

Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



- **New partnerships: new perspectives**
- **Project review**



Foreword

Opposite

Children during creative workshops in Harrow
Afghan Partnership

Once the rooms of the Royal Geographical Society echoed with male Victorian and Edwardian voices announcing new geographical 'discoveries' made, lands mapped and encounters with the people of Africa and Asia. It was from the Society that the geographers of the 19th and early 20th century set out to bring back new geographical understanding to quench the British public's thirst for new knowledge about the world.

In recent years our rooms have resounded not only with researchers, students, the public and policymakers but also with new and different voices, including those of Punjabi ex-servicemen, Afghan teenagers, Chinese children and East African women. It has been through these voices that we have revealed new discoveries, mapped new relationships and re-encountered our shared geographical and cultural histories with modern and inclusive accents.

Through our *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project we have rediscovered our geographical Collections, bringing new relevance and new meaning to some of our 2 million maps, photographs and documents dating back many hundreds of years. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund,

Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation, John Lyon's Charity and with specific support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families for our Afghan strand, our three year programme has developed new exhibitions and education resources through partnerships with the Afghan, East African, Chinese, and Punjabi communities.

Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities also helps to advance the Society's work in highlighting and promoting the importance of geography in the 21st century. Through geography everyone can understand more fully the world's people, places and environments, and how and why they are changing. Our work, as one of the leading learned societies, takes us into schools and universities and connects us with policy makers and the public.

Once it was the blanks on the world map that motivated people to travel to seemingly distant lands. Today very few, if any, uncharted blanks on the map remain. Now it is the search for understanding of the processes that shape and change our world and of different perceptions of that world that inspire new intellectual and physical journeys. As illustrated in the following pages, through the *Crossing Continents:*

Connecting Communities project we have encountered new insights which add to the landscape of our geographical understanding.

The Society has been delighted to share our geographical Collections with our community partners. However, the real source of joy has been to witness the shared perspectives that have brought contemporary relevance to our historic items and widened understanding of others' views. We may not yet know the final destination of any future 'learning journeys' into our Collections. However, what we do know is that the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project has ensured that these will now be shared journeys on which we will embark together.

Dr Rita Gardner CBE

Director
Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Introduction

In 2004, the Society's historical collection of maps, photographs, books, journals, documents and objects became fully accessible to the public through the Heritage Lottery Fund supported *Unlocking the Archives* programme. This programme provided a new exhibition pavilion and Foyle Reading Room, alongside online access to the Society's Collections and accompanying educational activities. It was followed in 2005 by the Designation of the Society's Collections, this recognition identifies pre-eminent collections of national and international importance held in England. The opportunity to use our Collections in partnership with a wider range of audiences was highlighted within the award of Designation, the Society's citation noting,

"the wider cultural significance of the collection is fully demonstrated in the application. The collections... offer a unique access point to the understanding of cultural exchange and encounters around the world. Commitment to broadening audiences... is evident."

In 2006, a three year programme entitled *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* was launched to increase public awareness and interaction with our collection. This project was supported by

the Heritage Lottery Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and John Lyon's Charity with additional support from the Department for Children, Schools and Families for the Afghan strand.

The programme aimed to increase access for communities to whom the Collections directly related. The Society also wanted to draw wider public attention to the Collections, develop educational activities and to promote greater understanding of our shared geographies and histories. The *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* programme addressed these objectives by creating a series of exhibitions and education resources around four geographical and cultural themes, each related to the Afghan, Chinese, East African and Punjabi communities in the UK.

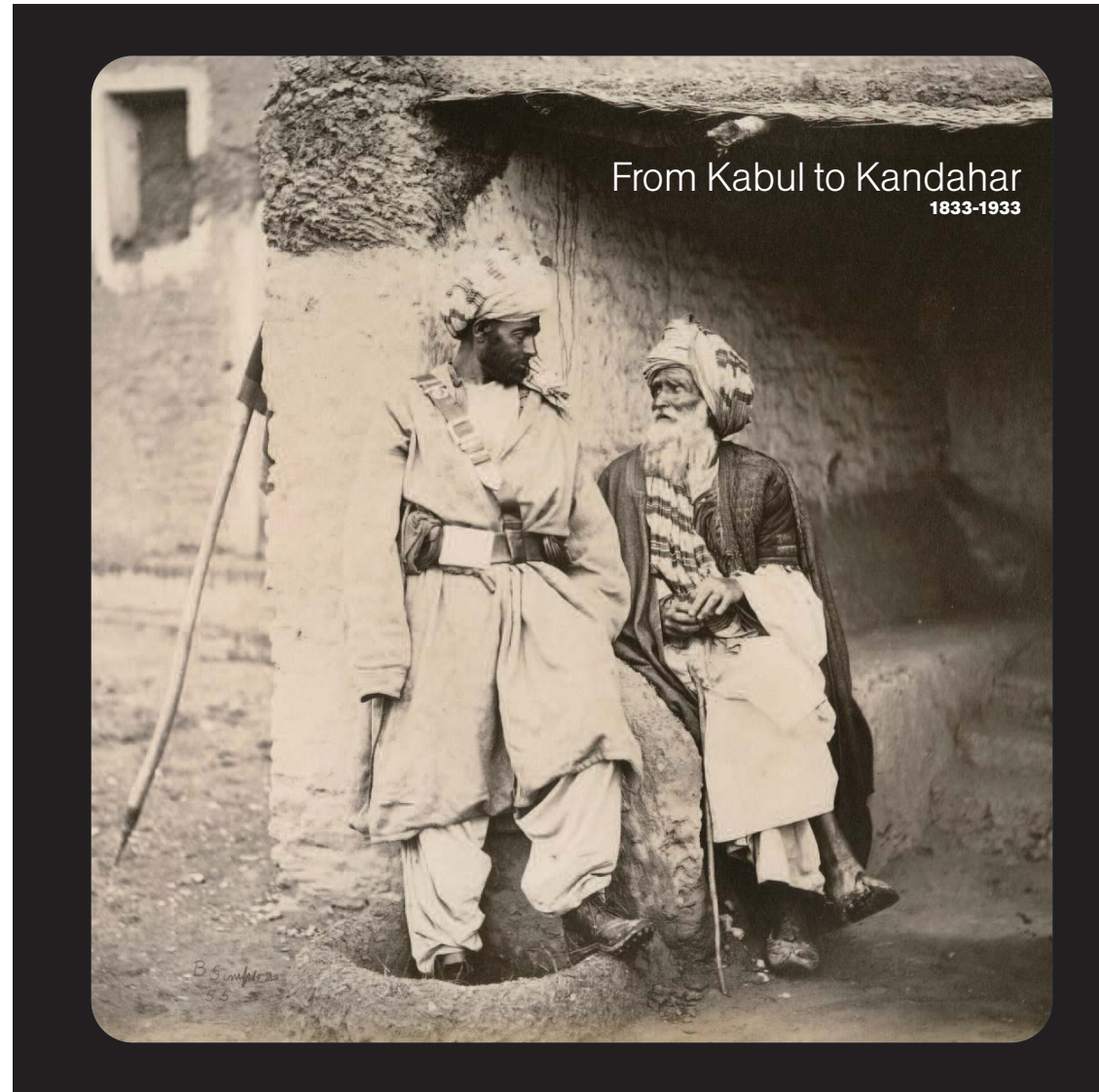
Community consultation for the development of the programme was at the core of all activities. A total of twenty community partners, with cultural ties to the four themes, took part in consultation workshops. They provided personal reflections on the Collections which shaped the development and content of the exhibitions. The exhibitions were accompanied by talks and 'showcase' events during which original items were

