

## Colonial science and military service: The West India Regiments and circum-Atlantic networks of knowledge, c.1815-c.1900

### PhD Project Overview

This PhD project focuses on the role of the West India Regiments in projects of circum-Atlantic colonial science, particularly exploration, botany and ethnology, in the nineteenth-century British Empire. Sitting at the interface of histories of science, empire and the military, the project also seeks to contribute to the 'decolonisation' of scholarly collections and academic knowledge. This is because the West India Regiments occupy a unique place in the history of British Empire in that they were a regular part of the British army but were almost entirely comprised of men of African descent. The West India Regiments were first established in the 1790s and served across the Caribbean and later West Africa. Across and within these regions, their personnel participated in the collection, exchange, circulation and publication of colonial knowledge. Some of these practices were directly related to Britain's military needs, while others were pursued privately in correspondence with metropolitan learned societies and organisations such as the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Royal Geographical Society. Ordinary soldiers too participated in the 'hidden histories' of circum-Atlantic colonial science.

The PhD studentship is funded by the [Arts and Humanities Research Council's Science Museums and Archives Consortium](#) Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme. It will be supervised by [Professor David Lambert](#) and [Dr James Poskett](#) at the [University of Warwick's Department of History](#) and by Dr Catherine Souch and Dr Sarah L. Evans at the [Royal Geographical Society \(with the Institute of British Geographers\)](#) (RGS-IBG), with additional support from Kiri Ross-Jones at the [Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#). The PhD will begin in October 2021.

### The PhD Project

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Britain first established the West India Regiments during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815). They served across the Caribbean, including in the continental enclaves of British Honduras (Belize) and British Guiana (Guyana). From the 1820s, they were also deployed at Sierra Leone, the Gambia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Lagos and elsewhere in West Africa. Numbering twelve at their peak, only a single WIR comprising two battalions remained after 1888. A third battalion based in the South Atlantic island of St Helena briefly existed from 1897 to 1902. The final regiment was disbanded in 1927.

Initially, the West India Regiments' rank-and-file largely comprised of African men purchased from slave traders. When Britain ended its formal involvement in the trans-

Atlantic slave trade, 'recruits' came from foreign vessels captured by the Royal Navy as part of its suppression activities. After slavery was formally ended in the British West Indies in the 1830s, the regiments became increasingly African-Caribbean as local volunteers enlisted, although there were still enrolments from West Africa. Despite their ethnic make-up, the West India Regiments were a regular part of the British army, armed, paid, rationed and uniformed (until 1858) like other foot regiments. They had white, mainly British, officers, although prior to the reform of the commission system, it was cheaper to join the WIRs, which meant they attracted officers of lower socio-economic status, often seeking personal advancement through a military career – and through participation in projects of colonial science.

### Historical context

West India Regiment personnel underwent regular deployments between and within the Caribbean and West Africa. Officers and men also moved between West India Regiment service and local paramilitary forces, as well as between military, administrative, diplomatic and intelligence-gathering roles. Indeed, although the project focuses on the West India Regiments, it also addresses the wider nexus of empire, colonial science and military service in the circum-Atlantic world. Across this trans-oceanic region, West India Regiment personnel participated in the collection, exchange, circulation and publication of scientific knowledge. This included officers such as explorer Alexander Gordon Laing (1794-1826), the first European to reach Timbuktu; botanical collector/forestry expert Alfred Moloney (1848-1913); and ethnologist and linguist Alfred Burdon Ellis (1852-94). Some of these practices were directly related to Britain's military needs (e.g. surveying), while others were pursued privately in collaboration with metropolitan learned societies and institutions such as the Royal Botanic Gardens and Royal Geographical Society – though these were often aligned with the broader project of British imperialism (e.g. through work with the botanical garden in St Vincent). Nor was it only officers who participated in these activities: ordinary soldiers such as Felix Ditt (Mohammed Sisei) and Philip Findlay (Mohammed Hausa) served as British guides and translators in West Africa. As such, they were part of the 'hidden histories' of circum-Atlantic colonial science – and the role of others is yet to be revealed.

### Research questions

1. What role did West India Regiment officers and men play in the collection, exchange, circulation and publication of scientific knowledge, particularly relating to exploration, botany and ethnology, across the British circum-Atlantic world?
2. What was the impact of the specific character of the West India Regiments on these practices, i.e. its ethno-linguistic composition, the socio-economic status of the officers and the regular circum-Atlantic redeployments?
3. How were these practices entangled with other colonial projects in which the West India Regiments participated, such as the suppression of slave trading/slavery; protecting commerce; diplomatic missions; and conflict with indigenous polities and (post-)colonial powers (e.g. Asante, Mexico and France)?

