The Voice of Geography

The evolution of the RGS-IBG by John Price Williams
“Many contributors... pointed to the effectiveness of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) in promoting its discipline at all levels and in all sectors with academic and professional activities, support for schools, an admirable programme of public engagement, and providing a single coherent voice, for example, to government”.

The British Academy
Reflections on Archaeology
March 2017

“The RGS-IBG is a most significant dimension of the institutional capacity of UK human geography and is unequalled in any other country. It is an extraordinary disciplinary resource”.

International Benchmarking Review of UK Human Geography
2013
On 1 January 1995, the Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) came into being. It arose from the votes of both memberships in favour of merging these two historic institutions. It brought the institutions full circle, reuniting them as one, following the departure, in 1933, of many academic members from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to form the independent Institute of British Geographers (IBG).

The merger proposals were developed over three years – 1992 and 1994 – by a joint Working Group. Undoubtedly the success of the careful and detailed merger negotiations owes much to the wisdom, extraordinary experience and pragmatism of Sir Crispin Tickell, RGS President 1990 -1993, who chaired the Working Group.

This booklet tells the story of the ‘coming of age’ of the RGS-IBG over the period since the merger – the planned developments that have shaped it into the Society of today, and some of the thinking and actions behind them. It is not intended as a definitive history, rather an opportunity to recognise how the RGS-IBG has evolved, building on the strengths of both the RGS and IBG at the time.

In particular, it is a celebration of the many donors, Fellows and members, trustees, organisations and staff that have so generously helped the Society’s development, with expert advice and encouragement, by volunteering time, with donations large and small, with grants and corporate support.

Thank you, one and all.

Dr Rita Gardner
Director, RGS-IBG
September 2017
Stimulus for change
Celebrating two landmark decades

The RGS-IBG is today one of the world’s leading geographical institutions because of strategies put in place from 1996 that have guided its progress to an influential and popular Society that is open to all and an effective advocate for geography.

“When I look at the successes of the RGS-IBG in representing geography over the last decades, I reflect on the tentative beginnings of the merger. The cultural differences were extreme and there were many on both sides who doubted the wisdom of the merger.”

Professor Emeritus David Sugden
President IBG 1995-6
Vice-President of RGS-IBG after the merger

The stimulus
The merger of the RGS and the IBG created the dynamic for development in 1995. It brought together two UK geographical communities with complementary activities and very different cultures.

The history
Many academic Fellows had broken away from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in 1933 to form the Institute of British Geographers (IBG) because the Society was not engaging with modern geography at that time, and no longer met their needs. The IBG concentrated on sharing advances in contemporary geography through research groups, journals and conferences for scholars. The RGS strengths were in supporting scientific expeditions and field research and in its London and regional lecture programme. By the early 1990s the two organisations were very different and each recognised the need for change and to generate more resources.

The challenge
Geography had not had a single, effective voice or a champion for the discipline. It faced competition and threats as a discipline in schools and universities; its potential was little understood by employers, teachers or students, and its public image was weak. It was time for serious action, so after nearly 65 years of separation and two years of intensive discussions, the two Councils proposed merger in 1994 and the memberships of the RGS and IBG voted to come together from 1995.

They did so on equal terms to chart a new course for geography, one that has led to remarkable progress, establishing a vibrant community and breadth of purpose, putting geography today in a better position than it has been for many decades. The support of members, the geography community more widely, and of donors has been essential to these developments.

The strategy
Key to the success of RGS-IBG has been a series of strategic plans, widely consulted upon, developed and carried through by the Director, Dr Rita Gardner, and her senior staff, with the advice and support of trustees. These evolutionary changes have enabled RGS-IBG to develop into a world-renowned resource for geography, open to all and proud to promote geography’s vital role in understanding and managing some of our most pressing challenges. In the process RGS-IBG has become a vibrant, dynamic and innovative organisation whose work benefits greatly from collaboration with, and the support of, the geographical communities.

This is the story of how it happened.
Challenges and opportunities

- How to create cohesion?
- Very different cultures in RGS and IBG
- The image of geography and the institutions
- A weak voice for the discipline
- Limited funds
- Merger created impetus for change and development
- How best to plan and resource it?
- With which audiences to focus new developments and why?
- Assets: How to maximise benefits from the building and the Collections?
- Traditional strengths of both to be retained: supporting the academic and expedition communities, scholarly publishing and events

Merger of RGS-IBG

- Limited funds
- Merger of RGS-IBG

Challenges and opportunities
Plan and process

Strategic planning for the future

- Reaching out to engage the public and members
- Addressing building functionality, access and image
- Securing the future
- Widening participation of underrepresented groups
- Discovering Britain walks, exhibitions, topical discussions, members' category
- Growing resources from enterprise, fundraising, membership and operations
- Sustaining and growing academic and expeditions and fieldwork activities
- Raising the position and standing of geography
- New programmes 2004 Professionals 2006 Schools 2007 Public
- Growing resources from enterprise, fundraising, membership and operations

Innovation and creativity
Unlock funding
Imaginative projects

- Public access to archives
- Build new facilities
- Refurbish the Ondaatje Theatre
- Advocacy with government
- Media coverage
- Ambassadors Programme
- Using the Collections and fieldwork to inspire and enable
- Addressing building functionality, access and image
- Reaching out to engage the public and members
- Securing the future
- Widening participation of underrepresented groups

Growing resources from enterprise, fundraising, membership and operations
A champion for geography

From the beginning, the strategy defined the need for this integrated Society to speak with a single, strong voice to change the image and standing of geography and for it to become a widely respected, modern learned society. We aimed to build on existing strengths and to develop a strong presence in new areas, thereby creating a multi-dimensional Society for geography and geographers.

We used the combined strengths of the RGS and the IBG, and the skills of staff, to raise the profile and standing of geography and, equally importantly, to engage with people outside the discipline – to demonstrate the significance of geography for the economy, for society, for the environment, and for the way we live our lives today.

We wanted to establish a greater breadth of purpose, to embrace fully not only research and scientific expeditions, but also education, policy and public audiences, a task beyond the scope of many other learned societies.

It meant we had to establish new areas of work, change perceptions and raise significant funds. This was done through three strategic plans, building capacity steadily over time and working with our key stakeholders.