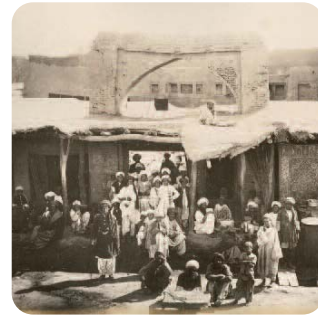
available to view at the Society. In addition, the exhibitions toured education, community and cultural venues across the UK, and also internationally.

Education resources for primary and secondary school pupils were created for formal and informal teaching settings. Online resources for Key Stage 2 and 3 geography, history and citizenship teaching, available via www.unlockingthearchives.rgs.org, and hardcopy packs with content suitable for informal teaching in supplementary schools were developed to link to the exhibitions. In addition, the Society also hosted creative education workshops during the presentation of the exhibitions.

This partnership approach was new to the Society and proved to be a challenging, yet rewarding process that saw many other unexpected and welcome outcomes. This publication provides an overview of the programme and reveals the dedication and contribution of the community partners, workshop facilitators, specialists, researchers, academics and Society staff during the course of the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project.

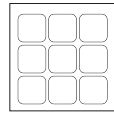
Vandana Patel
Project Coordinator
Harpreet Kaur Sanghera
Project Education Officer



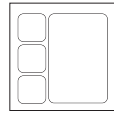




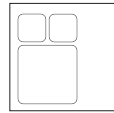
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Horse dealers, Kandahar
B Simpson 1881



4
Jeweller's shop in a bazaar
B De Card c.1930
Sarikis Turkoman women, Maruchak, 1933
Group of Hazaras, Kandahar
Ahmed Shah's Tomb, Kandahar
In the streets of Kandahar
B Simpson 1881
Belocche's in the Bolan Pass
Street in the bazaar, Canbul
J Atkinson 1842
Ayaub's ambassadors
Char Su, Kandahar
B Simpson 1881

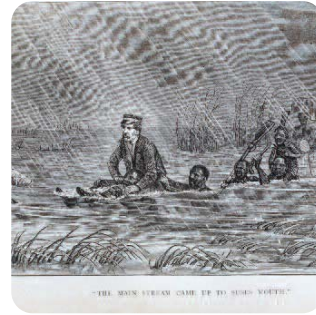
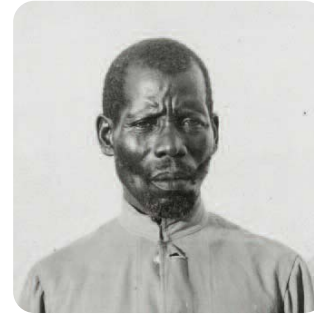


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Ramsay taking photos
TR J Ward 1903
Mosque at Baber's tomb, Kabul
GTVigne 1836
In the streets of Kandahar
B Simpson 1881
Dr Gray and Armenian interpreter
Van derWyde 1895



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Children during creative
workshops in Harrow
Afghan Partnership







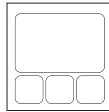
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A Livingstone, T Livingstone,
A Susi, J Chuma and
Rev. H Waller, Nottingham
R Allen and Sons 1874



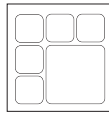
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Liberation by the Royal Navy
T Baines 1859
Sidi Mubarak Bombay
J A Grant 1860
Uganda railway
R E Critchley 1907-18
Mathew Wellington, c.1930



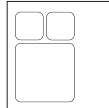
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Mazagon Hill, Bombay
Francis Frith & Co. 1883
Mathew Wellington
W McGregor Ross 1910
Joseph Thomson,
James Chuma (left)
and Makatubu
Rev. J B Thomson 1896
'The main stream came
up to Susi's mouth'
D Livingstone 1857
Moobarik (Mubarak) Bombay
James Chuma
Maul & Co. c.1874



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Bombay Africans 1850-1910
exhibition, 2007
Workshop at the Society
Workshop in Enfield
East African Partnership



Programme development and outcomes

The four partnership strands developed into the exhibitions and education resources listed below:

Afghan Partnership

Exhibition: *From Kabul to Kandahar 1833-1933*
Education Resources: Afghanistan – Moving Stories (online)

Chinese Partnership

Exhibition: *Seeing China: Community Reflections*
Education Resources: China – Snapshots in Time (online) and Seeing China – Snapshots of the Past and Present (pack)

East African Partnership

Exhibition: *Bombay Africans 1850-1910*
Education Resources: Encounters – Images of Empire (online), Kenya – A Changing Nation (online) and Stories from East Africa (pack)

Punjab Partnership

Exhibition: *The Punjab: Moving Journeys*
Education Resources: India – Pictures of the Past (online) and Pictures of the Punjab (pack)

Community partnerships

Community partners were primarily London based and had not had contact with the Society before. Our partners were:

- Afghan Association of London, Harrow
- Afghan Association of London Supplementary School, Harrow
- Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail
- Brondesbury College for Boys, Brent, London
- Camden Chinese Community Centre Youth Group, London
- Cartwright Hall Young Ambassadors, Bradford
- Chinese National Healthy Living Centre, London
- Congolese Community in the UK
- Friends of Maasai People, London
- Ghanaian Elders Group & Black Cultural Archives, London
- King's Cross Neighbourhood Centre, London (Chinese Adults & Children's group)
- Lancaster Youth Group, Ladbrooke Grove, London

- Muslim Women's Welfare Association, Ilford
- North Hertfordshire Sikh Education Council
- Obay Supplementary School, London
- Sangat Group, London
- Soho Family Centre, London
- Tanzanian Women's Association, London
- UK Punjab Heritage Association
- The Undivided India Ex-Servicemen's Association

The development of community partnerships was an integral part of the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project. Community partners contributed to the project from the beginning and assisted with short-listing items from the Collections for use during workshops with their groups. The Society also commissioned specialists from the community such as journalists, museum professionals and oral historians to carry out detailed research into the Collections and to provide an essay outlining items of interest and key themes that resonated with them. Themes for each partnership were left 'open' and only determined after all community consultation workshops had taken place.

