

Honouring geographers and contemporary exploration: from the archive to the ocean at the RGS-IBG Medals and Awards Ceremony 2011

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The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) annual Medals and Awards recognise achievements in geographical research, fieldwork, exploration, photography, teaching, and in enthusing public audiences. The speeches and citations are a record of the ceremony of 2011. With comments by Dr Sylvia Earle, Professors David Livingstone, Stuart Elden, John Lowe and Lewis Owen, the speeches provide insights into contemporary geography – from archival research to unexplored oceans, political geography to tectonically active mountain belts. President Michael Palin's introduction provides a background to the awards, which links earlier geographical exploration and its modern counterparts.

KEY WORDS: theory and research, research practice, history of discipline, human geography, physical geography

President's introduction

Michael Palin: To get myself in the right frame of mind to salute the winners of the Annual Medals and Awards of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), I spent some time last Friday afternoon, looking up at the Society's honours boards, inside the old entrance off what is now the painstakingly and handsomely restored North Face of our headquarters. Not only was the sunshine spilling in through spotless, scaffold-free windows, but by complete chance a sign writer was at work carefully adding the names of two of our medal winners today to a list which goes back 180 years.

It reminded me of the day I came here as a newly appointed Fellow in 1978 and saw these honours boards for the first time. They left an abiding impression. Not just because of the distinction of the names themselves but because, in some way these names, carefully inscribed in gold on black, defined the Society for me, made its headquarters Lowther Lodge the unique place it is. These boards carried a formidable legacy, the legacy of the Society itself and the story of the men and women – travellers, explorers, scientists, professors, and even astronauts who have been extending our horizons for 18 decades.

Ten years later, in the autumn of 1988, I came here to the Society to seek the advice of the then Director

John Hemming, himself one of those names on the honours boards, before embarking on a BBC series called *Around the world in eighty days*, which, unpredictably, turned out to be the springboard for a long and quite unexpected travelling career. I have to admit that the most useful advice John gave me was not exactly scientific. 'Whenever you're offered food, eat it', he told me, 'You never know when it will be offered again'. This sounded like a recipe for metabolic meltdown, and I was far too embarrassed to tell him that the first 48 hours of my arduous journey would be aboard the Orient Express to Venice. But since then, in 22 years on the road, I've found myself off the beaten track many times, and I know exactly what he means. If you're offered food in the Sahara Desert or halfway across the Polar ice-cap you don't say, 'No, thanks I'll wait till tea time'.

I couldn't leave that day without looking once again at those honours boards before I set out to see the world for myself. Not that I was trying to equate what I was doing with the deeds of Scott and Shackleton (although I did eventually get to the South Pole in a light plane with a door that wouldn't shut properly), but rather to remind myself of the spirit of enquiry that had motivated them and all those other dusty names stretching up to the ceiling. Which, simply put, was the desire to know more and understand more about the planet on which we live. And, as their modern

counterparts come forward to receive their medals and awards today we shall be reminded that the work still goes on. There are still so many questions to be answered. And they are questions of quite fundamental importance. Questions about climate change, deforestation, energy policy, the growth of cities, how communities and identities develop and change, how best to understand our vast oceans and landforms.

And what draws us all together today, both those collecting awards and all of us who belong to this Society, is that we think these questions are important and need answering. We call this collective curiosity, this need to know, geography. Geography – the discipline that tries to understand the earth, how it is the way it is and how we as humans can best interact with it. And what could be more important than that?

I realise that I'm preaching to the converted here. If I were Sepp Blatter I'd probably be talking about football. And world domination. If I were giving a speech at the BAFTAs I would probably be busy thanking my wife, my director, my agent and my dialogue coach.

Which is why I feel so proud to be the President of this Society. A Society committed, not to the preservation of the status quo or to any kind of personal apotheosis, but to making sense of change and confusion, to the selection and interpretation of new and often contradictory evidence, to the constant struggle to push back the frontiers of our knowledge. The awards today connect us right back to the motives of those who have been honoured by this Society for close on 200 years over the last 18 decades, who would, I'm sure, be mighty pleased to see the spirit of geographical enquiry burning as brightly as ever in the achievements we're here to celebrate today.

Thank you, in advance to our winners and to many more who may not have won Medals and Awards tonight, but whose work continues, patiently, to add to the sum of our 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 David Livingstone** and the Patron's Medal to **Dr Sylvia Earle**.

