Centre for the GeoHumanities

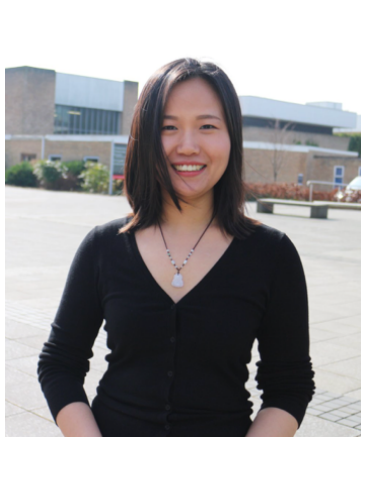
Newsletter No. 14
October 2024

Centre for the GeoHumanities

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of the Centre for the GeoHumanities newsletter. Please get in touch with us at geohumanities@rhul.ac.uk if you have news you would like to share or would like your work featured.

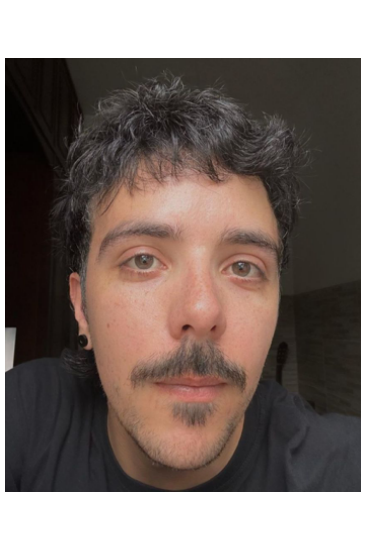
Visiting Researchers (2024-25)

The Centre welcomes international and national visitors interested in our research and activities. Since 2022, we have hosted academic visitors from Queens University Ontario, Padua, Paris, Naples, Neuchatel, Padua, Rio de Janeiro, Uppsala and Wuhan. In 2024-5 we are delighted to welcome five visitors from China, Brazil, Switzerland and the UK with interests in plant humanities, cultural geography, food imaginaries, literature, architecture, the visual arts and museum design.



Dr Muren Zhang is Associate Professor in English Literature at the East China Normal University, Shanghai, and author of a book on Neo-Victorianism, empathy and reading published by Bloomsbury. Her interests include mobility studies, cultural geography, and contemporary British literature.The subject of her research during her year-long visiting fellowship at the Centre from August 2024, supported by the China Scholarship Council, is 'Re-imagining England in the Twenty-First Century'.

Camila Medina Novoa is a landscape architect trained in Chile, currently studying for a PhD at the Institute for Landscape & Urban Studies, ETH Zurich. The subject of her research while at the Centre, from August 2024 to January 2025, is the global circulation on Araucaria araucana, the monkey puzzle tree. She is also a visiting researcher at Kew Gardens where she is a member of the Plant Humanities group.



Felipe Vieira is a PhD student at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), studying the history of cultural geography in Brazil. He has also published on landscape and cultural heritage and has interests in the role of film-making in geographical research. He is the first visitor under the terms of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the Centre for GeoHumanities and the State University of Rio.

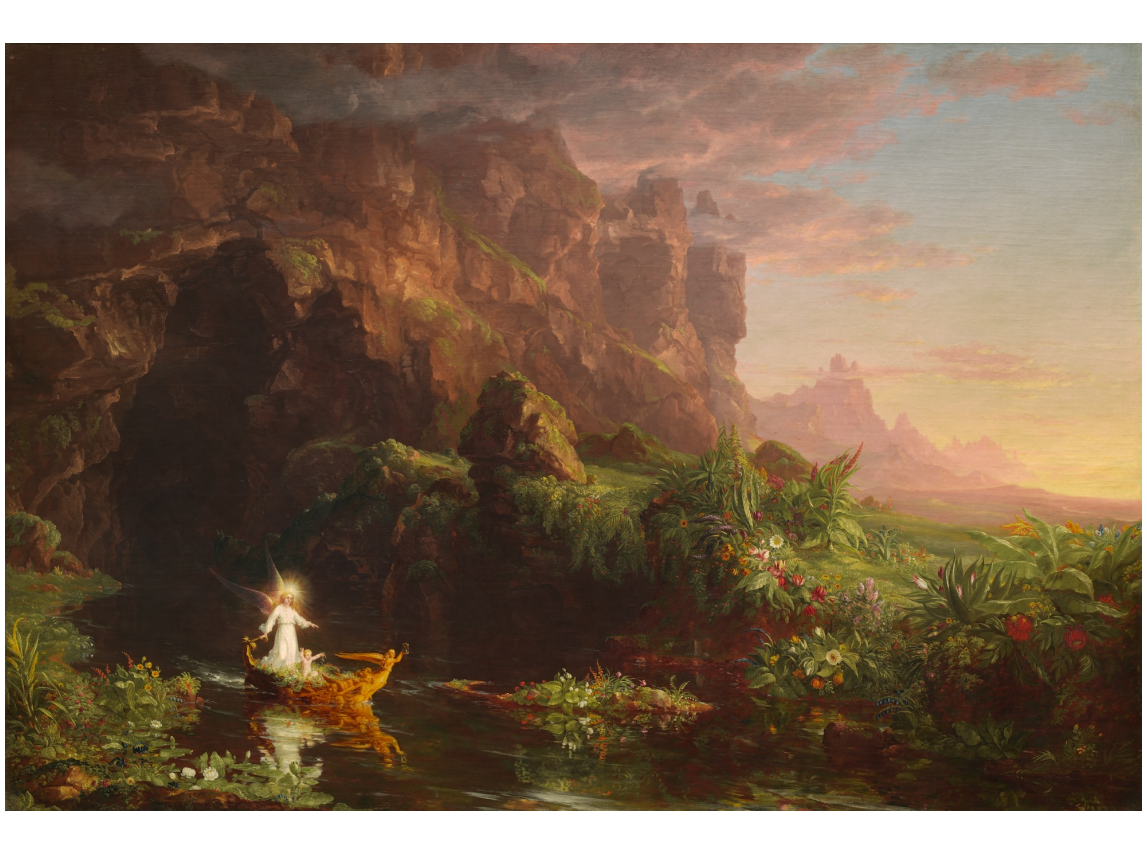
Dr Yinlan Xu is Associate Professor in Art and Design, with a specialism in museum and exhibition design, at the Nanjing Institute of Technology, China. Her research focusses on landscape, interior design and the global influence of Chinese culture. The focus of her research during her stay at the Centre, for a year from September 2024, is on the traditional art and design of Chinese flower arrangement.