Community partners took part in a series of workshops, a total of 60 workshops were led by 13 experienced facilitators, often from the same cultural background as the groups. All sessions were recorded enabling the Society's team and external advisors, such as invited academics, specialists and community coordinators, to review and develop further the themes and issues that arose during discussions.

Workshops ranged in style and content and were dependent on the age and interests of the groups. Children focussed on creative responses through performance poetry, photography and drama workshops. These workshops, which covered themes such as enslavement, war, independence and identity were developed into short films to accompany the exhibitions.

Reminiscence workshops with adults provided invaluable commentary that was used to guide the development of exhibitions and included within the accompanying interpretative panels. The historic Collections triggered discussions covering complex issues and emotive memories from the early recollections of arrival in England as immigrants, to the exploration of 'homelands', national histories and British identities. This commentary provided unique and alternative interpretative voices; revealing stories of hardship, acceptance and pride. Inaccuracies within the Society's Collections catalogue were also highlighted through this process; places and landmarks were correctly relocated, dates questioned and rare items identified, enriching the Society's own curatorial understanding of the materials.

Exhibitions

Each exhibition was displayed at the Society for a period of two months. Over 26,000 visitors viewed the exhibitions at the Society during the project period. Approximately 25% of these visitors were from culturally diverse backgrounds and the majority had not visited the Society before. The comments book provided a space for them to reflect on the exhibits and add to the debates that they had observed. The exhibitions provoked a wide range of responses; gratitude for unknown histories being revealed and for complex issues being raised, as well as interest in the educational role of the exhibits and the topical nature of some of the subject matter prompted many visitor comments which included the following:

"Excellent! I never in a 1000 years thought I would witness such history of the Punjab here – being a Punjabi this is so enlightening."

"Thank you for going to the trouble to put this unique exhibition together. My father served in the Punjab Frontier Force Rifles (Piffers) during World War I and held a life-long love of the country and respect for its soldiers. Fascinating history."

"With a son serving in Afghanistan this was a fascinating insight into the terrain and customs of the country."

"What a surprise – sometimes there is something that connects memory, history and emotion... just like the maps I see today."

"I am British, but have lived for most of the last 10 years in China and Malaysia – so it is interesting to see the 'reverse' perspective of the Chinese who have made their home here."

"I would like these stories to reach many more people – especially the generation of my children and grandchildren who know very little. You don't know who you are until you know where you come from."

"What hits me is what would be the motivation for the men to carry and look after Livingstone? They were carrying guns and could have overpowered him at any time."

"Knowledge is certainly power! I have often wondered how explorers like David Livingstone were able to navigate themselves to all the unknown places in Africa. It still baffles me why historians of the day choose to neglect to tell us these little known histories. Thank you for taking the time to share, more people should see this exhibition!"

Touring exhibition programme

"Excellent and informative. It's great for education and I will recommend my local library service obtain this exhibition for its gallery spaces."

Visitor comment

All the exhibitions toured regionally and were provided free of charge to educational, community and library venues. The four exhibitions were shown in 36 venues and were viewed by c. 35,000 visitors. Venues include Edinburgh University Library, the Centre for Global and Development Education, Somerset, Walsall Town Hall and Cartwright Hall, Bradford. Many schools have borrowed the exhibitions and used them in conjunction with their accompanying online resources. Teachers have reported that they have used the exhibitions across subject areas, illustrating that the subject matter need not necessarily be confined to geography, history and citizenship. The exhibitions will be online from June 2009 at www.unlockingthearchives.rgs.org.

International interest in the exhibitions was an unexpected welcome addition and led to reproductions of the *Bombay Africans 1833-1933* exhibition to tour Kenyan Museums in 2008 and *The Punjab: Moving Journeys* exhibition embarking on a year long tour of four Lahore based Universities in 2009.

"The exhibition engaged a wide audience with an interesting subject matter in a stimulating and accessible format. Hopefully this triggered greater interest in both geography and African studies, as well as the history of the Bombay Africans themselves."

Lecturer, University of Edinburgh

Education resources and activities

"These resources and the exhibition provided stimulating and relevant content for my lessons in year 7."

Geography teacher, St Columba's School.

Each strand of the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project developed linked education resources for Primary and Secondary school pupils and included online resources for use at Key Stage 2 and 3, education packs for use in supplementary schools and onsite workshops for pupils exploring the key themes raised within the exhibitions.

Online education resources were developed by the Society Project Education Officer and teachers. The resources include fact sheets, downloadable activities and galleries that enable teachers and students to access the Society's Collections and explore them as part of geography, history and citizenship curricula. Over 44,000 users have accessed the website to utilise the teaching resources and materials.

www.unlockingthearchives.rgs.org

"I used the *Bombay African* stories for all my Key Stage 3 assessments."

Dance teacher, St Columba's School.

Printed education packs have been produced specifically for use in supplementary schools, as many do not have online access. The packs include images and maps from the Society's Collections and are intended to supplement and extend elements of the Key Stage 2 and 3 history, geography and citizenship curricula. Packs developed include: *Stories from East Africa*, *Seeing China – Snapshots of the Past and Present* and *Pictures of the Punjab*.

"Beautiful, high quality visual materials which are not easy to find."

Lord William School, Oxfordshire

"Very interesting and engaging resources which challenge children to think."