Founder's Medal

Professor David Livingstone is a world-leading historian of geographical knowledge. Over the last 25 years, he has revolutionised the understanding of the discipline's history and its intellectual context. His books, including the ground-breaking *The geographical tradition*, have become part of the discipline's intellectual backbone.

David's scholarship and writing have also served to create a new field of study, the historical geography of scientific enquiry. In this he shows how scholars in other fields of science have been influenced by the geographical context in which they work. With a par-

ticular emphasis on science and religion, this work has played an important role in shaping the social sciences more generally. His current work explores historic influences of climate and climate change on the human condition. This recently featured in a week-long BBC Radio 4 series, and has extended his influence even further.

Unsurprisingly, David has been recognised on many occasions for his contributions: he was the youngest geographer elected as a Fellow of the British Academy, and he is a recipient of the Gold Medal of the Royal Irish Academy. David was an active and highly respected Vice President for Research and Higher Education in this Society between 2006 and 2009.

Today Professor Livingstone is recognised as a special member of the geographical community with the award of the Founder's Medal for the *encouragement, development and promotion of historical geography*.

Professor David Livingstone's acceptance speech

President, colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen, it is an enormous pleasure and privilege to be here tonight as this year's recipient of the Society's Founder's Medal. And so, first and foremost, I would like to thank the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) for this very great honour. But secondly, I'd like to thank the President for not saying 'Dr Livingstone I presume.' That is something I have heard before, really.

And you know, I am deeply aware this evening that I am standing in the long shadow of three other Davids who have received similar honours from the Society. There is of course David Livingstone himself who was awarded the Founder's Medal in 1855. You'll understand it when I say that I am now living in his shadow in more ways than one! What were my parents thinking?! Then in 1979 David Stoddart was the recipient of the medal. David was the external examiner for my PhD thesis. He was a massive intellectual presence on the discipline's landscape and a personal inspiration to me. Naturally I was pretty terrified when I showed up to my viva examination having just learned that he had failed the previous two PhD candidates he'd examined. But as I walked in through the door he threw me one of his mischievous winks and I knew all was well.

Then in 1997 I was here at the Society's Annual General Meeting when David Lowenthal received the Victoria Medal. Like myself today, David had looked back over the generations of previous recipients of the Society's awards – Captain Robert Fitzroy, John Eyre, Captain Charles Sturt, John Rae, Richard Burton, John Hanning Speke, and the like. All conjure up images of high adventure, daring expeditions and heroic exploration, feats of extraordinary bravery and astonishing endurance. As David Lowenthal contemplated such names – names that still breathe vitality into the Society's august history – he quipped that amidst so many

'intrepid explorers' he considered himself to be an 'extrepid implorer'. Believe me, I can echo that sentiment tonight. For I've always been a rather bookish geographer, a traveller in the archives, a cartographer of ideas.

I blame my old professor, Bill Kirk, for that. When I was an undergraduate he taught a two-year-long course opening up the whole realm of the history of ideas about nature and culture, environments and societies to scrutiny. And it struck me then that some of the most exciting scientific explorations actually never weighed anchor and pushed off to sea; that charting the terrain of ideas and imaginings, theories and thought could open up new vistas to the scientific mind too; that navigating through the map room and the archive, the text and the transcript could be as exciting as any literal voyage.

Since then I've tried to bring geography's history into the wider conversation of the history of science, culture, and philosophy. And along the way, I've derived huge inspiration from numerous friends and colleagues, as well as from my wife Frances, and our children Emma and Justin, who have had to share too many meals with the ghosts of geographers past. But more recently I've also begun to think that science itself has its own geography – specialist places where science is conducted, sites around which scientific knowledge circulates, venues where scientific conversations take place. As I've pondered on these I've come to think that such places are not to be thought of as mere settings, stages on which disinterested objective science is conducted; but rather to think of them as locations which shape in profoundly significant ways how science is practised, the findings that are generated, and the power that science plays in our modern world. And so I've been niggling away at the project of trying to construct an historical geography of scientific culture.

So it's a very great pleasure to learn that the expansive and exhilarating vision of geography that the RGS-IBG embraces incorporates enterprises of this sort. And it is thus with enormous pride but equally profound humility that I accept the 2011 Founder's Medal. To receive it from the Society's own 'intrepid explorer' – our President Michael Palin – is a very particular delight. Thank you for this exceptional honour.

