



London Interdisciplinary Social Science  
Doctoral Training Partnership

## ESRC CASE STUDENTSHIP AWARD

A partnership between the School of Geography Queen Mary University of London, The Canal & River Trust and The Geffrye Museum of the Home

### STAYING AFLOAT?

## MAKING HOME AND CREATING PLACE ON LONDON'S CANALS AND RIVERS

*Supervised by*

*Alastair Owens and Geraldene Wharton (School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London) with Sorwar Ahmed, London Waterway Boating Manager (Canal & River Trust) and Eleanor John, Director of Learning, Collections and Exhibitions (Geffrye Museum of the Home)*

The School of Geography and History at Queen Mary University of London, the Canal & River Trust and the Geffrye Museum of the Home invite applications for a doctoral studentship commencing on 1 October 2018. The fully-funded studentship is available as either +3 (3 year full-time PhD) award or as 1+3 (1 year full-time master's degree [MRes Geography or MRes Cities and Cultures] followed by 3 year full-time PhD). Applications for part-time study will also be considered. Funding covers fees and a stipend.

### Topic and rationale

The last decade has seen a remarkable transformation of London's waterways, the most visible manifestation of which has been the growth in the number of boats moored along the city's canals and navigable rivers. According to the Canal & River Trust (CRT) – the main partner in this research project – who are responsible for sustainably managing 100 miles of London's waterways, the number of moored boats has doubled since 2010 to over 4,000 vessels and in a recent survey 58% of respondents were using their boats as their primary home (CRT 2016; 2017). It is estimated that as many as 10,000 people live on London's waterways (London Assembly 2013). But as well as becoming an important place to live for Londoners struggling to pay the high costs of 'on land' accommodation or choosing an alternative lifestyle and home, metropolitan canals and rivers are also the focus of new economic activity and emerging sites of leisure and recreation, with 'blue space' and their adjoining green spaces being highly valued as contributing to the well-being of the city's inhabitants. Tow paths are important to the city's connectivity and have become key to strategies for enabling sustainable transport through their promotion as cycling and walking routes and as strategic routes for services and utilities (gas/electricity/fibre). These linear, connected blue spaces also provide vital migratory routes for wildlife and act as important refugia for biota in urban centres.

However, the rapid change in the use of the city's waterways has also led to conflicts between different users, such as boaters and their on-land neighbours. In 2013 the London Assembly commissioned a report into mooring on London's waterways making several key recommendations including increasing

capacity for mooring, and improving access and facilities (London Assembly 2013). The management and development of waterside settings is also addressed through the Blue Ribbon Network policies enshrined in the Mayor of London's Plan (2017). It is the CRT (working, where necessary, with other partners) that has responsibility to manage and develop London's canal and river networks within this planning and regulatory framework for the benefit of all users.

This research will assist the CRT in better understanding the needs of those who make their homes on London's canals and rivers and inform CRT's work with all users to develop waterway environments as sustainable and high-quality places for living, working and enjoying a range of leisure activities. The findings of this timely study will support realisation of the CRT's *London Waterways Partnership Ten Year Strategic Plan* (2014) and its recently launched *Draft London Mooring Strategy* (2017). The project will develop intellectual and theoretical frameworks for understanding contemporary home and place-making strategies along London's waterways. It will generate new evidence to inform the Trust's work and assess ways of measuring its impact.

### **Intellectual context and research questions**

The past 30 years have seen dramatic changes to London's residential landscapes and neighbourhoods as economic restructuring, programmes of regeneration, and processes of gentrification have transformed once run-down parts of the city into vibrant and desirable places to live in (see, for example, Hamnett 2003, Butler and Robson 2003, Camplin 2013). Yet as the population of the globalising metropolis has grown, household structures have changed, and its housing stock has increasingly become the focus of investment and speculation. As a consequence, many of the city's inhabitants have struggled to find affordable accommodation, particularly in inner districts of the city, where some have been forced to move away because of the rising costs of housing (Atkinson 2000, Minton 2017). High levels of migration to London have added to the city's social complexity and have increased pressures on housing leading to increasingly mobile and precarious experiences of domestic life, especially for lower income groups (Vertovec 2007, Jordan et al 2017, DeVerteuil 2017). This has led to a questioning of the sustainability of London and its ability to promote socially just ways of living amidst growing social and spatial inequality (Imrie and Lees 2013). Over the past decade, London's waterways likewise became a focus for various kinds of regeneration and renewal but have also seemed to offer one solution to the high costs of housing in the form of 'live-aboard' canal boats and other craft which can be sited at fixed points in the city by securing a relatively low cost 'home mooring' licence. Alternatively, a 'continuous cruising' licence allows boats to be moored at different sites across the city at minimal cost so long as they are moved every 14 days to a different place (CRT 2016).

