

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) Marketing Template

PROJECT TITLE

Creolising Caribbean foodways: Breadfruit from the mid-nineteenth century to the present

LEAD INSTITUTION

Name of HEI institution University of Warwick

Lead regional city Birmingham Coventry Leicester Nottingham

PARTNER ORGANISATION

Name of organisation Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

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

PROJECT

When breadfruit was introduced to the Caribbean in the late 18th century to feed enslaved people, it was not a success. Yet it has become embedded in the region's cuisines. This project explores how and why breadfruit was adopted and adapted to Caribbean needs – how, in short, it was *creolised*.

The journey of the breadfruit tree (*Artocarpus altilis*) from Oceania to the Caribbean in the 1790s – featuring Captain Bligh and the mutiny on the *Bounty* – is a well-known story encompassing global scientific networks, economic botany and an imperial project to feed enslaved populations. At first, breadfruit was not a success; enslaved people were said to reject its taste. Yet after slavery's abolition in the British Caribbean in the 1830s, breadfruit became increasingly significant in local foodways. It is now an iconic food deeply embedded in regional cuisines. This project explores this little-known Caribbean history.

The adaption of breadfruit to local needs occurred against the backdrop of wider developments: the decline of the export-orientated plantation system; the establishment of local peasantries; efforts to modernise Caribbean agriculture; decolonisation. Other factors affecting the breadfruit's adoption may include the presence of new populations arriving with indentureship, especially in Trinidad and British Guiana. Studying the history of breadfruit at different scales – via particular colonies, specific sites of cultivation, and different uses – reveals the routes, both elite and subaltern, through which it spread. Breadfruit now has a significant cultural presence, as an integral part of 'national cuisines' that emerged in the 20th century and an enduring symbol of the historical injustice of slavery. Breadfruit, in short, can tell us about the Caribbean's past, its present, and perhaps its future.

PROCESS

1. How and through what means did breadfruit trees spread across the Caribbean in the 19th and 20th centuries?
2. How widely and how were their fruit consumed?
3. Did the breadfruit's use as a food connect to its commercial utility as a source of fibre, timber, or adhesives?
4. What discourses about breadfruit circulated, and with what consequences? Why did breadfruit become of interest, at different times, to colonial authorities, scientists, post-colonial governments, international bodies, and nationalists?

The research rests on the exceptional print and manuscript collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, whose herbarium and the Economic Botany Collection also hold many relevant specimens. Further sources are held at the Breadfruit Institute at the National Tropical Botanic Garden, Hawaii, which the student could apply to visit. The project will also use other sources including botanical writing, cookbooks, travel and missionary accounts, and legal and tax records. The project is open to a range of interdisciplinary approaches, including those associated with 'critical plant studies', more-than-human approaches, and the environmental humanities. Skill in Spanish, French, or Dutch might enable comparative approaches to the spread of breadfruit across the Caribbean.

PLACE

The student will be supervised by David Lambert and Rebecca Earle at the University of Warwick's History Department, home to over 40 academics with unrivalled expertise in topics spanning the globe, working with around 70 PhD researchers. At Kew, the student will be supervised by Caroline Cornish and Mark Nesbitt. They will be supported by Kew's dedicated Science Education team, which oversees the 100-strong PhD cohort, organising training and academic events such as the Kew Annual PhD Symposium. They will have the full support of Kew Library & Archives staff and will receive a staff pass, desk and PC, with staff-level access to collections and expertise across the organisation and its global contacts.

The studentship includes opportunities to apply for funded placements of up to 6 months in total, in addition to the 3.5 years for the PhD. At Kew this could include creating an exhibition or developing community-based activities/resources. There are also opportunities for placements at a Caribbean institution such as UWI Mona or Hope Royal Botanic Gardens, Jamaica. The student will be supported in a range of other professional development opportunities, including networking, publishing, public talks and blogging.

PERSON

Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree and a distinction-level Master's degree (or equivalent professional experience) in history, anthropology, human geography or cognate fields, and experience in analysing historical sources. Familiarity with the history of the Caribbean and/or food is an advantage, as is a demonstrated ability to communicate research to a range of different audiences.

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:	Professor David Lambert
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