Patron's Medal

Michael Palin: Dr Sylvia Earle is a world renowned ocean scientist. She has advanced geographical science through research and exploration, influence and inspiration, raising awareness of the world's vast and unknown oceans.

An explorer at heart, she has led more than 50 expeditions, logged more than 6000 hours underwater, and in 1985 set a record for solo diving to a depth of 1000 m. She also has a distinguished record of scientific appointments which include Chief Scientist

at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USA, and founder of the Mission Blue Foundation. Author of more than 150 scientific, technical and popular publications, she has lectured in more than 60 countries, and appeared in hundreds of television productions.

In the 1980s, she was instrumental in the design and development of undersea vehicles such as Deep Rover and Deep Flight. These have allowed scientists to manoeuvre at ocean depths previously unreachable by humans.

Sylvia serves in key roles on many leading international conservation and exploration boards, foundations and committees. She was active in raising awareness of the impact of the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico with governments around the world.

In public recognition of her contributions, she has been named 'Her Deepness' by the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*, and a 'Living Legend' by the Library of Congress.

Dr Earle has been a powerful and influential voice raising understanding and awareness of the oceans, the challenges that face them, and their futures. Today she is recognised by the Society for this lifetime's work with the award of the Patron's Medal.

Dr Sylvia Earle's acceptance speech

President Palin, fellow explorers, fellow geographers, fellow residents of this little blue speck in the universe that we call home: from the tips of my flippers, I am deeply honoured to be the recipient of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) 2011 Patron's Medal. It is humbling – it's exhilarating – to join the company of some of my greatest heroes; Hillary, Heyerdahl, Amundsen, the Scotts (father and son), more than one David Livingstone and Jacques Cousteau.

Since my first breath of air under the sea in 1953, I have had the joy of spending thousands of hours diving, living under water, using submersibles, witnessing and sometimes participating in the greatest era of exploration in the history of humankind.

As a research scientist and explorer, I had the pleasure of starting three engineering companies; of being Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and a National Geographic Explorer in Residence. During these various phases, I have experienced the use of new technologies that for the first time have enabled humankind to connect the dots, see patterns, gain access to places, understand processes, and anticipate the future armed with unprecedented new insights.

I can't help but wonder what John Murray, who sailed aboard *HMS Challenger* between 1872 and 1876, edited the more than 50 volumes that resulted from that great voyage of discovery, and received the Royal Geographical Society's Founder's Medal in 1895, might think if he could go aboard a twenty-first century ocean research vessel. What would impress

him most? The ability to pinpoint exactly where in the ocean you are with satellites beaming data from high in the sky? The ability to hear the voice and see the image of a scientist half a world away and compare notes in real time? Or call your family from thousands of miles away and see their faces and get an instant update on what was happening on the home front?

Surely he would marvel at maps presented on large, illuminated screens, portraying great mountain chains that curve like giant backbones down the major ocean basins; of sea mounts, valleys, and broad plains that hold most of earth's water – and most of earth's life. I would personally like to take John Murray and his fellow Challenger scientists on a vicarious tour and watch their expressions while diving into the Ocean in Google Earth – a project I have been privileged to be part of since 2006.

Murray was the first to note the existence of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and of oceanic trenches, but he did not know, could not know, about plate tectonics, the underlying processes that cause continents to move and oceans to shrink and expand. The technology did not yet exist to take observers miles under the sea to record what was there – and safely return them to the surface. Murray would likely be thrilled by the results of the ten-year Census of MarineLife that turned up more than 250 000 species of organisms in the ocean, with a prediction that one to perhaps 50 million more may await discovery.

He might be astonished that humans have walked on the moon, inhabited a station in space, lived underwater, and journeyed across continents and oceans in hours, not months or years. I can almost hear him saying, 'What! You have mapped all of the land on earth, the moon, Mars and Jupiter, but only five percent of the ocean floor is known with comparable accuracy . . . You say 95 percent has never been seen, let alone explored? In 1960 two men, you say, went to the deepest place in the ocean but no one has been back? What are you thinking! What's holding you back?' He might be surprised to know how much the world generally, the ocean particularly, has changed in a century. Once common creatures – tunas, sharks, swordfish, cod, turtles, and many others have been reduced to a fraction of their former numbers. Coastal marshes, coral reefs, sea grass meadows, mangroves have been depleted by half or more. Millions of tons of plastic trash clog ocean gyres on the high seas, litter beaches, and snare thousands of birds, turtles, seals, fish and other wildlife every year. Excess carbon dioxide lofted into the atmosphere as a consequence of burning forests and fossil fuels is entering the sea, driving a trend toward acidification.

