



# BORDER CROSSINGS



# THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

Educational Resource Pack  
edited by Lucy Dunkerley and Phil Hindmarsh



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## INTRODUCTION



Award-winning theatre-makers Border Crossings created a new play about indentured migrations, with a company of actors from Mauritius and the UK which toured London during February 2020.

Slavery may have been abolished in 1833, but in the 19th and early 20th centuries, over 2 million Indian migrant labourers were indentured to work in plantations around the world. The workers boarded ships that would take them thousands of miles from home in search of 'a better life', while the abolitionists and Indian nationalists, called this a 'new system of slavery' and the 'international shame of the Indian'.

The roots of our Mauritian, Asian-Caribbean, Malaysian & Asian-African communities are all buried in this history, known as THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.

**'I didn't know that when slavery was abolished in 1833, it was the slave owners that were compensated. I didn't know that Britain's wealth had so much to do with the empire and exploitation. I didn't know that Britain had never made an apology. I didn't know.'**

The production was accompanied by a community engagement programme designed to reach communities who would not usually access the arts, particularly those with indentured heritage, and to enable young people and communities to engage further with the themes and working processes.

Education workshops were created to prepare students from schools and colleges to see the show, as well as engaging them with the history of indenture. Post-show workshops were delivered to enable students to use the experience to think about their own heritage and to think about the history and issues in relation to the world around them. Workshops were also delivered in community settings with heritage experts, creating dialogue with communities from Indian diasporic backgrounds and encouraging people to share their family histories.

A collection day was held at the National Maritime Museum, proving an opportunity for communities and audiences to share, discuss and bring together many of the stories and memories around the history of indenture provoked by the play. The photographs, stories and interviews shared on the day can be found in the European online museum of migration: <https://www.europeana.eu/en>

If you have a family story or photographs related to Indenture, please add it to the museum, so we can make our shared history more accessible for everyone as well as preserving heritage for future generations.

## HOW TO USE THIS PACK

Explore the hidden history of indenture further with this education pack, in which Border Crossings shares research, creative processes and methods used to create THE GREAT EXPERIMENT. You do not need to have seen the play to use the pack!

The first part of the pack covers the historical context and offers an overview of Indentured Labour as well as links to further reading and some thoughts on how the history relates to what is happening in the world today.

The second section of the pack offers insights into how we used the history and research in our creative process, as well as interviews with the creative team.

In the third part, you can find out more about the workshops we created for schools, using the history as a stimulus to create a devised piece of theatre.

Finally, we offer you some resources to research your own family history, and its relationship to indenture, slavery or slave ownership.



## PART 1 - THE HISTORY

### BEFORE INDENTURE: SLAVERY



Prior to mass slavery, convict labour was used in America, the Caribbean and the Colonies. However, there were never enough convict labourers to meet demand, and so the number of slaves used started to rise. Slaves were used in gold and silver mines, and on cocoa, coffee, cotton, sugar and tobacco plantations.

During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, European traders started their involvement in the slave trade. The Portuguese were the first nation to begin the Atlantic slave trade, first transporting slaves to Brazil in 1526. Other European nations soon followed. They took people from West Africa to Europe and America. Initially, they did not take many slaves but, as the demand for labourers grew in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, the number of slaves taken and shipped grew. It is estimated that 12.8 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic over a period of 400 years<sup>1</sup>.

Slaves taken to America, the Caribbean and the Colonies were not allowed to return home. They, and any children they had, were the property of the slave owner. This was called Chattel Slavery. It was introduced legally by Europeans from the Sixteenth Century onwards.

The majority of slaves came from the Bight of Biafra, the Gold Coast and Central Africa. They were captured through war, raids and kidnapping. They were taken to large fortified slave forts on the coast and kept -

sometimes for months - until they were sold. Sometimes the slaves were kept on ships while they awaited sale and transportation.

When the slaves arrived at their destination, they were washed, shaved, examined, measured and graded. Once sold they were often branded and given new names. These processes were carried out to degrade and break the slaves to ensure compliance. The slave owners did not want the slaves to rebel or run away. There were specific laws about slaves and they could be beaten, whipped or executed for breaking these laws.

Slaves worked around 18 hours a day<sup>2</sup>. There were not given any days off. They were treated very badly and usually only lived for around 7 to 9 years<sup>3</sup>. This meant there was a high demand for more slaves.

#### Further reading:

- The National Archives - Slavery and the British Transatlantic Slave Trade  
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records/>

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), ISBN 0-374-11396-3, p. 4. "It is now estimated that 11,863,000 slaves were shipped across the Atlantic." (Note in original: Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature", in *Journal of African History* 30 (1989), p. 368.), and Wikipedia

<sup>2</sup> The Abolition Project - [http://abolitione2bn.org/slavery\\_69.html](http://abolitione2bn.org/slavery_69.html)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

# THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY



Slavery was not universally popular, but it was very profitable. It provided jobs and cheap consumer goods (like sugar). By the late 1700s many people had started to express opposition to slavery. Some of the opposition was based on religious beliefs, other people (like doctors) had seen the treatment of slaves did not like it. The abolitionists were also supported by British social and economic forces. Some historians feel that the advance of capitalism in Europe helped bring about the end of slavery as industrialisation and large-scale agricultural farming techniques became more common. In Parliament, many of the MPs who lobbied to abolish the slave trade had interests in the sugar trade from the Indian Ocean, which was not dependent on slavery, and which could undercut Caribbean sugar if slavery ended.

The British Government passed The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act on 25th March 1807. After this, slaves could still be owned but not sold within the British Empire. On 23rd August 1833, The Slavery Abolition Act outlawed slavery in the British Empire. And on 1st August 1834 all slaves in the British Empire were emancipated - but still “apprenticed” to their former owners until 1838.

Slave owners were to be protected from an immediate labour crisis by this period of apprenticeship, under which the former slaves still worked for them for four to five years. However, many plantation owners were worried and began looking for alternative sources of cheap labour because ex-slaves were not willing to work for them any longer. Attempts were made at using free African labourers and Chinese labourers from Canton, Macao, Penang and Singapore. However, these were considered more expensive and less compliant than labourers from India.

**HM Treasury** @hmtreasury

Here's today's surprising #FridayFact. Millions of you helped end the slave trade through your taxes.

**Did you know?**  
In 1833, Britain used £20 million, 40% of its national budget, to buy freedom for all slaves in the Empire. The amount of money borrowed for the Slavery Abolition Act was so large that it wasn't paid off until 2015. Which means that living British citizens helped pay to end the slave trade.

2:05 PM - 9 Feb 2018

321 Retweets 351 Likes

The British Government paid £20 million compensation to the slave owners for the emancipation of the slaves. This was 40% of Britain's national budget and the debt was not fully paid off until 2015<sup>4</sup>. The slaves however received nothing.

The French abolished slavery in 1848 and the Dutch finally abolished slavery in 1863. The last country in the world to abolish slavery was Mauritania, as recently as 1981.

## Further reading:

- The Treasury's Tweet Shows Slavery is Still Misunderstood: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/12/treasury-tweet-slavery-compensate-slave-owners>
- Historians from UCL have traced the compensation payments to show the impacts on the physical, cultural, artistic and political sectors of British society: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/legacies/>

<sup>4</sup> Source - now deleted HM Treasury tweet 09/02/2018

# INDENTURE

After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, labour was scarce on the Caribbean plantations. This was a problem for the British Colonial Sugar Refining Company and the plantation owners as the Caribbean and South Atlantic economies were heavily dependent on slave labour for the production of sugarcane and other commodities. Initially, the British tried using convict labourers but there were not enough of them to supply the plantations with labourers. Indentured labour was the solution to this problem.

An indentured servant or labourer is an employee who is bound by a signed contract and who works (often without pay) for another person for a set period of time. The contract often allowed the employer to sell the labour of the employee to other people. The employee (or indenturee) worked for a specific payment or benefit. Sometimes this was for transportation to another country or to repay a debt.

At the end of the contract, the indentured labourers were given their freedom. Some were either given land to convince them to stay and work on the plantations or allowed to buy land in the country they had moved to (with the exception of Fiji where indentured labourers were not allowed to buy land). Some were allowed to leave their contracts early if they paid compensation to their employer.

However, indentured labour was hard work and often the workers were treated very badly. Many labourers died before their contract finished.

Indenture was initiated by the British in Mauritius and was considered to be **'THE GREAT EXPERIMENT'** - which would demonstrate the superiority of free labour over slave labour. It began in 1834 and lasted until 1917.

The Nineteenth Century saw a huge rise in the amount of people entering into the system of indentured labour. Some people felt that indenture was a way for migrants to build a better life for themselves and their families, others believed it was a new form of slavery.

After the successful implementation in Mauritius, indenture was introduced into the other British colonies and also adopted by the French and the Dutch in their colonies:<sup>5</sup>

## **British Colonies:**

British Guiana  
Trinidad & Tobago  
Jamaica  
Grenada  
St. Kitts & Nevis  
St. Lucia  
St. Vincent  
Cuba

## **The Pacific Region:**

Australia  
Samoa Island  
Barbados  
Hawaii

## **Dutch Colony:**

Suriname

## **French Colonies:**

Guadelope  
Martinique  
Réunion Island  
Seychelles

As part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), indenture is considered a form of slavery and is banned in most countries.

