

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

PROJECT TITLE				
Theatre and the Aristocracy: Passion, Patronage, Power and Politics, 1771-1893				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution		University of Warwick		
Lead regional city		Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation		The Bedford Estates (including Woburn Abbey)		
URL for organisation website		https://www.bedfordestates.com https://www.woburnabbey.co.uk		
<p>Project: Woburn Abbey is one of England’s ‘treasure houses’ and has been home to the Russells and the Earls and Dukes of Bedford since the 1620s. This project will interrogate the manifold, complex relationships between the aristocracy and the theatre across six generations of the Russell family between 1771 and 1893.</p> <p>Woburn Abbey has been closed to the public since 2019 as part of a major capital project that is due to be completed in 2025. This period of closure is providing a timely opportunity for rethinking how the house, family and collections can be narrated to future audiences. Since opening to the public in 1955, the house’s narrative has remained largely unchanged, focussing chiefly on the political successes of a select number of Earls and Dukes and how they used their increased power and wealth to develop their properties and land. In doing so, other thematic approaches to the collections have been fundamentally overlooked, as have the fascinating lives of their wives and lovers (male and female), their wider families and the thousands of people who lived and worked with them. When the house reopens, and in subsequent decades, there is a strong desire to ensure that the Bedford Estates’ narratives are dynamic, responsive and reflective of the diversity of its twenty-first century audiences.</p> <p>As the doctoral candidate working on this project, you will help to address the urgent need to rewrite the histories of Woburn Abbey and the Bedford Estates by approaching the collections from a social and cultural perspective. You will achieve this by centring your research on the Russell family’s associations with theatre across four key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Passion.</i> Analysing the significance of the family’s passion for theatre and how it is manifested in the collections. - <i>Patronage.</i> Examining how the role of the theatre ‘patron’ operated on national, regional and local levels and what benefits there were for both the family and the patronised in this system. - <i>Power.</i> Scrutinising the shifting relationships between theatre and the Russells and asking how they might evidence the changing power dynamics of British society in this period. - <i>Politics.</i> Questioning where these emerging theatre histories intersect and provide new insights on the existing political narratives at Woburn Abbey. <p>Process: This project will require rigorous primary research, interrogating archival material and analysing objects and artworks in the Bedford Estates’ collections. You will have access to the Bedford Estates</p>				

archives, which have significant amounts of uncatalogued materials and are an exciting untapped resource. In addition, the project will require research in other private and public archives.

Using this primary research, alongside secondary reading, you will deliver a PhD thesis in Theatre and Performance Studies. You will also work closely with your supervisors to co-curate an exhibition based on your research findings for Woburn Abbey and will co-produce a programme of public engagement activities to run alongside it. Throughout your doctoral studies you will be encouraged to share your research at academic conferences, with heritage professionals and on social media.

Place: At Warwick you will be supervised by two academics, led by theatre historian Dr David Coates. In your home department you will find a stimulating research culture where you will be supported by a wider team of research-active staff and doctoral candidates. At the Bedford Estates, you will be supervised by Nicola Allen (Archivist) and will have the opportunity to spend considerable periods of time there, particularly during the primary research and dissemination phases of your project.

This collaborative doctoral award has developed out of long-standing professional relationships between members of the supervisory team. They are committed to meeting with you regularly and to working together to develop you into a dynamic graduate who will have the relevant skills and expertise to pursue a career in either the heritage or higher education sectors, depending on your future career goals.

Person: To take on this project you should be a meticulous researcher who is passionate about this topic and the development of its outputs. The supervisory team are looking for a candidate who is dedicated, enthusiastic, openminded and inquisitive and who is willing to embed themselves in the cultures and practices of both organisations. They welcome applicants with a wide range of previous experiences and expertise, as the selected candidate will be provided with the relevant training depending on their interests, experiences and priorities. This might include collections handling, cataloguing, curatorial practice, social media training and training for teaching.

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:	Dr David Coates
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