**Project Title**
From Stoke Mandeville 1944 to London 2012: Photography and the Making of the Paralympic Community in Britain

**THE RESEARCH PROJECT**
(Max 750 words)

This project will examine the formation of the Paralympic community through the study of the NPHT photographic collections. This archive follows a community-centred approach. It reflects the daily life of disabled athletes, and not just the elite or mega-events, and aims to bring the photographs back to their regional communities through itinerant exhibitions, currently planned for Norfolk, Bradford, Manchester, Bath and London. By closely analysing the growing NPHT photographic collection, the student will identify how athletes, coaches, medical staff and families have used photography to define themselves as a ‘community’ and how they have used sport to frame and represent their disabilities. Understanding how the Paralympic community has appropriated medical images or the stories that Paralympians tell when seeing the NPHT photographs will challenge public perceptions about individuals with disabilities and will present new critical insights into the formation of sports communities, representations and disability.

The proposed CDA project will 1) determine the key role photographic representations have played in building the Paralympic community; 2) demonstrate the public impact and academic value of incorporating photographic collections into sport heritage projects and activities; 3) will consolidate the reputation of DMU as a leading institution in interdisciplinary arts and humanities research based on knowledge co-production with heritage institutions such as NPHT at regional and national levels.

This project will make a theoretical and practical intervention in current debates in disability history, photographic history and sports history. While scholars have examined the media coverage of Paralympic athletes, the visual history of the Paralympic movement is yet to be written. The NPHT collection of photographs produced by Paralympians, their families, coaches and medical professionals provide critical representations that, against negative imagery, showcase the disabled body as transgressive and full of political potential. Following a sociological approach which understands disability as formed by the interaction between the individual and society, the analysis of the NPHT photographic collections also sheds light into the understanding of sports disability within the Paralympic community. The critical examination of photographic sources will contribute to the sparse scholarship on the Paralympics, largely reliant on textual sources.

This project will follow the methods of photographic history. First, the student will conduct research on material preserved at the NPHT, working with archivists and cataloguers to classify the material and identify key details such as the producer, the circulation of the images between the private and the public sphere and their reception and consumption. Secondly, the student will select a group of photographic sources and conduct oral interviews with people related to them (athletes, coaches,
doctors or relatives who are either in the photographs or who took them). Following a photo-
elicitation strategy, the interviewees will use the photographs to reflect on their own experiences
within the para-sport world. This project will be co-designed between the NPHT, which will provide
the photographic sources and contacts, and DMU, which will provide the academic expertise and
guidance, to situate this project within the parameters of photographic, social, cultural, sport and
disability histories.

The outcomes of this project will be the result of the co-creation of knowledge between the student,
the academics at DMU and the NPHT. The PhD student will be key to maintain and enhance the NPHT
Paralympic heritage by means of 1) contextualising the existing photographic collection, 2) compiling
oral histories related to the Paralympic movement in the Midlands and 3) contributing to a Midlands
version of the itinerant NPHT exhibition, which will take place in 2024. Unlike other NPHT exhibitions,
the Midlands exhibit will be specifically designed for the region and will be the product of the M4C
CDA, as the NPHT is not currently planning to tour the exhibition anywhere in the Midlands.

This project is timely with the NPHT’s recent opening of the museum and coincides with the
Paralympics, starting just after the 2020 Paralympics close and finishing as the Paris Paralympics
happen in 2024 and the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, which include para-sports. In
Year 1, the student will be embedded in the NPHT, working with the primary sources and reviewing
literature for the formal review. The student will complete any necessary training during this period.
In Year 2, the student will conduct the oral history interviews, write the first chapter of the
dissertation and collect materials for the exhibition. In Year 3, the student will work on the itinerant
exhibition and write the rest of the chapters. In addition to completing a doctoral thesis, the student
will present this research at academic conferences and via publications.

2. Athanasios Pappous, Anne Marcellini, and Eric de Léséleuc, “From Sydney to Beijing: the evolution of the photographic
   and Film”, in Handbook of Disability Studies, edited by Albrecht, Seelman and Bury (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2001),
   pp. 195-218, Beth A Haller, Representing Disability in an Ableist World (Louisville: The Avocado Press, 2010) and
   Tinkler, Using Photographs and Social and Historical Research (London: SAGE, 2013); Elizabeth Edwards and Janice
   204-226.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE
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