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# Annual Conference 2008

## Welcome from the chair of conference

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**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

A warm welcome to the 2008 Conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). Whether you are here for just a day or the entire conference, I am delighted that you've chosen to participate in this week's rich programme of papers, workshops, lectures, meetings and social events. The three previous, consecutive annual conferences held here in London have all been a success. I am confident that this year's event will bring as much - if not more - stimulation, debate and enjoyment for all those involved as these previous ones did.

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The conference theme - 'Geographies that matter' - is intentionally more open-ended and less literal than recent ones have been. It is an invitation for us to situate our discipline in a wider world and to pose some perennially important questions that we often background in our daily activities as researchers, teachers, administrators and the like. What are the geographies that matter in the wider world, to who and why? And what is the role of geographical research, teaching and advocacy in respect of them? These questions oblige us not to be overly introspective but, rather, to look outwards to a world bursting with possibility, challenge, interest and danger. As always, the discipline of Geography has the capacity not only to reflect but to shape the wider discourse of geography constituted by all those worldly actors that we variously study and engage with. The key question then becomes how and to what ends.

As Conference Chair I am pleased to welcome this year's plenary speakers. The plenary themes are intentionally diverse but of equal topical significance. The opening plenary - 'Dealing with difference in 21st century Britain' - brings two distinguished voices together to discuss a profoundly geographical theme that matters a great deal to those living and working in the UK. Professor Miles Hewstone, of Oxford University, and Professor Engin Isin, of the Open University, will consider how the increasing socio-spatial diversity of Britain affects existing notions of nationhood, community and Britishness. The following three plenaries are all sponsored by the Society's journals. Professor Derek Gregory, of the University of British Columbia, will give the *TIBG* plenary entitled 'War and peace'. A plenary panel on 'The future of mapping' (sponsored by *Area*) brings together a range of experts to consider a topic important not only for academic Geography but the wider society. Finally, Professor Bill Ruddiman, of the University of Virginia, will speak to the theme of long term environmental change in a plenary lecture (sponsored by *The Geographical Journal*).

Needless to say, organising a conference on this scale is a major undertaking. I wish to thank Catherine Souch and Victoria (Tori) Jeffers for their efforts over the last 12 months, as well as David Over, Henry Rummins, Kathryn Thompson and all staff who will be contributing this week. Their professionalism and desire to make the conference as good as it can possibly be have been evident at every step of the way. In addition, the convenors of the various RGS-IBG research groups have, as ever, made a big contribution to this year's programme for which I thank them.

Many thanks to you all for coming and I do hope you enjoy the next three days. Looking ahead, the annual conference leaves London for Manchester in 2009 and the planning of this event is already underway. I do hope you decide to join us there next year, when Professor Stuart Lane will be the Conference Chair. I have also initiated a review of the conference that will, I hope, enable us to make it even better in 2009 and beyond.

Noel Castree, *The University of Manchester*