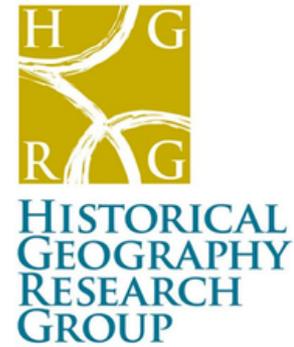


SPRING 2026

# HGRG NEWSLETTER

RGS-IBG Historical Geography Research Group



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

PATRICIA SILVEIRA

*Dear HGRG,*

Welcome to the latest edition of the newsletter and to everyone who has just joined the Group and the Committee in the past few months. Readers, if you are in the library, in the garden or at the beach, I'm sure you will enjoy this issue's features.

There have been a number of highlights that will be detailed throughout this newsletter, including our support of postgraduate scholars through our conference fund scheme, and the organisation of future events designed to connect the international community of historical geographers.

The 31st Practising Historical Geography Conference (PHG) took place at the Newcastle University in December 2025 (huge thanks to the Conference Officer, Paul Wright). The hybrid event ('Porous Archives 2') was a success and it was a wonderful opportunity to rejoin with old and new friends. A range of scholars from across the international community shared their experiences of working with archives and their impressions about writing historical geographies. The HGRG thanks all the participants who attended the PHG, and the Newcastle University for hosting this important event.

## In this issue:

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ARCHIVES IN FOCUS

PRACTISING HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY REPORT

<https://hgrg.org.uk/>



The RGS-IBG Annual Conference will take place in London and online from 1 to 4 September 2026 and the HGRG will sponsor a number of interesting sessions. These include: Radical Archives Praxis, Map Room Conversations, Exhibiting Nations, Geographies of Reparatory Justice for Historical Enslavement and the Journal of Historical Geography Lecture. I'd encourage our postgraduate and early career members to join the event, especially the New and Emerging Research in Historical Geography's session (wonderfully organised by the Postgraduate Representatives Cristian Croitoru and Xin Yang). A key highlight is that the HGRG has a small number of guest registrations available to support the attendance of either geographers or non-geographers who may have difficulties in paying their registration fee. Please see <https://www.rgs.org/research/annual-international-conference/registration#guests>

Our AGM will be taking place online in the end of August. We would love to welcome new members to the HGRG community, so please do recommend the Group to your colleagues. More details about the AGM can be found on the HGRG website.

Great news for the Dissertation Prize! For the next edition, the winners will also receive a Certificate from the HGRG to recognise their hard work, and the thesis conceptual and methodological sophistication. The full details of the scheme will soon be posted on our website and circulated through other media.

In terms of upcoming events, this year's HGRG Committee is planning a series of online events between August and September dedicated to collective projects of writing and teaching historical geographies, also to working (creatively) with archival and map resources. These events will be recorded and available for viewing online afterwards. For more news on this, keep an eye on the website and mailing list.

We would also like to remind all members that we have a number of funding schemes available on the HGRG website. The page includes information about our

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Postgraduate Support Scheme, Small Conference and Seminar Funding. The next deadline for submission is 1st April. The Group are also keen to support conferences dedicated to the advancement of historical geography and supporting the profile and careers of postgraduate and early-career historical geographers.

Applicants should be members of the HGRG and application forms can be found on the website <https://hgrg.org.uk/grants-and-prizes/>

Finally, I would like to say a huge thanks to all committee members who have worked so hard across the year (especially during my maternity leave) to keep the group active and to generate new exciting opportunities. Thanks to Heather Craddock and Christina Hourigan for organising this brilliant edition. The HGRG Committee thanks the community (almost 400 worldwide members on the mailing list!) and institutions that support our activities, publications and events.

As always, the HGRG Committee welcome suggestions for resources, events, publications or other items that could be included in future newsletters.

With best wishes,  
*Patrícia Silveira*  
Chair

## HGRG Committee

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# NEWS and Events

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2026

RGS and Imperial College London, and online, from Wednesday 2 to Friday 4 September 2026. The Chair's theme is Geographies of inequalities: towards just places.

The deadline for submissions for organised sessions, papers and posters is **Friday 6 March 2026**.

If you have any questions, please email us at [ac2026@rgs.org](mailto:ac2026@rgs.org). More information at: <https://www.rgs.org/research/annual-international-conference>

### Call for Papers: New and Emerging Research in Historical Geography (RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2026)

**DEADLINE: 17:00 (GMT) Monday 23rd February 2026**

This session provides a space for postgraduates and early-career scholars undertaking research in Historical Geography to present at a major conference in a supportive and relaxed setting.

We welcome papers from postgraduates/early-career scholars at any stage of their research, that discuss initial research aims/design; engage with methodological and/or theoretical questions; or that draw upon empirical findings. There is no chronological or geographical limit to papers and the sessions will be designed to encourage audience questions, as well as the sharing of experience and advice. Submit an abstract via this form:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdhW2DVqmToi0D48sO5MkYoFPiRQQmIvbE99e6HTPdGHEdj5A/viewform?pli=1>

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# NEWS and events

## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

### Map Room Conversations: Geographies of Inequalities (RGS-IBG 2026)

At the 2024 Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) conference, a new type of session was trialled, focused on engagements with the Society’s map collections. The ‘Map Room Conversations’ allowed participants to introduce a selection of maps from the archive to conference attendees, explain their interest and interpretations, and then to engage in dialogue with delegates, before a concluding discussion on lessons learned (see Legg and Parker 2026). Paired speakers addressed shared themes including Indigeneity, race and internationalism, language, diaspora and objects. In this call for papers, we invite submission of proposals to engage with the Society’s map collections in relation to the conference theme of ‘Geographies of Inequalities’. These will involve maps which help us understand inequalities relating “to society, culture and politics, to the economy, and community, and to development, climate and the environment.” Examples could include:

- Maps as resources for “challenging, addressing and seeking to overturn inequalities and injustices”.
- Maps as tools for “making a difference beyond the academy, in informing policy or practice about specific inequalities or injustices, in engaging in activism, campaigning or advocacy work to resist or overcome injustices, in engaging diverse public audiences with such work, or in offering practical solutions to the challenges of inequalities.”
- How maps of past inequalities allow reflection on current and future challenges.
- Experimental forms of engagement with the collections (counter-mapping, digital reformations, etc.)