Dr Ekaterina Gladkova is Assistant Professor in Sociology at the University of Northumbria. Her research interests lie in interdisciplinary work on the practices, politics and human/more-than-human entanglements in food production. She is currently developing a project on alternative food imaginaries and is interested in the role of artistic practice in thinking about alternative futures for food production.

Research Highlights

Mapping the Journey of Life

A Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship



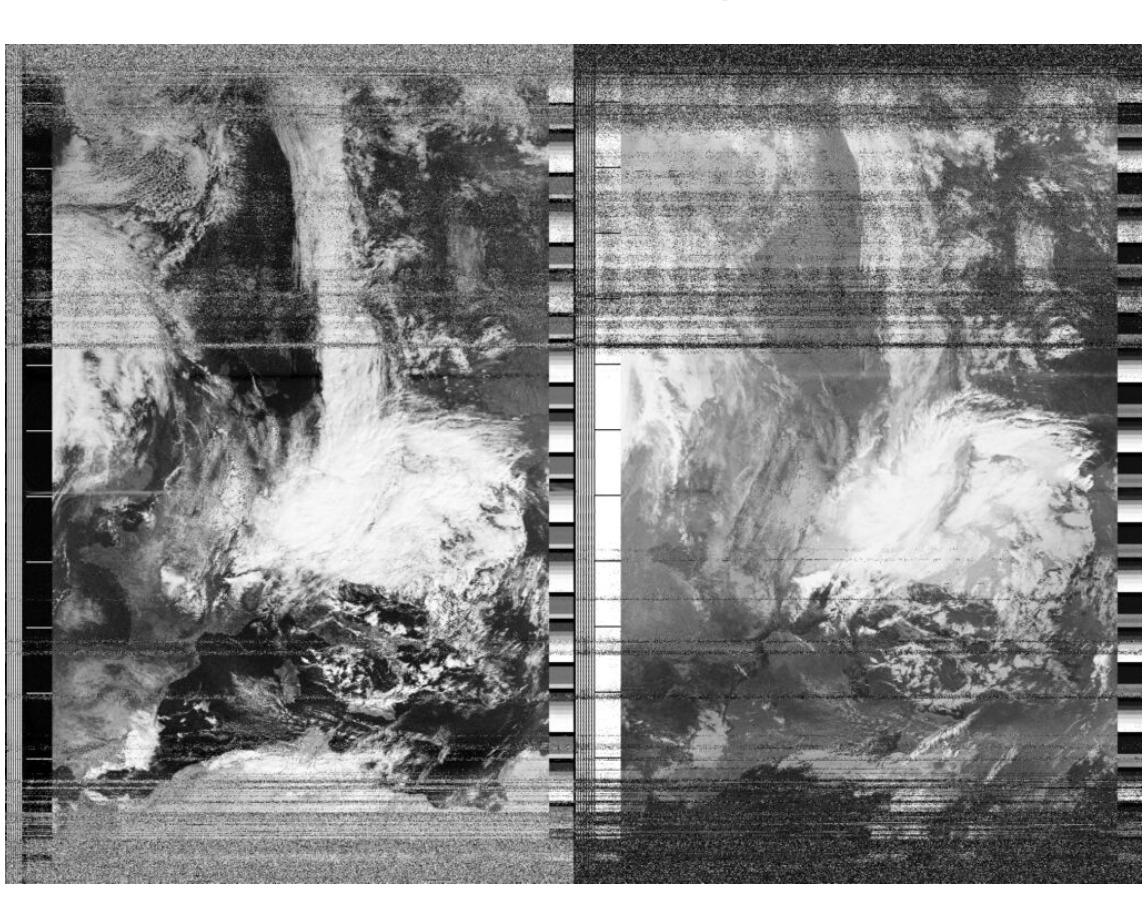
Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of life: Childhood* (1842), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Veronica Della Dora is a year into a three-year Leverhulme Research Fellowship on the journey of life, an ancient metaphor given new resonance in the age of the Anthropocene. Since antiquity, human life has often been conceptualized and narrated in spatial terms as a journey or a voyage. Over the centuries, the metaphor extended from individual spiritual trajectory to the collective destiny of humankind. During the twentieth century, the image of the ship of the soul traversing the stormy ocean of life transmuted into 'Spaceship Earth' floating in the universe. More recently, the metaphor has been resurrected at a new temporal scale, as humanity looks back into Deep Time, from an uncertain present, and forward into a dubious deep future in which the very continuation of human life is itself called into question. Why is the life journey such a resilient and pervasive image or metaphor? How have its representations changed over the centuries? And how do they speak of shifting perceptions of space and the environment, as well as of our relationship with life and death? Is it possible to identify moments of decisive shifts in this metaphorical appropriation due to social upheaval, natural disaster, or religious change? And what can they teach us about our relationship with the non-human world?

The Fellowship will result in a book which considers diverse representations of the journey of life, drawing on literary and visual sources from classical Antiquity to the present, and how changing types of landscapes, mobilities and scales associated with this metaphor reflect shifting perceptions of space, time and the environment, as well as of the human self, life and death.

Something in the Air

An AHRC Fellowship



Satellite image transmitted by NOAA-18, captured from Leipzig on 14 September 2024,by Ani. The image shows Storm Boris which caused severe flooding, train line closures and damage to houses, buildings and trees across central Europe.

