

AHRC TECHNE Partnership Award

A Paper World: The Collection and Investigation of Plant Materials for Paper Making, c.1830-1914

Project description

Innovations in the technology of print and the vast expansion of publishing during the nineteenth century stimulated the global search for new sources of paper. British industrial and scientific interest in paper making was enhanced by official concerns over paper shortage, notably in the 1840s, and a wide variety of natural sources for paper-making (including mulberry, barkcloth, bamboo, eucalyptus, flax, hemp, jute and a variety of grasses) were sought out and experimented with prior to the large-scale mechanisation of papermaking using wood pulp from the 1880s. While the economics of papermaking attracted the attention of industrialists and botanists, there was also a longstanding ethnographic interest in techniques of indigenous papermaking, stimulated by the accounts of travellers and explorers in various parts of the world from the second half of the eighteenth century, especially Asia and the Pacific. This combination of economic and ethnographic interest in paper inspired the assembling of collections of different types of paper, analogous to the better-known collections of indigenous textiles associated with the Cook's Pacific voyages and the textile sample albums circulated by the India Office from the 1860s.

The role of paper in the print culture of colonialism has recently become a subject of considerable interest, especially in the context of scholarly attempts to complicate assumptions about the nature of oral and print cultures. Clearly the history of empire-making underpinned the search for new resources, including paper just as much as food staples and minerals. Yet the history of the collection and investigation of alternative sources of paper has yet to be outlined in any depth. This project, drawing on the unrivalled collection of plant materials and manufactured papers in the Economic Botany Collection at Kew, will place paper collecting in its economic and cultural contexts. What is clear from scoping research conducted to date by the co-supervisors is that the range of paper sources investigated by industrialists, botanists and ethnographers was much wider than hitherto acknowledged: and the effort and experimentation involved substantial research programmes in which Kew played an important role. The project will focus mainly on the period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars (and the concomitant stimulus to global trade and exploration) and the advent of modern pulp-based methods of paper manufacture. It will encompass paper collections at Kew and elsewhere, including samples from colonial and non-colonial territories in the Pacific, India, Burma and Japan. It will also require archival investigation into the wealth of archival and print sources in the archives at Kew Gardens, where paper was referred to in this period simultaneously as both an 'economic product' and a 'cultural product'. The project will also require to collections held elsewhere, including India Office collections of paper samples at the British Library and the business records of manufacturers such as Thomas Routledge of Sunderland.

Intellectually, this project crosses disciplines, reconnecting the economic and the cultural through studies of a product made from natural fibres. The PhD thesis is likely to take the form of a series of well-chosen case studies, drawing on the rich heritage of collections at Kew and raising wider questions concerning the formation of knowledge about raw materials, technologies and commodities.

Supervision

The PhD will be supervised jointly by Prof Felix Driver (Royal Holloway) and Dr Mark Nesbitt (Kew). Felix Driver will provide academic direction to the project from the perspective of historical approaches to collections research and the geohumanities, as well as guidance on training and managing all other aspects of student administration as required by Techne. Mark Nesbitt will provide specialist guidance from the perspective of economic botany and cognate disciplines concerned with biocultural collections, and support on the use of economic botany & archive collections and associated requirements for Kew-based researchers, including training in object handling. In addition to the co-supervisors, the student will receive further guidance from Dr Innes Keighren, a specialist in book history and studies of print culture. Doctoral supervision will involve at least monthly joint meetings with both supervisors in addition to regular meetings with individual supervisors while working at Royal Holloway and Kew.

Partnership

This project contributes to an ongoing research partnership between the Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London, and the Economic Botany Collection at Kew. To date this has been reflected in collaboration on doctoral supervision, cultural engagement projects, student placements and visits, and a major AHRC-funded research project led by Felix Driver and Mark Nesbitt ("[The Mobile Museum: Economic Botany in Circulation](#)").

The Geography department at Royal Holloway is a major centre for postgraduate research. Currently the Department supports around 80 PhD students and 40 masters students in a variety of subject areas. Research in cultural and historical geography, supported by Royal Holloway's newly-established Centre for the GeoHumanities, is a notable strength. The department has a strong track record of collaboration on collections-based PhD research with cultural and heritage sector organisations, including in recent years the Science Museum, the V&A Museum, the Museum of London, British Library and the Royal Geographical Society.