We are very keen to include people who have not worked on the map collections, or who have not done historical research, before but who are keen to see how the map collections might contribute to their work. If you have an idea, please get in touch and we can advise on collections that might be of interest. In addition, we invite applications that build upon knowledge of existing map collections as well as from those keen to further explore the collections they have worked with. We are also able to incorporate digital maps, in conversation with pieces from the collection. Successful applications will benefit from advice and support from Dr Katherine Parker (Cartographic Collections Manager at the Society), and may wish to search the RGS’s online catalogue; the ambition is to pair speakers with similar interests.

Please submit an abstract of c.200 words, your name and institutional affiliation, and a few lines on your broader interests to [stephen.legg@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.legg@nottingham.ac.uk) and [k.parker@rgs.org](mailto:k.parker@rgs.org) by **Wednesday 25th February**.



# NEWS and events

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### HistoryLab 20th Anniversary Annual Conference 2026 Embodied Histories: Body, Mind, and Experience

17th July 2026 | Hybrid Conference, in-person at University of Birmingham, Staff House, Grand Central Room

*The human body is both a biological reality and a cultural construct. It is a site of meaning, experience, and power. From rituals of health and healing to practices of regulation, discipline, and display, bodies have both shaped and been shaped by their historical contexts.*

*We invite papers that place the body and lived experience at the centre of historical inquiry, engaging with themes such as medicine, disability, gender, the senses, and the emotions. We welcome contributions that explore how bodies and experiences have been represented, regulated, or performed, and how these processes intersect with broader questions of identity, power, culture, and society across periods and regions.*

This conference also marks the 20th anniversary of HistoryLab. Since its founding, HistoryLab has provided a national platform for postgraduate and early career historians to share ideas, foster collaboration, and build community. We invite participants to join us in celebrating this milestone year.

Key questions include, but are not limited to:

- How have bodies and lived experience been represented, categorised, or idealised in historical sources?
- In what ways have identities, hierarchies, and power relations been inscribed, contested, or negotiated through the body?
- How have societies regulated, celebrated, or suppressed bodily experience?
- How can historians integrate perspectives on embodiment into broader social, cultural, political, or global histories?

**Call for papers deadline is 27th March.** For more information and to submit:  
<https://royalhistsoc.org/calendar/historylab-20th-anniversary-annual-conference-2026-embodied-histories-body-mind-and-experience-call-for-papers/>



## NEWS and events

### THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON (ZSL) AT 200

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) at 200: Science, Society, and the Natural World, 1-3 July 2026

Huxley Lecture Theatre, Zoological Society of London, London

This three-day international meeting, held in SHNH's 90<sup>th</sup> year, will mark the bicentenary of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and delve into its history and impact on our knowledge of the natural world. Founded in the age of empire and Enlightenment science, ZSL has shaped – and been shaped by – transformations in zoological knowledge, conservation practice, and human-animal relations. The bicentenary offers a timely opportunity to explore ZSL's history and to reflect on its legacy in Britain and beyond.

Find more information: <https://shnh.org.uk/all-events/call-for-papers-for-the-zsl-at-200-meeting-july-2026/>

### HISTORY AND ARCHIVES IN PRACTICE, 2026

Shaping Societies, Improving Lives: The Impact of Archives and Historical Research  
Where: Firth Court, University of Sheffield  
When: Thursday 16 April 2026 (9:00 – 17:30)

Archives shape and are shaped by the communities and societies in which they exist and serve. For HAP26 we're exploring the relationship between collections, researchers, practice and locality to consider how archives have the potential to challenge the status quo and initiate change through collaboration and co-production.

Register to attend: <https://lnkd.in/e9RMuSk8>

Find information on attendee bursaries: <https://lnkd.in/ei4AwFvE>

If you have any questions, please email: [research@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:research@nationalarchives.gov.uk).



# NEWS and events

## PASSING OF SEAMUS O'BRIEN

The renowned Head Gardener at the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh and author Seamus O'Brien died at his home in December 2025. He had recently given the 2025 Tree Register Lecture lecture on 'The Expeditions of Frank Kingdon Ward (1885-1958)' at the RGS in November. He was the author of *In the Footsteps of Joseph Dalton Hooker, a Sikkim Adventure* (2019), *In the Footsteps of Augustine Henry and his Chinese plant collectors* (2011), and was in the process of writing a new book on Frank Kingdon Ward.

## RHS PUBLIC HISTORY LECTURE

Tuesday 3 November 2026 at 6.00pm

This year's RHS Public History Lecture in November will be given by Sathnam Sanghera. In association with Gresham College, London. More details available soon: <https://royalhistsoc.org/rhs-events-programme-2026/>

## REVOLUTION 250: THE MAKING OF THE USA

The National Archives, 23 May 2026 until 29 November

The *Revolution 250: The Making of the USA* exhibition will feature some of the most significant letters, papers, maps and documents of that period, including a rare Dunlap print of the Declaration of Independence itself.