## **Further reading:**

- Indian Indentured Labourers in Mauritius: Reassessing the 'New System of Slavery' vs Free Labour debate, Amit Kumar Mishra, Ambedkar University Delhi, August 2009  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249768243\\_Indian\\_Indentured\\_Labourers\\_in\\_Mauritius\\_Reassessing\\_the\\_'New\\_System\\_of\\_Slavery'\\_vs\\_Free\\_Labour\\_Debate](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249768243_Indian_Indentured_Labourers_in_Mauritius_Reassessing_the_'New_System_of_Slavery'_vs_Free_Labour_Debate)

<sup>5</sup> An overview of History of Indenture. p17, <http://www.aaprasvasighat.org/English/Resources%20Research/Documents/History%20of%20Indenture.pdf>

## WIDER CONTEXT - TEA, SUGAR AND CHINA



A tea plantation in China: workers trimming the tea leaves. Gouache painting with oxidisation. Credit: [Wellcome Collection](#). Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

The Chinese had been drinking tea for hundreds of years. In the Sixteenth Century, Portuguese missionaries and traders first brought it back to Europe in small quantities. It was not until the Seventeenth Century when Dutch traders brought tea to Europe in large quantities. It proved to be immensely popular, initially as a medicine and later as a drink, in European and American coffee shops. Tea's popularity grew over time, but it was very expensive and it remained something only wealthy people enjoyed.

The problem was that tea was very expensive and grown exclusively in China. The British brought large quantities of tea from the Chinese and paid for it in silver. However, the Chinese were not interested in purchasing any British goods. This meant that large quantities of silver were leaving Britain to buy tea. This could lead to a trade deficit and over time, Britain could run into financial problems unless the British were able to find something to sell to the Chinese.

To break the Chinese monopoly on tea production, tea estates were established in India in the state of Assam using tea plants bought or smuggled out from China. As with tobacco, cotton and sugar, the cultivation of tea is very labour intensive. As slavery had been abolished, the plantations used indentured labourers. These workers endured conditions that were little better than the slaves on colonial plantations had endured. However, the strong dark teas they produced became increasingly popular in Europe. As production increased, the price fell and tea became popular in India too - like the Europeans they used milk and sugar but added spices to their stronger, sweeter tea.

However, this would change when sugar - which had become both cheap and plentiful due to slave labour and tax cuts for plantations - and milk were added to tea. Both tea and sugar became incredibly popular and demand increased massively.

Later, the East India Company did find a product the Chinese did want to buy: opium. By the turn of the Twentieth Century, Britain was to become the largest drug dealer the world had ever seen.

China's drug problem affected between four and twelve million people<sup>6</sup>. When the Emperor of China asked the British to cease the trade, he was ignored. The Chinese took action and seized 20,000 crates of opium (approximately 1,400 tons)<sup>7</sup>.

In 1840, the British Government, enraged by the Emperor's actions, sent a small army from India and a fleet of ships to resolve the dispute and forced China into accepting a humiliating peace settlement. The Treaty of Nanjing, signed in 1841, forced the Chinese to open all their ports to British traders and to give control over the island of Hong Kong to the British. Hong Kong would not be returned to the Chinese until 1997. The Chinese were also to pay compensation for the opium that had been seized.

The trade in tea and sugar, in part, helped finance the expansion of British interests around the world and kept Britain as a major world power until 1914.

**Further reading:**

- Dark legacy of Britain's opium wars still felt today amid fight against drug addiction and trafficking  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/2075509/dark-legacy-britains-opium-wars-still-felt-today-amid-fight-against>
- The Bitter Story behind the UK's National Drink  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-34173532>



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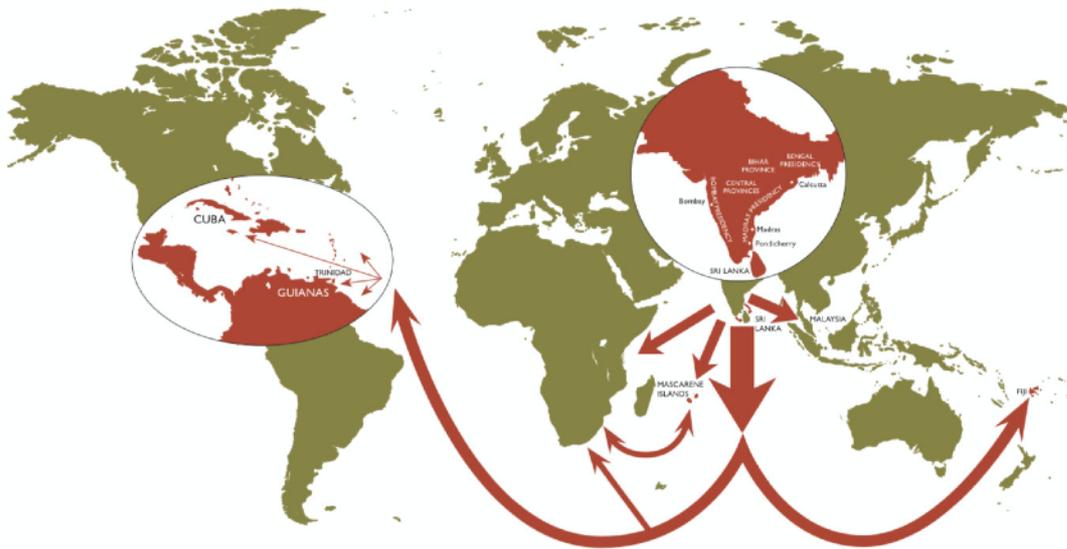
<sup>6</sup> Hanes, W. Travis; Sanello, Frank (2002). *Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another*. p 34. Sourcebooks. ISBN 9781402201493, and Wikipedia

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Opium-Wars>

## WHY DID PEOPLE SIGN UP FOR INDENTURE?

The regions of India around Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were plagued with drought, famines, landlessness, poverty and political turmoil from successive unstable governments in the early 1800s. Extensive large-scale opium farming had left vast areas of land barren. Many people fled these regions looking for work and food. Indenture may have seemed a viable option for many people looking to make a better life for themselves and their families.

### Principal Indian Migrations 1834 - 1924



Map: "Principal Indian Migrations", from "The Indian Labour Diaspora", Kumar, Carter & Bates, P2

The Orissa famine of 1866 affected 330 million people and killed over a million people in eastern India. In the worst hit areas 1 in 3 people died. The British colonial administrators did little to improve the situation. They had altered the economy and encouraged people to stop working in the textile industry and to work in agriculture - this altered the balance of the economy and made it heavily dependant on agriculture. When the famine hit, there were not sufficient alternative industries able to generate money to import food.

Between 1860 and 1878 it is estimated that 15 million Indians died in 10 mass famines.

The British stopped any private attempts to bring food into the area despite the story gaining traction in the Indian and British press. Some of the British felt that a famine was a way of combating overpopulation and others thought that the situation was so dire that it was impossible to alleviate the suffering.

Despite the famines, the British still exported around 200 million pounds of rice from India each year.

The migrants who signed an indenture contract must not have viewed it as slavery. If they had, it is unlikely they would have agreed to travel on long, arduous boat journeys to far away countries. Many considered indenture to be an increase in opportunity and security, a release from the bondage of

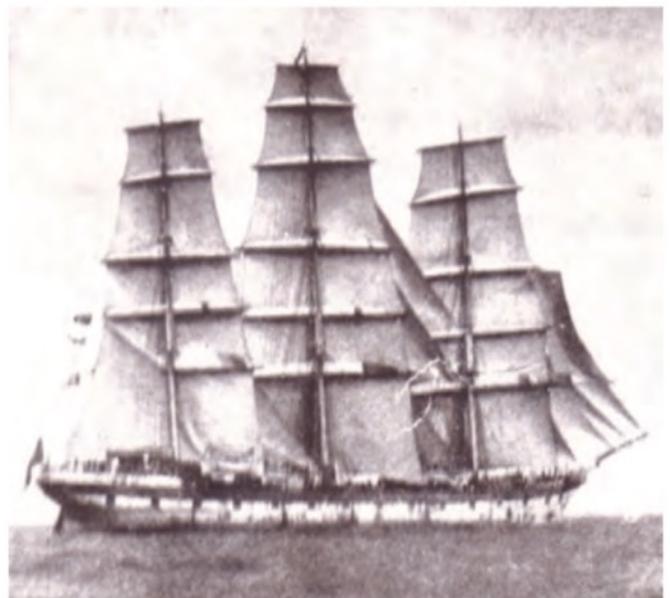
traditional customs, an escape from poverty, widowhood, caste prejudice, social disapproval or religious discrimination. Although the plantation owners in the colonies described the migrants as coming from the lowest sections in society, many were healthy young men, rather than the desperate, poor and hungry as has often been depicted. Over time, families and single women traveled from India under the indenture system.

Sea travel in the 1800s was at best uncomfortable and often very dangerous. The journey could take between 40 to 95 days, depending on the destination. They would be leaving behind everything they knew, breaking barriers of caste, religion and Indian values to travel to a faraway country to work for a minimum of 3 years.

