

My research interests are on Indian botanic gardens, Kew and the development of the natural sciences

From the late 1780s the East India Company botanic gardens, above all the gardens at Samulcottah in Coromandel, at Dapoorie near Poona, at Saharanpur in the Upper Provinces and Sibpur near Calcutta, served as foci for activity in all branches of the natural sciences, including botany, palaeontology and zoology. Initially they were based on the threefold examples (and often the sites) of indigenous Mughal experimental gardens, models developed in the Dutch and French empires and programmes for plant introductions encouraged by the physiocratic devotees of the Royal Society of Arts, which had been founded in 1754. This mixed parentage led quite quickly to the Indian gardens becoming centres of intellectual leadership for the pursuit of most branches of natural history, especially in botany and palaeontology. They also became effective centres for monitoring the rapid environmental changes that were taking place in South Asia and Burma. The gardens were also nascent centres for the promotion of crop introduction, new kinds of plantation species and early forms of agricultural science research. They acted as the starting points from which many, but not all, natural history exploring expeditions set out for little known parts of South Asia before 1857. Much of our research on this topic is thus devoted to exploring aspects of the history of the Indian botanic gardens and the colourful scientific personalities who staffed them, the role of botanic gardens as critics of EIC policy and assessing the power of the Indian gardens within the botanical information and plant exchange networks which characterised the empire. To date their histories are almost entirely unwritten, despite a wealth of archival material in India, England and Scotland. In starting to fill this gap, we will ask how it was possible for the botanic garden establishments to dominate Company environmental policy and how far their agendas were autonomous of the imperial centre in London.

I would like to develop the continuing social role of botanic gardens in combating drought, famine and propagating conservation and environmental ideas by developing the networks between Calcutta, Kew and CWEH, National Museum of Natural History (Delhi), Natural History Museum in an ongoing partnership that involves exhibitions, museum displays and actively encourages the social role of botanic gardens

I hope to develop a project through the network that will do the following;