

a productive scholar, writing on key skills for geographers, an excellent teaching practitioner and a tireless advocate for geographical education.

Professor Hay, unfortunately, is unable to join us from Australia today to receive the Taylor and Francis Award, but I would like to congratulate him on winning this award. I would like to invite Professor Mick Healey to accept the Taylor and Francis Award on behalf of Professor Hay.

The Ness Award goes to NEIL OLIVER, who has championed the wider understanding and popularisation of geography through his work in the media. As one of the lead presenters on the first two series of BBC's *Coast*, and now the lead presenter, Neil has brought the development and history of the British coastline to life. Highlighting geographical issues from landform development, to coastal management, to people and their use of landscapes over time, he has engaged and informed a wide range of audiences successfully popularising geography and the wider understanding of our world and its environments.

Neil Oliver is currently filming and thus unable to join us, but I would like to congratulate him on winning this award. We have just a short clip of *Coast* instead, showing him in action.

This year's winner of the Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize for the best undergraduate dissertation submitted for a first geography degree is HEATHER DINSDALE of the University of Lancaster for her dissertation 'Bodies, homes and institutions: constructed and contested identities at the end of the lifecourse'.

Richard Jones, University of Gloucestershire, is recognised with a special commendation for his dissertation, 'Evaluating the use of lichenometry and dendrochronology as dating methods on intra-glacial forelands'.

I invite Heather Dinsdale to receive the Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize.

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 2008 this prize was awarded to Emilie Lagacé for the paper 'Science-policy guidelines as a benchmark: making the European Water Framework Directive'². I invite Emilie to receive her award.

The last of the Society's Award winners to be presented today, and to receive one of the most senior awards, will respond with a speech on behalf of all the Award winners. This year's recipient of the Back Award is PROFESSOR DANNY DORLING for geographical research which makes an outstanding contribution to public policy.

Professor Dorling is one of the most policy-engaged geographers. Whether you listen to Radio 4 or read a morning newspaper, you will hear him, or of his work, on issues of inequality, welfare and poverty. Using rigorous spatial analysis and creative cartography, he

is not only able to analyse data but to communicate it to wide audiences. His scholarship, and his willingness and ability to communicate key geographical arguments and findings relevant to public policy, makes him a most fitting recipient of this award.

Professor Dorling's work is widely respected and cited in academic arenas, and far beyond that, amongst government agencies, welfare organisations, think-tanks and others concerned with welfare and social justice. This is reflected not only in his funding sources, publication outlets, and media and policy profile, but also in his international standing.

It is with great pleasure that I ask Professor Danny Dorling to receive the Back Award and to respond on behalf of all the award winners.

PROFESSOR DANNY DORLING

Mr President, Ladies, Gentlemen, Friends and Family. On behalf of this year's remaining award holders I am pleased to accept the various honours which the Council of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) have so kindly afforded us.

In trying to work out what I am supposed to say today I looked back at Susan Smith's speech, given on this same occasion a few years ago³. Then she worried about prizes and honours being extended to individuals, but also remarked on how well the Society had moved on from when women were disbarred, just shy of a century ago, and on how the Society was continuing to represent a 'vibrant disciplinary project – a collective effort of real significance for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the world'. In many ways Sue was surprised to find herself speaking here a dozen years ago and I am surprised to find myself here too, but also pleasantly surprised to be able to be again talking at a time when it is possible to say that the Society is making the decisions needed to continue that collective effort of real significance.

I am also very pleased not to be stuck in a university building today given that my colleagues in Sheffield are currently slowly losing the will to turn the page of yet another exam script as there is more marking to be done than ever before. Often it is not that bad. Occasionally what they read is gripping, so I'm especially happy to share in the success of Heather Dinsdale who has won the Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize for the undergraduate geography dissertation judged to be the best in 2008. I note she hopes one day to complete a PhD. I hope she does. I'd also ask that she plans to teach a six year old to map-read in, say, the year, 2044. I'll explain why in a minute.

