

Annual review 2020

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning





The Society



Vision

A world-leading learned and professional body for geography, widely respected for its independence, quality, innovation, and for the breadth of its activities promoting and supporting geography as the means for everyone to discover, understand and respect the world's people, places and environments.

Mission

A world centre for geography and geographical learning dedicated to the development and promotion of knowledge together with its application to the challenges facing society and the environment.

Society objectives

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) exists for 'the advancement of geographical science'. For the strategy 2017-2020, this purpose has been expressed as six strategic objectives for the organisation. These focus the activities of the Society and ensure that the Society's operational development is planned, integrated and responsive to the needs of the discipline, its practitioners, the public at large and the membership. Three objectives concern first and foremost the discipline. These are to safeguard the discipline, to develop and share geographical knowledge and understanding, and to support practitioners and students. Three objectives concern the Society. These are to grow our reputation, enhance our membership and sustain the future.

The Society's work is organised into thematic departments, each of which contributes work to several objectives.

The Society is a charity that exists for public benefit and which also has a broad-based membership that supports its mission and aims.

Registered Charity 208791

From the President and Director

President Rt Hon Baroness Lynda Chalker

Director Professor Joe Smith



It is a cliché, but 2020 was an unprecedented year – one that none of us predicted and likely one that none of us would choose to live through again. As a charitable organisation we faced a global pandemic that impacted on all of our activities as well as on all of us as individuals. However, as the dust settles and we enter a new normal, we are proud of the way that the Society, our trustees, our staff, members and all those working across the geographical community, dealt with the myriad of challenges thrown up during the year. It is testament to the commitment of all of those involved with the Society that we were able to achieve so much of what had been planned for 2020.

Among the achievements you'll read about in this annual review are how staff moved quickly and successfully to working remotely, how staff and members learned how to deliver activities and events online, and how the Society as a whole maintained its sense of community.

Despite a series of national lockdowns and varying regional coronavirus restrictions throughout the year, we provided a valuable series of online resources and teacher training sessions, almost doubling the number of teachers reached in 2020 compared with 2019. With physical exhibitions impossible, we produced three online exhibitions, showcasing materials from our Collections alongside images from the 2020 Earth Photo competition. We also provided free access to more of our catalogue of event and lecture recordings than ever before, ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to engage with geography from home.

Of course, there were things that we couldn't do as we'd hoped. For example, we had to postpone our Annual International Conference to 2021, and for many of our Fellows and members, the inability to visit the Society's building

in London for events or meetings has changed how they engage with the Society.

Conversely, there were things that we were able to do that were facilitated by staff and the public not being in our building in South Kensington. For example, during the summer, asbestos was removed from several areas, enabling remedial works to take place on the heating and cooling systems. And essential repair work was progressed on the south elevation that would otherwise have been very noisy and intrusive.

This will be the last annual review in this format, as during the second half of 2020, in consultation with Fellows, members and other stakeholders, we developed a revised strategy that will be implemented from 2021 onwards. The new strategy represents an evolution of the objectives set out in this annual review and sets the direction for our work for the coming years. You can read more about this on p24.

We would like to end by thanking you sincerely for your continued support of the Society. Every Fellow, member, donor, advisor and volunteer makes a difference and we appreciate it greatly.

1 Geography

Promoting and sustaining a vibrant discipline

Objective Represent, promote and advocate for geography as a leading discipline, so that its contribution to understanding our changing world is appreciated by the public and it maintains a strong position in education, research, fieldwork and expeditions, in civic society and in informing policy and business.

Context Geography has an essential role in the 21st century in helping everyone to understand our world. 2012 to 2016 saw significant strengthening in the standing and study of geography. 2017 to 2020 had uncertainties in the face of UK political and economic change.

The Society continues to be highly influential and an effective voice for geography, particularly in raising awareness of the importance of location data. During 2020, we showcased the value of geographical insight to a range of contemporary issues, but particularly the pandemic.

1.1 Making the case for geography

The COVID-19 pandemic is fundamentally geographical, and as such geographers were very much involved in demonstrating the value of the discipline throughout 2020 – from modelling and visualising the spread of the virus to highlighting the unequal impact of the disease. The Society supported and amplified this work by publishing a series of geovisualisations on our website and sharing them widely via social media.

The Society also published nine new case studies that highlight the relevance and impact of geographical knowledge and approaches on policy- and decision-making. These included how a geographic information system (GIS) was used by Thames Water to reduce fatbergs and flooding, how satellite remote sensing techniques helped develop better understanding of wildfires, and how understanding how the features of local environments affect health outcomes can lead to healthier places.

A priority for the year was to sustain networks and conversations with key stakeholders – and to facilitate these virtually. In particular,

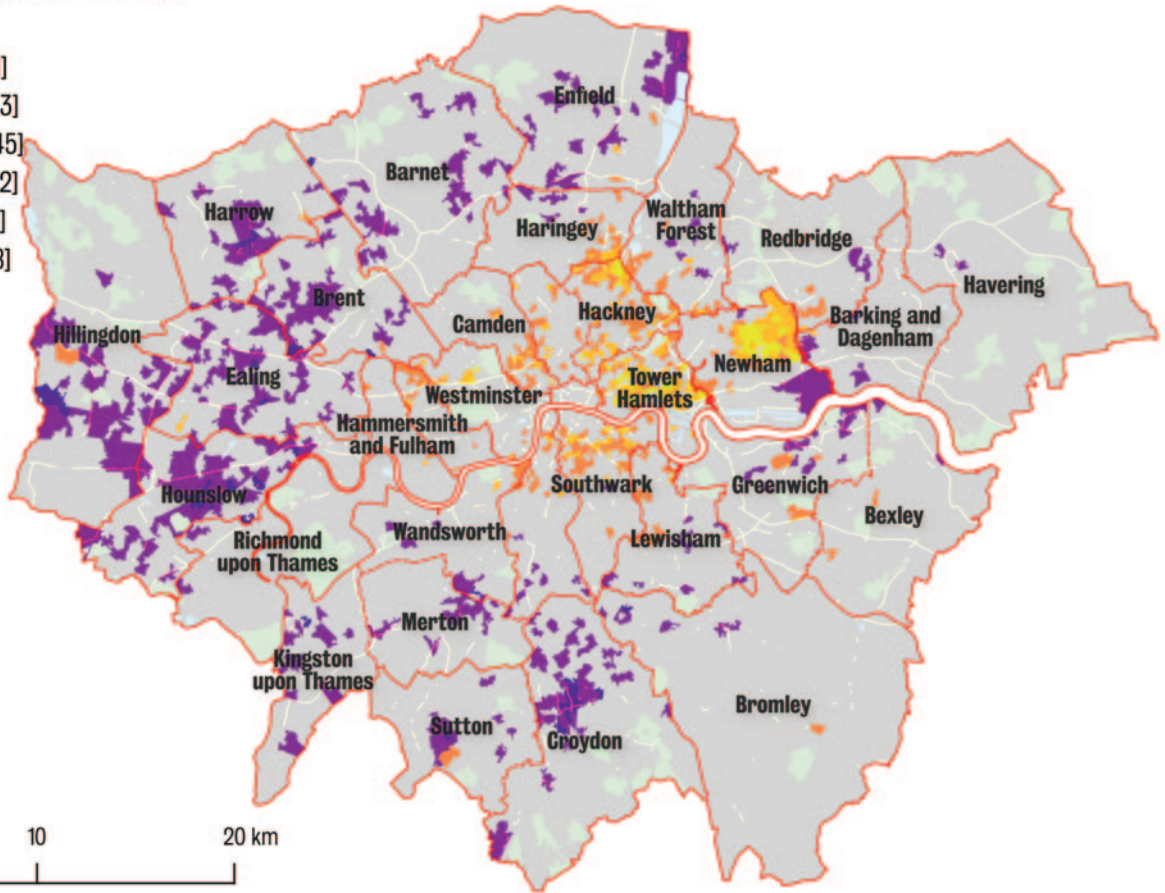
the Society provided online meeting spaces for the UK Heads of Geography Departments and our Research Groups, while maintaining regular contact with other geographical societies and relevant sister bodies worldwide.