Sasha Engelmann recently completed a two-year AHRC Fellowship on the theme of 'Advancing Feminist and Creative Methods for Sensing Air and Atmosphere'. The project funded a community air sensing project in Argentina, and a new, ambitious phase of the feminist satellite imaging project, open-weather. In Argentina, Sasha worked with anthropologist Débora Swistun and a local team of designers, students and programmers to establish a model of air sensing in the underserved community of Villa Inflamable. Over the last year, open-weather launched a new, web-based, open source satellite imagery decoder for NOAA satellite imagery, and a redesigned public archive, to which members of the open-weather network submit satellite images and weather notes from all over the world. For example, on 14th September 2024, workshop participants in Leipzig, Germany recorded satellite images of Storm Boris (pictured in the above image), and shared their reflections on vulnerable infrastructures, flooded landscapes and political climates in central Europe. Only a few days later, a contributor located in Alabama shared an image of Hurricane Helene. Over the next year, the open-weather archive will become a growing platform for diverse satellite imagery recordings and weather reflections. The AHRC funding may be coming to an end, but it has provided resources for new collaborations, infrastructure and research that will continue to unfold over the coming years.

Local Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

New AHRC-funded Research Project

THIS IS A TOWN
BUILT ON STORIES
THIS IS A TOWN
FULL OF TALES

Local Theatres is an exciting new two-year research project, funded by the AHRC, which examines the relationship between theatre and local communities, economies and cultures in the UK. It is led by Centre members Helen Nicholson and David Gilbert, from Royal Holloway's Drama & Theatre and Geography Departments respectively, building on their previous research on theatre in towns and geographical understandings of local identities. The project team is multi-institutional and strongly interdisciplinary and includes Adelle Hulsmeier (Performing Arts, University of Sunderland), Anne Marie Green (Chair in Work and Diversity, University of York), and Selina Busby (Professor of Applied and Social Theatre, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London), as well as number of postdoctoral researchers.

The first strand of the project, 'Performing Localism', explores the work of national leaders in participatory theatres and also uses commissions and partnerships to create new work. The team is working closely with the National Theatre's Public Acts team, particularly a new musical play devised with community groups in Sunderland, that is drawing upon David Gilbert's work on local archives. The project is also co-creating work with four local theatres, Sunderland Empire; Donmar LOCAL, London; The Curve, Slough; and The Stables, Hastings. Playwrights, performing artists and community participants will explore resources in local archives, national collections, local landscapes and landmarks to uncover hidden stories, and inspire new imaginaries of local life.

The second strand, 'Theatres and Local Cultures', will map the wider ecologies of local theatre in four contrasting areas – Sunderland, London boroughs outside the creative core, Hastings and seaside towns more widely, and Slough. In each case, the project team will explore the forms and capacities of local theatre activity, exploring themes of inclusivity, diversity, education and cultural opportunity.

New Geohumanities PhD Research

The Centre for GeoHumanities supports a large number of PhD projects by UK and overseas students, many of them working in collaboration with our partners in the culture, creative and heritage sectors. In September 2024 we welcome five new PhD students funded by AHRC and ESRC. Look out for more on PhD research in future Centre newsletters!

Jane Cameron, *Mapping messengers: the work, urban mobility and lived experiences of London motorcycle despatch riders 1970 – 2000*, supported by an AHRC Techne Studentship, supervised by David Gilbert & Pete Adey

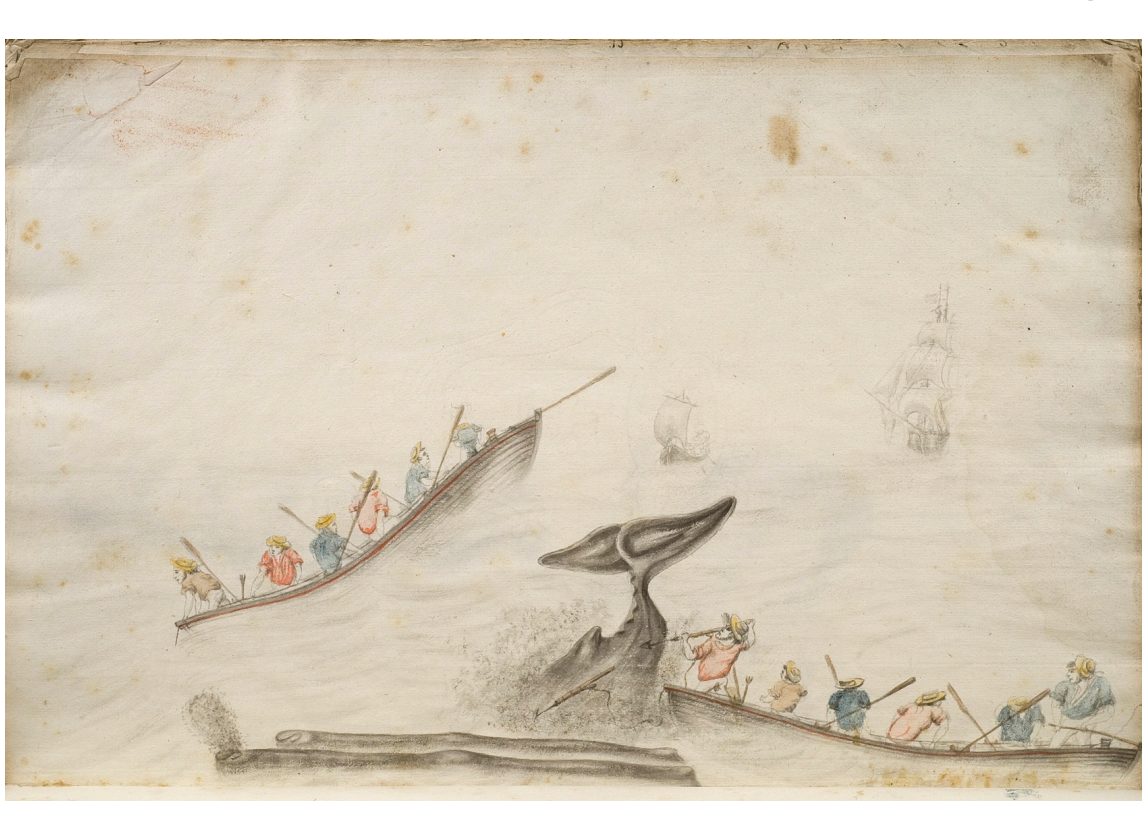
Sophia Kamps, *Economies of natural history: publishing science in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, supported by an AHRC Techne Collaborative Doctoral Award with Kew Gardens, supervised by Felix Driver & Innes Keighren with Caroline Cornish & Fiona Ainsworth at Kew