Murray and his contemporaries would be shocked that these things could happen, and happen so swiftly. He might wonder why, knowing what we know, that we have only managed to protect a tiny fraction of the ocean, to secure safety for those systems that deliver so much to us. Curiously, many still believe the ocean

is so vast, so resilient, that there is little that humans can do to change its nature – and even if some species and ecosystems disappear, why should we care? Now we know why. The ocean drives climate and weather, shapes planetary chemistry, governs the oxygen cycle, the water cycle, the nitrogen cycle, the carbon cycle – the cycle of life. If you like to breathe, the ocean matters.

Some whales, sea turtles, deep sea fish and corals alive today may have begun their lives 200 years ago when the industrial revolution was just getting underway. They may sense that the world has changed, but they do not know why, and they do not know what to do about it. We do know why and we do know what to do about it. Protected areas, protecting our life support system both on land and sea is the key. I call such places on land and sea 'hope spots', because they provide hope for all these creatures that we are fast losing and they certainly provide security for us.

Fifty years ago, we did not know the magnitude of our ability to alter the nature of nature – or the consequences for us. Now we know. Fifty years from now, options presently open may be gone. Ten percent of the sharks, tunas, swordfish, cod and many other ocean species remain so there is plenty of reason for hope. With protection, they may recover. Half the coral reefs are still in pretty good shape. If protected, they can serve as a model and source of restoration for damaged areas.

As never before, we know the value of intact natural systems to everything we care about. Perhaps as never again we have a chance to act on this new knowledge to secure an enduring place for humankind within the natural systems that keep us alive. So fellow explorers, fellow geographers, listen up: the greatest era of exploration has just begun.

Medals awarded by the Society's Council

Michael Palin: We now turn to the Victoria Medal, Busk Medal and Cherry Kearton Medal and Award, awarded by the Society's Council.

Victoria Medal

Professor John Lowe is one of the founders of modern Quaternary science. This is the study of the most recent phase in the earth's history and one that shaped much of the earth's surface as we see it today. He has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of past European climates – in particular the period of rapid climate change at the end of the last ice age, between 15 000 and 9000 years ago. In recent years he has also championed the use of volcanic ash in assessing the age of sediments, and has led large collaborative projects on the response of humans to abrupt environmental change.

John has served the profession generously and exceptionally well – notably as President of the UK Quaternary Research Association and Vice President of the International Union for Quaternary Research (INQUA). He has inspired and mentored a multitude of students who now hold influential academic positions around the world or are employed in government agencies, consultancies and business. Through all he has done, John has brought great distinction to British geographical and Quaternary science.

Professor John Lowe's acceptance speech About 11 500 years ago, global climate suddenly warmed: in geological terms, it was an 'overnight' event. Momentous changes followed in very quick succession, with humans increasingly playing a dominant global role. Our ancestors developed agriculture, quickened the pace of technology, spread to almost every corner of the globe, and multiplied – eventually to reach today's total human population of seven billion. It seems that we were primed, 11 500 years ago, ready to seize the opportunities that this warming event presented.

Humans had already experienced tumultuous climatic upheaval on many previous occasions. The hallmark of the Quaternary period, which stretches back more than two million years before present, is one of constant climatic unrest. Learning to cope with the vagaries of climate, some argue, is what stimulated *Homo sapiens* to become so resourceful and intelligent. But are we now poised, ready to witness a new momentous event, should our technological genius lead us to severely distort the very climate system that nurtured us?

The subtle and sensitive bonds between humans, climate, environment and landscape are what fascinates Quaternary scientists like me, while their study brings extra piquancy to the geography syllabus. In trying to play my small part in understanding this compound history, I have been privileged to work alongside many fine mentors and colleagues, too many to salute here in person. But four have been particularly influential on my career.

Brian Sissons was my PhD supervisor at Edinburgh University. One of the leading UK geographers at the time, he taught me how to study the landscape and to map its properties precisely. Russell Coope is not only a world-famous fossil beetle specialist, but a veritable polymath: he widened my science and philosophy vistas appreciably. Jim Rose was mainly responsible for me converting to Quaternary science when, as an undergraduate student, I attended an important field excursion he led in the Glasgow-Loch Lomond area: it was brilliant, his performance superb, and I was hooked! He subsequently nudged my career in a number of important ways. When PhD students together at Edinburgh, Mike Walker and I forged a close friendship, and a writing and research partnership, that have endured to the present day, and which I hope will continue for more years to come.