Throughout 2020, the Society also continued to support the Geography in Government group in its progression to an independent profession within the Cabinet Office. Membership of the group now exceeds 1,300 with visibility across local and national government, which is helping to increase the professional standing of geographers within the UK civil service. The Society also maintained its ongoing contact with ministers and officials across a range of relevant governmental departments and agencies, lobbying and advocating for the value of geography.

Geovisualisation of
predicted demographic
change throughout
London by 2021.

© Jonathan Reades

StDev. of Change 2011–21 [4835]



The mapping and analytics company Maploom created an open access, online interactive map to display current data for the COVID-19 pandemic.

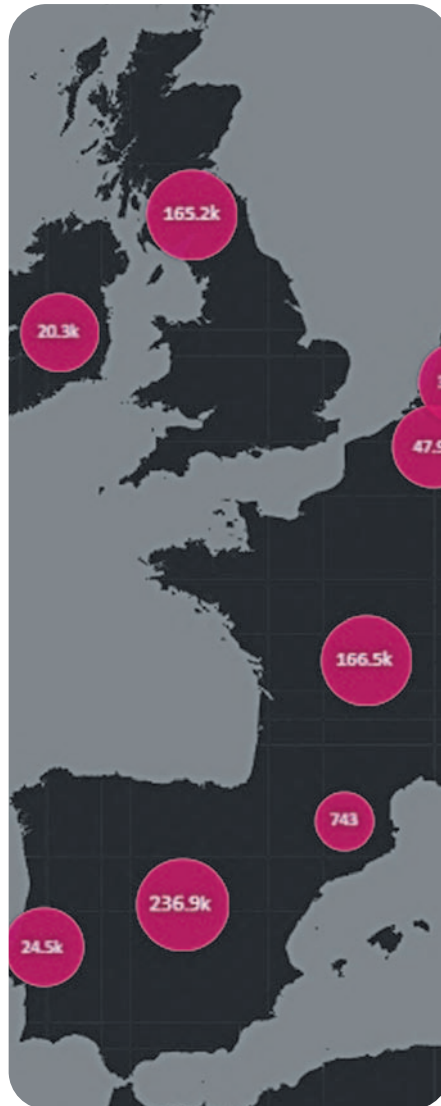
© Maploom

1.2 Advising on geography

During 2020, the Society submitted five responses to policy consultations on topics including the UK national data strategy, the proposal for a Natural History GCSE, and proposed changes to GCSE and A Level exams due to COVID-19. Alongside these responses, the Society was also approached by Ofqual for advice on arrangements, particularly in relation to fieldwork, for the 2021 examinations.

With the UK Heads of Geography Departments, the Society developed a statement and five principles on the delivery of high quality and sustainable taught undergraduate fieldwork that geography departments in higher education institutions will be able to sign up to. The statement and principles set out approaches to balancing, for example, the environmental cost of overseas travel with the personal educational benefits of experiencing different cultures, and how to ensure accessibility.

The Society nominated geographers to become panel members of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), however the work of the REF was slightly delayed mid-year due to the pandemic.



1.3 Promoting geography to wider audiences

With schools closed for much of 2020, the face-to-face elements of the Geography Ambassador programme were severely curtailed. However, online training was provided to 200 new Ambassadors from 40 universities, and we piloted remote Ambassador activities. During the year, the Professional Ambassadors scheme, which trains graduate geographers to become Ambassadors, was refreshed and relaunched to support not only sessions for school pupils, but also university career events.

The Society's Earth Photo competition and online exhibition resulted in coverage in *The Guardian*, *BBC Online*, *Digital Camera World*, *VICE* and many other outlets. *The Guardian* also featured our online exhibition of images from Eric Newby's archive. The *i* profiled Professor Heather Viles after she was awarded the Society's Founder's Medal, and she was also interviewed on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*. *The Telegraph* featured the Society's platinum prints of the *Endurance* expedition in their list of 'best Christmas gifts for 2020'. Talk Radio broadcast five *Geography at Home* interviews with the Head of Education.

2 Knowledge and understanding

Helping create a better informed world

Objective Advance, interpret and share geographical knowledge more fully, so that the world is better understood and more people benefit from using and enjoying geographical knowledge in their work, leisure and communities.

Context In a period of uncertainty and rapid change there is a greater need than ever to advance, and share, well-founded knowledge and understanding of the UK and the world. And to do so in ways that are meaningful to professional and public audiences today. We will bring our independence, convening power and inspiration to bear.

In a year of disruption and changes in ways of working, the Society was able to provide online spaces for both geographers and the public to explore new geographical knowledge. The Society continued to successfully support and promote expert knowledge and informed participation.

2.1 Advancing knowledge

Fieldwork was severely curtailed during 2020 due to the pandemic, however two of the projects awarded funding by the Society's grants programme were able to go into the field. Supported by the Dudley Stamp Memorial Award, PhD student Yu-Kai Liao, from Durham University, completed a year of field-based research into how different modes of commercial shrimp farming shape relations of hydrology, infrastructure, and social life in the Mekong Delta. And Dr Elia Apostolopoulou, from the University of Cambridge, was able to begin her field research into the right to energy justice in Greece, supported by the Society's Environment and Sustainability Research Grant.

Throughout 2020, the Society continued to select and commit funding for field research projects on the understanding that they would only take place when it was safe and responsible for them to do so. This means that with the generous support of our donors, close to £190,000 of funding was allocated to support 39 field research projects. Projects are planned to take place in 28 countries

spanning five continents, and covering a range of topics, including constraining river erosion rates and long-term evolution of volcanic island landscapes in the Azores and Madeira archipelagos, investigating the place-based geography of climate perception and its impacts on migration in Cambodia, and an interdisciplinary study of grazing pressure in the Dhofar Mountains of Oman.