Jack Seagrove, *Rethinking the relationship between the UK and the Overseas Territories: Kew, science diplomacy and soft power*, supported by an ESRC SEDArc collaborative studentship with Kew Gardens, supervised by Felix Driver, Rachael Squire & Alasdair Pinkerton with Tom Heller & Sara Barrios at Kew

Weitao Wang, *The geopower of air and fire: a cultural geography of fiery rituals in China*, supported by an AHRC Techne Studentship, supervised by Sasha Engelmann & Pete Adey

Emma Yandle, *The geographical museum: making knowledge through objects*, supported by an AHRC Techne Collaborative Doctoral Award, supervised by Felix Driver & David Gilbert with Sarah Evans, Catherine Souch & Katherine Parker at the RGS

Award for PhD thesis on Pacific whaling



Sketch from Journal of the whaleship *Gipsy*, kept by John Wilson, Surgeon, 1839-43 (RGS Collections)

On 30 September 2024, the British Commission for Maritime History announced the winner of the annual Boydell & Brewer Prize for the best doctoral thesis in maritime history. We're delighted to report that this year's prize was awarded to Rachael Utting for her PhD thesis at Royal Holloway on *Collecting Leviathan: The British Southern Whale Fishery and Global Knowledge Production 1775-1860*. Rachael was recently appointed curator of the Isles of Scilly Museum.

New Books

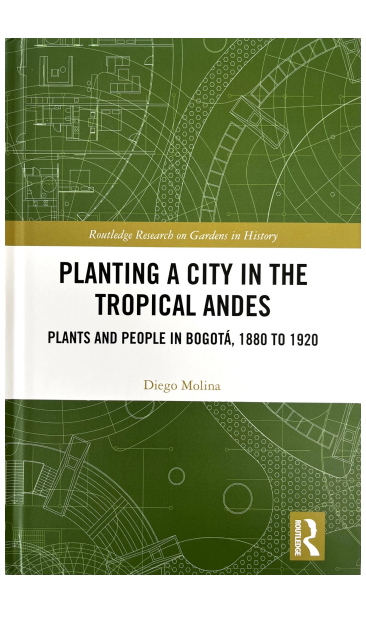
Evacuation: The Politics and Aesthetics of Movement in Emergency

By Pete Adey

Pete Adey's new book, *Evacuation: The Politics and Aesthetics of Movement in Emergency*, just published by Duke University Press, examines the politics, aesthetics, and practice of moving people and animals from harm during emergencies. He outlines how the governance and design of evacuation operate recursively on myriad political, symbolic, and affective levels in ways that reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. Drawing on a wide range of case studies, including the retrieval of wounded soldiers from the battlefield during World War I, escaping the World Trade Centre on 9/11, human and animal evacuations in response to the 2009 Australian bushfires and the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the book demonstrates that evacuation is not an equal process. Some people may choose not to move while others are forced; some may even be brought into harm through evacuation. Often the poorest, racialized, and most marginalized communities hold the least power in such moments. At the same time, these communities can generate compassionate, creative, and democratic forms of care that offer alternative responses to crises. Ultimately, Pete argues, understanding the practice of evacuation illuminates its importance to power relations and everyday governance. In the words of Caren Kaplan, "Peter Adey's intellectual curiosity and creativity have brought us something 'outside the box'" – or as Ben Anderson even more pithily puts it, "a stunning work"!

Planting a City in the Tropical Andes

By Diego Molina



Diego Molina's new book, *Planting a City in the Tropical Andes*, the first to be published in the new series *Routledge Research on Gardens in History*, reveals how the nineteenth-century modernisation of Colombia's capital city led to a transformation in the social role of plants. The book tells the story of how Bogotá, located in the high altitudes of the Tropical Andes, turned into a 'floristic island' formed by indigenous, introduced and cultivated plants. The account gives us a strikingly new perspective on the making of modern cities. At the global scale urbanisation is one of the main forces behind accelerating biodiversity loss. Yet, paradoxically, the expansion of cities has endowed urban environments with a greater number of plant species compared to their surrounding areas. *Planting a City in the Tropical Andes* takes a multidisciplinary approach to the cultural and ecological mechanisms that have transformed modern cities into unique botanical spaces. It explains how the nineteenth-century modernisation of Bogotá led to the replacement of traditional botanical practices with technical forms of knowledge, which in turn endowed the city with a distinctive floristic inventory. Through a novel botanical perspective on Latin American urban history, Diego uncovers how capitalist dynamics in Bogotá transformed plants into providers of clean air and water and how their use in the urban landscape was intended to contribute to the cultivation of a disciplined citizenry. Placing plants at the centre of its narrative, the book offers an original contribution to the largely unexplored history of horticulture in tropical Latin America. It serves as a compelling example of how the creative and conflicting forces of the Anthropocene have forged new environments, highlighting previously unseen relationships between people and plants.

Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond

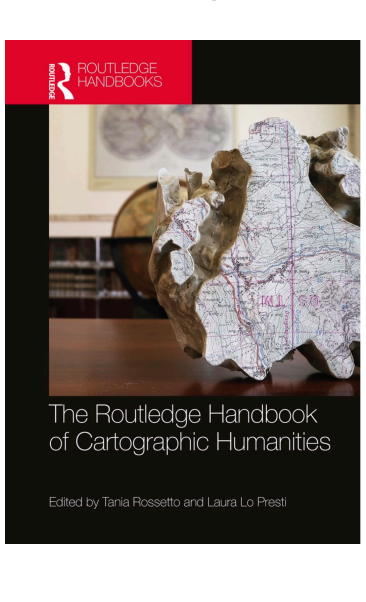
Edited by Veronica della Dora, Charalambos Dendrinos, Mark Guscin, and David John Williams

Veronica della Dora and colleagues are publishing a new book on *Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond*, amply demonstrating just how significant questions of space and the sacred have become within the field of Byzantine studies. Much recent scholarship in that field has addressed issues of embodiment and performance, power and identity, environmental perceptions and territorial imaginations. At the same time, the mobility turn in the humanities has prompted new approaches to the circulation of people, objects and ideas. Drawing together illuminating contributions from scholars in history, art history, literature, geography, architecture and theology, *Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond* sets the stage for further cross-disciplinary dialogue concerning Orthodox Christian spiritual culture and society in the Byzantine Empire and in the centuries after its fall.

