

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

PROJECT TITLE

Commemorating the Equal Franchise Act and Historicising Women’s Social and Political Lives at National Trust Properties in 1920s Britain

LEAD INSTITUTION

Name of HEI institution University of Birmingham

Lead regional city Birmingham Coventry Leicester Nottingham

PARTNER ORGANISATION

Name of organisation The National Trust

URL for organisation website <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

Project

This CDA is looking for a PhD researcher to work with academics and National Trust curators, properties, and collections to produce cutting-edge new research and public engagement outputs for the 2028 centenary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act. This Act finally gave British women the right to vote on equal terms with men, expanding the 1918 Representation of the People Act which enfranchised women over the age of 30 with the necessary property requirements. Moreover, the CDA will make a significant contribution to understanding by contextualising this Act alongside the wider socio-political context of women’s lives in 1920s Britain. This will be achieved by providing the first comparative history of the divergent cross-class experiences of women who both lived and worked in National Trust properties during this era.

Many elite women who lived in houses now owned by the Trust were involved in the campaign for women’s full enfranchisement, and played an integral, wider role in fighting for new opportunities for women, professionally, politically, and socially across the era spanning 1918–1928. Alongside illuminating their important, little-recognised contributions, the CDA will research the socio-political worlds of the domestic servants who also lived and worked within these properties, but who were not enfranchised in 1918 like their ‘mistresses.’ What is so striking about the 1928 Act is that it enfranchised exactly those women who worked and lived as domestic servants in Trust properties (both under 30, and with no property). The CDA offers a unique way to explore how servants and employers’ relationships changed during this era. Furthermore, the project’s comparative, national, and cross-class framing means it will make multiple interventions. The CDA will investigate the significance of Trust properties, ostensibly domestic spaces, as key sites for women’s political networks and as sites of work for women, as well as fleshing out understanding of the role played by age, region, race, and ethnicity in shaping women’s socio-political lives in the 1920s.

Process

Over the four years, you will be expected to produce a high-quality PhD on this topic as well as focusing your energies on producing public engagement activities for the 2028 centenary.

Preliminary investigations have so far revealed over 20 National Trust properties with relevant archives. You will be expected to analyse oral histories, diaries, magazines, and workbooks pertaining to domestic servants alongside paintings, letters, and political speeches for elite women. There are also digital databases, including census records, women’s studies collections, and regional and national newspapers.

Given the richness and diversity of the materials there are considerable opportunities to develop your own methodologies and framing. Initially, the CDA will focus on ten NT properties which have been carefully selected to provide a national picture and a range of property types, whilst also being manageable. Properties include Bodnant Gardens, Wales; Smallhythe Place, Kent; Wightwick Manor,

West Midlands; Dudmaston Hall, Shropshire; Paycockes House, Essex; Cliveden, Buckinghamshire; Killerton House, Devon; Wallington, Northumberland, and Mount Stewart, Northern Ireland. As the research develops, you could expand beyond these properties or indeed reduce the number.

Place

You will work closely with the project supervisors (Dr Zoe Thomas, University of Birmingham; Dr Laura Schwartz, University of Warwick; and Helen Antrobus, National Trust) and have regular supportive meetings relating to your academic writing and your public-facing work.

You will have the opportunity to contribute to a range of activities and engagement, through the National Trust's national commemorative programming for 2028. This depends on your interests and there is considerable room for flexibility here. Your work could include, but is not limited to, digital content, including an exhibition and podcast, on-site interpretations, and content for the NT Cultural Heritage magazine. You will also informally provide further work which will feed into these activities, e.g., you will write short 'guides' for the relevant NT properties for staff and volunteers. This research might also be used to edit catalogue records for specific collections.

You will receive extensive opportunities for professional development, both at individual properties and at a national level, such as shadowing National Trust curators and archivists and helping to co-produce the aforementioned outputs.

Person

We are looking for candidates who are really interested in women's and gender history and are invested in recovering and contextualising these histories.

We are looking for candidates who are keen to pursue creative methods of telling these histories and energised by communicating their ideas to diverse public audiences.

We would expect the candidate to have an MA in the humanities but also welcome applications from candidates who have had non-traditional career paths.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE. Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

Lead HEI Supervisor:

Zoe Thomas

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