### Research context

The project will engage with and enhance the scholarly literature in three main areas:

1. *Military histories of science* – naval expeditions and personnel have featured prominently in histories of science and medicine (Haycock and Archer, 2009; Reidy, 2008), more so than the pre-twentieth-century military – though see Greer (2020) on ornithology. The perspectives of the history of science have not been brought to bear on the WIRs, whose personnel have been examined as objects of medical and racial science (Lockley, 2020) but not as scientific agents or intermediaries themselves (Schaffer et al., 2009).
2. *Empire, science and mobility* – the movement of people, objects and ideas is central to the study of the British empire (Lambert and Merriman, 2020) and to global histories of science (Poskett, 2019). Such mobilities were often attended by processes of transculturation and creolisation. While the West India Regiments have been understood as loci of cultural exchange (Cooper, 2018), this project examines their place in networks of *scientific* knowledge. As such, it also contributes to the broader agenda of decolonising museum collections (Das and Lowe, 2018).
3. *Racial difference and military service* – recent years have seen increased attention given to the role of non-white personnel in British military history and the place of racial difference in the army (Schaffer et al., 2012). Yet, the West India Regiments have remained a marginal presence in British history, as well as regional histories of the Caribbean and West Africa. The 2014-19 AHRC-funded project, ‘Africa’s Sons Under Arms’ (‘ASUA’; Lambert was the PI) did address these lacunae (Lambert and Lockley, 2018; Lambert, 2018), though much work remains to be done.

#### Sources, methods and timescale

The history of the West India Regiments is large enough to allow the student latitude but bounded in historical and geographical terms. Chronologically, the project encompasses the period of comparative peace after the end of the Napoleonic War and as the presence of West India Regiments was established in West Africa, while the brief presence of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion WIR in St Helena at the end of the century offers a potentially interesting comparative perspective. Of course, the student may decide to focus on a narrower historical period.

Key resources and archives were scoped by Lambert during the ASUA project, though the perspectives brought by the history of science open up new potential sources and lines of approach. Key Science Museums and Archives Consortium (SMAC) collections:

- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK) – Directors’ Correspondence includes ex- West India Regiment officers such as Alfred Moloney and James Lawrence-Archer; sketches, seeds and preserved items they donated; Miscellaneous Reports on Caribbean and West Africa
- Royal Geographical Society (RGS-IBG) – *Proceedings*; *Journal*; correspondence; plans of colonies and territories surveyed by West India Regiments; African Association records

Relevant non-SMAC collections include:

- National Army Museum – the Templer Study Centre holds various papers relating to the West India Regiments
- The National Archives – includes muster books and pay lists (WO 12, WO 16); discharge papers and records of service (e.g. WO 76, WO 121); Colonial Office records for Caribbean and West Africa
- County Record Offices – a number hold personal collections of West India Regiment officers (e.g. Arthur Bosworth's papers at Northamptonshire Record Office)
- Jamaican Military Museum and Library – former headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> West India Regiment that holds records and material objects
- National Armoury Museum, Barbados – as above for the 2<sup>nd</sup> West India Regiment. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> West India Regiments were the longest units in existence, raised in 1795, amalgamated into a single regiment in 1888 and disbanded in 1927. Any research is likely to focus on these units and, hence, the collections in Jamaica and Barbados.
- Collections of botanical gardens in the Caribbean may prove useful. (The Royal Botanic Gardens has extensive contacts and can facilitate access).

The research process will begin with three key steps:

1. Reviewing the secondary literature on colonial science in the geographical regions in which the regiments served for references to the role of military/especially West India Regiment personnel.
2. Identifying examples of (former) West India Regiment personnel involved in projects of colonial science, starting with the most famous examples, including via the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The aim will be to enhance existing knowledge of such individuals, by locating them in terms of their wider military service and the role played by other 'hidden' army personnel.
3. Mining SMAC and non-SMAC collections for references to the West India Regiments and their relationship to colonial science. The student will have access to the Wiley Digital Archives, a platform for published and unpublished material in the RGS-IBG collections, as well as that of the Royal Anthropological Institute and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Based on these surveys, the student might organise the thesis around individual officers or men, comparative case studies (from the Caribbean, Central or South America, West Africa or St Helena) or particular forms of colonial science.