Linking award winners together is one of the challenges of accepting awards on behalf of a group. The only way I can find of doing this is through the variety of places all these winners appears to have travelled

to. Heather has already visited 20 countries, and she's the youngest. Emilie Lagacé too has travelled through a fair few, but I suspect that she had little idea she would end up being awarded the *Area* prize here for the best published article by a new researcher while working, for instance, on educational projects on a cruise ship in the Canadian Arctic. Did Neil Oliver realise that one of his rewards for working on so many miles and hours of *Coast* for the BBC (and much else) would be the Ness Award, partly for how grateful geographers would be as he rekindles interest in their subject? While Iain Hay was writing textbooks (more than one of which did what most writers only dream of – go to a third edition) while flying around the world from his base in Australia, I suspect that winning the Taylor and Francis Award for excellence in teaching and learning in geography in higher education was not at the forefront of his mind. Similarly, when Graham Goldup and Rebecca Kitchen were doing the excellent work in teaching geography at secondary level, the work which has won them both an Ordnance Survey Award, I suspect they were too busy to predict this. And, while Katie Willis was making contributions to development studies, working, among much else, on Inca structures in Peru, I don't think she would have realised that the Gill Memorial Award would be coming her way. Nor would Christine Dunn have thought – while looking at GIS mapping of landmines in Cambodia, or resources in Tanzania – that she would one day be presented with the Cuthbert Peek Award for development and application of participatory GIS. Nor, I suspect, did Jennifer Robinson think she would be presented with the Murchison Award for her studies, including her work at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa on what underpinned Apartheid. And I would be very much surprised if Simon King was thinking 'this shot will bag me the Cherry Kearton Medal and Award' while snapping a turtle laying eggs on a beach in South Africa! However, the only person I can really speak confidently for is myself, and while I haven't managed to travel as widely as any of the other award holders, I have got to draw maps of an awful lot of the world from the cartographic comfort of Britain, and I am very grateful for the Back Award for what those maps show and also for all the help I have had from friends, colleagues and family in making them.

Geography, even of the royal kind, is no longer the exclusive world of chaps who explore and make maps. When a dozen years ago Susan Smith accepted the awards on behalf of her group: being female, she was in the minority. Today, being male, I am in the minority of this group. Things do move on, even if change can appear slow, and even if you have to keep pushing to move in the right direction, or at least not to go backwards. The Society gives out more awards now than it did in the past and I hope in future it gives

out many more awards than it does now, because they are nice surprises.

We are currently living through times of confession: as bankers admit to not being so clever and MPs admit to having had a little greed themselves. I have a confession to end on. I am not the first person in my family to win an award from the RGS-IBG. My grandfather was awarded the prize 'for the best essay of not more than 5000 words' in 1937. He wrote on the Yorkshire coalfield and textile mills⁴. In those days the award came with £10, enough to pay for a two week holiday in Europe, an amazing luxury in the depression. Thirty-seven years later he taught me how to read a map. Which is why I hope Heather does the same, to some six year old in 2044. Seventy-two years later, last week, at age 93, my grandfather was helping me again with a book on comparing the 1930s with today.

Thank you very much for the awards, for all the help we have received, on behalf of all award holders.

The PRESIDENT

Last, but by no means least, we come to the Honorary Fellowships of the Society. These honours are awarded for outstanding services to the cause of geography and/or to the Society. Our recipients in 2009 have served both the discipline and the Society in the areas of geographical education.

This year Honorary Fellowships are awarded to Rachel Bowles and Patricia Wilson.

Rachel Bowles is recognised for her work in support of primary geography – she has published widely; involved, consulted, motivated and enthused teachers; founded the Register of Research in Primary Geography; and provided longstanding service to the Geographical Association, keeping the membership informed during times of upheaval in primary education and at times of real threats to geography in the primary curriculum. Her expertise, organisation and commitment are unsurpassed.

Patricia Wilson is also recognised for work furthering and promoting geography in schools. Throughout her career, Patricia Wilson has made a sustained and significant contribution to the teaching, advancement and examination of secondary geography in schools at a national level. She has done this both through her career professional roles, as the principal geography subject officer for the Secondary Examinations Council, now QCA, and as a highly respected consultant; and through her committed membership of the Society. She has been a tireless member of the Education committee and has generously provided advice and contributions to a number of the Society's major education projects and to its professional development training.

