A window onto the medieval world: illuminating the role of the English glass industry in glazing between AD 1100-1600

Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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Project summary

Applications are invited for a AHRC fully-funded Ph.D studentship based in the Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield (Caroline Jackson), working closely with the Stained Glass Studies Research School at the University of York (Sarah Brown), and including a specific laboratory placement with Historic England at Fort Cumberland in Portsmouth (Sarah Paynter).

This interdisciplinary project combines stylistic and chemical analysis of medieval glass, with documentary evidence, to understand the market for English and imported Continental glass during the 12th-16th centuries. The study will focus on unpublished assemblages of window glass from nationally significant sites in England held by Historic England.

The student will be enrolled at, and will receive their PhD from, the University of Sheffield, but will be expected to spend time both in York and Portsmouth, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of AHRC WRoCAH students.

Project description

The 12th-16th centuries was a period of rapid change for crafts and industries in England, greatly influenced by the exchange of ideas, materials and people with continental Europe. This period is fundamental to understanding the nascent English glass-making industry and its subsequent development, encompassing great advances in glazed architecture and new technologies introduced by continental glassworkers, but also the impact of the Black Death, Reformation, and the Dissolution of the Monasteries.
Little is known about the composition and use of English window glass predating the 16th century but, through chemical analysis, this studentship offers the opportunity to identify English-made glass from the main manufacturing regions in the Weald and Staffordshire, thereby illuminating the fluctuating fortunes of the English glass industry over time, relative to continental counterparts.

Working with staff at Sheffield and York, the student will examine manufacturing methods, decorative schemes and condition, and explore documentary and archaeological evidence. Analysis will begin with portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF). At Historic England’s laboratories in Portsmouth, the student will be trained in further scientific techniques, including Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and Energy Dispersive Spectrometry (EDS). The laboratory work can be undertaken as one block or in intervals, as convenient.

The student will have the flexibility to develop strategies and methodologies to explore key questions, such as:

• What proportion of English-made (regional) glass was used in high status English buildings, ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical?
• How does the pattern of supply change over time, and why (socio-economic/political events, building history, immigration and new technology, economies of production)?
• What factors influence the glazier’s choice of glass (affiliations with the Continent, cost, colour, quality, proximity to markets or glass producing regions)?

How will the studentship contribute towards the priorities and objectives of the project partner?

One of the central tenants of Historic England’s approach to research is that the significance of poorly understood or undervalued heritage assets is better understood. This research addresses national gaps in understanding the patterns of trade and technological development during the medieval period, using innovative scientific techniques to address these questions. Historic England and English Heritage have substantial collections of medieval glass from high profile sites in England; some of which are archived and published, but others are little studied and at various stages of assessment or analysis. The findings will inform the interpretation, presentation and conservation of comparable assemblages, whether in archives or in-situ, for use by researchers, conservators, curators, owners and visitors.

Please outline any engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives that will be supported by the studentship

This student will play an essential role in the publication of these nationally significant glass assemblages, and will be encouraged to engage creatively with a wide range of audiences about the nature of their work, including the archaeology, conservation and science sectors and general public.

Financial support

This full-time studentship is fully-funded at AHRC for 3 years and will begin in September 2019. The studentship will cover tuition fees at home/EU rate and provide a maintenance award at RCUK rates. In addition, Historic England will provide research expenses of up to £1000 each year (up to 4 years) to cover costs associated with undertaking the research.

If, after the student application closing deadline, you are selected by the CDA project team 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.

Eligibility

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, STEM subject areas (Chemistry, Physics, Materials Science, Geology), History, Museum studies, Conservation) along with a willingness to work across disciplines. Please note that all applicants should meet AHRC’s academic criteria and residency requirements (http://wrocah.ac.uk/new-student/ahrc-competition/#ameligible).

How to apply

Applicants are advised to contact any of the supervisors to discuss their application. Please note the application is a two stage process. Stage 1 will be your application to the supervisory panel to be selected as a candidate for the project. If you are successful in Stage 1, we will then work with you to develop your application in the second step (Stage 2), the
main WRoCAH competition, which closes at 5pm on Wednesday 23rd January 2019. Successful candidates will be announced in April 2019.

To apply please send an email containing the following to Caroline Jackson (c.m.jackson@sheffield.ac.uk)

1. A C.V. detailing your academic record (no more than 3 pages).
2. The academic transcript from your university.
3. Names and contact details for two referees who will be able to provide a reference by the interview date of EARLY DECEMBER if required.
4. An 800 word statement of purpose.
   As the general scope of the project is already defined, the statement of purpose should explain why you are interested in undertaking this particular programme of research and what experience and skills you would bring to the project. The statement should also include details about previous research experience and training, why you feel a WRoCAH studentship would be beneficial to your career aspirations, or anything else you feel is relevant.

Deadline for the first stage of the application process is 12 noon on Friday 30th November.

Interviews will take place in the Archaeology Department, University of Sheffield, on the afternoon of Wednesday 12th December. Please note that if you are unable to attend in person, it will be possible to conduct interviews by Skype.

For more information about this project contact
Prof Caroline Jackson (c.m.jackson@sheffield.ac.uk), Dr Sarah Paynter (Sarah.Paynter@historicengland.org.uk) or Sarah Brown (sarah.brown@york.ac.uk)

Date of interviews

Wednesday 12th December 2018