
British Academy President's Medal

The British Academy held its annual awards ceremony on 6 October 2011. Recipients honoured on the night included the three winners of the British Academy President's Medal in 2011. Awarded 'for signal service to the cause of the humanities and social sciences', the medal is intended to complement the medals and prizes given by the Academy for academic achievement, by identifying and rewarding outstanding leadership or contributions other than purely academic.



Sir Nicholas Kenyon has been one of the most active and positive forces in classical music culture in Britain for the past two decades. In 1996 he began a 10 year stint as Director of The Proms, in which time he transformed the series and enlarged its scope, cementing its position as the largest and most wide ranging musical festival in the

world, and overseeing the BBC's programming for the millennium celebrations. Since 2007 he has been the managing director of the Barbican Centre, bringing his ever innovative approach to the City of London's world class arts centre.

Accepting the award, Sir Nicholas said: 'The world of the performing arts and the academic world are not as separate as they are often perceived to be. I think it is often forgotten that everything we did at the Proms and everything we now do at the Barbican Centre is totally underpinned by academic research and understanding, which is then put into practice by brilliant performers. As we look forward, what we need to find is a way of bringing scholarship and performance ever closer together. As you, the scholarly community, search for impact, and we, the performing arts community, look for more involvement, participation and learning through all the artistic activities that we put on, I think there is an inspiring potential for those two things to be perceived as one by the public. Moving forward together, we can inspire a new generation to aspire to the exciting achievements of the arts and scholarship in recent times.'



Following her doctorate in social anthropology, **Dr Gillian Tett** moved to a career in journalism and joined the *Financial Times* in 1993. She covered the financial crisis of 2007-9 in an authoritative manner, making a major contribution to public understanding of events through the explanation of financial instruments. She is an assistant

editor overseeing the *Financial Times's* global financial markets coverage, and since March 2007 she has been the US managing editor.

Gillian Tett said: 'When I told my colleagues in the Cambridge Social Anthropology Department many years ago that I planned to go into journalism after doing a PhD, I think that many of them thought I had truly gone to the dark side. For an academic to go into the world of journalism, to become a hack, was seen as rather an odd option. When I arrived at the *FT* and told my colleagues I had a PhD not in economics but social anthropology, I think many of them thought that was pretty odd, if not rather hippy. Many of the bankers and the economists I have dealt with over the years as a journalist certainly thought my PhD in social anthropology was very strange.'

'But it has been a great privilege and a great opportunity in recent years to try to bring those two worlds together, and to use my background in social analysis to try to inform the way I write about economics and finance on the *FT*. I also try to use the privilege of the platform at the *FT* to bring attention to the world of anthropology and try to introduce more people to it. There is a lot more to be done in that respect: I have only taken tiny baby steps.'



Sharon Witherspoon has been in charge of the Nuffield Foundation's research in social science and social policy since 1996, and she became Deputy Director of the Foundation in 2000. She has contributed to the development of significant programmes of research on children and families, and on empirical research in law,



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as well as a wide range of projects on social welfare, including work on the finances of old age, and poverty and inequality.

Sharon Witherspoon said: 'I am a passionate advocate of social science, not just as a thing of beauty or as a generator of insights and even of further research questions. Both by temperament and by role I am an advocate of using strong, rigorous research to illuminate social policy, to change and challenge practice and generally create feedback loops that are part of being a democratic and reflective society; and yes, that is not quite the same as Research Exercise Framework impact. It is not that I believe that policy is only ever evidence-based, or that politics and values ever disappear from social science. Social sciences are certainly caught in the crossfire of politics and values more than some other sciences, as the

Academy knows too, and as its economists certainly do. But some social science evidence and reasoning is just stronger and more robust than others, and some of it needs to be thrust into places where it might do most good.

'I am glad that many of us have been able to work so closely together to address these questions and the issue of social science infrastructure; to challenge the fact that we still cannot get routine access to government anonymised data for secondary analysis; to ensure that peer review is used for more government-funded research; and to ensure funding and long-term planning for our valuable and vulnerable research infrastructure. Recently both the last Government and this one – largely in the form of David Willetts – have done us proud on longitudinal studies. More recently we have been working with the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Royal Statistical Society and others to support a generational shift in the capacity to use quantitative skills across a range of disciplines – not that it is only quantitative skills that matter, but we want some people other than economists to talk to about these things.

'In the end, though, I confess I will take the most enormous pleasure in interpreting the President's Medal as a challenge to do more. For surely now with the recession, and the shifts in the social order brought about by and in a laboratory of a changing Government with new social policy, and with all the challenges of behavioural change to consider, we need tough social science more than ever. That is the lofty aim. My more modest one is simply to disprove Ernest Rutherford's maxim that "the only possible conclusion social sciences can draw is: some do, some don't".'

More information on the British Academy's medals and prizes, including a full list of the 2011 winners, can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/prizes/