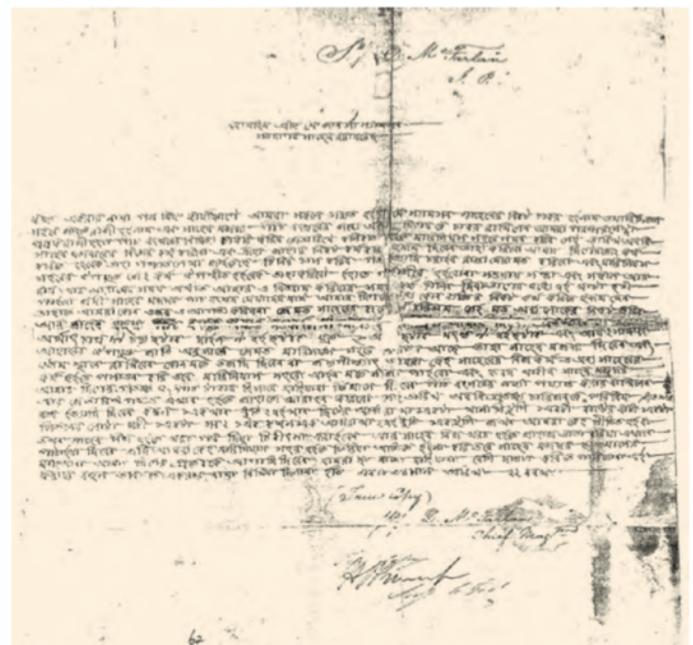
Inevitably, there were abuses of the indenture recruitment system. Some people were recruited through fraud, coercion, kidnapping and deception. Because of these problems, new rules were introduced and agencies and officials were appointed to ensure that indentured labourers had not been forcefully recruited and were aware of where they were going and the sorts of work they would be carrying out.

**Further Reading:**

<http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/TheIndianLabourDiaspora-compressed.pdf>



A typical 'Coolie Ship' that would have been used to transport indentured labourers. Kumar, Carter & Bates,



Copy of the first indenture contract. (Original source RA341, National Archives of Mauritius.) Kumar, Carter

# MORTALITY RATES ON THE VOYAGES



Mortality rates on the voyages were high, although the crew usually did their best to look after the indentured labourers because if they died, the crew of the ship got paid less. So, there was a financial incentive to make sure as many as possible survived the journey. The death of each indentured labourer would cost the ship approximately £13. One ship called 'The Roman Emperor' had 86 of their 288 passengers die which cost the ship over £1000. As well as young men, many families signed up for indenture. The child mortality on these voyages was very high.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly travelling by sea was dangerous, however for many journeys and for many people it was the only option. Mortality rates for sea travel were considerably higher than for people on land in the early 1800s. However, after the mid 1800s, conditions improved and mortality rates were almost the same for sea travel and being on land for adults. The mortality rates for children under the age under the age of 10 improved but was still significantly worse.

During the 1850s a significant attempt was made to improve sea travel by improving hygiene standards, reducing the number of passengers and trying to ensure passengers were healthy before they boarded the ships. There are factors that were unavoidable - the medical knowledge at the time was still fairly basic, illnesses and disease could still affect the crew and passengers and natural disasters (storms or tsunamis) could also cause outbreaks of sickness.

Unfortunately, there was also a tendency to blame the indentured labourers for any outbreaks of illness that happened on a voyage. The labourers were often referred to as 'Coolies' and were described as having poor hygiene, being habitually idle, compulsive liars and of being in poor health before the voyage. This would have been due to cultural differences and simple racism.

## Further Reading:

- Sailing the British Empire: The Voyages of the Clarence 1858-73, Voyages of Indentured Labour (30/50), by STSC 077, Fall 2015 First Year Seminar, University of Pennsylvania  
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-voyages-of-the-clarence/mortality-on-the-clarence?path=index>

<sup>8</sup> Sailing the British Empire: The Voyages of the Clarence 1858-73, Voyages of Indentured Labour (29/50), by STSC 077, Fall 2015 First Year Seminar, University of Pennsylvania, <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-voyages-of-the-clarence/index>

## LIFE ON THE SUGAR PLANTATIONS

Indentured labourers experienced a great deal of racism from the Europeans. They were called 'Coolies' which is a Tamil word for workers, originating from South India. It was considered that the indentured labourers were from the poorest sections of society. However, evidence suggests that Indians from all sections of society migrated.



Salina Jane: Coolies' Arrival

Our academic partners in the "Becoming Coolies" project explore the meaning of the word "coolie":

'Coolie' conjures up poignancy, tears, defeats, achievements. The word must not be left to die out, buried and forgotten in the past. It must be given a new lease of life.'  
Rajkumari Singh (1923-1979)

"In the nineteenth century the word 'coolie' came to be particularly associated with South Asian and Chinese indentured labourers who travelled to far flung locations around the globe to work in colonial sugar plantations. The term, then and since, has carried negative social and racial connotations and continues, today, to cause offence in some contexts.

Negative usages of the word 'coolie' derive from meanings imposed 'from above' (colonial administrators, for example) or from external social or political rivals. 'Becoming Coolies' seeks to move beyond these stereotypes and explores the myriad ways the term has taken on more positive meanings from the perspective of the migrants themselves. Historically, for example, the process of becoming a 'coolie' enabled migrants to escape entrenched social oppressions, such as caste, allowing the formation of South Asian communities outside India in which restrictive social taboos ceased to exist. For others, indenture created economic opportunities as well as privations and indentured migrants and their descendants were able to thrive in their new environments.

Today, the term 'coolie' continues to have multi-layered meanings. While for some, 'coolie' undoubtedly reflects the historical conditions of oppression and racism in which it came into being, for others it denotes a positive sense of identity and belonging.



Salina Jane: Indentured Workers in the Cane Fields

The culture of 'coolitude', a term coined by the Mauritian poet Khal Torabully, lays claim the word 'coolie' in order to present the forgotten voices of indentured migrants and their descendants in a positive way and fosters a sense of pride in the shared heritage of the South Asian diaspora.

But Coolitude has much wider significance: migration as a result of economic necessity, or political conflict, or social deprivation, or myriad other reasons is key to the human condition. New arrivals are commonly subjected to discrimination and attempts to dehumanize and categorise them. Where this succeeds, it shifts our attitudes towards fellow human beings who need support and empathy at a critical juncture in their lives. Coolitude is about breaking down the labels used to demonise migrants and explaining, poetically and historically, how and why we are all, more or less, at one time or all the time, 'coolies.'"<sup>9</sup>

According to historical records, native Fijians refused to work on the sugar plantations. So great was the demand for labour that by the early 1900s indentured labourers from India made up half the population of Fiji. In less than 40 years, over 60,000 indentured labourers had been shipped to Fiji<sup>10</sup>. The indentured labourers received a wage which had been agreed in their contracts. Typically, they were given a daily amount of around 12 annas for men, 9 annas for women and children under 15 years of age were to be paid wages proportionate to the work they had carried out<sup>11</sup>. The wages were considered to be higher than the wages in India and were an incentive to sign an indenture contract. It was also expected that wages would rise if the plantations profits rose. However, it was generally the case that wages did not increase. The indentured labourers wages remained at the same level for 80 years. They did however decrease when plantations performed poorly or when the price of sugar fell.

Plantation owners often withheld the wages of the indentured labourers. Any time of work due to sickness or lower production levels could result in docked pay. Some plantation owners held back wages for the workers' return passage back to India. Sometimes wages were held back until the crops had been sold. Plantation owners used many excuses not to pay the labourers. This forced many of the labourers to be financially depended on the plantation owners as they received food and board when their wages were withheld.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar, Carter & Bates, *Becoming Coolies*, <https://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/word-'coolie'>

<sup>10</sup> [https://yourstory.com/2017/12/indentured-labourers-india?utm\\_pageloadtype=scroll](https://yourstory.com/2017/12/indentured-labourers-india?utm_pageloadtype=scroll)

<sup>11</sup> <https://yourstory.com/2017/12/indentured-labourers-india>



Every aspect of the indentured labourers' lives was controlled by the people they worked for. They were rarely allowed to leave the plantations and were mostly isolated from the local population. Decisions about working patterns, hours, housing and food were made without their consultation. Many female indentured labourers were subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation. There are many records of indentured labourers attempting to escape or commit suicide rather than continue working on the plantations. Due to the poor treatment of the indentured labourers, anti-slavery campaigners were able to draw many parallels between indenture and slavery, considering indenture a new system of forced labour differing little from slavery.

In many of the colonies, the indentured Indian labourers did not mix very much with the local populations. They were generally excluded from integration at civic and political levels and there were colonial laws that also discriminated against them. They were also mostly illiterate and uneducated which excluded them further.

Indian indentured labourers were given a free passage home after 10 years. Many returned home after the abolition of Indenture in 1917. However, many chose to stay in the new lands they now called home, often achieving incredible success, acquiring prominent positions in social, financial and political sectors. There are also many artists and historians that come from this community and are now helping to bring the often forgotten topic of indenture the attention it deserves.

