

Research Partnerships at the National Railway Museum

The National Railway Museum, as part of the Science Museum Group, is actively seeking research partners for the annual AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral partnership scheme. 2017 is an exciting time for the Museum as it embarks on one of the most ambitious projects in its history – the multi-million-pound redesign of the site known as Masterplan.

The Masterplan is an ambitious redevelopment of the National Railway Museum. It will radically change the site and the visitor experience, with exciting new galleries celebrating the history and technology of railways and explaining how contemporary science and engineering are transforming railways today. It will represent a major change in the way the museum engages with its visitors. Greatly enhanced interpretation of its collections and subject area will build new audiences and position the NRM as one of the world's finest museums of transport and technology.

An ideal opportunity for embedded research, with Masterplan setting the public-face of the NRM for the next 25-35 years, the Museum is keen to encourage applications from a wide variety of subject areas.

The six key themes of Masterplan that are research priorities for the Museum are:

Revolution and Mania

Revolution and Mania focuses on the early beginnings of the railways in Britain, aiming to communicate the exciting swirl of experimentation, risky investment, and public excitement that brought the early Victorian network into being. It focuses on big characters, like the Stephensons, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and George Hudson, but also on the countless thousands of navvies who carved the new landscape of the railways into Britain, the shareholders who flocked to the new technology despite the risks, and the early travelling public who first experienced the railways with both fear and fascination.

Railways and Nations

Railways and Nations covers the impact of railways beyond Britain. British companies exported locomotives and carriages around the world and British engineers planned and built networks in a wide variety of climates and landscapes as countries worldwide sought to modernize through railways. But this was not a simple one-way process; new innovations and technologies developed abroad influenced railway practices back in Britain. It was also a highly complex one – British engineers built the railways of Empire that kept British rule over its far-flung territories assured. The NRM is keen to tell the multi-faceted impact of railways beyond Britain's shores and how that sheds light on Britain itself.

Serving the Nation

If Railways and Nations tells the international story, the Serving the Nation focuses on the British experience at home. It addresses the key question of *how the railways changed Britain*. Starting with the late nineteenth-century boom of consumer goods and services offered by the new transport network, it will explore how railways became essential parts of Britain, influencing society and culture, vital in times of war, and fought over politically in times of peace. It also addresses the post-war decline of the network as for many across Britain the new pace of modern life no longer depended on the railways who were forced to fight for their continued relevance.

The Way Ahead

In contrast to the traditional story of railway decline in the twentieth century, The Way Ahead draws upon recent scholarship to emphasise the continuing importance of research and development that defined, and continue to define, Britain's railways. It will examine the growing demands of speed and motive power, so vital to the ever-increasing demands of passenger and freight service, but also the more theoretical thinking that gave birth to projects like Mag-Lev. It will focus on key engineers and scientists, institutions like the Derby Research Centre, but also not shy away from the cold realities of why many of these projects ultimately failed to reach fruition or are still, decades on, yet to realise their full potential.

Railways and People

Railways and People focuses on the mass stories of public interaction with railways; how this new mode of transport changed how British people live, work, and play. Taking two wide-ranging subjects, the holiday-maker and the commuter, it explores how the railway companies reshaped employment and leisure in modern Britain. It takes a wide-angle lens, extrapolating out from the train journey to either work or holiday to consider how the railways sought to profit from and define every aspect of people's experiences on the rails, from investing in suburbia and buying up other competing forms of transport to operating their own hotels and enabling new holiday industries like Thomas Cook and Butlins. Finally, it develops this theme by examining the great influence railways had on children's lives, from schooling to fiction, and also considers the public attachment to railways through a case-study concentrating on the controversial destruction of Euston Station in the 1960s.

Operating and Running

Operating and Running is the story of how the railways work. From engine to track, signal box to carriage works, boardroom to shop-floor, this section concentrates on the interaction between people and technology that defines the railways. Railways were the biggest companies of their day,



in terms of assets, staff, and complexity, and this section covers the varied experiences of those men and women employed on the rails and beyond from the nineteenth century onwards. New technologies, harsh working conditions, and strict regulations defined a relationship between humans and machines that was fundamental to keeping the railways running and could, when it broke down, fail spectacularly. It also aims to explore the continuing debates around who owns the railways and how they should be run, questions that extend well beyond the boardroom walls and into wider culture and society.

Beyond the Masterplan

Whilst Masterplan content provides much of the focus of the NRM's research at present, we are also interested in the museological issues raised by transforming a railway museum. These include the special challenges of interpreting science, engineering and technological collections; public history and the uses of museums; the role of new technologies in galleries; and meeting the needs of museum audiences. We also see the conservation and care of collections as fields for further research. Investigations which intersect with the concerns of all the museums and/or partners in the Science Museum & Archives Consortium would be of particular value.

Assets

The National Railway Museum has a vast collection of objects, archive holdings, and other resources for academic study. The research library and archive in the museum, Search Engine, holds 25,000 monographs and over 800 journal titles covering the early 1800s through to the present day. The archive holdings comprise of around 100 individual archives, ranging from personal paper collections through to mechanical, technical, and educational material, the UNESCO listed Robert Stephenson and Company Archive, over 1350 boxes pertaining to the more recent General Electric Company, and over one million technical drawings. The collection also includes over 11,000 posters, 2358 prints, 1052 paintings, and 1,750,000 photographs, many of which have never been researched or displayed. The object collection includes over 300 locomotives and rolling stock, 628 coins and medals, almost 5000 pieces of railway uniform and costume, and much more.

Two-Page applications detailing the outline of the project proposed and how it might fit with existing Masterplan research objectives are warmly invited, as are other proposals and projects beyond the scope of the CDP scheme. These should be addressed to Research Fellow Oli Betts at oliver.betts@nrm.org.uk as should any queries about working with the NRM.