

Institution: ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Unit of Assessment: GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY
Title of case study: HIDDEN HISTORIES OF EXPLORATION
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The history of exploration is central to public understanding of the purpose and making of geographical knowledge. It is often imagined as the work of exceptional individuals in extraordinary circumstances. Popular portrayals of exploration have long been cast as heroic individual dramas, in which the explorer is the central character. Historical geography research at Royal Holloway has challenged this way of thinking. It has emphasised exploration's wider cultural, economic and social significance, showing it to be a fundamentally collective experience, and making visible the vital roles played by local people and intermediaries. It has demonstrated too how the collections of major UK scientific societies and museums are shaped by and can communicate these histories of exploration. The key impacts of the research are therefore on: (1) the cultural understanding of geography and exploration, especially through public exhibitions and their secondary reach; (2) the development of heritage collections strategy in major institutions, notably at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) (hereafter RGS-IBG).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>These impacts are underpinned by Royal Holloway research led by Driver (Lecturer to 1996, Reader 1996-9, Professor 1999-present), with colleagues including Crang (see Section 3, Grant 5, Professor 2005-present), Gamble (Grant 4, Professor 2004-11), Geoghegan (Grant 4, Post-Doctoral Fellow 2008-9), Jones (Grant 3, Post-Doctoral Research Assistant 2008-9), Martins (Grant 2, Research Fellow 1999-2003) and Pereira (Grant 3; Honorary Research Associate, 2010-13).</p> <p>This research has three interrelated strands that have cumulatively: (a) established new conceptual and methodological frameworks for approaching exploration; (b) demonstrated the insights of a geographical approach to collections and public science through a series of collaborations with major UK museums and scientific societies; and (c) then applied these approaches in uncovering the 'hidden histories' of exploration present within the internationally significant collections of the RGS-IBG.</p> <p>(a) New approaches to the subject of exploration. This research includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiation and development of the idea of a 'culture of exploration'. This established a wider framework for understanding the history of exploration and demonstrated the potential for new approaches to its public and visual histories (see Section 3 Reference 1, Grants 1 & 6). • Revisionist research on explorers (including major national figures such as Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone) and critical appraisal of the role of biographical writing in the history of exploration and the history of geography (Reference 2). • Scholarly research into the comparative and visual histories of tropical exploration and navigation, based on collections in UK, Australia, USA and Brazil. This established the significance and research potential of the visual archive of travel (References 3 & 4, Grant 2). <p>(b) A geographical approach to collections and public science.</p> <p>Through research grants, collaborative research awards and partnerships, teams led by Driver have worked with curators and other expert and enthusiast communities in the British Library, National Maritime Museum, Natural History Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, RGS-IBG, Royal Society, Science Museum and the V&A Museum. These projects have developed and demonstrated the insights of a geographical approach to collections and public science. Key themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interrelated histories of modern geography, exploration and natural history (Grants 2, 6 & 7). • Researching the geographical practices of collecting, organising and circulating objects (e.g. Reference 5, Grant 5). • Deploying such understanding to open up collections to new forms of engagement. For example, Grant 4 researched the potential for mobilising objects in museum stores by including enthusiast groups in the curatorial practice of the Science Museum; and Grant 7 focused on improving the public engagement programmes on economic botany of RBG Kew and the Natural History Museum.

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(c) The hidden histories of exploration in the RGS-IBG collections.

These two bodies of work were brought together in archival research at the RGS-IBG, a global centre for the collection of information from explorers about their travels (Grant 3). Through interpretation of visual and other materials (including photographs, films, paintings, sketches and associated documentation), this research analysed the agency of indigenous peoples and intermediaries in the history of exploration and considered their (in)visibility within the archive. Its findings were of three main kinds: on the collective work of exploration (highlighting the dependence of European explorers on local support, local knowledge and intermediaries such as guides and interpreters); on images of exploration and its encounters (showing how the RGS-IBG's visual archive could be read 'against the grain' to reveal its 'hidden histories'); and on issues of recognition and responsibility (reflecting on the extent to which the role of locals and intermediaries were recognised by the RGS in relation to wider debates over the ethics of exploration). These interpretive themes were developed further through community consultations, in which representatives of communities linked to these hidden histories provided their perspectives on the materials. AHRC funding (see Grant 3) supported this research and its dissemination, including through a major physical and online exhibition at the RGS-IBG (Reference 6).

