

## Minutes of co-ordinating and technical committee meeting 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013

### Attendees:

Vinita Damodaran (VD)  
Alan Lester (AL)  
George Adamson (GA)  
David Nash (DN)  
Tirthankar Roy (TR)  
Antonia Moon (AM)  
Amelia Wakeford (AW) (end of meeting only)

### On Skype:

Richard Gartner (RG) (second half only)  
Kate Showers (KS)  
Rob Allan (RA)

### Apologies:

Penny Brook

### **First half of meeting commenced 13:00**

#### Introduction and Delhi Meeting

VD introduced the meeting, stating that the first half of the meeting would address the second network meeting in Delhi on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August. The Delhi meeting will develop some of the current activities of the network. These include the creation of a coarse-grained archive and a meta-data system to access material for historical and climatological purposes. The metadata capabilities are undergoing development through the Hooker project.

The meeting in Delhi will also focus on pre-colonial climate history. This will include uncovering and accessing new sources. Deepak Kumar is keen to bring in Sanskrit and vernacular researchers from the National Manuscripts Mission. The project will explore ideas about the weather, ideas about interconnections between humans and nature, and report on droughts and famines. This will include Bengali folk songs, Tamil Literature and Chola inscriptions. VD pointed out that it is important during this meeting to gain firm links with other countries in the Indian Ocean World (IOW), particularly East Africa.

TR mentioned an article he published in past and present a year ago on pre-colonial Bengal. This made use of material from Bengali ballads, held in private collections. These were collected a while ago and published in annotated publications. More information would be available in Tamil literature. Pre-colonial manuscripts would be particularly useful for information on botanical knowledge, agricultural practices, and maritime trade. TR also suggested inviting representatives of the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata as this is a good resource for images; however, he warned that these do not often answer emails.

#### Existing Digitisation Activities and Archives

RA outlined ACRE-India. He stated that he is aiming to go visit the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) just before the meeting in Delhi. This is to develop an agreement to digitise old meteorological data, particularly looking to extend existing digitisation projects onto the wider India Ocean.

DN outlined the large availability of missionary material available. GA suggested inviting an individual who is cataloguing missionary materials in India. DN and KS discussed the availability of information on the weather within missionary materials from Lesotho. KS noted that the missionary archive in Morija is more comprehensive than the archives in France. DN mentioned a strong collection of Paris Evangelical Materials on microfilm at SOAS. DN and KS outlined the differencing quality of materials between missionary societies; the Hermansburg missionaries are particularly good as these were farmers. Missionaries are listed on the World Missionary Atlas and Catholic Missionary Atlas.

RA mentioned a planned meeting in Mozambique in September, in order to get together various Met Services from the IOW, particularly data people. This will be a "Show and tell" of material, and will show the importance of old meteorological data. ACRE are trying to get some historians and archivists involved. There will also be a similar meeting on Southeast Asia in Malasia later this year. VD suggested inviting Pauline von Hellerman to Maputo. DN mentioned material relating to Zanzibar in the Universities Mission to Central Africa collection in Oxford. RA stated that the digitisation will particularly be targeting the Meldreth meteorological material held in Mauritius, as well as Tanzanian and Malawian meteorological archives.

VD mentioned plantation sources. AM suggested involving Lucy Veale at Nottingham, who has used plantation records. DN mentioned sugar plantation records for Mauritius.

#### Forthcoming digitisation projects

AL and KS stressed that the purpose of the network must be to build a platform upon which further funds can be applied, with or without the involvement of Sussex. GA outlined the two digitisation projects that are planned. The first is a searchable database of materials, which is to be created by combining existing digital archive projects ongoing at Sussex, Kew Garden and the Natural History Museum. It was also involve a continuation of the Hooker Project. VD mentioned that the original Hooker Project had created the software for the database, and that six hundred further Hooker letters had been donated to Sussex from Kew for uploading using this software. AL agreed that this was a good level of ambition.

The second project will be a searchable online database of archives, which only includes a top-level description. The information from this will come from the emails sent out to all members of the network. AL mentioned that a similar project exists through the University of East Anglia website to track compensation money paid upon slave emancipation. He also suggested that the project should be started with the information that is currently available and given some publicity. This could then be shown to delegates at the Delhi meeting and would encourage further participation.

#### Format of Delhi Meeting

GA asked those present for advice regarding the format of the Delhi meeting. DN stated that a strong introduction to the aims of the network was necessary at the start of the meeting. AL mentioned that two concrete outcomes should be aimed for at the meeting. The first is to ensure all delegates contribute to the archival survey. The second was to discuss research synergies to build on the platform.

