The landscapes and seascapes of the small island groups of coastal Wales and Ireland

Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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Project summary

Applications are invited for a fully-funded PhD studentship based in the Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield. The PhD will be a collaboration with the EU-funded CHERISH Climate Change and Coastal Heritage project. CHERISH is completing archaeological and environmental studies of islands and coastlines in Wales and Ireland threatened by climate change. Inspired by ideas about islands as networks and the concept of seascapes, the PhD will research dependencies and separations within island groups and between islands and the mainland, how networks changed through time, and the interactions of humans and environmental processes. The project will recommend policies for making small-island landscapes more resilient to rapid environmental change.

The student will be enrolled at and will receive their PhD from the University of Sheffield, and will have the opportunity to spend between 6-18 months with CHERISH partners in Wales and Ireland, as well as benefiting from the resources and wider cohort of students in the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH).

Project description

There are many thousands of small coastal islands in the UK and Ireland. Although the majority are now uninhabited, almost all have long histories of human use and occupation. Academic convention has been to research each island independently, frequently highlighting their isolation and distinctiveness. This project will forge a new approach by examining groups of islands and their interconnections to the mainland through seascapes. It will seek to understand dependencies and separations, how these changed through time, and the interactions of humans and environmental processes. This approach takes inspiration from theoretical work on islands as networks, the concept of seascapes and the application of these ideas to comparable island groups worldwide.
Since 2017, the EU-funded CHERISH Climate Change and Coastal Heritage project has undertaken archaeological and environmental investigations on islands and coastlines in Wales and Ireland threatened by the effects of climate change. Small islands are especially at risk because of their physical exposure and the fragility of their ecosystems. UK climate projections for warmer temperatures, rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather will impact these island environments and the economic capacity for conservation agencies to sustainably manage them. CHERISH is generating an unprecedented portfolio of new data to better understand and prepare for climate change impacts, including palaeoenvironmental studies, archaeological excavations, marine geophysics, and high-resolution terrestrial laser scans. The proposed PhD project will build on the work undertaken by CHERISH, developing new and complementary datasets where required.

This PhD will be guided by three broad research questions that the student will refine through the selection of case studies and methods:

- How have human and environmental histories intersected to create distinctive configurations of island groups?
- How did the connections within island groups influence their collective and individual sustainability for human inhabitation?
- How can an understanding of island networks inform strategies for conserving the historic environments of small islands?

The student will focus their research on 1-2 island groups. The student will work alongside the CHERISH team to identify suitable groups and the datasets that are available from individual islands. Examples from CHERISH’s work include the island groups of southwest Pembrokeshire, Lŷn Peninsula (Gwynedd), Dingle and Iveragh (Kerry), and southeast Wexford. The student will visit the islands, examine archives and meet stakeholders in relevant conservation bodies.

For the case studies, the student will assemble and analyse the environmental and archaeological datasets created by CHERISH, alongside existing material and documentary sources held by museums and archives. The student will develop their methodology by taking, for example, a more material-based approach to earlier periods or working with archives for later historical topics. There will also be opportunities to undertake small-scale fieldwork alongside CHERISH, involving methods such as archaeological survey, environmental sampling or oral history.

The student will identify connections between islands and with the mainland through time, and reconstruct the character, extents and intensities of networks. This could include phenomena such as the movements of raw materials, the seasonal pasturing of stock, and variation in domestic and field system architecture. The data will be managed, analysed and visualised digitally using a Geographic Information System. The student will draw upon network analysis and assemblage theory to provide conceptual frameworks for their interpretations. In the project’s final phase, the student will engage with the CHERISH team and wider stakeholders while considering policies for making small-island landscapes and seascapes resilient in the face of rapid environmental change.

About the project partner and the supervisory team
The project partner will be the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW). The RCAHMW was set up in 1908 to research and record the historic buildings, monuments and landscapes of Wales. Based in Aberystwyth, the RCAHMW employs 30 specialist staff, including archaeological investigators and the archivists who manage the vast collection of photographs, documents and digital data sets that make up the National Monuments Record for Wales. The RCAHMW’s aims are to enhance knowledge and understanding of the archaeology, buildings, landscapes and maritime remains of
Wales; provide the facts to support decision-making about the management and care of Wales’s historic environment; and promote public participation, understanding and enjoyment of the Welsh historic environment. The CDA doctoral project will further these aims by generating new understandings of the coastal landscapes of Wales, making recommendations for the future care of Wales’s coastal islands, and creating knowledge that will engage and benefit the public’s understanding and enjoyment of the Welsh landscape.

The RCAHMW is leading a €4.1 million EU-funded project called CHERISH together with the Discovery Programme (Centre for Archaeology and Innovation Ireland), the Geological Survey of Ireland and the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University. CHERISH is a multi-disciplinary project aimed at understanding the past, present and near future impacts of climate change, storminess and extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of sea and coast. It is employing a variety of techniques and methods, including terrestrial and aerial laser scanning, geophysical survey and palaeoenvironmental sampling to study some of the most iconic coastal locations in Ireland and Wales. CHERISH is addressing one of the RCAHMW’s key research priorities, which is to understand elements of Welsh heritage of outstanding importance that are at risk from environmental damage. The CDA doctoral student will work closely with the CHERISH teams in Aberystwyth and Dublin, use and augment the datasets produced by CHERISH, and contribute novel perspectives to CHERISH’s recommendations for the future of Wales and Ireland’s island landscapes and seascapes.

