

# Annual Meeting of the United Kingdom Belize Association

Latin American Centre, University of Oxford

1 Church Walk, Oxford

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

9.30 am to 5.30 pm

**9.30 am - 10.00 am**

Welcome - David Howard, University of Oxford and Neil Stuart, UKBA President, University of Edinburgh

**10.00 am - 11.00 am**

*Belize in the British newspaper archives: 1722-1900* - Victor Bulmer-Thomas, University of London

*Canals and borders: economic diplomacy and the Belize territorial dispute* - David Gomez, University College London

*Access to Belizean history* - Cathy Smith, University of Edinburgh

**11.15 am - 12.30 pm**

*Belize UK relations* - Perla Perdomo, High Commission for Belize, London

*A case of Belizean exceptionalism? Exploring multi-ethnicity and political parties in Belize* - Dylan Vernon, Embassy of Belize-Belgium

*Energy for Life: community service and leadership* - Claudia Garcia, University of Westminster and Manuela Lue, Energy for Life Programme

**12.30 pm - 1.15 pm**

Lunch

**1.15 pm - 2.45 pm**

*Developing community business in Belize to improve local livelihoods in Toledo* - Neil Stuart, University of Edinburgh, Duncan Macqueen, International Institute for Environment and Development, Elmar Requena and Nilcia Xi, Toledo Institute for Development and Environment and Cathy Smith, University of Edinburgh

*Forest ecology and management in northwest Belize* - Sheila Ward, Mahogany for the Future, Nicholas Brokaw, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras and Laura Snook, Bioversity International

*Negotiating science and resource management in rural communities* - Sophie Haines, University of Oxford

*Maya archaeology and global soil security: recent research at Marco Gonzalez, Ambergris Caye, Belize* - Elizabeth Graham, University College London

**2.55 pm - 3.55 pm**

Screening and director's discussion of the award-winning film *Yochi* (2016) - Ilana Lapid, New Mexico State University, Kristi Drexler, New Mexico State University and Lee Mcloughlin, Wildlife Conservation Society-Belize

**4.00 pm - 4.30 pm**

Concluding comments and planning for UKBA 2018, the 21<sup>st</sup> annual meeting

**4.30 pm - 5.30 pm**

Drinks' reception

**5.30 pm onwards**

The Royal Oak, 42-44 Woodstock Road, OX2 6HT

## Presenters and presentation abstracts

### *Belize in the British newspaper archives: 1722-1900*

Victor Bulmer-Thomas

Victor Bulmer-Thomas is an Associate Fellow in the US and the Americas Programme, Honorary Professor at the Institute of the Americas, University College London, and Emeritus Professor of Economics at London University. From 2001 to 2006, Victor was the director of Chatham House, and from 1992 to 1998 he was the director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at London University. He edited the *Journal of Latin American Studies* from 1986 to 1997, and has authored or edited more than 20 books on Latin America and the Caribbean including, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Third Edition, 2014) and *The Economic History of the Caribbean since the Napoleonic Wars* (2012). He is a non-executive director of the New India Investment Trust and the JP Morgan Brazil Investment Trust. He has received honours from the governments of Brazil, Colombia and the United Kingdom.