St Cutbert and St Matthias Primary School

Onsite schools workshops for pupils aged from 7 to 14 accompanied each of the exhibitions. A total of 1680 pupils from 55 schools attended creative workshops with professional workshop facilitators including poet Sundra Lawrence, storytellers Anna Katama and Jan Blake and drama tutor Kumiko Mendl from The Yellow Earth Theatre Company. Sessions were developed to explore themes, ideas and concepts raised within exhibitions and included poetry activities based on the Society's Afghanistan collections; storytelling and drama workshops exploring the inspirational tales of the *Bombay Africans*; drama and discussion workshops exploring China's past and the Three Gorges Dam project; creative writing and drama sessions exploring the partition of India and its repercussions on the country and its peoples.

"The children loved the artefacts and really enjoyed looking at real pictures. The children were really interested in the topic (partition) because of the empathy they felt for the people. I am hoping to base our class assembly on the work we did."

Teacher, Hallfield Junior School

"I thought the outing would be a bit boring, but it turned out brilliantly and now I love geography... it was a truly wonderful experience."

Pupil, Norbury School

"Students from Africa and their parents were fascinated with the information."

Teacher, Mapledown School

Additional partnerships

The development of the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project has brought with it many new partnerships, some planned whilst others were unexpected. The media played a part in the international attention the project has received, bringing forth queries from academics, museums, writers and individuals worldwide.

From Kabul to Kandahar 1833-1933 proved to be topical and the BBC website featured two online galleries showing a selection of collection items. Organisations in Kabul are looking into developing an exhibit using the Society's Collections based on research carried out for this strand.

The *Bombay Africans 1850-1910* aroused interest in academic circles and resulted in two papers being delivered at international conferences. The *Bombay Africans* also featured in a book, *Smoke Othello* by novelist Vanessa Walters; the Black and Asian Studies Association *Newsletter 49* (which marked the bicentenary of the abolition of the British Slave Trade) featured a showcase of poetry produced by members of Lancaster Youth Group and each of the *Bombay Africans* was also provided with a *Facebook* profile and they now have a number of virtual friends. A copy of the exhibition was also donated to the Kenyan Museums service. *Time Out Mumbai* featured an article which was later followed up by a talk in Mumbai by Clifford Pereira, consultant on the exhibition.

Artists Grace Lau and Anthony Key agreed to the inclusion of their artwork in the *Seeing China: Community Reflections* exhibition, enhancing key themes with wit and impact. The educational publication *Primary Geographer* devoted three pages to the Chinese strand, highlighting the benefits of using archival resources in the classroom.

The partition of India and the fragmenting of a regional Punjabi identity covered in the exhibition *The Punjab: Moving Journeys* drew in academics and the Indian and Pakistani Punjabi communities

alike. Four universities in Lahore confirmed exhibition tours in 2009 and Dr Pippa Virdee, academic consultant on the project, presented a talk in Lahore at the launch of the tour. This strand also attracted history students from De Monfort University; a group of thirty attended a research trip to the Society as part of their course.

Following consultation workshops on the project, two community partners applied for funding to start their own education projects – both citing the Society's Collections as an integral part of their new projects.

Exhibition themes

From Kabul to Kandahar 1833-1933

"How nice to find information on Afghanistan presented without media hype or political idealism."

Visitor comment

Themes

Addressing stereotypes and negative public perceptions of Afghanistan was central to the development of this strand. The exhibition covered the history of Afghanistan pre 1800; the cultural and religious diversity that resulted from its location on important trade routes in Asia; and Anglo-Afghan contact in the 19th century.

Community partners wanted this strand to reflect pride in their culture and history and to present an alternative perspective to that portrayed by the media of the conflicts in the region. The themes commemorate Afghanistan's place in history and reveal the numerous and significant cultural, political and economic encounters and exchanges that have taken place over the centuries, emphasising how these legacies have continually connected people to one another's histories. The exhibition provided an opportunity to discuss early British encounters with Afghanistan and the three Anglo-Afghan wars that took place in the mid to late 19th century; these records revealed an often divided yet resilient country that united when under attack.

Community partners were keen to present a narrative that allowed audiences to observe the complex evidence and come to their own conclusions about the region, its history, and its people. Contemporary images were also added to provide a glimpse of day-to-day life in Afghanistan today.

Collections items

"We are really impressed to see our Afghani past."

Wahida, community partner

Enquiry into the Society's Collections for representations of Muslim cultures led to the development of this exhibition on Afghanistan. Research revealed a number of photographic albums from the 1850s onwards documenting the region for British military and administrative purposes. A series of beautiful yet haunting images following the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80) taken by Benjamin Simpson, Surgeon General, form the basis of the display; they include images of a war-ravaged Kandahar and group portraits of Afghan officials, diplomats and locals. Published journals by John Alfred Gray, physician to the Amir from 1885-89, and Ernest and Annie Thornton, manager of the Amir's tannery and his wife are used in the exhibition to annotate photographs and a selection of illustrations by James Atkinson from 1842 of bazaars, places and landmarks.

Commissioned essays

- *Rediscovering the Middle East: The Royal Geographical Society's Middle Eastern (Western Asian) Collections* by Steve Brace
- *(Re) Claiming Britain* by Hammad Nasar
- *Cars, Caravans and Camels – Journeys to Muslim Cities across the Centuries: Kabul, Algiers, Medina* by Sara Wajid

Community consultation partners

- Afghan Association of London, Harrow. Coordinator: Hooshang Paigair; Ashna, Nader Hassani, Shureesh and Wahida Zalmal
- Afghan Association of London Supplementary School, Harrow. Coordinator: Frohar Poya Faryabi; Atifa, Tarana Fazal, Aryan Ghafuri, Karima Ghufun, Shahir Nojo and Omid Sheirzai
- Matthew Tariq Wilkinson and the pupils from Brondesbury College for Boys, Brent, London.
- Professor Siad S Hashimi, Moheb Mudessir, Daud Naji, the Afghan Embassy, London and Chris Kempton from the Victorian Military Society

Bombay Africans 1850 -1910

"Another hidden history brought to light! The comments by the community groups and the young people add poignancy to the historic material – an informative and thought provoking exhibition."

Visitor comment

Themes

The Society's connections to exploration in Africa in the 1800s and the African men that assisted expeditions became the focus for this strand. Based on research carried out by historian Clifford Pereira FRGS into the histories of the Bombay Africans, the lives of Sidi Mubarak Bombay, Abdullah Susi, James Chuma, Mathew Wellington and Jacob Wainwright were explored. Their histories revealed childhoods traumatised by enslavement, of forced migrations across the Indian Ocean eventually leading to liberation and life in India, and then travel back to Africa through joining the expeditions of explorers such as Burton, Livingstone, Stanley, Speke and Thomson.