Draft timescale (to be finalised in discussion with successful candidate):

- Months 1-6 – induction at Warwick, RGS-IBG and RBGK. Background reading on the history of the WIRs and nineteenth-century colonial science, culminating in two contextual essays. Attend RGS-IBG sponsored 'Practising Historical Geography' conference.
- Months 7-12 – initial survey of collections material and production of a third sources and methods paper, leading to identification of possible case studies. Finalise research questions. Present preliminary findings and proposals in an informal workshop at the RGS-IBG and at Warwick History Postgraduate Conference. Formal upgrade from MPhil to PhD.
- Months 13-27 – detailed analysis of archival material at RGS-IBG, RBGK and elsewhere, including archival work in Jamaica/Barbados. Decisions made about thesis format.

Produce paper for presentation at the ‘New and Emerging Research in Historical Geography’ session at the RGS-IBG conference. Lead a ‘Collections Showcase’ at RGS-IBG, which will form the basis for the contribution to the British Library’s ‘West India Regiments’ Online Learning Resource (see below).

- Months 28-36 – produce papers for conferences. Organise conference at Warwick on ‘Decolonising the History of Science’ (see below). Finalise text for the Online Learning Resource.
- Months 37-48 – placement and other professional development activities. Writing-up and submission of thesis.

### *Online Learning Resource on the West India Regiments*

The ASUA project created a free Online Learning Resource on the West India Regiments for pupils aged 11-14, hosted by the British Library, containing digitised sources, captions, essays, lesson plans and a timeline (<https://www.bl.uk/west-india-regiment>). The library has agreed that the PhD student will create new content, comprising of an additional 1000-word essay on the role of the West India Regiments in colonial science, accompanied by 4 digitised images of primary sources from the RGS-IBG and RBGK collections, each accompanied by a 300-word explanatory caption. The addition of this new content will be followed by a relaunch of the Online Learning Resource to bring it to new audiences.

### *Conference on ‘Decolonising the History of Science’*

The PhD student will organise a one-day conference in their final year to bring together interdisciplinary and international perspectives on the decolonisation of the history of science, focusing on postgraduate and early career perspectives and featuring a keynote lecture by a major scholar in the field. Funding for the conference will be sought through the Doctoral Fellowship Competition, which is administered by the [University of Warwick’s Humanities Research Centre](#).

### Key bibliography

- Cooper, Elizabeth, ‘Playing against empire’, *Slavery & Abolition* 39: 3 (2018) pp 540-557
- Das, Subhadra and Miranda Lowe, ‘Nature read in Black and White: Decolonial approaches to interpreting natural history collections’, *Journal of Natural Science Collections* 6: 4 (2018) pp 4-14
- Greer, Kirsten A., *Military Ornithologists and Migrant Birds Shaped Empire* (University of North Carolina, 2020)
- Haycock, David Boyd and Sally Archer (eds), *Health and Medicine at Sea: 1700-1900* (Boydell Press, 2009)
- Lambert, David and Peter Merriman (eds), *Empire and Mobility in the long Nineteenth Century* (Manchester UP, 2020)
- Lambert, David and Tim Lockley, special issue on ‘Africa’s Sons Under Arms’, *Slavery & Abolition* 39: 3 (2018)
- Lambert, David, ‘Imagining Britain’s West India Regiments in the Caribbean, 1795-1838’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46: 4 (2018), pp 627-650

Lockley, Tim, *Military Medicine and the Making of Race: Life and Death in the West India Regiments 1795-1874* (Cambridge UP, 2020)

Poskett, James, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920* (University of Chicago Press, 2019)

Reidy, Michael, *Tides of History: Ocean Science and Her Majesty's Navy* (University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Schaffer, Gavin, special issue on 'Racializing the Soldier', *Patterns of Prejudice* 46: 3-4 (2012)

Schaffer, Simon et al. (eds), *The Brokered World: Go-betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Science History Publications, 2009)

## The Supervisory Team

The PhD will be supervised by staff at the [Department of History at the University of Warwick](#) and the [Royal Geographical Society \(with the Institute of British Geographers\)](#), with additional support from staff at the [Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew](#).