### *Canals and borders: economic diplomacy and the Belize territorial dispute, 1845-1865*

David Gomez

The diplomacy towards the Belize-Guatemala territorial dispute has not been widely researched, although the matter of the dispute itself has been increasingly analysed over the years. In general, the assumption has been that Britain's handling of the territorial claim to Belize was rooted in its desire for colonial expansion of territory, and subsequently study of the dispute hitherto has been focused largely on its colonial legacy – that is to say, the legal strength of the competing claims to Belize. Viewing Britain's handling of the territorial dispute as power maximization however has clouded study of the subject, and also obscures the tangibility of Belize within Britain's wider foreign policy towards the Central American region at a particular temporal juncture. This study rejects the above assumption and argues instead that British foreign policy behaviour towards the territorial dispute was influenced by its economic considerations in the region alongside other factors. Consequently, for more than a decade starting in the mid to late 1840s, settlement of the Belize territorial issue was subordinated to Britain's wider interests in Central America. Yet most of the scholarship on the dispute seems to have glossed over this angle of analysis; or, alternatively, has treated it somewhat tangentially. This study addresses this deficit, and the aim is to elucidate the factors that may have shaped British foreign policy towards the Belize territorial dispute between 1845 and 1865; and also to explain how these likely combined to influence British foreign policy behaviour over the matter. Using a theory of bargaining leverage in territorial disputes that combines issue linkage and economic diplomacy as foreign policy strategies, this study submits that Britain's diplomatic handling of the territorial dispute was influenced by an interplay of three things: the salience of Belize to Britain vis-à-vis plans for the construction of a trans-isthmian canal; changes in the nature of interstate power relations in the international system in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the way in which Anglo-American relations had unfolded. This theory suggests that Britain benefitted from the challenge over the Belize territory by adopting a peaceful approach to managing the dispute and by linking an economic issue that was highly salient to other weighty factors in order to secure compromises with regards to Belize. In short, the way Britain handled the dispute allowed it to first exclude settlement of the Belize issue from the wider Central American issue; to subsequently obtain agreement from America on

the boundaries of Belize and finally to elude any contention from America on the grounds that it had contravened the Monroe Doctrine when it eventually declared Belize a colony.

David Gomez is a trade and private sector development specialist with over twenty years of experience in international development projects. He has specialist expertise in international trade analysis and negotiations; export development; services trade; and value chain analysis. David has led or participated in a wide range of technical assistance and capacity building projects implemented by international development partners including the European Union, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Organization of American States and the World Bank. He has worked in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. David is currently a doctoral research student at University College London - Institute of the Americas and holds a Graduate Diploma in International Development with Distinction from the London School of Economics; an MA in International Relations (with Distinction) from the University of Kent, Canterbury where he attended as a Chevening Scholar; a Master of Laws (LLM) in International Trade Law from Northumbria University in Newcastle and a BSc in Secondary Education from the University of Belize.

### *Access to Belizean history*

Cathy Smith, University of Edinburgh

In this talk I want to reflect a little on my experience of doing historical research about Belize using records located in the UK, in Belize, and online. I will examine the conditions that influence access to and interpretation of 'the archive' of Belizean history: the creators and form of the remaining records; level of physical preservation; ordering and cataloguing by archivists; movement and final location of the material. I will end by considering the implications for Belizeans who may be interested in researching their history.

Cathy is entering the third year as a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, which has run alongside working as the project officer for a DFID-funded Darwin Initiative Project that has been training communities in Toledo District in Belize in savanna fire management. Her research looks at how the history of fire management of the lowland coastal savannas of Belize has been shaped by the interaction of global scientific ideas with that specific ecological, social and political context.

### *Belize UK relations*

Perla Perdomo

Perla Perdomo is the High Commissioner for Belize in London. Perla is part diplomat (spending ten years as deputy head of mission in Mexico City, and setting up the Belize Embassy) and part businesswoman - she has spent the past six years in the private sector where, as the General Manager of Travellers Liquors Ltd, she oversaw the global expansion of the brand.

### *A case of Belizean exceptionalism? Exploring multi-ethnicity and political parties in Belize*

Dylan Vernon

Despite diverse multi-ethnicity, with two dominant ethnic groups, and some favourable pre- and post-independence conditions for divisive ethnic politics, the modern politics of Belize has

not been characterised by ethnic-based political parties. In light of the divergent experiences of such Commonwealth Caribbean states as Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago, my paper asks to what extent is the Belize case exceptional and why? I examine elements of the relationship between ethnicity and political parties, since adult suffrage in 1954 and into post-independence Belize, by exploring what factors in the Belize context contributed to the evolution and dominance of ethnically-integrated parties. I argue that the primary factor was the strategic decisions by early nationalist leaders to forge multi-ethnic political unity to achieve independence, but illustrate that there were also other contextual factors at play. Additionally, this noteworthy achievement by Belize does not preclude important ethnic dimensions in its modern political relationships. Yet, the Belize case demonstrates that ethnicity-based party political affiliation is not the inevitable outcome in multi-ethnic societies in the Caribbean.