The importance in revealing these hidden histories and emphasis on creating biographies for these African explorers formed the core around which other themes such as the Indian Ocean slave trade and the African diaspora in Asia were placed. By illustrating their lives, achievements and relationships with the European explorers, community partners were keen to have these men presented as role models with achievements to their name and as explorers in their own right. Their stories also demanded the reassessment of the histories of exploration; the recognition of indigenous skills and expertise within this area and how these stories are retold.

Reference to the lesser known Indian Ocean slave trade also provided a comparative narrative to that of the Atlantic Ocean slave trade, whose abolition was commemorated in 2007 when this exhibition was shown. Questions from the community about

the African diaspora in the Middle East (Western Asia) and Indian subcontinent prompted research into contemporary communities in these regions and a new map charting this was created to conclude the narratives for the many Africans who never went back to Africa.

"I would like these stories to reach many more people – especially the generation of my children and grandchildren who know very little. You don't know who you are until you know where you come from."

Mwatumu, community partner

Collections items

Portraits of the Bombay Africans had been previously identified in the Society's Collections since many of these men received RGS medals that recognised their contribution to the expeditions they were members of. Further research into the Collections provided additional information about the identified materials, alongside new discoveries such as a new image of Mathew Wellington as a younger man. Materials related to David Livingstone's expeditions were included to convey his story and the strong links he had with the Bombay Africans. Key items such as the illustration by Thomas Baines of liberated men and children on *HMS Lynx*, a diary entry by Sir Percy Z Cox about his encounter with an African pearl diver in Abu Dhabi, and an album of photographs by explorer J A Grant provided rare insights into the Indian Ocean slave trade. The Bombay Africans history spans a wide geographical area that includes Tanzania, Kenya, the Congo, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Yemen and India – photographs from the Collections for each of these countries brought to life this compelling, yet little known history.

Commissioned essay

- *The Bombay Africans and the Nineteenth Century Exploration of Africa* by Clifford Pereira

Community consultation partners

- Congolese Community in the UK. Coordinator: Ackys Kituba and Frederick Yamusangie Bakalandwa; Philemon Dombebe, Senga Kanguma, Odimba Kasende, Marie Louise Pambu, Ngunga Ngoma, Richard Ntaka and Benjamin Shamashang
- Friends of Maasai People, London. Coordinator: Mercy Kiminta; Sean Arts, Antoinette Gellen, Daniel Kungu, Jack Muchemi, Davis Murundegwa, Peris Yiapan and Joseph Masindet
- Ghanaian Elders Group & Black Cultural Archives, London. Coordinators: Jacine Cooper and Suzanne Ngo-Eyok; Dame Betty Asafu-Adjaye, George Blankson, Herbert Bokari, Kobina Bresi-Ando, Margaret Bresi-Ando, Daniel, Douglas Darko, Comfort Ofoosu-Mintah, Georgina Sah and Emmanuel Yaopreku Wilson-Kpikpi
- Lancaster Youth Group, Ladbroke Grove, London. Coordinator: Ghino Ghafar; Misha Badar-Sadafri, Caddesia, Kiah Daley, Martha Emaha, Chris Facey, Liam Hodge, Ade Jones, Lakeisha Joseph, Malik, Conrad Mitchell, Ellis Mitchell, Savannah Omoregie, Jazz Reid, Jo Jo Reid and Cleveland Williamson
- Obay Supplementary School, London. Coordinator: Ade Adeshina and Diane Martins; Emmanuel Adejoro, Katherine Adejoro, Hakeem Adeshina, Kareem Adeshina, Temidayo Akinmoladun, Simeon Goering, Jackline, Sheriece Johnson, Kelvin, Mickel Macall, Joshua Mackenzie, Fariha Miah, Maisha Miah, Lavinia Mireku, Darrell Morris, Stephanie Odidi, Stephen Odidi, Amy Ogunlana, Ashrafu Rahman, Oba Shabaka Thompson, Sharon, Abu Suma, Boma Tariah, Jennifer Tariah and Danielle Williams- Bowen
- Tanzanian Women's Association, London. Coordinator: Mariam Kilumanga; Beth, Ezera Chomete, Amanda Christian, Upendo Ernest, Baruani Karenga, Uli Kyusa, Anna Lukindo, Mwatumu Malale, Mariam, Abubakr Msuya, Nora, Patricia, Ralph and Meleina Stefano

Seeing China: Community Reflections

"If I were to return to China... I do not have many friends (there) and life would be boring. I don't belong there anymore. I have got used to life here and really don't want to move anymore."

Community participant

"As a half Chinese person, half Irish who was born in the UK and whose father escaped from China, I am very interested in its history."

Visitor comment.

Themes

The subject of identity and migration arose frequently in discussions and individuals of varying ages were keen to reflect on their diversity, culture, values and experience. Participants often addressed their 'Chineseness' from a diverse cultural viewpoint rather than one associated to a physical place; a result of multiple migrations over many generations. The exhibition addressed these themes by giving an overview of the history of Chinese migrations globally, recounting the experiences of individuals and providing a glimpse of British encounters with China that had influenced the migration of Chinese people. Cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and London were used as a backdrop to illustrate these complex shared historical events and the exhibition included work by artists Anthony Key and Grace Lau to provide contemporary visual commentary on pertinent issues.

The role of women in Chinese culture both historically and in today's society also arose; this was due to the high number of female participants and also due to the inclusion of Isabella Bird Bishop's story as a lone Victorian female traveller in China in the 1890s. Areas of discussion included marriage, emancipation and education amongst others.

"An interesting, revealing and compassionate look at things once lost and emotions ignored; only to be remembered in this beautiful, thoughtful and reflective exhibition."

Visitor comment

Collections items

The Society's collections covering China are considerable and research helped to focus the themes. Visual and written records by Isabella Bird Bishop provided a female point of view that contrasted to Captain GSS Gordon's images of the British presence in major cities; whilst John Thomson and the Ato Photographic Association's photographs reflected detail within cities and scenic landscapes. Photographs of people were selected to reflect diversity and to emphasise individual histories that had remained untold. Popular texts *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* by Isabella Bird Bishop and *The Silent Traveller in Oxford* by Chiang Yee were quoted to raise questions and offer differing perspectives of British and Chinese travellers. Modern images of China were placed next to historic pictures to reflect on the complex nature of progress and migration in a globalised economy and society.