The Society is part of the Science Museum and Archives Consortium, which, with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), supports PhD studentships working on our Collections. In 2020, the consortium awarded a new PhD studentship to Katie Vann at Royal Holloway, University of London. She will be reconnecting historical photographs of Indigenous peoples and practices to contemporary initiatives concerning Indigenous knowledge and heritage development, with a focus on the Rupununi region of Guyana.

2.2 Interpreting and sharing knowledge

The COVID-19 pandemic and the first national lockdown in March necessitated a rapid response from staff across the Society to cancel or postpone all planned in-person events, inform all speakers and attendees as soon as possible, and refund ticket costs promptly.

Once it became clear that in-person events would not be possible for some time, the Society put in place the infrastructure and technology needed to deliver virtual events. Between March and December, 40 public events were streamed, attracting more than 34,700 views. In addition, 18 Monday night lectures for Fellows and members, 48 sessions of continuing professional development for teachers and 22 events for professional geographers have taken place online, generating over 30,300 views.

During 2020, the online events organised by our regional committees, including talks on severe weather, rural communities and marine ecosystems, attracted much larger numbers than their in-person events. This is likely due to them being promoted nationally, rather than just regionally, as well as

more people being able to attend no matter where they live or work. Conversely, the average number of viewers watching the Monday night lectures decreased in comparison to in-person lectures. This is likely due to the highly social nature of these evenings, which can't be substantially recreated online.

Speakers in the Monday night lecture series for Fellows and members included Sir Michael Palin talking about his journey through North Korea, Tim Jarvis talking about retracing Shackleton's survival journey, Professor Andy Tatem talking about the geography of disease, and Dr Amanda Rogers talking about how classical dance has been used to rebuild the Cambodian nation. The Society's Collections were showcased through a series of online talks including Dr Kate Simpson articulating the narratives of women on David Livingstone's expeditions, and Jules Stewart exploring 1930s New York.

Unfortunately, all of the dates in the Regional Theatres Programme, which programmes high profile geographical speakers in theatres across the country, were cancelled during 2020.

The third year of the Society's Earth Photo competition, developed in partnership with Forestry England, attracted over 2,600 entries. The images submitted to the competition were not only awe-inspiring, but also revealed geographical stories that might otherwise not have been told. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the planned exhibitions in the Society's Pavilion and at three Forestry England venues did not take place. However, all the shortlisted images were showcased in an online exhibition on the Society's website.

The Society's annual Young Geographer of the Year competition attracted a record number of entries with over 10,500 pupils aged nine to 18 writing about the world beyond their window. The Society's essay competition in partnership with the *Financial Times* also attracted high quality entries as sixth form students discussed the geographical story behind a chosen set of data related to sustainability and climate change.

In December, the Society launched a digital sticker album as part of our educational resources programme linked to the Weddell Sea expedition.

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This image of fishermen and their families mending nets in Vietnam was shortlisted for the 2020 Earth Photo competition.

© Ly Hoang Long

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Zahra Kahn won the KS3 category of the Young Geographer of the Year with this poster
© Zahra Khan

During 2020, the Society produced a range of educational resources to support teachers and parents homeschooling, including a series of interactives exploring Antarctica.

In addition to the collectable images shared each week on the Society's Instagram channel that explore Antarctic life, tourism and governance, we also released five new interactives that connect the classroom to the coldest, windiest and driest continent.

Unfortunately, the 2020 Annual International Conference, which was to be chaired by Professor Uma Kothari and had the theme *Borders, borderlands and bordering*, was postponed due to the pandemic. The conference, with the same Chair and theme, will take place in September 2021 with either a mix of in-person and online sessions, or entirely online, depending on the coronavirus restrictions in place at the time.

The Research Groups were particularly active and continued their usual activities – including meetings, seminars and conferences – online throughout 2020. The Postgraduate Forum, set up PGF@Home and held their mid-term conference as a series of live Tweets. Others, such as the Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Research Group, organised virtual writing and reading groups to help members support each other. In addition, the Society welcomed a new Working Group



– the Latin American Geographies Working Group – bringing the total number of Research and Working Groups to 32.

Publishing of new geographical research findings through the Society's scholarly journals (*Area*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *The Geographical Journal* and *Geo: Geography and the Environment*) and book series continued during 2020. *Geo* is the Society's open access, online-only journal and a system upgrade in the autumn allowed audio and video files to be hosted directly within its articles, rather than as supplementary features, allowing authors to present their data analysis in a more dynamic way. Our journals are available in over 13,500 institutions worldwide, including almost 8,000 in the Global South via philanthropic initiatives.

Geography Directions, the Society's blog linked to our scholarly journals, put out a call in May for contributions that brought a geographical lens to the coronavirus outbreak, as well as pieces that consider the world after the pandemic. By the end of the year, over 100 articles on this theme had

been published, a significant increase in activity compared with 2019.

The book series turned 20 during 2020, and *Home SOS: Gender, Violence, and Survival in Crisis Ordinary Cambodia*, by Professor Katherine Brickell was published in June.

When launched publicly in 2021, the Wiley Digital Archives (WDA) project will enable institutional access to the Collections from across the globe, opening up new opportunities for research and engagement with our remarkable historical resources. By the end of 2020, despite delays caused by the coronavirus restrictions, the digitisation of the Collections materials included within the scope of the WDA project was close to completion. To promote research use of the WDA online platform, which allows users to make connections between materials in many different formats to build up a richer portrait of a given place, person or expedition, the Society was able to offer 10 Wiley Digital Archive Fellowships.

2.3 **Extending our engagement with new audiences**

The need to move all of the Society's events online from March onwards, created the opportunity to reach new audiences. Initial analysis showed that many people were attending regional events who would not otherwise do so, and that the make up of the audience for Monday night lectures also changed as Fellows and members could participate wherever they were.

The Society conducted an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) survey of the UK geography higher education community. The results of this survey, alongside the results of the *Geography of geography* research commissioned by the Society in 2019, are being used to develop a strategic programme of interventions across the Society's work with schools, higher education and professional geographers in the workplace.

Alongside this, the Society continued its work across the geographical community to address EDI issues, including with sector-led programmes, such as Athena Swan, that support underrepresented groups in higher education institutions.

3 Geography in practice

Enabling professional and student communities

Objective Help meet the needs of practising geographers and students, so that there are vibrant, well trained, accredited professional communities, and highly employable students.

Context Geographical knowledge and skills are increasingly recognised at work and sought out by employers. Professional development and accreditation is becoming more widely valued and rewarded by employers. It is timely to expand the Society's role as a professional body and its support for professional geographers.

Throughout 2020, the Society continued to develop its support for professional geographers, alongside maintaining standards through personal and programme accreditation. By sustaining effective training for teachers, lecturers and field scientists, the Society also supports the pipeline of geographers into a range of professional communities.

3.1 Promoting the professionalism of geography and geographers

In November, the Society hosted the online Geographers in Government Award ceremony cementing the close working relationship between the Society and the Geographers in Government Profession.

