

Piers Baker studied Indian archaeology as an undergraduate with founding Trustee Raymond Allchin. After an academic year in Kabul as Research Fellow at the British Institute of Afghan Studies – curtailed as the political situation deteriorated in 1978-79 – he returned to Cambridge for his PhD under Raymond Allchin on “Shahr-I Zohak and the History of the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan”; this was subsequently published (with Raymond Allchin as co-author, in respect of the latter’s 1950s fieldwork on which it drew) as No.1 in the AIT Series. In his student years, Piers took part in archaeological projects in Iran (Nush-I Jan area survey) and Pakistan (Tarakai Qila, again with Raymond Allchin) as well as Afghanistan. Closer to home, he followed his other interests, in arms and armour, working as a volunteer on cataloguing projects at the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Royal Armouries, on European and oriental material respectively.

The lack of openings for continuing work in those areas in the early-mid 1980s led to a change of career direction. Following over 20 years in the Foreign Office, starting on the Afghanistan desk and ending as Deputy Ambassador in Vienna, Piers worked next in academic administration, initially as Director of the International Office at Imperial College London, then as Assistant Director of the Engineering Professors Council. From 2012 to 2021 he was Clerk to one of the lesser-known City of London Livery Companies – Tin Plate and Wire Workers – in charge of the administration of the Company, including its extensive charity work, as well as organizing an annual programme of events.

Working part-time since leaving Imperial gave Piers time to re-engage with his earlier academic interests, particularly contributing to the British Museum’s Masson Project. This recently concluded with the publication of the third volume bringing together Charles Masson’s numismatic and archaeological work in Afghanistan in the 1830s – and including a few photos taken by Piers in the 1970s alongside drawings of the same sites by Masson from 140 years previously. He continues to work as a volunteer in the British Museum’s Coins and Medals Department on collections-related research.

Piers is also a Trustee, and Treasurer, of the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum.