is why I and other colleagues in the human dimensions community will not give up on efforts to inform policy, design research programs, undertake local field studies and train students to study the human dimensions of climate change. After sharing the news of this award with close family and friends, the first group I wanted to tell was my postgraduate students – because it validates the choice they have made to study climate change and its human dimensions and the hopes we share that solutions will be found for a more sustainable future.

The PRESIDENT

Patron's Medal

Jack Dangermond is recognised with the award of this Royal Medal for his role in advancing geographical science through the development of Geographical Information Systems (GIS). When introduced, it was revolutionary software for mapping and geospatial analyses. Today it has grown to become an essential tool for geographical research and applications across the business, government and not-for-profit worlds.

Jack has been an immense driving force in the development of the GIS industry. A GIS pioneer from the early days, his company, the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), has created the most

successful GIS software in use worldwide with more than one million users at the present time.

Beyond this commercial success, Jack is a leader and a visionary who has been instrumental in advocating for geography and its key role in understanding and responding to many of the big issues of the twenty-first century. He has led initiatives to donate software to environmental, educational and non-governmental organisations across the world; has set up a major publishing and educational enterprise which focuses on geography and the ways in which we can use technology to enhance living standards; and spoken at literally thousands of meetings worldwide.

He is a tireless ambassador for geography and for GIS and holds a number of prestigious awards and honorary doctorates from around the globe, reflecting both his major profile and the considerable influence of his work.

Today Jack is recognised for his lifetime's work advancing geographical science with the award of the Patron's Medal.

JACK DANGERMOND

First, I want to thank the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) for giving me this award and for recognising the role of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in geography. This is a milestone event for me, and also for the GIS world that I am part of.

Geography has been co-evolving with this interesting technology for some decades. In the last half of the twentieth century, a group of people began exploring what I like to call, 'computational geography'. This work, like the roots of this organisation, involved people interested in exploration and geographic science. These fellows explored new frontiers and blended mathematics and computing with maps and geographic information. Some of them were just kids playing around, developing little algorithms. Some of them took themselves quite seriously: people like David Bickmore, here in this country in the Experimental Cartography Unit; people like Howard Fisher at the Harvard Lab; people like Duane Marble and Roger Tomlinson, who is a member of your Society from Canada; people like my own professor, Carl Steinitz, who is here with me today. They played around and experimented with automated mapping and building data models of geography within computers. Their work laid a foundation for the emergence of what we now know as Geographic Information Systems, commonly referred to as GIS.

Their work was picked up by many others here and around the world, and expanded upon and extended in the academic world. Also in business, people began to say, 'Hmmm, I want to get my business geographically literate – I want to get the geographic advantage!' This started a whole new and interesting way of thinking about geography. Government

agencies also began to automate their geospatial data and develop whole new ways of doing things. The foundational aspects of geography and maps have become a central part of government. One leader here, Vanessa Lawrence of the Ordnance Survey, is world-renowned for that very thing – building a geographic foundation for society.

This technology has become very successful – there are hundreds of thousands of organisations, big and small, that have now embraced it and embedded it as a way to guide their decision-making, to automate and guide their operations. Some would call it ‘applied geography’. I like to think of it as the embedding and integration of geographic knowledge into the way organisations behave.

While GIS has already been successful, my sense is this is only the beginning. The technology that’s emerging is about to create a new age of geography. Today most people are familiar with the consumer-oriented maps on the web and the personal navigation systems that are becoming pervasive with cell phones. These technologies give a little glimmer of what is possible. We are learning how to use the power of the web to reach every aspect of society. As we roll the whole of geographic knowledge into this environment, GIS and geospatial thinking is going to change the world. People (all of society) will come to understand geography as a foundation for action. What we know in the geographic science community, will be leveraged. People will understand relationships and patterns and processes in whole new ways; they’ll think differently, and hopefully they’ll act differently. They’ll look at their human footprint, and think about geography, and the consequences of what they’re doing in a more thoughtful way.

I accept this medal from you and I appreciate it very much. I accept it on behalf of all of my colleagues, some of who have worked with me for 40 years, helping the methods and technology to emerge. Sometimes I think it’s like a microscope for microbiologists – I like to think of it as a macroscope which is co-evolving not only with applications but also with core geographic science itself. I also accept the award on behalf of all the million or so GIS users. I appreciate the Society doing this; it means a lot to this community. They’re quite dedicated: they’re looking at global warming and climate change, biodiversity and human health, land use and natural resource management – all the dimensions of the environment that I know you care about, that are close to us – and they’re trying to develop systems for managing all of the things that really matter.

