

**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			
<b>Proposed Project Title:</b>	Images and Empire in British Military Collections: The Photographic Archive of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI)		
<b>Project Summary:</b> <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	The project uses the photographic archive of the Durham Light Infantry (1881-1968) to interrogate the role of photography in this regiment, headquartered in Northeast England and deployed throughout the British Empire. Based in the DLI Collection at The Story, Durham, it centres photography as a way to examine histories of empire, masculinity, and military life through the 50,000 images produced by and for a single regiment. How did photographic events shape the unit's identity in peacetime and conflict – and how can decolonial approaches to imperial photography and contemporary military collections help inform the future of this important archive?		
<b>Host University:</b>	Durham University		
<b>Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b> <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. The Story, Durham			
2. The Trustees of the Durham Light Infantry Collection (Secondary partner, in that they own the collection cared for at The Story)			
<b>Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b> <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Carolyn Ball	Email:	
Name:	Gillian Kirkbride	Email:	
<b>Primary AHRC Subject Area:</b> <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>	Photography: History, Theory and Practice		
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"/>	
<b>If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why:</b> <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>			
Although Photography is the primary subject area of this PhD, the project design, research questions, and methodology intersect with other AHRC Subject Areas, namely 1) History, in particular histories of empire, gender, and technology and 2) Cultural and			

Museum Studies, since the project takes place in an archive and will contribute to the redevelopment of the DLI Museum in Durham. Methodologically, working with photographic materials always requires an interdisciplinary approach, especially in contexts where photographs may have been used primarily as direct, unmediated evidence of the past.

## 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)*

“Images and Empire in British Military Collections” uses the photographic archive of the Durham Light Infantry (1881-1968) to address a significant gap in historical research. Military collections in the UK hold vast photographic archives, yet no study has considered the nature of these archives in the round or the part photography played in a range of military activities, from sports and social events to combat. By interrogating the role of photography in the history of a single regiment, this project examines how the camera was embedded in military life over an almost 90-year period. It explores the motivations, practicalities, and impacts of photography in the regiment; what restrictions, opportunities, and absences the camera created in military contexts; and how the circulation, archiving, and digitization of photographs influences their use today. By engaging with decolonial approaches to photographic archives, the project also contributes to an expanding awareness in UK-based military museums, about the need to use their collections to tell more complex histories of empire.

With roots in two earlier regiments and the county’s voluntary militias, the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) was founded as the British Empire approached its maximum extent. The DLI’s antecedent regiments took part in the Crimean War and were active in India, New Zealand, and the Caribbean, while the 1882 invasion of Egypt was one of the new, merged DLI’s first deployments. It participated in almost every theatre of British operations from that point: the 1898 invasion of Sudan, Boer War, World War One (Western Front, Northwest Frontier of India/Pakistan), World War Two (Myanmar/Burma, North Africa, Italy, Germany, including the liberation of Belsen), Korean War, and the Cyprus Emergency. The 50,000 photographs in its archive relate not only to these engagements, but also – and as importantly – to life at its headquarters in Northeast England and commemorative events held there, for instance at Durham’s Cathedral and Town Hall. Empire was a photographic phenomenon both at home and abroad.

Working in partnership with The Story, the new home of Durham’s county archives, the project centres photography as a site of identity formation for the DLI regiment, the local community, and empire itself. Since the DLI photographic archive is already well-catalogued (and largely digitized), it is feasible for the project to take an overview of the entire collection while drilling down to identify productive case studies. This allows it to take two interrelated approaches: 1) archive-based research on the photographic archive, with a focus on histories of masculinity, empire, and military life, and 2) practice-based research on how these photographs can be used in public-facing engagement at The Story and in the curation of a dedicated DLI gallery as part of a new cultural venue in the regiment’s former Durham building, which is currently in development.

