Historical Geography Research Group

NEWSLETTER

- Summer 2020 -

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Copy for the next issue:
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Letter from the Chairs

Dear HGRG members,

Welcome to the summer edition of the newsletter. We're delivering this to you now at the end of what can only be described as the longest and strangest teaching semester on record. The pivot to online learning in HE along with caring responsibilities, home schooling and worries about the health and wellbeing of friends, family and colleagues have made for a tricky few months. I sincerely hope the arrival of the newsletter finds our members and readers in good health and strong spirits.

Whilst we endeavoured to bring you an issue earlier in the spring, I'm afraid the time somehow disappeared, and we find ourselves now at the height of summer. Many of us are asking, 'where did the time go?' and 'why, even when we no longer commute to work, are there still not enough hours in the day to get everything done?' This newsletter takes a moment to reflect upon the issues of time through the changing seasons of the Research Group.

While the late summer is conference season in a 'normal' year, most of you will know by now that this year's RGS-IBG conference has been postponed until 2021. The 2021 International Conference of Historical Geographers has been similarly postponed (as I advised members on the reading list recently). However, the Research Group's annual general meeting will still take place (as it is a requirement of our constitution). We plan to hold the AGM remotely by Zoom (or similar) in early to mid September. Details will be circulated to the mailing list and via Twitter in the next few weeks and members asked to sign up to attend (in order to ensure we provide a safe online space for members).

As is usual, the AGM will see changes to the HGRG committee. As some of you know, this is my final year (of four) as Chair and I will be stepping down from the Executive Committee after more than eight years in post. I have hugely enjoyed my time on the committee (having served in one capacity or another since 2008 – I think) and have felt very privileged to lead a research group whose support and collegiality I had benefitted from so significantly as a Masters and PhD student.

Having been voted in as Chair Elect at last year's AGM, Cheryl will step into the Chair's role in September, leaving the Honorary Secretary's Position vacant. Other committee members also reach the end of their terms this year. Anyone keen to be involved is encouraged to email Briony (B.McDonagh@hull.ac.uk) and Cheryl (Cheryl.McGeachan@glasgow.ac.uk) and talk to us about the opportunities to get involved. More generally, we'd love to welcome new members to the HGRG, so please do recommend the Group to your PhD students and colleagues. There are plenty of informal opportunities to get involved too – the year's Practising Historical Geography (PHG) event will most likely take place online (details to follow) and the HGRG virtual writing retreat will continue under whatever kind of lockdown conditions we find ourselves in come the winter.

Beyond immediate Research Group matters, recent world events have thrown a critical spotlight on the importance of understanding histories (and historical geographies) as a means of forwarding current and future debate. Far from being only considered an academic endeavour, histories and their geographies are being publicly remade and reimagined in streets, parks and rivers across the world. Opportunities arise for the group to consider how academic historical geographers connect into, challenge and support such debates. These are themes we hope to explore more fully in this autumn's PHG event.

We are also facing new challenges as individuals and as a Group. How do we continue to support PGRs and ECRs in this challenging current climate? How do we continue to empower conversations within our research community in a just and equal way, across geographic borders and digital divides? How do we work collectively and collaboratively with other research groups and institutions (such as archives and libraries) to support one another as we move cautiously into a post-pandemic future? These are all issues we will continue to engage with in the coming months and years. We hope you will support the Group, join in the conversations, and make your voice and ideas heard.

Kind regards

Briony and Cheryl
HGRG Chair and Chair Elect

How I became a historical geographer

Stephen Legg

Stephen Legg is a professor of historical geography at the University of Nottingham. His research focuses on twentieth-century colonialism and imperialism, with particular interests in Indian urbanism and constitutional reform. He is the author of *Spaces of Colonialism* (Blackwell, 2007) and *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire* (Duke University Press, 2014), the editor of *Spatiality, Sovereignty and Carl Schmitt* (Routledge, 2011) and the co-editor of *South Asian Governmentalities* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *Subaltern Geographies* (University of Georgia Press, 2019). As of 2020 he will be an editor of the *Journal of Historical Geography*.

