

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) Studentship

**Thames Barge Stories: Exploring the design and material culture of the
Thames Sailing Barge c1800-present
with National Maritime Museum and Royal College of Art**



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Start date: 1st October 2025

Application Deadline: 30 June 2025 at 23.59

Interviews will take place (via zoom) on 18 July 2025

[Information Webinar](#) and Q&A Friday 16 May at 13.00-14.00. Please use the link to join.

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) part of Royal Museums Greenwich, and the Royal College of Art (RCA) are delighted to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2025 under the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDP) scheme.

Thames Barge Stories explores the design and material culture of Thames sail barges – commercial vessels unique to the Thames estuary – from their 19th-century heyday to the present. This practice-led doctoral project combines lens-based art practice with design history methodology to generate fresh perspectives on Thames barges, revealing object-centred microhistories of local, national and global trade networks and bringing new visibility to the diverse working-class communities who sustained them. In doing so, this project aims to enrich knowledge about NMM collections and reconnect contemporary audiences with the rich cultural heritage of the river.

This project will be jointly supervised by Dr Josephine Kane and Professor Rachel Garfield at the RCA and Dr Hannah Stockton and Simon Stephens at the NMM. The student will be expected to spend

time at both RCA and NMM, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK. The studentship can be undertaken either full (4 years) or part-time (8 years).

We encourage applications from a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds and career stages. Students should have a Masters Degree in a relevant subject or be able to demonstrate relevant equivalent experience. The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

Project Overview

This practice-led interdisciplinary doctoral project will employ archive and collections research as the basis for developing a substantial body of original film and/or photographic work, supported by a thesis. We are looking for an artist whose practice engages with social history and lived experience and who is keen to develop their archival research skills, knowledge of riverine material culture and to employ object-centred design historical methodologies. This studentship might also appeal to historians with a creative practice in photography, art filmmaking or related lens-based work.

The project will be driven by two core aims: one focused on conducting collections-based research to throw new light on barge design and use; the other on photography and/or filmmaking as a means to generate new critical perspectives on their historical and contemporary significance. The project will pay close attention to the experiences of working-class communities and the diverse individuals engaged in building, sailing, living and trading on these unique vessels, including women and children. It will also engage with contemporary barge owners, heritage partners and estuary communities in London, Kent and Essex.

As a doctoral student you will spend time at the National Maritime Museum researching relevant collections, from ship models and plans, to photographs and oral histories, concerned with Thames barges and the surrounding environment. You will have the opportunity to work closely with NMM's curatorial staff, benefitting from their expertise in maritime London and maritime technologies.

The RCA's supervisory team, based in the School of Arts and Humanities (SoAH), will contribute expertise in lens-based art practice, critical design histories of London, and object-led, site-specific methodologies. As a member of the SoAH PhD community you will have access to a studio and Audio-Visual facilities at the RCA. You will be encouraged to engage with a lively research culture across the College which connects art and design practices with research on rivers and oceans.

The supervisory team will support the successful candidate to develop their own lines of enquiry and areas of focus in relation to the broader aims of the studentship. Indicative Research Questions may include (but are not limited to):

- 1) How has the design, construction and use of Thames Sailing Barges changed since the early 19th century, and what were the key factors in these changes?
- 2) What role has design and material culture played in the lived experiences and identities of crew and communities connected with the barges? How has this varied across time and geographical location? How can a visual investigation illuminate/animate these lived experiences?
- 3) How does a lens-based output bring visibility and new audiences to histories of marginalised objects, people and places?
- 4) What does an object-led history of the barge reveal about shifting cultural attitudes to the river, past and present and how can a visually led enquiry foster an affective understanding of their importance?

- 5) How does an interdisciplinary design history/art practice approach to collections research bring new knowledge and methodologies, to the discipline of the history of design?

Research with National Maritime Museum, part of the REACH CDP Consortium

This research studentship is one allocated to NMM, via their membership of the REACH CDP Consortium by the AHRC. The successful student will be expected to spend time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience with the partner in Greenwich, London as part of the studentship.