Dylan Vernon has been Ambassador of Belize to the European Union and the Kingdom of Belgium for three and half years. In this capacity, he is also a non-resident representative to the WTO and non-resident Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of France, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Kingdom of Spain. Just before this work in diplomacy, he completed PhD studies in Caribbean and Latin American Politics at the UCL-Institute of the Americas in mid 2013. However, most of his prior professional career has been in Belize proper. This included an active engagement in civil society organisations promoting development and good governance, a period of service with the UN Development Programme and as a lecturer at tertiary institutions, including the University of Belize. In Brussels, as Belize's Ambassador, he has served as pro tempore president of both the Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (SICA) Group and the CARIFORUM Group in Brussels. He has also represented Belize and the Caribbean Region on the executive boards of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and of the Community Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). He maintains a strong interest in academia generally and, especially, in research on Belize's modern political history.

### ***Energy for Life: community service and leadership***

Claudia Garcia and Manuela Lue

In 2010, Claudia Garcia was offered a high school scholarship by the Energy for Life Program, a non-profit organization in Belize. Claudia is 21 years old and is from a remote village in the Cayo District of Belize called Buena Vista. Her parents are farmers; they have 12 children and do not have electricity in their home. Through the Energy for Life Program, Claudia has realized that life is not only about receiving. Claudia has been mentored by the employees of Belize Natural Energy, who fund the Energy for Life Program. Claudia graduated as salutatorian of her high school; she graduated on the honor roll from Saint John's College Junior College in Belize City and she then took off a year to become the co-leader of the Energy for Life Youth Group. Claudia is the first Belizean to win the International Diana Award, the first Belizean to win the Scotiabank International Bright Future Young Leaders Award. She is an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society in England. Claudia won these international awards for her community service work and her leadership skills. Claudia applied to 25 universities worldwide during her year off after sixth form. She was offered a full scholarship by the University of Westminster in London. Claudia is presently studying for a BSc in Psychology. She wants to become a Psychologist and go back to Belize to assist in the development of the country.

Manuela Lue was a Director of the Energy for Life Programme in Belize for the past nine years. This is a charity in Belize that sponsors, mentors and tutors underprivileged youth for school. Youth in the Programme live all over the country of Belize. Manuela opens doors for these youth by training them in soft skills and connecting them with other charitable and for profit institutions for volunteering, training and internship experiences. Manuela will speak about the needs and realities of the youth in the Programme, describe what the youth learn in the Programme and highlight the methods and techniques used in teaching the youth. The underprivileged youth in the Scholarship Programme receive a significant amount of mentoring and many of them have won national and international awards for community service work and leadership skills. Several of them have also travelled overseas for cultural exchanges and to pursue further education. The youth are breaking the cycle of poverty and the older youth in the Programme become mentors to the younger ones.

### ***Developing community business in Belize to improve local livelihoods in Toledo***

Neil Stuart, Duncan Macqueen, Elmar Requena, Nilcia Xi and Cathy Smith

In this talk we explore the idea that businesses owned and run by local communities and operating according to concepts of sustainability can provide an incentive for protection of natural resources. By describing an approach to business incubation trialled in Belize as part of a current Darwin Initiative project that has fostered four start-up business ventures in Toledo, we examine the ideas that conservation makes business sense and the somewhat controversial idea that local business owners may be more effective stewards of natural resources than government agencies.

Neil is a Senior Lecturer in geography at Edinburgh University and has worked on projects in Belize since he was part of an expedition to survey of the coastal mangroves of Belize in 1991. He was one of the leaders of the 1996 Expedition to the Booth River and has since worked extensively on Belize's savanna ecosystem. From 2009-2012 he led a project to assess the biodiversity of Belize's savannas funded by the UK Darwin Initiative, with partners including the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh, the Belize Botanic Gardens, the University of Belize and Belize Zoo. He is presently leading a second Darwin project with TIDE and the University of Belize ERI which aims to strengthen the capacity of local communities to protect themselves from wildfire, while developing livelihoods based on sustainable use of local resources. Many of Neil's Masters and PhD students undertake research projects in Belize. Neil has been on the organising committee for many UKBA meetings and most recently organised the meeting to celebrate 50 years of Edinburgh University research in Belize in 2016. He was elected President of the UKBA in 2015.

