

M4C DTP Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) Marketing Template

Project Title			
Slavery and Empire on Display at Charlecote Park, Warwickshire			
LEAD INSTITUTION			
Name of HEI institution	University of Birmingham		
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION			
Name of organisation	National Trust		
Website URL	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/		
THE RESEARCH PROJECT			
<p>The ‘Slavery and Empire on Display at Charlecote Park, Warwickshire’ doctoral project will examine questions of wealth derived from slavery, imperial connections, material culture, collecting and display, through the case study of Charlecote Park in Warwickshire. It will be supervised by Kate Smith (History, University of Birmingham), Kate Nichols (Art History, University of Birmingham) and Rebecca Harvey (Curator, National Trust). Completing this doctoral work between 2020 and 2024 is timely, as it will directly contribute to the National Trust’s reinterpretation of collections at Charlecote, particularly in 2023.</p> <p>Historians increasingly understand British country houses in their global and imperial contexts. Recent research has highlighted how wealth derived from slavery and empire underpinned the building and rebuilding of the British country house in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Similarly, scholars are studying the object and art collections that families engaged in the slave trade, plantations and imperial trade and administration, acquired and displayed within their houses. Yet, little attention has been given to what happened to such collections if and when they moved on from the family who purchased them and became displayed in new contexts. ‘Slavery and Empire on Display’ uses the case study of George and Mary Lucy’s Charlecote Park to tackle this problem, revealing the longer legacies of connections to slavery and empire and how and why such legacies have often been silenced and forgotten.</p> <p>In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, buoyed by family wealth derived from ownership of Jamaican plantations from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, William Beckford purchased vast numbers of objects. However, as the family fortune diminished and debts mounted, Beckford was forced to sell his collections, most famously at the Fonthill Sale in 1823. Here, George Lucy purchased South Asian ebony and ivory furniture, silverware and Chinese porcelain. George and Mary then displayed the collection of global luxury goods at Charlecote. The largely Asian wares came to be reimagined and redisplayed between 1824 and 1844, as the couple substantially renovated the house. Charlecote contains an unusually rich example of Asian objects acquired through imperial trade routes, which were purchased by wealth derived from the Caribbean plantation system and then redisplayed in a different context. As such it has the potential to significantly illuminate our understanding of the interweaving influences of slavery and empire.</p> <p>‘Slavery and Empire on Display’ asks, where and when were the Asian luxury goods made, and by whom? How and why did they come to Britain? How were these objects and the broader Beckford collection perceived? How was the Fonthill auction understood? Did this event shape the meaning of the objects? How and why did the Lucys purchase these objects? How did they display them? How did they redisplay them once the house renovation was complete? How did the Lucys afford to purchase Beckford objects and renovate Charlecote? The project seeks to reveal the changing meaning of objects linked to wealth derived from plantations and obtained through imperial connections over the early nineteenth century.</p> <p>In 2020-2023, Charlecote will be renovating its heating system. The work will disrupt the usual house experience, requiring the removal of some collections from display. This creates the opportunity for new interpretation when the collections are fully reinstalled in 2023. The completion of the re-display in 2023 will coincide with the 200-year</p>			

anniversary of the Fonthill Sale, where George Lucy made significant purchases. It also coincides with the 200-year anniversary of the beginning of the Lucy's substantial alterations at the Park. Thus, the reinterpretation will be focused on including a fuller understanding of the Beckford pieces and their display within an altered interior at Charlecote. The PhD project will provide the crucial underpinning research for such a reinterpretation.

To complete this doctoral project, you will engage with object and archival collections at Charlecote, alongside documentary collections in the Warwickshire Record Office, Bodleian Library, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Library of Birmingham. You will benefit from accessing a range of expertise both from your academic supervisors and your National Trust supervisor. You will also have access to a range of National Trust courses and will do 6-month internship with the Trust to complete initiatives connected to exhibitions, interpretation and outreach.

If you are interested in pursuing a PhD in histories of empire, slavery, objects, collecting and display and want to engage with a high-profile heritage site, please get in touch.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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