I would like to add final congratulations to all the recipients of the RGS-IBG medals and awards for 2009.

And now I come to two final pieces of business. The candidates nominated for vacant Council positions who are returned unopposed are: Michael Palin, elected as the new President of the Society until 2012; Barnaby Lenon, as Vice-President; Michael Ashby, Ordinary Councillor, Education; and Susan Owens as Ordinary Councillor, Research.

Elections were held for two positions: Honorary Secretary, Expeditions and Fieldwork and Ordinary Councillor, Expeditions and Fieldwork. Those elected to hold those posts, respectively, are David Petley for a second three year term and Nick Middleton.

I would like to extend my very warm thanks to those Members of Council who have completed their terms this year and have served the Society so well on the Council. First, Andrew Linnell, who has been an outstanding Vice President for Education during a period of considerable growth in the Society's activities to support geography at school. Also completing their terms and warmly thanked are: Peter Smith, Ordinary Councillor, Expeditions and Fieldwork; Darrel Sheinman, Ordinary Councillor, Education; Noel Castree, Chair of Annual Conference 2008; and Jo Little, Ordinary Councillor, Research.

Finally, as this is my last appearance as President, I want to say a few thanks. I want particularly to thank the Council. It's a very diverse body with a wide range of perspectives and opinions. I want to thank them particularly for their creative support and I want to especially thank the Executive Council, which consists of the Vice Presidents and the Treasurer, who have not just been supportive, but in their advice have been very wise.

I secondly want to thank the staff of the RGS-IBG. We have an extremely able and committed staff who work long hours, who are calm and focused, even under considerable stress. They're warm and open to the membership. They're a great team and we're very fortunate to have them.

And then finally, I want to thank the Director, Rita Gardner. She is, I believe, an outstanding Director. She has led and is leading the Society forward in new and exciting directions putting into practice the strategies that the Council has designed and approved. She is a true visionary, strong also on attention to detail, and with a great sense of what is practical. I think we are extremely fortunate to have her and I would like you to join me in a round of applause for the Council, for the staff and for the Director.

That brings us to the end of the AGM.

Special General Meeting

A Special General Meeting of the Society's Fellows was held at 15.00 on 18 May 2009 to consider the

resolution proposed by a group of Fellows '*The Royal Geographical Society with IBG should, in keeping with the express wording and the clear spirit of the Royal Charter of Incorporation, carry out its own expeditions which will contribute to the progress of geographical knowledge; and that it should resume the regular organisation of its own sponsored multi-disciplinary research projects, in geography and related disciplines in cooperation with scientists in host countries, to study different terrains and objectives to a high standard.*' The Society's Council was opposed to the resolution.

At the Special General Meeting, Alistair Carr and Justin Marozzi spoke in favour of the motion; Robert Allison and Heather Viles against. Also on stage to answer questions were Timothy Bosworth (in favour) and Rita Gardner (at the request of the Society's Council). Short presentations by the four speakers were followed by a broad range of questions from the floor from those in favour, those against, and those undecided. For the motion to be passed, a minimum of two-thirds of those voting would be required to vote in favour.

More than 10,000 Fellows were eligible to vote by postal ballot or in person; of those 4197 exercised their vote. The vote was decisively against the resolution; 2590 (61.7%) against and 1607 (38.3%) in favour. The poll was organised by Electoral Reform Services.

While the vote was a clear endorsement of the Society's current approach, the Society recognises that 15% of the Fellowship as a whole chose to vote in favour of the resolution. The Society will proceed later this year with the planned 5-year review of its support for generating new knowledge through research and scientific expeditions. More details will be available in the Society's autumn Bulletin and on the website (www.rgs.org/Review). Constructive comments from Fellows, individually or collectively, are welcomed and will be considered as part of the open review process. The President will take a keen and independent interest in the Review panel's work.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/>
- 2 **Lagacé E, Holmes J and McDonnell R** 2008 Science-policy guidelines as a benchmark: making the European Water Framework Directive Area 40 421–34
- 3 **Smith S J** 1998 Murchison Award acceptance speech *The Geographical Journal* 164 170–1
- 4 **Charlesworth E** 1938 A local example of the factors influencing industrial location *The Geographical Journal* 41 340–51