Other factors that play a role in explaining the growing popularity of canal and river living include the prospect of pursuing a more environmentally sustainable life-style and living in close proximity to (urban) nature (CRT 2016). There is increasing interest in the extent to which access to 'blue space' can improve human health and well-being (Völker and Kistemann, 2011), an issue that is increasingly recognised in metropolitan planning discourse and practice (Mayor of London 2017) and that connects with campaigns to designate London as the first national park city (Raven-Ellison 2017). Waterway living is also valued because of the strong sense of community that is felt to exist among boaters (CRT 2016). So while there has been some effort to understand some of the conflicts between different users of canal spaces (e.g. Middleton 2016, London Assembly 2013), there is also recognition that metropolitan waterside environments are emerging as novel public spaces where more convivial forms of urban life are being experimented with through new kinds of social interaction and consumption often centred around nature, food and creativity (cf Koch and Latham 2013, Shaftoe 2008). There is also evidence that in some areas of the city (such as Haggerston and Islington, Paddington Basin and, in the future, Old Oak Common) canals can become a focus for new economic activity, especially for SMEs within London's cultural economy and creative sectors (cf Pratt 2009, 2017).

While London's resurgent canals have prompted media interest and have been the focus of a number of journalistic articles (e.g. Kalinina 2015, Palmer 2015), scholarly research on the distinctive nature of canal living as a new domestic practice or on the production of waterside environments as new metropolitan places is surprisingly limited.

### Core research questions:

1. Who is living on London's canal boats? What are their motivations? How diverse are London's waterway communities?
2. How do people live on canals? Are they 'home moorers' or 'continuous cruisers'? How frequently do they move? How does their mobility impact on work, social or educational commitments? How do they manage the challenges of canal boat living – access, safety and security, lack of permanent address, waste management, maintenance and access to municipal services? How do communities form and operate along canals?
3. What can be done to enhance canal environments? How can the CRT and other stakeholders plan and provide safe, healthy, well-serviced and attractive spaces to live in? How should the impacts of canal living on urban habitats, both aquatic and terrestrial, be managed and mitigated sustainably within the context of well-functioning ecosystem services?
4. How can London's waterways be developed to become vibrant places? What are the needs of different users?  
How can waterway places remain inclusive and become sustainable? How can conflicts between different users and stakeholders be managed?
5. What do waterway residents, other canal and tow path users, and those who manage these environments see as their responsibilities, contributions, and rights?

### Methodology

Working within three contrasting 'London Waterway Character Areas' – waterway and waterside locations defined by the CRT and covering central and outer London – the project will take a mixed methods approach. It will combine qualitative and environmental survey methods (including the Canal Environment Survey <https://canals.cartographer.io>), newly developed by Wharton and Gurnell in a collaborative project with the CRT), and will include questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups undertaken with canal boat dwellers. It will also involve interviews with other key stakeholders such as CRT staff, local authority representatives, planners and policy makers, community and boating interest groups (e.g. Residential Boat Owners Association) and other canal users; and observation of and participation in key events such as canal festivals).

### Timescales (PhD)

**Year 1:** Reading and review of academic and policy/'grey' literature on transformation of London and its housing markets, canal living and linked planning and policy, place-making and home; reconnaissance of Waterway Character Areas and finalisation of study sites; progression meeting; conduct environmental surveys; produce 1<sup>st</sup> interim report for CRT. **Year 2:** main field work, including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups; transcription and preliminary analysis of materials; produce 2<sup>nd</sup> interim report for CRT. **Year 3:** completion of data analysis; help organise conference (see below); write and revise chapters for thesis; produce final report for CRT; draft one article for submission to an academic journal; submit thesis. *Note: supervisions fortnightly in year one; monthly thereafter.*

### Plans for dissemination and knowledge exchange

In addition to the PhD thesis and academic articles that result from the research, the student will:

- Have at least twice-yearly meetings with key CRT staff including the Policy, Research and Impact Team Manager, Development and Engagement Manager, Boating Strategy and Engagement Manager and the London Waterways Boating Manager and key staff at the Geffrye. Produce two annual interim reports and a final report for the CRT and present the research findings at the London Waterway Partnership Annual General Meeting which includes invited external partners. Work with the CRT media team to disseminate the findings.
- Work with CRT and QMUL to organise a one-day conference on *Urban Waterway Living and Place-Making* for professionals and academics in Year 3.