Finally, I pay tribute to my immediate family, the members of which have calmly tolerated my academic obsessions. To my two sons, Stephen and Christopher, a public apology is perhaps due. For the first 15 summers of their lives they were wheeled off, without a by-their-leave, to various corners of Europe on protracted field campaigns, thinly disguised as 'family holidays'. They little realised how much extra sparkle they brought to those adventures.

I married their mother and my wife, Jeanette, in 1969, just before entering my final year at St Andrews. Soon after the wedding I enticed her into accompanying me on an eight-day excursion, thinly disguised as part of our honeymoon – my final-year field mapping project, based in Glen Torridon in the remote NW Scottish Highlands. While there, she volunteered to act as my field assistant until, while out surveying landforms one day, she on the staff, me peering through the optics, I carelessly directed her (backwards) over a steep bluff, from which she toppled helplessly onto the surface of a soggy peat bog, which may still retain her imprint. She was subsequently harassed by cattle and attacked by those vicious Scottish midges, while the field campaign came to an abrupt and premature end when we fled our rented Highland cottage immediately after discovering it to be haunted. That was the first and last time Jeanette acted as my field assistant, 42 years ago. But she has been hugely supportive and helpful in every aspect of my career, and for being so, while offering constant companionship and encouragement, I am especially grateful.

To all those mentioned, a piece of this medal belongs to them; but I'll keep hold, for safe keeping, in memory of this day, and in gratitude to the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) for awarding it to me. It is such an honour, and I thank the Society most earnestly.

Busk Medal

Michael Palin: Professor Lewis Owen is recognised with the Busk Medal for his pioneering achievements in field research under the most challenging of circumstances in tectonically active mountain belts.

While Lewis has contributed substantially to many facets of physical geography, the work for which he is recognised is his advanced field research in inaccessible places: in the Himalayas, the Andes in Argentina, the Alaska Range, and the Red Sea margin in Yemen. Using remote sensing, field mapping and dating of landforms and sediments, his work has given new insights into large-scale landform development and the relations between tectonics, climate and the earth's surface processes.

A clear thinker and an astute scholar, he is an outstanding field scientist who has the ability to ask the right questions and to choose the best means to answer them.

Professor Lewis Owen's acceptance speech Mr President, Madam Director, Fellows and guests, it is a great honour to be awarded the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)'s Busk Medal for 2011 in recognition of my field research in Quaternary history and geomorphology in tectonically active areas.

The great collaborations one develops with talented and generous colleagues from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds are amongst the many joys of conducting field research. This medal really acknowledges the numerous collaborators that I have worked with over the years. I am indebted to these friends and colleagues for their companionship, stimulating discussions, advice and humour while undertaking field research in so many fascinating parts of the world.

The research we have been conducting is challenging; academically, physically and sometimes politically. Yet, it is extremely rewarding in so many ways. In essence, we have been exploring the complex inter-relationships between tectonics, climate and earth surface processes that produce some of the world's greatest landscapes. Examining the processes and interrelationships is not only important for understanding how landscape evolves, but is essential for hazard mitigation and sustainable development in some of the most environmentally sensitive and most populated parts of our planet.

The view of Mount Everest, for example, inspires one's imagination and provides background for some of the questions we ask, including: what forces are responsible for building mountains, in this case placing limestone, that once formed in shallow seas, atop of the world's highest mountain? What processes were responsible for cutting the deep valleys that traverse high mountains, like these? How fast are the mountains eroding? How is sediment transferred through and out of mountains? How has climate changed in the past and how have glaciers responded? And what does the future hold for such landscapes?

Fortunately, we now have the tools to begin to answer these, and many other, questions. These tools include incredibly precise remote sensing technologies, newly developing geochemical and geochronological methods, and sophisticated computer modelling, but we still need the field-based studies to collect raw data and samples for analysis. With accelerating human impact on our landscapes, together with these new tools, these are exciting times to be a geoscientist. I am truly fortunate and honoured to be part of this great exploration of our planet.