### ***Forest ecology and management in northwest Belize***

Sheila Ward, Nicholas Brokaw and Laura Snook

We study tree species, composition, forest dynamics, and regeneration of mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) in old-growth forests of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area, northwest Belize. Our goal is to understand and conserve these forests. Here we present preliminary results and impressions. Inventory of trees ( $\geq 10$  cm DBH) and environmental factors in 209, 400-m<sup>2</sup> plots shows how soil and topography correlate with tree species distributions and forest types. New lidar data will help us relate species distributions to both environment and ancient Maya features, to reveal the long-term impact of ancient Maya land

use. In another study, of forest change over 25 years, tree inventories in four 1-ha permanent plots, first inventoried in 1991, show differences in dynamics among old-growth forest types. It appears that forests on evidently richer soil and/or flooded occasionally have faster turnover of trees than forests on poorer soils and some upland settings. Lastly, experimental gap creation and enrichment planting in areas designated for forestry, have shown that gaps at least 0.5 ha are needed to promote mahogany regeneration and that, to be worthwhile, enrichment planting in gaps requires follow-up weeding. Mahogany seed trees and progeny have also been followed.

### *Negotiating science and resource management in rural communities*

Sophie Haines

As part of efforts towards sustainable development goals, governmental and non-governmental bodies in Belize are undertaking 'watershed management' projects to assess and manage not only water but also land, ecosystem and human aspects of resource stewardship and climate change adaptation. Belize's history of rural development and conservation interventions has been complicated by legacies of colonialism, indigenous land rights struggles, territorial disputes and past failed projects. This paper discusses recent anthropological research into what contemporary watershed management interventions mean and entail for rural residents of Stann Creek and Toledo districts, whose lives and livelihoods depend on the environments in question. By tracing interactions between rural residents and the scientists, government representatives, land developers, NGOs and civil society organisations with whom they negotiate environmental knowledge, I examine the processes of translation and participation that may or may not occur during scientific environmental assessments and management interventions.

Sophie Haines is James Martin Fellow and ESRC Future Research Leaders Fellow at the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Oxford. She completed her PhD in anthropology at University College London in 2011. She has carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the UK, Belize and Kenya.

### *Maya archaeology and global soil security: recent research at Marco Gonzalez, Ambergris Caye, Belize*

Elizabeth Graham

Marco Gonzalez is a Maya site at the southern tip of Ambergris Caye. Excavation in 1986 and 1990 provided the basic site chronology. Marine resource exploitation, trade, exchange, and salt production were key activities from 300 B.C. until about A.D. 1200, when mangrove encroachment impeded easy access to the sea. At that time, the inhabitants moved north to what is now the town of San Pedro, although there is evidence of limited activity until Spanish contact. My present-day research focuses on the long-term environmental impact of human activity, particularly soil formation. The dark surface soils at Marco Gonzalez are more fertile than would be the case under natural conditions, and locals have traditionally used the soils in their gardens. We have dubbed these soils Maya Dark Earths and, in addition to their nutrient capacity, we are now looking at soil production itself. Do ancient remains contribute to soil production and if so, how? Our intention is to contribute to efforts to improve global soil and food security by re-examining the role in pedogenesis of the materials that result from human habitation.

Elizabeth Graham is Professor of Mesoamerican Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. She has carried out archaeological research in Belize since 1973 and served as Belize's Archaeological Commissioner from 1977 to 1979. Her research has entailed excavations at cave, mainland, and coastal sites in Belize; recently she has worked at Lamanai on the New River Lagoon and Marco Gonzalez on Ambergris Caye. Her book—*Maya Christians and Their Churches in Sixteenth-Century Belize* (University Press of Florida)—bridges Precolumbian Maya and Spanish Contact-period history in Belize, but also contributes to knowledge of the early British presence and Belize's divergence from the Spanish colonial trajectory.

### *Yochi*

Ilana Lapid, Kristi Drexler and Lee Mcloughlin

Award-winning *Yochi* (2016, 26 min) is a narrative short film shot in Belize, Central America. Yochi, an 8 year-old selectively mute Mayan boy, guards a nest of yellow-headed parrot chicks on sacred land entrusted to him by his grandfather. When Yochi discovers his beloved older brother Itza is poaching in order to pay his debts, Yochi's loyalties are put to the test. When Itza realizes he has poached Yochi's nest, he is faced with a dangerous sacrifice. More information on the film can be found at [www.yochifilm.com](http://www.yochifilm.com).