Commissioned essays

- *Chinamen and Englishmen: an exploration of identity* by David Chan
- *Exploring the Length, Breadth and Heights of China* by Lee Fulton
- *Through the eyes of a woman traveller: Isabella Bishop in China (1879-1897)* by Siu-fan Lee

Community consultation partners

- Chinese National Healthy Living Centre, London. Coordinator: Jenny Lam; Chooi Yoke Choong, Kiu Chung, Koon Sang Chung, Chung Kiu Ho, Sze Mui Kwok, Choi Lai, Kwai Mui Lai, Wu Wan Lin, Pak Lo, Kou Mui Ng, Wong Ying Tang, Man Kuen Tse, Yuk Lin Wong, Wan Lin Wu and Lai Fong Yeung
- Camden Chinese Community Centre Youth Group. Coordinator: Wing Hong; Lap Chan, Cynthia Chui, Kenny Huang, Julian Li, Angel Liu, Pam Liu, William Liu, Chinh Truong, Fan Yang, Yin Ben Yu and Yin Ho Yu
- King's Cross Neighbourhood Centre, London (Children's group). Coordinator: Judith Yung; Carmen, Becky Cho, David Ho, Sindy Ho, Andrew

Lee, Kevin Lee, Kotka Lim, Pui Yee Liu, Shing Chi Liu, Hoi Ying Ou, Kajun Pang, Kakay Pang, Kayan Pang, Amy Yuan and Natalie Yuan

- King's Cross Neighbourhood Centre, London (Adults' group). Coordinator: Judith Yung; Lai Wah Chan, Suel Hoong Chan, Ching Lin Cheung, Chin Ling Cheung, Kam Hou Cheung, Liu Yin Chin, Fung Kam Choi, Danyue Fu, Jenny Hu, Lin Hu, Mrs Law, Hon Hang Lee, Mee Oi Leung, Chu Lee Li, Chong Ji Lim, Yin Ching Liu, Quynh Ai Ly, Tai Fook Man, Mui Kim Monuent, Rui Xian Ou, Mrs C L Pang, Siew Bee Tan and Mrs Wong
- Soho Family Centre, London. Coordinator: Florence Hong; Janet Chen, Jia Chen, Eva Cheuk, Jia Cheuk, Wai Ming Cheung, Dean, Yu Feng Huang, Jessy, Joanna, Leanne, Ngan Lin Leung, Lisa Li, Lian Ti Liew, Lin, Patrick, Xiu Li Pong, Alice Qiao, Raymond, Shinghei, Landy Siew, Steven, Ngan Lai To and Yip Chi Yin

The Punjab: Moving Journeys

"Being a British Punjabi girl I found this exhibition very insightful and it helped me find my identity and learn about my roots. This exhibition is excellent for the young Indian and Pakistani generation living here in England."

Visitor comment

Themes

This strand originally explored Sikh culture, but following community consultation it was changed to address the Punjab, bringing together Indian and Pakistani, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh Punjabi community voices. The Punjab region in North West India was partitioned in 1947 based on religious grounds, coinciding with the end of British rule in the sub-continent. Discussions with community partners revealed three clear themes, those of loss, migration and identity.

Successive generations of religiously and culturally diverse rulers in the region have shaped and influenced the Punjab and its culture. The community partners suggested that this regional evolution should be central to the story of the Punjab. The theme of loss therefore was not confined to territorial rights or ancestral homelands; it was felt on a cultural and spiritual level. Punjabi's shared a language, cuisine, music, identity and much more, the 1947 partition abruptly severed these connections. Loss was also expressed by community groups in relation to migration, a direct result of partition itself and also the result of the British presence in the region.

The influence of the British in the region led to development as well as major upheaval and mass migrations; the canal colony constructions led to the relocation of Punjabi's within the Punjab, whilst heavy recruitment of Punjabi's, Sikh men in particular, into the British army led to migrations within India and across the British Empire. Ex-servicemen attending workshops conveyed their personal experiences of partition, serving in the

Second World War and subsequent life in Britain and are quoted within the exhibition.

The impact of multiple migrations and partition prompted questions about Punjabi identity – was it something that was still relevant? The latter part of the exhibition explored the 'layered' identities that community members found themselves inheriting including that of being British and the concepts of personal and community identity. The groups also reflected broadly on the diversity of Britain and other immigrants and found parallels with other communities beyond the coverage of this strand.

"It has taken me into my 40s to realise that my life has been defined by partition; not in some abstract conceptual, emotional sense... but I am a child of refugees and refugee families, on both sides."

Parmjit, community partner

"As I come from a partitioned country (Ireland) I found the parallels striking."

Visitor comment

Collections items

Maps were used extensively in this strand to show principalities, infrastructure development, population densities, and the distribution of languages and faiths. These maps helped set the scene of the pre-partition Punjab and also explain the process of partition. Communicating the impact of partition was achieved using these maps, allowing reflection on their importance as accurate records whilst at the same time highlighting their oversight of the 'human' scale; which was all too evident in the violence that followed partition. Photographs taken during the Gilgit Mission of 1885-86 by military personnel illustrate British and Punjabi officials in their finery and provide evidence of a growing British presence. A selection of images depicting landmarks such as the Golden Temple and Lahore Fort showed the influence of the many rulers and cultures that the region had seen

and provided a trigger for collective reminiscences. Images of Punjabi women were few, however, a 'Western' female voice was found in the book *From Winter India: Travel and adventures of an American woman in the India of the Raj* by Eliza R Scidmore, 1903. Accounts by Punjabi or Indian travellers and officials such as Munshi Mohan Lal, 1834 served to contrast experiences and views presented by the British including that of the Christian missionaries.

