

'Our greatest strength is our broad appeal'

Following the launch of the President's Appeal to raise money for a new members' room at the Society's home in London, director Dr Rita Gardner explains why anyone can join

■ 'I've been clear from the beginning that we need to respect our traditions, but look to the future. The Society is open. We're a community of professional geographers, young members and geography enthusiasts who all make important and complementary contributions. We want everyone to feel welcome here.'

The planned transformation of the old library into a comfortable new room with Wi-Fi access for members and their guests at the Society's Grade II*-listed headquarters, Lowther Lodge, reflects director Dr Rita Gardner's ambition 'to fit this organisation for the 21st century'.

Since taking on the role in 1996, Gardner has succeeded in more than doubling the organisation's annual turnover and securing some £17million in additional funding; most visibly through Unlocking the Archives, a major project that saw the Society open the doors to its rich resources.

'I felt we had huge potential to popularise geography and build on our history as one of the world's most vibrant geographical organisations,' she recalls. 'The Society was poised for change. To be part of that transition was something I couldn't resist.'

Sitting at the table where David Livingstone worked out the geographical records of his missionary travels in Africa,

Gardner is adamant that the Society's knowledge, held not only within its archives but also by the wealth of fascinating individuals connected to it, should be shared with the widest possible audience.

Before accepting 'the best job in geography', she was already a passionate advocate for learning and discovery. An accomplished geomorphologist who led major field-research projects in some of the world's most remote and challenging environments, she had also served as a young Fellow on the Society's Council, set up the Society's regional programme and was the first woman to hold the post of honorary secretary.

'I knew the Society well, and they recognised my energy and commitment,' she says. 'The first few years were daunting, but I'm more daunted now by how successful we've been and the pressure that puts on the team. Our greatest strength is our broad appeal. The RGS-IBG is about research and higher education, scientific expeditions and fieldwork, education in schools, policy and public engagement. We're guided by the Society's strategy and we're never short of ideas; the biggest challenge is finding the resources to implement them.'

'The support of our membership is invaluable,' she continues. 'People join the RGS-IBG for

a variety of reasons, but a unifying factor is that most believe that we do a great job advancing and promoting geography and they want to give something back. They see that we have a real role to play in presenting different perspectives, inspiring people and being known as a source of reliable, unbiased information for audiences from all walks of life.'

'Our president, Michael Palin, is a fantastic example,' she says. 'He's someone who really cares about the Society and he will, I'm convinced, bring greater recognition for geography by championing it with young people and through forthcoming projects such as Britain from the Air, which we hope will connect people in the UK with their built and natural environments in new ways.'

'The Society has always believed that people of all ages should be encouraged to get outdoors and investigate the world around them, whether that's through field research and scientific expeditions, informed travel, adventure or an exploration of their local area,' Gardner says. 'Geography is about the interactions between people, places and environments, so when it comes to dealing with critical global issues such as climate change, migration, flooding and environmental degradation, I passionately believe that geographical understanding can help us become better citizens and guardians of our planet's future.'



The President's Appeal aims to raise the £860,000 required to create a new members' room at Lowther Lodge and make essential repairs to the building's north face, which overlooks London's Hyde Park. For more information, or to make a donation, visit www.rgs.org/presidentsappeal

Lynne Morris

Member of the Atlantic Rising team, which received the Society and Land Rover's 2009 'Go Beyond' bursary to undertake a 12-month journey following the 100-metre predicted sea-level rise of the Atlantic 'ALL THE WAY' along our route, people have stopped us in the street or jogged alongside our Land Rover in traffic jams, wanting to talk about the Society. It's an internationally recognised organisation, without whose generous support our project would never have been possible. Since awarding us the bursary, the Society has provided us with essential training, including a vital first aid course, and continues to assist us while we're in the field. You can follow our progress at www.atlanticrising.org/



Nick Crane

British cartographer, writer and presenter of Coast and Great British Journeys

'MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER was a Fellow, and it was his tales of travel in what was then Asia Minor that led me to join what I now see as the forum of modern geography; a place I return to for inspiration, ideas and chance encounters of the geographical kind. With the current crop of global challenges for us to tackle, the Society has never had a more critical role.'



Cliff Pereira

Historian, former chair of HIV charity Harbour Trust and a chronicler of Bexley's black and Asian history 'HAVING ENJOYED A short career in geophysics, I joined the RGS-IBG at a personal turning point, as I embarked on a career in travel and tourism. I met like-minded people and it fuelled my appetite for new trends in geography and exciting destinations. As guest curator of a Society exhibition, I found my connection with the Society produced positive changes in the public view of the role of "background" people in the history of exploration, both in the UK and abroad in India and Africa.'