1998-2005
Opening up the organisation

- Creating new, modern buildings changing our image; improving facilities; giving access to the archives; opening us fully to the public
- Devising a new membership category to be more inclusive
- Reaching out to Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) communities engaging new audiences

2006-2011
Developing our scope

- Engaging the public with geography helping create a better-informed world
- Involving schools and teachers developing a major educational programme
- Presenting our case to government learning to be an influential voice
- Establishing a professional body sustaining standards of the discipline

2012-2016
Fostering a vibrant discipline

- Promoting geography's growth an essential discipline for the 21st century
- Building professional and student communities the future lifeblood
- Linking geography to policy showing the relevance of research to key issues
- Growing our reputation as a world-leading geographical Society
- Securing the Society's future growing our financial base

The vision was for a world-leading institution, dedicated to advancing geographical science: sustaining the discipline and its applications; and as the means for everyone to discover, understand and respect the world’s people, places and environments.
Advocacy for geography
Reinvigorating the image

People are proud to be geographers. The image of geography, and of the Society, has changed significantly over the past 20 years partly because the Society has invested constant energy in advocacy, and a wide range of programmes and activities to make the discipline better-known and understood.

“One, among many indicators, is the high employability of geography graduates across a very broad range of sectors. This is ably demonstrated by graduate statistics and our online career information and profiles.

Another indicator is the growth in uptake of geography at school since 2011. Other initiatives have included:

• Britain from the Air exhibition, putting geography on the street for everyone
• Focus on gaining media coverage for the discipline, where possible
• Our Ambassador programme, created in 2006 and sustained ever since, has seen 600 young ambassadors for geography talking each year to some 30,000 school students about studying geography at university and the career prospects open to them
• The 21st Century Challenges programme, a series of public discussions and policy events, running for the past 10 years has aligned geography with the key issues of our time
• Policy briefings for parliamentarians and decision-makers promote the vital role that geography plays in issues relating to environment, place, society and development
• Our Annual Conference, now the largest geographical academic conference in Europe, attracts around 2,000 delegates, as well as national and international media interest
• The election of high-profile presidents, drawn from many walks of life
• A new ethos and welcoming entrance on Exhibition Road

“Geography – it’s the ‘must-have’ A Level”
The Guardian
August 2015
**Geography is now in a stronger position in schools and higher education and among employers than it has been for decades**

**Geography's position in the school curriculum**
The story of geography’s revival in England’s schools is remarkable. While part of the national curriculum, it lacked the status of the core subjects of English, science and maths. Too often it was absent from primary teaching, and taught 11-14 in integrated learning with other subjects. Numbers studying GCSE declined from 300,000 to 180,000 between 1995 and 2011. There was an urgent need to reverse the decline.

**How did we do it?**
In 2004 the RGS-IBG’s Director convinced the Secretary of State for Education to establish an official ‘Focus Group for Geography’ for which the Society provided the secretariat. This led to the Society and the Geographical Association being asked jointly to create and deliver an *Action Plan for Geography*. The £3.8m plan (2006-2011) is by far the greatest government support ever given to geography teaching.

In 2011 the Society played a key role in convincing the Schools Minister of the need and value of including geography in the new English Baccalaureate. This is the single most important reason for the increasing uptake of geography at GCSE and A Level, because it is a school performance measure.

Between 2012 and 2015, the Society was invited to be at the heart of the reform of the entire geography school curriculum, by the Department for Education. This strengthened and deepened the subject’s content, fieldwork, data skills and physical geography, and ensured good progression.

In 2016, the Society commenced the award of *Teacher Training Scholarships* in geography, funded by the Department for Education, in response to the shortage of geography teachers to cater for the increasing numbers of students.

**Geography's funding and status beyond schools**
In 1996, with the help of university geographer vice-chancellors and others, we lobbied the Higher Education Funding Council for England for geography teaching at university to be better funded. They agreed.

Since then the Society has been active in advocating for the discipline’s status and funding in research and higher education, in government, and beyond.

Recent years saw a marked increase in the profile and popularity of geography in UK universities: a 20% increase in undergraduate numbers since 2012, new courses established in several universities, and very high rankings for student employability and student satisfaction. Around 7,250 students now enrol each year.

Most recently, the Government Chief Scientist has agreed to appoint a Head of Geography in the government science and engineering profession. RGS-IBG supported the Central Government Geography group, established by Chartered Geographers, in attaining this.

This is a major development because it recognises, for the first time, the importance of geographical understanding and geo-spatial analysis and interpretation in government, putting it ahead of many other disciplines. It also recognises the substantial number of geographers working in government on policy, analysis, delivery and evaluation.
Enhancing education
The biggest boost for geography

The Action Plan for Geography between 2006 and 2011 provided a massive injection of government funding to boost the teaching of geography at school and the confidence of geography teachers.

“There’s never been a better time to study geography...”

**Steve Brace**
Head of Education and Outdoor Learning
RGS-IBG

It is increasingly recognised that geography is interesting, important and has good career prospects.

By funding the *Action Plan for Geography* the government had signalled its support for the discipline. This had a significant impact on the confidence and motivation of geography teachers.

The Action Plan sought to work with teachers to enhance their knowledge, skills and confidence, drawing upon academics, leading geography teachers and both RGS-IBG and Geographical Association staff to help do that.

It enabled:

- New online resources to enrich teaching at Key Stage 3, for both subject specialist and non-specialist teachers
- Professional development programmes
- Curriculum development activities
- Student voice project that sought student views
- The development of professional recognition (Chartered Geographer) for individual teachers
- The development of the quality mark for schools
- The creation of the *Geography Ambassadors* programme
Geography Ambassadors

This scheme recruits and trains geographers from universities and work places to go into classrooms and to introduce students to the many exciting benefits of studying geography and the excellent career prospects that follow.

“The Ambassadors were excellent. They were engaging, inspiring and ensured that the students understood the importance of geography in a fun, interesting and motivational way.”

Millie Harris
Geography Teacher
King Edward VI Community College

The Ambassadors are young, lively role models who talk knowledgeably about why geography matters, about career possibilities, and show the transferable skills and interests they themselves have developed as geographers.

It is a great way to widen students’ perceptions and to encourage them to pursue geography as GCSE and A Level options. The scheme works closely with schools and universities, as well as some employers, offering the opportunity for all to strengthen their links with each other on a local, regional and national scale.

Starting from scratch in 2006, by 2010 Geography Ambassadors had presented more than 1,200 talks to around 30,000 school pupils across England in the year.

The programme is immensely popular and has been continued since 2011, at similar activity levels, with the support of corporate donors Esri UK. It is complemented by online careers resources and ‘Going places with Geography’ events in London and other cities.
Improved curriculum – new support for teachers

The phased introduction from 2014 of the new, content-rich, knowledge-based curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, has been met by the Society with support for teachers on the new and more demanding aspects of the curriculum.

Freely available satellite imagery provides new insights for teachers and pupils.

**2015**
Funding from the Nuffield Foundation enabled a new professional development programme for teachers centred on the new data skills requirements in geography GCSE and A Level.

**2016**
New partnerships began between the Society and selected universities to enhance locally-based teacher professional development, complemented by Society-created online resources on the new topics introduced at GCSE and A Level.