But, I would not be part of this journey if it were not for so many fine people, starting with my parents, who enrolled me on my first fieldtrip at the age of nine. David Emlyn Evans of the National Museum of Wales, who in my school years inspired in me a love of earth science; the many fine lecturers and professors at Imperial College and the University of Leicester where I took my degrees; Professors Edward Derbyshire and Brian Windley, my doctoral advisers, life-long friends

and mentors; the many colleagues and students with whom I have shared countless research and teaching field experiences, including Douglas Benn, John Lowe, Jim Rose, Claudio Vita-Finzi, Marc Caffee, Robert Finkel, Craig Dietsch, Milap Sharma, Ma Haizhou, Yeong Bae Seong and many others; and, of course, my wife and best friend, Regina, who has supported me in so many ways throughout the years, and my kids, who I am just beginning to take on field trips.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge the late Sir Douglas Busk, after whom this medal is named. Sir Douglas had a profound love of mountains and I am sure he would have enjoyed looking at my modest photograph of Mount Everest and exchanging tales of distant places.

Mr President, I am extremely grateful to the Society for awarding me the 2011 Busk Medal; I accept it with both pride and humility.

Cherry Kearton Medal and Award

Michael Palin: This Medal and Award is for a traveller concerned with the study or practice of natural history and photography. This year it is awarded to **Dale Templar**.

Dale has worked at the BBC as a producer and director for over 20 years. Most recently, she has been the series producer of the highly acclaimed BBC television production *Human planet* – the first natural history documentary of the BBC to turn the camera on ourselves, the human species.

Dale's professional career – in journalism, cinematography and documentary film production – has allowed her to lead and create teams of experts, gaining privileged access to many of the world's more remote regions. A gifted communicator, through numerous productions she and her colleagues have captured the amazing diversity of the world's environments, with stories and insights of how humans have learned to live in every habitat, adapting to the most inhospitable landscapes.

Awards of the Society as recommended by the Council

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 recipient of this Award will respond on behalf of all those recognised today. We start with the scholarly Awards.

Scholarly Awards

The **Back Award** is presented to **Professor Edmund Penning-Rowsell** for his significant and lasting impact upon both national and international flood policy.

During the 1970s, Edmund pioneered computer-based ways of simulating flood damage and losses,

working often in innovative partnerships with government. This work has developed progressively and has underpinned almost every government decision with respect to flood defence investment over the last 30 years.

Through the team he built up at Middlesex University, his work has been extended to all aspects of flood policy, including flood warning and the wider social and emotional aspects of flood events. Edmund is one of the key advisors to the UK government – co-leading the Flood Foresight study between 2002 and 2005, and playing a major role after the 2007 summer floods. His methods and approaches have had international as well as national impact, and his advice has been widely called upon by organisations worldwide.

The **Cuthbert Peak Award** for advancing geographical knowledge of human impact on the environment is awarded to **Professor Martin Wooster**.

Martin has established himself as an international leader in the use of remote sensing, particularly infrared methods, to detect the presence of large-scale fires and to measure their emissions of smoke, aerosols and greenhouse gases. Most of these fires are the product of human activity, often associated with the clearance of vegetated areas. The work has important implications for understanding the consequences of deforestation, its impact on the atmosphere, and its effect also for human health and well-being.

Much of Martin's work has been conducted through internationally collaborative, interdisciplinary teams and serves as testament to the quality and relevance of remote sensing research that is conducted within the UK on issues of vital environmental importance.

The **Gill Memorial Award** for great potential and achievement for those in the earlier stages of their careers is awarded to **Dr Peter Hopkins**.

Peter is an outstanding geographer who has achieved more than many at much later stages in their careers. A prolific author, his research on the geographies of youth, religion and race has already had significant impact. His work with young Muslim men, for example, broke new ground in the ways it challenged traditional identities. His recent book *Young people, place and identity*, which marks the culmination of many research projects, will undoubtedly become a benchmark for those working with young people.

Peter is also recognised for his unselfish generosity and his collegial ways of working, noted by many of his colleagues, as well as his commitment to widening participation in higher education.

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 2010 this prize was awarded to **David Bassens** for his paper, 'Searching for the Mecca of finance: Islamic financial services and the world city network', co-authored with Ben Derudder and Frank Witlox. This prize will be awarded at the Annual Conference in August.

Awards for teaching and engaging the public

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.

Vanessa Lawrence: The two **Ordnance Survey Awards** are presented to **Robert Lang** and **Ruth Ware** for excellence in teaching geography in secondary education.