Part of the Brill series *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1500*, the volume resulted from an international colloquium co-sponsored by the Centre for GeoHumanities and the Hellenic Institute, as reported in the CGH Newsletter (no.8, 2021). The book is dedicated to the memory of Julian Chrysostomides and Denis E. Cosgrove.

Handbook of the Cartographic Humanities

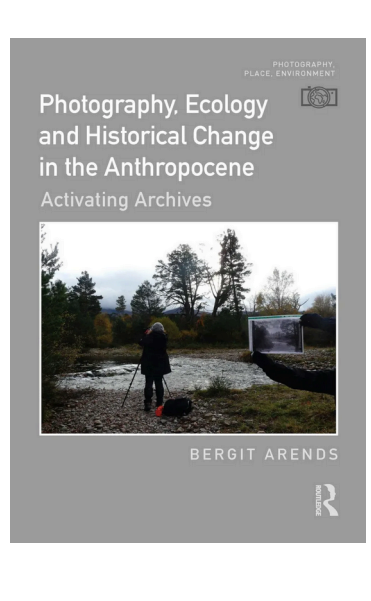
Edited by Tania Rossetto and Laura Lo Presti



The newly-published Routledge *Handbook of the Cartographic Humanities*, co-edited by cultural geographers Tania Rossetto and Laura Lo Presti, from the Centre's partner institution at the University of Padua, contains a dazzling array of 42 chapters on many aspects of the encounter between map studies and the humanities. Launched at the annual meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in August, the book's first chapter is by Veronica della Dora ('Mapping inner worlds: cartography as a humanity') and it also includes a contribution from Centre member Barbara Brayshay (with Aldo de Moor) on 'Participatory network mapping for public action'. There is also a chapter by another cultural geographer well known in the Centre, Giada Peterle, entitled 'Auto-cartography: (fictional) ethnographies of the self and the map in the field'. If, as Gillian Rose writes, "mapping remains an extraordinarily diverse and generative technique for mediating the world", then this Handbook provides a valuable guide to the ways in which humanities scholarship has contributed to its interpretation. Or as Tim Cresswell puts it, "This is a must-read collection for scholars across the humanities interested in the role of cartography in human meaning-making".

Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene

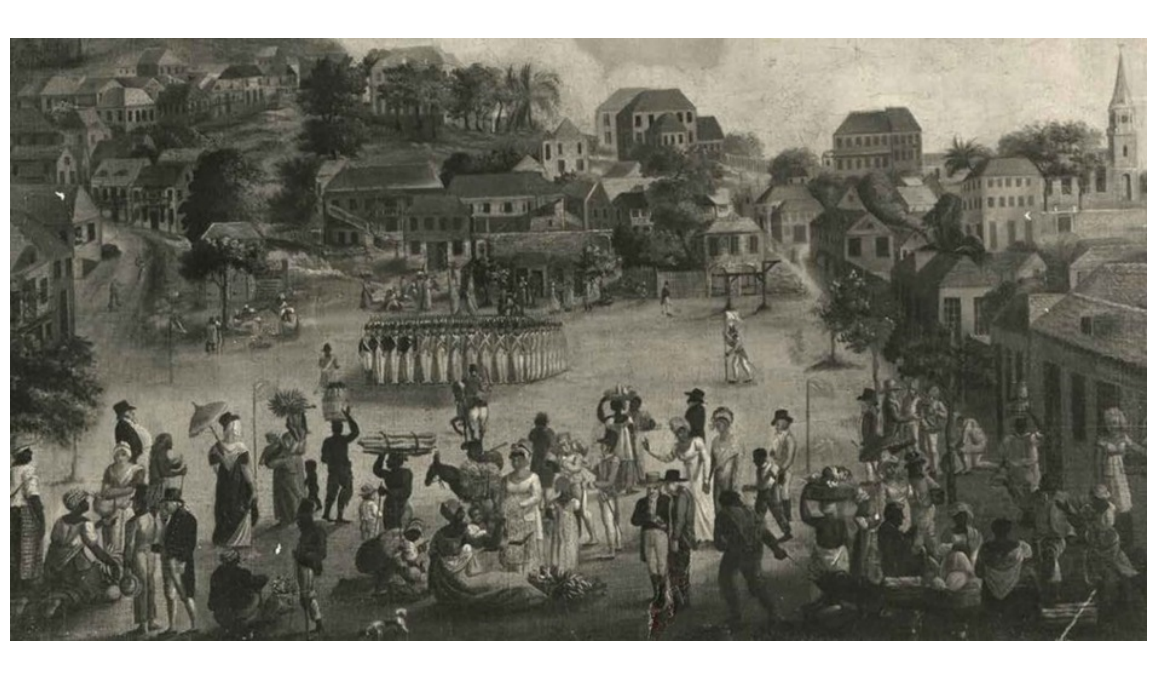
By Bergit Arends



The curator-turned-researcher Bergit Arends, affiliate member of the Centre, has just published a new book based on her PhD on the art of the Anthropocene at Royal Holloway and her postdoctoral research at Bristol and the Courtauld Institute where she is currently based. *Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene: Activating Archives* connects photography, archives, ecology, and historical change, and critically applies the Anthropocene as framework to the in-depth study of artists' projects. Bergit uses multi-disciplinary perspectives to view localised environmental, social, and political issues through the lens of research-based artistic practices. Her book makes available original research into newly and recently-discovered archives of ecological and historical change, while also showing how this research is manifest in exhibition contexts. This book discusses a number of significant international, transhistorical projects by contemporary visual artists who use archives and photography as documentary and performative media for the comparative study of environments and places. The work of a wide array of artists working from the 1970s to the present day are discussed including archive-based work by Nguyen the Thuc, Christiane Eisler, Chrystel Lebas, Mark Dion, Joy Gregory and Philip Miller.