**2017**
New corporate sponsorship and professional field science expertise provided by ERM (Environmental Resources Management) is furthering our work in professional development. A key part of this provides training and online resources for teachers to enhance capability in developing and running local field trips linked to the physical geography topics in the new A Level curriculum.

**Targeted projects**
Since 2012 a number of education projects developed by the Society have been supported externally, largely by trusts, foundations and government.

Our award-winning online resources include *Discovering Antarctica* and *Discovering the Arctic*, both developed in partnership with the British Antarctic Survey and supported by the Polar Regions Office of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Society is substantially involved in the major programme funded by the Department for International Development on teaching and learning about global development issues.

We have played a key role in the *London Schools Programme*, supported by the Greater London Authority, creating professional development networks and activities for geography teachers at primary and secondary levels across London boroughs.

The number, scope and use of the Society’s core offer of online resources has grown significantly, recording nearly 2,000 pages of resources, and 1.2 million page views in 2016 alone.

Face-to-face professional development activities have also developed steadily. In 2016, more than 1,000 teachers took part in training events in London and across England.

Ordnance Survey and HSBC have supported our work with teachers.
Facilities fit for the 21st century
The Ondaatje Theatre

Following the merger, the Society needed not just a new image, but new facilities. The first major building project was the refurbishment of the lecture theatre, one of the most popular in London, but virtually unchanged since it was built in 1930 and deficient in comfort and facilities.

“I am thrilled to have been even a tiny part of such a success, and continue to be thrilled every time I come to the theatre which bears my name. It is the greatest honour I have ever received.”

Sir Christopher Ondaatje

It was important that any refurbishment should retain the unique character and ambiance of the much-loved theatre, so the radical refit in 2001, designed by London architect Craig Downie, has retained its diamond shape and the original wood panelling, still surmounted by the names in gold of famous explorers.

There is now better seating, climate-control, lighting, audio and video facilities as well as improved wheelchair access in the 750-seat auditorium. Used extensively for Society activities, it is also a vital source of income for its first-class facilities make it attractive for other organisations to hire for lectures and debates.

The project cost £1.74m and is named the Ondaatje Theatre thanks to the exceptional generosity of one of the Society’s long-standing Fellows, Sir Christopher Ondaatje. Additional help came from the Weston Family, the Wolfson Foundation and other donors.

The Ondaatje Theatre later helped the Society’s fundraising when Members and Fellows paid £1,000 to dedicate individual chairs to themselves or to others. Their names are on small plaques on the back of some 350 chairs.

The Ondaatje Theatre is one of London’s best and most distinctive lecture venues. It is filled to overflowing on many Monday evenings for the Society’s flagship series of lectures.
The new building

The Society wanted a welcoming and contemporary presence on Exhibition Road – one of London’s great cultural and learning quarters – making geography visible and accessible.

“We’ve created a contemporary Members’ Room, conserved the North Façade of historic Lowther Lodge, and have plans for the South Façade renovation.”

Dr Rita Gardner
Director, RGS-IBG

We also needed education and exhibition facilities and a public reading room as part of our proposal to ‘Unlock the Archives’ for the public. This was a major undertaking; the largest building programme since the east wing of the Society was built in the 1930s.

It took four years to plan this scheme from feasibility to completion (1998-2001) and two years to build (2002-4). It was a sensitive task as it meant adding directly to the Grade II* listed Victorian mansion, built in 1874 and the Society’s home for more than a century, and taking part of the garden.

Architect Craig Downie reflected the new direction the Society was taking, designing open, welcoming and contemporary spaces, re-organising the way we used the old building and refurbishing ground floor rooms for new public uses.

Running 20 metres along Exhibition Road the transparent screen, etched by Eleanor Long with geographical themes, gives passers-by a flavour of what lies inside the sleek glass pavilion and invites the curious to explore further – tempting them in to see the free exhibitions and to use the Collections.

It’s a deceptive building, because 80% of it is below street level, comprising the public, 70-seat Foyle Reading Room and climate-controlled storage rooms for the Collections. The public reading room, designed for minimum environmental impact, retains natural light looking out over the lovely garden, redesigned and planted with Mediterranean species against the façade of Lowther Lodge and temperate plants on the north-facing side.

It opened to great media attention and acclaim in 2004 as a major part of our Unlocking the Archives project. It received the Construction Industry ‘Special Judge’s Award’ in 2005.
Unlocking the Archives
Moving mountains

While the new building was being constructed tons of material had to be moved, not only earth in the garden, but also, temporarily, our vast Collections of more than two million items. And there was a mountain of paperwork to get through to raise the £7.24m for the project.

The Society has one of the most outstanding private geographical Collections in the world. It was scattered over some 40 rooms – in the basement (in what were once the servants’ quarters of a private residence), on different floors and a lot of it in unsuitable environmental conditions.

About 100 tons of materials, documenting 500 years of geographical research and endeavour had to be lifted out of the rooms and taken away for storage in two warehouses before being brought back and re-housed for the opening in June 2004.

How we did it
We needed £7.24m – the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provided £5.04m, the remaining £2.2m came from donations from trusts and foundations, Fellows and major donors. We also needed to do a lot of learning.

The Society was greatly helped by:
• The HLF application process which was comprehensive and detailed
• Three expert professionals – in construction management, project management and heritage refurbishment – who acted pro-bono as an advisory group
• A creative architect who listened and who worked with us throughout
• The willingness of donors to support our vision

In all, through the planning, funding and construction period we recorded an ‘Everest’ of:
• Over 350 project meetings
• 1,875 written files
• More than 6,000 staff days

It was the Society’s first fundraising exercise on this scale since part of the original huge garden was sold in 1927 to pay for the extension that now includes the Ondaatje Theatre.
Open to all: Collections to benefit everyone

Although the map holdings were open to the public, access to the extraordinary holdings in the manuscript archives, library and photographic collections was largely reserved for Fellows and a small number of privileged scholars. From 2004 this changed dramatically; all the materials were made fully available to the public.

"Our Collections are now open to all and they truly inspire, inform and engage tens of thousands of people every year as a result of this improved accessibility."

Alasdair MacLeod
Head of Enterprise and Resources
RGS-IBG

It was time to modernise and to be open to all as part of the Society’s charitable remit.

The ambitious programme to build modern premises with the new facilities was an essential facilitator. With this physical change came other significant challenges:

• An intellectual challenge of reorganising and making available our vast Collections to anyone who wants to benefit from their richness

• A cultural transformation of inclusiveness – creating a new category of membership, and reaching out to the public in general, and BAME audiences in particular, to enrich the interpretation of the archives

Cataloguing had to be completed to international standards and an online catalogue created; a major programme of conservation took place; and many items were placed in new environmentally controlled and secure storage. New public programmes and activities have been created, including the acclaimed Enduring Eye exhibition featuring the Society’s iconic Hurley images of Shackleton’s expedition.