Current research in the Economic Botany Collection is aligned to Kew's Science Strategy, including documenting and understanding plant uses worldwide, and curating and using Kew's collections. This is reflected in a diverse and highly interdisciplinary research programme focusing on plant materials, medicines, and the history of economic botany. As a subject, paper making closely complements other current work on barkcloth, basketry, dyes and rubber, all of which likewise saw profound transformations in the 19th century. The project will offer the student opportunities for engagement that will be appealing both to Kew's public audience, and to stakeholders such as paper conservators, makers, source communities, and craft-based development projects. Better understanding of plant fibre sourcing and manufacturing is also of industrial relevance to fine paper makers, papermaking museums and paper conservators, with scope for better understanding of fibres in use, and revival of neglected fibre sources.

It is envisaged that the student will undertake regular sustained visits to Kew: initially in scoping the economic botany collection and selecting case studies, and subsequently in

undertaking primary research drawing on materials in the economic botany collection and in the library and archives. Work space and access to research resources will be provided in the Economic Botany Collection, which is also hosting staff and volunteers working on the Mobile Museum project.

A formal agreement regarding the Partnership between Royal Holloway, Kew and the student will be signed at the commencement of the project.

Required Qualifications and Skills Development

Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree in history, geography, anthropology or other relevant discipline, and will need to satisfy AHRC eligibility requirements including Masters-level advanced research training or equivalent. Preference may be given to candidates with prior experience in working with material culture, museum and/or archival collections, though others are encouraged to apply.

Skills to be developed in the course of the project include archival and other research skills (relevant to a variety of research environments); object handling and documentation (relevant to heritage sector employment); public engagement (relevant to many settings where communication important); use of large, multiple-format datasets (relevant to many settings).

Applicants must meet the RCUK residency requirements as described in paragraphs 43-46 of the 'Conditions of Research Council Training Grants' and comply with conditions set out in the AHRC Training Grant Funding Guide [see below for links.]

The Studentship

The studentship includes a stipend of £16,553 (plus fees at home/EU rates) for three years. There is an additional NPIF £550 per year to facilitate engagement with the Partner, and students can apply for an additional six months stipend to engage in extended development activities such as work placements.

TECHNE Doctoral Training Consortium

This PhD studentship is provided through the AHRC TECHNE Doctoral Training Consortium, which comprises seven universities in London and the South-East, supported by a large number of partner organisations in culture and heritage sector in London and the South East. The DTP offers approximately 50 AHRC scholarships each year across a range of arts and humanities disciplines. In 2017 TECHNE has introduced a new Partnership Award scheme which is funding an additional 12 studentships. Applications are made through the relevant university. TECHNE offers a wide variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research training and networking opportunities for students.

As a TECHNE student, the person selected will have full access to the TECHNE Doctoral Training Partnership development activities and networking opportunities. TECHNE students can apply for additional funding to support individual or group training and development activities.

Application Process

Applicants should submit (1) a two-page curriculum vitae, including contact details of one academic referee, and (2) a 1-2 page letter outlining your qualification for the studentship to: Professor Felix Driver, Dept of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX (f.driver@rhul.ac.uk) no later than **4 August 2017**.

Interviews are scheduled to be held at Kew on **16 August 2017**.

Further Information

Full project details

<https://www.rhul.ac.uk/geography/documents/pdf/newsarticles/ahrc-techne-partnership-award-full-description.pdf>

PhD research in Geography at Royal Holloway

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/geography/currentstudents/postgraduateresearch/currentphdtopics.aspx>

Economic Botany Collection at Kew

<http://www.kew.org/science/collections/economic-botany-collection>

Mobile Museum Research project

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/geography/research/mobile-museum/home.aspx>

AHRC Techne Doctoral Training Consortium

<http://www.techne.ac.uk/>

AHRC Training Grant Guide

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/skills/phdstudents/currentawardholders/>

RCUK Conditions of Research Council Training Grants

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/termsconditionstraininggrants-pdf/>