The Society welcomed the publication of the National Geospatial Strategy in early summer, and we continued discussions with the Geospatial Commission, in particular on skills and apprenticeships.

Throughout the year, new additions were made to the Society's collection of *I am a geographer* profiles, which showcase the wide range of careers open to geographers.

3.2 Developing substantially the programme of professional support and accreditation

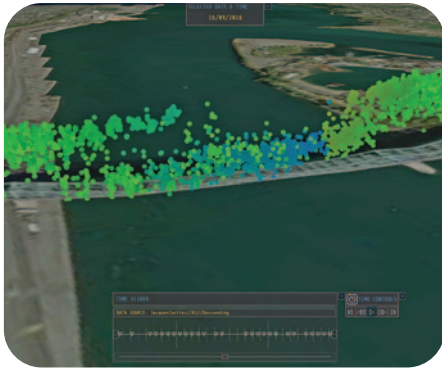
Towards the end of 2020, the Society awarded the first accreditations to Master's degree programmes to three programmes at two higher education institutions. Through the scheme, the Society aims to recognise good practice in geography learning and teaching across UK higher education, while supporting continuous quality improvement and promoting good student outcomes across the sector. Alongside this new scheme, by the end of 2020, undergraduate degree programmes at 54 institutions had been accredited by the Society.

In the summer, the Society launched a searchable, online register of Chartered Geographers (CGeogs). CGeog is the only internationally recognised professional accreditation for people using geographical knowledge and skills in the workplace, and there are now 594 active CGeogs.

Professional geographers were also supported through the development of

The Society provides support for geographers working in a wide range of professional settings. Emily Selwood, from the Satellite Applications Catapult, produced this visualisation of a deteriorating bridge.

© Emily Selwood



a bank of online career resources linked to the four themes of the CGeog competency framework, and a new online CPD enrichment series. The latter was launched during summer and comprised online discussion groups hosted by Chartered Geographer assessors and mentors for small groups of CGeogs and Fellows completing free online learning from third party providers.

In September, the Society's inaugural Professional Practice Group (PPG), the Disaster Risk Management PPG, was convened. Through tailored events and sharing best practice, the group aims to develop a community of professional geographers who use geographic information and approaches for disaster risk management in their day jobs or in extra-curricular activities.

3.3 Sustaining a strong training function in schools, higher education and field science

The Society's Geography Teacher Training Scholarship programme, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), successfully recruited 140 Scholars who started their training in September 2020, and continued to support previous cohorts of Scholars as they embark upon their teaching careers.

However, alongside some other subjects, DfE decided in the autumn not to provide teacher training bursaries and the accompanying Scholarship for trainee geography teachers over the academic year 2021/22.

Alongside the support for new and very early career geography teachers offered through the Scholarship programme, the Society continued during 2020 to run high quality and sought-after continuing professional development (CPD) sessions for geography teachers. Due to the pandemic, from March all of the sessions were held online and attracted a record number of participants.

Explore, the Society's expedition and fieldwork planning seminar was held online in November and comprised a series of sessions over a Saturday

afternoon and early evening. Holding the event online enabled people who would not normally be able to attend an event in London to participate. However, by being online only, some of the informal networking opportunities that are normally a feature of the event were unfortunately lost.

Many of the other training events normally organised by Geography Outdoors are practical and hands on, and therefore didn't translate well into online events. Despite these challenges, more than 200 people were able to access the Society's training aimed at upskilling and sharing best practice among the community of expeditioners.

The Society's bank of teaching and learning resources for higher education institutions expanded during 2020 with the addition of resources on, among others, virtual fieldwork and supporting wellbeing and employability. The Society also continued to offer presentations to student groups on employability, skills and career paths, and due to the pandemic these have been developed into a suite of on-demand talks that are available online for geography departments to use when they require.

2020 in pictures

Dr Fleur Visseur featured in one of our 2020 education podcasts.

© Fleur Visseur

Exhibition of prints from the 1921 Mount Everest expedition.

© Tina Lees-Jones

The Society's grants programme funded 39 field research projects.

© Meg Picken

Pre-lockdown events included *The future of food* and *Journey times*.

© RGS-IBG



Contributions to geography were recognised with medals and awards.

© RGS-IBG

Geography career profiles now online, including Kathryn Ganarin at the MoD.

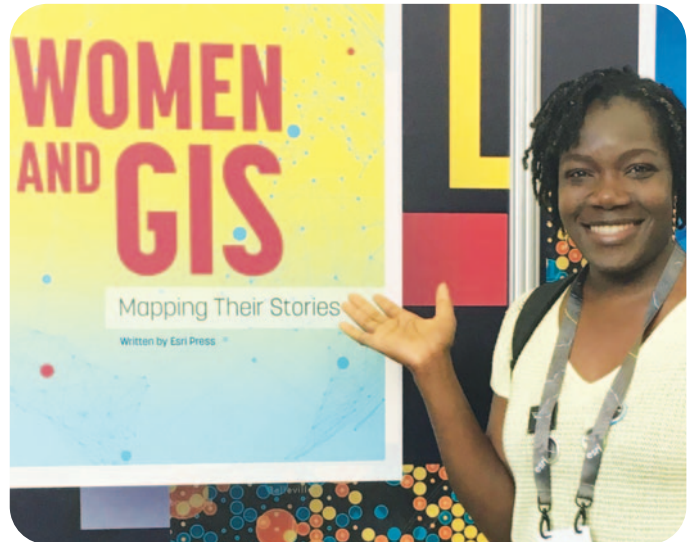
© Kathryn Ganarin

Online exhibition of Eric Newby's photographs from our Collections.

© RGS-IBG

Black History Month featured profiles of geographers, including Naa Sackeyfio.

© Naa Sackeyfio



4 Growing our reputation

Building on tradition, independence and contemporary relevance

Objective Build further the Society's strong profile, reputation and presence, nationally and internationally, reinforcing and publicising its role as a leader among learned societies and a partner of choice.

Context The Society is well established and highly respected, UK-wide and internationally. It has a well-developed international reach in selected activities and an international membership in more than 100 countries. It is regularly consulted as a leading learned society. Geopolitical changes and technological developments offer incentives and opportunities to establish a stronger presence, and partnerships with sister societies, across the UK and internationally, for mutual benefit and that of geography.

As the UK's learned society for geography and professional body for geographers, the Society is a trusted partner with a reputation for innovation and impact. Throughout the challenges of 2020, the Society worked closely with other organisations to deliver successful projects.

4.1 Developing and consolidating bilateral relationships

The Society has long standing, close working relationships with partner bodies and sister organisations across the geographical and broader social sciences communities. These include the Association for Geographic Information, Geographical Association, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers, the Field Studies Council, the Council of British Geography, the British Academy, the Academy of Social Sciences, and the examining bodies that offer GCSE and A Level geography. In general, the Society works in partnership with these organisations in order to present a stronger, joint voice on shared issues.

During 2020, the Director joined a group of independent organisations advocating for better government support throughout the pandemic. The group, all of whom receive no core funding from government and have a reliance on ticket sales income, shared information and coordinated responses to consultations.