The lead academic supervisor will be [Professor David Lambert](#), who is Professor of Caribbean History at the University of Warwick. Previously, he was Reader in Historical Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London and a post-doctoral Research Fellow at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. In 2009, he was awarded the Philip Leverhulme Prize for outstanding contribution to his field, recognised at an international level. His reputation as a scholar have been confirmed by securing grant income; invited keynotes, fellowships and international visits; and requests to serve as a reviewer, referee and examiner, as well as by bringing his expertise to non-academic audiences. He has been Principal Investigator on grants worth almost £1 million. These included the AHRC Standard Research Grant, 'Africa's Sons Under Arms: Race, Military Bodies and the British West India Regiment in the Atlantic world, 1795-1914' (£512,209 fEC), which ran 2014-19. He has served on the AHRC's Peer Review College since 2012, now as a Strategic Reviewer, and has also reviewed grant applications for the ESRC, Leverhulme Trust, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Lambert is Director of the Humanities Research Centre, which promotes interdisciplinary research at Warwick and former Director of the interdisciplinary Centre for Caribbean Studies – the only such centre in the UK and one with a global reputation. Professor Lambert has been one of the editors of the interdisciplinary journal, *Slavery & Abolition*, since 2019 and is former editor of *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*. He is on the editorial boards of *Atlantic Studies*, the *Journal of British Studies*, the *Journal of Historical Geography* and the *Journal of Maritime History*. He is the treasurer and a trustee of the Oxford-based David Nicholls Memorial Trust, which promotes research on the Caribbean, and on the Advisory Board of Wiley Digital Archives. Lambert has supervised 12 PhD students since 2007, with a 100% completion record. These have included 3 collaborative PhD studentships – 1 with the RGS-IBG itself and 2 with the National Maritime Museum. At present, he is supervising 1 MRes and 3 more PhD students.

At Warwick, the student will be co-supervised by [Dr James Poskett](#), who has been Assistant Professor in the History of Science and Technology at the University of Warwick since 2017.

Prior to that he was a research fellow at Darwin College, Cambridge. He is currently co-supervising 2 PhD students. He is also on the Advisory Board of Wiley Digital Archives.

The Dr Catherine Souch is the lead supervisor at the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and will be the main point of contact for the doctoral student at the Society. Dr Souch is Head of Research and Higher Education at the RGS-IBG. She joined the Society in 2006, having before that served as Professor of Geography and Head of Department at Indiana University and as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. She has extensive experience of archival research and has considerable experience in the supervision of postgraduate students (Masters and PhD). Her role as Head of Research & Higher Education at the RGS-IBG involves overseeing the Society's grants programmes, its research groups, journal and international conference, and liaison with the national and international geography research and higher education communities. She is actively involved in promoting and delivering the Society's initiatives to deliver impact from academic research: this is evident in her work with schools (through the 'Ask the Expert' and in the 'From the Field' schemes); in her work with the public (through coordination of exhibitions and collections-based events); and in benchmarking and other policy outreach. Dr Souch currently co-supervises 5 PhD students and has successfully supervised 8 AHRC CDAs to completion.

The student will be co-supervised at the RGS-IBG by Dr Sarah Evans who, in her role as Research and Collections Engagement Manager, will provide vital support and expertise in the design and delivery of the project's outreach and public-engagement activities. Sarah was one of the Society's first AHRC-funded CDA students – PhD awarded 2014 – and joined the staff of the Society in the same year. She has deep knowledge of the Collections and of the opportunities afforded by the recent large-scale Wiley-led digitisation, as well as extensive experience of archival research. She works closely with the cohort of current and recent CDA students to share their work through the Society's public engagement channels, including the Society's Collections events programme, which she oversees. She has published and presented on her research on women's involvement in RGS-supported expeditions in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century for both scholarly and public audiences. She is currently actively involved in convening sessions on decolonising archives and on uses of digitised archival material, most recently at the Royal Anthropological Institute online conference in September 2020.

Kiri Ross-Jones, Head of Archives at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, will be the student's contact at this institution and act as an additional advisor.

### **The Institutional Partners**

#### Department of History, University of Warwick

Warwick's Department of History is one of the largest in the UK, with over 40 full-time academic staff and more than 20 research fellows engaged in research notable for its disciplinary range and geographical scope. It has a strong international reputation and high rankings in university guides and surveys, and was ranked first in the UK in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) for the proportion of world-leading research activity

(4\*). The Department has been awarded more than £5m in research grants and contracts over the past five years. There is a high-level of staff expertise to support the student and the department has a strong tradition of research on the Caribbean (Lambert, Cowling, Lockley, Ono-George), Africa (Anderson, Branch, Lowman) and histories of science (Poskett, Bycroft, Stein). The PhD student will be further supported by Warwick's expertise and resources in the Global History and Culture Centre and the Centre for Caribbean Studies.

