

The life-blood of the British?: A postcolonial history of blood-grouping, 1901-1950

During the first half of the twentieth century, the science of blood typing was central to producing and sustaining medical, anthropological and socio-legal understandings of racial and inherited human difference. Historians (Tapper; 1999) have covered this ground with regards to the USA, but only cursory accounts have been offered concerning the British context (Mazumdar:1992, Kevles;1985, Schneider;1995). I will study the scientific literature (such as that in the *BMJ*), and the archives (such as the personal papers of the anthropologist Arthur Mourant and those of the serologist Robert Race held at the Wellcome Library), in order to answer two as-of-yet unposed questions; firstly, to what degree did this work 'scientise', and thereby alter, existing concepts concerning the relationship between blood and human difference, both inherited and racial?, and secondly, to what degree did this form of scientific racism authorise British imperial and eugenic projects in their aim to create a 'better human stock'? In essence, I will question what was at stake in the scientific work on blood grouping, and investigate how scientific work, like all epistemologies, was both shaped by, and helped to shape, the local context of its production. The MA in Medical History at Warwick will provide me with the skills necessary to expand my interest into a PhD project. The "Theories, Skills and Methods" core module will hone the research and writing expertise I have gained as a Warwick undergraduate, whilst the "Themes and Methods in Medical History" module will build on my undergraduate history of medicine training. Moreover, the "Race and Society in Colonial India" option would offer a historical background and colonial context to my research, all of which will be integral to producing an engaging dissertation.