

**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>	AIDS, inequality and religious ethics of care in 1980s and 90s Britain		
<b>Project Summary:</b> <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	This project radically rethinks the place of religion in shaping public responses to AIDS. The project complicates narratives of secularisation in modern Britain, examines how new viruses expose and entrench inequalities, and expands a queer ethics of care. In a context where stigma and shame were so powerful, any act of recovery is important: this project highlights unique and almost unknown documents on AIDS, while creating a new AIDS archive through ethnographic interviews. The Salvation Army's intervention in HIV/AIDS is little known. Its potential to illuminate the broadest historical and most resonant dynamics of the AIDS crisis demands its telling.		
<b>Host University:</b>	Durham University		
<b>Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b> <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, William Booth College, London, SE5 8BQ			
2.			
<b>Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b> <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Steven Spencer, Director of International Heritage Centre (Archives)	Email:	
Name:	Ruth Macdonald, Archivist & Deputy Director	Email:	
<b>Primary AHRC Subject Area:</b> <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Do not add or amend subjects - there will not be a corresponding Subject Area panel to assess the application.</i>	History		
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 type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why:</b> <i>(Maximum 100 words. Note, all applications will be assessed by the appropriate primary subject area cross-institutional panel.)</i>			

## 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)

### *Context, significance and questions*

It is forty years since the identification of HIV and first recorded deaths from AIDS in the UK. Labelled 'the gay plague' by 1980s popular media, HIV and gay men were stigmatised. The UK government's public health campaign 'Don't Die of Ignorance' (1987) raised awareness but entrenched fear and prejudice. Scholars (eg. Berridge, 2018) have analysed state policy and gay activism (eg. the Terence Higgins Trust 1982) yet there is little scholarship on British HIV support mobilised by those outside the gay community. From 1985, the Salvation Army (founded 1878), delivered care to those dying of AIDS in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh. This was unusual. Christian organisations were slow to respond and the crisis typically brought religious organisations into conflict with gay communities, not least because public commentary invoked theological conceptions of 'sin' (Severs, 2024). Pointing to the paucity of scholarship, Matt Cook (2017) urges scholars to critically engage with popular responses to HIV/ AIDS to understand the complexity of the public context. This project takes up Cook's challenge and is both timely and time critical in illuminating unique and almost unknown memories about HIV/ AIDS.

Developed in partnership with the Salvation Army, it uses the Army's HIV initiatives as a case study to examine the tensions and opportunities inherent in delivering care to gay men dying of AIDS in a context of fear, homophobia and stigma. Notably, the Army's own policies during this period made it impossible for anyone in a same sex relationship to become an Army officer (or demanded that Army officers remain closeted). The project explores the complexity of one agency's actions—decision-making, collaboration, and communication—as an aperture into the challenges of delivering meaningful care. It has broader implications for understanding how responses to new viruses can expose and entrench inequalities between social groups and highlights practices that create space for spirituality, compassion and care (relating to dying but, also, sexuality).

With the advent of Covid-19, scholarly interest has burgeoned in medical, social and political responses to new viruses and the memory of HIV (Garcia Iglesias & Atherton, 2024). This case study highlights the long trajectory of such responses where stigma and compassion have unequal life and death stakes. Aberrant sexual orientation proved a stark dividing line on the emergence of HIV/AIDS, but the vulnerability of gay people exceeded mere prejudice and rested on associated economic, social, and political marginalisation. An unorthodox religious outfit, the Army was quick to respond to HIV because of its long history of addressing inequalities: the officers who started HIV outreach already had strong relationships with gay men based on collaboration in the face of poverty.

### *Contribution & Approach*

Generic scholarship on modern Britain assumes 'secularisation' (Allen, 2021). This project actively interrogates the complex relationship between religion and homosexuality in the context of AIDS to query simplistic narratives of secularisation and mutual antagonism. Religion in modern Britain was far from uniform, with tremendous scope for divergence between theological doctrine, institutional policy and personal spirituality. The absence of religious belief or spirituality among gay persons cannot be taken for granted. Meanwhile, religious bodies could approach welfare as the site for enacting belief in ways that might conflict with their theology (Severs, 2024). By examining the Army's AIDS initiative, this project unpicks these tensions and complexities to contribute to the history of modern Britain generally and histories of religion, inequality, and sexuality specifically.

