

## Mapping the collections: oral histories of architecture in the British Library

Reference: 2025-CB-OHA

<b>Supervisor(s)</b>	Mary Stewart, Lead Curator of Oral History and Director of National Life Stories and Niamh Dillon, Project Director of Architects' Lives
<b>Team(s) and department(s)</b>	Oral History, Sound Archive
<b>Start date/timeframe</b>	Earliest start: June 2025 Latest end date: March 2026
<b>Duration</b>	<b>Three months</b> (or part-time equivalent)
<b>Part time/Full time</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Full time only <input type="checkbox"/> Part time only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full time or part time  Minimum days/week if undertaken part time: 2
<b>Location/Working arrangements</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Can only be offered on site at St Pancras <input type="checkbox"/> Can be offered as fully remote placement <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can be offered as hybrid placement (remote with some visits)
<b>Application deadline</b>	Friday 21 February 2025, 17.00 GMT

Eligibility criteria, funding information and details of how to apply are available on the British Library website: [Research collaboration - The British Library](#)

### **Context and nature of placement project**

This placement offers the opportunity to document a collection of national importance as it reaches its 30th anniversary. Architects' Lives is an oral history project which charts the architectural history of Britain from the 1930s to the present day in the words of those who shaped it. The collection's 168 life story recordings illustrate how new building forms, materials, individuals, and institutions interplayed with the altering political and social landscape. This is a unique opportunity for in-depth work with a renowned collection to help analyse its holdings and help shape its future development.

Architects' Lives is currently the largest collection of life story recordings with architects and those in associated professions and sits alongside several smaller architecture collections at the British Library. The collection comprises those who are well known such as Denys Lasdun, Peter Smithson, Jane Drew, Terry Farrell, and more recently, Allies and Morrison and Niall McLaughlin, but also those whose work is important but less known.

National Life Stories (NLS) at the British Library is the centre for oral history in the UK with a mission 'to record and preserve a wide range of voices through in-depth biographical accounts, to make them available and inspire their use.' Alongside the British Library's other oral history holdings, which stretch back to the early 20th century, NLS recordings form a unique and invaluable record of people's lives in Britain today. NLS has an active fieldwork programme and works in partnership with a range of external partners.

## Tasks and outcomes

Typical tasks and outcomes will include:

- Engage with the Architects' Lives collection of 168 recordings, alongside other smaller architecture-related oral history collections. Build a broad categorisation of the architects and practices represented in the collections (e.g. building types, time period, public vs private sector, diversity).
- Identify gaps in the collection (e.g. regional disparities, lack of coverage in certain geographical areas or areas of knowledge). The student will produce a written report of their findings, with an executive summary of key points for development.
- This will involve desk-based research, literature review and listening to recordings.
- Listen and summarise two or three original recordings and present reflections on the interview and the process of listening to the supervisory team. This will give the student experience of library standards for metadata and descriptive categories, plus building an awareness of data protection legislation and sensitivity review processes.
- Write two Sound & Vision blogs, illustrated with audio clips highlighting the findings and the value of the collection.
- Provide suggestions for new research approaches to the collection which could include identifying new architectural practices to research, and potential routes for further dissemination.

## Training and development opportunities

PhD placement students are welcome to access a wide range of workshops, talks and training available at the Library. Supervisors will offer advice on which opportunities may be of particular relevance. Depending on availability, these wider training opportunities may include, for example, the Digital Scholarship Training Programme, Cultural Property Training, Research Roundtables, Business & IP Centre workshops and staff talks.

In addition, this particular PhD placement will provide the following opportunities:

- Training provided in oral history – Introduction to Oral History course and GDPR workshop run at the BL.
- Opportunity to research and contextualise a national archival collection and have impact on its future direction.
- Present findings to the oral history team at a team meeting, and potentially one other internal forum.
- Support and mentorship provided as part of the Oral History team at the BL.
- Access to significant expertise in oral history and architectural history – through the day-to-day supervision by *Architects' Lives* Project Director Dr Niamh Dillon.
- Acquisition of skills in the catalogue requirements for oral history (metadata collection, summarising and sensitivity review).
- Opportunity to publish research on a national website (Sound & Vision blog).
- Presentation skills in explaining findings.
- The knowledge acquired may permit the student to add material from *Architects' Lives* to their ongoing PhD research, or future postdoctoral study plans.

### **Required knowledge and skills**

All applicants will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- Ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing, internally and externally
- Working knowledge of Microsoft Office applications and online meeting tools
- Ability to follow instructions and policies, in particular with regard to Health & Safety and the safe use of collections
- Ability to work effectively with others while also completing tasks independently
- Clear reasons for applying to a specific placement and good understanding of the project purpose

In addition, this specific placement project requires the following:

- Working knowledge of research techniques using archive and library catalogues
- Excellent knowledge of British social history – particularly twentieth century
- Demonstrable knowledge of architectural history in Britain post-WWII