Commissioned essays

- *Panjab – Lost Pasts to Claimed Presence: A Songline Through Ancestry, Homeland and Belonging* by Parminder Chadha
- *The Followers of Mohammed* by Ima Qureshi
- *Punjab Collection Audit* by Paramjit Khera,

Community consultation partners

- Cartwright Hall Young Ambassadors, Bradford. Coordinators: Sofia Maskin and Nicola Fox; Salma Ahmed, Amrin Bhatti, Simon Cantrill, Fizza Ilyas, Hafsa Javed, Tanzeela Javed, Sabah Mahmood, Aneela Maqsood, Zakiya Maskin, Carl McBride, Sedhaf Naz and Lucas Uren
- Muslim Women's Welfare Association, Ilford. Coordinator: Shahida Sarwar; Noreen Akhtar, Fauzia Aslam, Nasreen Azra, Zebun Bashir, Abida Beghum, Parminder Kaur, Nadia Khan, Yasmin Khan, Samina Malik, Ila Mehta, Munazza Naqvi, Sumera Naz, S Nazish, Kausar Perveen, Mushyeda Shah, Naghma Shaikh and Aneela Sheikh
- North Hertfordshire Sikh Education Council. Coordinators: Harwinder Singh and Paramdip Khera; Jasdeep Kaur Dhillon, Kuldeep Dhillon, Oupkar Ghatore, Bonita Theara, Jamie Theyara, Kieran Theara, Marcus Theyara and Roseanne Theyara
- Sangat Group, London. Coordinator: Parminder Chadha; Amarjit Chandan, Harbakhsh Singh Grewal, Kuldip Puwar, Jasbir Jessie Rayat, Naseer Sheikh and Ajit Singh
- UK Punjab Heritage Association. Coordinator: Verinder Singh; Amarjit Chaggar, Kamaldeep Singh Dhatt, Davinder Dhillon, Harbakhsh Singh Grewal,

Atter Kalsi, Inderjit Kaur, Jasvir Kaur, Meerat Kaur, Amrit Maan, Amandep Madra, Joga Singh, Kamaljit Singh, Parmjit Singha and Dr Pippa Virdee

- The Undivided India Ex-Servicemen's Association. Bhajan Singh Bahia, Gulzara Singh Bir, Rajinder Singh Dhatt, Harbans Singh Gahunia, Moktiar Singh Rai and Simitar Singh

Special thanks



The Heritage Lottery Fund, Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation, and John Lyon's Charity for kindly supporting the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* programme.

- Rolex supports public access to the Society's collections
- *From Kabul to Kandahar 1833-1933* was funded by the Department of Children, Schools and Families

Project Team

Vandana Patel: Project Coordinator
Harpreet Kaur Sanghera: Project Education Officer
Steve Brace: Head of Education & Outdoor Learning

Foyle Reading Room Team

Julie Carrington, Julie Cole, Francis Herbert, Justin Hobson, Pauline Hubner, David McNeil, Jamie Owen, Eugene Rae, Sarah Strong, Jan Turner and Joy Wheeler

Community Workshop Facilitators

Afghan Strand: Frohar Poya Faryabi and Rinku Mitra

East African Strand: Dzifa Benson, Beyondr, Rinku Mitra, Richard Mkoloma, Zagbar Oyortey and Clifford Pereira

Chinese Strand: Siu-fan Lee, Veronica Needa and Kumiko Mendi (The Yellow Earth Theatre Company)

Punjab Strand: Farina Alam, Parminder Chadha, Rinku Mitra, Clifford Pereira, and Ina Qureshi.

Exhibition Development

Led by Vandana Patel (Project Coordinator)

Afghan Strand: Deborah Dunham and Rinku Mitra

East African Strand: Clifford Pereira

Chinese Strand: Paul Bevan and Diana Yeh

Punjab Strand: Dr Pippa Virdee (De Montfort University, Leicester)

Exhibition Advisory Panels

Afghan Strand: Frohar Poya Faryabi, Professor Siad S Hashimi, Moheb Mudessir, Clifford Pereira, Angela Schlenkhoff from the Institute of Afghan Studies and Sara Wajid

East African Strand: Dr Hassan Arero (Horniman Museum), Professor Felix Driver (Royal Holloway University of London) and Lowri Jones

Chinese Strand: David Chan, Lee Fulton, Florence Hong, Wing Hong, Jenny Lam, Clifford Pereira, Hannah Phung, Rinku Mitra and Judith Yung

Punjab Strand: Clifford Pereira, Paramdip Khera, Cara Lucas, Amandeep Madra, Rinku Mitra, Ina Qureshi and Paramjit Singh

Education Resource Development

Led by Harpreet Kaur Sanghera (Project Education Officer)

Afghan Strand: Rinku Mitra

East African Strand: Anthony Barlowe, Sarah Haynes, Helen Martin, Rinku Mitra and Tessa Willy

Chinese Strand: Anthony Barlowe, Margaret Mackintosh, Rinku Mitra and Tessa Willy

Punjab Strand: Margaret Mackintosh, Rinku Mitra and Tessa Willy

Project Supporters

Afghan Strand: Adam Gardner

East African Strand: Dr Mubarak Abdulqadir and Dr Ali Salim Baakabe of the Fort Jesus Museum, Kenya, Bexley Archives Centre, Kenya Wildlife Trails Ltd, Dr Kaingu K'Tinga (Krapf Museum Rabai, Kenya), Sara Wajid, Neil Williams and Naomi Woddis

Chinese Strand: Anthony Key, Grace Lau, and Helena Lee

Punjab Strand: The Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail, Rashid Ashraf, Gerard Greene (Redbridge Museum), Green Cardamom, Moti Roti, Nicolas Reynard, Simon Rudd, Professor Ian Talbot, Andy Wallace, Sara Wajid, and Neil Williams

Filming/ Photography and Editing

East African Strand: Dan Saul for short film *Bombay Africans*

Chinese Strand: Dan Saul for short films *The Family, Looking Back and My London*

Punjab Strand: Farina Alam for short film *My Journey*

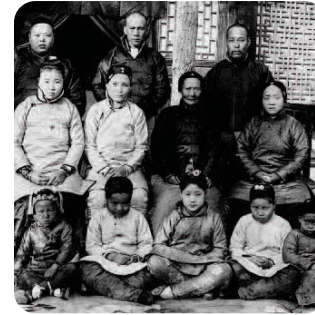
Community Engagement Evaluator

Kate Pontin

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Education resources and exhibitions are available online at: www.unlockingthearchives.rgs.org







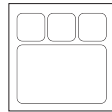
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Great Wall of China
H Ponting 1907



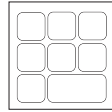
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Peking, 1900
Kites, Peking
Ato Photographic Association 1930-35
Europeans in sedan chairs,
Hong Kong, c.1900
Shaohsing
Ato Photographic Association 1930-35



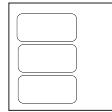
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Chinese children from Kuldjia, 1878-82
Canton
Ato Photographic Association 1930-35
Children of China Town,
Los Angeles, California, 1900
Group of European children, Fukien
I Bishop 1895
Physic Street, Canton
J Thomson c.1869
The Kwei Family
C P Skrine 1922-24
Kajgar Chinese women
with small feet, c.1880
Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong
R C Hurley 1897



