

‘The Non-Elite Painting and Decorating Trade in Britain 1600-1800’

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship with the University of Cambridge and the Museum of the Home

Start date: 1 October 2025

The deadline for applications is 5pm (GMT) 23rd May 2025

Interviews will be held week commencing 2nd June 2025

The University of Cambridge and the Museum of the Home are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2025 under the [AHRC’s Collaborative Doctoral Partnership \(CDP\) scheme](#).

This PhD will explore the lives and careers of people who painted and decorated working-class and lower-middle-class homes and lodging houses in the early modern period. The project will involve extensive archival research in numerous British collections. The successful candidate will also be involved in the museum’s upcoming redisplay of the early modern period rooms.

This project will be jointly supervised by Dr Matthew Walker (Assistant Professor in Architectural History), Dr Frank Salmon (Associate Professor in the History of Art) at Cambridge; and, at the Museum of the Home, by Marina Maniadaki (Exhibitions and Project Manager) and Louis Platman (Curator and Research Manager).

The project will also feed into the Centre for Studies of Home (CSH), an interdisciplinary research hub between Queen Mary University of London and the Museum of the Home, and the student will become part of the CSH cohort. The student will have access to research in progress days and conferences organised by the CSH, and their project will receive promotion and support from the CSH.

The student will be expected to spend time at both the University of Cambridge and the Museum of the Home, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK. The student will have access to the same levels of training, support, and expertise as members of staff at the Museum of the Home, thus developing core museum skills alongside academic capabilities.

Project Overview

This project seeks to understand non-elite painting and decorating in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before it became a recognised and regulated profession. It will identify and explore the identities of the people who painted, plastered, and wallpapered the homes of lower middle-class and working-class homes, as well as lodging and boarding houses in the period. Thus, the project will tell the stories of low-skilled, often itinerant painters and decorators, as well as the homeowners and landlords who employed them. It will build up a picture of the typical careers of non-elite painters, as well as establish the degree to which homeowners and landowners painted and decorated their houses

themselves. As is apparent from a cursory review of the archival material, many of the people involved in non-elite painting and decorating in the period were women, so the project will also contribute to our broader understanding of gender and lower-class employment in the period. Finally, the project will also reveal, to a greater degree than is already known, exactly what non-elite interiors looked like in the period, with the aim of informing the museum's displays and future acquisitions.

This is a very under-researched subject area. Existing scholarship on the history of interior decoration has almost exclusively focussed on elite homes and the work of major artists such as Daniel Marot and Antonio Verrio, or high-profile designers such as William Kent and Robert Adam. Likewise, the history of non-elite builders, carpenters, and furniture makers has received some attention, but not painters and decorators. This project will remedy this and, in doing so, shed new light on how non-elite homes were decorated (again, a very under-researched area), as well as answer important questions about the broader nature of working-class employment in the period.

The doctorate will involve a significant amount of primary research, using archives across Britain. The resulting thesis will use contemporary art and architectural-historical techniques to analyse the data. The student will be expected to shape the analytical and theoretical framework of the project, though it will probably engage with the history of private and family spaces in the early modern period (informed by the work of Ariès and Habermas, but also more recent scholars such as Vickery).

The research questions will be developed in consultation with the student, but may include the following:

- What were the processes through which non-elite homes were decorated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?
- Who were the people employed in painting, plastering, whitewashing and wallpapering middle and lower-class homes?
- How substantial was the non-elite painting and decorating trade in the period, and were there regional variations?
- What were the patterns and security of this employment and to what extent was their work regulated by the guild system?
- Were the lodging and boarding houses used by low-income people painted or decorated in any way?
- To what extent did homeowners and landlords paint and decorate their own properties?

Potential archives that the project would use are as follows (the student would be expected to add to this list):

- The Museum's own collection, including wallpaper samples, trade cards, and material relating to the furniture trade.
- The archives of the Painter-Stainer company.

- The Hewlings Catalogue of English Builders (a very large card index of mainly unknown English craftspeople which has recently become publicly accessible in Cambridge).
- Archives relating to trade cards, such as the John Johnson Collection in Oxford.
- Court records, such as the archives of the Old Bailey and other regional law or church courts, which include numerous references to the lives of non-elite painters.
- Archives relating to the births, death, wills, and estates of painters and homeowners (National Archives, and regional civic and parish records).

DETAILS OF THE AWARD

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 4 years or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 8 year.

The CDP studentships will provide an annual maintenance grant to cover living costs (£19,237 stipend + £600 CDA allowance pa at current rates) and university tuition fees at home fee level. The fee gap between the home and overseas fee rates will be covered by the University through internal co-funding for international candidates.

For more details, see: <https://www.postgraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/funding>.

The student is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of the Museum of the Home worth up to £1,000 per year for 4 years.

The successful candidate will be eligible to participate in events organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK.

The student will have desk space at the MoH during the entire duration of their PhD. This will bring the added benefit of fully embedding the student into the working environment of the museum and gain an invaluable professional insight into areas of work such:

- Curatorial practice: exhibition development and design, museum text writing, community engagement, research skills for museum displays, object acquisition.
- Collections care: object handling training, preventative conservation, object packing and storage, documentation and cataloguing.
- Developing and delivering learning programmes.

ELIGIBILITY

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

- This studentship is open to both Home and International applicants (see above for details on fees).
- To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:
 - 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

Further guidance can be found here: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UKRI-030221-Guidance-International-Eligibility-Implementation-training-grant-holders-V2.pdf>

- 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 Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.
- Applicants should ideally have, or expect to receive, a relevant Masters-level qualification by the time of taking up the appointment, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting. Suitable fields are: queer history and culture, gender and sexuality studies; home studies; photography; visual culture; museum, heritage and cultural studies; social history. While not essential, some prior experience of museum-based work would be welcome.
- The studentship offers a distinctive opportunity to undertake a collaborative doctorate with a university and a museum. As such, students should demonstrate their interests and aptitude for exploiting the unique possibilities of a studentship that will allow them to develop career-enhancing skills in heritage and public engagement, and to contribute to the cultural and intellectual life of both institutions.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and the Museum of the Home.

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/>

HOW TO APPLY:

Please include in your application:

- Personal Statement (max. 1,500 words) explaining why you are interested in researching this topic, including what you would bring to the project and how you think you would develop it to reflect your own interests and expertise.
- A sample of writing. This could be a piece of academic writing (e.g., MA dissertation) or a text written in the course of any current or previous professional work.
- Your CV.
- Two references.
- Transcript of university-level grades and qualification certificates.

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

The successful applicant will be expected to apply formally through the University of Cambridge following notification of the interview outcome.

All prospective students are strongly advised to first make informal contact with the lead supervisor. Dr Matthew Walker (matthew.walker@qmul.ac.uk).

Please send materials to: postgraduate.admin@aha.cam.ac.uk