3. References to the research

- (1) F. Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Blackwell, 2001).
- (2) F. Driver, 'Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904)' and 7 other entries (2004), and a feature article on biography and exploration ('The active life: the explorer as biographical subject' [2005]), in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press).
- (3) F. Driver and L. Martins, 'John Septimus Roe and the art of navigation, c.1815-1830', *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002), 144-61; reprinted in T Barringer, G Quilley and G Fordham (eds) *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2007).
- (4) F. Driver and L. Martins, eds, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- (5) F. Driver and S. Ashmore, 'The mobile museum: collecting and circulating Indian textiles in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies* 32 (2010) 353-85.
- (6) F. Driver, 'Hidden histories made visible? Reflections on a geographical exhibition', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (2013) 420-35.

These publications were supported by the award of the following peer-reviewed research grants:

- (1) *The Culture of Exploration*, British Academy Research Leave Grant, 1997 (Driver, £5,018)
- (2) *Knowing the Tropics: British Visions of the Tropical World*, AHRB Research Grant, 1999-2003 (Driver, £147,274).
- (3) *Hidden Histories of Exploration: Exhibiting Geographical Collections*, AHRC Museums, Galleries, Archives and Libraries (MGAL) Research Grant, collaboration with RGS-IBG, 2008-9 (Driver, £168,799).
- (4) *The Cultures of Enthusiasm*, ESRC Post-Doctoral Fellowship, collaboration with Science Museum, 2008-9 (Geoghegan PDF & Gamble PI / Mentor, £79,490).
- (5) *Fashioning Diaspora Space: Textiles, Pattern and Cultural Exchange Between Britain and South Asia*, AHRC Research Grant, collaboration with V&A Museum, 2007-10 (Crag PI & Driver CI, total £510,152).
- (6) *The Visual Culture of Exploration*, Leverhulme Trust Fellowship, 2010-13 (Driver, £162,858).
- (7) *Cultural Engagement Project: Re-enchanting Economic Botany*, AHRC, for collaboration with the Natural History Museum and RBG Kew, 2012-13 (Driver, £10,100).

4. Details of the impact**(1) Enhanced cultural understanding of geography and exploration.**

The underpinning research suggested that innovative curation and exhibition of the RGS-IBG collections could communicate a new, more inclusive history of exploration, in which the contributions of a wider range of people were recognised and valued than had traditionally been the case. The impacts of the research were therefore pursued through a strategy of public engagement comprising: an exhibition at the RGS-IBG (October-December 2009); a website, with an online exhibition and related research and educational resources (2009-present); a travelling

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exhibition, available for hire from the RGS-IBG (2009-present); and secondary reach through media coverage and additional public engagement activity. The AHRC evaluated this work as outstanding – ‘a highly effective project which has had a significantly greater public impact than anticipated’ – and presented it in the AHRC Annual Report and Accounts 2009-10 as a case study of ‘world class research and its impact’. Specifically:

- *Exhibition at the RGS-IBG*: 3,664 people visited over 40 days, significant numbers for RGS-IBG exhibitions. Visitor feedback was enthusiastic (examples: ‘Very moving. Thank you RGS for evoking a sense of shared heritage’, Janaki Venkat, India; ‘Thank you – from an English 70+ woman who did not know!’; ‘Fabulous job’, Stephen Loring, Smithsonian). More than 500 new users actively engaged with the Society’s collections during this period.
- *Website*: A substantial, sustainable website was designed to present the exhibition and other research and engagement materials, and secured online within the RGS-IBG (www.hiddenhistories.rgs.org). From its launch in October 2009 to July 2013, the site received 70,490 page views in 19,614 visits. Usage of the site was notably international: 55% of visitors from beyond the UK, 40% from beyond the English-speaking world, from a total of 132 countries. Dwell-times were significantly above average for the RGS-IBG site.
- *Travelling Exhibition*: Venues for the travelling exhibition until July 2013 included a University Science Festival (2000 visitors, 2010), Kew Gardens Open House Day (1200 visitors, 2011) and the Royal Engineers Museum (3442 visitors, 2013).
- *School Teaching Resources*: To embed research findings in school curricula, the project developed a suite of web-based teaching resources (lesson plans, powerpoints, fact sheets, research resources, podcast interview, film clips), targeted at KS4 (Geography) and KS5 (History) teachers. The former centre the theme of ‘Exploring Everest’, addressed to GCSE specifications on extreme environments. The latter centre ‘Exploring Africa’, addressed to GCE specifications on the history of the British Empire. These resources can be accessed from both the Hidden Histories website and the RGS-IBG teaching resources webpage, the latter averaging 40,000 direct hits per month. The resources were profiled in RGS-IBG mailings to all 3,400 UK secondary school geography departments, highlighted on the Historical Association website and promoted in workshops with teachers / Ofsted inspectors for geography and history.
- *Media Coverage*: The exhibition gained secondary reach through media coverage that went beyond reportage to highlight key debates and to disseminate exhibition materials. Extensive interviews appeared in *The Times* (7 December 2009), *Sunday Times* (20 Sept 2009), *The Guardian* (8 Dec 2009), *Times Higher Education* (5 December 2009), *BBC History* (October 2009), and *Geographical* (December 2009). *The Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Geographical* also produced online image galleries using project research. The exhibition was discussed in numerous podcasts, blogs and enthusiast websites worldwide from perspectives ranging from popular histories of science (e.g. <http://timetoeatthedogs.com>) to adventure journalism (e.g. <http://thosewhodared.blogspot.co.uk/>).
- *Other Public Engagement Activity*: Diverse audiences were directly engaged. 19 public talks/lectures were given in autumn 2009, including one lecture attended by 520 people. Other activities included two prisoner-led lectures in Brixton Prison, organised through the Diversity Department; contributions to the RGS-IBG 2011 exhibition / web materials on *Rediscovering African Geographies*; talks to KS5 school students in Black History month; and a Passenger Films discussion event at the Roxy film-house London (c. 100 attendees).

