

● Collaborative studies – Using the Collections today for research

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“Some 150 years ago, the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets were cartographic voids that resided outside of our knowledge and vision – all scientists could do was imagine. But now, those blanks on the map have been filled in, explored, drilled, scanned, photographed from space, and their future projected in graphs and computer models,” said Jean de Pomereu from the University of Exeter.

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Jean is one of three PhD students using the Society’s Collections for research. Supported by ‘Collaborative Doctoral Awards’, bridging the gap between purely academic institutions and non-academic organisations, the awards enable researchers to be at the heart of archival materials.

Jean’s project, supervised by Dr Kathryn Yusoff and Dr Simon Naylor from the University of Exeter, explores how information about climate was recorded by expeditions across the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets from the beginning of the 19th century to the most up-to-date of scientific research.

“Today, ice sheets are a treasure trove of information – they provide us with snapshots in time that allow scientists to look back and see the world as it was, but also to predict how it might change,” Jean said. “Working with the Society to use its archival material, I’m focusing on scientific and other images that were recorded and brought back by ice sheet expeditions, and I’m looking at how these shaped and continue to influence public thinking about climate change,” he said.

The Society’s Collections, which comprise more than two million documents, maps, photographs, paintings, periodicals, artefacts and books, and span 500 years of geography, travel and exploration, provide an unparalleled resource for research. Each year more than 18,000 enquiries are made, both in person at the Society’s



headquarters and online through its catalogue, to help write books and papers, plan trips, study family histories, and more.

The other two collaborative projects, in their initial stages, are Terra Incognita: women in the expedition archives 1913-1986 undertaken by Sarah Evans (University of the West of England) under the direction of Dr Avril Maddrell and Professor Alison Blunt; and Geographical Projections: Lantern slides, science and popular geography, 1860-1960 to be supervised by Dr James Ryan and Dr Simon Naylor.

Website: www.rgs.org/rhed