Recent Events

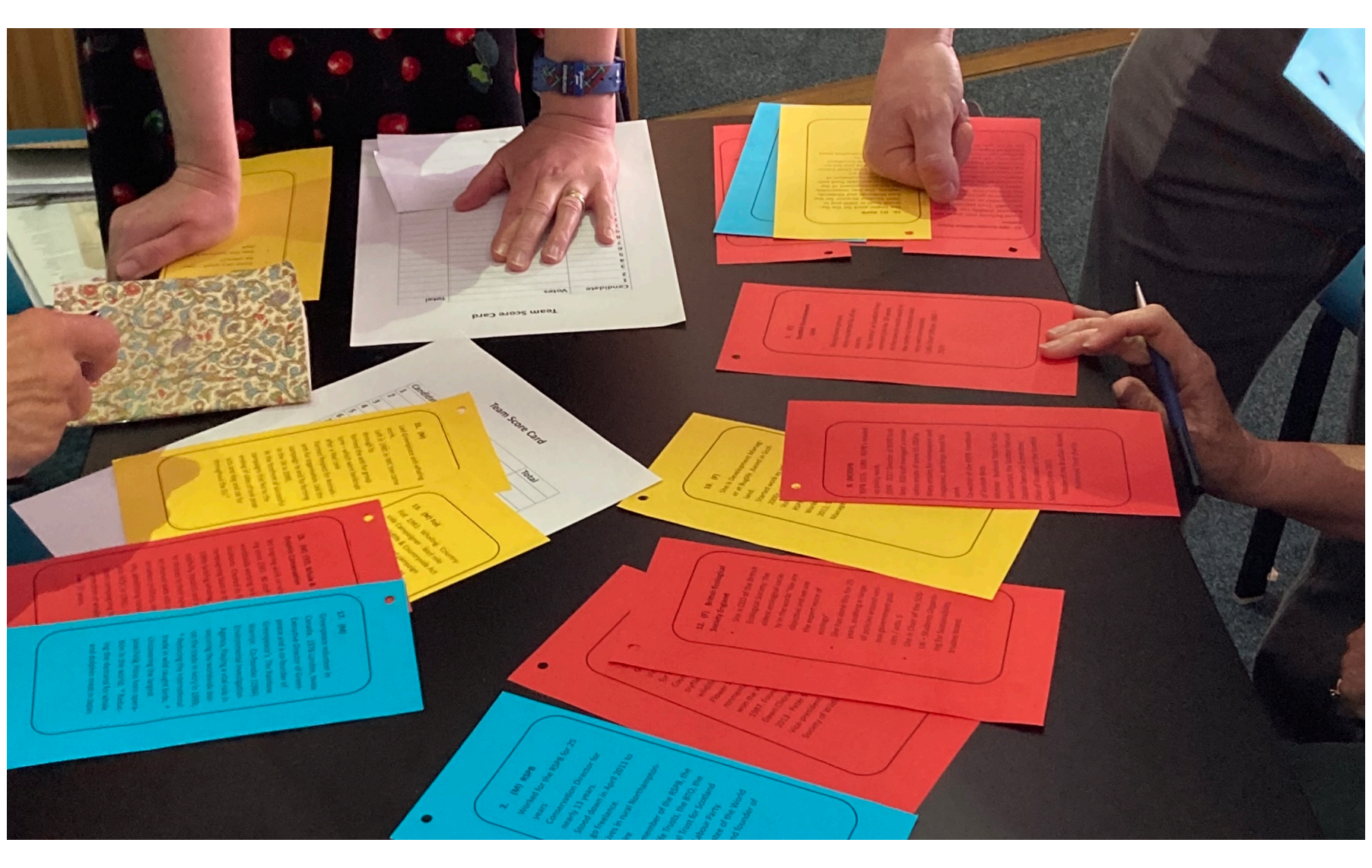
Historical geographies of the Caribbean



Detail from "Grenada Market Square, 1779." © National Library of Jamaica Digital Collection

The Royal Geographical Society's annual conference, in August 2024, included a lively double session on Historical Geographies of the Caribbean convened by David Lambert and Jo Norcup, former members of the Royal Holloway Geography Department. Innes Keighren presented a paper from his current research on questions of race and credibility in eighteenth-century Grenada. The paper drew on the findings of his current book project—a biography of the eighteenth-century Scots planter, politician, and spy, William Macintosh—to examine how intersecting social and legal frameworks conspired to subtract credibility from the testimony of Black people, both enslaved and free, in colonial Grenada. The paper focused on testimonies gathered by Macintosh in his role of Justice of the Peace for the parish of St Andrew's, in cases variously of theft and rebellion, and how the legal validity of those testimonies was established or rejected. In examining the case of the celebrated African autobiographical writer and anti-slavery campaigner Olaudah Equiano, who brought a complaint of theft by a white islander to Macintosh in 1771, Innes considered how Equiano's words were subject to "testimonial injustice" by being made valueless through legal codes designed to protect and underwrite white hegemony. His paper concluded by exploring how the rebellious voices of enslaved Africans acquired credibility and political significance only when rendered through the testimony of white islanders, and how Macintosh's own credibility was later subject to doubt on the basis of suspicions as to his own racial identity. Innes' biography of Macintosh is under contract with McGill-Queen's University Press. To follow his continuing research, check out his blog: *On the Archival Trail of William Macintosh*.

