

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) Studentship: Locating Lace in the Landscape of Desire: Mapping the Hidden Histories of the Antique Lace Trade through the Blackborne Collection at The Bowes Museum

Introduction and timelines

Start date: 1st October 2025

Application Deadline: 20th June 2025

Interviews will take place in the week commencing **7th July 2025**

Northumbria University and The Bowes Museum are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2025 under the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Scheme.

This project will provide the first comprehensive study of **Blackborne Lace Collection at The Bowes Museum**, focusing on the 19th-century antique lace trade and its influence on fashion and society.

This project will be jointly supervised by Dr Ellen Sampson and Professor Anne Peirson Smith, Northumbria University and Jane Whittaker and Rachel Whitworth, The Bowes Museum. The student will be expected to spend time at both The Bowes Museum and Northumbria University.

The studentship can be studied either full or part-time.

We encourage applications from the widest range of potential students for this CDP studentship and welcome candidates from different backgrounds and career stages.

Students should have a master's degree in a relevant subject.

The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

Project Overview

The Blackborne collection at the Bowes Museum, donated in 2007, is one of the largest and most important lace collections in the world. It comprises 7000 items, dating from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, from the remaining stock and study collection of the Victorian-era father and son lace dealers, A. Blackborne and Company of London, who supplied antique lace to collectors, museums like the Met, and fashionable clients.

The collection features many rare pieces of lace, including a man's needle lace collar made in England around 1635, a large selection of lappets (part of a woman's headdress) from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, and spectacular dress flounces and veils from the late nineteenth century. All the major lace-making centres and techniques are represented in the collection. Despite its historical value, only a third of the

collection has been catalogued, leaving critical aspects of its unique history and cultural significance unexplored.

This project will provide the first comprehensive study of the collection, focusing on the 19th-century antique lace trade and its influence on fashion and society. During this period, the rise of machine-made lace disrupted the handmade lace industry, yet created a new demand among affluent buyers for antique handmade lace as markers of distinction. Antique lace became a valuable and coveted commodity, collected for its craftsmanship, adapted into contemporary garments, or used in costume and interior design.

The project addresses three key themes:

1. **The Antique Lace Trade:** examining the lace trade's operation outside of major fashion centres and the impact of regional craftsmanship on 19th-century dress.
2. **Collecting and Fashion:** investigating how and why collecting antique lace and its perceived value influenced fashionable dress and societal practices.
3. **Valuation and Adaptation:** exploring motivations for collecting lace, its use in contemporary fashion, and the rationale for value-based comparisons between antique and machine-made lace.

The project will have an emphasis on object-based research and exploration of the structure and makers of lace, as well as its societal and commercial impact in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through historical research, speculative methods, and digital humanities, the study will map the hidden histories of this international textile trade. Research stages include, cataloguing the collection, analysing lace origins, techniques and adaptations, and contextualizing the trade through visual and literary sources.

The outcome of this project will be the first complete survey of the Blackborne lace collection, presenting a fuller understanding of both its scope and significance and relationship to other major lace collections in museums. An interactive digital atlas mapping trade routes and object histories, and a contribution to a curated exhibition at The Bowes Museum are also planned.

The studentship has three main objectives:

- Developing a critical research analysis of the Blackborne lace collection at Bowes mapping the untold histories of its creative craft and trading origins based on cataloguing the collection and contextualising it in historic literary and visual documentation comprising the thesis and published work.
- Conducting a detailed survey of the Blackborne lace collection captured in the form of an interactive digital atlas foregrounding an understanding of its range and importance to the antique lace trade and its connection to other lace collections for scholars and the public.
- Disseminating the historic and geographic journey of the lace collection and its contents for the museum's stakeholders by curating a gallery display in the Bowes

Fashion & Textile Gallery to complement a larger exhibition on the Blackburne collection.

Research questions:

The project seeks to achieve these aims interlinked questions/themes:

- How does the antique lace trade of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enhance an understanding of an international fashion industry/textile trade which existed outside (yet constellated from) major fashion centres? What and who constituted the handmade antique lace market and how was quality and provenance assured?
- How and why did antique lace collecting, and an increasing understanding of the importance of handmade lace, alongside the rise of lacemaking as a hobby, impact or influence fashionable dress at this time? How did regional/country-specific craft practices impact upon/inform fashionable dress practices of the upper and middle classes?
- What does the Blackburne lace collection tell us about the value afforded to handmade lace in this period and its usage compared to other types of lace? What were the motivations behind collecting antique lace? What items of antique lace were the most fashionable and why?