The supervisory team will comprise Dr Bob Johnston (Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield), Ms Louise Barker (RCAHMW, Aberystwyth) and Dr Katherine Selby (Environment Department, University of York). Bob Johnston is a landscape archaeologist with a particular interest in the coastal and upland landscapes of western Britain. He has undertaken field-based investigations of prehistoric settlement on the Welsh islands of Bardsey and Skomer. Most recently he has worked on the impacts of past and future sea-level change on the archaeological landscapes of west Wales. Louise Barker has over 25 years’ experience in archaeological survey and investigation. During that time she has worked in commercial archaeology, for English Heritage as a Landscape Investigator and, since 2004, at the RCAHMW as a Senior Investigator in Archaeological Survey. She has led major archaeological survey projects throughout Wales, including studies of coastal promontory forts (published in the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society) and the Welsh slate industry (recently published by the RCAHMW as a research monograph). Katherine Selby works at the interface between archaeology and physical geography, with her primary focus on how changing sea level and coastal configurations affected settlement patterns and use of resources. Her PhD reconstructed sea level change on the Isle of Skye over the last 15,000 years and subsequently she has worked in Orkney, the Isles of Bute and Mull investigating coastal and sea level changes.

**Engagement, outreach and dissemination opportunities**

The student will participate in CHERISH’s wide-ranging and ambitious programme of public and stake-holder engagement activities. CHERISH holds a yearly professional seminar and public day school, which the student will attend and contribute at least one poster and one presentation. CHERISH’s end of project conference will take place at Dublin Castle in autumn 2021. The student will contribute to the organisation of the conference and lead a session or workshop. The student will present a paper at an international conference in collaboration with the project partner and academic supervisors. In addition, the student will co-lead one guided walk in their study area and either co-present a public talk to a local heritage group or contribute to an educational activity for a school group. CHERISH is producing exhibition panels, guidance documents and interpretative products as part of the outreach element of the project alongside the project’s website and active Facebook and Twitter accounts. The student will be invited to publicise their research through these channels.

CHERISH will open up exceptional professional networking opportunities for the student. CHERISH has established a network of 17 stakeholder organisations across the UK and Ireland. These include governmental
heritage organisations such as Cadw, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, the National Monument Service in Ireland, National Trust and Natural Resources Wales, and existing coastal archaeological projects such as SCAPE in Scotland and CITiZAN in England. The student will meet and work alongside these stakeholders during placements in Aberystwyth and Dublin, and at CHERISH’s yearly professional seminars and the end-of-project conference.

Financial support and eligibility
Full-time AHRC Competition Studentships for doctoral research are 3 years in duration (or 5-6 years part time). Awards must be taken up in October 2019. No deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise UK/EU fees at Research Council rates and, for eligible students, a maintenance grant (£14,553 in 2017/8).

Applicants should have a strong academic record, including a Distinction (or equivalent) at Masters level in a relevant discipline, which may include but is not exclusive to Archaeology, Archaeological Science, Environmental Science, Geography and History. Please note that all applicants should meet the AHRC’s academic criteria and residency requirements (http://wrocah.ac.uk/new-student/ahrc-competition/#amieligible).

How to apply
The selection will be a two-stage process. At Stage 1 the supervisory panel will select one candidate for the project to go forward for consideration by the main WRoCAH panel. Applications to Stage 1 will close at 12 noon on Friday 30 November 2019. If you are successful in Stage 1, the supervisors will work with you to develop your WRoCAH application. Applications to Stage 2, the WRoCAH competition, will close at 5pm on Wednesday 23 January 2019. If you are selected at Stage 1 to be put forward to WRoCAH, your application will be considered competitively within the main WRoCAH competition. Being put forward for consideration is not a guarantee of funding. Successful candidates will be announced in mid-April 2019.

To apply please send an email containing the following to Bob Johnston (r.johnston@shef.ac.uk):
1. A CV of no more than 3 pages;
2. The academic transcripts (listing unit/module results) for your undergraduate and postgraduate degrees;
3. Names and contact details for two referees who, if needed, will be able to provide references by the interview date of mid-December;
4. A supporting statement (no more than 800 words) explaining why you are interested in undertaking this programme of research, what experience and skills you will bring to the project, and why you feel a WRoCAH CDA studentship would be beneficial to your career aspirations.

The deadline for Stage 1 of the application process is 12 noon on Friday 30 November. Please send applications direct to r.johnston@shef.ac.uk. Interviews will take place in the Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield, during the week commencing 10 December 2018. We are unable to offer interview expenses. If you cannot attend in person, it will be possible to conduct interviews by video conference or phone.

For more information about this project contact
Bob Johnston (r.johnston@shef.ac.uk), Louise Barker (louise.barker@rcahmw.gov.uk) or Katherine Selby (katherine.selby@york.ac.uk)

Date of interviews
Week commencing 10 December 2018