More details to follow soon: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/whats-on/>

## THE SINGH TWINS: BOTANICAL TALES AND SEEDS OF EMPIRE

Kew Gardens, open until 12 April 2026

*THE SINGH TWINS: Botanical Tales and Seeds of Empire* by internationally acclaimed artists The Singh Twins showcases a striking new body of work inspired by Kew's botanical archives.

This is accompanied by the exhibition *Flora Indica: Recovering the lost histories of Indian botanical art*, the first-ever public display of 52 rediscovered botanical illustrations by Indian artists commissioned by British botanists between 1790 and 1850. More details: <https://www.kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-on/singh-twins-flora-indica>



# NEWS and events

## LONDON GROUP OF HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHERS

### Seminar Programme, Spring Term 2026

The London Group of Historical Geographers is a seminar series hosted by the [Institute of Historical Research](#), University of London.

**24th February** Emma Martin (University of Manchester)

*The Empire's treasure house: diplomatic gifts, bureaucratic indifference and the erasure of provenance in colonial India*

In person (Basement, IHR) and online via Zoom

**10th March** Swati Chattopadhyay (University of California)

*Victoria Memorial Hall and the geo-logics of empire*

In person (Basement, IHR) and online via Zoom

Seminars are held on Tuesdays at 5.30pm. For further details, or to subscribe for notifications of future seminars please visit <https://lghgseminar.wordpress.com>.

## EMPIRES, PLANTS & GARDENING SEMINAR SERIES

The Gardens Trust, online via Zoom

This series picks up themes and ideas from the Gardens and Empires conference presented in June 2025 by English Heritage and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in association with the British Library. The series will focus on European empires and will examine their global impact and influence on plants and gardening.

**24 February:** 'What's in a Name?' Plant Nomenclature in 17th-Century France, with Jérôme Brillaud.

**3 March:** Legacies of Empire - The Royal Horticultural Society's Plant Collector Archive, with Fiona Davison and Sarah Easterby-Smith.

**10 March:** The Uprooted Empire - Epiphytes, Greenhouses and Hybrids in 19th-Century England, with Diego Molina.

For more details and to register: <https://thegardenstrust.org/gt-events/>



# NEWS and events

## LECTURE SERIES ON MAPS AND SOCIETY

THIRTY-FIFTH SERIES: 2025–2026

AT THE WARBURG INSTITUTE, University of London

**26th February** Bob Headland, Hakluyt Society Speaker (Scott Polar Research Institute):  
'Cartographical Conundrums and Antarctic Sovereignty'

**26th March** Mimi Cheng (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz):  
'Aesthetics and Authority in 19th Century Maps of China'

**7th May** Anthony Terry (Independent Researcher):  
'The Derrotero Ingles: Unravelling the Mysteries of an early 18th Century English  
Waggoner in Peru'

Lectures in the history of cartography are convened by Catherine Delano-Smith (Institute of Historical Research), Philip Jagessar (King's College London) and Alessandro Scafi (Warburg Institute). **Meetings are held on selected Thursdays at the Warburg Institute at 5.00 pm (admission is free) and are followed by refreshments.** All meetings are now hybrid: in-person attendance is strongly encouraged, for remote access see: <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/whats-on/maps-and-society-lecture-series>, or contact: [c.delano-smith@sas.ac.uk](mailto:c.delano-smith@sas.ac.uk)

Meetings are generously supported by the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association's Educational Trust and the International Map Collectors' Society.

## SCIENTIFIC PORTRAITS AND PORTRAITS FOR SCIENCE

**Friday 20 March, 9.30-17.00, in-person at the Royal Society and online**

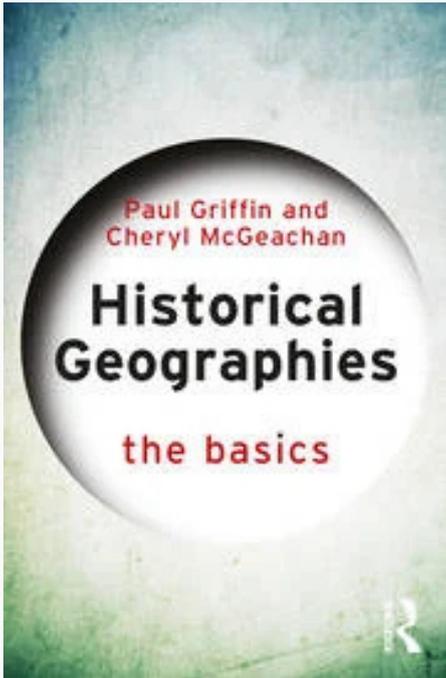
This one-day event looks at portraits of scientists, portraits created for scientific study, and portrait collections in academic and learned organisations. What was the significance to scientists in having their images recorded and displayed for posterity? How have portraits been created, used and collected by scientists in the course of their work? How are issues of diversity and Empire reflected in portrait collections?

**Registration is essential to attend in person. Find out more and book:**  
<https://royalsociety.org/science-events-and-lectures/2026/03/scientific-portraits/>



# New Books and Resources

## HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES: THE BASICS BY PAUL GRIFFIN AND CHERYL MCGEACHAN



The newly published *Historical Geographies: The Basics* provides readers with a thorough grounding in a sub-discipline that revisits the past through a geographical lens.