For reasons absolutely no one can explain, I grew up wanting to be a town and country planner. In the mid-1990s I spent two school-organised work experience placements with Nottinghamshire County Council, where I quickly learned that town planning entailed very little sculpting of grand boulevards. The first placement was office-based and focused on zoning regulations, with the occasional inspection of a derelict factory destined for regeneration. The second placement entailed footpath maintenance and construction, often with young men and women working off the hours of a community service order. Whilst the HGRG's generous invitation to reflect on the origins of my historical geographicalness is an intimidating and impossible task, it does offer the opportunity for some speculative retrospectivism. The first placement was a primer in how the urban landscape is undergirded with relations of law and power, while the second exposed the (in this case, coerced) labour through which landscapes are constructed and maintained.

With a nostalgic eye, my ongoing geographical interests can also be traced through to my A' level courses. While I enjoyed the pragmatism and 'real world' problem-orientation of geography, I fell for history. While geography stoked my career-long interest in cities, the early-modern history course material introduced me (at a push) to the insecurity (Henry VII) and territoriality (Henry VIII) of English sovereignty, and to the founding of Europe through violent and constitutive relationships with its outsides (read through Charles V and Suleiman the Magnificent, without a single mention of Edward Said).

I arrived for undergraduate study at Cambridge, having prioritised my head (geography) over my heart (history), with no idea that there was a sub-discipline between the two. I was lucky enough to study under two historical geographers who have already recounted their own journeys for this newsletter, and who indelibly crafted what the study of past geographies meant for me. I caught Phil Howell (HGRG newsletter, winter 2019) mid-transitioning from his earlier interests in industrial protest to his later interest in sexuality and colonialism. His imaginative re-crafting of a course on the industrial revolution into an introduction to Foucauldian analysis has left a deep an impression upon all my work, while my second monograph was a direct response to his generative analysis of the regulation of prostitution.

A gated entrance to an old Delhi mohalla. Credit: S. Legg

Gerry Kearns (HGRG newsletter, autumn 2016) was also an inspirational guide to the politics of comparative urbanism, plotted through the overlapping spaces of imperialism, socialism and high modernism. Perhaps the deepest impression was left upon me by James (Jim) Duncan's course on post-colonial geographies. His analysis of colonial landscapes as text fed

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my emerging interest in theory while introducing the ethical quandary that haunts me still; namely, how to square the urge to explore the global sites through which colonialism played itself out without reproducing the epistemic violence of imperialism through my geographical research. I was lucky enough to secure ESRC-funding to undertake my PhD research on colonial Delhi under Jim's supervision, with Phil and Gerry on my review panel.

A storage godown at Old Delhi Railway Station. Credit: S. Legg

Whilst the above speculations string together many of the components of my journey to becoming an historical geographer, the definitive period and place for this identity formation would be the six months I spent in Delhi collecting the material for my PhD. It quickly became apparent that my proposed project, looking at how low ranking/subaltern workers in the new capital crafted spaces of homeliness within the imperial landscape, would be impossible due to all the key files having been destroyed. After repeated moments of deep despair, it became clear that far fewer scholars had explored the neighbouring, older city of Delhi than had explored Edwin Lutyens' masterclass in British colonial landscaping New Delhi. The PhD morphed into a study of residential accommodation, policing and town planning (yes!) in the capital and anti-colonial nationalist responses in the city. It soon became apparent that there were plenty of people in Delhi who could remember the 1930s. Days in the archives were soon supplemented by evenings in the homes of families in the city, collecting oral of histories of women's political, interwar worlds.

It was the experience of the contemporary city of Delhi as much as the archival fieldwork that returned me home as a confirmed historical geographer. In part, this was through the opportunity to interview the people and visit the places of my historical research. But the six-month trip was also a lesson in incompatibility and the necessity of drawing back. My body did not like Delhi, and will never recover, or forgive me. Delhi was, and still is, an angry city. My ability to survive it was a direct product of the financial legacies of post-colonial Britain; I was a paying-guest in a nice, south Delhi suburb with a loving and caring family. But I was also constantly made aware of the privileges of whiteness, through the preferential treatment I received during interactions at work, at tourist sites, or in Delhi's (at the time) illegal gay scene.

