

**South Asia Archive and Library Group
Minutes of the 80th Conference
held at the Wellcome Library, London, 20th February 2009**

Present:

David Blake	(ex- British Library)
Penny Brook	British Library
John Cardwell	University of Cambridge Library
Paul Carter	British Library
Kevin Halliwell	National Library of Scotland
Jessica Haynes	British Library
Craig Jamieson	University of Cambridge Library
Pam Jaycock	University of Cambridge Library
Pat Kattenhorn	(ex- British Library)
Kathy Lazenbatt	Royal Asiatic Society
Alice McEwan	Royal Asiatic Society
Margaret Makepeace	British Library
*Nicholas Martland	SOAS
Emma Mathieson	Indian Institute, Bodleian
Sarah Mazzarino	British Library
*Francine Millard	National Library of Scotland
Antonia Moon	British Library
Richard Morel	British Library
*Henry Noltie	Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh
Catherine Pickett	British library
Sarah Preston	University of Cambridge Library (RCS)
Farzana Qureshi	SOAS
Rachel Rowe	Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge
Malini Roy	British Library
*Nikolai Serikoff	Wellcome Library
Rosemary Seton	SOAS
Judith Tranmer	British library
Jan Usher	National Library of Scotland

*Speakers.

Apologies: Françoise Simmons (CUL); Leena Mitford (BL); Marina Chellini (BL); Ursula Sims-Williams (BL & AIT)

Delegates were welcomed to the Wellcome Library by SAALG chair Rachel Rowe.

Francine Millard's talk on the Medical history of British India project <http://www.nls.uk/indiapapers/index.html> at the National library of Scotland, "Rum Barrels and Rabid Badgers", gave us a little history of the Wellcome Trust-funded project and the latest news. New content will be uploaded in the next few months, on army health, lock hospitals, medicines and medical colleges, with veterinary reports to follow. The talk was made very entertaining by the inclusion of "giant microbes", used to illustrate the 4 main diseases prevalent in India at that time, and subject of the efforts of many British medical researchers of the period. She singled out her particular favourite items from the collection, including

reports from Francis William Cragg, educated in Edinburgh, who literally gave his life to scientific research. Cragg trained in Entomology and Parasitology at Edinburgh and in 1905 he joined the Indian Medical Service. Specialising in disease-causing insects and parasites, he became infected with relapsing fever (caused by ticks and lice) which he was researching. He was forced to return to Edinburgh in a state of failing health. After working in Edinburgh for a few years he returned to India to further his work on fleas, lice and bed bugs.

In 1924 he was deputed to investigate typhus but fell ill with it. Cragg did not recover and died in Lahore. His obituary in *Nature* says, "Cragg was a fearless investigator, never hesitating to expose himself to infection. We mourn his loss; it is irreparable, as there are so few workers in this branch of zoology who may be considered such all-round experts as Cragg."

Another favourite is the reports from the lock hospitals. The government depended greatly on the British soldier to maintain imperial authority it obviously needed men to be as healthy as possible. But also to cater to all their needs it provided Indian women as prostitutes. The women were viewed as a necessity rather like blankets and food. A system was set up and there are five volumes of Lock Hospital reports providing striking details of this. The areas covered are British Burma, Central Provinces, NW Provinces and Oudh, Madras Presidency and the Punjab, dating from 1874 to 1891. Regimental brothels were established, e.g. "Bamboo Alley", and the prostitutes were split into two groups. Registered women under the Acts were issued with a ticket and were examined for venereal disease each week. The registered women accepted the control of the authorities and were seen as respectable. In the army health reports there are examples of the forms and tickets used.

The women who did not register "lurked about after dark" near the forts. This was a problem for the authorities – to steer the soldiers away from diseased unregulated women.

W. Curran, in 1877 remarked, "The British soldier is, as we all know, not very particular in the distribution of his amorous patronages. He selects his partners, without fear or favour in the darkness of the night, as well as under the shadow of a tree or within the shelter of a corn-field."

Henry Noltie then gave his talk on his book "Robert Wight and the botanical drawings of Rungiah & Govindoo". The RBGE has 23,000 of Wight's herbarium specimens, and in its collection of botanical drawings it has 711 of those made for Wight. These have now been connected with the herbarium specimens.

Wight began his work in India using his medical training, investigating cattle disease at the Seringapatam cattle stations originally set up by Tipu Sultan. In 1778 Thomas Munro appointed Wight as the Madras naturalist (interestingly, of the 8 officially appointed naturalists, 5 were trained in Edinburgh, including Roxburgh). He travelled to South India in 1826 and collected natural history specimens, and took an artist to record them. After he returned to his regimental duties, having had his post axed by the Governor as being too expensive, he enlisted the help of William Hooker to help identify the many specimens and drawings sent from India.

