

Roxburgh House

One of the emerging follow on plans that we have been discussing is the possibility of restoring William Roxburgh's house and the old herbarium and library in the AJC Bose Botanic Garden in Howrah for use as an interdisciplinary climate research centre or an interpretation centre for the botanic garden.

William Roxburgh was a Scottish surgeon and botanist who worked extensively in India in the latter half of the eighteenth century, describing species and working on economic botany. He is known as the founding father of Indian botany. One of the early superintendents of the Calcutta Botanical Garden he took over from Colonel Robert Kyd in 1793 as Superintendent of the Company Garden at Sibpur. A catalogue of the garden was made in 1814 – Hortus Bengalensis.

The house and herbarium of Roxburgh are in a very dilapidated state. Roxburgh was an important botanist and a significant figure for the natural history of both Britain and India. Preserving his house and library is critical to the preservation of the story of Indian botany and also to the architectural heritage preservation movement in India.



Herbarium Project

We are also currently engaging in conversations between the BSI and a number of botanical institutions in the UK, including Kew and the Natural History Museum, about the digitisation of Indian specimens.

The Indian specimens, which are held in these UK institutions, are invaluable to botanical research in India and the BSI has shown considerable interest in a digital record of these resources.

This project is also of great interest to Kew, which currently boasts an online herbarium of 30,000 specimens. This project aims to increase this, with particular focus on Indian specimens.



URL: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cweh/research/indianocean>
Email: environmentalhistory@sussex.ac.uk
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BMHIOU/>
Twitter: @Indianbotany

The Botanical and Meteorological History of India and the Indian Ocean World

A CWEH, University of Sussex Network Project



The Botanical and Meteorological History of India and the Indian Ocean World

A CWEH, University of Sussex Network Project

The Botanical and Meteorological History of the Indian Ocean World is a collaborative, international research network, devoted to the interdisciplinary study and open access sharing of information relating to the climate and environment of India and surrounding countries of the Indian Ocean World.

Initial funding from the Sussex Research Opportunities Fund and the AHRC has led to collaborative work between the Centre for World Environmental History (CWEH) at Sussex with a range of non-academic institutions such as the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, (Kew) the British Library (BL), the U.K. Met Office, the World Meteorological Organisation and Indian institutions such as the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun (FRI) the Indian Museum and the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH).

Project History

The Indian Natural History collections are a product of the documentation project of colonial empires: British, French, Dutch and Portuguese. Through our AHRC network on the botanical and meteorological history of the Indian ocean 1500-1900, CWEH is responsible for identifying relevant historical records on environmental and climate change, strengthening academic and non-academic networks, providing online hosting for descriptive accounts of the collections and providing a roadmap for digitising these sources for improved accessibility.

Previous collaborations have included:

- Assisting holding institutions, such as Kew, the British Library and the Natural History Museum to identify important collections like the Nathaniel Wallich collection (www.nmnh.nic.in/nhmwinh.pdf) and establish connections with institutions in South Asia, such as the BSI, Kolkata and the FRI, Dehradun.
- Collaborating with the Kew to create an online digital resource for the Indian letters of Joseph Hooker (www.kew.org/josephhooker).
- Providing expertise on Indian collections in an exhibition at the Natural History Museum, which highlighted the importance of collections at holding institutions, such as Kew, the British Library and the Natural History Museum. <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/art-nature-imaging/collections/india-collection/history-and-context/index.html>.
- Negotiating with the World Meteorological Organisation in Maputo in April, 2014 on the climate heritage of the Indian Ocean and working on the final implementation plan for preserving the climate heritage of the Indian Ocean (<http://www.gfcs-climate.org/node/1>).
- We are currently working on a project to map the historic climate archive for the Indian Ocean World and model the climate events in the last 500 years.

Indian Natural History Exhibitions

In October 2016, CWEH facilitated a project that set up two exhibitions focused on the Natural History Heritage of India in two Indian museums. To inaugurate these exhibitions, a two-day conference was held at each museum, with speakers from a range of Indian and U.K. institutions.

The first exhibition was entitled *Joseph Dalton Hooker: Botanical Trailblazer and the Botanical Heritage of India*. This was curated by Kew, and was displayed in the BSI Gallery in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. Included in the exhibition were sketches that were highly important to the history of Indian botany, but that had not previously been displayed in India.

This prompted the BSI to renovate their gallery and to curate a number of additional exhibitions to accompany the Joseph Hooker exhibition, displaying objects in their collection that had not previously been available for public viewing.

The second exhibition, *Empire and the Environmental Heritage of India* was curated by the British Library and was displayed in the Mysuru branch of the NMNH.

The French Institute of Pondicherry also curated an exhibition on medicinal plants to be displayed at both galleries.

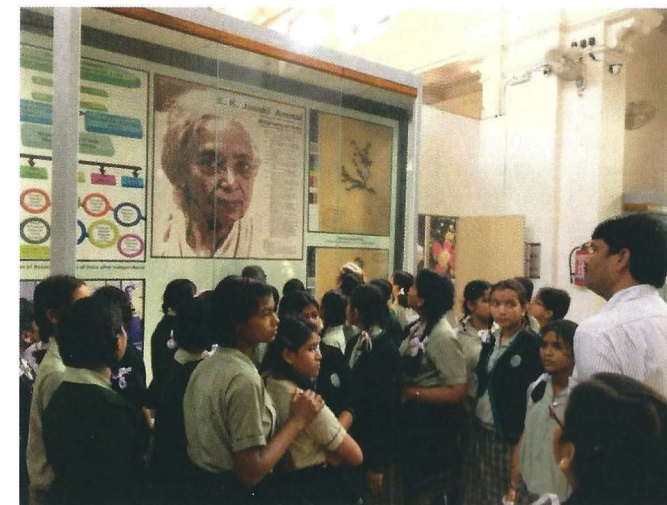
The inaugural conferences of these exhibitions provided a platform for further communication and information-sharing, both through the presentation of research papers from individuals associated with the network and through informal discussions amongst the network and with members of the public.

The exhibitions were inaugurated respectively by Sri Ajay Narayan Jha, the current secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and A.C. Lakshmana, a former minister of the Karnataka Ministry of Environment and Forests. Communication with these bureaucrats and politicians was of vital significance in understanding and ultimately influencing public policy.

The BSI are now planning a tour for the Joseph Hooker exhibition, beginning with the India International Centre in Delhi followed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.



School Project



Since January 2017, we have been providing two field trips per month for middle school students from two Bengali vernacular public schools in Kolkata to the Indian Museum and the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Botanic Garden. With lectures and activities provided by the BSI staff and other academics associated with the network, the students have learnt widely about subjects such as biodiversity, deforestation, global warming and the ecosystems of the Sundarban National Park.

These field trips have been overwhelmingly popular with the students, many of whom would otherwise have been unable to afford to visit these important sites.

The AHRC funded project will run for 14 visits, ending in July, but the success of these field trips and the enthusiasm shown by the BSI staff has led to the BSI offering to adopt the scheme and continue to fund these visits from August onwards.

