

CDA-1-Photographic-Traces

Traces of Empire in the Built Environment: Exploring the Collective Memory of Colonialism through the Photographic Collections of the Historic England Archive

How to apply and further details: <https://www.sww-ahdtp.ac.uk/prospective-students/apply/collaborative-doctoral-award-projects-2021/>

Supervisors

- Dr Tom Allbeson (Cardiff University, allbesont@cardiff.ac.uk)
- Dr Erika Hanna (University of Bristol, erika.hanna@bristol.ac.uk)
- Gary Winter (Historic England, Gary.Winter@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

The two HEI supervisors, Tom Allbeson and Erika Hanna, are both historians of photography and the built environment who both have considerable experience of doctoral supervision and working with external partners. Gary Winter, the supervisor from Historic England, has worked at Historic England and its predecessors for over twenty years and has contributed to the creation of exhibitions, online image galleries and website content. He has co-authored five English Heritage/Historic England publications, including *Picturing England: The Photographic Collections of Historic England*.

The project has been developed in partnership with Historic England, specifically Gary Winter (Exhibitions and Images Officer) and Tamsin Silvey (Cultural Programme Curator). It is supported by Historic England's Head of Research, Head of Archive and Digital Asset Management, and Head of Creative Programmes and Campaigns.

Subject

'Traces of Empire in the Built Environment' will use historic photographs to tease out the multiple ways in which the English built environment has been formed and reformed through its links to empire. This will include an examination of a wide range of areas, including the construction of monuments and statuary, the creation of buildings and spaces, and the work of the tens of thousands of people who travelled from the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and found work as architects and builders in England's cities.

The photography collections of the Historic England Archive provide a unique and currently underexplored resource for exploring these themes. The Archive's collection of 9 million images is one of the largest photography collections in the country, and provides a crucial window into the shaping of the built environment. Using photographs as the key primary source for this research project provides an opportunity for the CDA student to consider England's landscapes and streetscapes at moments of their formation, explore the official and unofficial uses of space, and examine the lives and contribution of people such as builders and machine operators who so often get overlooked in narratives of changes to the landscape.

The outcome of the project will be an 80,000-word thesis alongside a public-facing online resource for Historic England. It is expected that the student will directly contribute to Historic England's public engagement activities, for example by writing for Historic England's Heritage Calling blog and by making contributions to the Enriching the List initiative. It is also expected that the student's research will enhance assessments of the archive collections and their context, and that images and stories the student uncovers will be used in public engagement initiatives.

Research questions and methods

The research questions cluster around a series of issues relating to empire, the built environment, and photography, but will be shaped by the interests and research of the postgraduate researcher in consultation with their supervisors. They might include:

- How has the built environment been shaped by links with empire?
- What role have imperial citizens (architects, planners, builders, machine operators etc) played in shaping the built environment?
- How can photography be used in making sense of both grand narratives and granular stories of the role of empire in the formation of the built environment?

The project will draw on research methods and critical interpretive frames that illuminate the cultural significance of architecture, urban space and public ceremonies or spectacle drawing on research methodologies of cultural geographers, historians of anthropology, scholars of urban memory and others. This will include the following approaches:

- Social histories of imperial cities, considering the ways in which spaces and practices of the city were shaped by expansion and industrialisation
- studies of collective memory as constructed through the transformation of urban space (e.g. the creation of monuments, the naming of public spaces or the staging of festivities)
- social biography of photographs, tracing the changing networks within which images circulate and how this circulation shapes the meanings of both photographic objects and the subjects of photographs
- analyses of how discourses of urbanism are shaped by historic visual material and practices.

Research context

With the removal of the Colston statue from the centre of Bristol, the boarding up of a statue of Robert Baden-Powell at Poole quay, and Sadiq Khan's review of London's statues, the imperial legacies of the built environment are constantly in the news. However, the relationship between the built environment and empire has been repeatedly contested and rewritten through successive periods of renewal and reconstruction. Indeed, the construction of imperial statuary and spaces, Second World War bomb damage and reconstruction, the postwar creation of social democratic cityscapes or of motorways and

airfields, and crises regarding deindustrialization and the 'inner city', are all, in differing ways, stories about Britain's shifting relationship with empire.

The project relates directly to the government's 'retain and explain' policy and Historic England's advisory position regarding Contested Heritage, particularly concerning statues and other objects in the built environment. Historic England seeks to contextualise or reinterpret Contested Heritage, enabling the public to learn about challenging histories. Historic England is currently piloting initiatives that will interrogate responses to Contested Heritage for the sector. This project will contribute to the contextualisation and reinterpretation of Contested Heritage and help to create new layers of meaning to the extant historic built environment. This will, in turn, help inform others, including those in the heritage sector, local authorities and local communities, wishing to reveal untold stories and hidden histories in the public realm.

Within historical research, there has been a long running scholarly debate regarding the formation of imperial landscapes, with works by scholars such as Felix Driver, David Gilbert, and Miles Ogborn. There is also currently new momentum in histories of Black and Asian Britons, with notable recent works by Kieran Connell, Kenyetta Perry, and Mark Matera. This research project is therefore designed to make an important contribution to academic debates, Historic England's current objectives, and public discourse by unpacking the multiple and overlapping ways in which empire 'came home' in the formation of English townscapes.

Main resources/collections in this area

Research will draw on a number of collections in the Historic England Archive, such as the [Red Box Collection](#), established by the National Buildings Record during the Second World War to forge a picture of architectural heritage threatened with destruction. The project will also utilise many other photographic collections held by Historic England from individuals and companies documenting public spaces, historic and contemporary architecture, and the construction of modern buildings and infrastructure. These collections include [Millar and Harris](#), [Andor Gomme](#), [Maurice Barley](#), [Bedford Lemere](#), [Marshall, Keene & Co](#), [John Gay](#) as well as the [John Laing](#) and [London Midland & Scottish Railway](#) collections. The [Historic England Library](#) at Swindon is also an excellent resource for books and periodicals covering all aspects of the historic environment.

Research could also usefully also draw on representations of the built environment, urban projects and national celebrations in the press and popular publications. A significant British media archive is available via the [Tom Hopkinson Centre](#) (Cardiff) including popular British magazines such as *Illustrated London News*, *Picture Post* and the *Sunday Times Magazine*, as well as publications from across the globe, such as *Drum* magazine published in numerous African nations from the 1950s. Likewise, Bristol houses the [Penguin Archive](#) (covering the period 1935 to the 1990s) and the Penguin Book Collection (1935 to the present).

Skills developed by student and employability enhancement

The close partnership between Historic England, Cardiff, and Bristol will provide the postgraduate researcher with a unique and valuable skillset. Their employability will be enhanced by researching within a working, living archive, gaining experience of cross-team co-operation and the value of building and developing partnerships, both within a heritage organisation and with external partners. They will also develop skills and knowledge in acquisition, conservation, cataloguing, archive handling, collections research, collections management, copyright, digitisation, customer services and how an archive works using an audience-first approach. In addition, by having access to other teams within the Public Engagement group, the student will gain an understanding of how the work of the Historic England Archive can contribute to a variety of public engagement activities, from social media output to the creation and delivery of cultural programmes.

The student's placement at Historic England will be crucial to the development of the research project. They will base themselves at the Historic England Archive in Swindon for one day a week and spend four weeks with the Creative Programmes and Campaigns team at Historic England's London office. Access will be given to the Historic England Archive's collections and staff working within archives and public engagement. Training will be given in the use of databases, accessing and handling archive material, the production of content for the *Heritage Calling* blog, curating an online exhibit, and other practical skills.