When their contracts ended, many of the indentured labourers were encouraged to renew their indenture and continue their work. Some labourers preferred to find alternative work. However, there were often laws used to stop them, such as vagrancy laws which required the former labourers to have accommodation, employment, and two letters (one from the Office of Protector of Immigrants and another from the District Police Station) proving they were not vagrants. Failure to have any of these in place could result in imprisonment in a prison similar to a Workhouse. At this point, they could be reclaimed by their former employer and forced back into indenture. The legal system was in this way used to increase the indentured labourers independence on the plantation owners. The free labour was not exactly free. However, by the mid-Nineteenth Century, many were able to move off the plantations and establish their own village settlements and achieve socio-economic mobility. Some rose from the ranks of field workers to contractors and established themselves as landowners, small scale planters and entrepreneurs. They raised money for temples and schools and helped build up their communities.

**Further reading:**

- The Vagrant Depot of Grand River North West, 1816 - 1886 by Satyendra Peerthum  
<http://www.apravasighat.org/English/Resources%20Research/Documents/Vagrant%20Depot.pdf>
- The Indian Labour Diaspora, Kumar, Carter & Bates, p 9 -11  
<https://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/TheIndianLabourDiaspora-compressed.pdf>

### Numbers of Indian Indentured Labourers Shipped to European Colonies

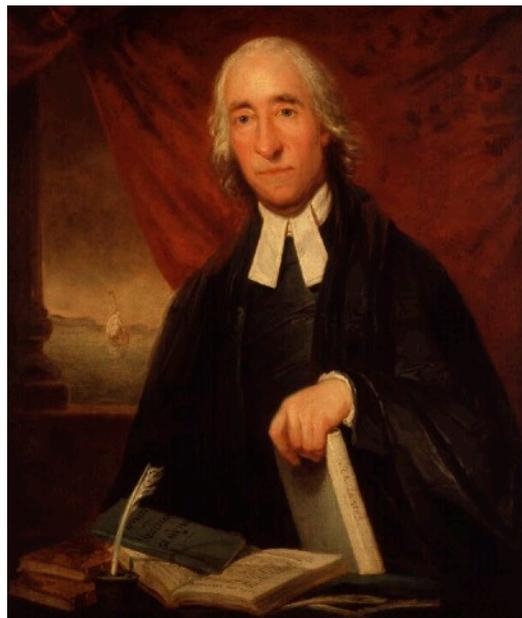
Name of Colony	Period of Emigration	No. of Emigrants
<b>Mauritius</b>	1834 - 1900	453,063
<b>Demerara / British Guiana</b>	1838 - 1916	238,909
<b>Trinidad</b>	1845 - 1916	143,939
<b>Jamaica</b>	1845 - 1913	36,412
<b>Grenada</b>	1856 - 1885	3,200
<b>St. Lucia</b>	1858 - 1895	4,350
<b>St. Kitts</b>	1860 - 1861	337
<b>St. Vincents</b>	1860 - 1880	2,472
<b>Nevis</b>	-	300
<b>Natal</b>	1860 - 1911	152,184
<b>Fiji</b>	1879 - 1916	60,965
<b>Malay</b>	1844 - 1910	250,000
<b>East Africa</b>	1896 - 1921	39,000
<b>Seychelles</b>	1904 - 1916	6,315
<b>Réunion (French colony)</b>	1861 - 1883	26,282
<b>Ceyenne (French colony)</b>	-1883	4,300
<b>Guadeloupe (French colony)</b>	-1883	13,500
<b>Martinique (French colony)</b>	-1883	10,000
<b>St. Croix (Danish colony)</b>	-1883	87
<b>Surinam</b>	1873 - 1916	34,304
<b>Total</b>		1,479,919

Chart data taken from "The Indian Labour Diaspora",  
Kumar, Carter & Bates, p 6

## CAMPAIGNERS FOR ABOLITION

### **James Ramsay (1733 - 1789)**

James Ramsay was a ship's surgeon, Anglican priest and a leading abolitionist. He joined the navy in 1757 as a surgeon aboard the Arundel in the West Indies. In November 1759 the Arundel intercepted a British slave ship, The Swift, which was seeking help. Many of the crew and slaves had died from dysentery and he treated over 100 people of the boat. When leaving to board the Arundel, Ramsay slipped and broke his leg. He retired from the navy and became an Anglican priest on the island of St Christopher (St Kitts) welcoming both black and white people into his church. He also became a surgeon for several plantations and witnessed first hand the ill treatment of the slaves. He returned to Britain in 1781 and wrote two anti-slavery essays which were very influential. He met with many politicians to try and bring about the end of slavery.



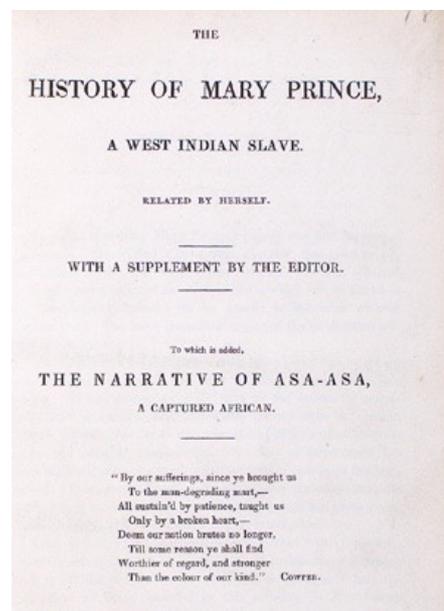
### **William Wilberforce (1759 - 1833)**

William Wilberforce was a British politician, philanthropist and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He headed the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty years until the passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807. Due to ill health, he retired from politics in 1826, but still campaign for the abolition of slavery. He died three days after hearing that the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 through Parliament was assured.



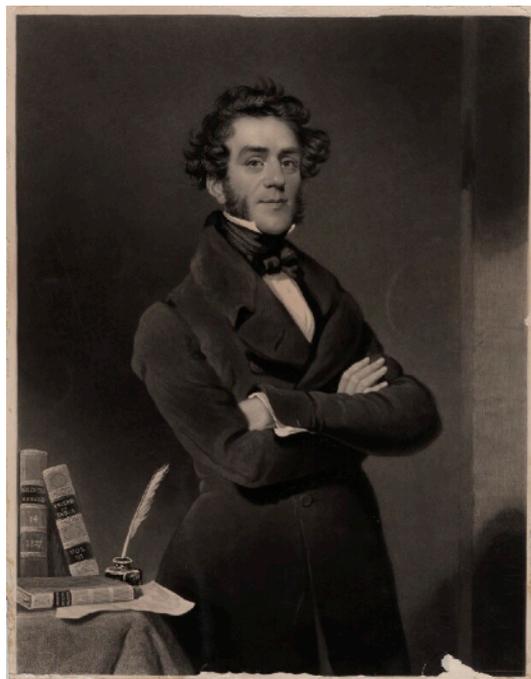
### **Mary Prince (1788 - after 1833)**

Mary Prince was a British abolitionist and autobiographer. She was born in Bermuda to an enslaved family of African descent. She was sold four times and travelled to Britain from Antigua with her owners to carry out domestic duties in 1828. She left them and found work with a prominent abolitionist, Thomas Pringle. Her book, "The History of Mary Prince" was published in 1831 and was the first account of the life of a black woman to be published in the United Kingdom. This first-hand account of the brutalities of enslavement, released at a time when slavery was still legal in Bermuda and British colonies, had a galvanising effect on the anti-slavery movement. Mary Prince was a witness at two libel trials in 1833. After that, it is not known if she remained in Britain or returned to Bermuda.



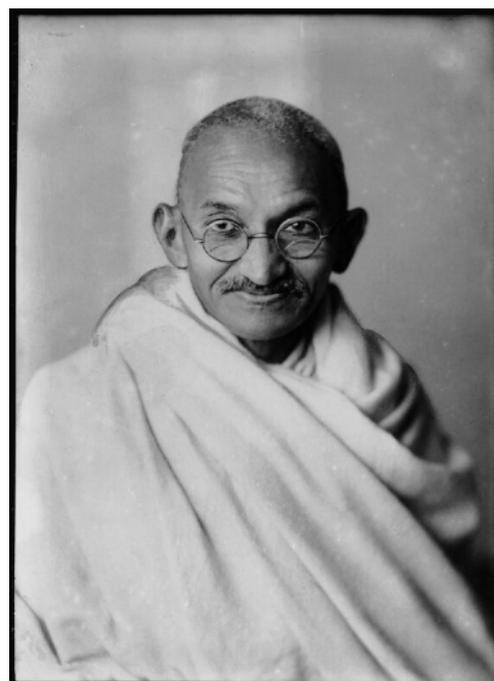
### **George Donisthorpe Thompson (1804 - 1878)**

George Thompson is regarded as one of the most important abolitionists and human rights lecturers in the United Kingdom and America. He gave a series of lectures in 1833 that led to the creation of The Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the World. In 1834 he travelled to America to campaign for the end of American slavery with the American Anti Slavery Society. He is credited with the founding of 150 anti slavery organisations in America. He was forced to flee Boston after attempts had been made to kill him. He was involved in the founding of the British India Society in 1839 which wanted to reform the governing of India and was President of the Bengal British India Society which was founded in 1843. He was the MP for Tower Hamlets from 1847 until 1852. Thompson campaigned against Indenture, which he regarded as a new version of slavery.



