

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Medals and Awards celebration 2017

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The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) annual Medals and Awards recognise achievements in researching, communicating and teaching a wide range of geographical knowledge. The speeches and citations are a record of the 2017 celebration, with contributions by Sir Gordon Conway and Lindsey Hilsum, and Professors Andrew Cliff, David J A Evans and Henry Wai-chung Yeung. The speeches include comments on the importance of geography for mapping extreme human experiences, engaging policy-makers, understanding and tackling climate change and hunger, and inspiring others through teaching, fieldwork and travel.

KEY WORDS: geography, fieldwork, travel, teaching and learning, climate change

President's introduction

The President opened the celebration by asking attendees to observe a minute's silence for reflection on the recent atrocities in London and Manchester.

Nicholas Crane: Welcome to the RGS-IBG Medals and Awards celebration 2017. This is where we recognise those who have made a difference in the world of geography and in the world. Following the success of the ordering of the event last year, we will present our Awards starting with recognition of Honorary Fellowships and Prizes, then the Awards of the Society, and finally the Society Medals, ending with the Gold Medals approved by Her Majesty The Queen.

In line with custom, Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung, recipient of the Murchison Award, will give a speech on behalf of all those recognised with Awards, Prizes and Honorary Fellowship. The presentation of the Busk, Victoria and Gold Medals will each be accompanied by a short speech from their recipients.

We will intersperse the proceedings with short videos highlighting *Migrants on the margins*, the Society's Field Research Programme; a short extract from the just-aired BBC documentary on the Society's film collection¹, which has been recently digitised, and its importance for historic and contemporary research; and stunning photographic images by Harry Hook, this year's Cherry Kearton Medal and Award recipient.

Events like this do not just happen. So before we begin, I would just like to thank the many staff who have helped to organise this event, and in particular Grace Matthews in the Director's Office, and the Medals and Awards Committee members and those who judged the Alfred Steers and Area Prizes, for their deliberations on tonight's awards. I would particularly like to thank all those who took the initiative and time to submit and support nominations.

To begin the proceedings, we will award an **Honorary Fellowship** of the Society. These Fellowships are awarded in recognition of outstanding service to the Society and/or to the discipline of geography. This year we have one recipient, **David Riviere**.

For 14 years David served as Head of Finance and Services at the Society. Today, David is recognised for his extraordinary commitment and services to the Society *in the period after* he retired from that role in 2014. For the last three years (2015, 2016 and 2017) he has actively supported his successors, most notably spending considerable time in drafting the statutory accounts for the Society. This culminated early this year, with David going very considerably 'above and beyond', voluntarily and without reward, providing advice, sharing his expertise and responding to enquiries, to ensure all statutory accounts and supporting schedules were fully completed. For his loyalty, his unwavering commitment to the Society and his support of former colleagues, today David is recognised with a very well deserved Honorary Fellowship. I would like to

Westgarth, Chief Executive of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, to accept the Geographical Award.

The **Ness Award**, for outstanding creative writing at the confluence of travel, nature and culture is awarded to **Professor Kathleen Jamie**.

Professor Kathleen Jamie is best known for her poetry and non-fiction that creates connections between cultures, past and present, and between humans and their environments. These themes have been at the root of her writings since her early work on North Pakistan, and are reflected in her more recent writings on China and Tibet, and her native Scotland. Kathleen invites readers to look differently at the world and has changed the coordinates of nature-writing through her feminist perspectives, concerns with internationalism, and attunement to different cultural relationships with the natural world. A leading figure among her generation of writers, she is the winner of more than 15 literary prizes; author of 12 books; and regular writer for *The Guardian*, *London Review of Books*, *Granta* and Radio 3 and 4. She is an outstanding writer for whom travel and natural history are the touchstones of her practice. As such, it is most appropriate the geographical community join the literary community in honouring her contributions. I am very pleased to invite Professor Kathleen Jamie to receive the Ness Award.

Research Awards

We now turn to the Awards for research, including field research and the sharing of research findings. The **Gill Memorial Award** is presented for potential shown by an early career researcher. The recipient this year is **Dr Sarah Mills**.

Dr Sarah Mills is a cultural-historical geographer. Her work crosses historical geography, with rigorous archival inquiry, and geographies of children and youth, developing a specific interest in the cultural politics of youth engagement with nationalism, citizenship and faith. Held in particularly high esteem by her colleagues, she has already published extensively – 21 articles and two books; received multiple grants, including prestigious ESRC awards; and is highly sought after for presentations. Her work has broken new ground, bringing into question traditional understanding of youth organisations, and the role of religion and gender, and has uncovered hidden histories of volunteering. Over and above all of this, she is most generous in her support for her colleagues and students. Sarah is a particularly impressive early career researcher, showing great potential, with a track record already very worthy of celebration. I am very pleased to invite Dr Sarah Mills to the stage to accept the Gill Memorial Award.

The **Cuthbert Peek Award** recognises those advancing geographical knowledge through the application of contemporary methods, including Earth observation and mapping. This year it is

presented to **Dr James Cheshire** for advancing geographical knowledge through the use of mappable Big Data.