The imperial cinema in Paharganj. Credit: S. Legg

The hostility of Delhi emerged from its over-density and the frustrations of its informal and chaotic urbanism. But it was repeatedly impressed upon me that Delhi was *still* a partition city, forever recovering from the trauma of 1947. After the splitting of colonial India into independent India and Pakistan, c.330000 of Delhi's Muslim residents migrated to Pakistan, while c.500000 non-Muslims arrived. In-migration continued, such that by 1951 Delhi had a population of 1.7 million (from a 1947 population of c.950000. Its 2001 population was 13.8 million, today it is 18.9 million). Despite my oral history work and explorations of urban physical heritage, the Delhi I had come to know and (tough) love was transformed beyond recognition from the colonial capital I had been researching. The historical geographer I was becoming was a product of interactions between the archive and the city, between Britain and India, between the present and the past, and between the urge to explore colonial spaces and the fear of speaking for (not of) colonial subjects. I would like to thank my international collaborators and my amazing colleagues at Nottingham for their help in my continuing attempts to negotiate these historical and geographical interactions.

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From the archive

Insights to archives of imperial mapmaking

By Johanna Skurnik , University of Sussex

My brother's favourite thing when it comes to my work is to wonder about the 'dusty objects' that his sister allegedly spends all her days with. He is amused to hear my stories about 'the archives', a place he has never visited, and that are as foreign to him as the construction sites of new apartment buildings, his sites of work, are to me. In his imagination I am hunched over piles of disorderly papers or unfolding maps somewhere that is difficult to access, presumably dark and, according to my stories , often chilly.

In my current postdoctoral project, I have come face to face with a number of different archival collections as well as practices of access that all have their part to play in the history that I am excavating concerning the Arrowsmith family map firm and its business of imperial mapmaking. The firm was in operation in central London from the late eighteenth century to the 1860s, led first by Aaron Arrowsmith, then his sons Aaron and Samuel Arrowsmith and finally by his nephew John Arrowsmith. It had close connections with the British government, especially the Admiralty and the Colonial Office, collaborated with metropolitan scientific institutions (with John Arrowsmith, for example, serving on the council and being the semi-official mapmaker of the Royal Geographical Society), and providing maps for the travel accounts published by book publishers such as John Murray and Thomas and William Boone.

The maps, many of which came to exist through the printing presses at 10 Soho Square, the firms most long-lasting location of operation, mapped the expansion of the British Empire, tracked the routes of explorers and travellers and documented the developing infrastructure of Britain. They abound in the public archives and private collections across the world. This is in stark contrast with the amount of written material that would document the complex social and material processes of making, trading and consuming these maps. As no archive of the firm exists, it has become a methodological challenge to understand how they were produced, where they were used and by whom as sources of geographic knowledge for navigating the expanding British Empire, or for something else entirely.

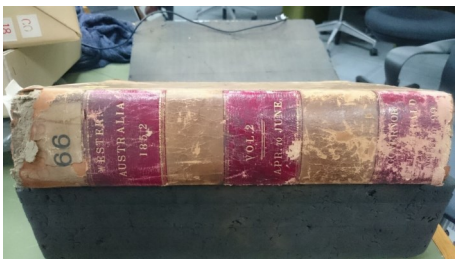
One archive that is at the core of my project in answering these questions is The National Archives at Kew, that holds the records of the Colonial Office. These records which are mostly organized by colony, are well indexed online, bound in thick leather covered volumes, and provide access to the reports that accumulated in London through the practices of British overseas colonial governance. They constitute a seemingly endless trail of papers and notes that help understand the administrative use of the cartographic medium and the social relation that the Arrowsmiths as commercial mapmakers had with the permanent officials of the department working at Downing Street. On numerous occasions, the minutes and annotations by these men penned in the letters received help understand how the geographic data moved in and out of their hands and entered (or not) the maps compiled and printed few kilometres away in Soho.

The National Archives, Kew, London. Credit:J Skurnik

In these notes, I am at times lucky to find contemplations of the meanings that mappings had for their users: whether the Colonial Office should sponsor the publication of this or that map, how the documents were managed, how different parties were granted access to them, how maps and reports were mobilized in colonial governance, and how some of them went missing and were forgotten. Surprisingly many of the volumes still contain the mappings that arrived from the colonies as enclosures to the dispatches, although many have been extracted to flat storage and must be ordered separately to the map reading room one level up. All these mobilities, over hundred and fifty years ago and more recently forces a researcher to come to terms with what Tony Ballantyne calls the centrifugal and centripetal forces that went into generating these collections and which constitute how and where – if anywhere - one can today access the different documents.