Robert Lang is a geography teacher at King Edward VI Five Ways School in Birmingham. A Chartered Geographer (Teacher), he has contributed to the development of a very successful geography department at that school. Bob's work is particularly impressive because he has always actively shared his experiences of teaching beyond his school – with teachers in Birmingham and beyond – through the Society's networks, with the Geographical Association, with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and on Teachers' TV. Bob has been especially active in the promotion of GIS in the classroom – training teachers who are new to the technology to enhance their confidence and abilities.

Ruth Ware, also a Chartered Geographer (Teacher), is Faculty Leader for Creative Environment at Bishop Justus Church of England School in Bromley Kent, where she set up and manages the geography department. At the forefront of implementing creative and innovative teaching and learning methods, Ruth has a particular passion for fieldwork – both locally in partnership with other organisations, including Bromley Rangers and Thames Water, and also further afield. Ruth's geography field trip to Iceland last year was delayed on its return by the volcanic eruption and accompanying ash cloud – providing the students involved with real-world experience of outburst floods and ash plumes. In the words of the students – 'the best revision lesson ever!' Ruth has been instrumental in helping the Society develop a teachers' professional development network in Bromley, supporting the work of other local teachers and trainees in the Borough.

Michael Palin: The **Taylor and Francis Award** is presented to **Sharmila Ray Kumam** for the promotion of teaching and learning in higher education in India.

Sharmila is the current Head of Geography at Loreto College, Kolkata. Loreto College is a beacon of good practice in the teaching of geography in higher education institutions in West Bengal and other parts of India. Under Sharmila's leadership, the department has had the intellectual courage to engage with new concepts, skills and techniques, transforming the curriculum and the learning experiences of the students. Students at Loreto College choose the subject because they love it – they learn about the dynamism and application of geography; they develop the skills to think

independently and critically; and they are highly sought after by employers. The members of the department also are to be commended for their outstanding contribution to geographical teacher training, raising the level of knowledge and skills of teachers in local schools.

The **Ness Award** for popularising geography through travel writing is presented this year to **Colin Thubron**. Colin is one of the leading travel writers of his generation. His bestselling books, meticulously researched and beautifully written, present a unique and popular chronicle of the world's most remote regions – of Asia in particular. They portray the lives of the ordinary people Colin encounters; provide detailed geographical and historical descriptions; and give sensitive insights and social commentary. In Colin's words, his journeys 'spring from curiosity about worlds which his generation has found threatening – China, Russia, Islam – and from a desire to humanise and understand them'.

Colin's work continues to evolve, engaging audiences with new and more complex perspectives, from the Silk Road to Siberia – placing him at the forefront of contemporary travel writing and in the canon of great literary travellers. Colin has received many awards throughout his career, testament to his accomplishments as an author. We are honoured to recognise him with the Society's Ness Award.

This year the recipient of the **Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize** for the best undergraduate dissertation submitted for a first geography degree is **Flora Hinks**, from the University of Sheffield, for her study 'The modification of the urban climate by small parks in Sheffield, UK'.

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 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 is **Professor Stuart Elden**.

Stuart is one of the world leading scholars working at the intersection of political theory and political geography. His 2009 book *Terror and territory: the spatial extent of sovereignty*, for which he is recognised here, contests the idea that in the era of globalisation, territory no longer matters. The book highlights how territory, often seen as a static backdrop to politics, is being reconfigured as a central part of geopolitical conflict. In a world riven with conflict, he argues that ideas of political space need to be reconsidered. His work achieves a distinguished combination of breadth and depth, underpinned by erudite and detailed analyses of texts read in their original languages. *Terror and territory* takes political geography in directions the field has rarely gone before. It is of tremendous intellectual significance, highly deserving of recognition by the Murchison Award.

Professor Stuart Elden's acceptance speech Mr President, Madam Director, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to offer this speech, on behalf of all those given an award by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

I was in Australia when the letter was sent, and did not receive it. A follow-up email was sent a few weeks later, which I read in the middle of the night while jetlagged in a hotel in Los Angeles. I ran through a number of emotions in quick succession: surprise, pleasure, gratitude and then a mounting dread at what this meant: that, as recipient of the Murchison Award, I had to give this speech. And that I would be doing it immediately after Michael Palin.

I want to say a few words of recognition of the other award recipients, and of thanks. Thanks both to the Council for the awards, but also to the family and friends that we all depend on as we undertake the travel, conduct the research, teach the students, and write the words of our publications or shoot the scenes of documentaries.

