

The Sunderland Collection announces 'Challenging Maps and Exploration', a hybrid symposium held with the Royal Geographical Society

Friday 26 September, 2025

The Sunderland Collection's Dutch Admiralty copy of Pieter Goos' 'Zee-Atlas', 1675

The Sunderland Collection is proud to announce a day-long symposium 'Challenging Maps and Exploration - Cartographic Encounters with Empire, Indigeneity, and Contemporary Exploration', taking place in London and online on 30 October 2025. The second in what promises to be an international series, this symposium is free of charge and open to all.

Held in partnership with the Royal Geographical Society, 'Challenging Maps and Exploration - Cartographic Encounters with Empire, Indigeneity, and Contemporary Exploration' will be a day of lively discussions exploring historical and contemporary issues around maps and exploration, examining critically important, yet often overlooked issues. Hear from experts with contemporary perspectives on the decolonization of geography and the power of maps to empower disenfranchised Indigenous communities, and from explorers about their actual use of maps out in the field.

The day will consist of three panels, each featuring leading voices from a range of specialisms and an audience Q&A:

Panel 1: Cartographic Encounters with Empire

Historian Dr Edward Armston-Sheret (RGS-IBG), Professor Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge), and Dr Katie Parker (RGS-IBG) will draw from their respective research, discussing how the interwoven history of exploration and empire can be analysed in maps, globes, and other cartographic objects.

Panel 2: Cartographic Encounters with Indigeneity

Professor Michael Bravo (University of Cambridge), Dr Rohini Rai (University of London), and Dr Sana Murrani (University of Plymouth) will discuss how Indigenous peoples have used and currently use maps as powerful tools to (re)claim sovereignty, places names, resources and more.

Panel 3: Cartographic Encounters with Contemporary Exploring

Explorer and climate scientist Felicity Aston, adventurer and author Phoebe Smith, and explorer Tom Allen (RGS-IBG) will share some of their favourite map and navigational stories, and discuss how historical maps influence and inspire their expeditions.

Dr Edward Armston-Sheret, Prof Sujit Sivasundaram, Dr Katie Parker (top row) Prof Michael Bravo, Dr Rohini Rai, Dr Sana Murrani (middle row) Felicity Aston, Phoebe Smith, Tom Allen (bottom row)

Helen Sunderland-Cohen, custodian of The Sunderland Collection and a Fellow of the RGS, says: "It's incredibly exciting to announce our second free symposium, following the success of 'Maps Are Too Exciting!' at the Bodleian Libraries in October 2024. Creating opportunities for discussion, debate and learning in the varied and wonderful world of cartography is central to our mission at The Sunderland Collection, and we couldn't be happier to present this illustrious range of speakers to the widest possible audience in person and online, free of charge. We hope you will join us for what promises to be a fascinating day of thought, exploration and ideas!"

Dr Katie Parker, cartographic collections manager of the Royal Geographical Society, says: "Maps tell stories, often stories of exploration. With this symposium, we hope to continue wider conversations about when, where, why, and by whom, exploration happens, and the defining role maps have - not only in the expeditions themselves but also in how we record and commemorate these journeys. This is a historical and ongoing process, and we are looking forward to welcoming map experts and explorers alike. It will be fascinating to see how we can build on the stories that the maps in the Society and Sunderland collections tell."

Challenging Maps and Exploration - Cartographic Encounters with Empire, Indigeneity, and Contemporary Exploration

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9.30am - 4pm, 30 October 2025

Education Centre, Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR, and online at [RGS.org](https://www.rgs.org)

Tea, coffee and lunch are included for those attending in person

Free of charge, [register here](#)

Following the event, the panel discussions will also be available at The Sunderland Collection's online home, oculi-mundi.com

The Sunderland Collection

The Sunderland Collection comprises exquisite cartographic objects from the 13th to the early 19th centuries. Featuring world and celestial maps, atlases, books of knowledge and globes, it is a unique curation showcasing the evolution of knowledge, as well as a striking celebration of human exploration, discovery and wonder. Founded 40 years ago by Dr Neil Sunderland, The Sunderland Collection is based in Switzerland and has a core mission to be as accessible as possible - for study or simple enjoyment. The collection has been digitized in full and made available at its online home, Oculi Mundi. The collection also actively champions heritage skills, craftsmanship, art and the exploration of ideas through its busy programme of exhibition loans, free conferences and The Sunderland Collection Art Programme.

View The Sunderland Collection online at oculi-mundi.com

Follow The Sunderland Collection on [Instagram](#)

Oculi Mundi

A destination for discovery, shared exploration, and sheer joy, Oculi Mundi ('the eyes of the world') is an innovative digital cultural heritage experience and the online home of The Sunderland Collection. Oculi Mundi aims to immerse curious minds into the world of antique maps and atlases - showcasing human achievement, artistry, and imagination. Celebrating the thinkers and makers who came before, Oculi Mundi is a platform for ideas and exploration that reaches for the future by embracing innovation, fostering scholarship, and enabling creativity.

Explore the website at oculi-mundi.com

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Royal Geographical Society

The Royal Geographical Society is a learned society, professional body and registered charity with over 14,000 members that has been dedicated to the advancement of geographical science since its founding in 1830. Today, we deliver this mission by developing, supporting, and promoting geographical education, research, expeditions and fieldwork, and professional practice, as well as by advocating on behalf of the discipline. Our broad public and cultural engagement programme, alongside our historical Collections of over two million items spanning 500 years of geography, travel and exploration, support our aim to foster an understanding and informed enjoyment of the world we live in. Everyone with an enthusiasm for geography, travel and exploration is welcome to join us.

Find out more about the Society at www.rgs.org

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