4.2 Enhancing our presence, online and across the UK

In February, a new Web Communications Officer was appointed, the first time the Society has had a dedicated member of staff to work solely on the website. Throughout the rest of 2020, improvements and enhancements were made to the website including introducing online exhibitions of Collections content, redeveloping the Venue Hire pages and enabling online events.

Also in February, the Society launched an Instagram account, adding this to the social media channels already in use. Instagram is an image-driven medium, suited to the stunning photographs and images the Society is able to share to illustrate its work. By the end of 2020, over 6,000 people were following the Society on Instagram and this is steadily growing. Other recommendations from the social media review undertaken in 2019 were also implemented including sharing more non-Society content from across the geographical community and closer working between departments with social media channels.

The Society's *Hidden Histories of Exploration* exhibition, which recognises and celebrates the collaboration and co-production of a selection of expeditions, was converted into an online exhibition during 2020.

© RGS-IBG



Throughout 2020, social media was used to increase the Society's reach and engagement, with campaigns such as the announcement of the Earth Photo competition winners and sharing the Society's medal and award recipients helping to increase our public audiences.

The pandemic resulted in the Society being unable to have a physical presence anywhere in the UK after March. However, the profile of the Society's programme of regional events increased significantly during the year as people were able to watch from anywhere.

4.3 **Extending the international dimension of current activities**

The Society is the UK representative body for the International Geographical Union (IGU) and the European Association for Geographical Societies (EUGEO), and we continued to support their activities throughout 2020.

The Hong Kong branch of the Society was able to move its programme of talks online from May. During 2020 they organised over 40 talks and field visits.

In Singapore, the regional committee organised 10 events during 2020, nine of which were online.

5 Enhancing our membership

An important source of expertise, funding and enthusiasm

Objective Reach and engage new supporters and retain the enthusiasm and expertise of existing Fellows and members, across the UK and beyond, ensuring a strong and growing membership of both professionals and enthusiasts who support our activities.

Context The Society benefits from its Fellows' and members' knowledge, enthusiasm, time, contacts, and their subscriptions which provide around a quarter of the Society's gross income. The Society especially values its many loyal Fellows who are long term supporters. To continue to develop sustainably, the continuing high retention and good recruitment of Fellows and members is essential.

The breadth of the Society's membership is at the core of our ability to influence and advocate successfully on behalf of the discipline. Every Fellowship and membership subscription supports the Society's charitable work championing geography, inspiring the next generation and disseminating geographical knowledge.

5.1 Continuing to improve engagement and communication with members

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required the Society to rethink some of its communications channels, especially during the early stages of the first national lockdown. This resulted in the termly Bulletin being online-only for the autumn 2020 edition, and the 2019 Annual Review was primarily available as a digital publication. These temporary changes, brought about by external circumstances, allowed the Society to pilot different formats and alternative methods of communication. Fellows and members are now able to choose whether they wish to receive print or digital editions of the Society's membership publications.

A Membership Working Group was set up in early 2020, with the aim of better coordinating the Society's work with different sections of the membership. The Group responded quickly to data showing potential drops in renewal rates and ensured that the Membership Team had the resources they needed while working remotely.

5.2 Enhancing recruitment and retention

Retention rates for 2020 were 74% overall and 89% for Fellowship. This is down slightly on the last couple of years, but exit surveys have shown that this is likely due to the impacts on individuals of the pandemic. Given the situation, the Society is heartened by the desire of our Fellows and members to renew their memberships and their support for our work.

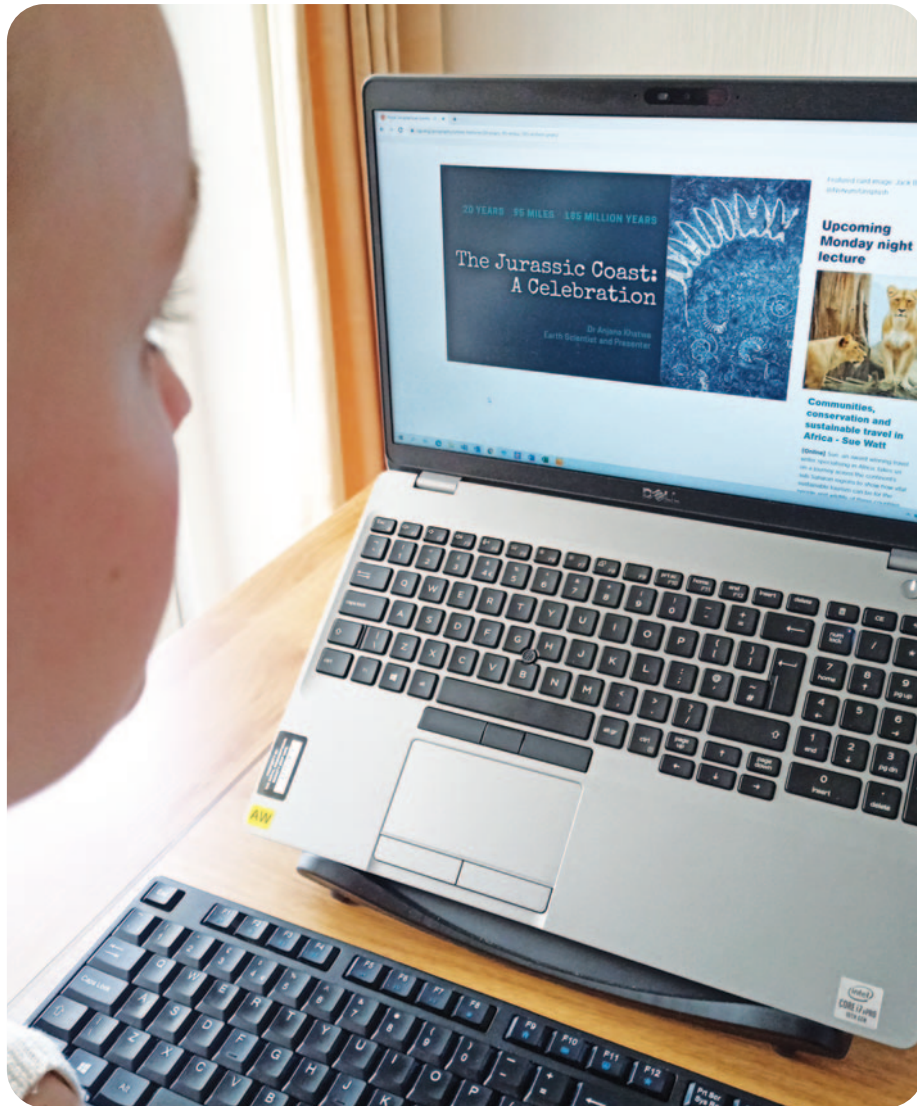
The Geography Teacher Training Scholarship programme brought in 140 new Postgraduate Fellows.

School Membership increased with 560 School Members at the end of December, compared to 496 at the end of 2019, reflecting the additional support provided during lockdown.