‘Writing this book felt an embodiment of the collaborative and collective spirit we have encountered across our historical geography journeys. We wanted to create a resource that we could use in the classrooms and with our PGR students, one that could spotlight and showcase the multiplicity of historical geographies that have inspired and motivated us. We hope this will be a useful starting point for people from a range of disciplines interested in historical geography and will encourage future conversations and collaborations.’  
-Paul Griffin and Cheryl McGeachan

Follow the HGRG for details of a possible upcoming book event.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY RESEARCH GUIDE

The National Archives has published a new research guide for Environmental History collections. The guide offers advice on searching for the following topics in the records at The National Archives:

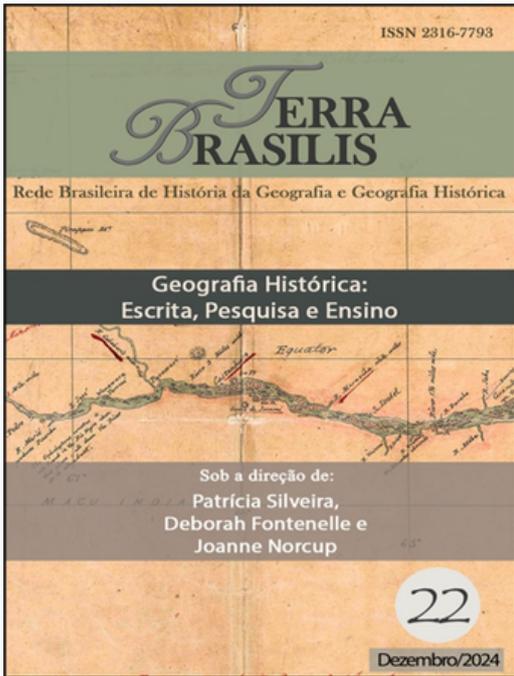
- Colonial environmental management
- Legislation on conservation, pollution, and climate change
- Water management
- Agriculture
- Conservation

Find out more and view here: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/environmental-history/>



# New Books and Resources

## JOURNAL SPECIAL ISSUE ON 'HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY: WRITING, RESEARCH AND TEACHING'



Last year a special issue of the Terra Brasilis Journal (vol.22) was published on the topic of 'Historical Geography: writing, research and teaching'. The multilingual issue has been guest-edited by Dr Patrícia Silveira, Deborah Fontenelle and Joanne Norcup. Proposing this special issue arose from long and animated conversations between the organisers about the distinct but also shared expanse of interest in Historical Geography research from their respective home countries.

The edition received fifteen contributions from scholars based in Brazil and in the UK, and these have been organised in five sections: Papers, Research Notes, Reviews, Bibliographic News and Reports. Available here:

<https://journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/15834>

## SEMINAR TO LAUNCH THE SPECIAL ISSUE AND CELEBRATE MAURICIO ABREU'S WORK

On December 2025 an event was organised at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) to launch the special issue dedicated to 'Historical Geography' (Terra Brasilis Journal) but also to celebrate the 15 years of the launch of the book 'Geografia Histórica do Rio de Janeiro, 1502-1700' (2010) ('Historical Geography of Rio de Janeiro') written by the Brazilian historical geographer Mauricio de Almeida Abreu. The seminar involved the editors of the Terra Brasilis Journal and also Abreu's colleagues, such as Dr Paulo César da Costa Gomes (UFRJ) and Dr Fania Fridman (IPPUR/UFRJ). More information about events and publications about Historical Geography in Brazil and Latin America, follow the Instagram page @geografiahistorica.



Image: Patrícia Silveira



# Archives in Focus

## SEEING UNDERGROUND: OBSERVATION AND COAL IN THE KHASI HILLS

Shreya Khaund, Warwick University and  
the RGS

“No scientific observer has to depend more on his own knowledge and faculty of observation, and less on instrumental appliances, than a geologist.”  
— W. T. Blanford, Hints to Travellers (1883)

In 1883, the geologist William Thomas Blanford (1832-1905) published practical advice for scientific travellers across the British Empire. A geologist, he insisted, required very little: a hammer, a pocket compass, a clinometer, a notebook and above all, trained eyes. Geology, he argued, depended less on instruments than on “the faculty of observation.”

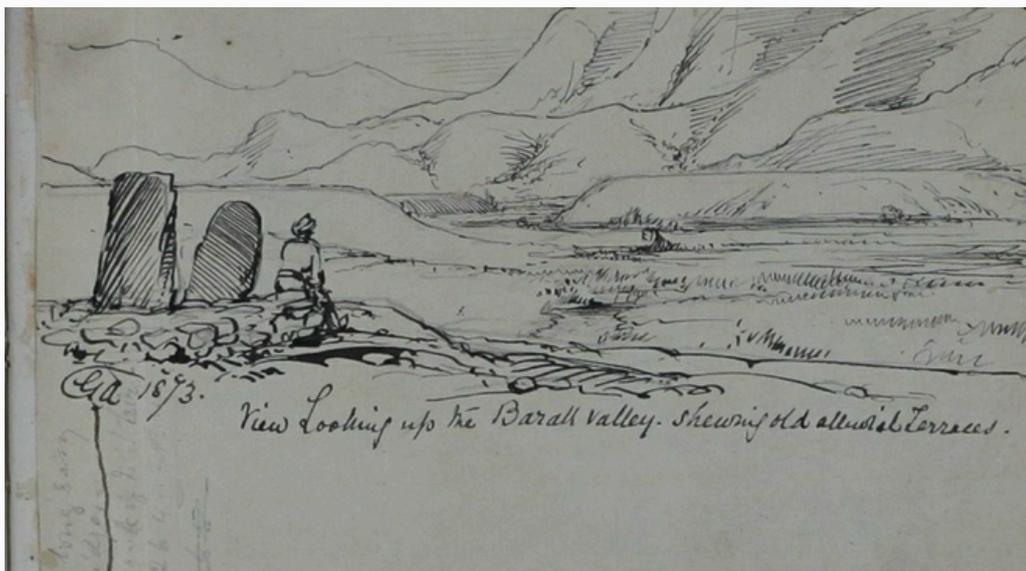
But what did it mean to observe something that lay underground?