Since 2002 Rolex have kindly supported the Society’s Picture Library and contribute towards the conservation of our vast Collections.

What’s in the Collections

• Artefacts include an oxygen set used on the successful British conquest of Everest in 1953; the sextant taken by Darwin on the Beagle; David Livingstone’s cap and his first sketch of Victoria Falls, among 1,500 objects

• 1 million maps – the oldest a version of Ptolemy’s Cosmographia, dating back to 1486

• 500,000 images

• 250,000 books

• 1 kilometre of shelving containing manuscripts, diaries and letters
Exploring shared histories: reaching new audiences

We have used the Collections, for the first time, to engage and work in partnership with the UK's black, Asian and minority ethnic communities to explore shared histories in places around the world and help promote social cohesion.

This has brought to light new interpretations and meanings of the Collections and perspectives on shared histories from communities in areas of the world that have been deeply engaged with and affected by exploration. Their stories were captured in community workshops, online school resources and exhibitions.

This work began with the innovative Crossing Continents-Connecting Communities project (2006-2009), working in partnership with Afro-Caribbean, Chinese and East African communities in London.

It was followed by other projects, including the Hidden Histories of Exploration partnership with Royal Holloway College London, that used the Society’s Collections to research the role of intermediaries and indigenous peoples in the history of exploration as participants in the making of new geographical knowledge.

This work has continued to evolve and to build the capacity of communities in Collections-based projects. Now the Society is increasingly a partner in community-led historical research projects, drawing on our Collections and expertise.

The Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts & Humanities Research Council have supported these innovations with community partners in exploring and sharing the meanings of the Collections and the histories they hold. This, in turn, has greatly enriched the Collections’ documentation.
Engaging the public

Geography in the open air

We have been reaching millions of people in the UK – by bringing geography to them through street exhibitions and a geographical website that guides walkers through landscapes.

“I’ve lived in Britain all my life, we grew up here and there’s so many things I didn’t know, that I’d never seen before.”

Visitor to Britain from the Air
Bath 2010

“This is a very good way to appreciate the UK. It should be a must experience for everyone in the country.”

Visitor to Britain from the Air
Birmingham 2016

Britain from the Air

One hundred huge aerial images of Britain’s extraordinary landscapes are used in free street galleries to tell the stories of Britain’s changing environment, economy and society. The exhibition was curated by the Society and launched in 2010 by Michael Palin in Bath’s city centre.

The launch featured widely on television, radio and in national and regional newspapers, reaching an audience of more than 19 million people. Since then the exhibition has been seen by millions of people in Birmingham, Chatham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Nottingham and Oxford. It featured in Shanghai as part of the Great Britain exhibition and twice in dedicated BBC online slideshows. In a visitor survey, 95% rated it as excellent or good.

It was developed in partnership with street gallery experts WeCommunic8 and funded by a major donor; city venues have been supported by Craghoppers Ltd, the Ernest Kleinwort Trust, and locally by businesses and councils in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Nottingham, Oxford, Bath, and Chatham.

Discovering Britain

Our walking website takes people, literally, many steps nearer to understanding the landscapes in which they live and the stories they tell.

The interactive site provides more than 400 self-guided activities – themed walks, shorter trails, viewpoints and aerial images – across Britain. From remote mountains to city neighbourhoods, the walks explore themes ranging from landscape formation and land use change, to industrial decline and the changing nature of communities and identities.

The walks aim to bring geography alive and to encourage people to explore and to be curious about their local area.

The content has been funded by a major donor, with additional support by the 2012 Cultural Olympiad programme, and curated by the Society and guest walk creators.

We estimate that at least 225,000 people have used walks and other activities so far.

W www.discoveringbritain.org

The rationale was to engage the public in a greater understanding of the issues facing us in the 21st century and of geography’s contribution to understanding and addressing them.

Nearly 50 discussions followed, on national and global topics, that attracted average audiences of around 250. They covered topics such as flooding, ocean pollution, regional economic development, housing and migration in the UK, climate change, mobile technology in the development of Africa, and the education of women in the developing world. Each involved speakers from a range of perspectives. In later years separate discussions were also convened with professional and policy audiences.

They were made more widely available, including to schools, through videos and online resources.

21st Century Challenges have been enabled by support from the Schroder Foundation, major individual donors, and from Shell UK as a corporate project partner.
Live and lively events

The Society buzzes with activity. In 2016 we put on over 450 events – lectures, training programmes, conferences, exhibitions, and other activities for our different audiences.

The number of events held annually has almost trebled in the past two decades. The significant increase reflects the growth and vibrancy of the Society, the eagerness for live activities, and the commitment of both Society staff and the volunteer Research Groups, Regional and Younger members’ committees to deliver them.

The majority are open to the public and many were held outside London – in our nine regional branches in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in major towns and cities, and in Hong Kong and Singapore. These activities, including the exhibitions, attracted two million people in 2016.

Our Monday night lecture series in London is among the most popular live lecture programmes in the world, regularly attracting audiences of more than 650 Fellows, members and guests to each of the 30 lectures per year. High profile speakers and professional experts give their time freely to inspire, inform and stimulate curiosity. Recent technical improvements in the Ondaatje Theatre have enabled high quality recordings of lectures online.

Trailfinders has kindly supported the Society’s work in public engagement, including that through travel, in recent years.
The Society has sustained, and in many cases developed and grown, the work of the former RGS and IBG in enabling research and scientific expeditions and in sharing new research findings. The Society supports a world-leading UK geographical research community.

Our conference trebles in size
Academic geographers come from more than 55 countries to one of the largest annual conferences of its kind in Europe.

Now more than 2,000 people attend each year, compared with 850 in 1995.

Traditionally the IBG annual conference was organised by a host university, but increasing pressures on university staff time and resources made it sensible for the Society to take on the core administration from 2003.

The conference now takes place two years out of three at the Society, enabled by the new building developments. This has done much to encourage the academic community to feel at home.

In 2017 there were more than 380 parallel sessions of talks over three days, many co-ordinated by the Society’s 31 specialist Research Groups. These have also evolved, increasing in number and in their range of activities: from undergraduate prizes, to their own journals, websites, grants, provision of teaching resources, reading weekends and conferences. The Research Groups, originally central to the IBG, support areas of specialist academic interest.

Conference media coverage – print and online – has also significantly expanded. In 2016, there were more than 200 different articles and references to the proceedings, out of a total of 350 media references in the year.

Our journals read in 160 countries
The Society’s publications have sustained strong reputations and high rankings, publishing peer-reviewed academic research and articles from scholars across the world. Generations of editors and editorial boards have kept the publications at the leading edge of scholarly publishing.