Voices for Change: Oral Histories of the Environmental Movement

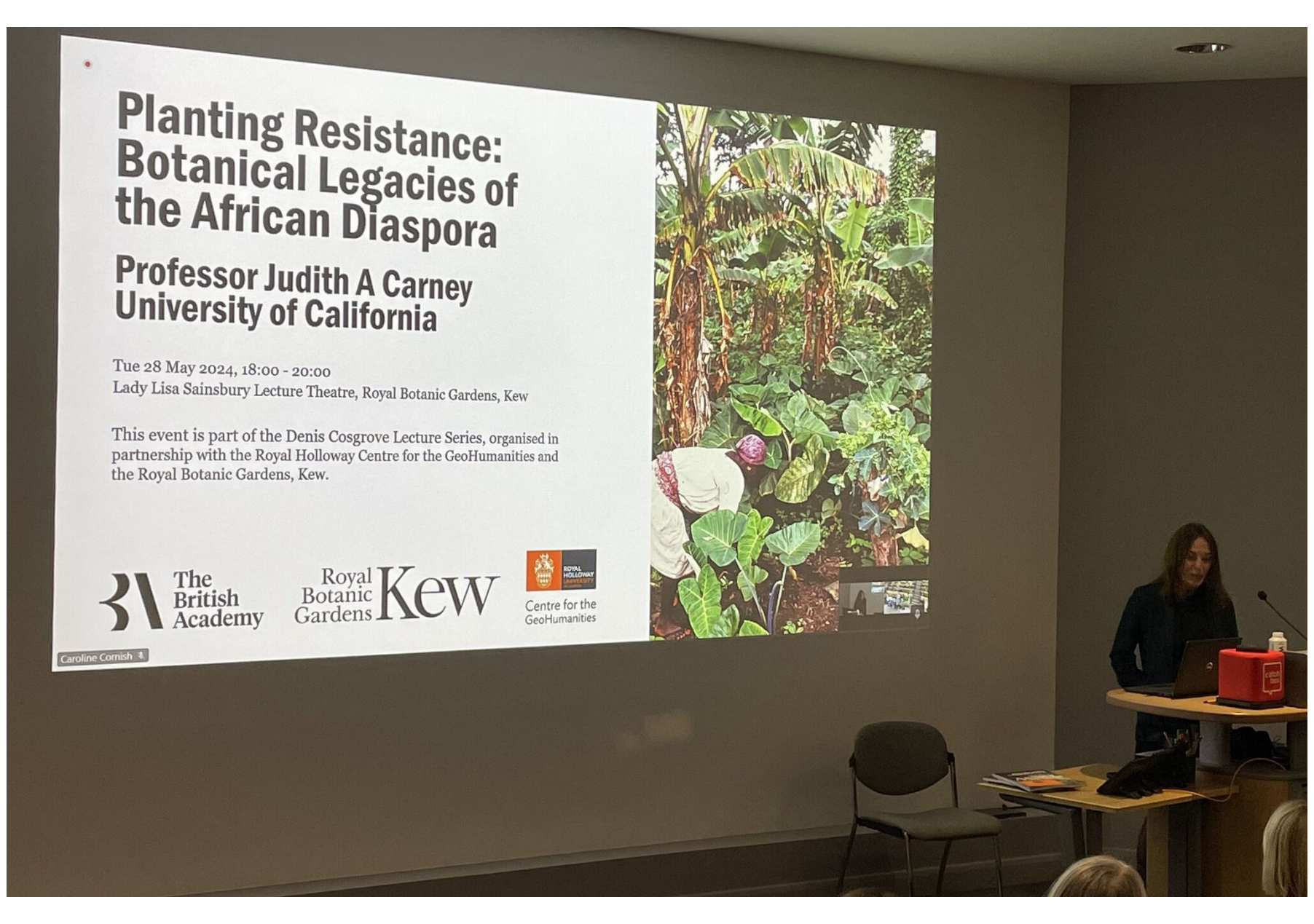


Workshop participants at the 2024 Oral History Festival play the interviewee selection game designed by Barbara Brayshay and Jeremy Iles, members of the OHEM team

The Centre for GeoHumanities hosts a major AHRC-funded project on the Oral History of the Environmental Movement, or OHEM for short (see CGH Newsletter no. 10, 2022). In July 2024, project team members Barbara Brayshay and Jeremy Iles took part in the Oral History Festival at the British Library, organised by the Oral History Society in collaboration with National Life Stories (one of the partners on the OHEM project). The theme of their presentation was on 'the challenge of choosing which voices are heard', reflecting one of the core aims of the project to present a genuinely inclusive history of the environmental movement in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, region and generation. In tune with the participatory ethos of the event, Barbara and Jeremy designed a game for the occasion ('the matrix game') in which a deck of cards with biographical details of anonymised activists were shared with participants who then had to face the challenge of designing and implementing an appropriate selection process resulting in an agreed list of interviewees which, reflected the diversity of the movement in all its forms. The exercise, which replicated in miniature a long and considered process which has involved extensive deliberation within and beyond the OHEM project team, generated much discussion. In fact it was so successful that the cards will be played again at future events!

Seventh Annual Cosgrove Lecture

May 2024


Planting Resistance: Botanical Legacies of the African Diaspora
Professor Judith A Carney
University of California
Tue 28 May 2024, 18:00 - 20:00
Lady Lisa Sainsbury Lecture Theatre, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
This event is part of the Denis Cosgrove Lecture Series, organised in partnership with the Royal Holloway Centre for the GeoHumanities and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
The British Academy
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
Centre for the GeoHumanities

Judith Carney delivers the 7th Denis Cosgrove Lecture in the Lisa Sainsbury Lecture Theatre, Kew Gardens, 28 May 2024