### **Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948)**

Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and political ethicist who promoted non-violent resistance in his campaign to end British rule in India. He was a prominent figure in the campaign to end Indian indenture which followed the abolition of Atlantic slavery and has been referred to as 'the second abolition'. Gandhi's activism began in South Africa where he campaigned on behalf of indentured workers. Labourers in the colonies, protesting about their treatment and conditions, had organised strikes which were put down by local law enforcement. When stories about the mistreatment of indentured labourers reached India, there were calls from Indian nationalists for the system to be abolished and a popular movement against recruitment began to grow. After his return to India from South Africa, Gandhi took the lead in the nationalist struggle to end indenture, leading to the first mass movement in India. The indenture system ended in March 1917 as a result of a long struggle by nationalist leaders in India and resistance by the workers in the colonies.



- Portrait of James Ramsay by Carl Fredrick von Breda, oil on canvas, 1789. National Portrait Gallery (NPG2559). Creative Commons. Limited non-commercial use.
- Portrait of William Wilberforce by George Richmond, watercolour, 1833. National Portrait Gallery (NPG4997). Creative Commons. Limited non-commercial use.
- Image of The History of Mary Prince - licence free image.
- Portrait of George Thompson by Charles Turner, published by and after George Evans mezzotint, published 12 November 1842 NPG D40423 © National Portrait Gallery, London. Limited non-commercial use.
- Photograph of Mahatma Gandhi by Elliott & Fry, half-plate glass copy negative, 1931 NPG x82218 © National Portrait Gallery, London. Limited non-commercial use.

# THE MOTHER OF ALL MIGRATIONS

by Michael Walling

The title is, of course, a bit misleading: people have always migrated. But the indentured labour migrations of the 19th and early 20th centuries set a new pattern which has continued ever since. This defines a lot of current debates around the subject, with workers from poorer nations migrating to richer countries, and their colonial outposts in order to meet a demand for labour and to earn money to support themselves and their families. Given the way in which contemporary “economic migrants” are often criticised for “wanting a better life”, it’s worth recalling that this pattern of migration was started by rich, imperial countries, particularly Britain, when they wanted cheap labour for their plantations.

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT of indentured labour was echoed in the Windrush Generation. After World War 2, there was a shortage of labour in the UK, and so the 1948 Nationality Act granted free movement to Commonwealth citizens, with the right to enter and settle in the UK. The Empire Windrush was the name of the ship that brought the first 802 West Indian migrants to Britain in the same year, responding to an advertisement in a Jamaican newspaper that offered cheap transport on the ship to people who wanted to work in the UK - a really powerful echo of recruitment for indenture. While the Windrush Generation were regarded as important to the economy, they also met with extreme prejudice. As recently as 2017, it was discovered that the Home Office had been threatening some of them with deportation if they could not prove that they had the right to remain in the UK. This “Windrush scandal” eventually led to the resignation of the Conservative Home Secretary Amber Rudd.



There have been similar waves of migration in other European countries. During Germany’s process of economic reconstruction, from the 1960s onwards, they looked to Turkey for the provision of “guest workers” or “gasterbeiter”. Germany’s 1965 Law on Foreigners gave citizens of the Common Market (which later became the EU) better rights than the gasterbeiter, who had one-year residence permits that might or might not be renewed according to the needs of the labour market. The German government, and the Turkish one too, clearly saw these migrations as temporary. As a result, the gasterbeiter are still regarded as foreigners in Germany, and still have the vote in Turkish elections. However, they are now a large community, with shops, restaurants, mosques and cultural centres. As one guest worker said: “We were wanted but not welcome”.



The descendants of the original indentured labourers have frequently continued the pattern of migrations; in some cases because they don’t feel so deep an attachment to the former colonies where they live as they might to their ancestral lands, had their forebears remained in India. The Nobel Prize winning novelist V.S. Naipaul was the grandson of Indian indentured workers who migrated to Trinidad in the 19th century, but after his migration to the UK to study at Oxford, he had little positive to say about the Caribbean, and created for himself a new identity as an “English gentleman”. “The history of the islands can never be told satisfactorily”, he wrote. “History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.”

By way of contrast, the journalist Lainy Malkani is very proud of her descent from Indian indentured workers who migrated to

the Caribbean, in her case Guyana. Her father came to London in the early 60s, with her mother following some time later, once he had established a viable way of living in the UK. Lainy made a series of radio programmes about indentured workers, and has written a book of short stories, "Sugar Sugar", which deals with the legacy. To her mind, understanding the past is important in shaping the future. She says of her own daughters: "They both 'belong' and see themselves as part of that educated, professional, bourgeois world; they are proud of their hinterland, the journeys that their mother and grandmother had to make and whose achievements are now their own foundations. They are proud young citizens who will contribute and help to shape the future of modern Britain." Lainy was a speaker on THE GREAT EXPERIMENT panel at the Cutty Sark, and at our NMM Collection Day.

Jatinder Verma, the founding director of Tara Theatre, where we also performed the play, is another descendant of indentured labourers. Jatinder's family had "left a small town in northern India to make a new life on the railways in East Africa". He was born in Tanzania and grew up in Kenya, learning Swahili alongside Hindi, Punjabi and English. In 1968, at the age of 14, he came to Britain with his family, when the Kenyan government introduced tough new laws forbidding "non-nationals" from working. This resentment towards the descendants of indentured workers is quite common: it has been seen in various forms in Africa, the Caribbean, Malaysia and Fiji. Jatinder's family made it to the UK just before the British government rescinded the right of Kenyan Asians to be UK citizens: the bill, which Jatinder calls a "great betrayal", was rushed through Parliament in just one week. The evening after he arrived at Heathrow, he saw himself on the TV News. 1968 was also the year of Conservative MP Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech, threatening a violent response to migration. Four years later, when the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin expelled the Asian population from his country, there was a further wave of migrations to the UK, amidst huge political turmoil. Mahmood Mamdani, who was part of that migration and has gone on to be a famous academic and political commentator, remembers that the British "seemed to be getting ready for us as one prepares for a swarm of locusts." Race relations were very tense in Britain throughout the 1970s: Jatinder founded Tara Arts in response to the racist murder of a young Sikh man, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, in 1976. "I burst into tears", he remembers. "What did this boy do that he was killed? I've been trying to make sense of those tears ever since."



Border Crossings' Trustee Prakash Kurup is also of Indian descent, via Malaysia, another colony where there was an indentured migration, in this case to work on the rubber plantations. For his specific community, Prakash explains: "The story of the Malayalee (from Kerala) community is not of indentured labour but of voluntary migration of unemployed Indians seeking employment in the greater British Empire.... My maternal grandfather and grandmother probably came to Malaya after WW1 around 1918. My mother was born in 1929 in Malacca. I guess my grandfather was seeking employment in the rubber plantations like so many other young men from Kerala.... My grandfather worked and managed the Guthrie rubber plantations

throughout the Japanese occupation of Malaya from December 1941 to their surrender in August 1945; the British having fled during that time. The British then returned in 1945, took back the plantations, and gave my grandfather a pat on the back and a small gratuity!" Because his grandfather rose to management status, and his father had served in the British army, Prakash's family enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle, including the chance for him to come to the UK and study

Chartered Accountancy. He became the first non-white partner in the London firm Haslers in 1989. Prakash's two daughters, Debbie and Helen Kurup, both work in theatre and TV: Debbie is currently starring in "Prince of Egypt" at the Dominion in the West End!

Today, there are still Indian people migrating in search of work, looking to make enough money to feed their families. Many of them go to the Gulf states, and particularly Qatar, where there is a huge building boom, ahead of the already controversial 2022 World Cup. In November 2019, the Indian Foreign Minister reported that 34,000 Indian migrant workers had died in the Gulf since 2014. Since January 2019 alone, the Ministry had received 15,501 complaints relating to labour abuse, particularly non-payment of wages, denial of labour rights including time off and reasonable hours, and the absence of residence permits. In the words of Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International: "Qatar is still on track to organise the world's bloodiest sporting event in history." If indenture was a refined form of slavery, then so is much contemporary labour-based migration.

In the face of these stories of the legacy of indenture, one of the strangest anomalies is Priti Patel, Home Secretary in the Conservative Government led by Boris Johnson. Her father's parents migrated from Tarapur, Gujarat to Uganda in the 1950s. Since Sushil Patel married Anjana in Uganda before they came to Britain, it's likely that her mother's family were indentured, though I've not been able to find any direct evidence of this. Either way, it seems extraordinary that the daughter of Ugandan Asian migrants should be the person responsible for a new "points-based" immigration system, under which people's suitability to live and work in the UK is assessed on the basis of whether they speak English, have a job offer, and (crucially) have "skills" (which are measured on the basis of how much money they are already being paid). Interviewed by LBC presenter Nick Ferrari in February 2020, while we were performing THE GREAT EXPERIMENT, Priti Patel admitted that her own parents would not have qualified to migrate to Britain under this system.



"This is the point," she said. "We are changing our immigration policy to one that's fit for purpose for our economy, based on skills."