Due to the challenging circumstances for everyone during 2020, the Society invested additional staff time in retention activities such as more targeted emails and a telephone campaign to encourage people to renew.

The Society's events, including our Monday night lectures, were live streamed from March onwards.

© Glyn Williams



5.3 Learning more about our members and their engagement with the Society

A membership survey was undertaken in January, and over 1,000 Fellows and members shared their thoughts on the Society's communications, member benefits and overall experience of membership. The most popular requests in response to the survey questions were for the Society to live stream Monday night lectures, provide the termly Bulletin digitally, and provide greater support for geography professionals.

The move to remote working and online activities from March hastened the implementation of live streaming for all the Society's events (including Monday night lectures) and the provision of a digital edition of the Bulletin. As has been mentioned earlier, the Society has a clear commitment to improving support for professional geographers and implemented several new services during 2020.

The survey responses also provided the Society with valuable information on why people join, what they value about their membership and where the Society can improve.

6 Securing the future

As one of the world's largest and most active scholarly geographical societies

Objective Enable a robust future for the Society, by increasing income sustainably, using technology effectively, and enhancing staff capabilities.

Context The Society is an independent body and, like other learned and professional societies, receives no core government funding. Annual income has more than doubled in real terms since 1996, and substantial external donations have been attracted. The current UK setting placed greater uncertainty on growing income over 2017-2020. We are thus aiming for modest, sustainable growth in core funding from subscriptions, enterprise, operations, and corporate support; plus fundraising success for new projects.

Despite the challenges of a global pandemic and the effect COVID-19 had on the Society's ability to generate income through hiring our venue, a review of activity against the strategic plan at the end of 2020 showed good progress. The breadth of scope and broad balance of our charitable activities was continued, along with investment in staff training and development.

The Society ended 2020 with an operating deficit on the General Fund due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While membership income remained significant, net revenues from the Society's Enterprise Company were severely hit by the closure of the Society's building from March onwards. The financial review (pages 20/21) sets out how the Society generated its income and how its expenditure supported its charitable activities.

The fundraising environment in 2020 was extremely challenging and, in the second half of the year, was mainly focussed on supporting organisations at risk of collapse due to the pandemic. Fortunately, the Society was not in that position as the trustees decided to draw on reserves to allow the Society to cope with the unforeseen impacts of COVID-19.

During the year, progress was made on the House Project to repair and enhance the Society's building in South Kensington. The appointed design team undertook a series of workshops with staff and other stakeholders

to better understand current use of the building and where opportunities for improvement lay. Alongside this, urgent repairs to the south façade and chimney were planned for early 2021.

The Society continued its contract with the human resources consultancy, HRSP, throughout 2020. Alongside more usual case work such as staff recruitment, HRSP were able to support the Society through the process of furloughing eight staff during the first national lockdown and then again once flexible furlough and part time working was allowed by the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

All statutory reporting requirements were met, including successfully submitting the Society's first VAT return under HMRC's Making Tax Digital regime.

Redesignation of funds

During the year Council reviewed the Society's designated funds and made a number of redesignations in response to the Society's strategy, medium term plans and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These redesignations eliminated the Contingency Fund, Legacies Fund and Endowment Fund, and established two new designated funds: the Strategic Reserve, to provide resilience against future economic shocks, and the Major Building Repair and Renovation Reserve to recognise the Society's commitments to repair and renovate its premises.

The excess of the balances on the Contingency Fund, Legacies Fund and Endowment Fund over the amounts newly designated to the Strategic Reserve and the Major Building Repair and Renovation Reserve, totalling £1.26m, was released to the General Fund.

The Society thanks everyone who has generously donated in support of our work.

Corporate Benefactors in 2020



Esri UK supported our Geography Ambassador scheme and teacher training programme, bringing GIS expertise to the classroom.



Jaguar Land Rover supported our expedition and fieldwork training activities, ensuring best practice is shared.



Ordnance Survey supported our work to advance geospatial understanding among young people, policymakers and professional geographers.



Rolex supported our historic Collections, helping to increase public access and conserving our holdings for future use.



Trailfinders supported our work with the public, promoting the relevance and enjoyment of geography to foster a greater understanding of our world.

Corporate Business Member



Silversea engaged the Society to provide informative materials on their expedition cruise ships.

The Society's Grants Programme is generously supported by

20th IGC Fund
30th IGC Fund
Albert Reckitt Award
Dudley Stamp Memorial Award Fund
Frederick Soddy Award Fund
Geographical Club
Henrietta Hutton Memorial Fund
Hong Kong branch
Jasmin Leila Award
John Pilkington
Monica Cole Bequest
Paul and Mary Slawson
Neville Shulman, CBE
Ralph Brown Memorial Fund
Ray Y Gildea Jr Award
Rob Potter Award
SUN Institute Environment & Sustainability
The Late Sultan of Oman
Thesiger Oman Award
Walters Kundert Charitable Trust

Other donors and funders during 2020

Advanced Mathematics Support Programme/Department for Education
Anonymous donors
Arts and Humanities Research Council
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Department for Education
Department for International Development
Estate of Keith Fountain
Estate of Professor Roy Charles Bridges
Estate of Pamela Jones
Flotilla Foundation / Weddell Sea Expedition
SUN Institute Environment & Sustainability
Transglobe Expedition Trust

Financial review

The summarised financial statements for 2020 on the following page provide an overview of the Society's balance sheet assets, liabilities and funds, together with its income and expenditure by activity.

In 2020, the Society's annual operating result on the General Fund, after transfers between funds, other than the redesignations referred to in the Securing the future section above, but before investment and pension gains/losses was a deficit of £0.51m (2019: surplus of £0.07m). This was on the total General Fund income of £3.48m (2019: £4.86m) and was below the budget for the year, which had been set before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The total Society income was down by 55.6% at £4.91m (2019: up 79.2% to £11.06m) due to the unusually high income in 2019 arising from the endowments from the estate of Esmond Bradley Martin totalling £5.58m, and the impact of the pandemic. The expenditure on charitable activities reduced in the year to £3.74m (2019: £4.34m), which amounts to 83.3% (2019: 80.9%) of total expenditure.

The reduction across the Society's main sources of General Fund income reflects the impact of the pandemic. Gross General Fund income was down in all areas compared to 2019, except for donations. The more modest drops were in membership subscription income down by 1.1%, income from tenants down by 12.1% and corporate sponsorship down by 20.3%. The largest drop in income, a reduction of £0.90m and 63.6% was in RGS Enterprises turnover, primarily as a result of the venue hire business being virtually closed for three quarters of the

year. Income from charitable activities also reduced substantially down by £0.32m and 28.3% as the annual conference was postponed and events income was dramatically reduced. Investment income also fell significantly, reducing by 29.5%. Total membership income in 2020 stood at £1.67m (2019: £1.68m) and generated £1.00m (2019: £0.98m) net after costs of membership services. Proportional income is summarised in the first pie chart.