There are now five journals, compared with three in 1996. The originals – Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, The Geographical Journal and Area have been joined by WIREs Climate Change (published jointly with Wiley and the Royal Meteorological Society) and a new open access journal, GEO.

Society journal articles were downloaded more than 1.3 million times worldwide in 2016. The Geographical Journal also has the highest circulation of any geography journal worldwide, with some 12,000 institutions offering access to it.

The journals are made available to poorer, developing countries through publishing partner Wiley’s philanthropic programme; back issues of all the journals are available to all via JStor.

An academic monograph series was started in 2000 and this has proved extremely popular.

The scholarly journals are complemented by the longstanding, popular Geographical Magazine, which has benefited from new innovations by Syon Publishing.
Expanding the grants programme

From the first strategy in 1998, a decision was taken to increase the Society’s capacity for giving grants to support geographical research of all kinds across the world for people at all career stages, from undergraduates to senior researchers.

“As a young explorer and aspiring researcher, the Society’s grants programme has enabled me to successfully complete a complex scientific fieldwork expedition on the highest mountain range on Earth. I would encourage anyone with a passion for the world to consider applying for a grant as the experience and opportunities that come with it will change your life forever.”

Sergiu Jiduc
2015 Karakoram Anomaly Project Fieldwork

Through the support of many individuals and organisations, we have increased our endowments for grant-giving by some £2.5m of donations, and we have benefited in addition from more than £1m that has been donated and used year-on-year for grant-giving.

The first appeal raised some £1m to create a ‘small research grant’ endowment for early career scholars and a further £900,000 in support of specific awards. During the third strategy donors kindly supported us with nearly £825,000 of endowed funding, largely from former grant-giving trusts and foundations.

Many are named awards, including the Ralph Brown, Slawson, Shulman, Dudley Stamp, Thesiger, Fleming and Walters Kundert Awards. All make a big difference to advancing knowledge and to career development of recipients.

Some attract significant media attention, among them the Land Rover Go Beyond bursary (£30,000 per year plus a Land Rover on loan); and the Journey of a Lifetime award, in partnership with the BBC, that provides £5,000, training and a broadcast on Radio 4.

In 1994 the RGS awarded just under £40,000 in grants, largely to university undergraduate expeditions, the majority from year-on-year corporate funding. In 2017, £197,000 was awarded to recipients, who also included early career scholars, postgraduates, established researchers and independent travellers. The majority of funding was from Society endowed funds.
Collaborative field and archive research

In 2011, we invited Fellows and members to suggest broad topics for a new field research programme. Three themes were agreed and project proposals invited. *Migrants on the margins* is the result, the Society’s first ever city-focused programme.

“*The pressure of large numbers of poor migrants moving into slums in African and Asian cities is a global challenge. *Migrants on the margins* seeks to understand better the impact of migrants on communities they move to, and what enables migrants to move out of extreme poverty.*”

*Dr Laura Hammond*
SOAS, University of London

Launched in 2016, it is a joint programme with research led by Professor Mike Collyer and his team at Sussex University and colleagues at SOAS and Durham universities. Collaborating international research institutions are based in the four cities selected for the study – Colombo, Dhaka, Harare and Hargeisa. The first field survey season was in 2017; the project is timed to end in late 2020.

The field-based project is seeking to help understand and address one of the greatest global issues of this century – migration of poor, largely rural people into medium-sized cities in Africa and Asia.

Around £1m has been raised to fund the project, mainly from the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department for International Development (Global Challenges Research Fund); the University of Sussex and the Society also contributed.

Society led field research programmes were a particular focus of RGS activity between 1977 and 2001, under the leadership of Dr John Hemming (to 1996) and Nigel Winser. The *Shoals of Capricorn* programme (1995-2001) studied oceanography and marine biodiversity in the Indian Ocean.

The Society has also been successful in gaining funding for PhD students to work on historical materials in its Collections, through a collaborative grants programme for museums, archives and libraries funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Twelve students have worked, between 2006 and 2017, on topics ranging from *Women in the Archives* to *Armchair Geographers*, and this has also greatly enriched our archives.
Inspiring through expeditions and fieldwork
Planning and exploring

Our flagship expedition event, *Explore*, is a weekend seminar each year; it celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2016. It’s a vibrant source of contacts, advice and inspiration for those thinking of their first independent expedition.

“Land Rover’s continuous support over decades for this aspect of the Society’s work has been of enormous help.”

**Dr Rita Gardner**
Director

*Explore* brings together some 280 delegates with more than 130 experts in areas such as health and safety, planning and funding, science and social science, adventure and knowledge of the remoter parts of the world.

Would-be explorers can also get specialised training courses and individual advice from the Society’s Geography Outdoors Centre, formerly known as the Expedition Advisory Centre, which specialises in advising on scientific expedition planning in challenging environments. Thousands of scientific expeditions, mostly undertaken by undergraduates, have benefited since 1980.

We have sustained and developed these activities over the past 23 years, recognising the inspiration and confidence building they bring to younger people, and the many field science careers they help to stimulate.

Drawing on this expertise, as a new development we played a key role in the formation of British Standard 8848, launched in 2007, which provides guidance on health and safety for expeditions, fieldwork and adventurous activities organised outside the UK.

With new health and safety regulations in the UK for school and college fieldwork, the Society was ideally placed to develop new training courses for those taking fieldwork leadership responsibility. The courses have proved very popular; currently training around 500 people annually.
Raising aspirations

We wanted to use fieldwork and expeditions to inspire and raise aspirations in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in new ways. It is part of our strategy to use geography and fieldwork to enable social mobility, widen participation and to change lives. The Learning and Leading programme has been the main vehicle.

“The Society’s Learning and Leading programme transforms lives, providing opportunities which enable young people to become confident, informed and sensitive geographers.”

Dr Margaret Byron
University of Leicester

In the seven-year Learning and Leading programme, funded by a major donor, we sought to support and inspire some 400 young people through:

- Summer schools for groups of 16 AS Level students who had not been able to go on a residential field course. They spent five days learning through fieldwork and individual projects, living alongside young people from different parts of the UK. It greatly helped their confidence and plans for university
- Mentored gap experiences in the year before university, building their confidence and helping them to plan their own gap experience. They were given a grant to cover costs
- First-year undergraduate apprenticeships enabled them to work with a university tutor on an overseas field research project in the summer vacation. It was an intense learning experience and inspired many ‘apprentices’ to achieve good degrees and to go on to further study as confident individuals

For well over half of the participants, these projects were transformational. We are continuing, with support from donors, both the summer schools and the fieldwork apprenticeship scheme.

“In October, I will be studying geography at the University of Oxford, which I believe would not have been possible had I not participated in the Summer School programme.”

James Howard
2015 Summer School

“The most rewarding aspect of the Gap Scholarship was having the opportunity to challenge myself and to gain confidence in my own abilities. I had been a terrified, nervous wreck who had never left England at the start and by the end I had navigated myself across the world and was a confident, ambitious person.”