Recent years have seen extraordinary increases in the availability of data. Dr James Cheshire has embraced this challenge for geographical data analysis, drawing on great technical capability, imagination, and creativity. James combines some of the best traditions of geography – cartography, visualisation and geographical understanding – with new areas of spatial and environmental data analytics. Beyond an impressive array of academic publications, he is lead author of two best-selling books: *London: the information capital* and *Where the animals go*. He hosts a very popular web site and blog (spatial.ly) which has been viewed millions of times over the last five years and is regularly featured in the national press. And, if that's not enough, James is a key member of the Q-Step programme to enhance quantitative skills among undergraduates; and is the only geographer to hold key roles in both phases of the ESRC's Big Data research programme. I am very pleased to invite Dr James Cheshire to the stage to accept the Cuthbert Peek Award.

The **Back Award** is given for research contributing to policy. This year, it is presented to **Professor Harriet Bulkeley** for her contributions to the shaping of international policy on climate change.

Professor Harriet Bulkeley is a world-leading academic expert on the politics and governance of climate change. Her particular expertise lies in climate change, energy and urban sustainability, critical issues of our time. Her standing and impact in policy circles is underpinned by her academic publications: seven books and more than 50 papers. This work has documented how cities and non-state actors are critical to climate policy, and has uncovered the social processes by which decarbonisation of societies and economies will occur. Her work is in demand across Europe, and globally. Harriet sits on the advisory board of the UN Habitat Cities and Climate Change initiative; has been a contributing author to the IPCC Working Group III; has served on the DECC/DEFRA Social Science Expert Panel; and has produced commissioned reports for the World Bank and European Commission. She has expertly demonstrated how and why it is necessary for human geography to contribute to climate change policy. I am very pleased to invite Professor Harriet Bulkeley to receive the Back Award.

Murchison Award

Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung is this year's recipient of the **Murchison Award**, the most senior of the Awards, for pioneering publications in the field of globalisation.

Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung has an outstanding record of publication and has made major

contributions to some of the core concerns of geographical science. His work on globalisation, uneven development, global production networks and the rise of East Asian firms has generated substantive new knowledge about the dynamic processes reshaping the contemporary world economy and their profound socio-spatial consequences.

A conceptual pioneer for the last two decades, and a prolific author, his research is foundational to understanding economic globalisation, and has contributed to shaping debates in contemporary economic geography. His work has also taken key concepts of the discipline into the heartlands of cognate disciplines, including international political economy, business and management studies, development and regional studies, and Asian studies. Henry holds editorships of two top journals and serves on a suite of editorial boards.

Henry is widely regarded as one of the leading economic geographers in the world – his work has developed new strands, filled important gaps in our knowledge, and is at the forefront pushing theoretical and empirical boundaries to provide invaluable insights for scholars and policy-makers alike. It is my pleasure to welcome Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung to the stage to receive the Murchison Award and to speak on behalf of all the Award recipients.

Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung's acceptance speech

Good evening, President Crane, Director Gardner, family, colleagues, and friends. As a China-born kid growing up in Hong Kong and now a Singaporean living and working in the 'Little Red Dot' of Singapore – both former British outposts in then the 'Far East', I feel deeply humbled and honoured to have the Murchison Award 2017 conferred on me and, by custom, given the opportunity to deliver this acceptance speech on behalf of all the recipients of Awards, Prizes and Honorary Fellowship. Thank you very much indeed to the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and all fellow geographers for your recognition of our collective endeavour in research and fieldwork, teaching and public engagement.

Today's awards celebrate the outstanding and yet diverse contributions of our recipients. For many years, I taught 'Geography 101' to first year classes of 400 or more at the National University of Singapore. I remember vividly the *most* important concept that all my students must learn was 'geographical imagination'. This is where the creative works of Harry Hook, Kathleen Jamie and James Cheshire make all the difference to our collective geographical imagination – from Harry's incredible collection of photographs taken across the African continent, to Kathleen's award-winning writing on the mountains of

Northern Pakistan and Tibet, and the natural world of birds and whales, and James' wonderful visualisations of spatial data.

Putting our geographical imaginations into scientific research represents the key contributions of Harriet Bulkeley, Sarah Mills and Brendon Blue. Harriet's longstanding work informs us critically about the politics of climate change and environmental governance. Sarah's research into the geographies of young people demonstrates great breakthrough potential. Brendon's *Area* paper makes a compelling call for a constructive and yet critical physical geography.

As a professor, I see education as my core mission. Indeed, without my secondary school geography teachers in Hong Kong and my thesis supervisors in Singapore and Manchester, I certainly would not be here. I am therefore most pleased that this evening we honour those who have made enormous contributions to the teaching and learning of geography. Claire Power and Paul Turner have shown us how their innovative deployment of digital media can engage students and bring geography into their learning spaces. Ian Cook and colleagues are fantastic purveyors of fieldwork and humanistic 'deep learning' in higher education. Our youngest here, Alex Henry, must have written his prize-winning dissertation with the right educators around him!

