

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:	'Where do we belong?' Using innovative methods to explore working-class identities through Sunderland's past, present, and future.		
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	In a context of uneven post-industrial development, Brexit, stigmatisation and recent unrest, this project explores working-class identities and belonging in Sunderland and the surrounding area. By examining memories of industrial life and emergent identities, connections between emplaced pasts and possible futures will be explored through partnership with Redhills (Durham Miners' Association) and innovative public-facing methods including oral histories, photography and soundscapes. The project will capture the multi-sensorial character of complex space-times, allow the student to consider belonging as an affective orientation to time and place, and provide nuanced understandings of post-industrial places today and into the future.		
Host University:	Northumbria University		
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. Redhills			
2.			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Ross Forbes	Email:	
Name:		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>	Cultural Geography		
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>			
Whilst the primary subject area is Cultural Geography, reflecting the interests and expertise of the proposed supervisors, there are clear crossovers here with history, particularly in terms of the partnership with local heritage organisation Redhills Research and shared attention to the importance of industrial histories and post-industrial legacies, intersections with work in the field of historical geography, and the use of oral			

history approaches to data collection.

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 Questions

1. What are the connections between lived experience of industrial life and future lives of working-class communities in Sunderland and the surrounding area?
2. How might a multi-sensorial methodological approach engage residents in exploring and understanding these connections?
3. What is the potential for these connections to open-up public dialogue across different areas, groups, and generations?
4. How might expressions of working-class life past and present, challenge dominant narratives of the post-industrial?

Research context

Sunderland and its surrounding areas, has a proud industrial heritage, fragments of which remain in the environment and memories. Although 'memory and temporal processes are fundamental to the existences of post-industrial spaces' (Emery, 2018:6), they can be disconnected from consideration of future landscapes of community (Nayak, 2006). Much of the media representation of places such as Sunderland, contributes to a separation of past and future through a language of decline, loss, and in the context of Brexit, being 'left behind' (Findlay et al, 2019). Recently, we also have seen this in the coverage of violent disorder. Whilst the facts of change and 'collective loss' (Walkerline and Jimenez, 2012; Meier, 2012) that are open to exploitation is undeniable, such discourses stigmatise entire communities (Tyler, 2020; Butler-Warke, 2022). Understanding how belonging is practiced and understood (Antonisch, 2010) is thus crucial at a time when powerful actors show an unwillingness to acknowledge both an 'uneven geography of development' (Mah 2010, p. 398) and the ongoing significance of 'the industrial' (Luger and Schwarze, 2024).

This CDA explores post-industrial belonging as material and affective (Hill, 2013), through the complex temporalities of working-class identities in and through Sunderland. It asks what has changed and what remains, what is held onto and what is forgotten and by whom, and how we might harness these temporalities in hopeful ways. With Redhills, a trusted community organisation in the Durham Coalfields area (which incorporates Sunderland) that is looking to expand their work that harnesses the 'living heritage of the area', this research will provide the opportunity for working-class people to define their own identities (Isakjee and Lorne 2020). The CDA researcher will draw upon Redhills established community connections but will also actively contribute to the establishment of a hub for the study of 'left behind places'. The studentship will contribute to literature on geographies of the 'post-industrial' and working-class identities (Dowling, 2009; Emery, 2018; Luger and Schwarze, 2024). It also builds upon established work on the intersection of space, time, class and post-industrial life in Geography at Northumbria University, including Clayton's work on class, race, identity, temporality and belonging, and Griffin's historical research into solidarity and resistance.

Research methods

Oral histories, supplemented by photography, will be conducted, drawing upon established contacts organised through Redhills. Recorded biographical interviews will be conducted with those with memories of industrial life in locations significant to participants (work, home, community, leisure). Through a multi-sensorial and more-than-representational approach, additional layers of meaning and understanding can be elaborated (Gallagher and Prior 2013). The partnership will allow the student to also produce soundscapes combining this interview audio with other sources (past and current) to provide a deeper appreciation of place-based working-class identities in emergence. These soundscapes will be discussed through workshops involving range of social groups to garner reactions and reflections of those with more limited or diverse memories of industrial life. This research would be conducted ethically, upholding principles of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent, drawing on AHRC and Northumbria University guidance with those who have the capacity to participate.

First Year

Explore literature around key concepts and contextual historical literature relating to the area.

Work with Redhills on initial participant recruitment via purposeful sampling and snowball sampling.

Second Year

Working directly with Redhills in residence at Redhills Durham Miners' Hall.

50 oral histories conducted with older adults (men and women) with memories of industrial life.