I want to close by describing what I believe is an important new aspect of geography called ‘GeoDesign’. This is not simply about describing geography as it is – with observations, maps, measurements, or models – it’s a vision for using geographic knowledge, for designing and creating our common future, for building the next generation of geography.

It’s time that we begin getting conscious about this. Instead of being at the mercy of the consequences of very rapid geographic change, we must learn how to take responsibility as a human species to guide the evolution of geography through science-based design – at all scales and in all activities. The science of geography and GIS will provide the framework for doing this.

And if we don’t do this? Most of us are now beginning to recognise the consequences of that. Surely we will not survive. As we learn to leverage geographic knowledge in this way, I believe we will design a better world, one that’s sustainable and supportive of life as we know it.

So once again, thank you, and I appreciate this chance to be here with you and receive this great honour.

The PRESIDENT

We now turn to the Victoria Medal and the Busk Medal awarded by the Society’s Council.

Victoria Medal

Professor Rick Battarbee is one of the most accomplished physical geographers of his generation. From his initial ground-breaking work on the use of lake sediments to document the effects of acid rain on ecosystems, to the wider concerns of present global climate change, his research has put UK science at the forefront of international research.

Many of the approaches he pioneered, such as using diatoms as sensitive indicators of environmental change and dating lake sediments with lead isotopes, now are standard techniques within the discipline. Furthermore, through the Environmental Change Research Centre at University College London he has taught, inspired and influenced a large group of research students and young scholars.

A Fellow of the Royal Society, Rick has been recognised by leading learned societies across the world – in Scandinavia, Russia, China and the USA. He has brought great distinction to British geographical science.

I am very pleased to invite Rick to receive the Victoria Medal for his conspicuous merit in research on environmental change.

PROFESSOR RICK BATTARBEE

It is a great honour to be awarded the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Victoria Medal. I was fortunate in 1989 to receive the Back Award from the Society and so it is a very special privilege to receive a second award.

In this day and age most research, certainly environmental research, is conducted by teams of scientists, but it is often only the head of the research group

that receives public recognition. In that regard I have had the great pleasure over the last 30 years to have worked with, and in many cases to continue working with, an outstanding group of talented and highly motivated research students and staff in UCL. I should like to dedicate this award to them, without whom very little would have been achieved.

Our success has also depended on the support of a succession of Heads of Department, from Bill Mead, who risked my appointment back in 1976, having I'm sure never heard the word 'diatom' before, through Ron Cooke, who persuaded Derek Roberts, the Provost of UCL at the time, to set up the Environmental Change Research Centre in 1991, followed by Richard Munton, Peter Wood and now Mark Maslin who have supported the ECRC, principally through the appointment of staff and through investment in progressively expensive laboratories.

One of our main research interests has been trying to understand how upland lakes and streams have been and are affected by 'acid rain'. In the 1980s 'acid rain' was the hot topic of the day. At first the British Government denied any relationship between fossil fuel combustion and environmental impact but then finally bowed to the scientific evidence that acid rain was indeed the cause of the widespread damage to upland waters in the UK and other parts of Europe.

Across Europe, governments acted to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions from power stations. The results have been dramatic, with emissions now having fallen by 90% since 1980. And we can now show that lakes and streams in the UK are beginning to recover.

But it is not all good news. There is a long way to go for upland water ecosystems to be fully restored, and the recovery is threatened by climate change, not by an increase in temperature but by an increase in the amount and intensity of sea-salt laden winter storms that are expected in the future in upland Britain.

I think it is worth bearing in mind that as we now tackle climate change, principally by reducing dependence on coal and oil, there will be added benefits from the concomitant reduction in the emission of other serious pollutants produced by fossil fuel combustion, not only sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides that form the precursors of acid rain, but also highly toxic pollutants such as polyaromatic hydrocarbons and trace metals, especially lead and mercury.

However, the climate change battle has not yet been won despite the compelling nature of the science, and carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere continue to rise inexorably. It is important that learned societies, such as the RGS-IBG, play a full role both in strongly supporting the science base needed to inform Government policy and, equally importantly, in helping to communicate that science to the wider public.

I applaud the work of the RGS-IBG in both those regards, and thank you again for the great honour in bestowing this medal on me.

