

## Research Training at The Royal Geographical Society

Last week, from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> December, nine volunteers, and a Full Spectrum Productions Co-ordinator attended The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) for an insightful week of Research Training.

The attendees at the research training all derived from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and age ranges, from 17 to 25 years old. Four of the volunteers discovered the training after developing an interest in research having attended The Jamaica Hidden Histories/Cultural Re-Awakening Conference in October 2013.

Over the course of the week, the volunteers were given an introduction to the RGS, and its extensive collection of artefacts and collections. Crucially, the volunteers gained a personal understanding of the importance of such artefacts and how these contribute to our understanding of history. Volunteers were introduced to The Royal Geographical Society's complex cataloguing system, gaining first hand experience of how they would use this themselves.

*"I found a lot of this information quite refreshing!"* said a contented Kareem Buckley. *"It is a lot more engaging than for example, geography lessons in school. You get to interact with things a lot more here than with what I've experienced in school!"*

As the week progressed volunteers were taken through rare photographs held at the RGS, from learning how photo-taking methods have changed over time, to what stories some photographs actually tell us. They were astonished to hold photos from the 1820s, as well as impressed by the quality! Later sessions included inspecting other various artefacts housed at the society, including various articles found from unsuccessful historic expeditions to Mount Everest.

*"One of the highlights for me was to know that I was able to touch something someone else had touched centuries ago!"* said an overwhelmed Dammir Boyce, on artefacts from George Mallory's boots.

The training also afforded volunteers insight into the rapid progress that has been made within the field of research. Aptly, Wednesday's session was led by the RSG's Mapping Librarian, featuring maps dating back to the 1600s. Volunteers were given detailed explanations of map reading, and what stories could be extracted from various historical maps.

*"We looked at maps that didn't have Australia, Canada, Japan or Korea, which is bizarre! They hadn't been discovered back then, and look how big they are now!"* Xenia was intrigued to note.

With the week as fast-paced as the history they were learning about, as Thursday approached, the now expert volunteers took the bold steps of conducting their own research whilst at the Royal Geographic Society. Taking into consideration all they had learnt, volunteers explored various research techniques for their own historical investigations. In the afternoon, RGS's Public Engagement Officer brought the volunteers back to the modern day with a discussion on social media, and how this can actually be used to explore, record and champion history.

With completion of the Research Training in sight, volunteers would on the final day be given a secret tour of the museum including revealing the RGS's wartime Air Raid Shelter which could still be used. All volunteers received a certificate for their week, with many citing ways in which the training would be used to follow up their own successes.

*"I'm a media student, and before projects we have to research. As I now have a better understanding of skills in that area, it will be easier especially with planning",* said college student Ruqaiyyah Baptiste.

Newman University student Louise Jones, vowed to use the research training to enhance her degree, when she returns to Birmingham. *"The research skills I've gained this week will be so useful when it comes to doing more research to my project looking into families, their identity and belonging."*

Moreover, Dammir Boyce expressed great fulfilment from the week's training, and revealed: *"I would now like to research my dad's family, and this research will help out with that. The information from the archives would help looking through various catalogue entries, books and other entries to find out further information"*.

From my overview, all attendees found the research training at the Royal Geographical Society a highly valuable and beneficial experience, and furthermore the training has galvanised volunteers to become further involved with research on the Jamaican Hidden Histories project.

Orrel Lawrence, Volunteer Writer