- Work with the Geffrye Museum to develop materials for a small exhibition on 'Canal Boats as Home'; and deposit research materials within the Geffrye's 'Documenting Homes' archive collection.
- Work with the QMUL Geography Schools Liaison Officer and the RGS-IBG Education team to develop learning and fieldwork materials based on the research for the 'Changing Places' theme of the new Geography A-Level.

### **Supervision and Training**

The Supervisory Committee will comprise Alastair Owens and Geraldene Wharton (School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London) with Sorwar Ahmed, London Waterway Boating Manager (Canal & River Trust) and Eleanor John, Director of Learning, Collections and Exhibitions (Geffrye Museum of the Home). In year 1, fortnightly supervisions will be held with the Queen Mary supervisors and joint monthly meetings will be held with the full supervisory team. In years 2 and 3, meetings will be held at least monthly with all supervisors.

Research training will be provided by the School of Geography at Queen Mary University of London and Further, more specialist, training will be available via the ESRC London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (a collaboration between Queen Mary, University of London, King's College London and Imperial College London). Further support and training will be provided by the project partner organisations.

The candidate will join a thriving graduate community in the School of Geography at Queen Mary and will be able to work alongside other doctoral students working on collaborative projects with external organisations, including: The Geffrye Museum of the Home, The V&A Museum of Childhood, The Bank of England and the Runnymede Trust.

### **Person Specification**

Essential skills, qualities and knowledge:

- A first class honours degree or upper second class honours (with evidence of first class work) degree in a relevant discipline.
- Knowledge of at least one of the following research areas: urban social geography, (urban) sociology, planning and urban regeneration; waterway restoration and management
- Experience of undertaking experience of undertaking qualitative and survey research, and ideally environmental survey
- Ability to work critically with secondary literature
- Ability to collaborate with the Canal & River Trust and Geffrye Museum to undertake research and to develop public engagement activities
- Ability to be self-motivated, well-organized, and to respond to constructive criticism
- Willingness to willingness to take a full part in the LISS-DTP and QMUL postgraduate communities.

Desirable skills, qualities and knowledge:

- Familiarity with scholarship on contemporary London, place making and housing and home
- Experience of interdisciplinary study or research
- Experience of organizing public engagement activities

*Please note:*

The ESRC has strict residential eligibility criteria governing the students that can be nominated for this award. If you are not a British citizen and/or not usually resident in the UK (and have not been for the past three years), please discuss this with Alastair Owens so that your eligibility can be determined. Further information on the criteria can be found on the [LISS-DTP website](#).

## **Equal opportunities**

The College Charter states that our work shall be carried out in a spirit of tolerance, freedom of opinion, mutual concern and community service, and undertakes to avoid discrimination against any person on the grounds of religion, race, sex or politics. The College has a policy statement on Equal Opportunities in Employment, which we are actively implementing.

## **Application Process**

Candidates should complete an official an ERSC LISS DTP Collaborative (CASE) [application form](#) and submit it with the following accompanying documents: a cv, academic transcript for all relevant degrees.

You should also provide two references. At least one reference should be from an academic referee who is in a position to comment on the standard of your academic work and suitability for postgraduate level study. Ideally the second reference should also be written by an academic who knows your work. Alternatively the second reference can be from a professional referee. Your referees can either submit a paper copy and post it to us, or complete it electronically and send it via email. Your referees should send their references directly to the ERSC LISS DTP at [liss-dtp@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:liss-dtp@kcl.ac.uk) **by 23 February 2018.**

To be considered for this studentship all elements of your application must be sent to [liss-dtp@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:liss-dtp@kcl.ac.uk) no later than 5pm on **Friday 23 February 2018**. All short-listed applicants will be interviewed (either face-to-face or, in the case of overseas candidates, by telephone or skype).

For an informal discussion please contact Professor Alastair Owens ([a.j.owens@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.owens@qmul.ac.uk)), 020 7882 2750.