AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Studentship (PhD)

Home on the Rails: The design, fitting and decoration of train interiors in Britain, c.1920-1955

The National Railway Museum (Science Museum Group) in collaboration with The Open University

As part of an exciting partnership between the National Railway Museum (NRM) and The Open University (OU), we are able to offer a three-year, full-time AHRC-funded studentship for doctoral work on the design of railway interiors. The student will join a community of doctoral students in Art History at the OU but spend time with the National Railway museum collection and staff in York.

This project is an opportunity to examine the connections between the design, fitting out and choice of decoration in train interiors in Britain, c.1920-1955 and the shifting concept of home. Carriages played a key role in the movement of passengers over short, intermediate and long distances around Britain, and needed to combine durability with accommodating familiar domestic activities. Although much has been written on train exteriors from the standpoint of railway history, little attention has been paid to the construction of ideas of home in this transient context, nor to the design-making process and networks which underpinned carriage design.

Accordingly the collaborative PhD might address the following research questions: Firstly, it could examine the nature of domesticity within the railway carriage, and the extent to which their layout, fittings and decoration enabled social interaction to be mediated by domestic norms, or subverted barriers of class and gender. Secondly, it
could consider the nature of the decision-making process in the train interior, testing claims that furnishings were often the result of choices by individuals based on gender, technological knowledge or their hierarchy in the company. This could also involve investigating the networks used by different companies to design and supply goods such as decorative textiles, flatware, glass and ceramics. Thirdly, the project offers opportunities to consider how far these networks reflected wider concerns to improve standards of design and public taste and the role of public exhibitions as part this discourse. In particular it might examine the tensions between interiors designed in historicist styles, rooted in the domestic, and experiments in the design of modernist spaces.

There is room to shape the specific research questions of the study according to archival interests.

The studentship will be supervised by Dr Clare Taylor and Dr Susie West at the OU, and Anthony Coulls and Ed Bartholomew of the NRM. This full-time studentship, which is funded for three years at standard AHRC rates, will begin on 1 October 2016. For academic queries, please contact Dr Taylor at clare.taylor@open.ac.uk.

RESEARCH AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The student will be registered for a PhD in Art History. At the OU, Art History has close links to the area of Design and a jointly appointed Professor of Design History (Professor Elizabeth McKellar). In the Research Excellence Framework 2014, Art History and Design ranked 6th among UK departments for 3* and 4* research: 88% of research submitted was considered ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’.

Arts and Humanities research at the OU is internationally recognized across a range of subject areas, too, from English and Creative Writing to Classical Studies, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Music and History. For more information about Arts research at the OU, including AHRC-funded projects, see: http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/index.html. There is a strong vision for developing successful interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, and a commitment to ensuring that our research informs our teaching and a wider process of exchange with cultural and heritage partners. Through our national presence, augmented by our close links with the BBC and other media outlets, our research informs public opinion and policy, and promotes debate and engagement with key questions of the day. The Faculty also hosts a vibrant programme in the Digital Humanities: http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/digital-humanities/index.shtml.

The OU is part of the Design STAR AHRC funding consortium. In addition Arts and Humanities students benefit from the university’s membership of CHASE, the AHRC Consortium for Humanities and Arts in Southeast England, whose other members are Goldsmiths, University of London, Soas, Birkbeck, The Courtauld Institute of Art, and the universities of Kent, Essex, Sussex and East Anglia. The main university facilities are sited at Walton Hall in Milton Keynes with additional offices in the regions and nations.

There are more than 1,000 postgraduate research students currently enrolled at the OU. Of these approximately 570 study full-time on campus, while the rest study part-time.
There are currently over 90 postgraduate research students in the Arts and Humanities, of whom about 1/3 study full time.

Open Research Online (ORO) is an institutional repository that contains over 30,000 records of OU research outputs. Annually over 1 million items of full text content are downloaded from ORO and it receives visitors from over 200 countries and territories. The University’s iTunesU site was launched in 2008 and includes research content. There have been more than 58 million discrete content downloads from that site, while OU content on YouTube has reached more than 6.7 million visitors.

Research students have an induction programme and training programme. Training areas include (for example) bibliographical databases and other IT skills and managing a research project through its different stages. The OU provides additional study-skills training days focussed on the particular needs of Arts and Humanities students, including the CHASE consortium’s AHRC-funded training programmes. The OU Library offers specially tailored induction sessions and a wealth of online resources for research. We also have a Virtual Research Environment, which provides training and networking opportunities as well as resources such as careers advice.

Student progress is regularly monitored through six-monthly reports. At the end of the first year students undergo a thorough probation review process and mini-viva, and their continued registration is conditional on a satisfactory outcome. For further information see the research degree prospectus, which can be downloaded from http://www.open.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/index.php.

RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

Established in 1975 as the first national museum outside London, the National Railway Museum is the largest organisation of its kind in the world and forms part of the Science Museum Group. The NRM has specialist curators with interests including railway vehicles; art, photographic, film and sound collections; archive collections and oral history. For many years, curators have carried out research across the NRM’s key subject areas of the history and technology of railways and their impact on social and cultural life. This has helped to provide detailed and contextual understanding of the Museum’s collections, which has resulted in scholarly publications, websites and books, as well as many exhibitions. In 2008 the NRM opened its Search Engine library and archive facility, which gives free and open access to the paper-based collections and which has become a hub for staff, academic and public research. Search Engine has dedicated research spaces which are wi-fi enabled and researchers are permitted to use their own ICT and digital cameras to capture images of sources en masse.

The NRM and University of York collaborate on a joint initiative, the Institute of Railway Studies & Transport History (IRSTH). Since it was founded in 1995 the IRSTH has become an internationally recognised centre for the study of transport history and mobility. A recent collaborative programme included the AHRC-funded ‘Commercial Cultures of Britain’s Railways, 1872-1977’, which analysed the ways in which the railways developed marketing, advertising and branding to encourage the consumption of railway travel in three critical periods in their history. The NRM and IRSTH also joined forces on two recent AHRC collaborative doctoral awards, Matt Thompson’s ‘A Master whose heart is in the land; picturing the tourist Utopia of the Great Western
Railway, 1897-1947” completed under the Beyond Text programme; and Alex Medcalf’s ‘Picturing the passenger as customer in Britain: the Great Western Railway, 1906-1939’.

Other collaborative PhDs being undertaken at the NRM under the CDP scheme are ‘Britain’s railways in the Great War, 1914-1918’, by Tanya Kenny in conjunction with the University of Aberdeen, and ‘Food Miles, the imaginings, politics and practice of food distribution in the UK, circa 1920-1975’, by Thomas Spain, in conjunction with the Institute of Railway Studies & Transport History at the University of York. The facilities and expertise of the IRSTH will be accessible for the student as part of the NRM’s collaboration agreement with the OU.

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please email (in Word or pdf) a full CV, sample of academic writing (maximum 3,000 words), a letter of 500 words outlining qualifications for the studentship and the contact details of two academic referees to research@sciencemuseum.ac.uk by the deadline of 21 June 2016. Please use the subject heading ‘NRM/Open University’ in the subject line of the email.

Shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit an OU application form prior to interview.

STIPEND, EXPENSES AND FACILITIES

Please note that this studentship is subject to the AHRC eligibility regulations. Applicants are strongly advised to check eligibility before applying.

For home students, the studentship carries a maintenance grant at the level set by the research councils (£14,067 in 15-16) as well as UK/EU tuition fees. In addition there is an extra payment to the student of £550 per year for expenses relating to the collaboration. The OU makes available an allowance for training and project-related research costs subject to a standard £1,000 annual limit, with pre-approval of specific research plans. The NRM will also make available up to £1000/year to the student to help defray collaboration and research expenses. The successful candidate will be provided by the OU with a notebook computer.

REQUIREMENTS

It is essential that the successful candidate has:

- Good academic qualifications in an Arts and Humanities subject (ie a 1st or 2:i degree from a UK institution or equivalent from a non-UK institution and/or a Masters degree)
- Demonstrable ability to produce academic writing of a high quality
- Evidence of the self-discipline and organizational skills required to complete a major academic project in three years.
In addition, it is highly desirable that the successful candidate has:

- An interest in bringing academic research to a public audience
- Experience of working with archives and museum objects
- Willingness to be an active participant in the broader intellectual communities of the OU, the NRM and within the AHRC CDP cohort.

**OU APPLICATION FORMS:** Following shortlisting, applicants are required to submit an OU research degrees application form at

http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/explained/how_to_apply.htm

For practical advice on the applications procedure, contact the Research Degrees Team (research-degrees-arts@open.ac.uk) or 01908 654882. For discussion of the academic content of studentship, please contact Dr Clare Taylor (clare.taylor@open.ac.uk)

Again: Please note that this studentship is subject to the eligibility regulations for AHRC awards and applicants are strongly advised to consult the guidance in the Training Grant Funding Guide prior to preparing an application: http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Postgraduate-funding/Pages/Current-award-holders.aspx

**CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS:** 21 June 2016

**INTERVIEWS SCHEDULED:** 19 July 2016.

It is expected the studentship will start 1 October 2016.

Equal Opportunity is University Policy.