During the year the Society learned it would be receiving a significant legacy from Miss Pamela Jones, estimated to be approximately £1.16m. The legacy is not restricted in its use and has been included in the Society's unrestricted Legacy Fund, which in turn has been redesignated.

General Fund expenditure as a whole decreased in 2020 by 16.0%. 2020 total costs, at £4.50m, were 16.2% below 2019 (£5.37m). The Society's expenditure on charitable activities reduced by £0.60m, down 13.8% on 2019, to £3.74m. Of the total expenditure, 5.6% (2019: 5.6%) was from restricted funds, with almost all the remainder from the General Fund. The main areas in which reductions in expenditure occurred were those most affected by the pandemic, with reductions in research, higher education and grants of 45.0%, RGS Enterprises of 40.0%, policy, communications and media of 21.3% and education, expeditions, fieldwork and grants of 14.8%. The second pie chart shows expenditure by activity (with the effects of depreciation removed).

The summary consolidated balance sheet shows net assets increasing by £0.82m (2019: £6.70m), excluding the change in the liability

of the defined benefit pension scheme, as calculated annually for FRS102. This liability increased to £1.23m (2019: £Nil) in the year. The Society's actual, legal obligation to funding the scheme is determined by the triennial actuarial valuation, the last one being at June 2020. The Society's calculated Free Reserves, after the redesignations and taking account of the FRS102 calculation of the pension deficit, at 31 December 2020 were £4.27m (2019: £2.94m).

Independent auditor's statement to the Trustees of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

We have examined the summarised financial statements of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) for the year ended 31 December 2020 set out on page 21.

Respective responsibilities of the Trustees and the auditor The trustees are responsible for preparing the summarised financial statements.

Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summarised financial statements with the full annual financial statements and the Trustees' Annual Report.

We also read the other information contained in the summarised Annual Report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summarised financial statements. The other information comprises only the Annual Report.

We conducted our work in accordance with our engagement letter dated 5 February 2021.

Opinion In our opinion the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full annual financial statements and the Trustees' Annual Report of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) for the year ended 31 December 2020.

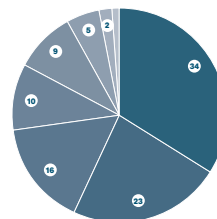
RSM UK Audit LLP Statutory Auditor, April 2021.
The Pinnacle, 170 Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK9 1BP

Consolidated Balance Sheet

	ENDOWMENT	RESTRICTED	DESIGNATED Research & New Initiatives	DESIGNATED Other	GENERAL	TOTALS 31.12.2020
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Fixed assets	•	3,953	•	120	1,304	5,377
Investments	•	4,753	2,386	2,073	3,547	12,759
Current assets	5,413	48	•	•	4,227	9,688
Current liabilities	•	•	•	•	-1,361	-1,361
Inter-fund accounts	•	736	552	1,979	-3,267	•
FRS102 pension scheme	•	•	•	•	-1,225	-1,225
Net assets	5,413	9,490	2,938	4,172	3,225	25,238
Funds balances 31.12.20	5,413	9,490	2,938	4,172	3,225	25,238
Funds balances 31.12.19	5,581	9,372	2,819	4,310	3,697	25,779
2020 net Funds movement	-168	118	119	-138	-472	-541

Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities

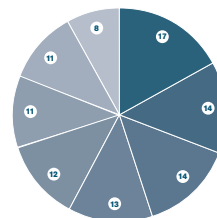
Incoming resources (see right for analysis by sources)	-168	284	76	1,235	3,480	4,907
Resources expended (see right for analysis by activity)	•	-252	-20	-15	-4,209	-4,496
Net investment gain	•	111	80	81	135	407
Surplus before transfers	-168	143	136	1,301	-594	818
Transfers between funds	•	-25	-17	-1,439	1,481	•
Surplus after transfers	-168	118	119	-138	887	818
FRS102 actuarial gain on pension scheme	•	•	•	•	-1,359	-1,359
	-168	118	119	-138	-472	-541



£4.91m income by source

2019 £11.06m

- 34% Membership subscriptions
- 23% Donations, grants, appeals and endowments
- 16% Income generated by charitable activities
- 10% RGS Enterprises turnover
- 9% Investment income
- 5% Corporate supporters
- 2% Tenants
- 1% Services provided



£4.50m expenditure by activity

Excluding depreciation of £0.33m. 2019 £5.18m (£0.18m)

- 17% Education, expeditions, fieldwork and grants
- 14% Membership services
- 14% Research, higher education and grants
- 13% Information services and resources
- 12% Other, including governance
- 11% Engaging wider audiences
- 11% RGS Enterprises costs
- 8% Policy, communications and media

Governance

The Society is governed by its Council which largely comprises Fellows elected from and by the Fellowship. They are drawn from the main areas of activity of the Society. There are 21 elected Council members and up to four further Council members may be co-opted, including a postgraduate representative, to bring further breadth, expertise and contact networks.

In line with recommendations of good practice by the Charity Commission, the Council identifies the skills and expertise gaps that would be most helpful to fill in the elections to the Council each June. Fellows standing for election are encouraged to state how they meet those identified gaps. However, this approach does not preclude any Fellow standing for election to positions relevant to their background. The Council is also cognisant of the value of diversity, while seeking to attract the most appropriately qualified people to guide the Society's governance.

Council positions are elected for a single term of three years at the Annual General Meeting. Due to the pandemic, in 2020 the AGM was held as a virtual meeting and Fellows were able to vote in advance of the meeting by post or digitally. Elected Council members also serve on the appropriate Committee of Council to provide liaison between the two levels.

The Council met four times in 2020, and attendance averaged 87% across all four meetings. The Executive Committee, which comprises the senior Trustees, met in the intervening periods as the need arose.

The following Council members were in office at the end of 2020

President

Rt Hon Baroness Lynda Chalker of Wallasey

Immediate Past President

Nicholas Crane

Vice Presidents

David Atkinson
(Education)

Professor Alison Blunt
(Research and Higher Education)

Robert Lucas
(Expeditions and Fieldwork)

Honorary Treasurer

Carol Lawson

Chair of Annual Conference 2020

Professor Uma Kothari

Honorary Secretaries

Grace Healy
(Education)

Professor Peter Kraftl
(Research and Higher Education)

Professor Nina Laurie
(Expeditions and Fieldwork)

Ordinary Members of Council

Robin Ashcroft
Philip Avery
Professor Michael Bradshaw
Joanna Coles
Professor Steve Darby
Professor Klaus Dodds
Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB
Dave Lovell OBE
Niall McCann
Aimee Morse
Dr Melanie Norman
Hugh Thomson

The following also served as Council Members until June 2020

Claire Allen
Professor Joanna Bullard
Caitlin Hafferty
Mark Humphreys
Professor Hester Parr
Chris Speight
Dr Nicola Thomas
Professor Jamie Woodward

The Council is advised by specialist committees for Education; Expeditions and Fieldwork; Finance; and Research and Higher Education. Attendance at these committee meetings averaged 75% across the year. The Finance Committee met four times, as usual, and comprises a core membership of accounting, financial, legal and investment professionals. The other committees met twice, as usual, to give advice on their areas of expertise. In addition, advice was provided by the Regions Committee, specialist sub-committees, including one for investments, one for policy and professionals, one for the Collections and one for equality, diversity and inclusion, and, where appropriate, individual professional advisors. RGS Enterprises Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Society, is governed by its Enterprise Board.