Drawing on materials from the Royal Geographical Society collections, my research explores how British surveyors in nineteenth century colonial Assam, then part of the expanding northeastern frontier of British India, sought to render the subterranean world visible in their search for economically viable resources. I focus in particular on the Khasi Hills, a plateau region within colonial Assam that became a key site of coal exploration in the nineteenth century.

### Mapping Depth for Empire

By the mid nineteenth century, coal had become a central object of enquiry in geological surveys across Northeast India. The expansion of the Bengal railways and the growing reliance on river steamers made fossil fuel appear an attractive and comparatively inexpensive solution for powering imperial infrastructure. Surveys in the eastern Himalayan foothills were therefore strategic enterprises.

They generated new scientific knowledge through the study of rock strata and seismic activity, while also serving



A tour in Assam. H. H. Godwin Austen, Library Manuscripts, October 28, 1872.  
Source: Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)



economic ambitions by identifying coal deposits capable of sustaining an expanding imperial network.

In the 1860s, the geologist and surveyor Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen (1834-1923) undertook detailed geological work in the Khasi Hills. Travelling north to south across the hills, he examined metamorphic formations and coal bearing strata, attempting to determine both their composition and their commercial potential.

Unlike conventional cartography, geological surveying required vertical thinking. Coal seams could not simply be traced across the landscape. They had to be imagined in depth. Surveyors measured the angles of dipping rock beds and estimated the thickness of mineral seams, translating surface traces into projections of subterranean wealth.

Along the banks of the Umiyam River, Godwin Austen recorded irregular bedding and signs of erosion. He wrote of drawing “a line... between the lower and coarser beds, and the upper finer ones with coal.” Such distinctions relied heavily on ocular judgement, the trained ability to infer what lay beneath from what was visible above.

### **Improvising the Subsurface**

Blanford’s recommended toolkit was minimal, but even these instruments were not always sufficient. In one coal section, frustrated by what he considered exaggerated estimates of seam thickness, Godwin Austen abandoned standard measurement techniques. Instead, he began using a ten-foot pole:

“Well knowing how very wild some estimates have been, especially with regard to coal beds... I commenced here to take in the whole of the measurements with a 10 feet pole.”

Improvisation was not exceptional. It was the routine. Dense forest, heavy rainfall, and unstable rock exposures complicated systematic measurement. Geological knowledge emerged through adjustment, approximation, and embodied skill. What appears in official reports as precise scientific data was often produced under challenging and contingent conditions. Observation was as much negotiation with terrain as it was detached calculation.

### **Vertical Visions and Marginalised Knowledge**

Colonial geological surveys privileged depth. Value was imagined vertically, embedded in deeper strata. Coal demanded a volumetric imagination. The Khasi Hills were not devoid of mineral practices before colonial intervention. Local communities mined iron and copper and extracted iron by washing granite sand beds along riverbanks. However, the techniques used by local communities worked horizontally, drawing value from shallow deposits rather than deep seams.

When colonial surveyors encountered existing mining practices, they relied on local labour and expertise even as they reframed extraction through a different logic. Depth based mining was presented as scientific and profitable. Yet the underground could never be separated from the surface world. Rivers, forests, and human labour shaped what could be known and extracted.

### **Forests Above, Coal Below**

Godwin Austen’s accounts vividly describe the ecological entanglements of geology and forest. Limestone outcrops were entwined with roots and creepers:

“Huge cable like creepers hung suspended... while canes and ferns formed the under



wood, and flourished in the dark vegetable mould of this damp virgin forest.” Dense foliage frequently obscured geological formations. To regain perspective, Godwin Austen instructed local guides to construct maichans, observational platforms built high in tree trunks. From fifty feet above ground, he could finally “command the sea of waving foliage.” From these elevated vantage points, he described the landscape as “entering another world.” Ravines and eroded limestone appeared “extraordinary” and “fantastically eaten away.” Geological description blended measurement with wonder. The subterranean was processed not only scientifically but aesthetically. Forests, rivers, and labour were not peripheral to geological knowledge. They were integral to it.

### **Seeing What Cannot Be Seen**

Colonial understandings of the subterranean were never produced by vision alone. They depended on improvised tools, ecological negotiation, aesthetic interpretation, and embodied skill. When surveyors claimed to “see” underground, they were translating surface clues into anticipatory visions of mineral wealth. Observation was not passive recording. It was imaginative projection shaped by imperial priorities and constrained by environmental realities. The geological surveys of the Khasi Hills reveal both the ambition and the instability of colonial science. To map the underground was to grapple constantly with opacity, uncertainty, and the limits of vision. In tracing these practices through the RGS collections, we gain insight not only into the history of coal extraction in Northeast India, but into the broader question of how empires sought to make the unseen legible.

