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Public Lecture Series

Thursday 16 October 2025

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Reforming the British Empire: Space, Place and Mobilities of People, Capital and Ideas in the Global Restructuring of the British Empire

Alan Lester, University of Sussex

Discussant: Sara de Athouguia Filipe, University of Neuchâtel, nccr – on the move

16:15 – 17:45 CET
This talk will be held at the University of Neuchâtel, Espace Tilo-Frey 1, Room R.O.12 and on WEBEX (link).

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Abstract

A new appreciation of the importance of space, place and mobility has characterized imperial historians' recent 'spatial turn'. With a case study of the simultaneous transformation of different sites of the British Empire during a moment of reform and restructuring in the 1830s, this lecture suggests that historians of Empire still have much to gain from a consideration of the ways that geographers have conceptualized these phenomena. Trajectories of people, capital and ideas cause the changes that literally 'take place' over time but also concurrently, and they are often mobilized from particular locales of concentrated power within relatively short timeframes. In this case that locale was Westminster, London, over the course of two parliamentary sessions.

Bio

Alan Lester is Professor of Historical Geography at the University of Sussex, UK and Adjunct Professor of History at La Trobe University, Australia. He has published twelve books on humanitarian, settler, governmental and indigenous networks within the British Empire and the place of Empire in the current culture war, including Ruling the World: Freedom, Civilisation and Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century British Empire (Cambridge University Press, 2021) and The Truth About Empire: Real Histories of British Colonialism, ed. (Hurst, 2024). He is the 2022 Association of American Geographers Distinguished Historical Geographer and co-editor of the Manchester University Press monograph series, Studies in Imperialism, which is nearing its 200th volume.

This lecture is co-organised with the Institut d'histoire, within the framework of the project: Sea and Air-Border Formation in the Interwar Middle East: A Trans-Imperial and Spatial Perspective.