**CDA5**

**Narrating the Covid-19 Lockdowns in Wales, 2020-21:**

**Loss, Work, Community, and Consolation in the “Collecting Covid” Archive**

**Supervisors:**

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The supervisors combine expertise on loss and consolation; the social and emotional impact of Covid-19; place, identity and expressions of place through literature (especially poetry); and the creation, curation and analysis of archive material. Elen Phillips is Principal Curator of Contemporary and Community History at AC-MW and lead curator for the “Collecting Covid” project.

**The project and research methods**

This Collaborative PhD project has been developed with Amgueddfa Cymru–Museum Wales (AC-MW) and will centre on the museum’s ground-breaking “Collecting Covid” archive. This archive comprises images, artefacts, and textual responses submitted by survey participants during the Covid-19 lockdowns 2020-21. The doctoral researcher will examine these personal narratives and images in relation to the cultural geography of Wales and the context of a global public health crisis.

With approximately 1300 responses, “Collecting Covid” represents a critical mass of data with cultural and public significance: <https://museum.wales/collections/collecting-covid/> . Responses featured in the “Covid Stories” blogposts (2020) plus initial analysis by Arad Research (2021) evidence key themes, four of which will form the core of this project: loss; work; community; and consolation. The PhD project will analyse how these high-level themes are articulated within the archive and how they make sense of individual experiences of the pandemic in relation to local, national and global geographies.

**Likely research questions and methods:**

In what ways were loss and consolation experienced and narrated in Wales as a result of Covid-19 and associated lockdowns?

As Covid-19 altered workplace and community practices, how was this manifested for people in Wales and their personal stories?

What part have local, national, and global geographies played in narrating the experience of Covid-19, especially in fostering wellbeing and resilience?

Depending on the skills profile of the chosen researcher, methodologies are likely to include two or more of the following:

Thematic coding of qualitative data;

Narrative or discourse analysis of open responses;

Visual analysis of images and artefacts;

Creative practice (by the researcher and/or public participants);

Participative methods (such as co-creation of display materials);

Public engagement activities.

It is anticipated that sub-themes will be defined by the researcher, based on qualitative thematic coding, potentially including: localities; neighbours and mutual aid; virtual and international networks; risk and anxiety; social isolation; bereavement; wellbeing; loss of work; key workers; hobbies and upskilling; the plural languages of Wales; gender and diversity; nature and sustainability. These foci will enable the researcher to navigate the overarching themes, generating vital understanding of how the pandemic was narrated in relation to community, place and space (including digital spaces).

Specifically, the researcher will develop an understanding of narrative; coding of qualitative material; and/or visual analysis skills, which they will use to interpret qualitative biographical material. These advanced, inter-disciplinary skills will be developed throughout the research process, through both university and museum training and practice. The student will make a timely and innovative contribution to scholarship on contemporary Wales, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the connections between place, health and narrative. They will also curate and disseminate their findings, developing a public engagement plan and contributing to the work of AC-MW.

The “Collecting Covid” dataset has unique potential for understanding the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, specifically, snapshots of how individuals in Wales narrated their own experience of pandemic lockdowns and their implications. This work is timely, when the reported experiences are still fresh, and while individuals, communities and institutions can benefit from insights and potentially cathartic opportunities to reflect on the impact of the global pandemic in local and Welsh contexts.

Analysis of the archive will create opportunities for further public engagement activities, potentially including creative outputs by the researcher (stories, poems, images, film) and creative workshops (e.g. poetry or creative writing) with the public at AC-MW sites. Utilising the “Collecting Covid” materials, the PhD project and associated public engagement activities will both analyse and add to the archive as a dynamic collection-resource.

**Research Training and employability**

Research skills development, work with the museum, and public engagement activities will enhance the student’s employability. In addition to University of Reading Graduate School modules, and supervisor-led specialist training, AC-MW has a well developed programme of training opportunities for CDA students, which facilitates cross-cohort networking and enhancement opportunities. Tailored training includes: object handling, digitisation, archiving, public-facing roles and cataloguing, as well as opportunities for internal or external placements (e.g. with education and exhibitions teams), enhancing employability upon graduation. Training starts with a full day induction to working at AC-MW followed by regular research seminars and an annual research conference; plus archive and public engagement training with Elen Phillips.

The research and collections/museum skills training, creative and/or report writing, placements, and public engagement activities (see above) all represent transferable skills which can be taken forward into employment, notably within the museum sector, academia or public research companies.

These will enhance the employability of the student.

**Details**

The student will be based at the Department of Geography and Environmental Science at the University of Reading, working closely with the whole supervisory team, including training opportunities at Amgueddfa Cymru–Museum Wales. Applicants should have a 2:1 or First in a relevant discipline (e.g. social-cultural or historical geography; contemporary history; museum studies), and ideally have a relevant Masters qualification. Applicants will have the option to consider, in consultation with supervisors, submitting the PhD by thesis or published papers. See: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/graduate-school/doctoral-opportunities/types-doctoral-degree>