A far more marginal archive, but nevertheless an influential one, for me is something else entirely. Beginning my project over a year ago, I

encountered an intriguing collection of material



Documents on Western Australia. Credit: J Skurnik

by a professor of adult education, Coolie Verner, currently housed by the University of British Columbia, Canada. Verner was a prolific scholar of the UBC with a special interest in map history. One of his passions was the Arrowsmith map firm and its mappings of North America. His papers form a collection that I have never personally visited but have only accessed via the pdfs that the collection staff was kind enough to scan for me. They cover mainly printed documents and notes Verner accumulated. Essentially, they form an archive of the Arrowsmiths generated by a scholar, exposing me to parts of his lines of thinking, the clues that he came across in the 1970s, long before I was born.

Scrolling through the pdfs revealed for example how Verner plotted together Arrowsmith family history and with the help of his connections in London made sense of the different addresses that the firm operated at. He patiently corresponded with archivists and librarians to obtain copies of relevant maps and documents to Canada. These practices of collecting documents and doing research provoked me to reflect on the influence that the research infrastructures of the 2020s have for the knowledge that I am able to generate. Personally, I enjoy getting my hands dirty from the rotting leather and old papers by investigating them on site, but I also acknowledge that without the numerous extant digital collections (and the willingness of the archivists to deliver digital copies) it wouldn't be possible for me to efficiently collate together material scattered across the globe. My experience with the Verner papers therefore stands as one example of how one can be in 'the archives' at home under a blanket on the sofa. And this couldn't be further from my brother's idea of how I spend my days.

Johanna Skurnik is a visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Geography, University of Sussex. She is undertaking a postdoctoral research project that is concerned with the mapping of the British Empire.

Shelfie

By Jon Winder,

University of Kent

Grown-ups worry about children's play. In particular, they worry about how and where it happens. From playgrounds in parks to the unfriendly *NO BALL GAMES* signs in public spaces, the urban landscape is sprinkled with spaces where children are meant to play, while regulations attempt to shape how they should play.

Image Credit: J. Winder

The street has long been seen by adults as a space where children should not play, because of the physical and moral dangers that lurk there (something the present-day Playing Out movement is attempting to rectify). At the same time, the places where children are meant to play have become increasingly standardised and 'regulation' playgrounds can be found around the world. From salubrious South Kensington to refugee camps in Syria, swings, slides and railings are the order of the day. Playgrounds are political too and often become embroiled in wider public discourse. From the *Guardian* to the *Globe and Mail* playgrounds have been focal points for debates about

financial austerity, social equity, inclusive environments and the taming of childhood.

Colin Ward observed in *The Child in the City* (1978) that children will play anywhere and with anything. But if that's the case, why do we put so much time and effort into creating dedicated places where children should play?

Digging in the archives will hopefully allow me to answer this question, contributing to our broader understanding of children's place in public space. Whatever I unearth will also have important consequences for my personal and professional history too. Before starting my PhD, I worked (and occasionally played) in a local authority parks department, increasingly specialising in creating and improving play spaces for children. Over time I became more and more uncertain about the underlying purpose of the playground. I was unsure whether I was meant to be creating good play spaces for children, helping children to create their own places to play, bolstering local politicians' election chances, or attempting to alleviate parental anxieties. Turning to my geography and history books, I thought I might find out more about where the idea of the children's playground came from and why. While I found that little had been written about the history of public spaces created by adults for children, two park histories did make a significant contribution to my journey in search of the playground.

Early on in my search, I got a sense that parks and playgrounds were not considered worthy of scholarly attention, that people beyond the park railings perhaps felt that such spaces were inconsequential. Fortunately, I found *The Invention of the Park* (2005) by Karen Jones and John Wills. It transported me from ancient Assyrian groves and Persian paradises to the English landscape park; from city parks and national parks to nature parks and theme parks. While these spaces were unsurprisingly different in terms of their design, public access and use, the common thread that united them all was 'an endless fascination with perfect nature and cultural idealism.' Finding scholars who had approached public parks as eco-cultural landscapes was a significant confidence boost and has provided a strong foundation for my project. I could look beyond conventional garden design histories, which invariably focused on the 'great men' of landscape architecture, and legitimately explore the social and environmental factors that have been significant in shaping how parks and especially playgrounds have been created, understood and used. Just as parks have often represented a curated form of nature, perhaps playgrounds can be understood as curated places for play.