In 10 years Wight collected 2 tons of specimens. He was appointed as economic botanist in India to investigate the growing of cash crops such as cotton. 10 years later he returned to the UK and donated his specimens to Kew – they distributed duplicates and some were sent back to India.

Wight was one of the few botanists who recorded the names of the artists he used, and Rungiah and Govindoo are the most prominent.

Wight championed the use of lithography to make botanical illustrations more widely accessible; previously, copper-plate engraving with hand colouring was employed, which was time-consuming and costly.

After lunch, Nikolai Serikoff and Ross MacFarlane showed us some beautiful selections from the Wellcome Library's extensive South Asia collections.

In a neat follow on from Henry Noltie's talk, Nicholas Martland gave a talk on botanists introducing Malay plants to Calcutta, especially cash crops.

There is a long history of interaction between India and the Malay Archipelago; the East India Company had a presence there (at least until the late 17th C) when plants were shipped from the Spice Islands to Calcutta.

The Dutch created a monopoly on nutmeg crops in Malaya and did not allow it to be grown elsewhere; however, the Company presence there meant that this spread and was grown in India also. There was mixed success in growing Indonesian plants in Calcutta Botanic Garden, but the British persisted because they believed that plants would acclimatise (precedents included tea from China). They invested a lot of time and effort, importing tens of thousands of plants from the Malay archipelago to try and establish cash crops, but there was not much return on this investment.

Nicholas pointed out the problems related to research in this area, which are hampered by changes to place names. Reference to *The dictionary of economic products of the Malay Peninsula* / I.H. Burkill and *The dictionary of the economic products of India* / Sir George Watt can help, as they include these name changes and vernacular terms.

Business Committee Meeting:

Apologies: (as above)

Treasurer's report tabled. Rachel thanked Antonia for her work as Treasurer.

Newsletter and blog-

Rachel thanked Leena Mitford for her hard work and success with the Newsletter. She also thanked Pratibha for her assistance.

Rachel explained the value of the Newsletter; however, it was often out of date by the time it was published. There were discussions on how to widen access to the blog; it was felt that longer and more detailed articles could be linked through the blog to the SAALG website.

Promotion of the website is crucial; Leena can supply a list of academic institutions we could contact.

Kathy volunteered to promote the site – pdfs could be mounted, as could conference papers and presentations. It was agreed that Jan would send an “idiots' guide” to the blog to encourage subscription.

It was also agreed that Kathy and Jan would liaise on the website and blog; Xiao Wei Bond is still happy to mount items on the website. Jan to send minutes of 79th

conference to Xiao Wei. Rachel thanked Jan for setting up and promoting the SAALG blog and encouraged members to subscribe and contribute to it.

NACIRA –Rachel updated everyone on a name change - Mapping Asia is now called UKIRA (UK Information Resources on Asia). It has been going for 10 years and needs updating. There have been several problems with SOAS hosting the site, the Uni of London IT services are working on stabilising the data. After this time, it would be helpful to have a different host – Kevin Halliwell agreed to find out if NLS would be happy to do this, especially as UKIRA does not yet have NLS holdings on it.

Reports –

Kathy reported from RAS that there had been an excavation of a stupa at the birthplace of Buddha, and that “Peppe papers” on this had been donated to RAS.

Nicholas reported from SOAS that JISC funds had been made available to set up a digital unit to digitise Islamic mss in collaboration with a U.S. institution.

Penny reported from the BL that they are strengthening links with India and had recently sent a delegation to Delhi where they met Chinese and African counterparts. There has been progress with the computerised cataloguing manuscripts.

Craig reported from CUL that the Tibetan mss are now catalogued and microfilmed, but there is still some work to be done.
He reminded everyone that the NACIRA workshop was held every September.

Kevin Halliwell reported from NLS on the delegation to the Kolkata Book Fair where Scotland was the theme country. There were banners showcasing relevant items from the National Collecting Institutions (NCIs), such as the NLS, NMS and NGS. Kevin gave a talk at the Book Fair on “Kolkata Curiosities”, and Jan gave one at the National Library of India on the “Medical History of British India online project” and future plans.
There had been a Scots in Bengal book proposal which Kevin and Jan will pursue as members of the NLS Publishing Board.

Rachel reported on the Mary Thatcher book “Respected memsahibs” <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Respected-Memsahibs-Anthology-Mary-Thatcher/dp/1843822148>, and also the oral history and film project “The Latter days of the Raj” www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk.

The next SAALG conference will be held at the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge, in summer – date to be confirmed.

Thanks were given to Rachel for organising our 80th conference; Rachel thanked Antonia for her assistance.