It was agreed that the first day of the meeting would involve presentations and the second discussions of research projects. AL suggested that 3 delegates should be nominated to coordinate new projects, and these asked to give plenary presentations on the first day.

#### **First half of the meeting ended 14:20**

#### **Meeting recommenced 14:30**

RG entered the meeting on Skype. It was agreed that he would attend the meeting in Delhi. AM asked if he was aware of any similar projects to this, he replied that he didn't. GA asked whether the idea of combining archives would be possible. RG replied that it would.

#### Future Collaborative Projects

VD mentioned that GA had been selected by University of Sussex as the candidate for the 2013 AXA Research Fellowship Award. The subject of the project is risk and resilience to climate in India.

DN discussed potential collaboration with Steffen Vogt at Friburg. This relates to an existing project running through Friburg to reconstruct climatic conditions in the Middle East using Arabic sources. DN approached Steffen Vogt with missionary sources in order to extend this project into the nineteenth century; however, the project has progressed no further. DN suggested that no money was available from Friburg. RA suggested that French consulate records may be useful in this region,

and potentially Sultanate records. KS concurred that the Sultanate records may be useful, possibly including instrumental records, but that this was unknown at present. The Qatar foundation were discussed as a potential funding source. AM mentioned the ongoing Qatar project at the British Library to digitise middle-eastern materials, and stated that she had requested that information on botany and meteorology be forwarded to the network. RA mentioned that he did not know where the British consular records were. DN suggested the National Archives at Kew.

VD outlined a project in the pipeline to digitise the Kew miscellaneous reports. This would be headed by Jim Endersby and be a collaboration between the Kolkata Botanic Gardens, Kew Gardens and Sussex.

VD introduced a new project on climatic reconstruction and social resilience to climate, looking broadly at South Asia and possibly Southeast Asia. This involves everyone present at the meeting, including TR's expertise on economic history. To be called "informing resilience: historical analysis of climate resilience and climate change in South India". The project will combine documentary, instrumental and palaeo records and will potentially aim to map drought and El Niño events. Its purpose will be to improve the climate record and look at adaptation. It will involve case-studies from south, west and east India and maybe Southeast Asia. The project is to be submitted to the ESRC large-grants project in outline for 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

TR suggested that there were two big questions to be asked. The first is extending the climatic record. The second concerns responses to and management of climatic events, or adaptation. This includes questions on the ways in which livelihoods (agriculture, maritime trade) factor in climatic risk into the way that they function. This is largely overlooked within histories. DN mentioned that climate reconstruction and livelihoods can be studied with the same sources. TR cautioned that the climatic record would need complete sources, but that studies into resilience would not. He suggested that a statistical method could be developed to determine at what level a climatic event could create a drought.

Regarding pre-1700 material, DN and TR agreed that a medieval specialist would need to be brought into the grant. However, DN cautioned against the grant becoming too large. AM suggested that the British Library may have pre-colonial materials, and that we should speak to the new head of South Asian materials.

RA stated that any material would be available, either instrumental or descriptive. Using descriptive data to calibrate models is a new goal of ACRE. DN suggested that the grant be written as exploratory for pre-1900, with definite outputs post-1900. AM agreed, as an exploratory element is an important part of any grant. KS suggested that a database may be developed whereby descriptive data could be mapped spatially; this may also help to overcome problems with interpretation. RG said that this would be possible. VD suggested setting this up as a pilot for improving the methodology in the future.

KS, GA and DN discussed a database. KS stressed that the data need to be inputted as raw data. DN mentioned that coding by hand is difficult. GA suggested that the database could be designed to incorporate some coding processes. Only simple georeferencing would be necessary by hand. RG suggested that this could be possible. KS then mentioned that this could become a crowd-sourcing database, into which materials could be inputted without central control from Sussex.

VD suggested analysing newspapers as the principle source as these will guarantee a strong climate reconstruction. Other archives could be complementary. DN suggested four case study areas, with a post-doc working on each. This could be differentiated either geographically or by language. VD stressed the need for region-sensitive scholars.

VD suggested AHRC Care for the Future as an alternative funding source, should the ESRC bid be unsuccessful. DN mentioned that they have a forthcoming meeting in London, to which we should attend. An impact statement has already been written for a separate Care for the Future project submitted for Western Africa, which could be adapted.

AW mentioned that the "killer question" should be "what are you trying to find out and why is it important". DN suggested that this had already been answered. AW stated that the project was

mapping the balance between scope, balance, deliverables, feasibility and usefulness of the project. This is necessary for a successful grant.

It was suggested that case study areas should be East India, South India and the Konkan. This could be differentiated into post-docs looking at English, French, Portuguese, Tamil and Bengali sources.

**Meeting ended 16:00**