

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

Project Title				
Histories of sexual health in London's East End				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	University of Birmingham			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	Barts Health NHS Trust Archives and Museums			
URL for organisation website	www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/barts-health-archives			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>Using the rich archival collections of the Whitechapel Venereal Disease Clinic, this project will be a granular study of sexual health in London's East End from the interwar years to the beginning of the AIDS crisis. It will focus on the health experiences and outcomes of marginalised and minoritised communities.</p> <p>The twentieth century witnessed enormous changes in medical knowledge, public attitudes, policymaking and infrastructure for sexual health. But the personal, lived experiences of sexual health, especially among marginalised and minoritised communities in the decades before the AIDS crisis, are largely missing from the archives to which historians have hitherto had access. As such, these personal experiences have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve.</p> <p>Established in 1929, the Whitechapel VD Clinic was among the most significant sites in the nationwide Venereal Disease Service—Britain's first universal healthcare system free at the point of use. The Whitechapel Clinic archives (WCA) contain approximately 12,000 items, including complete patient records dating from the 1920s. They are unique among surviving sexual-health archives in their scope and completeness. Importantly, the collection also reflects the long historical trajectory of medical and social beliefs linking migrants and minoritised populations with the spread of STIs. But despite the richness and importance of these archives, they have received little systematic analysis. At present, the WCA is only partially digitised and redacted, meaning that access is restricted. The Institute of Applied Health Research (University of Birmingham) and the Centre for the History of Medicine (University of Warwick) have therefore partnered with Barts Health NHS Trust Archives and Museums to facilitate the student's work with the WCA and help them to produce cutting-edge scholarship based on records not previously seen by historians.</p> <p>The bedrock of the student's archival research will be the WCA. For comparison and context, they will also draw on archives from central government and local authorities across the UK. And they will undertake oral histories with people who accessed or staffed sexual-health services in London's East End. Although their focus and approach will be shaped by their own research interests and by what they find in the WCA, it is expected that they will address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were historical sexual-health policies and services complicit in the othering of minoritised communities within medicine and public discourse? 				

- Did the Whitechapel Clinic’s historical record-keeping practices contribute to discrimination against and disempowerment of patients?
- Can these records help us to identify the legacies of historical sexual-health inequalities and critique their impact on communities today?

The student will benefit from the complementary expertise of Dr Anne Hanley (Birmingham), Professor Roberta Bivins (Warwick) and Kate Jarman and Ginny Dawe-Woodings (Barts Health). They will receive a programme of tailored training that addresses the practical and ethical challenges of working with highly sensitive records. In year 4 of the PhD, they will draw on these skills as part of a formal placement (approximately 6 hours a week for 10 weeks) with Barts Health. During this placement, they will consult on the development of a major funding bid that would enable Barts Health to complete the WCA’s digitisation. This collaboration will offer the student new insights into their own research while also helping them to develop grant-capture skills and gain valuable experience of collaborative project planning and development that will support their future career. They will also receive training from the Oral History Society to collect, transcribe and analyse oral histories. And they will have access to training and resources to support their public-engagement work.

This project is embedded within the medical humanities and committed to using history to respond to today’s health challenges. The student will be affiliated with Warwick’s Centre for the History of Medicine but will be based formally in Birmingham’s Institute of Applied Health Research. In the IAHR they will be supported by Hanley’s UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship, [Histories of Sexual Health in Britain, 1918–1980](#), as well as a multidisciplinary community of researchers specialising in sexual and reproductive health. As a member of this research community, the student will build links with staff delivering sexual healthcare through University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust. This will complement links that they will also build with staff delivering Barts Health NHS Trust’s sexual-health services. With links to two of England’s largest NHS Trusts, the student will gain an understanding of contemporary sexual-health challenges and priorities, contextualise their work in modern-day provisions and develop policy relevance for their historical research.

For more information about this project, contact [Dr Anne Hanley](#).

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Anne Hanley
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	a.hanley@bham.ac.uk