The PRESIDENT

Busk Medal

Professor Ann Varley is recognised with the Busk Medal for her long-term commitment to field research in Mexico.

Ann's research is at the forefront of both theoretical and policy debates around urbanisation, housing and law in Latin America. This research, which is grounded in collaborative fieldwork in Mexico, has highlighted how informal and illegal land tenure processes operate on the ground.

Ann is an exceptional scholar, with an international reputation for original and challenging, empirically based and policy-relevant research. She has a long-term commitment to working collaboratively with colleagues in Mexico and to communicating her research findings widely, in both English and Spanish, to academics and practitioners.

The esteem in which her research is held within Latin America is demonstrated by numerous invitations to speak at conferences and workshops on the continent.

I now invite Ann to receive the Busk Medal for her contributions to fieldwork abroad.

PROFESSOR ANN VARLEY

I'm very honoured to accept the award of the Busk Medal and deeply grateful to the Society. I'm especially pleased because I see this award as an endorsement of the *type* of work I do in Mexico: spending extended periods of your life in a country, speaking the language, and doing the work yourself. A young Latin Americanist recently told me that although her department wanted her to make lots of funding applications, they didn't want her to do the fieldwork – she was to employ research assistants to do it for her. That seems to me to be a great shame. We're paid to teach, and that naturally imposes limits on what we can do, such that we do need to work with others. And it's right that we pass on the skills we've learned to those working with us. But without some flexibility enabling us to spend more than just the odd week or two on fieldwork ourselves, the quality of our research *and* teaching *will* suffer.

Crucial insights that have shaped my thinking could never have been gained second-hand. I learned so much from the bemused looks that greeted questions I asked people in Mexico City about whether they would sell their homes once they had a property title; from the woman who declared that she would only ever leave the area 'in her *cajón*' – her box, meaning her coffin; or from the elderly woman who came up to

talk to me one day while I was taking photographs in Puebla. I was a foreigner; we'd never met before; but that didn't matter: she just wanted to tell me about how her daughter-in-law was being so mean to her, a real bully. That turned a familiar story about domineering mothers-in-law making life a misery for their sons' wives on its head, and set off a whole new chain of thought about the implications for older women of sharing a home when the balance of power shifts and they become the vulnerable one. None of these insights would have been possible had I not been there in person, and had I not been able to communicate in a Spanish that was robust enough to navigate the rich and pungent colloquialisms I heard every day. So I worry when I see research proposals crossing continents but employing sub-contractors to do all the work on the ground, and when half the remaining budget goes on paying someone to translate everything into English.

I'm also glad to be acknowledged for sticking to work in *one* country. It troubles me when young researchers are routinely told they must go somewhere different for their next project. There's a trade-off between breadth and depth, and I also wonder about the implications of researchers treating countries like so many scalps on our belt. I took a conscious decision not to follow that path, so it feels very good to see the value of remaining loyal to Mexico recognised in this way.

And finally, I'm delighted that you've made this award to someone whose fieldwork takes place at home. In, on, and around the homes people in Mexico work so hard to build for themselves. There are still those for whom the idea of a geography of home is just too – well, foreign. They don't know what they're missing. I'm delighted that you do. Thank you very much.

The PRESIDENT

We now come to the Awards of the Society as recommended by the Council. The Murchison Award will be presented towards the end as the winner of this award will respond on behalf of all the 2010 Award winners.

The **Cherry Kearton Medal and Award** for a traveller concerned with the study or practice of natural history and photography is awarded to FRANS LANTING. For more than 25 years, Frans has travelled the world documenting wild places, science and conservation in environments from the Amazon to Antarctica. His mission is 'to promote knowledge and understanding about the earth and its natural history through images and ideas that convey a passion for nature and a sense of wonder about the living planet'. His assignments have ranged from the search for pygmy Bonobo chimpanzees in the rainforest of the Congo, to a circumnavigation by sailboat of South Georgia Island. His photographic work appears in books, magazines and exhibitions around the world.

Frans has received numerous awards for his work as a photographer and a conservationist – including top honours from the World Press Photo, the Sierra Club's Ansel Adams Award, BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year, and Sweden's Lennart Nilsson Award.

Frans' photographs convey a real passion and excitement about the world in which we live. They bring geography to life, illuminating a world of beauty, wonder and insight, as well as making people aware of the world's landscapes, which need to be protected, preserved and appreciated.

Frans regrets being unable to join us today owing to his work schedule.