Collection of visual material of sites mentioned in the oral histories, and participants at those sites.
Thematic analysis of the oral histories and participatory identification of excerpts for use in soundscape and soundscape(s) created.
Three collaborative workshops held to broaden dialogue and collect data, including: women, ethnic minority groups, and younger people and will be deposited with Redhills following completion of the work

Third Year

Write the thesis.

An exhibition of soundscape/visuals to serve as a tool for wider public engagement, enhancing the impact and accessibility of the research findings and to build on the outreach work of Redhills.

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)

Data collection, participant recruitment and oral history work will be based out of Redhills facilities with some interviews being conducted and recorded in external locations. The cost of travel will be covered by the stipend and additional collaborative student funds. Audio equipment will be an important element of the research methods. These will be loaned out from Northumbria's stock of equipment at no additional cost. Access to funds to support training opportunities to help with any audio outputs will be requested through the NBCDTP, although this will vary depending upon the skills that any potential student might already have in this area. The student will also be expected to participate in NBC training events and present at appropriate conferences (e.g. RGS-IBG conference). The student will apply to both NBC resources and Northumbria faculty resources to support the travel and accommodation associated with this work. As the project develops, funds will also be requested to assist the development of project outputs, including dissemination.

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)

The lead supervisor (Clayton) will facilitate regular communication between Northumbria and Redhills. Redhills will provide a project mentor (Ross Forbes) who will act as the primary point of contact for the duration of the project. Redhills will be involved in the early stages of project design with meetings every other month during first year where the theoretical and conceptual framing will also be developed. In year 2 team meetings will be more regular (at least monthly) to shape research practice. During this time the student will be based at Redhills (Durham Miners' Hall) to shape recruitment, conducting oral histories and developing methods for engaging wider publics. In the final year, the student will return to Northumbria to write up their thesis whilst retaining strong links to Redhills to disseminate the work. This will require meetings with Redhills at least once a month. At Northumbria, student progression is assessed through an initial project approval stage (3-6 months) followed by two progression reviews at months 11 and 23. Our regulations require formal and documented monthly contact between supervisors and supervisee.

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

(Maximum 200 words)

The student will benefit from the expertise and resources offered by Redhills in terms of local knowledge and established networks forged with residents, acting as a trusted partner in the participant recruitment process. The student will be able to tap into existing relationships with other academics working with Redhills around allied interests (Tomaney et al, 2023) as part of the efforts to develop a collaborative research hub. Redhills will provide access to a local space that is routed in the wider area, including desk space, as well as providing exhibition space for potential outputs.

Redhills will enhance their profile as an established and growing living heritage work hub. This will have the potential to support evidence for future funding. The research will also help to widen the scope of public outreach, by bringing in more diverse voices into conversations around the salience of industrial heritage across the region and contribute to established policy discussions. The collaboration will offer a 'critical friend' relationship and will provide a conceptual framing for the voices of local residents and influence future research directions. This aligns with Redhills' mission 'to harness our living heritage to revitalise our coalfield communities'.

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.)*

As indicated in their letter of support, Redhills is committed to several in-kind contributions. This includes:

- Collaborative research from professorial to research assistant level.
- Access to the extensive community network surrounding Redhills and its development
- Research office space within the refurbished Miners' Hall.
- Connectivity for Northumbria University within this emergent research collaboration.
- Access to Durham Miners' Association archives and people.
- The opportunity for embedded research within their organisation.

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

(Maximum 200 words)

At the outset all parties (student, supervisors and Redhills mentor) will meet to discuss roles, expectations, and to map out our approach to working collaboratively. We will establish a preliminary timeline and focus on how the student can draw upon the resources of Redhills, but also contribute to and develop the organisations' heritage-oriented activities.

The student will meet regularly with academic supervisors (at least one a month) with meetings involving Redhills every other month. At key milestones, such as progression points and during the 2nd year of the project, during which the student will be working more closely with Redhills, these collective meetings will become more regular. As set out in the supporting letter, there is an opportunity to contribute to Redhills as it grows into a collaborative research hub around Just Transitions and 'left behind places'.

The collaborative dimensions of this project and local expertise of the non-academic partner will become particularly important when it comes to recruiting participants and in developing networks with groups beyond those regularly engaged with Redhills. It will also be crucial in opening routes to dissemination in the region and by providing suitable spaces and facilities to allow for potential dissemination of project outputs.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr John Clayton
School or Department:	Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences
Email Address:	_____
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Paul Griffin
School or Department:	Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences
Email Address:	_____
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ross Forbes
Organisation/Institution:	Redhills CIC
Email Address:	_____
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	
Organisation/Institution:	
Email Address:	
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	

Name:	
Organisation/Institution:	
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)

Lead Supervisor: Dr John Clayton (Northumbria University)