## **WORKING ACROSS BORDERS: TRANSNATIONAL ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AT KEW GARDENS**

**Mariana Lamego, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro**

This short report reflects on my experience conducting archival research at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, between April and September 2023, as part of the project “Transnational Academic Mobility and Knowledge Networks: Geographical Research and Collaboration between Britain and Brazil”, funded by the British Academy, during my period as a British Academy Visiting Fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London in collaboration with Professor Felix Driver.

As a Brazilian woman historical geographer working in a British archive on the work of Monica Cole (1922-1994), a leading British biogeographer who carried out extensive fieldwork in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century, my research unfolded across multiple geographical and institutional boundaries. The experience highlighted both the transnational character of geographical knowledge production and the importance of personal archives for historical research. In what follows, I reflect on this experience through two lenses: international academic mobility and the role of Kew as a repository for personal research archives. Accustomed to researching mostly in institutional archives and newspaper libraries, I found that my encounter with Monica Cole’s personal archive became a process of methodological discovery, at once challenging and deeply stimulating. During this five-month period, I undertook weekly research visits to Kew,



which houses a large and, at the time, largely uncatalogued archive of Monica Cole's documents. My research focused on Cole's two major fieldwork periods in Brazil, in 1956 and 1965. Cole's work was deeply entangled with Brazilian landscapes and institutions, foregrounding the transnational nature of geographical archival research. The material held at Kew reveals how transnational academic mobility and personal networks shaped geographical knowledge in both Brazil and the UK, while also drawing attention to the uneven geographies through which such knowledge circulates and is preserved. These transnational dynamics are materially anchored in the very structure and organisation of Cole's personal archive at Kew. Monica Cole's archive is housed there by her own decision. During her lifetime, she was a major contributor to Kew's botanical collections and wished to have her personal research papers deposited there after her death. The archive arrived in several deposits between 1994 and 2009 and today comprises more than 200 archival boxes, along with her botanical materials. The collection includes a wide range of documents, such as field notebooks, research and teaching materials, personal papers, and an extensive photographic archive containing prints, contact sheets, negatives and glass slides. Many of these materials arrived in their original boxes, carefully organised and labelled by Cole herself, often marked with her initials "MMC". Numerous folders include handwritten index cards describing their contents. This attentive practice of self-archiving proved crucial for navigating the collection and interpreting the materials Cole consciously chose to preserve. As Philippe Artières (1998) has

noted, such practices reveal an autobiographical intention embedded in the act of preserving one's own papers. Once at Kew, I found out that the boxes had not been opened for research since their deposit. This fact accompanied me throughout the five months of archival work, producing a mixture of excitement and apprehension. The abundance and heterogeneity of the archive transformed the research process into a series of methodological decisions, as engaging with such a volume of material required strategies of selection, navigation and interpretation (Jake Hodder, 2017). Because material related to Brazil was dispersed throughout the collection (albeit systematically organised by Cole) the support of Professor Felix Driver was fundamental. Drawing on his familiarity with the Kew collections, he helped identify and pre-select materials related to Cole's work in Brazil, enabling more focused and efficient navigation of the archive. The experience of working with Cole's personal archive at Kew highlights the importance of institutions that preserve and provide access to the work of individual researchers. For scholars working across transnational contexts, such archives not only offer invaluable empirical sources, but also enable reflections on research practices, scientific authority and the spatialities of knowledge production. In this sense, Kew functions not only as a botanical and scientific institution, but also as a key site for historical and geographical research, enabling encounters across disciplines, places and generations while shaping my own understanding of archival research as a situated, positioned and transnational practice.



## CASA DE DETENÇÃO DA CORTE (THE COURT'S DETENTION CENTER) – ARQUIVO PÚBLICO DO ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO (PUBLIC ARCHIVE OF THE STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO)

### Deborah da Costa Fontenelle

According to its website, the Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro “aims to implement the state archive’s policy defined by the State Archives Council - CONEARQ, through the management, collection, technical processing, preservation and dissemination of the state's documentary heritage, guaranteeing full access to information in order to support public administration and governmental decision-making of a political-administrative nature, the citizen in the defense of their rights and to encourage the production of scientific and cultural knowledge”.

Among its files are the documents concerning the Court’s Detention Center, between 1861 and 1901. The Detention Center was part of a bigger complex known as the Court’s Correction Center, which began to function in 1850. While the Correction Center was destined for prisoners with long-term sentences already settled by justice, the Detention Center, opened in 1856, had as main purpose to hold individuals who “(...) had not yet been convicted or who had committed minor offenses without punishment. It was primarily used for short-term detentions” (Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro).