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Drama workshop, Camden
Reminiscence workshop, Camden
Drama workshop at the Society
Chinese Partnership



The Punjab
Moving Journeys





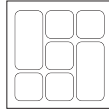
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Bakshi Murray (Governor of Gilgit) and Mehal Singh (Commanding Radur Regiment), 1865-66



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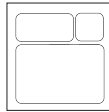
Dancer, c.1920
Temple, Amritsar
ENH Cameron 1914



Bombay Sappers and Miners, West Punjab, 1897-98
Cart crossing Bias River
Capt. C M Ritchie 1906
Gandhi Saturday in Karachi
D Oliver 1930
Sikh sentry, Fort Johnston, Malawi
H Johnston 1891
Map detail: Cantonment and environs of Umrtsar, 1868-9

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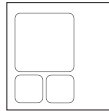
Officers of the Gilgit mission, 1885-86
Kojhak railway tunnel, Lahore
AC Yate 1896-97
Embroiderers, 1910-20



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Consultation workshop, Southall Workshop, Bradford
Punjabi Partnership

The Punjab: Moving Journeys exhibition, 2008



From the margins to the mainstream

As guest curator and advisor to the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project I had a unique perspective on this project. It brought together my interests in a number of areas; as a professional active in community heritage, as a Fellow of the Society itself, and through my academic interest in geography and history. From all these perspectives it is clear to me that *Crossing Continents* has been an astounding success. The aims of the project pose two questions. Basically who was the Royal Geographical Society doing this for and to what aim? The resultant project has helped change the way the public views the discipline of geography – a process that some academics would consider as the construction of ‘public geographies’. This has occurred within the project in a number of ways.

The model of the project development included considerable input from the heritage sector – a discipline not usually associated with geography. The introduction of ‘Indigenous Agency’ for archive interpretation and narrative construction by the community has been for the benefit of the wider community. One facilitator involved in the Chinese strand stated that “The personal

response makes it [geography] more accessible to an audience somehow. I could only measure this through my engagement with the whole project which was one of interest, curiosity and excitement. It challenged me to work in new ways with new material using my skills as a drama facilitator.” Many of the communities involved could be considered as relatively disenfranchised within Britain today, be they immigrants, socially polarised urban communities or inner city youths who had been excluded from school. However, this disenfranchisement also rings true with respect to the way in which these communities are represented within British history and the history of other countries. The Tanzanian community illustrated this when referring to Tanzanian history books, often written in the 1960s, that failed to mention the Bombay Africans in the study of geography and history in Africa itself. This underlines the impact of ‘Eurocentric’ narratives and the inequalities it brings in the teaching of world geography and history and the importance of innovative critical thinking.

The project includes a big institutional change within the Society by the creation of ‘public geographies’; where activities such as workshops are valued and

community perspectives are placed alongside academic commentary on the same public platform. The use of specialists who may not be academics but draw their expertise and interests from the fields of art, theatre and media is another innovation. This marks the debut of the Society to London’s heritage sector – a factor that has only been made possible by the new exhibition pavilion and Foyle Reading Room which has much potential still left to be tapped.

The most important point is that this project demonstrates a changing relationship between academic geography and our society. The view that community and specialist non-academics are of equal value, if not more valuable for their ability to reach out to audiences than academic expertise alone. To see a family of Maasai in their traditional clothing wander the corridors of the Society and admire a painting of Wilfred Thesiger with the backdrop of a Samburu (an ethnic group related to the Maasai) is a major cultural change for the Society. My previous personal experience of the Society is seeing the Maasai featuring as static subjects in a photographic exhibition, or as backdrops to a presentation on a lecture on African

Opposite

Students from a Brent secondary school during education workshops at the Society about the Punjab



wildlife or at a book launch – often on, or by some European who either travelled in Africa or decided to experience “life on the plains”. It is important to personalise geography, thereby reducing distance from landscapes, to see the far reaching cultural, economic and environmental effects of our lifestyle. Indigenous agency has a role to play here, highlighting the need for cultural brokers or intermediaries to create discourse.

The production of historical geographical knowledge has a resonance to the very core of British geography and the Society. This is exemplified in re-examining the role of the perceived “followers” in the story of African exploration in the African strand of the project. This strand also highlights the psychological importance of portraying non-Europeans in geographical history, and hence increasing the interest of geography at secondary school and university level for Black and Minority Ethnic students – especially boys. And this was evident in the cheers that echoed around the Society’s Ondaatje Theatre when the Lancaster Youth Group, of which some members had been excluded from mainstream school, presented their creative responses to the Bombay Africans.

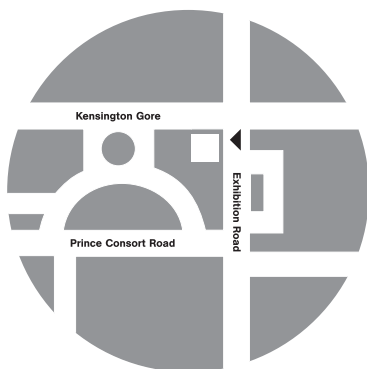
Arguably the Punjab strand suggests that the use of geographical mapping was paramount in the process of partition. This leads public challenge of the role of cartography in today’s world and the role of cartographers as experts in the construction of new geo-political entities (e.g. the formation of the new Balkan states after the collapse of Yugoslavia). In the case of the Punjab this also challenged the public perception of a culturally distinct India and Pakistan – before partition they were joined at all levels, geographically, historically, spatially, socially and by shared language, and culture. The public is encouraged to question if a map legitimises ownership, statehood, and distinctness – or is it a construct for political gains. Who makes the map and for what reason? Does it tell the full story or is there a specific agenda?

Clearly the outcomes demonstrate that through the defined model of project development, academic geography and the discipline has taken an active role in the development of discourse between academia and the public as well as among the public. Geography, and human geography in particular, has been brought to the public in a form not previously seen in the discipline, with

great success. Furthermore the project has successfully redistributed the ‘capital’ of political, cultural, economic and social geographies to distinct communities. Strands of the project have quite literally crossed continents and made innovative and challenging historic and cultural connections that are opening doors to positive dialogue. I believe that through the *Crossing Continents: Connecting Communities* project the Society has brought new insights, new partnerships and new future possibilities to its work in supporting the cutting edge of geographical thought and development in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Clifford Pereira FRGS
Guest Curator





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