The **Back Award** is presented to PROFESSOR CHRIS HAMNETT for his policy-relevant research on housing, social change and inequality. Chris' early research in the 1970s on the 'break-up' of the London flats market was followed by work on housing inheritance and the implications for wealth distribution, while his current work is on social class, ethnic change and education in East London.

His work has had a wide range of impacts: it has led to the formulation of legislation, to his involvement in 'think tanks' and to his interdisciplinary recognition. Further evidence of the wide impact of his work is reflected in his writings over many years on economic and housing issues for *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times* and *New Statesman*.

The **Cuthbert Peak Award** for advancing geographical knowledge through contemporary methods is presented to DR JEROME LEWIS. Jerome has pioneered the use of digital mapping in unusual and important contexts to empower local people to regain a role in the management of their environments in the face of rapidly changing situations. Current GIS technologies usually require significant expertise to operate. Jerome has developed innovative icon-interfaced Geographic Information Systems, responding to the needs expressed by indigenous groups in the Congo Basin confronting legal and illegal pressures on the forests in which they live. These innovations in digital mapping are bringing very real benefits to historically marginalised and vulnerable communities.

The **Gill Memorial Award** for great potential and achievement for those in the earlier stages of their careers is awarded to DR COLIN McFARLANE. Colin has already gained an international reputation for his work on urban inequality, infrastructure and knowledge. Focusing on Mumbai's informal settlements, his research has revealed new insights into the nature and production of urban inequality, and how different forms of knowledge and learning enable and limit people's capacities to respond. A highly productive scholar, his work has already had significant impact across urban, development and political geography, and has helped to place geography more centrally in academic debates within anthropology, development studies and political science.

In association with the Society's academic publishing partners, Wiley-Blackwell, *Area* awards the annual **Area Prize** for the best article in the journal by a new researcher. In 2009 this prize was awarded to EDMUND HARRIS for his paper, 'Neoliberal subjectivities or a politics of the possible? Reading for difference in alternative food networks'.

Edmund is unfortunately unable to join us this evening and his prize will be awarded at the Annual Conference in September.

Now to our celebration of excellence in teaching, in engaging the public and in serving the international community. I would like to invite Dr Vanessa Lawrence, Director General and Chief Executive of the Ordnance Survey, to present this year's two Ordnance Survey Awards.

DR VANESSA LAWRENCE

The two **Ordnance Survey Awards** are presented to ADRIAN TAYLOR and HELEN YOUNG for excellence in teaching geography in secondary education. Both are committed and innovative teachers.

Adrian Taylor is Head of Geography at St Mary's Roman Catholic High School, Chesterfield. A Chartered Geographer, Adrian is actively engaged in connecting new research in geography to classroom practice, both with the Society and with the Geographical Association. Notable is his imaginative involvement of out-of-school experts in fieldwork. For example, local planners for urban fieldwork and magistrates to provide a citizenship dimension to Key Stage 3 work on crime.

Helen Young is a geography teacher at The Friary School, Lichfield. She has been instrumental in the integration of ICT and GIS in both this and her previous schools. Her website, geographygeek.co.uk, has a large following of teachers who benefit from numerous free resources for classroom use. She has also developed GIS materials for educational publishers.

The PRESIDENT

The **Taylor and Francis Award** is presented to PROFESSOR MARTIN HAIGH for the promotion of teaching and learning in higher education. Martin is a leader in education for sustainable development and global citizenship. A Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a long-term member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (recently completing a 6-year term as Co-Editor), he has enabled publication of major symposia on topics as diverse as 'Teaching about Europe', 'Geography and gender' and 'Sustainability education'. He has also written extensively on the internationalisation of the curriculum.

The **Ness Award** is presented to PROFESSOR IAIN STEWART, who has championed the wider understanding and popularisation of geography through his

work in the media. Iain has balanced a strong academic career with a successful series of television programmes that have brought both geology and geography to prime-time television. Through his unique style of presentation, his sense for adventure, and in-depth knowledge, these series, which include *Rough Science*, *Hot Planet*, *The Climate Wars* and *Journeys into the Ring of Fire and Earth*, have engaged large audiences and fostered a greater understanding of our world. His most recent BBC series, *How Earth Made Us*, made frequent references to the vital role that geography plays in the understanding of our environment.