Details of Award

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 48 months (4 years) or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 8 years.

The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home fee. Please note, the RCA has two fee bands for PhD students in the academic year 2025/26 (see the [RCA website for full details](#)). The Low Residency route, which has access to a shared/bookable workspace and a low level of technical provision, has full-time fees of £8,400 (Home) and £25,700 (Overseas). The High Residency band, which includes access to a dedicated workspace and higher level of technical provision, has full-time fees of £10,250 (Home) and £30,450 (Overseas). Candidates should indicate at interview which mode they wish to pursue (high or low residency), and this will be agreed by the supervisory team according to the successful applicant's needs.

Overseas students are eligible to apply but will need to cover the difference between the home and overseas fees rate i.e. £17,300-£20,200 depending on the residency band, and are required to reside in the UK until completion of the PhD.

The award also pays an annual stipend for all students, both home and overseas. This stipend is tax free, and is the equivalent of an annual salary, enabling the student to pay living costs. The UKRI Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2025/2026 is £20,780 plus London Weighting of £2000/year i.e. a total of **£22,780**. There is also a CDP maintenance payment of **£600 per year**. Further details can be found on the [UKRI website](#).

The successful candidate is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of National Maritime Museum worth up to £1000 per year for 4 years.

The successful candidate will be encouraged to participate in professional development events and activities organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK. These activities are organised by a coordination team based at the V&A and are designed to provide CDP researchers with the knowledge, networks and skills to thrive in their future careers.

Eligibility

- This studentship is open to both Home and Overseas applicants.
- To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:
 - Be a UK or Irish 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](#) based on revisions to Training Grant Terms and Conditions for projects starting in October 2025.

- Overseas students are eligible to receive the full award for maintenance as are home students. They will need to pay the difference between what the AHRC provide to the university for tuition and the charge made by the university for tuition fees for overseas students studying for a doctoral degree in the RCA's School of Arts and Humanities. For 2025/26, the fee difference between home and overseas for a Low Residency route is £17,300; and for High Residency it is £20,200.
- 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 of Global Majority backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented at this level.
- Applicants should ideally have, or expect to receive, a Masters-level qualification in a relevant subject – such as photography, filmmaking, history, art history, design history – or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting such as lens-based practice or in the maritime heritage sector.
- Applicants will provide a portfolio of their lens-based practice, a sample of recent academic writing, and a research proposal as part of their application to the RCA. The proposal should identify a particular focus and outline creative approaches in relation to the research aims and the broad scope of Thames Barge project outlined above.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in social and maritime history, the museum and heritage sector, collections-based research and an enthusiasm for developing interdisciplinary skills.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both Royal College of Art and the National Maritime Museum.

NB. All applicants must meet [UKRI terms and conditions for funding](#).

How to apply:

To apply for this studentship, you must submit an online application to the PhD in Arts and Humanities via the RCA's admissions portal by **Friday 30th June 2025**.

- Visit the RCA's [Applicant Portal](#) and create an account.
- To complete your application, you are required to submit a Research Proposal, a Digital Portfolio of work (including examples of your creative work and a recent sample of academic writing), and a short video of yourself describing your creative practice and interest in pursuing a PhD.
- The Research Proposal should identify a particular focus and outline your artistic practice in relation to the research aims and the broad scope of Thames Barge project outlined above.
- Please title your proposal clearly '**Thames Barge Stories: RMG RCA CDP Studentship**' to ensure you are considered for the award.

Please refer to the RCA's [PhD Application Process page](#) for more information.

The RCA is committed to promoting equality and diversity in its application processes. See RCA's Equality and Diversity [Policy](#) and [Statement](#) for further details.

The CDP scheme asks all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI monitoring form [here](#). All responses are anonymous.

Any queries?

We encourage you to attend the [Information Webinar](#) on **16th May**, which will give full information about the project and how a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership project works. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions. A recording of this will be made available in the [projects section](#) of the REACH CDP Consortium page.

If you have further questions after attending this, please contact Dr Josephine Kane on josie.kane@rca.ac.uk