

Collecting, Colonialism, and Empire

Working with archives and museum collections in Northeast England and Northern Ireland

11 – 12 May 2023 at Hotel Indigo, Durham

Thursday, 11 May 2023

9.00 Registration and refreshments, Hotel Indigo

9.30 Welcome and Introduction

Christina Riggs (History, Durham University)

10.00 Global Beamish: Revisiting History at The Living Museum of the North

Julie-Marie Strange (History, Durham University)

Helen Barker (Beamish, The Living Museum of the North)

Rheba Macha (History, Durham University)

Natasha Anson (History, Durham University)

Established in 1970, Beamish is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Northeast of England, known for its recreations of 19th and 20th century village life and its use of costumed interpreters. But whose histories does Beamish represent, and how does it situate its account of the region's industrial development in the context of the British Empire? In this session, an academic, a curator, and a postgraduate researcher share their work on a project called Global Beamish, which aims to draw attention to underrepresented histories of class, gender, immigration, and race.

11.30 Tea and Coffee Break

12.00 Collecting, Colonialism, and the Country House

Jo Moody (National Trust)

Julie Biddlecombe-Brown (Raby Castle)

June Watson (Northumbria University)

Historic properties in England include country houses as well as more modest residential buildings, the majority of which date to the era of British colonialism, involvement in the slave trade, and imperial expansion. Properties may belong to the National Trust (a registered charity) or be overseen by Historic England (a non-departmental public body), while others remain in private ownership. How are historic

properties researching their collections', owners', and occupants' links to colonialism and empire, and what challenges do they face in presenting this research to wider audiences? In this session, professional practitioners and a postgraduate researcher share their research and reflections on this important and timely theme.

13.30 Lunch

14.30 *Please make your way to the Oriental Museum for our afternoon session.*

15.00 South Asia at the Oriental Museum: Research, Teaching, and Display

Rachel Barclay (Senior Curator, Oriental Museum, Durham University)

Radha Kapuria (History, Durham University)

Jonathan Saha (History, Durham University)

This session at the Oriental Museum features a handling session and discussion with academic researchers who are using its collections to develop decolonial approaches to teaching, as well as a chance to examine display practices in the galleries, with insights from museum curators.

17.00 Reception **Place TBD**

Please make your own arrangements for dinner.

Friday, 12 May 2023

9.00 Registration and refreshments, Hotel Indigo

9.30 Looking Otherwise: Object Histories and Material Worlds

Emma Reisz (History, Queen's University Belfast)

Annie Tindley (History, Newcastle University)

Briony Widdis (Anthropology, Queen's University Belfast)

The second day begins with a panel exploring how reading and interpreting material and visual culture can shed new light on histories of colonialism and empire. It features scholars from different disciplines whose work draws out how colonial and imperial expansion shaped the production, circulation, interpretation, and appropriation of material artefacts and visual culture.

11.00 Tea and Coffee Break

11.30 Museums, Archives, and Empire in the Northeast

Lizzy Baker (Tyne and Wear Archives)

Andrew Parkin (Great North Museum: Hancock, Tyne and Wear Museums)

Clare Hunt (National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool)

Carolyn Ball (Durham County Record Office)

TBC: Curators from up to two other organizations in the Northeast

This session comprises short presentations and a panel discussion featuring curators and archivists from a range of institutions in the Northeast. In what ways did global processes of empire-building, and its aftermaths, shape their archives and collections – and what are the implications for their curatorial, interpretation, and development strategies today? More than 12 years into a period of fiscal austerity, museums and archives with a range of governance structures face funding and other challenges, with practical implications for engaging with their users, visitors, and collections.

13.00 Lunch

14.00 *Please make your way to Palace Green Library for our afternoon session.*

14.15 Colonialism, Slavery, and Empire in the Palace Green Library

Jonathan Bush (Archivist, Palace Green Library)

Francis Gotto (Archivist, Palace Green Library)

Christina Riggs (History, Durham University)

At this hands-on session in the Palace Green Library, delegates will explore visual and material culture from the Durham University's Special Collections, including the Sudan Archive created at the university after Sudan achieved independence from the British Empire in 1956. How does empire structure this archive? How does the university communicate, consult, or collaborate with researchers in Sudan and South Sudan, as well as members of the Sudanese diaspora? What interpretive tools and ethics of care do different archival holdings – such as photographs, battle trophies, or private papers – require? We'll also hear about new research investigating the university's links to the Atlantic trade in enslaved people, with headline findings and future plans.

16.15 *Please make your way to **Place TBD (on Palace Green) for our closing session***

16.30 Discussion and Reflection – with tea/coffee and refreshments

To draw our two-day training event to a close, this final session invites delegates to reflect on the research and practices that speakers have shared with us and offer their own insights and critiques. What strategies (if any) have seemed most promising, and where are the sticking points? How can museums, archives, and universities most effectively embed decolonizing approaches? Have our discussions helped delegates see ways forward in their own research? There are challenges in reinterpreting collections in our current moment, marked as it is by 'culture wars', funding shortfalls, and pressing concerns for climate and social justice. But more accurate and inclusive histories represent an important step towards a more equitable and informed society.

18.00 Close