The **Geographical Award** is given to MAPACTION for providing non-commercial mapping support to disaster relief efforts worldwide. MapAction, a non-governmental organisation based in the UK, uses GIS technology to improve coordination efforts among agencies and host countries during disaster responses. MapAction provides rapid answers to questions such as 'where are the greatest needs' and 'where are the gaps that need to be filled', delivering information directly to rescue and relief agencies. MapAction's first emergency deployment was to Sri Lanka in December 2004 in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami. Since then, MapAction's highly skilled GIS teams have carried out more than 18 emergency and 55 disaster preparedness missions. I invite the Trustees and volunteers of MapAction, Andrew Douglas-Bate, Helen Campbell, Lynne Kirkham and Victoria White, to accept the Geographical Award.

This year there are two recipients of the **Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize** for the best undergraduate dissertation submitted for a first geography degree – JOSEPH JENKINSON (University of Southampton) for 'An exposé of the critically endangered palm *Dyopsis saintelucei* endemic to the littoral forest mosaic of Southeast Madagascar'; and LUCY STAPLETON (University of Cambridge) for her dissertation 'From local buzz to global pipelines: a question of firm maturity'.

The last of the Society's annual Awards to be presented today is the **Murchison Award** for scholarly publications. It is one of the most senior awards and the award recipient will respond with a speech on behalf of all the Award winners. This year's recipient of the Murchison Award for publications judged to contribute most to geographical science in preceding years is PROFESSOR GERRY KEARNS. Gerry has made significant advances to understanding the history and nature of geopolitics. His 2009, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* has been widely acclaimed and brings together scholarly research on the history of geography with a systematic attempt to make that history critical for contemporary geographical practice. The product of almost three decades of meticulous research, it provides a most eloquent illustration of why it is necessary to study geography's history if we are to create more socially,

politically and environmentally responsible forms of geographical inquiry in the future.

It is with great pleasure that I ask Professor Gerry Kearns to receive the Murchison Award and to respond on behalf of all the Award winners.

PROFESSOR GERRY KEARNS

On behalf of all those honoured with an Award by decision of the Council of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), I want to say thank you to the Council, to the people who nominated us, and to the families, friends and colleagues who encourage, support, and help develop the work that today is being recognised.

From the practice of its great German pioneers, Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter, Richard Hartshorne defined geography as the study of the earth as our home. Here, at the Royal Geographical Society, where geography is itself so much at home, and on this occasion when we celebrate geographical work in education, in research, in business, in humanitarian assistance, and in government, I want to dwell a little over the urgency of cultivating this geographical perspective, for as we reflect upon the earth as our home we see that we are in crisis.

Humankind makes itself at home on earth in physical, cultural and social ways and these give geography its central themes of environment, place and space. In physical terms, we might fashion a home from the materials we find around us but survival requires that we transform our surroundings. If we clear trees to make fields in which to sow crops, or pen animals to raise them for draft, milk or meat, or we burn prairie to ensure that it rejuvenates as grass for our buffalo rather than progressing to bushes or trees, or we remove stones from fields and raise ridges of earth upon which to plant potatoes, we change dramatically the cycling of nutrients and minerals through the soil and with what we add and what we subtract we make our own soils.

If the environment of agriculture is one we make for ourselves, then how much more so is the world of modern industry. Once the hydrocarbons stored within coal and oil were yoked to the tread wheel of producing electricity the human transformation of nature accelerated. Frans Lanting's photographs inspire a sense of wonder and of the sublime and they make me reflect upon the very long period of physical and biological evolution that developed the liquid envelope around the earth within which humans could emerge and flourish. Iain Stewart's television programmes recall the many ways human history has been punctuated and at times even directed by the restless physical earth with its dramatic eruptions and natural fluctuations. The earth has warmed and cooled in slow cycles that have profoundly altered the geomorphic processes of glacier, river and wind that shape its surface and that create the limits for the

spread and survival of all species of animal and plant. But now our bombs can do more than Vesuvius and have indeed done so with the firestorms in Dresden and the Armageddon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and with the carbon dioxide and particulates we discharge from our cars and power plants, the species made extinct by our relentless clearing of woodlands and draining of wetlands, the major river systems that barely dribble into the sea now that we abstract so much water for irrigation, the sedimentation produced by the soil erosion for which our agriculture is responsible, human beings are now the primary causes of changes to global climate, to global geomorphic processes, and, in sum, to the conditions of existence for life on earth. If you do not want to call this a crisis, you would have to concede it is a truly awesome responsibility.