The student will benefit from being part of a large graduate cohort (almost 100 students) in the History Department. All first-year students attend the weekly Graduate Research Forum, which assist them in the design and implementation of their research, and provide guidance and advice on skills and strategies needed to develop their thesis work toward completion and dissemination (including publication). The student will be able to access generic training through Warwick's Research Student Skills Programme, as well as that more specific to the arts and humanities through the Arts Faculty Postgraduate Research and Professional Training Programme, and the Faculty of Arts doctoral training hub CADRE (the Centre for Arts Doctoral Research Excellence).

The History Department has extensive experience of engaging with cultural heritage organisations, including the RGS-IBG itself. Other collaborative PhDs have involved the Wellcome Trust, the British Library, the National Army Museum, the Imperial War Museum, the Horniman Museum, the James Collection, the Foundling Hospital, the Parliament Archives, the History of Parliament Trust, Waddesdon Manor, Heritage England, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the National Maritime Museum – the latter also involving Lambert as supervisor.

### Non-university partners

This PhD studentship is part of a wider collaboration between the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew – both members of the Science Museums and Archives Consortium (SMAC) – working with the Department of History at the University of Warwick. Its wider concerns are...

- exploring the imperial and colonial origins of collections, including approaches to decolonising such collections
- addressing under-representation, diversity and inclusion across collections and audiences
- developing research that links the Consortium members' collections and those beyond

The studentship is focused on projects of colonial science in non-European contexts that involved West India Regiment personnel, whose rank-and-file were overwhelmingly African and African-Caribbean. As such, it offers great potential for telling new stories about the role of non-white figures in exploration, botany, ethnology etc. and opening up novel ways of interpreting scientific collections. In the wider social context provided by 'Black Lives Matter' and the aftermath of the Windrush Scandal, the proposed research also responds to these SMAC priorities in a way that does not simply continue to equate 'Black History' with the histories of slavery and abolition, narrowly defined. In so doing, the studentship

articulates the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusivity as core values at the RGS-IBG (<https://www.rgs.org/about/equality,-diversity-and-inclusion/>). Likewise, the RBGK has stated that 'It's time to decolonise botanical collections' (Professor Alexandre Antonelli, Director of Science, <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/time-to-decolonise-botanical-collections>) and the institution is particularly keen for its African and Caribbean collections to be studied, which are under-researched in comparison with those relating to India. The project will connect the collections of the SMAC partner institutions – the RGS-IBG and RBGK – via the historical role of WIR personnel, while also generating new pathways for interdisciplinary research through non-SMAC collections such as those of the National Army Museum and The National Archives. This is augmented by the novel opportunities afforded by the RGS-IBG's involvement with the Wiley Digital Archives project and the other searchable collections that this incorporated (e.g. Royal Anthropological Institute and British Association for the Advancement of Science).

### Professional Development

The studentship includes funding for an extended placement of up to six months. One option is to work at the Royal Botanic Gardens with its public engagement team, which is particularly interested in translating modern historical research into stories and language that can be used in social media, garden interpretation and other forms of activity in order to reach new and under-represented audiences. This work forms part of a broader decolonising initiative at the RBGK, which highlights the urgency of researching 'hidden histories' in botany. Not only of great benefit to the student, this placement would also serve as a form of knowledge exchange and institutional learning between the RBGK and the RGS-IBG, which is addressing similar issues.

Depending on the priorities of the student, they will also have the opportunity to pursue other professional development opportunities, which could include...

1. Networking/publishing – following on from the conference on 'Decolonising the History of Science', the student will develop and submit a proposal for a book in the Warwick Series in the Humanities (with Routledge), working in conjunction with Lambert (as HRC Director) and Jennifer Abbot (at the publishers) to guide them through the process.
2. Public profile enhancement/engagement – the student will present a 'Be Inspired' lecture at the RGS-IBG in order to bring the findings of their PhD and the broader 'decolonising' agenda to a wider audience.
3. Exhibitions – the student will curate a small exhibition for display in the RGS-IBG's ambulatory cases, to coincide with the Society's annual conference in August/September, and make a funding bid for large-scale exhibition in the Pavilion drawing on their research.