Staff

The Director reports to the Council and has responsibility for coordinating the Society's strategy and running the Society and its activities, assisted by a senior team of five departmental heads and a staff that numbered 51 in December 2020. All staff members are based at the Society's headquarters in Kensington, London, but were working remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Venue Hire

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Looking ahead

Professor Joe Smith

While the past year has thrown up unforeseen challenges and disruption, the Society has been able to weather the storm. This has been, in no small part, thanks to the resilience of the staff and trustees, alongside the loyalty of our membership. However, the current global pandemic is just one of the political, economic and environmental uncertainties we face as a charitable organisation, and we need to ensure that the Society continues to be able to make a positive difference.

During the second half of 2020, a wide ranging and participatory process was undertaken to develop a new strategy that would stand the Society in good stead for the future. The aim was to produce a strategic plan that would allow the Society to take advantage of new opportunities as they present themselves as well as to mitigate against the challenges that will come our way.

The Society's mission to 'advance geographical science' has been a keystone of our work throughout our history. And the new strategy expresses this in terms of a vision for geography and geographers that places the subject and the Society at the heart of progress towards a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable world.

The strategy is structured around four key aims:

- 1** to empower and support geographers in the gaining and sharing of geographical knowledge
- 2** to amplify the contribution that geography makes to understanding the world and the difference it makes to all our lives
- 3** to engage, serve and develop the Society's membership
- 4** to sustain the reputational, financial and institutional future of the Society itself

To meet these aims, we will continue to build on our work providing access to the best possible resources, supporting the professional development of geographers, and ensuring that the discipline – and its ability to connect the physical and social sciences and the humanities – is widely appreciated across all sectors of society, including the general public, policymakers, civil society, and business.

For the Society to remain a vibrant and relevant membership organisation, learned society and professional body, it is essential we retain the enthusiasm and expertise of our current Fellows and members, while reaching and engaging with new ones. Alongside this we need to nurture and protect diverse income streams, well-supported and well-trained staff, appropriate technology, and good governance structures.

Unlike our previous strategic plans, the new strategy is not time-bound. Instead, it will be reviewed at regular intervals by Council to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This, and a more agile approach to its implementation, will equip us to take full advantage of emergent opportunities and act to mitigate challenges as they arise.

Recognising excellence in 2020

The Society's Medals and Awards have recognised excellence in the breadth of geographical research, practice and public promotion since the foundation of the Society in 1830.

The two Royal Medals (The Founder's and Patron's Medals) are among the highest international accolades. They are awarded for 'the encouragement and promotion of geographical science and discovery'.

In 2020 Her Majesty the Queen approved the award of the Royal Medals as follows

Founder's Medal

Professor Heather Viles

'for her excellence in establishing the field of biogeomorphology'

Patron's Medal

Michael Jones

'for his contribution to the development of geospatial information'

The Society also celebrated the following awards

Victoria Medal

Professor Jonathan Rigg

'for long-term and influential research in development geography focusing on South East Asia'

Busk Medal

Professor Nina Laurie

'for her contribution to social inclusion, international development and environmental sustainability through fieldwork and research'

Cherry Kearton Medal & Award

Steve McCurry

'for photography that encourages reflection on the interaction with peoples, landscapes and wildlife across the world'

Murchison Award

Professor Peter Kraftl

'for research that has significantly contributed to social and cultural geographies'

Back Award

Professor Andy Tatem

'for leading the development of geospatial and demographic data to assist the work of public policy around the globe'

Cuthbert Peek Award

Chris Hill

'for providing longstanding geospatial expertise to the professional and student communities to understand human impact on the environment'

Gill Memorial Awards (two awards)

Dr Kimberley Peters

Dr Helena Pimlott-Wilson

'for outstanding early career research in human geography'

Ordnance Survey Awards (two awards)

Emma Metcalfe

Charity Mhlanga

'for excellence in geography education at secondary level'

Taylor & Francis Award

Dr James Esson

'for sustained contributions to teaching and learning in higher education, particularly through the RACEWorking Group'

Ness Award

Nancy Campbell

'for the popularisation of geography through poetry and non-fiction writing'

Alfred Steers Dissertation Prize

Rupert Stuart Smith

'for the undergraduate geography dissertation judged to be the best in 2019'

Area Prize

Dr Menusha De Silva

'for the best article in the journal by a new researcher' (co-authored with Dr Kanchan Gandhi)

Geographical Award

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre

'for facilitating fieldwork and encouraging scientific engagement within the community'

Ron Cooke Award

Tenaya Dewsnap-Cooper

'for her A Level Independent Investigation *How does deprivation and public perception vary between Hyde and Gee Cross, Greater Manchester*'

Geography in Government Award

The Geography Spatial Analysts Team at the Office for National Statistics

The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) team at Natural England 'for innovative tools to help users access, analyse and present data from the MENE Survey'

Honorary Fellowship

Andy Eavis

Professor Bojie Fu

Clare Hadley

Michael Hand

'in recognition of outstanding support for the Society and geography'

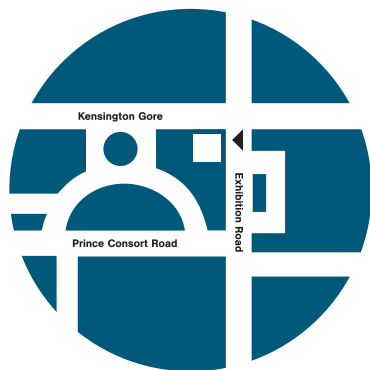
The Society further recognised excellence through the Young Geographer of the Year Awards, the Rex Walford Award to recognise newly qualified teachers, and the Excellence Awards made to pupils who achieved the highest marks in GCSE, A Level and International Baccalaureate examinations in geography.

This report summarises the Society's charitable activities and finances in 2020 in pursuit of its objective to 'advance geographical science'. The Society's work is guided by its current strategy and benefits a wide range of professional and public audiences. The Society is a vibrant organisation that seeks to balance its stakeholders and activities for the benefit of all our users and of geography. The full annual accounts and report can be found on our website and that of the Charity Commission.

If you would like to receive a copy of this report in PDF so that it can be read in larger print or using Adobe Reader software, please visit

www.rgs.org/annualreview

Registered Charity 208791



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Acknowledgements

Front cover

Photographer Tamara Stubbs was shortlisted in the A Climate of Change category of the 2020 Earth Photo competition with this image
Crabeater Seals Napping © Atlantic Productions

Page 1

Rt Hon Baroness Lynda Chalker of Wallasey, RGS-IBG President © Fabio Burrelli
Professor Joe Smith, RGS-IBG Director © Panel 8 Photography