## PART 2 - MAKING THE PLAY

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

#### Using Historical Research to Create a Play

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT is a devised play which was created in partnership with the Becoming Coolies project. <http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk>

The creative company included a Director, 5 actors, a choreographer and a visual Artist.

Many Performing Arts courses have a devised element: students and teachers are keen to learn new processes or ideas they can use to create theatre. There are no fixed ways of creating devised performances: but there are certain elements that can help!



- 1) Pick a topic that really interests you and resonates now. Think about why you are creating it now and who are you creating it for.
- 2) Do lots of research: facts; background; photographs; music; film; first person testimony. Decorate the rehearsal room with it. You can add it as you come up with more ideas. Make the space your own.
- 3) Don't be frightened to try out lots of ideas. Often things that do not work help you find something that does. Don't worry about the whole piece at the beginning: create lots of small scenes and think about how they might fit together. It's a bit like a jig-saw puzzle. Then you can look at what is missing.
- 4) When working with historical facts, explore different ways to bring them alive. Can you play around with scenes in the present day to show how history has an effect now or gives further insight into the history? There are no rules - it's fine to make it up as you go along. The discussions you have in the rehearsal room can be used to create material. If your company is passionate about something then that's a great starting point.

Border Crossings' Artistic Director Michael Walling has an approach that is not about following a series of exercises or a stock model of working. He brings people together to explore the subject and encourages them to take risks and be playful. His process is very open, but this only works through creating a safe space for the company to explore, develop and shape a piece together. He doesn't enter the rehearsal room on the first day with a fixed idea on what the piece will be. He has, however, already done a vast amount of reading and research before the rehearsal process begins. Devising is about working together as company and the director's job is shape the piece and bring out everyone's voice in the room. All the actors need to be prepared to bring something of themselves into the process, and this involves lots of discussion as well as improvising and games.

## INTERVIEWS WITH THE CREATIVE TEAM

Here is a selection of interviews from the creative team to give insight into our process.

### MICHAEL WALLING - DIRECTOR



#### Why this project now?

I've been interested in Mauritius for a long time: Nisha (who performs in the show) and I are married, so there are lots of very immediate connections to the place. But neither of us knew very much about the history until, on our last visit there, we went to the Aapravasi Ghat: the museum created in the old depot building where the indentured labourers landed. It gave us a very powerful sense of this huge global history that just isn't talked about, taught or known. As we thought about it more, I started to realise how important the history is for understanding the current moment. The Brexit vote represented a reaction against migration, and the reassertion of a belief in Britain as some sort of exceptional nation. There have been surveys showing that people who voted Leave tend to think of the British Empire as a positive thing. I felt we had to set some records straight: to step back from all the flag-waving and tell the real stories of how the imperial period shaped the modern world.

#### How do you start to create a devised piece? What did you do?

The first thing you do is to get the right people in the room. The balance of different performers in the cast was crucial - and the play became partly about how each of them, coming from very different backgrounds, came to understand themselves in relation to the history. A lot of devising is about the self. That doesn't mean that the characters you see on stage are literally the actors - they aren't - but it does mean that one of our starting points was "Who is in this room and what does this history mean for them?"

To begin with, we spent a lot of time exploring the history. We were really lucky to have the three visiting experts, each for about four days, and they gave us a lot to talk about... During those conversations, I was looking for the telling things that people might say, the hints of possible differences, conflicts and dramas. Then we started to use those as the beginnings of scenes.

### **How did you use the Becoming Coolies project?**

We did try to create some scenes which recreated the history in some way. The historians told us lots of great stories, and we attempted to improvise some of them. And we looked for possible characters from the history - making scenes like the freeing of slaves. Most of them were terrible, really terrible. I think it's partly that we don't really relate to experiences like slavery in a direct way, and partly that the moment you start recreating history like that it all becomes a bit sentimental, which was the last thing any of us wanted. The story we had to tell wasn't really about individuals and their emotions - it was about structures, systems. It's political.

The only scene from those early efforts that made it into the play was the scene where the indentured man asks a scribe to write him a letter home. It was an interesting moment, because it started to suggest how history is always filtered, how the people in history are themselves performing, how little is actually direct and clear. It started to show us the way towards a play which was more complicated and mysterious.



### **Do you approach each devised piece in the same way?**

Every project is different. I do have a stock of exercises which I can draw off to stimulate creativity, but they aren't really the process in themselves. I think there's a common misapprehension about devising that it's all about knowing the exercises and that if you just do them you'll somehow get a play. What I've learnt through working on devised pieces is that the key is NOT to have a set method, but to be open to what the process is seeming to offer. So, for example, if an individual actor was finding out something about their own family history, I would encourage them to write a monologue about it. If an improvisation in which an actor played a slave made him feel uncomfortable, I would encourage him to use that discomfort in a positive way. It's all about the dialogue.

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

I'm very fond of the story of Boodhea, which Marina Carter told us quite early in the process. I think it's because it was one of the moments of creative breakthrough. We were really struggling with how we could portray indentured workers with any sort of truth - and then a tall, older, white man walked to the front of the stage and presented this little Indian girl with such emotional truth.... Coming to understand that their being so distant from ourselves was actually useful - that was really important for me.

## MARIA DA LUZ GHOUMRASSI - MOVEMENT DIRECTOR



### **What interested you about this project?**

The project interested me as it brought together history and culture, and as a person of mixed heritage of Cape Verdean descent I began to understand and discover possible links to the history and culture of my own family. It was fascinating to be part of such project.

The company offered a safe space to share and begin to discuss difficult issues that each one of us felt were private and pertinent to our cultural heritage, but were surprised to find out were common in our shared history and humanity.

The project helped empower us as individuals and artists.

As the movement director I felt that my role was to support the emotion in the piece. I simply guided the actors and helped polish the movement of what was already there.

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

How one can use history and culture to create a piece of art that raises awareness about less known facts in history and still create a strong emotional response in the audience.

### **What exercise/process/technique did you find most useful during the devising of THE GREAT EXPERIMENT?**

The way the director was able to give voice to each actor and weave it into the work to producing a coherent piece.

## **NISHA DASSYNE - DEVISER PERFORMER**



### **What interested you about this project?**

I am Mauritian and the play is about Mauritius. Admittedly a very painful bit of our history, nevertheless a very important part as its echo is still felt. This project also gave me a unique opportunity to get back onstage. I enjoy being on stage and this play challenges all of my acting abilities.

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

The archive photos of the indentured labourers are very powerful portraits. They tell stories of heartbreak, loneliness as well as of vision, bravery and pride. While drawing faces on set with my chalk, I am learning to absorb the stories of these people in my imagination. They become familiar to me as I draw the facial features and thus my empathy for them becomes real.

### **Can you tell us about the Music you perform in the show?**

Sega is the heartbeat of the island. Sung in Creole, it takes its roots in the days of slavery overlapping the indentured people's arrivals. The Africans and Indians sang praises to the spirits and gods. But on the island they sang about the hardship of functional life, the loss of their motherland, the joys of founding and creating a new connection with a new land. The musical instruments used are adapted from things found on the island.

### **What exercise/process/technique did you find most useful during the devising of THE GREAT EXPERIMENT?**

The process of listening to one another on stage is a revelation. I talk a lot and communication seems to be a self-centred affair! But in THE GREAT EXPERIMENT, actors have to listen to one another. Because the play is about very personal exchanges as characters and the real self. Listening to suppressed feelings, blurred intentions and uncensored expressions was vital. The ghosts of this history required critical hearing.

## **TOBI KING BAKARE - DEVISER PERFORMER**



### **What interested you about this project?**

When I had my audition for this project, it was the first time I heard about indenture. I never thought economically, what happened to the former slave plantation fields and even the market as a whole. I was always a sucker for history so starting the project was a no brainer. To prepare for the project I started reading a whole lot more. I read books like Akala's 'Natives' and watched documentaries about the Ruins of British Empire and I learnt more about myself than I did studying history as an A' level. Slowly but surely for me, even though the play was about Mauritius, it felt very personal and important.

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

One fact that completely shocked me was Britain's actual involvement in the exploitation of slaves. In our curriculum we learn Britain had slaves but its implied that they weren't as bad as the Americans and how Britain didn't allow it in our country. However, Britain indulged in slavery for a long time and actually wanted it to continue longer than it did. It wasn't until slavery was forcibly revoked by revolutionary rebels (Britain sent troops to attack and stop these rebels) that Britain finally started saying they were pro "human rights".

Also "Bobby Mc Ferrin Circle song 6" is an absolute jam! We did a lot of our physical warm-ups to this song so it will forever have a place in my heart. Shout out to Maria!

### **What exercise/process/technique did you find most useful during the devising of THE GREAT EXPERIMENT?**

I really enjoyed the different movement exercises we explored. Maria used to tell us to think of our feet as roots spreading through the earth. This visualisation really works for me and grounded me every time. I'm sure I'll take the technique to all my future productions. Once again, Shout out to Maria!

## HANNAH DOUGLAS - DEVISER PERFORMER



### **What interested you about this project?**

The subject matter. I didn't know anything about Mauritius or indenture, so I was fascinated to know more. But mainly it was knowing more about the effect the British Empire has had on our lives and society today - being a part of that conversation, about inherent racism and white privilege and ignorance, felt too important an opportunity to miss! :)

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

Lots of things! The fact that Britain didn't finish paying for slavery until 2015 ASTOUNDED me. And the "nwa nwa" song will always stay with me because I loved David and Nisha singing it!