(2) Heritage collections strategies.

The underpinning research has left lasting impacts on professional heritage practice both within and beyond the RGS-IBG.

- *Within the RGS-IBG*: The RGS-IBG is one of the world’s best known organisations devoted to the advancement of geographical understanding. Its collections received Designated Status from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in recognition of their national and international significance in extending ‘understanding of cultural exchange and encounters around the world’. The curation of these collections has been significantly enhanced by the Hidden Histories project. In addition to infrastructural and documentation legacies, the project contributed a new research-oriented model for the Society’s exhibitions and a reappraisal of underused parts of the collections (notably film). Following the success of the project, the RGS-IBG has developed its programme of collections-based research, for example by supporting 5 Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs)

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and initiating an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) with the Royal Society. The project significantly enhanced interaction between RGS-IBG divisions responsible for collections, research and public engagement, a cross-divisional impact recognised by the Society as strategically important.

- *Other heritage institutions:* Specific aspects of the research at the RGS-IBG delivered new insights on exploration to other heritage experts. This included: the identification of previously anonymous indigenous people in artworks (reported to the National Portrait Gallery); the discovery of watercolours by Catherine Frere (newly exhibited in the 2013 British Museum exhibition, 'Social fabric: African textiles today'); and the first analysis of the 1922 film 'Climbing Mount Everest' (leading to a new research collaboration on expeditionary film with the British Film Institute). More generally, the underpinning research has helped to embed collaborative research and geographical approaches within the ongoing curatorial practice of multiple institutions. For example, Royal Holloway Geography initiated CDAs at the Science Museum, collaborations that significantly influenced its successful application for an AHRC CDP and the foundation of its new Research and Public History Department in September 2012. On the basis of his expertise in collections-based research and public engagement, Driver was appointed advisor to the Natural History Museum's Centre for Arts & Humanities Research and the Thames CDP Consortium (The National Archives, National Portrait Gallery, National Maritime Museum). 4 Royal Holloway Geography PhD students have gained employment in full-time collections-related positions at the British Library, RBG Kew, National Maritime Museum and the Science Museum.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact**(1) AHRC Evaluations of Impact of Hidden Histories of Exploration project**

- AHRC evaluation of research grant final report: assessment letter, Sept 2011
- AHRC impact case study report, July 2011
- AHRC Research Performance and Impact Report, submitted to the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, Oct 2011 (case study on pp.10-11)
- AHRC Annual Report and Accounts, 2009-10 (case study of 'world class research and its impact', pp. 8-9).

(2) Impact of Hidden Histories of Exploration project and exhibition within RGS-IBG

- Project website: www.hiddenhistories.rgs.org

(3) Secondary Reach via Media Coverage

Online galleries produced by other agencies on the basis of the research:

- Telegraph - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatpicturegalleries/6669616/The-hidden-history-of-exploration.html>;
- The Guardian - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/gallery/2009/dec/08/historyandhistoryofart-geographyandenvironmentstudies>
- Geographical - http://www.geographical.co.uk/Magazine/Archive/Archive_-_Dec09.html

Specimen press interview report:

- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/dec/08/nineteenth-century-explorers-local-guides>

Specimen blog interview:

- <http://timetoeatthedogs.com/2009/11/04/interview-with-felix-driver/>

(4) Contacts

- AHRC evaluations of impact: (1) AHRC Head of Communications; (2) AHRC Head of Evaluation.
- Impact of the exhibition on public understanding of exploration, on RGS-IBG strategy, and on schools teaching resources: RGS-IBG Head of Research.
- Secondary reach into popular science media: Editor, *Time to Eat the Dogs: On Science, History and Exploration*.
- Impact on collections-based research in museums sector: Head of Research and Public History, Science Museum.