Why I joined the RGS-IBG

Society members and Fellows come from all walks of life and their reasons for joining are as diverse as they are



Dan Studley (ABOVE, LEFT)

Eighteen-year-old young member who attends Castle School in Thornbury, Gloucestershire 'MY FIRST EXPERIENCE of the Society was when I attended its week-long summer school in London. This was an invaluable experience and convinced me that geography was the path I was going to take in my future studies. To enhance my knowledge, I became a young member. This has given me a privileged opportunity to attend lectures from people such as Michael Palin and Charley Boorman. It also means I can attend local and regional seminars and receive *Geographical*, which is full of inspirational content.'

Danny Dorling (ABOVE, CENTRE)

Professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield. Received the Society's 2009 Back Award for contributions to social policy. His work on re-mapping inequality can be seen at www.worldmapper.org 'I JOINED THE RGS-IBG because I wanted to know what one of the world's largest learned societies and professional bodies for geography was doing, especially one with such rich resources. As a member living in the north of England, one of the attractions for me has been to watch the steady way in which the Society has opened up to, and engaged with, contemporary Britain by encouraging new audiences to participate in geographical learning and discussion.'

Hugh Dennis (BELOW)

Actor, writer, comedian and regular panellist on *Mock the Week* 'I NOW EARN my living in broadcasting, but my degree is in geography and, although my life has taken a largely unconnected course, Fellowship of the Society has allowed me to once again build bonds with a subject I love, and one that seems increasingly relevant in this all too rapidly changing world.'



Damien McCloud (ABOVE, RIGHT)

Geography graduate and senior consultant for engineering and design consultancy Arup, and an initial assessor for the Chartered Geographer accreditation scheme 'I JOINED THE Society about four years ago because I felt it was the only place really supporting professional development in GIS. My company encourages its employees to integrate with the community and taking part in the Geography Ambassadors programme has been a perfect way for me to develop my communication skills, through sharing my interest in geography with young people.'

To hear from more of the Society's members and Fellows, including Anna Ford, Josh Lewsey, Ben Fogle and Dan Box, visit www.rgs.org/ourmembers

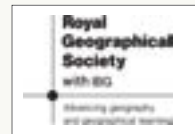
JOIN THE SOCIETY GET THE MAGAZINE

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) promotes enjoyment and understanding of our world. Membership is open to all. You may use geography in your profession, have a thirst for geographical knowledge or a passion for travel. *Geographical* is the Society's magazine and is available as part of membership. To find out more, call the Membership Office on 020 7591 3080



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The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a leading world centre for geographers and geographical learning. One of our aims is to stimulate the awareness and enjoyment of the subject to a diverse range of people.

Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them – both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support these aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library, and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

TO FIND OUT ABOUT JOINING THE SOCIETY, PLEASE CONTACT US ON
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AT www.rgs.org/joinus

RGS-IBG CORPORATE BENEFACTORS:
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8 JANUARY, 10AM
GOING PLACES WITH GEOGRAPHY FOR YEAR NINE PUPILS
(Schools event, Bath)
Led by the Society's Geography Ambassadors, this is a great opportunity for year nine pupils to sample some GCSE geography before making their option choices. Lively, hands-on workshops will also give an insight into the opportunities geography offers at university and as a career. Venue: Bath Spa University.
i Places are limited to 25 per school. Tickets: free but must be booked in advance. Email ambassadors@rgs.org

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18 JANUARY, 6.30PM
SEARCHING FOR POSEIDON'S STEED
(Lecture, London)
Marine biologist and writer Dr Helen Scales journeys around the world in search of seahorses, uncovering humanity's 1,000-year fascination with some of the world's most enchanting and endangered fish.
i Free for RGS-IBG members and guests



19 JANUARY – 11 FEBRUARY
SEEING CHINA: Community perspectives
(Exhibition, London)
A repeat of this exhibition of the Society's Chinese collections interpreted by members of London's Chinese community, reflecting on migration, identity and the role of women in society in China and Britain.
i Free, open to the public, Monday–Friday, 10am–5pm. Please use the main entrance on Exhibition Road



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21 JANUARY, 7.30PM
TO THE CRATER OF THE RAIN GOD: An overland journey through East Africa
(Regional lecture, York)
An account of a three-week safari by Land Rover through Meru and Amboseli national parks, the Masai Mara national reserve and Ngorongoro Crater, covering a range of topics, including conservation, education and natural history. Venue: Terrington Hall School, York.
i For further details, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100

25 JANUARY, 2PM
BE INSPIRED... The Pundits and the Great Game
(Afternoon talk, London)
Journalist and author Jules Stewart has produced four books to date on the history of the British on the North-West Frontier and in Afghanistan. Find out how he used the Society's collections to inspire his writing and personal research. Venue: Education Centre, RGS-IBG.
i Tickets: free to RGS-IBG members and educational users. Non-members: £5, payable in advance. Pre-booking required. Contact 020 7591 3044 or showcase@rgs.org

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28 JANUARY, 7PM
WINES OF THE WORLD
(Young Members' event, London)
A chance to sample wines from around the world guided by an expert. Informal social evening.
i Tickets: £10 for RGS-IBG members; £15 for non-members. For further details, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100. Limited places, so please book early. Please use the Kensington Gore entrance