Here's a version of the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhYqALI4WAg>

### **What exercise/process/technique did you find most useful during the devising of THE GREAT EXPERIMENT?**

I loved all the grounding work we did with Maria, I found that so helpful. I also loved that the modern parts of the play were so very naturalistic, it was great to be able to improvise every day!

## DAVID FURLONG - DEVISER PERFORMER



### **What interested you about this project?**

On a personal level, being from Mauritius, I was drawn to the project from early conversations with Michael, the director. It's about my origins, my own ancestry and the consequences on me as a person today. On a more global scale, it was immediately very interesting that Michael wanted to look at this part of history with historians in the room, with a high level of research and documentation. It made the piece more interesting to talk about the world we now live in, and how it was shaped by this part of our history. Finally, it's also a revealing piece for many: descendants of indentured, British people who know nothing about this bit of history, it's just an important story to tell, and which should be in history books.

### **What fact/photograph/piece of history/song/object inspired you the most during the process and why?**

We play ourselves, or versions of ourselves, so first, I simply brought my Mauritian identity to the rehearsal room, which is so rare for me to explore, so I really indulged by bringing stories, poetry, music from my Mauritius, anecdotes, sensations, memories and my knowledge of traditional drumming. The Ravanne is a Mauritian musical instrument, a drum to which I've always had a special relationship. It represents intimately my relationship to my Mauritian identity. In the creative research process, I took the opportunity to express this relationship in a very personal sharing with the team. And we also had long honest conversations about what it is to be Mauritian in our experience of it and in the perception of others. It became even more significant to me when my Ravanne, and a whole scene about my relationship to it became a part of the play: It was surprising and at the same time very empowering. I felt like I was confessing something really personal to hundreds of audience members.

### **What exercise/process/technique did you find most useful during the devising of THE GREAT EXPERIMENT? (or specifically used with the above?)**

First, Michael Walling, the director and Border Crossings had this idea to work collaboratively with historians on the project. He had gathered an amazing amount of sources, documentations and readings to start with. Moreover, for the first three weeks of devising, we had a scholar in the room to take us through their expertise on the British colonies, the system of Indentured labour, and on Mauritius. We also looked at Shiraz Bayjoo's work, whose audio-visual creations also brought to the room a true sense of atmosphere. In Michael's work, you feel welcome to make bold offers and write scenes. You even have to be a pro-active and creative actor. You need to be quite prepared, documented and, at the same time, completely open and able to improvise, and change direction. Devising only operates with good listeners. It's such a collaborative process with actors and the director and also our choreographer. Everybody is imagining the show collectively, and at the same time letting out a lot of themselves. It needs a lot of time and care.



## **PART 3 - WORKING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

### **EDUCATION WORKSHOPS**

As part of the THE GREAT EXPERIMENT project we worked with schools and colleges, giving young people the opportunity to engage with our process and the subject. All groups also attended the show. Workshops enabled students to create their own performances in response to the history, using a similar process to the company's. This Workshop process could be recreated and adapted for other historical periods and subjects.



Hannah Douglas, Tobi King Bakare and Lucy Dunkerley with Year 9 students, Chiswick School

#### **1) Space**

In each school we decorated the room with lots of our research, which transformed it into a creative space with materials to act as a starting point for discussion and inspiration.

Resources can be found here:

<http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/resources>  
<http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/life-stories>

We put up songs, photographs and lots of facts. Students were invited to explore the space and the subject matter. Walking around a space and interacting with the material feels creative and encourages young people to explore their reactions and emotions. It means you can step back, really look at the photographs and feel a connection.

If you have time, research material could be gathered over several lessons or students could be asked to bring material in that they can add for themselves.

#### **2) Group discussion - based on materials in the room**

- When and why was slavery abolished?
- What happened next?
- Why would people agree to travel far from home under 5-year contracts?
- The caste system
- What were the conditions on the ships?
- What is indenture? Was it a new form of Slavery? Did anyone do well out of it? Does slavery still exist?

### 3) Warm up by Maria da Luz Ghourrassi

#### Physicality

I believe that performers of any discipline, including dancing, acting, singing, painting, playing an instrument or writing are more prepared and are more resourceful when they are connected to their bodies, feelings and thoughts. In order to evoke memories, reawaken feelings and express thoughts, one has to use the body as an entrance to this mysterious world.

#### Preparing the actors

The following exercises can be adapted to any group regardless of abilities and experience in the practice. They draw from dance techniques, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique and voice work from various sources.

It is suggested to begin with Breath to underpin the rest of the work. It is followed by physicality, raising awareness and pulse rate, relaxing and preparing the performer for voice and acting work. The rest of the session could change the order of the exercises according to the discipline or work to be carried out.

#### Breath

This could be done standing, sitting in a supported comfortable position or lying down. Standing (or sitting) with feet hip width apart, arms by your side, close your eyes/lower your gaze. Take your full attention to the soles of your feet and the floor. Stretch out your toes, relax the muscles of your feet.

Shift your attention to your breath. Notice the expansion and contraction of your ribcage, and of your lungs. Notice the air moving through your nostrils into and from your body. With each breath try to let go of tension in the various parts of your body.

Place your hands on your ribcage and notice the movement of your breath.

This exercise can be extended by working with a partner, A and B, in front of each other, facing one direction, person A observes person B breathing. Where is the breath more noticeable? After a few breaths person A places their hands where the breath is most noticeable on person B. After a few more breaths remove your hands and notice if there is any change on the way your partner is breathing. Person A then looks for another place where the breath is noticeable, and repeat the same process. Repeat this process twice more, then change over.

The next stage can be to have the whole group in a tight circle in which all performers are facing in one direction. All will be focusing on their breath at first, then shift their focus onto the breath of the person in front of them and repeat the process described above. See image from rehearsal below.



### Physicality and vocal work

Continuing from the Breath work, extending the breath to sound and feeling the vibration in various places in the body. On your own body or others' bodies.

Taking the breath into stretching, yawning, the body in different ways, various directions.

### Painting the Space

Circle joints starting with fingers, followed by the hands, elbows, shoulders, arm, hips, knees and feet in a sequential order. Do this in a relaxed continuous way, in all directions, taking the time to enjoy each body part, looking and noticing the small details.

Let the movement take control of where you move in space and begin to move through space.

Begin to interact with the space, using your senses seeing, smelling, touching. Notice other in the same space, look, see respond exchange moves, copy, mirror each other.

As in the previous exercises one can add voice and sound to explore this body breath connection.

In silence or soft slow meditative music. (eg <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUOcWp24Aj>.)

### Copy Me

Choose a vibrant music track, in a circle, one by one dances their own moves as response to the music, all copy.

eg Sega, one of the major music genres of Mauritius

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_rBfhnpNyl8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rBfhnpNyl8) (strongly African influence)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbyzCFPe1-w> (strongly Indian influence)

### Centring and grounding

Continue moving and walking through space gradually slowing down your pace until finding stillness.

Take a moment to notice your energy though your body focusing on your breathing.

Notice the changes and heartbeat.

Continue moving in space this time extremely slowly. Connecting your feet to the floor, finding your centre and continue focusing on your breath. Go to the extreme of your slow movement, noticing the effort your body is doing.

Begin to notice and connect with others through eye contact. Relate, respond to others and the space.

This can be done for over 4 minutes and also lead to a group improvisation with voice, with prompts or completely free, in silence or with music.

(Cliff Martinez- Solaris Soundtrack ~

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jintml12qaY&list=PL7374F7C406CAE786>)

This work supports the actors perform the slow movement sections in the play and to stay connected throughout the play.

### Up, Down, Open/Close, Forward/Back

This is a Laban inspired exercise for the whole group to relate to each other and the space.

We used this exercise to inform movement sections in the play.

The group is in space close to each other. The workshop leader, directs the group with the following:

Slowly Up  
Fast Down  
Fast Open  
Fast Close  
Very Slowly Forward  
Fast Back

Order of Directions and Way of doing it (fast, slowly, sudden, jerked, etc) can change.

See image bellow for further possibilities.

Prompts and contact work can also add to the complexity of the work.

<b>Time</b>	Sudden: <i>rushed, hurried, now now now!!</i>	Sustained: <i>lingering, relaxed, waiting for the perfect time to act.</i>
<b>Space</b>	Direct: <i>linear, pinpointed, laser-like.</i>	Indirect: <i>expansive, flexible, meandering</i>
<b>Weight</b>	Heavy: <i>compressed by gravity, collapsed, overcome</i>	Light: <i>delicate, buoyant, lifted up, floating</i>
<b>Flow</b>	Bound: <i>contained, controlled, rigid, clear</i>	Sustained: <i>abandoned, released, outpouring, out of control</i>

#### 4) Creating non-naturalistic scenes

In small groups students created 2 slow-motion scenes, without words. Like a moving tableau.

They explored the follow topics.

- o Famine/poverty in India in 19th Century
- o Life on board a ship crossing the Kala Lani (Black Water - the sea) from India to Mauritius

##### Famine

Each student thought about who they were, what they were doing and thinking, and found ways to interact with the others in their group. The Key element was all moving at the same speed, together, and using the space well, (making sure to use different levels), slowly moving with good contact with the floor.