While Jones and Wills examined the long history of the park around the world, my second shelfie offered a detailed case study of a single green space: Central Park in New York. In *The Park and the People* (1992), Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar discuss the motivations and actions of the designers and metropolitan elites who instigated the Central Park project but, as the title suggests, they also uncover the multiple stories of a much wider park community. I soon found myself reading about other aspects of the park story: from the people who lost their homes and neighbourhoods to make way for a new public greenspace, through stories about the German gardeners and Irish labourers who had reshaped the landscape, to the ongoing negotiations between park users and park authorities about what constituted a 'public' space. Central Park authorities responded slowly to changing expectations about leisure and recreation, especially for children. As a result, the first dedicated play space was only introduced in 1926, which perhaps helps to explain why children and play are only briefly mentioned in this otherwise rich social history.

In my quest to find out more about the playground, I turned to historians of childhood, including Hugh Cunningham and Harry Hendrick (1997). They provided important background information about the way that social constructions of childhood have changed over time, but they rarely mentioned how these notions where shaped by and played out in public spaces. Unsurprisingly, geographers have been more interested in the interaction between notions of childhood and public space, but they have tended to focus on present-day places. There are, however, notable exceptions. In particular, the work of Elizabeth Gagen stands out. *Playing the part; performing gender in America's playgrounds* (2000) focused on early twentieth-century USA, examining how both spatial and supervisory playground regimes set out to reinforce normative gender roles. Playgrounds were created by the Mother's Club of Cambridge to transform 'regular little street urchins' into respectable adults-to-be. Both the design of the spaces and the values and ideas that shaped organised activities reinforced binary gender roles and emphasised particular ideas about the American way of life. Finding Elizabeth's work was fantastic; I had found a scholar interested in the history and geography of landscapes designed specifically for children. My mind raced. Did the UK and USA have similar playground histories? Were the same processes involved? Subsequent archival research has

Shelfie

suggested that while there were links between playground advocates in the UK and USA, there is a different story to tell. UK playgrounds did not become 'educational establishments' in quite the same way as they did in the US, so there was still work for me to do.

My archival research has shown that Victorian social reformers were attempting to influence where and how children played, but by the twentieth century there were other processes at work too. Playgrounds have acted as spaces where social ideas about childhood, empire, nature, health and recreation have been played out. However, the evidence from the early twentieth century suggests that the playground has been influenced by processes of commercialisation too. Inter-war Park Superintendents and manufacturing companies attempted to meet the increased demand for leisure facilities in parks, and in doing so established and developed a modern notion of the children's playground as a space with swings, slides, and roundabouts. In general, however, neither superintendents nor companies had much experience in providing either spaces or infrastructure for children. Park staff invariably had a horticultural background, while the companies that were manufacturing playground equipment had previously produced a diverse range of products that included fencing and gates, gymnastic apparatus and boxing rings, and even tube-bending and bread-and-butter machines. Despite their diverse backgrounds, British companies soon claimed to be experts in the provision of children's playgrounds. By the late 1930s they had exported playground equipment to Canada, Belgian Congo, Venezuela, North Borneo, USA and St Helena.

Early in my project I borrowed David Cohen's passing assertion in *The Development of Play* (2006) that there had been 'social engineers on the swings,' suspecting that it might describe playground advocates and explain their motivations. Writing from the Harvard School of Education in 1908, Everett B. Mero certainly seemed to fit the description when he stated that that playgrounds should only occasionally be a place for spontaneous fun! However, after rummaging in the archives (particularly in the un-catalogued and un-sorted Wicksteed Park archive in Kettering) I have become increasingly unsure about whether it is the best narrative to explain the history of the playground in the UK. It had seemed like a catchy title when I put together my PhD research proposal, but now I am not so sure. Please excuse the very poor alliteration, but I am starting to wonder whether there were also companies on the climbing frames, patrons on the plank swings, and sociologists on the slides…

Jon Winder is in the second year of his PhD in the School of History at the University of Kent. Alongside his research, he leads the Critical Excursions in Kent project, and raises money to restore historic landscapes. His PhD research is supervised by Karen Jones, professor of environmental and cultural history, and Charlotte Sleigh, professor of science humanities. He occasionally tweets @JonWinder_

Reports

REPORTS

Practising Historical Geography Conference 2019

"Looking back, going forward: digital historical geographies."

6th November 2019, University of Nottingham

By Sarah Rafferty, University of Cambridge

In 2019, the HGRG *Practising Historical Geography Conference* celebrated its 25th anniversary, with not one, but two rather large cakes.