Rowan Blackmore
2011-2012 Gap Scholarship

“Without the opportunity provided by the Fieldwork Apprenticeship I doubt I would have been able to gain my position on the PhD and be able to continue in further education after my bachelor’s degree.”

Sion Regan
2012 Fieldwork Apprenticeship
Becoming a professional body

The Chartered Geographer

The Society is the organisation that awards professional accreditation in geography – the status of Chartered Geographer, approved by the Privy Council in 2001.

Chartered Geographer, Paul Clifton, reporting on the QE2 in Dubai as BBC Transport Correspondent.

- The accreditation demonstrates that geographical knowledge and skills are distinctive and used in a wide range of employment sectors. It puts geographers on a par with chartered geologists, engineers, planners, surveyors and the like.

- It has fostered Society partnerships with key sectors and companies employing geographers, including the insurance, consultancy, transport, defence, environment and geographic information industries, and the public sector.

- It has enabled the Society to work with professional geographers throughout their career, supporting them with training and networking.

- Chartered Geographers are now leaders in their professions and, in many cases, active advocates for the discipline and an increasingly powerful network for the Society.

ERM provides corporate support for our work with the professional community of geographers.

This area will be a focus of significant further growth during the Society’s current strategy, 2017-2021.
Setting standards

Since 1997 we have collaborated with the geography community in setting frameworks for the discipline – notably in co-ordinating the benchmark standard for geography at university – and in providing advice on the discipline and its applications.

"The Society is so important in helping students, teachers and professional geographers to understand the challenges the world faces and to contribute to a better future for our environment and communities."

John Alexander
Chairman, ERM

We have become a first port of call for government, the research councils, higher education bodies and geography departments for advice and liaison.

In 2016 the Society began to accredit geography degree programmes and so far more than 90 degree programmes from more than 30 different institutions have been accredited.

The Society has also recently taken on a greater role in providing teaching and learning support in higher education – from teaching resources, to ‘new to teaching’ programmes, external examining projects, and data skills projects.

This has been supported by grants from a range of organisations, including the Higher Education Academy, the British Academy, ESRC, and in terms of teaching and learning, the work of our Research Groups.

Future growth

Recent developments with partners have set the scene for a significant expansion of our work with professional geographers at all career stages and across the UK in the coming years.

They include the Geographers in Government initiative, and the strategic alliance with the AGI to raise awareness of geographic information.
Making it happen
Fit for purpose governance

As part of its first strategy the Society reviewed and revised its governance structures. Much of the highest-level framework, reflecting and securing the interests of both RGS and IBG, put in place at the time of the merger, has stood the test of time.

The review streamlined the lower levels of governance, to ensure good fit with the wider range of activities and audiences. The aim was to get the right balance so that governance was effective, reflected good practice for the charitable sector, and was not unnecessarily burdensome on staff, committee and trustee time.

The outcome was that we:

- De-layered the committee structure, placing more reliance on four committees of the Council (Research and Higher Education; Education; Expeditions and Fieldwork and Finance) for specialist advice and guidance, removing most existing sub-committees
- Maintained the Regions Committee and the Research Groups Sub-Committee as strong liaison committees for the volunteer regional branches and Research Groups, respectively
- Established expert advisory groups in a small number of areas where advice, often time limited, was required that was beyond the remit of the main committees; notably in our policy work and for selected large projects
- Reduced the frequency of committee meetings; establishing an Executive Committee of senior trustees (which includes the chairs of the four main committees of Council) to meet when needed between Council meetings

Membership for all

Many people interested in the world and how it works, as enthusiasts, felt that the Society was not for them and they had no means by which to join unless they knew a Fellow.

Until 2003, people had to be sponsored by existing Fellows before they could join the Society. As part of our new openness we wanted to allow anyone to join and to do so easily. Fellows voted to create a new category of member. It has been a great success.

At the same time the requirements for Fellowship were strengthened, so applicants now have to show they have contributed to geography in some way, such as by holding a geography degree, by taking part in scientific expeditions or writing about geography.

The other major success has been revitalised membership for students, aimed at A Level and undergraduate students and which gives them access to excellent resources for study. There are now over 1,900 Young Geographers.

Total membership across all categories has risen from 12,000 in 1996 to 16,000 in 2016, a net average increase of 200 a year. Fellows and members have access to the Members’ Room – an elegant, informal working space created in 2011 – and to Monday night lectures, live and online. Many join simply to support the Society’s work for geography.
Helping out

Volunteers are now involved in large numbers and in a broader range of activities. About 3,000 people now volunteer to help the Society in its work each year.

They support our wide-ranging activities as:

- Participants in our Ambassador programme (about 600)
- Speakers in our events, discussions and conferences; and as trainers in our professional development events (about 750 excluding the Annual Conference)
- Editors, advisors and peer reviewers for our scholarly journals (about 1,120)
- Committee and advisory group members, including London-based committees and nine regional committees
- Members of the 31 thematic Research Group committees
- Volunteers in support of the conservation of our Collections and much more besides

Staff numbers have also increased, from 38 to 60, including in particular staff to support our new and expanded areas – education activities, public engagement work, policy and professional activities; and to support income generation through fundraising, enterprise activities, and membership recruitment.

The commitment, capability and hard work of our staff over many years has been an essential underpinning of the Society’s development.

Volunteer views

Monday night lectures

“The RGS-IBG has created an amazing platform for science, exploration, political debate, adventure and story-telling. It’s thrilling to lecture and be part of the RGS-IBG community.”

Andrea Wulf
Monday night lecture speaker

Journals

“The chance to edit The Geographical Journal has been a great opportunity to help build the Society’s reputation for publishing the best of theoretically-informed and policy-relevant research from across geography.”

Professor Keith Richards
Journal Editor

Ambassador Programme

“Geography means so much to me as a student. Being an Ambassador helps with my personal development, and spreads new ideas and geography love.”

Daisy Hunt
Geography Ambassador
Funding our development

Between 1997 and 2016 we raised more than £35 million for the Society’s development. This was from major donors, trusts and foundations, statutory sources, company sponsorships, membership giving and legacies. The Society also increased income from its three other main sources – the commercial Enterprise company, charitable operations, and membership subscriptions.