This project intersects histories of emotion, memory and ethics of care. It explores the interpersonal dynamics between Army workers, state and welfare agencies, and people with HIV/AIDS, their lovers, friends and families. It analyses the language of Army leadership and workers delivering care alongside attempts by other actors to give meaning to their experiences, exploring how care was an 'emotional practice' (Scheer, 2012). In focusing on a large yet self-consciously unorthodox religious organisation, the project asks whether the Army's 'outsider' status in delivering welfare to other 'outsiders' produced an 'ethics of care' that – paradoxically for a Christian organisation committed to heteronormativity – overlapped with feminist and queer ethics of care.

### *Outputs*

This project depends upon partnership with the Salvation Army and a Collaborative Doctoral Award would enable its implementation. Outputs include: a thesis; the assemblage of a new archive; public engagement on the history of HIV/AIDS; and contribution to efforts to recover hidden AIDS archives (eg., The National HIV Story Trust & Annabel's Trust). The project will develop the student's diverse research skillset while producing interdisciplinary outputs with application beyond the Academy.

**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)*

Depending on their prior skills and experience, the student may well benefit from undertaking formalised oral history training. For example, the British Library's National Life Stories project runs training sessions with the Oral History Society online and in person. Regardless of prior skills and experience, we would support the student undertaking trauma-informed oral history training.

The student would need a digital recorder, priced at around £100.

**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)*

Communication will be maintained via email correspondence between the non-HE partner, archivist Steven Spencer, and Julie-Marie Strange (in the first instance) and subsequently, the team of supervisors for the doctoral student. This will be supported by monthly supervisory meetings (online and/or in person) and six-monthly all-supervisor on-site meetings (minimum) in London or Durham. All supervisors, including Steven Spencer, would be involved in interviewing and recruiting a successful candidate. An initial meeting with the successful student would establish project milestones that would be reviewed at six-monthly intervals.

This project builds on solid groundwork by Spencer and Strange to secure non-HE organizational support for this project. Working with the Salvation Army's communications officer, we have secured the agreement in principle of potential oral history interviewees affiliated to the Salvation Army.

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

*(Maximum 200 words)*

There is potential to develop information science aspects of the project to an extent that provides the Army with the beginnings of an official HIV archive and the researcher with transferable skills. In the tradition of numerous LGBTQ+ collections (eg, the LSE's Hall-Carpenter Papers), the aim is to build an 'assemblage' of sufficient core materials to facilitate the development of a Salvation Army AIDS archive in the longer term. This would:

- Enable the Heritage Centre to identify and collate existing dispersed archival materials in the Army archives relating HIV/AIDS and create new oral history holdings.
- Enable the Heritage Centre to place its records relating to HIV in a wider historical context and develop their relationships with other organisations concerned with HIV archives (eg. National HIV Story Trust, West Sussex and Lothian archives).
- Facilitate a new and critical dimension to understanding the early years of AIDS in the UK, especially the role of Christianity, within and beyond the Army through the project's outputs.
- Develop the student's skills in ethics, heritage and archive management, working with partners to co-produce collections, interpretation and public engagement; enhance their understanding of heritage site operations (especially within the context of a complex, international organization).

**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 non-HE partner will provide substantial in-kind contributions totalling approx. £7,500 over 3 years. This includes an estimated 12 days per annum of staff time by an Archivist (based on £170 per day average salary), a desk space with IT

equipment in a shared office for approx. 1 week per annum (based on £200 per week average London desk rental) and on-site accommodation for an initial research visit of 1 week (£78 per night). The student will also benefit from the mentoring and expertise of Steven Spencer, as Director of the International Archives and Heritage Centre in project management, collections management and public engagement.

**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 collaborative arrangements between the supervisors and the Salvation Army are essential to the doctoral programme. Strange will project manage the PhD as primary supervisor. The student will be based for the research component of the project at the Salvation Army’s International Heritage Centre and when there, the student will feedback to Spencer weekly. The student’s access to archives and interviewees will be managed by the Army’s Heritage Centre staff, overseen by Spencer. The supervisory team (including Spencer) will hold monthly meetings (a mixture of online, in person or hybrid). Strange typically checks in with Year 1 doctoral students mid-month to ensure they have fortnightly contact throughout their project.

The student will 1) work alongside Heritage Centre archive staff to identify and collate existing archival holdings within the Army’s Heritage collections and 2) undertake oral history interviews with Army staff delivering AIDS care and those in contact with it; transcribing and cataloguing those interviews. Supported by the Heritage Centre’s archivists, the student will create a finding guide and index for using the Army’s AIDS collection and create a public-facing document that situates the Army’s AIDS care in a broader narrative and archival context.

**SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS**

**Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:** Julie-Marie Strange

School or Department:	History, Durham	Email Address:	
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**Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:** David Minto

School or Department:	History, Durham	Email Address:	
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**Name of the Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:** Steven Spencer

Organisation/Institution:	Salvation Army International Heritage Centre	Email Address:	
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Organisation/Institution:		Email Address:	
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**Name of Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:** Leanne McCormick

Organisation/Institution:	History, Ulster University	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’s expertise maps precisely onto the different dimensions of this project: theoretical underpinning, subject expertise, methodology, non-HE partner relationship and outreach. The proposed supervisors have met and developed this proposal collaboratively over the past two years in conjunction with the Salvation Army’s International Heritage Centre. Strange and Spencer have met with officers within the Salvation Army to secure support for the project and

have negotiated access to prospective interviewees.

Each supervisor brings a different background in subject and theoretical expertise which, taken together, constitutes a compelling logic to support this project. Strange's background is in histories of death and dying, especially among marginalized persons and communities. She has also worked extensively on philanthropic and religious organisations. Minto is an historian of gender and sexuality in transnational perspective and has expertise in queer theory, queer legal history and histories of intimacy. He is currently completing a monograph on twentieth-century gay and sexual politics in a transnational context. McCormick is a social historian with expertise in gender history and the history of sexuality, and currently a Co-Investigator on an AHRC funded project 'Queer Northern Ireland: Sexuality before liberation'. Her work has focused on marginalised groups and their interactions with philanthropic and religious organisations.

In terms of working with the Salvation Army Heritage Centre, Strange and McCormick have both established working relationships with Spencer and are familiar with the Salvation Army's archival holdings and infrastructure. Strange began working with the Heritage Centre in 2010 and has since engaged with their archives on themes of poverty, gender, fundraising, finance and stigma politics. McCormick worked with the Salvation Army International Heritage Centre over several years while producing a research report on Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland and most recently in her role as co-chair of the Independent Truth and Recovery Panel. Minto has been giving lectures on HIV/AIDS in Britain at Durham for five years and works in partnership with the Blue Sky Trust to deliver public talks on the US AIDS quilt.

All the supervisors have methodological skills and training to support the student. Both Strange and McCormick have experience in conducting oral history interviews, often around sensitive and emotive topics, and subjects dealing with health and welfare. They both have the experience and knowledge to support the student in applying for, and navigating, ethical issues pertaining to the project. Combined, the supervisors draw on a broad range of qualitative methodologies. All have experience in using materials relating to everyday life, institutional records, autobiographies and other forms of life story, cultural representation, visual and material resources. Minto brings unique expertise in terms of working with legal and political histories, particularly useful for helping the student situate the Army's response to HIV/AIDS in broader public health context. Spencer has a track record in producing academic publications and conference presentations.

All are experienced PGR supervisors and Strange, McCormick and Spencer have previously supervised CDA projects to completion.

#### **SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT**

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

*(Maximum 500 words)*

The student will join a thriving research culture and community at their home institution, Durham. There are approximately 50 PGR students within the History department at any one time. They have their own, dedicated research programme with training opportunities and seminar series and are embedded within the department's broader research culture. This includes access to departmental research seminars, workshops (including on how to get published, how to apply for grants, developing postdoctoral projects) and symposia. Pertinent to this project, the student will be encouraged to join research groups on Modern British History and Gender and Sexuality. These groups run independent programmes of talks and events, networking opportunities and archival workshops. Durham University is home to the Institute of Medical Humanities which provides research seminars, training workshops and access to a community of researchers working in and around issues of health inequalities and access to care. Durham also hosts the International Centre for Moral Injury. This Centre, based in Durham's Theology department, is a major hub of new research into issues of moral belief and ethics of care. They run a dedicated series of seminars and events exploring these issues from different religious and humanist perspectives. The Centre for Death and Life Studies hosts multiple projects on death, dying and care and will provide a core source of support and intellectual exchange for the student. Strange is a member of both centres and on the steering

committee for CDLS. She will support the student in making contacts and becoming integrated in their respective research cultures.

The partnership with Ulster will be a boon for the student, especially in terms of access to the recent Queer Northern Ireland (<https://www.queerhistoryni.com/>) project, which sought to create an archive of queer experience and stories up to the 1970s, and the Centre for the History of Medicine. Ulster's History department has a purpose built, dedicated space for PhD researchers.