“Images and Empire” bridges historical research and contemporary museum and archive practices to ask:

1. How did photography shape regimental identity in peacetime and conflict? What people, places, and events were often, or never, pictured? How are class, gender, and race made visible, or invisible, in the DLI photographs? Who made decisions about the taking and archiving of photographs at different points in the DLI’s history and across its deployments?
2. What does a history of the British empire look like through the DLI’s photographic archive? As photographs made in a military context, do they promote, undermine, satirize, or ignore imperial ideologies, up to and including the era of the Cold War and independence? Do certain themes, albums, or sets of photographs emerge as significant case studies for histories of masculinity and empire, for instance with supporting documentation or images of key individuals and events?
3. How can decolonial approaches to photographic archives and military museums inform the future of the DLI Collection? What similarities and differences exist between the DLI archive and other military photo archives, as far as this project can discern? How can The Story and the collection Trustees develop an ‘ethics of care’ (Odumusu 2020) for photographs whose subject matter raises questions about visibility online or in public displays?

The project will produce a doctoral thesis, an information pack for The Story’s internal use, and a contribution to public engagement, whether through specific activities, online or in-person displays, or the development of protocols and interpretation for the new DLI museum. The specific form of engagement will emerge in partnership with The Story and in conversation with the DLI Collection Trustees, as well as other academics and heritage professionals working on decolonisation in UK military museums. A Collaborative Doctoral Award is essential for the realization of this project, which stands to yield significant new knowledge and skills for the candidate and supervisory team, as well as measurable impact for The Story and the DLI Collection.

**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 project requires access to the DLI archive, including an estimated 50,000 photographs (many mounted in albums) and related documentation. The Story will provide relevant training for the handling of materials in its collection, the use of its collections database, and relevant archival standards, while the primary supervisor, Prof. Christina Riggs, will ensure the student is versed in the history of photographic technologies. The supervisory team will jointly oversee any ethics training and preparation for public-facing work, such as engagement activities or contributions to displays and interpretation.

Further training opportunities may arise over the course of the project through Durham's Centre for Visual Arts and Culture (CVAC, which has an active postgraduate committee), interaction with the National Army Museum and Imperial War Museums, and by attending conferences and events elsewhere. In the UK, the universities of Oxford, St Andrews, De Montfort, and Westminster host regular photographic research events, as do institutions such as the National Media Museum in Bradford. The student will be able to request funding from the Department of History as well as the Northern Bridge, to support conference attendance and research visits over the course of the project (approximately once per year), grouping such visits together to reduce travel costs.

**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 academic supervisors at Durham University and colleagues at The Story have developed close working relationships, including student visits to the new archive facilities. The physical proximity of the partner institutions will facilitate in-person meetings at scheduled intervals, with additional meetings on an as-needed basis.

At the outset of the project, the academic supervisors, The Story advisors, and the candidate will create a workflow chart setting out milestones for academic progress alongside archive-based activities; this will be updated at the start of each academic year. The primary supervisor and the candidate will meet monthly in Year 1, including the secondary supervisor and The Story advisors once per term (3x/year). The entire team will remain in independent contact as well. If wished, a shared folder (Dropbox, Google, or similar) can enable all team members to access written work, meeting notes, and so forth, minimizing reliance on email chains.

The academic supervisors and The Story colleagues will involve each other in professional development activities related to the project, for instance public engagement events or training opportunities. The primary supervisor will seek support to host a conference at Durham University during the project, inviting researchers and curators from military collections across the UK.

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

*(Maximum 200 words)*

The candidate will gain invaluable experience and transferable skills in The Story's new facilities at Mount Oswald, where Durham's county archives have been re-housed alongside state-of-the-art exhibition and study spaces. Moreover, the candidate's research will contribute to the final phase of a ten-year project to redevelop the DLI Museum, a major public attraction. The candidate will benefit from staff expertise at The Story in the history of the Northeast and the DLI, and in all facets of archiving, engagement, and visitor services. S/he will develop presentation skills for non-academic audiences, including the Trustees of the DLI Collection and professional archive and museum networks.

