

**Robert Layton**  
**Chancellor's Medal**  
**29 April 2019**

Professor Robert Layton, FBA, has a global reputation for groundbreaking anthropological research based on long-term fieldwork in France, Australia and China. If the best anthropologists are generalists, finding unexpected links between apparently different phenomena, then Bob is surely an anthropologists' anthropologist. It also makes it rather difficult to summarise his life and works.

During his career he has not only made important interventions into how we understand property rights, art, cultural heritage, the evolution of hunter-gatherer society, and anthropological theory—but has also pioneered the *integration* of biological and social theories to explore the co-evolution of genes and culture. Cultural evolution is now one of the most exciting subfields in Anthropology with Durham leading the field.

Bob has always used his research to benefit the people he worked with. In the 1970s, his work on land rights was vital in securing the sacred site of Uluru, or Ayers Rock, for its traditional owners and later ensuring UNESCO recognition. He brought the issue of reburial of indigenous skeletal material to international attention and, at the request of the Council of British Druid Orders, has been instrumental in English Heritage's consultation on the reburial of human remains. Now, although nominally retired, he is leading a collaborative project with Shandong University of Art and Design to improve the incomes of local rural artists.

Bob studied anthropology at UCL, completed his DPhil in Sussex in 1971, and then joined Durham in 1982 after almost a decade working in Australia. Prolific as well as cutting-edge, his books have been reprinted numerous times and translated into many languages. His *Anthropology of Art* has had no less than three different Chinese translations. A colleague who accompanied him on a tour of China said it was rather like being with a rock star, albeit a very modest one.

The significance of his work has been recognised through countless awards including the Royal Anthropological Institute's Rivers Memorial Medal and election to Fellow of the British Academy. In 2013, he was appointed to the Chinese National Academy of Arts as their first Chinese government-funded 'High-End Foreign Expert'. This is the highest award the Chinese Academy can award to a non-national and was the first made to a non-Science academic. In 2016, he was made Honorary Professor of Shandong University of Art and Design and named 'Friendly Ambassador of Shandong Province'. Reflecting the breadth of his intellectual achievements, he is also Fellow of the Linnean Society.

Bob's contributions to Durham, the department and the discipline are huge. During his 36 years tenure, he served twice on RAE panels, three terms as Head of Department and led the department's growth in size, research productivity and quality. His vision of a broad-based Anthropology shaped the Department we have today and is celebrated annually in the Robert Layton Dialogues. These debates reflect critically on the juxtaposition of methods, questions and areas of enquiry across Anthropology's sub-fields. He remains key to Durham's anthropological community as a figure who is both nurturing and inspiring.

In an age when kindness and an ethic of service are rarely matched by spectacular intellectual achievements, we have Bob as a model of what is possible.

Vice-Chancellor, I present Professor Robert Layton to receive the Chancellor's Medal.