Our work cannot succeed without the unwavering support from dedicated institutions and individuals. Since 1956, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award has supported successive generations of young people to take on challenging geographical expeditions and self-improvement activities. Closer to 'home', the RGS-IBG would not have functioned so well without the extraordinary service of David Riviere, its Head of Finance for 14 years, and his generous support since.

Let me indulge a little further since I have come a long way from Singapore this morning and will be on my way back later tonight. As the saying goes, 'geography is destiny'! Well, not quite so in my view. This destiny is not preordained and can be reconfigured through globalising processes in which I have had the fortune of participating. Having done my PhD in Manchester under the supervision of Professor Peter Dicken (recipient of the 2001 Victoria Medal), my connection to British geography is deep and lifelong. Since returning to Singapore at the end of 1995, my home institution NUS has been very supportive of this international research outreach as part of 'Globalising Singapore'. Meanwhile, British higher education has become much more international, while East Asia has emerged to be a major economic centre. Through my work on economic globalisation, I have been fortunate to play some role in bridging this mutually beneficial academic interaction between the UK and East Asia. In short, I might have got my 'geography' right!

Looking forward, the globalisation of academic research and higher education will certainly continue in this interdependent world economy. Together with all our winners, I am sure we will endeavour to play a greater role in promoting geographical research, education and public engagement in this new world. Thank you RGS-IBG, for supporting and recognising our collective cause and efforts.

Royal and Society Medals

Nicholas Crane: Finally, I now turn to the Society's highest accolades: the Cherry Kearton Medal and Award, and the Busk, Victoria and Gold Medals.

Cherry Kearton Medal and Award

The **Cherry Kearton Medal and Award** is presented to **Harry Hook** in recognition of his photography and documentation of Africa.

Harry Hook is a highly accomplished photographer and film-maker, who has been documenting the people and landscapes of Africa for over 40 years. His powerful images bring contemporary Africa to the fore, illustrating migrants' journeys from the land to the city, illuminating Africa past and present, and telling the stories of its peoples. Using humour, passion and personal insight, and drawing on special techniques, including a mobile portable studio, to take intimate portraits of his subjects across the continent, his images reflect hopes, fears and aspirations for Africa's future. He is very widely known. Most recently his work featured in the BBC4 documentary, 'Photographing Africa', in his book *About Africa*, and appears regularly in newspapers and magazines across the world. His work and commitment are most worthy of recognition. I invite Harry to join me now to receive this year's Cherry Kearton Medal and Award.

Busk Medal

Professor David J A Evans is recognised with the **Busk Medal** for excellence and originality in the study of glacial landscapes and processes and for empowering the next generation through fieldwork.

In a research career spanning 30 years, Professor David J A Evans has published more than 180 papers, 14 books, including some of the definitive textbooks, and much more. This has led to our understanding of the 'fingerprint' left by modern and ancient glaciers and ice sheets. This impressive record of research has been underpinned by extensive fieldwork in modern-day glacial environments, including Iceland, Arctic Canada, the Himalayas and South Georgia. While this research activity and his world-leading standing is itself worthy of recognition, David is also specifically recognised for his longstanding commitment to introducing, and inspiring, successive generations of students to overseas

fieldwork and expeditions. From the start of his career at University of Glasgow, and more recently at Durham University, each summer David has led 'long' field trips, involving students in their planning and delivery. The outcomes of the students' work have been quite remarkable – definitive maps of glacial terrain, field guides, papers that have enhanced our understanding of glacial landscapes. But the legacy of these is much greater – the training and most importantly inspiration of the younger generations in the 'art' and 'science' of observational fieldwork. I am very pleased to invite Professor David Evans to join me on the stage to receive the Busk Award.

Professor David J A Evans' acceptance speech

It is always an honour to be acknowledged by your professional organisation, but for me the award of the Busk Medal by the RGS-IBG is extra special in that it recognises two things that form the foundation of all that I have attempted to do in my career. First, to understand glacial geomorphology using modern analogues and thereby ensuring credibility by actually engaging with real glaciers; and second, to pass on our developing knowledge of glaciers and glaciation to younger generations through field research and research-led teaching. I have been extremely fortunate to have undertaken my career research in some of the world's most impressive landscapes, especially the least accessible of those locations such as the Canadian Arctic, Svalbard, Iceland and South Georgia. I have spent long spells in each of those landscapes with excellent colleagues and friends too numerous to mention. Of those I must acknowledge firstly my PhD supervisor and career-long collaborator Professor John England of the University of Alberta, without whom my Arctic Canada experiences would simply never have happened, and my family, Tessa, Tara and Lotte, who have either suffered my long absences on fieldwork or have instead accompanied me and shared base camp life, long walks and off-road excursions, and often even taken field notes for me. Finally, I would like to encourage all academics to contemplate taking student groups on field research expeditions as I have done for the last 25 years, because it is the only way that field science can ensure a secure and productive future.

Victoria Medal

Nicholas Crane: Professor Andrew Cliff is this year's recipient of the **Victoria Medal**, which is awarded to recognise outstanding geographical scholarship. He is recognised for research excellence in spatial epidemiology, the spread and clustering of infectious diseases.

Professor Andrew Cliff was one of the first geographers to recognise the importance of an emerging critique of the application of standard