**Headline figures**

- In 1994 the total income reported in the RGS accounts was £1.28m (£2.31m in real terms allowing for CPI inflation); this rose to £1.72m (£3.1m in real terms) in 1996 as the incomes of the RGS and IBG were fully merged. In 2016 the Society’s income was more than double in real terms, at £6.52m
- The past 20 years have seen significant increases in annual incoming resources generated from all four main sources. This has meant, for example, that net Enterprise income from venue hire lettings alone now more than covers the cost of running and maintaining Lowther Lodge
- The Society’s investments have grown over time, from £1.3m at market value in 1994 to £9.38m at market value in 2016. This includes significant additional funds raised as donations for grant-giving, including a number of endowed grants, and important contributions from legacies to help establish a much-needed Society endowment fund
- The £35 million of funds raised has accelerated the Society’s growth, capacity and sustainability
- Costs of fundraising in 2016 were less than £100,000, representing approximately 5% of the total income generated or committed to by donors for activities in 2016 and beyond
Approaching
development

We have a simple approach to development and funding. Always guided by our strategic plan, we deliver our core activities on income from operations, subscriptions and enterprise profits. As those sources grow so our core activities grow, usually incrementally and gradually.

- We introduce change through major new initiatives, for which we fundraise to gain up-front project funding, drawing on a wide range of sources.

- Projects in the past 21 years have ranged from the £7.24m needed to deliver the Unlocking the Archives programme; to individual educational web resource projects such as Discovering Antarctica at around £140,000. All are important to the Society, no matter how large or small, as they contribute to our strategic development.

- £22.8m of the £35m funds raised were to enable new strategic projects.

- Projects are always fixed-term, so we aim where possible to grow our core funding sufficiently to enable us to include some of the best elements of our projects into core activities subsequently. Where this is not possible we seek to sustain these elements with new external sources.

- In this way, the Society has grown its activities steadily, in a planned fashion, and sustainably. We have also learned much in the process as an organisation.

Society’s major projects

21st Century Challenges
Action Plan for Geography (2 phases)
AHRC Collaborative Studentships
Britain from the Air (2 phases)
Changing Climates: Changing Lives
Chartered Geographer CPD
City Lecture Series
Climate4Classrooms
Creative Compass
Crossing Continents:
  Connecting Communities
Data Skills in Geography
Discovering Antarctica (2 phases)
Discovering the Arctic (2 phases)
Discovering Britain (2 phases)
Discovering Galapagos
Enduring Eye Exhibition
Field Research Programme
  Migrants on the margins
Field Research Programme
  Shoals of Capricorn
Field skills for the future
‘From the field’ Awards
Geography Ambassadors
Geography a subject hub for London
Geography in the news
Geography Teacher Training Scholarships
Global Learning Programme
Global Perspectives in Higher Education
Growing the Grants Programme (2 phases)
Hidden Histories
Hidden Journeys
Learning and Leading Programme
Lost Landscapes Exhibition
Members' Room
New scholarly journals (two)
North Façade conservation
Ondaatje Theatre refurbishment
Passport to the Poles
Rediscovering African Geographies
Rediscovering London’s Geography
University Programme Accreditation
Unlocking the Archives
Walk the world
Who do we think we are?
Your Climate Your Life
Development in numbers
Selected highlights

£35+ MILLION RAISED
Over £35 million has been raised between 1996 and 2017; with the cost of fundraising around 5%.

680+ CGEOG ACCREDITATIONS
We now have more than 680 accredited Chartered Geographers.

2.5m VIEWS
We receive over 2.5 million page views of the Society’s education resources per year.

1.3 MILLION DOWNLOADS
185 events were held in 1996. In 2016 we ran over 450 events.

In 2016 Society journal articles were downloaded more than 1.3 million times by researchers in 165 countries.

RGS-IBG
Developing the Voice of Geography

2010
New Journal launched: WIREs Climate Change

2006
Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities project leads work with BAME communities

2004
Launch of Unlocking the Archives and new facilities

2001
£5.04 million HLF grant approved

1999
Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Unlocking the Archives

1998
RGS-IBG officially merge

1995
RGS Resource Centre

1994
RGS-IBG first Strategic Plan

1993
RGS-IBG produces ‘Marketing’ guidelines

1991
RGS-IBG first Handbook for Uncovering the Archives

1986
RGS-IBG first Symposium

1985
First RGS-IBG Education Conference

1984
Fieldwork for a Button

1983
RGS-IBG first Articulate Geographer

1982
RGS-IBG first Outreach Map

1980
RGS-IBG first Geographies

1979
RGS-IBG first Geographies

1978
RGS-IBG first Education Conference
In 2017 we awarded £197,000 in grants, mostly for field research. Since 1996, income has grown an average of 5% per year in real terms. Between 1996 and 2016 the Society has seen a 33% increase in membership. An estimated 3.5 million people a year engage with the Society’s work today.

Over £6.7m has been invested in enhancing the Society’s facilities and conserving the Society’s historical home.

- **5% Growth**
- **£197k Grants**
- **33% Membership Increase**
- **3.5 Million People**
- **£6.7+ Million**

**Timeline:**
- 2011: North Façade conservation of Lowther Lodge completed
- 2011: Discovering Britain walks programme starts
- 2011: Members’ Room created in the old library
- 2011: Head of Geography to be appointed within government
- 2012: Strategic Plan published
- 2012: Close involvement in school curriculum reform for four years
- 2013: Successful advocacy for geography in the English Baccalaureate
- 2013: Geography Ambassadors programme sponsored
- 2013: New Field Research Programme starts, addressing a global issue
- 2013: University geography programme accreditation scheme starts
- 2014: New, stronger National Curriculum for Geography published
- 2014: Third appeal: brings total raised for new Society Grants since 1995 to £3.75m
- 2014: IT upgrade for Ondaatje Theatre enabling quality video capture of lectures
- 2015: Third Strategic Plan published
- 2015: Data Skills in Geography Project for teachers commences
- 2015: Enduring Eye exhibition launches in London ahead of UK cities tour
- 2016: University geography programme accreditation scheme starts
- 2016: RGS-IBG + AGI strategic alliance
- 2017: ‘Head of Geography’ to be appointed within government
What area of the Society’s development impresses you the most?

“It was vital for the health of the discipline and the Society, and for the benefit of society in general, that geography’s position at school and university was protected. The Society’s development of strong and effective advocacy skills has ensured that geography’s position has been enhanced.”

Professor Dame Judith Rees
President 2012 - 2015

“It has to be Unlocking the Archives, transforming how the premises is used, and acting as the catalyst for change into the accessible, informative and vibrant organisation that is the Society today.”

David Riviere
Head of Finance and Services
2000 - 2014

“The RGS has been transformed from a traditional society into one that is dynamic and forward-looking. The promotion of geography in schools and the establishment of the Chartered Geographer status are just two of the major successes.”

Sir Ron Cooke
President 2000 - 2003

“It’s never-ending advocacy for geography and the life-changing support it provides for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to go on fieldwork trips or gap years.”

Laura Stone
Honorary Secretary for Education

“With the merger of the RGS with the IBG it was essential for the Society to prepare a strategic plan, to which all parties would contribute. The first such plan stood the test of time and was triumphantly delivered, to be followed over the years by other very successful strategic plans.”

