

British Academy President's Medal

THE BRITISH ACADEMY President's Medal was unveiled for the first time at the Academy's annual awards ceremony on 25 November 2010. Awarded 'for signal service to the cause of the humanities and social sciences', it 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. Up to five medals may be awarded annually.

Robin Jackson, Chief Executive and Secretary of the British Academy, said: 'At a time when humanities and social science disciplines are coming under increased funding pressures, it is all the more important that outstanding work to support these areas is properly celebrated. That is the aim of the new British Academy President's Medals, and we have three very distinguished recipients for the first award.'

The three recipients were Dr Sarah Tyacke, Professor Michael Worton, and Rt Hon. Peter Riddell.

Dr Sarah Tyacke was awarded a President's Medal on the grounds of her service to historical records, in particular through her work as head of the National Archives. In this role she transformed the accessibility of archival material for scholars and the public, and she led on archival legislation and a national archival strategy.

Professor Michael Worton was awarded a President's Medal for his leadership in addressing 'the languages deficit' among British university students. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) chose him to lead its Review of Modern Foreign Language provision in higher education in England (published September 2009). His reputation was enhanced by the qualities of that report: its fairness, its ability to consider many sides of



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the problem, and the careful balance of its exposition. Professor Worton has worked tirelessly to reverse the trend of decline that has beset language study in the UK.

Rt Hon. Peter Riddell was awarded a President's Medal for an outstanding record as the producer of an informed picture of the



The recipients of the British Academy President's Medal, 25 November 2010: Sarah Tyacke; Michael Worton, with Sir Adam Roberts, President of the British Academy; Peter Riddell. Photos: David Graeme-Baker.

inner workings of Whitehall, high politics and the party battle. Peter Riddell was a journalist for nearly 40 years, writing mainly, but not exclusively, about British politics, Parliament and political parties. In 2008 he was appointed one of the first Senior Fellows of the newly formed Institute for Government, and in 2009 he co-authored its influential report *Transitions: Preparing for Changes of Government*. He is a member of the judge-led privy counsellor inquiry into any Government complicity or involvement in the mistreatment of British national

detainees by overseas countries. Peter Riddell is a valued supporter of the British Academy, and has taken part in and chaired many Academy discussion meetings.

Peter Riddell said: 'It is a special honour to be recognised by the leading national organisation for the humanities and social sciences. It is very important to bridge the gap between the academic and media worlds. Faults lie on both sides: the short-termism and scandal-driven sensationalism of the media is matched by the all too frequent self-

reverential and self-referential narcissism of academics concerned only with references in journals which only fellow academics read. That is why I applaud the attempts by the British Academy to ensure that the academic voice is heard in public policy debates.'

More information on the British Academy's medals and prizes, including a full list of the 2010 winners, can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/about/medals

The designer of the medal

The medal was designed by artist and designer Stephen Raw, who was present at the awards ceremony. Stephen's art is concerned with 'language made visible', and his recent work has included a Royal Ballet memorial in Westminster Abbey, and a Burns Banner to celebrate Robert Burns' 250th anniversary in Edinburgh. The British Library has recently added to their map collection a set of the Tolkien maps that Stephen drew for the 1994 edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, working under the tutelage of Christopher Tolkien.

Stephen Raw