Dr Clayton is an Associate Professor in Human Geography. His research focuses on the connection between space, identities and inequalities driven by an interest in how marginalised groups experience, navigate and challenge social fault lines. He has offered contributions in fields including social class (in relation to education and digital exclusion); everyday multiculturalism; ‘race’, racism and ‘hate’; asylum, migration and work; austerity; and emotional geographies. Methodologically his interests primarily lie in qualitative methods including ethnography, various forms of interviewing – including biographical interviews, and more recently institutional archival work. His research has involved partnership working with multiple non-academic organisations, mostly in North East England. For this project, he will offer his extensive experience of PhD supervision, having seen 7 students through to completion, as well as experience of PhD examination. Secondly his experience of public engagement and partnership working in the region will help to support the student with external collaboration and engagement. Thirdly, his work around social geographies of class, complex temporalities and geographies of ‘race’ and racism will be of value to the students’ conceptual work. Lastly, he will support the student methodologically, especially in relation to oral history interviews.

Second Supervisor: Dr Paul Griffin (Northumbria University)

Dr Griffin is an Assistant Professor in Human Geography. His research expertise cuts across historical geography with a particular interest in community organising across race, class and labour. This connects with his methodological interest in oral histories, archives and the provision of usable pasts. His research has most recently considered unemployed organising within deindustrialising contexts, allowing him to work closely with archives and communities in shaping public facing historical outputs. For this project, he will offer disciplinary expertise from historical geography, as well as theoretical insights through his contributions to labour studies which include reflections on diasporic and working-class communities. He also has a strong working relationship with regional non-academic partners through ongoing teaching (including student visits around post-industrial landscapes) and research connections (through research around early twentieth century South Shields). Dr Griffin has supervised one student to completion and currently supervises two other students.

Redhills Research Advisor: Ross Forbes

Ross has extensive experience in academic research applied to industrial, sociological and political settings. He has worked in and around the issues of the post industrialisation and its potential solutions since 1984. He is currently chief executive officer of Redhills, The Miners’ Hall, Durham which is developing a broad-based research collaboration to examine policy and action for ‘left behind places’. This research focusses on policy changes which can relieve the socioeconomic and cultural effects of sustained underdevelopment. Ross not only leads the development of the multidisciplinary research model but also heads up the UNESCO bid for world heritage status for the Miners’ Hall. He is an Honorary Professor of University College London (Bartlett School of Planning).

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:
(Maximum 500 words)

The research student would join our department at an exciting moment of growth and success. Geography and Environmental Sciences at NU is ranked 2nd for ‘research power’ in the UK. This is a rise of 39 places compared to 2014. All of our impact is rated within the top two categories of very considerable (3*) and outstanding (4*); 90% of our outputs are rated either internationally excellent (3*) or world-leading (4*). As part of this ongoing progression the department is committed to increasing the number of postgraduate research students.

The CDA student would become part of the Social and Cultural Geographies research group (SCG). Work within this group draws upon radical and critical approaches in human geography to develop nuanced understandings of injustices, critically engaging the various multi-scalar struggles that seek to challenge them. The growth and diversity of research interests in this group will provide a conducive environment for the student to develop and share their work. It is particularly noticeable that a number of both staff and PGR students are engaging with historical geography, as well as issues class, social change and divisions in the region as well as concepts of haunting and memory. Alongside this, the student would be encouraged to engage with other research groups at NU and within the region, including the 'Histories of Activism' research group and the 'Creative Arts Research Network'. There is also opportunity here for the student to benefit from the wide-ranging expertise of the NBC research community with potentially generative conversations around industrial landscapes and heritage.

Dr Clayton and Dr Griffin have co-ordinated a number of activities with the PGR community in recent years, including postgraduate reading group and our intention here would be to include the student within this collaborative setting immediately. The reading group offers a space for shared readings of key disciplinary texts, the sharing of works in progress, and opportunities to engage with challenging materials collaboratively.

To further support PGRs' career development, we encourage attendance at a three-day introductory course on teaching, enabling them to be involved in academic activities with undergraduates. PGRs also have access to a budget that covers research expenses specific to their needs (e.g. fieldwork, international conference attendance), which ranges between £2k and £5k, distributed over three years. Students are encouraged to be proactive by organising their own discussion groups, contributing to early-career organisations (e.g. RGS Historical Geography Research Group), presenting at conferences, accessing external research funding (with advice from supervisory teams), and engaging with non-academic communities (e.g. media, schools).

The student will be provided with a personal computer and access to desk space within a shared office for the duration of the studentship. In addition, PGRs are able to access the recently created Research Commons space in the University Library: this is a dedicated area for PGRs and academic researchers centrally located on the main university campus.