The candidate will gain skills in archival research and the handling, storage, documentation, and digitization of photographic materials. Given the wide range of photographic collections around the world, experience in this field opens a number of career pathways, including HE, archives, museums, libraries, and picture libraries.

The Story and the DLI Trustees will benefit from enhanced understanding of the DLI Collection's photographic holdings and their relation to the regiment's activities in the Northeast and across the British Empire. An important aspect of the project involves developing decolonial approaches to the entwined histories of photography and empire. To this end, the candidate will expand the archive's audience and interpretation, for instance through online features, new displays, or engagement activities. The candidate will help deliver training for The Story staff and volunteers as well, and share the research results regularly with the DLI Trustees.

**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 Story will host the student on site to facilitate research on photographic and related archives of the DLI Collection. Staff will offer an induction to the candidate and access to any training opportunities that arise during their time at The Story, alongside project-specific training in The Story's collections management system; handling, conservation, and archival storage; and public engagement, outreach, and museum interpretation, as required. This may extend to the use of on-site desk space and computer terminals; the supply of materials for any documentation and storage improvements that may arise; and resources associated with the development and implementation of any engagement or training activities the candidate develops.

For the purposes of the doctoral thesis and any academic publications arising from it, The Story will support fee-free use of DLI images where possible. The Story will also facilitate regular contact between the candidate and the Trustees of the DLI Collection.

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

*(Maximum 200 words)*

The candidate will collaborate with The Story in three areas: 1) improvements to the historical understanding, digital presentation, and interpretive possibilities of the DLI Photographic Archive, which comprises c. 50,000 photographic prints and related material; 2) creation of an information pack for The Story staff and volunteers, summarizing the research findings; and 3) contributions to the development of the DLI Museum, which might include (but are not limited to) the selection of photographic images, choices around their display, creation of an ethics framework, or public engagement arising out of the research.

These collaborative outcomes represent work the candidate can undertake both as part of the research process (1) and as a summative result (2), helping to ensure effective knowledge transfer and mutual benefit for the candidate and The Story.

The exact contribution the candidate makes to the development of a new DLI gallery (3) will emerge through discussions with The Story and will depend on the candidate's own interests and skills, as well as the results of the doctoral research. The Story and the Trustees of the DLI Collection would like the gallery to convey the complex histories of empire, a challenge also faced by other regimental museums and military collections in the UK.

**SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS**

<b>Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:</b>	<b>Prof. Christina Riggs, Chair in the History of Visual Culture</b>
School or Department:	History
Email Address:	
<b>Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:</b>	<b>Prof. Jonathan Saha, Professor of South Asian History</b>
School or Department:	History
Email Address:	
<b>Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:</b>	<b>Carolyn Ball</b>
Organisation/Institution:	County Archivist and The Story – Manager
Email Address:	
<b>Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:</b>	<b>Gillian Kirkbride</b>

Organisation/Institution:	The Story – Museums, Heritage, and Collections Manager
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Email Address:	
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**Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:**

<b>Name:</b>	
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Organisation/Institution:	
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Email Address:	
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**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 supervisory team bring complementary expertise, knowledge, and skills to the project, and a commitment to its success.

The primary supervisor, **Christina Riggs**, is one of the only photography scholars based in a history department in the UK. Her research on photography and the 1920s Tutankhamun excavation broke new ground in considering the role of photographic and archival practices in the historical interpretation – and perpetuation – of coloniality. She is currently writing about the impact of historic photographs on public imaginations of the past, including the use of enlargements in museum displays and the prevalence of digital modifications such as colourization, animation, and ‘zoom’. Since joining Durham in 2019, Christina has been developing new research on photography, local industries, and imperial connections between Northeast England and the Middle East. She is lead supervisor of a current Northern Bridge CDA with Beamish Museum, focused on the photo archive of Daisy Edis and the J. R. Edis Studio in Durham, and she has supervised or co-supervised six PhDs to completion. Christina is the author of eight books and has extensive public engagement experience (media appearances, exhibit curation, and writing for the general public). She began her career as a museum curator and education officer. Her research has been supported by the AHRC, the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust, and All Souls College, Oxford.