Ilana Lapid is a filmmaker and educator interested in telling visual stories that put a human face on global conflicts. She was born in NYC and grew up in Jerusalem, Ottawa and Las Cruces, NM. She holds a BA from Yale and MFA from the University of Southern California in Film Production. Lapid received a Fulbright in Romania to work with visual stories of Roma (Gypsy) children, and was an Artist in Residence at Slifka Center at Yale. She has directed multiple short films that won awards at international festivals, including *Red Mesa*, which won Best Short at the LA Latino International Film Festival. Her short *La Catrina* is a selection of the 2016 Women in Film and Television International Showcase, and the binational 2016 Femme Frontera Filmmaker Showcase. Lapid is an Assistant Professor at the Creative Media Institute of New Mexico State University, where she teaches directing, screenwriting and border cinema. In 2013 and 2014 Lapid led a documentary filmmaking course in the jungle in Belize, which inspired her to write and direct *Yochi*. She is now working with Wildlife Conservation Society, other international NGOs, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, to use *Yochi* for conservation education across the Caribbean. Lapid is currently working on a feature film based on *Yochi*, dealing with the illegal wildlife trade in Chiquibul jungle in Belize, bordering Guatemala.

Kristin Drexler is a full-time faculty of Human Ecology and Forestry at American Public University. Drexler is also a PhD student in Educational Leadership at New Mexico State University. She is currently producing a feature documentary with Film Shark Media about Yellow-Headed Parrots in Belize, Central America. In the late 90s', Drexler served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Belize. Returning there each year since, she and her husband consider Belize their second home. From 2006 to 2014, Drexler founded and directed the Belize Field School, a series of faculty-led academic courses with NMSU. Drexler recently produced a documentary filmmaking field course in Belize over two summers. Drexler continues her community development and education in Belize; she conducts community surveys as part of her faculty and doctoral research. Drexler serves on the board of directors for Full Basket Belize, a U.S. non-profit, which provides scholarships and community grants in Belize.



Lee Mcloughlin joined Wildlife Conservation Society in 2016 in a dual role as the Belize Terrestrial Program Coordinator, and Program Officer for WCS Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean. Lee is developing a terrestrial conservation program for Belize and supporting the development and expansion of WCS' Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean conservation program, focusing on the protection of the 5 largest remaining forest blocks in the region. Lee holds a MSc in Protected Areas Management and has developed an in-depth understanding of Belize's National Protected Area System both with WCS and 6 years as Protected Areas Program Director for Ya'axché Conservation Trust, a Belizean NGO in southern Belize. Prior to Belize Lee spent a year with Terrain NRM undertaking Habitat Network Planning in Australia's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Notable achievements in Belize include the development of the National Compliance Management Strategy for the Forest Department, and the Southern Maya Mountains Compliance Management Strategy for Ya'axché. With Ya'axché, Lee also developed and delivered the inaugural Belize Ranger Training Academy and created and revised numerous Protected Area Management Plans.

## **United Kingdom Belize Association**

**[www.ukbelizeassociation.org](http://www.ukbelizeassociation.org)**

The United Kingdom Belize Association (UKBA) provides a focus for people who are working or interested in Belize, and aims to stimulate and to encourage activities that benefit Belize and help to raise its profile within the UK and internationally. The Association is international in its reach and membership, and offers an opportunity in the UK for sharing current research and discussion on environmental and societal issues in Belize. In conjunction with the Belize High Commission in London, this is principally channelled through annual meetings, where the results of research activities and projects covering a wide range of topics and interests are presented.

### **UKBA 2017 delegates**

Sylvia Batty & guest

Irene Brews

Barbara Bulmer-Thomas

Victor Bulmer-Thomas

Kristi Drexler

David Gomez & guest

Elizabeth Graham

Sophie Haines

David Howard

Ilana Lapid  
Claudia Leticia  
Manuela Lue  
Lee Mcloughlin  
Kate Quinn  
Roger Miller  
Emily Morris  
Malcom Penn  
Perla Perdomo  
Ally Sangster  
Stephanie Septembre  
Neil Stuart  
Cathy Smith  
Juliana Tappe  
Dylan Vernon  
Shiela Ward  
Yujing Wu