

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS			
Proposed Project Title:	What's the Crack? Mapping Radical Social Justice Histories in the North East of England (1985-2025)		
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	The Crack (1985 -) magazine offers an unparalleled account of activism in the North East over the past 40 years. This PhD project will construct the first radical social justice history of the North East – intersectionally centred around gender, sexuality, race, and class - using the archives of The Crack. This project offers an opportunity for engagement with the largest untouched archive of community-based social justice in the country and will aim to develop a new cultural record of the region centred around themes of social justice, paving the way for future scholarship in this area.		
Host University:	Newcastle University		
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
The Crack Magazine, 1a/1b Bolingbroke Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 5HP			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Amanda Baxter	Email:	_____
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>	Media and Communication Studies		
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Please note that your application will be assessed by the relevant primary AHRC subject area review panel. However, in this space you should indicate which other subject areas your proposal covers and how your methodology is genuinely interdisciplinary.)</i>			
This project's research questions and methodological approach are intrinsically interdisciplinary, drawing together Cultural Studies, English Literature, and Geography. The research questions are orientated towards a place-based analysis of local print culture and regional literary representation. The theoretical framework combines a cultural-materialist literary analysis with recent scholarship in cultural geography, and feminist and queer studies, allowing the student to situate the socio-political and artistic contributions of the magazine within its local context of production, circulation, and readership. These methodologies enable the project to provide a community-led social justice history attending both to literary economy and cultural representations of the North East.			

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

Research Significance and Aims

The Crack has been at the heart of North East social activism since the 1980s, and the timeline of the magazine's inception and developmental history is paralleled by the North East's own political consciousness. The magazine emerged in 1985 in response to Thatcherite ideologies and has remained responsive to other social justice-led movements pertaining to feminist, queer, working-class and non-white communities in the region. **Challenging and subverting stereotypical notions of 'Northernness'**, the magazine is diverse in terms of its style and its contributors, offering political commentary while pushing at the frontiers of aesthetic creativity. Existing cultural histories of the North East are dominated by social realism as the default representational mode for white working-class experience (see Law, 2002; Procter, 2006; Ashbridge 2023a), neglecting the region's feminist, queer, non-white, and other working-class artistic heritages. *The Crack* represents a vital and unacknowledged resource for challenging established disciplinary orthodoxies around North East cultural identity, Northernness, and literary regionalism more widely. The project will **map the intersectionalities of social justice work in the North East** through an archival reading of the magazine in relation to key historico-political moments over the magazine's 40-year history, **concentrating on struggles regarding feminism, sexuality, race, and class**, against the backdrop of Thatcherism, the AIDs crisis, New Labour's policies of multiculturalism, and Brexit. The project will 1) offer a **critical reappraisal of the local magazine** as a 'decentralising' (Crawford, 1991) genre in areas of British literary studies and 2) register the magazine's contribution to **a wider – but hitherto unacknowledged - history and mediation of community-led activism** in the North East.

Project Aims

- To examine a historical conjuncture in which questions of feminism, sexuality, race, class and queerness took on new dimensions in the literary-cultural milieu of the North East.
- To identify the material conditions in which the magazine was produced, disseminated, and read, particularly in relation to local communities in the North East.
- To situate this history in relation to a national history of social justice activism in Britain since 1980.

Research Questions

- In what ways does the magazine's 40-year archive revise the post-war cultural identity of North East, especially during a period of heightened class consciousness, state-led homophobia, and racist riots?
- What do the representational and mediated cultural practices of the magazine contribute to debates regarding English regionalism and regional cultural production?
- What were the operational practices of *The Crack* (e.g. sponsorship, contributors, distribution), and what do these practices say about local contexts of literary production, dissemination, and consumption?

Research Context and Methodologies

The cultural identity of the North of England has long been dominated by an image of cis-heteronormative working-class identity, from poets and playwrights associated with the Angry Young Men and New Wave movements, to the post-industrial novel (O'Brien, 2020). All of these forms deploy the documentary format of social realism as the default mode for the region, creating an image of the entire North of England as an undifferentiated space of white, working-class masculinity which is resistant to artistic innovation (Cockin, 2012; Vice and Forrest, 2015; Ashbridge, 2023b). In exploring *The Crack's* record of publishing a diverse range of feminist, queer and non-white writing from the North East, these **established understandings of Northern cultural production are challenged and re-orientated**. The project has a two-pronged methodological approach. The PhD will use an archival approach to record the developmental history of the magazine, drawing from recent place-centred work in the creative industries (Shaw, 2019; Bulaitis and Gilmore, 2023; Marsh and Howcroft, 2024). The project's literary-critical aspect will **combine cultural geography** (Cresswell, 2004; Hazeldine, 2020; Massey, 2008; Tomaney, 2020), **with feminist and queer studies** (Careless, 2022; Ormerod, 2023; Longstaff, 2022; Spruce, 2021) and **political science** (Gilroy, 1989; Virdee, 2014). This interdisciplinary lens will allow the candidate to **situate the socio-political and artistic contributions of the magazine within its local context of production, circulation, and readership**.