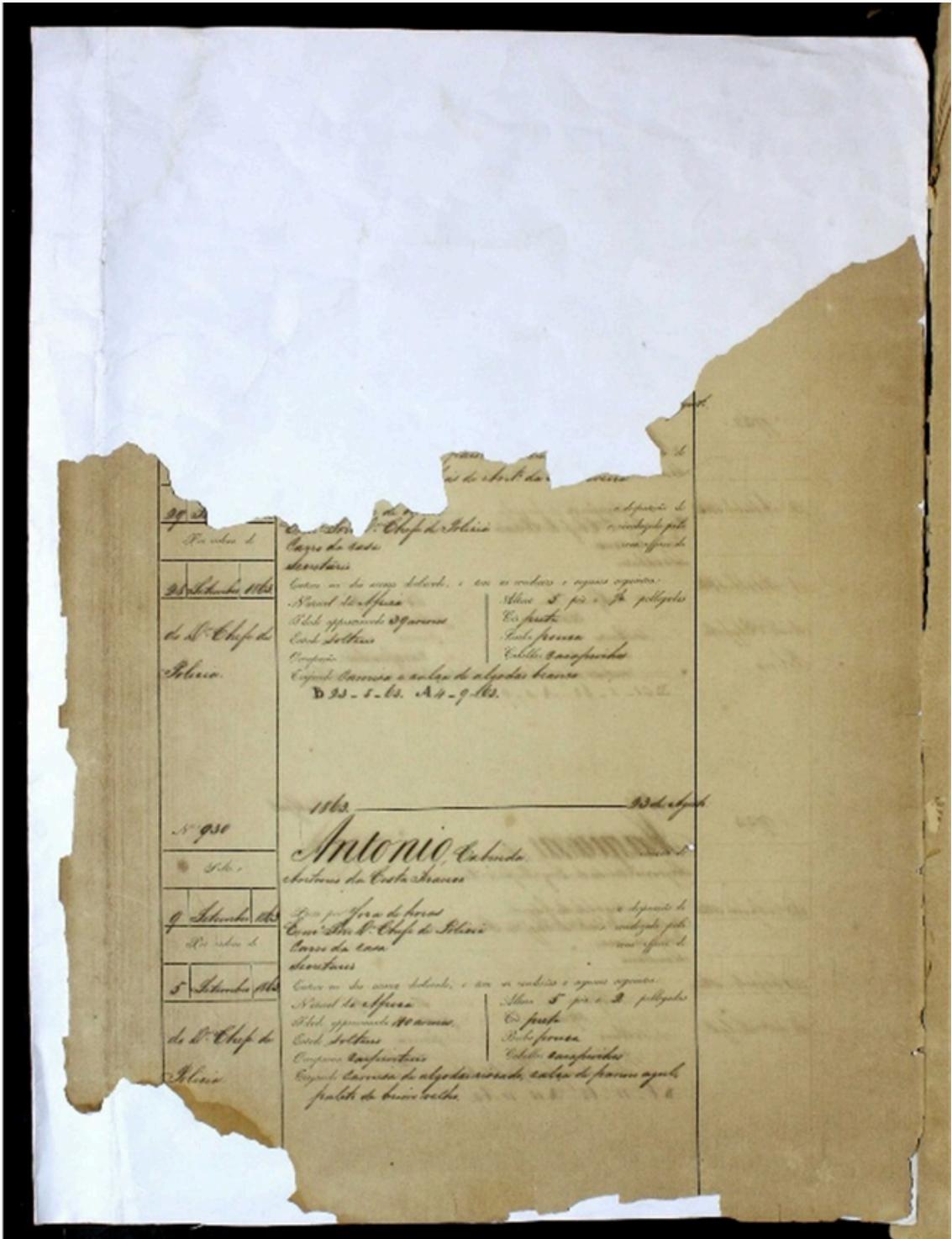
The Court’s Detention Center held control of their prisoners by filling out a file at the time that each person entered the prison. The file contained information such as

name, parents’ name (in case of being free people) or owners (when were enslaved people), reason for the arrest, district of the arrest, place of birth, age, local of residence, color, occupation, marital status, height, clothing and other physical characteristics such as face, eyes, beard and hair.

As an example, the image below corresponds to a scan of page 1 of the Register of Enslaved Prisoners from the Court’s Detention Center. This record serves as an initial illustration of how information was provided upon entry into the prison. It shows that there were three registers per page. Later, records become more detailed, with two registers per page. There is also a difference between those who are enslaved and those who are free or freed. We can see yellowed paper, with torn parts, missing about half of the page. In what remains of the page, we can see one of the three registers that existed per page. This is the entry record of Antonio, Cabinda, 40 years old, arrested for "being out of time".

By observing this file it’s possible to notice that information is very concise and objective. Sometimes it is hard even to understand the reason for the arrest. Therefore, it’s important to analyse this archive in combination with other archives, such as press and law, for example. By crossing references, we can obtain more information about the arrest and, perhaps, better understand the context that it happened.

(C) Christoph Haefliger



Source: Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro



# Practising Historical Geography

## POROUS ARCHIVES: the 30th and 31st Practising Historical Geography conferences (2024/2025)

By Dr Paul Wright, Newcastle University

The 2024 and 2025 Practising Historical Geography conferences (both held at Newcastle University) shared the theme of "Porous Archives", which was conceived as a critical exploration of research practices that allow archive collections and contents to become less "finished". A Porous Archive approach is one that goes further than a researcher's self-contained consulting of archives, and considers instead how to creatively turn archived things to face onto and roam through contemporary worlds in porous, unfinished, many-peopled ways. Looking back on previous Practising Historical Geography conferences, you can see that how geographers understand, use, and critically unfold archives (and archiving) is a recurring feature of interest. If you need further evidence of how much archives matter, then there are two collections in HGRG's own research series that engage with this subject - "Practising the Archive" (2007) does so directly and "Collaborative Geographies" (2013) has an archival thread running through it - more recently a fascinating special issue of the Journal of Historical Geography, "Archives as Worldmaking" explores how archives and acts of archiving are not simple repositories about the world, but rather, function as motive forces for geopolitical imaginaries that make the world. Porous Archives is, therefore, a further

recurrence of our interest in archives, where that interest is not only because archives corral treasures we might want to dive into (and where we must problematise "corralling", "wanting" and "diving"), but also because archives roam through everyday geographies in meaningful ways which our presenters in 2024/2025 recognised and, in some cases, instigated. In 2018, Briony McDonagh (then the Chair of HGRG) quoted Simon Naylor in saying that Historical Geography was in rude health. Judging by the papers received for Porous Archives that remains the case in 2024 and 2025. But staying healthy is especially important right now, given how many health problems there are to navigate in UK Higher Education as it stumbles through a post-pandemic context of redundancies, hiring freezes, expenditure cuts, increasing marketisation and brutal workloads. In this context, small but meaningful opportunities for critical explorations are much needed restoratives: the Practising Historical Geography conference series has now fulfilled this function for thirty-one years. Details of the thirty-second conference will follow later in 2026 but for now, the eleven papers from 2024 and 2025 are summarised below.