The Earl of Selborne
President 1997 - 2000
“The Society’s work today encourages and inspires everyone to experience and learn about geography.”

Chris Speight
Chair
Regions Committee

“Expanded programme of grants supporting field, desk and archival research across the world yielding new insights on issues critical for the 21st century.”

Dr Catherine Souch
Head of Research and Higher Education

“A major success was obtaining large sums of money from the Department for Education for the teaching of geography in schools and colleges. Over the years the Society has become much more professional and now encompasses a wider range of activities, not only in the UK but also overseas.”

Professor Sir Gordon Conway
President 2006 - 2009

“RGS-IBG has continuously built a deserved track record of initiative, leadership and achievement as a centre of excellence and flagship for Geography; enabled in all endeavours by ambitious and sustained fundraising.”

Claire Fitzalan Howard
Advisor

“I love the way that it has transformed itself into a forward-looking, engaged, open and youthful outlet for promoting adventurous science, curiosity and wonder at the world around us.”

Professor Alun Hubbard
Grant recipient

“Over this period our membership has gone from strength-to-strength, retaining the central place of our Fellows while gaining new School and Ordinary Members, Chartered Geographers and many students through Young Geographer.”

Steve Brace
Head of Education and Outdoor Learning
Donors and donations

Our donors have been fundamental to the success of the Society and to the rising profile of geography. Every single donation has made a difference – in developing our work, in enhancing our facilities, and more importantly to the beneficiaries of our charitable activities.

Equally as important as the money has been the advice, the contacts, and our donors’ confidence in us. Their funding has helped to develop our reputation through our work, and that in turn has opened doors to other funding.

We are hugely grateful to long-term funders such as our loyal and long-standing corporate supporters, who together over the past 23 years have given around £5.7m in total.

Equally, there are the major one-off grants and donations from different sectors, among them:

• The Heritage Lottery Fund (our largest single grant of £5.04m to Unlock the Archives)

• Sir Christopher Ondaatje (our first major donor whose support encouraged others to have confidence in us)

• The Department for Education (funding the Action Plan for Geography, with £3.8m of which our share was £1.9m)

• The legacy from Fellow, Alan D Falk (£1.4m)

• The Weston Foundation and the Clothworkers’ Company who both gave generously to support Unlocking the Archives

• The ESRC and AHRC for competitively supporting the Migrants on the margins field research project (through partners in Sussex University)

• Those who wish to remain anonymous but whose contribution has been very much appreciated

Developing our education work, and our public engagement activities including exhibitions and Discovering Britain has relied heavily on grants from trusts and foundations, starting with The Mercers’ Company in 2003, and involving many others since including, among those recently the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and the Nuffield Foundation.

Many individuals and organisations have supported our grants programmes, including the late Ralph Brown; HM Sultan Qaboos (Thesiger Oman Fellowships); the Walters Kundert Charitable Trust; Dudley Stamp Memorial Fund; The Albert Reckitt Charitable Trust; Gumby Awards; Neville Shulman; Paul and Mary Slawson; John Pilkington and family and many others whose support is much appreciated.

Our membership in general has supported three major appeals, one in each strategy, that have helped unlock the archives, add to our grant-giving, support the field research programme, and refurbish parts of the building including creating the Members’ Room, with a total of more than £1m.

We thank all who have aided our development and our charitable work.
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What next?

Following nearly a year of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including Fellows and members, the Society’s Council approved the new strategy in April 2017 and the implementation plan in June 2017.

The consensus was for an evolutionary strategy, maintaining the breadth and balance of the RGS-IBG’s current activities and audiences, and building on the strong growth and developments in recent years. There is scope and need for significant new initiatives across all our areas of work, while simultaneously sustaining and enhancing existing core activities that lie at the heart of our endeavours to advance geographical science and, as a charity, to provide public benefit.

Safeguarding our discipline, advancing and sharing geographical knowledge with a wide range of audiences, and supporting geographers – from students to professionals – remain key foci of our work in partnership with the geographical community.

We also aim to enhance further our standing and profile – as a world leading scholarly geographical society, a respected innovator among UK learned societies and professional bodies, and an effective advocate and champion for geography and geographers.

Externally, in common with sister bodies, and many other organisations too, the Society faces a significant level of uncertainty and change in its operating environment over the coming years. New risks and opportunities – for the Society and for our discipline – are likely to arise out of geopolitical change in the world and at home, the performance of the UK economy, policy shifts in research and education, developments in technology, social change, and the data and information revolution.

Internally we will see changes in leadership in the Society, with a new Director appointed to succeed Dr Rita Gardner taking up the post in Spring 2018, and a new President being elected in June 2018. Rita is stepping down after nearly 22 years as Director. There is, however, welcome continuity across existing trustees and senior management staff.

The strengths the Society has developed – innovation, resilience, inclusivity, flexibility, relevance and forward thinking – will be invaluable in helping us to navigate this unusual degree of change and uncertainty. So, too, will the continuing commitment of our trustees, Fellows and members, donors, staff, and those who support in a range of capacities with their expertise and time.

We look forward to working with you all in the coming years and thank you, once again, for being a valued part of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).
“Undoubtedly the two most significant successes for the Society are the numbers of younger members I see at the Monday night lectures, and the fact that for these same lectures it is often a fight to get in, and indeed out, so great is the demand to hear our speakers. The reputation of the Society remains strong and respect for its work is high. This does not come without an enormous amount of effort by the Director and the management team, which has been rewarded by a gradual, but sustained rise in the number of students wanting to take geography courses.

My own personal highlight, apart from many fine lectures, was an evening in Hong Kong, when an auction to raise money for the Society was so successful that my President’s Appeal was oversubscribed overnight, enabling long-overdue improvements to be provided for the members at Lowther Lodge. The fondness and respect shown for the Society that night was a massive encouragement.

The breadth and relevance of the Society’s work, across the whole discipline of geography, has been inspiring. There is a tendency in long-established bodies to mark time, to live off the past. The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has not only kept up with the times, it has led the agenda for the study of geography in the future.”

Michael Palin
President 2009-12
Two decades of evolutionary changes have enabled RGS-IBG to develop into a world-renowned resource for geography, open to all and proud to promote geography’s vital role in understanding and managing some of our most pressing challenges. This is the story of how it happened.

The Voice of Geography
Twenty-three years ago, the merger between the RGS and IBG began the process of creating an organisation of shared influence and vision.

The quest to learn, to explore, to make sense of our habitat and to protect it, is a defining human characteristic. Applied to the planet, it is a challenge beyond the reach of any individual. Geography has always been a collaborative project.

At the heart of the subject that helps everyone understand our world, its places, its people, its environments, the Society is geography’s voice and champion in the UK.

Nicholas Crane
President

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