Geography has been very good to me. I have no formal qualifications in geography, and was trained instead in history, politics and political theory. But when I moved to Durham in 2002, I found the Department of Geography, and the wider discipline welcoming, supportive and the right combination of challenging and inspiring. One of the things I most love about it is the freedom to work on almost anything I am interested in, because a geographical angle can be brought to bear on almost everything. While I am probably happiest in the Rare Books room of the British Library, I have been able to travel the world as a geographer, both in terms of the academic travel of conferences, lectures and seminars, but also to places I have written about, and also as a tourist.

In terms of my work on territory I felt a strong desire to show how the research I had been conducting from a theoretical and historical perspective could speak to contemporary concerns. The work I've undertaken within political geography, broadly understood, was motivated by this, and by an anger at what was happening in the world.

That I can do this work – political, historical, and theoretical – within geography is a wonderful opportunity. To receive recognition for it, for its contribution to geography, from geographers, and from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is humbling. This is especially so given the quality of work within the discipline, much of it displayed and conveyed at this Society's annual conference, and some of the very best conducted by the other award winners today.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the list of award winners and the nominations that I was sent in preparation for these words was the recognition of teaching. Coming from a family of teachers, where both my mother and father were teachers and then head-teachers, it was wonderful to see this crucial role recognised.

This recognition is, of course, primarily to Robert Lang, Ruth Ware and Sharmila Ray Kumam. Loreto College in Kolkata sounds an inspiring place, and the Taylor and Francis award to Sharmila deserved recognition for the way that geography is taught there. Robert Lang's work in Birmingham, especially in terms of the innovative use of technology; and Ruth Ware's dedication to education generally and fieldwork especially make them hugely deserving recipients of the Ordinance Survey awards.

Yet it is not simply in these areas that education was to the forefront of the nominations. The award of the Alfred Steers dissertation prize to Flora Hinks shows the potential of geographers of the next generation.

Other award recipients among us, whose explicit recognition was for other factors, were also commended for their general role in education, and for their dedicated and inspirational teaching.

Edmund Penning-Rowsell's work on flooding and flood defences is geographically and scientifically sophisticated, but also politically inspirational and clearly demonstrates the relevance of geography to not simply understanding the world, but changing it. But not all change by humans is positive. Martin Wooster's work on human impacts on the environment, especially in terms of large-scale fires, also demonstrates the importance of thinking about the impact we, and our choices and behaviours, have on the planet.

Peter Hopkins, whose work on youth, religion and race is being rightly recognised today, was also highly commended for his service work, his collegiality, and his dedication to his students, his department, and higher education. The latter has been in part in terms of widening access, but also in calling the government and higher education policy to account for the devastating changes being forced upon the sector.

Education does not, of course, simply happen in formal settings. Not all education can have a price put on it. Educating the public and policymakers is a crucial part of the work undertaken by Edmund, Martin and Peter. The books, articles and reports we write as academics are, we hope, going to be read by a wider interested public. But few, if any, academics can hope to have the same impact with their words as Colin Thubron has had with his. The recognition of his literary merits is deserved in part for the inspiration his works of travel writing and literature have had on several generations of geographers both within and

beyond the academy. Reading Colin's work, and of Colin's work, I cannot help but feel overwhelmed and inadequate in terms of my own travel, writing and knowledge of the world. For those of us who do not have the stamina, bravery and endurance to undertake these kinds of journeys, Colin's written words, and the programmes Dale Templar has produced, including notably the wonderful *Human planet*, allow us a glimpse of these other places, other cultures and other worlds. Michael Palin's own programmes, of course, did similar things. Dale's commendations also stressed her commitment to education, both in terms of formal lectures and the long discussions afterwards.

While these awards are given for either research or education, what seemed most striking in reading the nominations was how intertwined these two aspects of our work actually are in practice. Future policy, and future directions in geography, should not be conducted with a sense they can be distinct.

Finally, on behalf of all the other award recipients, I would like to reiterate my thanks for the recognition of this work. Thank you.

Regional Anniversary Awards

Michael Palin: Last but by no means least we have the 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 these were awarded in 2010. These recognise the distinguished and hardworking efforts of the regional committees in creating a programme that has grown from some ten events in its first year to more than 85 events in 2010. 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 three people, nominated by their committees to receive Regional Anniversary Awards: **Chris Brightman** from the South West region; **Kathleen Oldfield** from the Cheshire and North Wales region; and **John Russell** also from the South West region.

I would like to add final congratulations to all the recipients of the RGS-IBG Medals and Awards for 2011.