To take up the cultural meanings of home is to reflect upon how we come to feel 'at home' on earth. We all have the experience of moving into a new place and how, as we unpack familiar things, the place becomes less alien. These relations between familiar things, familiar routines, and familiar surroundings are the practices of home-making and we take most of it for granted, it is part of our common sense, the ways of doing things that we share with others around us. We have only to travel to be pulled up short by the shock of unfamiliarity, that people in other places do everyday things in a quite different manner than we do ourselves. The first time I was in Eastern Europe, around the time the Wall fell, I found the cities odd and it took me a little while to realize that what was affecting me so profoundly was the absence of advertising. Absent capitalism, absent the competition between brands – there was nothing promotional populating my vision, just buildings, no neon or billboards. With capitalism will come the visual trappings of consumerism as well as the conversion of a home into the sort of capital asset that, as Chris Hamnett shows, plays such a central role in the transmission of economic inequality from one generation to the next.

I was recently in Marrakesh and sat in a coffee shop overlooking Djemaa el Fna, the big square at the heart of the walled city – the size of two or three football pitches – and watched the storytellers at work as they gathered around themselves an audience for episodic tales they interrupted, perhaps at cliff-hangers, to take up a collection, before taking up again their tale. I am sure that one of them was telling the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe for I saw the orator mime the chink in the wall and the lovers reaching towards it to kiss just as I have seen it mimed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Beside the square are the souks, a congeries of stalls and alleys where shoppers, traders and donkeys wriggle around each other under the rush matting that shades the alleys. Five times a day, above and around the souks, the minarets of the mosques of the walled city broadcast the call to prayer and Muslim men and

women gather separately in practice of their religion. Beyond the walled city, the colonial French built their own district, the Guéliz, with its radiating boulevards, ornamental gardens, rows of buildings of uniform height with shops and cafés at the base and apartments above. Here in the French district, we find not donkeys but stretch limousines, not a call to prayer but advertisements for alcohol. It has a very different feel to the souks, the Djemaa el Fna, the market stalls with the rush-mat covered alleyways, the stentorian guard of minarets and the courtyard gardens of the palaces. For the French, the difference was between civilised order and barbaric chaos and they thought the contrast so self-evident that merely placing one alongside the other would lure the Arab people of the Medina towards the enlightenment of the Guéliz. In the 1950s, the French imposed their own choice as ruler upon the people of Morocco and faced a religious uprising, or jehad, that made the country violent and ungovernable and in 1956 the French gave up the unequal task of holding on to their African colony.

As Colin McFarlane's work makes clear, we must continue to struggle with how to respect and learn from cultural difference. One of the greatest geographers, Peter Kropótkin, insisted that the purpose of geography was so to impress upon adults and other pupils the wonderful diversity of ways that people in different places make themselves at home on earth that they would grow up immune to the arrogance that sees superiority where instead we should see rather a challenge to our capacious empathy. Geography can cultivate this empathy and while our world currently resounds to what some identify as a clash of civilisations and others prosecute as a global war on terror, to identify a crisis in global sympathy – the challenges to the global citizenship that Martin Haigh advocates – only underlines how necessary the geographical perspective continues to be.

Finally, let me take up the social dimensions of making the earth our home. Adam Smith identified the division of labour as a motor of economic development and he gave the example of a pin factory where he found that the workers could turn out more pins by each specialising in a particular stage in the production of the pin. Yet, in many ways, the fundamental division of labour is spatial: between the country and the town, between different regions. We still recall this when we refer to Luton Town football club as the Hatters, or Northampton Town as the Cobblers. The average shopping trip underlines these sorts of interdependencies and as we cruise the aisles of the average supermarket we can fill our trolley with a veritable United Nations of foodstuffs. If I go to buy a pair of shoes I am not as likely to find the work of the Northampton cobblers as to pick up a pair of Italian shoes or Indian trainers. And here is the rub, in buying the shoes I am implicated in a commodity chain that employs people, perhaps children, in some places, and makes profits for shareholders in some other

place. In the essay for which Edmund Harris is being honoured, he writes of the movement for local food, a development which would reduce the carbon footprint of food transportation and may allow people to exert greater pressure to get their vegetables without added carcinogenic fertiliser and their meat without animal growth hormone.