The theme of this year's conference was "Looking back, going forward: digital historical geographies". This felt particularly fitting for me, as it meant returning to the University of Nottingham – where I'd studied as an undergraduate and first come across the HGRG – whilst providing the opportunity to discuss the challenges that still lay ahead on my PhD journey – a project which is increasingly utilising digital sources and methods.

Dr Jo Norcup opens the conference. Credit E. Armston-Sheret

Reports

In what has been termed the 'Digital Age', the volume of digital sources for historical geographers has become vast and the research methods available to us are changing to reflect this. A common thread running through the presentations was the *promise* and the *threats* of digital options in the archive. Professor David Lambert (University of Warwick) opened proceedings with his Keynote on 'Following the West India regiments across the British Empire' in which he weaved together a collection of archival sources to retell the stories of marginalised black soldiers in the British Army. Lambert suggested that such a project would not have been possible without digital searches of archives, thus giving the researcher the ability to seek out relevant material from a number of collections and amplify marginalised voices.

A packed programme. Credit E. Armston-Sheret

Dr Caroline Bressey (UCL) gave the Keynote Plenary and described her use of digital searches through the Trove digitised Australian newspaper archive, focusing on job adverts. She touched on the politics of archival digitisation and, like Lambert, commented on the opportunities of finding marginalised voices in somewhat overwhelming volumes of archival material. It is this abundance of sources and the number of 'false positive' results that Key Word Searches produce however, that can lead to the researcher getting lost in searches and losing focus. Bressey implored that strict search boundaries are a necessity, as well as a continual critical approach to digital sources, just as an historical geographer would employ with more traditional sources.

The afternoon workshops enabled us to get hands-on with some 'traditional sources' in the form of the School of Geography's map collection, run by Professor David Matless and Philip Jagessar. Additionally, we engaged and discussed the digital outputs of the 'Slaves Legacies' Project, led by Dr Susanne Seymour and Lisa Jones (Bright Ideas, Nottingham).

Despite the digital turn and historical geography evolving as a discipline, for me, one thing remains the same at the HGRG and at the Practising Historical Geography Conference: the sense of community and support they provide. Dr Peter Martin summarised this well in his 'Postgraduate Reflections' talk, and it was further cemented by the HGRG Undergraduate Dissertation Prize Winner and Highly Commended awardee being able to present their research at the conference. Olivia Russell (University of Edinburgh) spoke on 'Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence; Gertrude Bell's Cartographic Work for The Royal Geographical Society in 1913 to 1918' and Tallulah Gordon (UCL) conveyed her research 'Suffragettes in the City: Exploring Gendered Memory Through Analysis of Two London Exhibitions Commemorating the British Women's Suffrage Centenary'. Both presentations were thought-provoking and engaging, grappling with feminist histories.

A huge thank you is in order to everyone who helped to organise and spoke at the 25th Practising Historical Geography's Conference, particularly to Dr Joanne Norcup. We are looking forward to what the 26th year holds! (… Hopefully more cake!)

Sarah Rafferty is a PhD Candidate at the University of Cambridge. Her work examines infant and early-childhood mortality in London between 1870 and 1929.

J.B. Harley Fellowship in the History of Cartography

Emily Boak, University of Calgary Department of Anthropology & Archaeology

As a MA student in the Department of Anthropology & Archaeology at the University of Calgary in Canada, my thesis research brings together approaches from anthropology, historical geography, and the history of science to shape a larger critical discussion of the long history of foreign imperial visualization practices in Afghanistan that continues today with the intensive use of aerial imaging by the U.S. military. That is, my thesis looks at the particular styles of mapping, photographing, and surveying that were developed by foreigners in Afghanistan, from the British to the Soviets to the Americans, that allowed them to visualize, imagine, and understand Afghanistan from a distance. Afghanistan

is one of the most imaged places in the world, and I am interested in the ways in which historical images and maps resonate in and among more recent technologies, but also the ways in which the visual products of previous empires prove essential to the creation of new visualizations by militaries, and scientists today. These interests and questions led me to my thesis research, which asks how the modern imaging of Afghanistan by the U.S. military draws upon visual and cartographic traditions laid by the British empire and the Soviet Union.