The secondary supervisor, **Jonathan Saha**, is a historian of British imperialism, with a focus on Myanmar (Burma) in the 19th and early 20th centuries. He has published on the history of imperial masculinity, imperial ideologies, and anticolonial thought. He is one-third of a History department teaching team recognized with a Durham University teaching award for their module on decolonial approaches to the South Asian collections of the Oriental Museum, in collaboration with colleagues from the OM and Special Collections. Jonathan is also a member of the editorial collective of the *History Workshop Journal* and is an editor of the *Empire’s Other Histories* series from Bloomsbury. He served on the Royal Historical Society’s Race, Ethnicity and Equality Working Group from 2017 to 2022 (co-chairing it from 2019 with Prof. Sadiyah Qureshi), and was a co-author of the Group’s landmark 2018 report. He is currently supervising a PhD projects on Lascars and the British Empire. His research has been supported by the Independent Social Research Foundation.

At The Story, two lead advisors will collaborate to cover the project’s twin scope of archive-based research and the development of the new DLI Museum: Manager of The Story and County Archivist, **Carolyn Ball**, and Museums, Heritage, and Collections Manager, **Gillian Kirkbride**. Carolyn has overseen the transfer of six miles of archives to The Story’s new site and the creation of its exhibition and study spaces. Her remit covers all aspects of archival management and strategic partnerships. Gillian oversees collections and site management across the county’s museums and heritage venues, including exhibition design and interpretation, documentation, storage, and conservation. With research interests in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century conflicts, the British Empire, gender, and LGBTQ+ histories, she is the lead for the curation of the new DLI gallery as part of the development of a new cultural venue in the former Durham Light Infantry Museum building in Durham city.

**SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT**

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

*(Maximum 500 words)*

With its emphasis on empire, gender, and decolonial research methods, and its collaborative partnership with The Story, this project on the photographic archive of the Durham Light Infantry fits strategic priorities identified by Durham University for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. The project will further develop the university's links with the local community and regional heritage organizations, as set out in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities' Creativity and Culture Strategy.

The Department of History at Durham University is one of the top-ranked history departments in the United Kingdom, with a commitment to research that spans geographic and temporal boundaries and incorporates a range of methodologies, including visual culture and oral history. It has recently expanded and refurbished its office, teaching, and communal spaces in the historic centre of Durham. PGR students have access to shared office space within the department buildings, as well as being able to request study space in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities postgraduate centre and the Bill Bryson Library.

The History department has a thriving postgraduate community, with regular PGR reading groups organized and attended by members of academic staff. At least two department-wide seminars (or similar events) take place each term, and subject-specific research groups – including one with a focus on the Northeast of England, another on Modern British History – meet at least once per term to discuss work-in-progress or hear an invited speaker. PGR students have access to a range of academic and professional skills training through the Durham Centre for Academic Development and the Durham University Excellence in Learning and Teaching Award (DELTA); paid teaching experience is available (if wished), depending on a candidate's academic progress and the department's undergraduate timetable each year.

In addition, the Centre for Visual Arts and Culture (CVAC) is an interdisciplinary research centre that hosts seminars, archive and museum visits, conferences, discussion groups, and training sessions on all aspect of visual arts and culture, material culture, digital and traditional media, and museum and heritage studies. The CVAC postgraduate committee has created a welcoming environment for taught MA and postgraduate research students, with dedicated reading groups, social activities, and an annual Summer School organized by postgraduates themselves.

Durham's shortlisting for the UK's City of Culture 2025 strengthened collaborations between the university and several local arts and heritage organizations, including Beamish Museum, The Story, and Redhills (historic headquarters of the Durham Miners' Association, currently undergoing an HLF-funded refurbishment). The candidate will thus find a stimulating research environment not only within Durham University and other Northern Bridge institutions, but also throughout the city and region where the DLI regiment was based over the course of its almost 90-year history.