Whilst this concludes the Porous Archives themed conferences, this is not the end of Porous Archives as an interest - we're exploring reading/writing groups and, moreover, publication opportunities to make the most of the contributions so far and any that may yet follow, and you are welcome to read more on this and register your interest here, or contact the conference officer, Paul, at [paul.wright3@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:paul.wright3@ncl.ac.uk).



Papers presented, with sincere thanks to all our speakers:

**Dr Ana Laura Zavala Guillen**

(Northumbria University Newcastle):

Opening the 2024 conference with "Affective (Visceral) Fugitive Archives", this moving analysis (and compelling co-production) expands Ana's work on cimarronaje de archivo (archival marronage) and the creation of visceral, collaborative archives that retell the experiences of fugitive women who escaped slavery under Portuguese imperial rule in Brazil to Argentina and Uruguay, and importantly, this paper reflects on how that retelling was led by Black female artists who are descendants of those fugitives.

**Jason Irving** (University of Kent): A lavishly illustrated paper replete with detailed archival work analysing the particular geographies of nature, race, and colonialism that intersect in planting and possessing by European colonisers, in this case of Logwood grown in Jamaica c.1655-1720.

**Dr Paul Griffin** (Northumbria University Newcastle): Not visiting archives, not reading archives, not researching in archives, but encountering archives, this paper probed how archives should be refigured as encounters, and how through this refiguration we can understand the combination of labour, collaboration, and relationships that intersect the (sometimes assumed) modes of analysis we employ in archives.

**Farhan Anshary** (Newcastle University): Faced with large scale rural to urban internal migration in the 1970's, Indonesia

prohibited jobless migrants from moving to urban areas - a phenomenon largely unheard of elsewhere in the world. The remembering of these restrictions require drawing on difficult archives in terms of being privately owned, or un-organised, or both, and this paper considers how this inflects the narrative of the research.

**Dr Paul Wright** (Newcastle University): One way to a porous archive is to "export" archival material so that it can be shared between, scribbled on, narrated, and re-ordered by, in this case, volunteer researchers reviewing the diary of a First World War munitions worker, but in this retrospective analysis, imaging, collating, printing, and distributing this material created a new, flat, papery, note-centric and semi disposable "exploded habitus", very different to the original setting for the material, and with implications for the research that resulted.

**Dr Ivan Markovich** (Durham University): Recounting the archival journeys that contributed to Ivan's recent book, "An Atmospheric History of Smoking in Modern Britain", which we were privileged to hear before its publication in 2025 (Bloomsbury).

**Dr Dan Bos** (University of Chester): Opening the 2025 conference was a reflection of a project which combined art, photography, and cultural geography to reanimate the archival traces of tourist experiences on Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), Wales, especially the 19th-century visitor books once held in summit huts atop Yr Wyddfa, and the practices and process of documenting and reanimating such archival materials in public exhibitions.

**Dr Ben Newman and Dr Colin Lorne** (Open University): During this workshop Ben and



Colin shared a small collection of (scanned) materials from the Stories-so-far: Doreen Massey archive project, many from Doreen's more recent work on the Kilburn Manifesto. This was a significant privilege, and a brilliant opportunity to actively practise some of the emerging tenets of Porous Archives by directly engaging with the previously unreleased papers of a truly public intellectual and deeply political geographical scholar. We hope to write this up in more detail soon on the [Porous Archives](#) microsite.

**Colin Fuchs** (Open University), William Kutz and Henrik Gutzon Larsen (Lund University): The International Dialogue Project (IDP) is a curiously forgotten initiative given the current scholarly interest in 'dialogue'. Initiated by Anne Buttmer and Torsten Hägerstrand at Lund University in 1978, the IDP produced over 150 video-recorded conversations with researchers, artists and practitioners. This now forms a compelling archive of how knowledge may move and endure in dialogic encounter, and this paper further reflects aims to return some of the IDP's lost vocabulary to the present.

**Quiran Song** (University of Warwick): The evolution of Central Asia's geospatial structure is marked by the South-North Tie (S-N Tie), underpinned by interactions between nomads and sedentary populations, and the East-West Tie (E-W Tie) which emerged as nomadic groups entered Central Asia in succession from the East Eurasian Steppes. This paper recognised that the early regional geography here has, as an important feature, the interdependent rise-and-fall dynamics among Eurasian nomadic groups and reciprocity between nomads and peasants.

**Olalekan Ojumu** (Archivi.ng): Abstract: [Archivi.ng](#) aim to compile a complete collection of independence speeches for a public storytelling project on governance and national memory in Nigeria, but as a wholly new digital archive their own story is defined by a nine-month search across Nigeria's fragmented archival landscape, assembling isolated transcripts, deteriorating documents and unlabelled audio reels. These encounters revealed the degree to which Nigerian state archives operate as porous systems shaped by institutional discontinuity, personal discretion, staff memory, and chronic underfunding, and the independence speeches emerge as unfinished objects as a result, reshaped by loss, recovery, and interpretive labour.