Details of Award

- CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 4 years (or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 8 years).
- The award pays an annual stipend for both home and international students. This stipend is tax free, and is the equivalent of an annual salary, enabling the student to pay living costs. The UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2025/6 is £20,780. There is also a CDP maintenance payment of £600/year.
- The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home UKRI rate for PhD degrees. Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2025/2026 is a minimum of £5,006.
- For this studentship, international students **may** be charged home fees by Northumbria University which are covered by the award. Fee level will be confirmed after interview. International students will be required to reside in the UK until completion of the PhD.
- The student is eligible to receive an additional grant for travel and research-related expenses during the course of the project courtesy of The Bowes Museum worth up to £1000 per year for 4 years.

Further details can be found on the [UKRI website](#).

Eligibility Requirements:

- Academic excellence i.e. 2:1 (or equivalent GPA from non-UK universities with preference for 1st class honours); a Masters (preference for Merit or above); or APEL evidence of substantial practitioner achievement.
- Appropriate IELTS score, if required.
- Applicants cannot apply if they are already a PhD holder or if currently engaged in Doctoral study at Northumbria or elsewhere.
- Must be able to commit to campus-based full-time or part-time study.

To be classed as a Home student, candidates must:

- Be a UK National (meeting residency requirements), or
- have settled status, or
- have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- have indefinite leave to remain or enter.

If a candidate does not meet the criteria above, they would be classed as an International student. Applicants will need to be fully enrolled in the UK before stipend payments can commence.

- Further guidance can be found here based on revisions to Training Grant Terms and Conditions for projects starting in October 2025 - [Policy statement: review of the training grant conditions – UKRI](#)
- We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to study for a CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. We particularly welcome applications from people from Global Majority backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.
- Applicants should ideally have or expect to receive a relevant master's-level qualification in a relevant subject, e.g. Fashion Studies, Art History, Textile History, History of Design, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the museum sector and potential and enthusiasm for developing experience and skills cognisant with a potential future career in the cultural, heritage, galleries, museums, and archive sectors.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and The Bowes Museum.

NB. All applicants must meet UKRI terms and conditions for funding. See:

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Academic Enquiries

This project is supervised by Dr Ellen Sampson and Professor Anne Peirson Smith. For informal queries, please contact ellen.sampson@northumbria.ac.uk. For all other enquiries relating to eligibility or application process please contact pgr.admissions@northumbria.ac.uk.

Applicants can expect reasonable adjustments throughout the process. If you require any assistance through the application, or interview process (if you are shortlisted), please visit [Accessibility Support here](#)

How to apply:

For further details on how to apply see

<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/postgraduate-research-degrees/how-to-apply/>

In your application, include a 1000-word research proposal, outlining how your current academic interests relate to the doctoral project, reasons for applying for the studentship, and how your prior education and other experiences have equipped you to undertake the project, and also the advert reference (e.g. FAC25/ADSS/ARTS/SAMPSON)

We ask all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI monitoring form [here](#). All responses are anonymous.

Please note that applications will only be accepted when submitted with the following information:

- A fully completed application form (all sections must be completed).
- Evidence of academic qualifications (certificates and transcripts).
- Evidence of accepted English language proficiency for applicants whose first language is not English.
- Please note that even if you are applying for a [postgraduate research degree](#) with a pre-defined research proposal, you are still required to write a proposal expanding on the provided description of the project. For guidance on writing your research proposal, please see [here](#).

Two academic references (submitted directly by the referees, not the applicant).

The referees should ideally be familiar with the candidate's academic work, and able to assess their potential and preparedness to undertake PhD research.

Northumbria University is committed to creating an inclusive culture where we take pride in, and value, the diversity of our postgraduate research students. We encourage and welcome applications from all members of the community. The University holds a bronze Athena Swan award in recognition of our commitment to advancing gender equality, we are a Disability Confident Leader, a member of the Race Equality Charter and are participating in the Stonewall Diversity Champion Programme. We also hold the HR

Excellence in Research award for implementing the concordat supporting the career Development of Researchers and are members of the Euraxess initiative to deliver information and support to professional researchers.

With thanks to the Arts & Humanities Research Council



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