Through the generous support of the J.B. Harley Fellowship in the History of Cartography and funding from the Historical Geographers Research Group, I spent a month this summer carrying out research at the India Office Records and Map Collections at the British Library. During my time at the British Library, I was able to examine nearly 200 historical maps, drawings, photographs, journals, and collections of letters that spanned from the First Anglo-Afghan War in 1839 to the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919. During this period, the British bureaucratic and military offices, based in colonized India, surveyed Afghanistan in detail, producing the huge collection of maps that now reside at the India Office Records of the British Library. The bureaucratic system that produced them is reflected on the maps, many of which bear multiple stamps and notations that detail the acceptable practices of distribution among various offices and ranking individuals, as well as the spectrum of confidentiality.

Examining these collections, the question that came to the forefront was: what *kind* of knowledge do maps give us? It is often assumed that maps exist for a simple purpose – to orient the viewer and allow them to navigate an unknown place. However, within the collections of the India Office Records it became increasingly clear to me that these maps were not only providing "orienting" knowledge, but also contained and evidenced narratives about the kingdom and the future. The well-respected cartographer and Geographer to the Queen, James Wyld, included a booklet with his 1878 map of Central Asia and Afghanistan, which was prefaced thus:

> "I venture to say, that read in conjunction with any really good map of the country, a perfect stranger will with ease be enabled to follow the probable course of events, and to forecast the future of a kingdom which must indubitably be absorbed sooner or later into our Empire of Hindostan." (Wyld 1878. Notes to Accompany Mr. Wyld's Maps of Central Asia and Afghanistan. M. 46900.58.)

What James Wyld describes here is a sort of self-evidence afforded to maps, wherein it is assumed maps and cartography can foretell the future, or the 'probable course of events.' Maps that alone seemed straightforward exist within lively networks of books, journals, letters, writings, drawings, and photographs that reference each other take on meaning in their context. As I continue to reflect upon this historical moment, I hope to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning that was given to these maps and images of Afghanistan.

My time in London gave me the opportunity to build connections with map curators and scholars in historical geography, cartography, and the archaeology of Afghanistan. I am thankful to the network of J.B. Harley Fellows who helped me to make invaluable connections with Tom Harper (Lead Curator of Antiquarian Mapping) and Jim Caruth (former Lead Curator of Modern Mapping and Cartographic Materials) at the British Library. They, along with the knowledgeable staff of the reading rooms, provided essential support as I learned to navigate the collections. In addition, thanks to the fellowship I was able to travel to Oxford University to attend the Oxford Seminars in Cartography. During my time in London, I also attended the book launch of Warwick Ball and Norman Hammond's *The Archaeology of Afghanistan* at the Society of Antiquaries. Ball and Hammond are two of the foremost scholars on the archaeology of Afghanistan, and this event gave me the opportunity to network with many of the people whose work has been instrumental to my own.

This September, I presented research on contemporary visualization technologies in Afghanistan, another side of this project, at the annual meeting of the Society for the Social Studies of Science (4S). There, I not only presented a paper, but organized a session, entitled "Seeing through New Eyes: Science, Truth and Technologies of Visualization." This experience allowed me to interact with many scholars in science and technology studies further develop my ideas. In November, I will be presenting my research at the joint American Anthropological Association (AAA) and Canadian Anthropological Society (CASCA) meetings in Vancouver. As I reflect on my research this past summer and the connections it has allowed me to make, I am deeply grateful to the J.B. Harley Fellowship in the History of Cartography for its generous support of my project.

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HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY RESEARCH GROUP

ARE YOU A FULL MEMBER OF THE HGRG?

Some of you reading this newsletter and, perhaps, participating in our activities will not be a full member of the HGRG. Some of you, for instance, will have expressed an interest in the work of the group when you became a member of the RGS/IBG and so joined that way. And that's just great! We welcome and celebrate the breadth of our membership.

Nevertheless, there are some important benefits to be gained by switching to Full membership and we would encourage you to consider doing so. It would be of immense benefit to the Group and we promise to make you feel 'special' in return! As it stands if you are with us as a RGS/IBG member only, we receive a minimum contribution (as little as £2 *per annum*) from that. In return all you receive is this newsletter.

In short we would be delighted to welcome you to join us as a full member of the HGRG community! Membership subs are essential for us to continue to provide the full range of support and we are grateful for the collegiate generosity of members in

Full Membership £12.00 *per annum*.

Should you choose to become a full member you will be added to the e-circulation list, will receive the HGRG Research Series and the HGRG Newsletter. Your subs will help support the grants that we provide to the HGRG community and you will be eligible to apply for these. Finally, you will get a reduced rate on back issues of the HGRG Research Series and have the op-