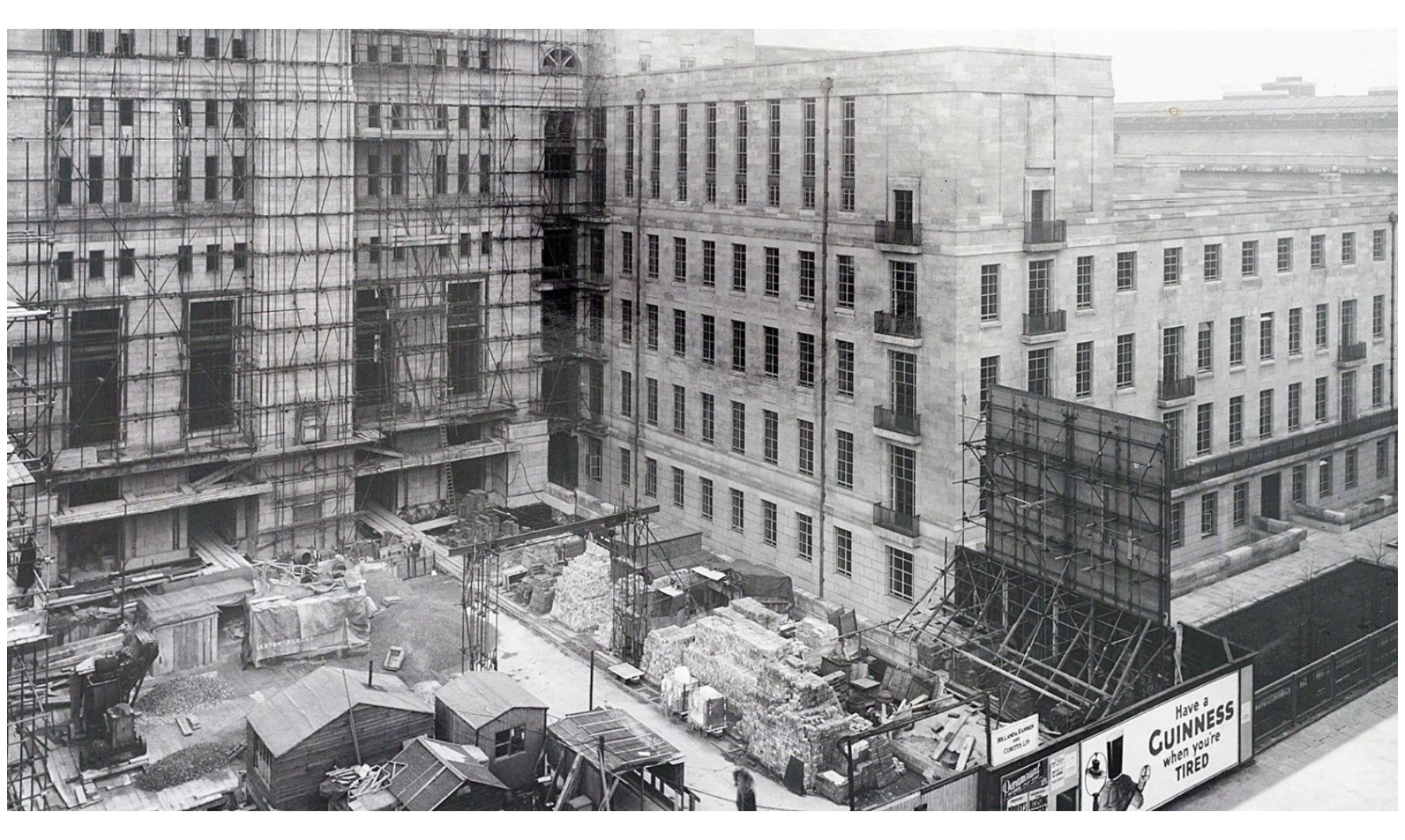
Judith Carney's lecture, *Planting Resistance: Botanical Legacies of the African Diaspora*, was delivered to a packed audience at Kew Gardens on Tuesday 28th of May. Judith spent the afternoon before the lecture visiting the Kew collections and meeting with staff, including the Kew Director Richard Deverell and the Royal Holloway Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julie Sanders, also a member of the Centre for GeoHumanities. Afterwards Julie Sanders encapsulated the event in a vivid social media post: "A superb Denis Cosgrove memorial lecture this evening delivered with intellectual panache by Prof Judith Carney from UCLA, about food, autonomy & freedom, using a career-deep understanding of archival history & the concept of Bio-refugia to talk about participatory & just food futures. The best of UC Berkeley learned interdisciplinarity was being shared in a generous way that resonated so much with me and fellow audience members".

Judith Carney's lecture will soon be made available digitally by the British Academy – look out for the news from the GeoHumanities Forum and on the Centre website, where previous Cosgrove Lectures are also available in video and/or audio form.

Recent Events

Geographies of Law and Empire

Fortnightly from Tuesday 8th October 2024 | Institute of Historical Research in Senate House, London



Senate House, University of London, under construction, 1937

In conversation with a group of French historians, Michel Foucault once described his books as "philosophical fragments made in historical construction sites". If this metaphor has any lasting appeal amongst academics it is surely because today it is recognised that the work of building ideas is essentially a collective endeavour (even when its products are associated with individual authors). This is why the research seminar series remains one of our favourite building sites.

And so we welcome the latest seminar programme in the long-running series organised by the London Group of Historical Geographers, this one convened by Innes Keighren around the theme of law and empire. These seminars are free and open to all. To register to attend any of the seminars listed below, please visit this page on the website of the Institute of Historical Research. **All seminars begin at 5:30pm** and are available online; with the exception of the fourth (12 November), they can also be attended in person at the Institute of Historical Research in Senate House.

8 October 2024 **Nathan Perl-Rosenthal** (University of Southern California)
The art of prize: privateers' legal geographies in the long eighteenth century

22 October 2024 **Lisa Ford** (UNSW Sydney)
Inquiring into colonial law reform: views from the archives of the Commissions of Inquiry, 1819–1833

5 November 2024 **Chloe Ireton** (UCL)
Imagining liberty: legal geographies of enslaved and free Black people in in late sixteenth-century Sevilla

12 November 2024 **Joel Wainwright** (Ohio State University)
How does the law obtain its space? Justice and racial difference in colonial law: British Honduras (Belize), 1821, with Discussant: Filiberto Penados (Galen University)

3 December 2024 **Maïa Pal** (Oxford Brookes University)
The law of infrastructure: jurisdictional accumulation and neo-imperialism at British and French undersea cable landing sites

Members of the Centre are also welcome to join the London Group of Historical Geographers' seminar mailing list to keep up-to-date with its activities or take a look at its archive of previous talks. The convenors of the Group are Felix Driver and Innes Keighren of the Royal Holloway Centre for GeoHumanities, Miles Ogborn (Queen Mary) and Margot Finn (UCL).

Eighth Cosgrove Lecture (2025)

The eighth in the Centre's series of Cosgrove Lectures will take place in 2025, provisionally on **Thursday 15th May 2025** at Royal Holloway. Watch out for further details coming later in the year!

Previous newsletters back to 2016 are archived and available here.

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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