Outcomes

As well as the thesis, the project will harness digital technology to the magazine's archive to build a decentralised map of social justice activism in the North East. This freely available, co-produced digital resource will promote future research in the area.

This CDA also allows for significant public engagement in partnership with *The Crack* magazine. This **knowledge exchange and community activity** will benefit the region as a whole, by improving knowledge of the past of social justice work. This is one of the reasons why this CDA project is so suited to Newcastle University: aside from supervisory expertise, the HaSS Faculty is highly experienced in developing and supporting **public engagement and public history activity**. The candidate will be supported to run a series of outreach events, mapping onto Newcastle's Engagement and Place agendas. This will support the candidate's development as an active and collaborative researcher, as well as giving them experience of planning and running events.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

The training and development support required by the candidate will be carefully planned and managed by the project team to maximise the ease of transition into doctoral study, and **to build added value** into the project for the academic and non-academic partners. The candidate will require access to training on Shorthand (available via the Robinson Library) to prepare the digital exhibition and will audit SEL3405 which includes exhibition curation expertise from the National Library of Scotland. The candidate may also require training in oral history interviews to include in the exhibition; this training can be accessed by the Oral History Unit at Newcastle. Aside from disciplinary conferences/workshops that the candidate will be encouraged to attend in order to present work-in-progress, the costs of delivering this project will be supported by the university and partner organisations.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

Longstaff has a longstanding connection with *The Crack*, including as a contributor with an innovative 'Queer' column (2008-16) and he and Baxter have **also worked closely together on social activism projects**. Longstaff and Gillis have worked a series of EDI-related projects at NCL as co-leads and co-authors; Gillis and Ashbridge have similarly worked together more recently as co-leads and co-authors on EDI projects around student experience; they all three have a strong working relationship. As the candidate will be registered at Newcastle, the lead supervisor will ensure that they receive the expected academic support from their primary institution, as well as co-ordinating communication between the rest of the supervisory team. Monthly meetings between the candidate and the supervisors will take place (either in-person or remotely via Zoom); we will ensure that we meet in-person at least every three months. This will allow for **a genuine exchange of ideas as well as monitoring the academic progress** of the candidate. All meeting records will be shared across the team: clear goals and targets will be mapped onto an agreed project timeline. Concerns on progress will be flagged as soon as possible.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 200 words)

The project should be prioritised because of its emphasis on working in partnership between and within academic institutions, and with external partners, to build a sustainable network of expertise and collaboration around local social activism. For *The Crack*, this project represents an opportunity **to increase academic and public accessibility to the scope and content of this significant record of social justice activities** in the North East over the past forty years. As such, one of the chief benefits to them will be in a greater understanding of the network of connections and the capacity to share that with local communities. For the candidate, the benefits will be in research collaboration developing several layers of public engagement activity, with a broad reach thematically, supported by the expertise of colleagues working within both academia and *The Crack*. The candidate will be involved in the archive management of the magazine from the start of the project, including the establishment of a catalogue, and digitisation. This will lead to **wider cross-community programmes of public engagement and education**.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

The Crack will be making a significant in-kind contribution in the following key ways:

- A principal part of the contribution will be in the form of the time and expertise of Amanda Baxter. Ms Baxter will induct the candidate and they will also work with the longstanding editorial team to integrate into the working environment of *The Crack*, providing training on the archival collection including its scope, management and practical support around the handling.
- The time resource of the other *The Crack* employees, including editor Rob Meddes, who will also contribute knowledge and expertise to this project.
- Lastly, significant in-kind contribution will be made via the agreed conservation of the archival material, so that it can be

accessible to the public. In addition, it is also anticipated that the archival materials and copies of *The Crack* will be bequeathed to the Robinson Library. Discussions with Ian Johnson who is the Head of Special Collections and Archives have already occurred with this in mind.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 200 words)

This has been an organic development between the project team members, with an emphasis on co-production of research and the impactful development of its outcomes, and the activities for the candidate reflect this. A **planned placement component** with *The Crack* for three months at the end of Year One, and again for three months at the end of Year Two, will have in-built training elements in the history of the magazine, and its connections with local social activism. The placement will consist of work **engaging with local communities** on the project, and how it will uncover their stories about the magazine, and the events listed therein; this will support innovative and creative thinking about the magazine's future, and the future of local social activism. The candidate will effectively open up the archives of the magazine for the public. The candidate will be given the opportunity to contribute a public lecture at Newcastle, and to deliver an exhibition of their research findings to diverse local groups and communities.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Gareth Longstaff
School or Department:	Arts and Cultures
Email Address:	_____
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Stacy Gillis
School or Department:	English Literature, Language and Linguistics
Email Address:	_____
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ms Amanda Baxter
Organisation/Institution:	<i>The Crack Magazine</i>
Email Address:	_____

Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:

Name:	Dr Chloe Ashbridge
Organisation/Institution:	Newcastle University
Email Address:	_____

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate:

(Maximum 500 words)

The research interests and expertise of the supervisory team work together symbiotically to underpin this project.

[Dr Gareth Longstaff](#) is Senior Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies. His research addresses the use of queer theories and methodologies and their intersection with celebrity culture, pornography, and desire. Gareth also works on how archival processes can include mundane and ephemeral objects and how this aligns with queer regional heritage, desire, and community. Through his involvement in projects such as the *Queer Beyond London* project (AHRC) and in publications including "He had a pair of shoulders like the Tyne bridge": Queer Evocations of the North-East and the Legacy of *Out on Tuesday* and *Out*" (2022) he brings expertise that traverses queer theory, archival work and heritage. In addition, his most recent work has

focused on intimacy and community between gay men through affirmative practices of how desire is embodied, sex-positivity, barebacking, and consensual promiscuity. He is also an executive board member of Curious Queer Arts. His work on queer community heritage and archival practices is also informed by oral history practices and he is a committee member of the LGBTQ+ strand of the Oral History Society. He has successfully supervised six PhDs (2 AHRC; 1 ESRC) and currently supervises six students.

[Dr Stacy Gillis](#) is Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature, and Associate Dean (Education). Her research focuses on narrative form, cultural politics, genre and gender. One of the convenors of the Faculty's Gender Research Group, she is also the managing editor of the international journal *Feminist Theory*. She has extensive experience of PhD supervision, having supervised 18 PhDs (8 AHRC; 1 SSHRCC; 1 Fulbright & REA) to timely submission, and has mentored these students into posts at Bristol, Lund, MIT, Birmingham, UEA and Durham, and into industry positions. Gillis has substantial experience of PhD external examination and is currently supervising four PhD students.

[Dr Chloe Ashbridge](#) is a leading cultural historian of the North. She has published widely on the region in relation to working-class literature (2020), devolutionary politics (2022; 2023a), and race (2023b), with a forthcoming book on Northern Postcolonial Print Cultures (EUP, 2027). She is part of the Executive Committee of the British Association of Literary studies, a member of the Steering Committee of Newcastle's Postcolonial Research Group and has been external examiner at the University of Huddersfield.

Amanda Baxter is the founder of *The Crack*, and has been embedded in social justice activism in the North East since the 1970s. She brings considerable expertise in project management, social justice networking, and local publishing histories.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

The strength of this project lies in the **active and diverse research environments** that the student will be able to take advantage of: Newcastle University's School of Arts and Cultures (SACS), School of English Literature, Language & Linguistics (SELLL), and *The Crack* magazine. In SELLL, the candidate will benefit from the support of the vibrant postgraduate community, including the innovative Postgraduate Research Culture Group, and the seminar series (including the possibility of an exchange) with La Sapienza in terms of sharing **research methods and modes around social justice activism**. There is a longstanding commitment to book history and periodical culture in SELLL (Connolly, Hone, MacLeod), print networks (Orr, Procter, Srivastava) as well as work on social justice activism (Chedgzoy, Haslett). The candidate will also benefit immensely from the research expertise of the long twentieth-century group (Byers, MacLaughlan, Srivastava) and from colleagues working on **regional voices and identities** (Niven, Procter, Sangupta). In SACS, the candidate will join The Queer Media, Culture, Heritage (QMCH) seminar series as well as taking part in a supportive and vibrant environment consisting of regular reading groups, workshops and work-in-progress sessions. Other areas of research in SACS that will allow the candidate to present and discuss their work with national and international scholars include the Masculinities Group (Haywood, Longstaff and Evers) The Critical Pedagogy Discussion Group (Bates) The Newcastle Critical Discourse Group (Kelsey and Khosravini) and the Disrupted Knowledges Research Group (Longstaff, Sikka, Walls). In terms of the Faculty, the membership of the Gender Research Group and the Postcolonial Research Group will be crucial spaces for the candidate to attend seminars, and to share work-in-progress: these groups are both longstanding collaborative research fora open to those **researching social justice inequalities**. The candidate will also be supported by the supervisory team in organising a conference on *Social Justice Activism in the North East*, to establish their credentials in the field.