The scenes were all performed simultaneously with music. All groups were asked to beconscious of the other groups in the space, and to move together to create one big picture.

The young people decided who should start on stage, and who should enter the space and travel through.

This was then tried with music.

##### On board

In the same small groups, they each found an activity to do onboard the ship, such as washing, sleeping, eating etc.

The whole group worked on moving together with the motion of the waves and tightening the space so that they had limited space to move, which could contrast with the Famine scene.

They then worked out where each group should be. They were asked to think about how long the journey was, and what their character might be feeling.

The scene was also played with music.

#### 5) Monologues and letter writing.

Each student picked a photograph of an indentured labourer and researched some facts to use. They created either a letter home, or a monologue giving a personal reflection on what they had discovered. They created a piece in the first person, imagining what it would have been like to be an indentured labourer or a wife or child left in India wondering if their husband/father would return. (examples below)

## 6) Putting it all together

The monologues were layered together with the non-naturalistic scenes and performed with music. The group decided how to come together at the end with photographs of the indentured labourers using some of the techniques explored in the warm-up.

This was designed to be a starting point: further scenes could be created from the research.

Each group we worked with was able to create a 10-15-minute play in a 2-hour workshop which could be developed into a full-length play.



Collage by Salina Jane

## **SAMPLES OF WORK CREATED IN THE WORKSHOPS**

by students from St. Charles 6<sup>th</sup> form college

A minor was sent to prison.  
A minor can't be sent to prison.  
Vain and futile would be the hope of  
any system that trains the rising  
of this Island to the habits of slaves,  
It would be almost impossible  
To raise from the future  
Creole generations hands of  
Men and women to go forth  
In their morning toil with  
The pouches on their shoulders  
The pride in coolie identifications  
Is accompanied by a necessary decolonisation  
As the first step to demand  
Political self-positioning  
This inviolable, surreal India  
Was a potent malleable instrument  
Of India's self-preservation of  
Racial dignity as a society.

\*

Dear mother,

The journey here was long but the excitement of the adventure kept me going. Upon arrival I saw a young boy getting arrested, he couldn't have been more than 12. It is said that he stole some boots, to keep his feet warm. He went to prison.

It is very different here. The work is fine. I am fine.  
I haven't had time to meet anyone but I will in due course. It is just the work here is taking up a lot of my time.

Please don't worry I will be fine.

Yours truly,

Your Son.

\*

My dark eyes have seen so many dark things.  
Is that why my eyes are so dark?  
The suffering of man, women and child have aged me more than my years.

The famine I have escaped is better than these chains, bound to an agreement we are.  
5. Nothing more, nothing less, that is the number of rupees I earn per month. Once I prayed daily, now I pray inside, my worship died on the ships, left to starve on the harbour.

We are slaves, slaves to our master, when did he become ours and not theirs?  
When did chains shake their way onto my mind and onto my body? One day we will break free, free of the chains called slavery.

## PART 4 - YOUR OWN HISTORY

### FAMILY HISTORIES

If you want to find out more about your family history and how it relates to indenture and slavery, you can begin with the following websites:

#### **Legacies of British Slave Ownership:**

University College London has a searchable database listing slave owners, beneficiaries and agents acting for slave owners. Some people are listed because they were related to owners or beneficiaries - but they may not have actually owned slaves themselves. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>

#### **Becoming Coolies:**

**Becoming Coolies - Rethinking the Origins of the Indian Ocean Labour Diaspora** has an extensive list of websites to help people wishing to trace their ancestors:

<http://www.coolitude.shca.ed.ac.uk/?q=node/34>

Other sites listed on the **Becoming Coolies** website include:

The **UK National Archives** has a guide to researching the history of indentured labour. This includes a downloadable register of births, marriages and deaths at sea (1891-1972), recorded by the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/indian-indentured-labourers/>

**UNESCO** has declared the documentary heritage of indentured labour migration to be part of the 'Memory of the World' and has provided an index to available public archives: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-7/records-of-the-indian-indentured-labourers/>

Information on Indian Emigration Passes to **Fiji 1879-1916** have been compiled by the **National Library of Australia**:

<https://www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/indian-emigration-passes-to-fiji-1879-1916>

A database containing the records of 27,000 of the 34,000 migrants from India to **Surinam** in colonial times is available online on the server of the **Royal Archives of the Netherlands**

<https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/nt00345?searchTerm=>

Ships Lists for Migrants to **Natal**, in South Africa, have been made available online by the **University of Kwa-Zulu Natal**: <http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/SHIP/shipndx.html> The data can also be purchased on CD <http://molegenealogy.blogspot.jp/2012/07/indian-immigration-registerships-lists.html>

Information on researching family history in **Trinidad & Tobago** is available here:

<http://trinidadandtobagofamilyhistory.org/eastindianimmigr.html>

**Mauritian** Immigration Records are held in the archives of the **Mahatma Gandhi Institute**:

<https://www.mgirti.ac.mu/index.php/indian-immigration>

The **Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site** in **Mauritius** also has a developing documentation centre:

<http://www.aapravasighat.org/English/Pages/default.aspx>

A multilingual online database is available for **Mauritian** sources: [www.genealogie.mu](http://www.genealogie.mu)

The **Families in British India Society**, which focusses on British families in India, has a searchable database:

<http://www.fibis.org>

Other useful Indian links (these include links to pay-for-use) family history search services:

<http://genealogy.about.com/od/india/tp/Research-In-British-India.htm>

<http://www.genealogylinks.net/country/india/index.html>

<http://forebears.io>

# RESEARCHING AFRICAN AND ASIAN CARIBBEAN FAMILY HISTORY AND MIGRATION AT THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

by Penny Allen, Librarian

The Caird Library & Archive in Greenwich is considered the largest centre for the study of maritime history in the world. The library holds three collections that make up the resources to start your discovery of migration, indenture and genealogy relating to Asian-African, Asian-Caribbean, Malaysian & Mauritian people.

These are:

The Collections online catalogue: <https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections.html#!cbrowse> which holds items considered as objects: Coins and Medals, Decorative Art, Flags, Textiles, etc.

The Archive Catalogue: <https://www.collections.rmg.co.uk/archivecatalogue> which contains original documents and manuscripts. The Library Catalogue: <https://www.collections.rmg.co.uk/librarycatalogue> for printed books and journals.

It is worth noting that Maritime records are not usually a starting point for compiling a genealogy, however there is much material in our collections that will provide a contextual background to your research. Also, the Caird Library & Archive do not hold original passenger lists, they can be found at the National Archives in Kew. I'm not certain the originals are available to order, but have they have been digitised on Ancestry.

Records of Asian seamen are not numerous and are dispersed throughout a variety of records so the researcher needs to have a specific year and name of vessel in order to search the archival collection. It is not normally recommended to search by family name in any of our collections.

The Caird Library & Archive was used recently by a group of researchers to develop a guide to discover African and Caribbean family history which is now published on the museum website. The research was centred on formerly British colonies in the Caribbean.

Research Guide - V5 - African Caribbean Family History - <https://www.rmg.co.uk/research-collections/research-guides/research-guide-v5-african-caribbean-family-history>

Links to websites with information for Caribbean Ancestors (not vetted by the National Maritime Museum):

6 websites for tracing Caribbean ancestors - this list includes the very active Caribbean Family History Group (UK) with branches in Solihull and Birmingham. (I believe there is also a Facebook group.) <https://www.whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/blog/6-websites-tracing-caribbean-ancestors>

The British Library - Researching the Asian and African Collections at the British Library - <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2019/01/researching-the-asian-and-african-collections-at-the-british-library.html>

The British Library - Caribbean collections - <https://bl.uk/collection-guides/caribbean-collections>

Digital Library of the Caribbean - <https://www.dloc.com>

The National Archives - Kew, London - Discovery is their catalogue and you will find many references here for Caribbean research as well as information on the MV Windrush. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

Society of Genealogists - London - this repository and research library holds some very unique resources. This page describes a talk give by Adrian Stone, a genealogist who traced his Caribbean family history from Bristol to Africa, but also highlights collections held by the SoG. <https://www.sog.org.uk/news/article/searching-for-your-caribbean-ancestors-a-half-day-course-on-15-feb-2020>

For example, the writer found a CD of 1300 images of men, women, children and families. Title: 'Genealogy of Jamaica'. I would recommend a visit to the Society as they are a specialist library and their collection deserves to be explored in person.

Further research may require contact or visits of the various archives in the Caribbean, such as: the Bermuda Archives, <https://www.gov.bm/department/archives> and the Jamaican Archives, <https://www.jard.gov.jm>.

The Caird Library is open to any type of researcher and it is free to register. If you wish to visit the library, we recommend registering for a reader's ticket online ahead of your first visit at [www.rmg.co.uk/aeon](http://www.rmg.co.uk/aeon). Upon finding an item in the catalogue, you may order it for a future visit using the Aeon Ordering System.

Please see the library website for more information. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/library>



Production photos by John Cobb



# BORDER CROSSINGS

The Great Experiment

DUGDALE



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