We make ourselves at home on earth by cultivating these sorts of dependencies across space, but with interdependence comes responsibility yet we do not deal directly with the Indian child who inhales the poisonous glue and who breathes the corrosive dust while attaching the soles to the uppers of our training shoes. Instead, the production and exchange are mediated by companies answerable only to their shareholders, and to the regulations passed and occasionally enforced by governments. The geographically educated citizen understands the necessity for such regulations if he or she is to buy with anything like a clear conscience. Pressure upon the timber companies and on the governments who lease them tracts of forest has produced some steps in some places towards sustainable forestry and work such as that for which Jerome Lewis is honoured is part of attempts to reconcile logging with preserving a place for indigenous peoples within the forests which sustain them physically and spiritually.

There is a marvelous Oxfam poster currently on the platform at Cambridge railway station. It reads: 'You're right. People dying thanks to climate change is a long way off. About 5,000 miles, give or take.' The global environmental changes currently underway will displace millions, beginning with those living on atoll islands or on alluvial lands at the mouths of major rivers. There will be ever more need for the services offered by MapAction, surveying disaster areas and providing real-time updates of maps of vulnerability and hazard. It is clear that the way some people make themselves at home on earth produces changes that deny others even the barest toehold.

This has always been the consequence of colonialism. As Europeans took the lands of North America, they took away the grazing lands of the buffalo and drove the starving native peoples westwards until in desperation a Paiute Indian named Wovoka elaborated an apocalyptic religion that dramatised the feeling that there was no longer any place for his people upon this earth and with this Ghost Dance the Indians so disturbed the authorities of the US government that the cavalry moved against Sitting Bull with slaughterous consequence at Wounded Knee. In similar fashion, between 1847 and 1852 the British government managed the Irish famine in ways that increased the insecurity of local people and over a million died and another million and a half emigrated. Thereafter, many potato-growing families in the west of Ireland concluded that the land had turned against them; they had become refugees in their own country, so they told their children to abandon the tongue of

their grandparents, learn English, and flee to America if they could, England if they must.

These interdependencies are always difficult to manage in a spirit of solidarity and justice. However, there are grounds for believing that they are especially dangerous today with littoral peoples on the edge of displacement, with 6% of the world's population identified as indigenous and keeping precarious stewardship over 20% of the world's surface and a disproportionate share of the world's plant and animal species subject to repeated incursions from Western, Chinese, and Indian companies eager for the timber or bauxite or coltan amidst or above which indigenous peoples live; and with the corruption of government by the lure of foreign mining and drilling companies so notorious that commentators speak blithely of a resource curse and wonder whether the discovery of further oil in Sierra Leone or Uganda portends ultimate social disaster for the peoples of those two countries.

For geographers, then, the physical home is our environment, the cultural home is our place, and the social home is our space. Each of these three dimensions is in crisis. Whether we can continue to feel at home on earth is an open question and in addressing this question a geographical perspective is vital. I applaud the Royal Geographical Society for its tradition of encouraging open debate around these issues and for its commitment to developing a geographical understanding among pupils, teachers, corporations, researchers, government and the public. On behalf of the other prize winners, I once again say thank you for acknowledging our contributions to this continuing tradition.

The PRESIDENT

Special Awards

From time to time the Society offers Special Medals and Awards. On the anniversary of their centenary, the

Society awards a Special Medal to the CHINESE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, recognising the great contributions it has made to advancing and promoting geography and to supporting geographical scholarship within China. This award will be presented formally at a future occasion when the President of the Society is able to be here to receive it.

Regional Anniversary Awards

In recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Society's regional programme, the Society's Council has approved a number of Regional Anniversary Awards, the first of which will be awarded in 2010, with further awards following in 2011. These recognise the distinguished and hard-working efforts of the regional committees in creating a programme that has grown from some 10 events in the first year to more than 80 events in 2009. While all the recipients would be the first to say that it has been a team effort involving all local volunteer committee members, there are nevertheless some people who have gone above and beyond in sustaining, supporting and developing the regional activities over most if not all of the past 20 years.

This evening we recognise the regional committees as a whole and we do that through the following five people who have been nominated by their committees to receive this award; many have been regional chairs for many years: HOKEY BENNETT-JONES from the Northwest region; MICHAEL HAND from the East Anglia region; BRIAN HOGG from the Yorkshire and Northeast region; BRIAN HOYLE from the Southern region; GEOFF PARKES from the West of England and South Wales region. I ask them to receive their awards.

I would like to add final congratulations to all the recipients of the RGS-IBG Medals and Awards for 2010.