

Minutes of AHRC Project Meeting between the Centre for World Environmental History, the British Library and Kew Gardens.

3rd August 2016

The British Library

Present:

Vinita Damodaran (Sussex),
Antonia Moon (BL),
Virginia Mills (Kew),
Laharee Mitra (Sussex),
Michael Rayner (Sussex)

Vinita Damodaran began with an introduction of the history of the Botanical and Meteorological History of The Indian Ocean World and the project to transport two exhibitions to Indian institutions. The first exhibition, which is being curated by Kew Gardens, will be exhibited in the BSI gallery of the Indian Museum in Kolkata. This exhibition is based on Joseph Hooker's Indian collections and was originally displayed in Kew Gardens in 2011. The second exhibition is based on Science and Empire and will comprise materials drawn from the British Library's collections. It will be displayed in the National Museum of Natural History in Mysore, rather than the Indian Museum of Natural History in Delhi, as was originally proposed, owing to a fire. Vinita also briefly introduced a second project, which would involve an integrated database of information relevant to Botanical India. She expressed her desire for a continued collaboration between the three institutions on future projects.

Vinita confirmed the receipt of funding for the project and laid out a timetable for ongoing activities. Project participants are due to meet in Sussex in mid-September. Dates were discussed and the 9th was agreed upon, with the 22nd as a back-up date, should this prove to be too early. The Joseph Hooker exhibition is due to launch on the 1st October and the Science and Empire exhibition is due to launch on the 6th October. Virginia Mills expressed concern about the tight deadline. Chris Mills, who is curating the exhibition, is out of the country until the 11th August and will be working on two other exhibitions at the same time, so work on the UK end might not be finished until mid-September, which will give very little time for work at the India end.

Progress for both exhibitions was discussed. Antonia Moon confirmed that the British Library had completed all nine panels for the exhibition and showed a print-out of the panels. She said that she would be sending the PDFs to the NMNH within the next few days. The PDFs are to be printed and mounted in Mysore, as requested by the NMNH, and Antonia requested grey paint behind the panels as the panels are in white. This gives the NMNH two months to prepare the exhibition on their end. Vinita was able to provide diagrams of the scales of the display cases. These will be 180cm high, 120cm wide and 90cm deep. The depth will allow additional materials supplied by the NMNH to be displayed in front. Antonia asked how the museum wants to be acknowledged in the panels. Virginia confirmed that the Kew Gardens were providing 6 panels of commentary, which had been created in 2011. These will need updating, which will be the main bulk of the work. The objects will be facsimiles rather than originals, as the Kew will be putting on a Joseph Hooker exhibition to mark his bicentennial in 2017. Most of these have already been photographed. After some discussion, it was agreed that the Kew would print the materials themselves, rather than supplying PDFs. Virginia stressed the need for a specification of the space and a plan of the gallery dimensions of the Indian Museum by 11th August at the latest. The exhibition will fill two galleries. At the moment, one of these is prepared and fitted with display cases. The Kew will also need to know what else the Indian Museum want to add to the panel commentary. Chris will send existing commentary for them to look over, to speed the process along.

There was discussion about including indigenous materials from the archives of both Indian institutions, and both the British Library and the Kew are keen to incorporate these materials into the exhibitions. Both Indian institutions will be encouraged to source local materials and if possible, the panels supplied by the UK institutions will be modified to be more relevant. As there is limited time, however, it was suggested that for the most part, the UK institutions will carry on regardless and the Indian institutions can add to the exhibitions once they are already set up.

There will be an opening conference at the Indian Museum on the 1st October. This will be a public-facing conference, targeted towards non-academics and will focus on science and empire. Local academics and UK academics will be speaking, including representatives from the Kew and the British Library. Some people will be travelling from Kolkata to Mysore, to deliver the same conference there. Sussex will be providing the travel tickets and the accommodation, but people will need to apply for their own visas. Sussex will offer advice on which visa to apply for.

Vinita confirmed that the student study days will be focusing on children of the ages 12-14 from two Kolkata schools, targeting the Bengali vernacular. These field trips will include two trips to the Joseph Hooker exhibition and the Botanical Gardens in Kolkata. Originally the number of children in each field trip was estimated to be 24, but this may have been a significant underestimate. Interactive activities were discussed, but the consensus was that the British Library and the Kew could only suggest ideas to the museums and they would need to plan these activities themselves. The British Library have included a poem about nature in their panels, to inspire school children to write their own poems.

It was suggested that the conference is accompanied by hand-outs, which would include web addresses. Virginia suggested taking copies of Pat Griggs' book *Joseph Hooker: Botanical Trailblazer* to the conference and will look into the possibility of a reduced price for sale in India. It was suggested that there should be a focus on legacy, so that the exhibitions will last into the future in some degree. This could include collecting materials inspired by the exhibitions either in a book or on a webpage. There was a discussion on where the exhibitions would tour after being displayed in these two museums. Vinita hopes to take them to Dehradun in April to accompany the Commonwealth Forestry Conference. Venugopal has expressed interest in taking the exhibition to a UNESCO festival. More research will go into possible locations for these exhibitions. Sussex will set up a Twitter account for the projects. The Twitter address will be shared at the conferences as well as any hashtags created for the events. The British Library has a wide Twitter network and will assist in publicising the project's Twitter account.

Laharee Mitra will be starting a student placement at the Kew sometime after the 11th August. Details of this placement are to be discussed in more detail between Virginia and Laharee. The work is likely to involve selecting materials to accompany exhibition. Laharee will not be able to work for many days before the end of August, owing to her dissertation workload.

Follow-up actions are as follows:

- AM to send PDFs to Venugopal, requesting a grey background.
- AM to send PDFs to Sussex and Kew for reference.
- AM to ask Venugopal how the museum would like to be acknowledged in the panels.
- VD and MR to send Venugopal a programme of events.
- AM to send Venugopal a suggestion of what local material to include in the cases.
- Kundu and Das to agree upon indigenous materials to include in exhibition and to send details to Kew.
- Kundu to calculate deadlines for when she needs the panels and facsimiles and to send details of deadlines along with a scale plan of the galleries and displays to Kew.

- MR to set up Twitter account.
- MR to contact AM regarding Twitter network
- AM to confirm list of airlines that British Library will not use.
- VM to confirm which representative from Kew will be attending the conference.
- VM to discuss dates for placement with LM.