

## Exploring working-class writing at the British Library

Reference: 2019-15-EVA

<b>Supervisor</b>	Dr Sarah Evans, Research Engagement Manager (Social Sciences and Humanities)
<b>Department, Location</b>	Research Development team – St Pancras, London
<b>Start date/timeframe</b>	September to December 2019 preferred (if full-time).
<b>Duration</b>	<b>3 months</b> (or part-time equivalent). For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of <b>2.5 days/week</b> on site at the Library.
<b>Remote-working</b>	Full-time candidates would be required to spend 3.5 days on site at the BL per week. Part-time candidates would ideally spend 2.5 days on site per week.
<b>Context for placement</b>	
<p>As the national Library the British Library has a responsibility to represent the diversity of lives and experiences within the UK. This research project will contribute to a wider movement within the Library to ensure that our research and engagement reflects and attracts people of different backgrounds, disrupting previously accepted hierarchies and creating space for conversations about the power dynamics inherent within the production and consumption of culture. The upcoming exhibition on Women’s History and Rights, the recent exhibitions on Windrush (2018) and Gay UK (2017) and smaller projects such as PhD Placements on BAME Publishing and Housing Activism, as well as the BSA Postdoctoral Fellowship (along with many other pieces of research across the Library), have contributed to this wider momentum.</p> <p>Recent research by <a href="#">Dave O’Brien</a> and colleagues (2016) using Labour Force Survey Data estimated that almost half of all authors, writers and translators come from middle-class backgrounds. Publishing as an industry has been identified as almost exclusively upper-middle class. There are questions about how the wider cultural industry (including public cultural institutions such as the British Library) play a role in determining in/equality and access within writing and publishing. Informed by this research and wider academic research about working-class writers, the PhD Placement will help show the British Library’s role in capturing and making available working-class writing. The PhD Placement will support the exposure of less well-known working-class writers and their output, helping to demonstrate the literary and cultural importance of this work for the wider knowledge and cultural economies.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Research Development</a> team plays a role in ensuring that the research the British Library undertakes reflects wider society and has broad relevance. This Placement will complement ongoing work within the Research Development team to take an inclusive look at our collections, ensuring that our research and research outputs represent wider society. More specifically, Sarah Evans has a research background in working-class studies, publishing on social class in published edited collections and peer-reviewed articles and online.</p>	
<b>Expected tasks and outcomes</b>	
<p>There are two parts to this PhD Placement. The first is to undertake research on UK-based working-class writers and fiction/autobiography in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The research will involve locating the works of working-class writers and potentially linking their published output to their personal archives (which may be held at the British Library or elsewhere).</p> <p>It will involve looking beyond those working-class writers who are most well-known and best represented at the BL (such as Alan Sillitoe, Shelagh Delany, Barry Hines) to draw out material by less-well known writers, or perhaps those who have not been historically identified as ‘working-class’ because other aspects of their identity have been in focus. Drawing on their own knowledge, the Student will help determine the boundaries of what we mean by published working-class writing, fiction and autobiography and will help set the scope for this project. They may choose to</p>	

focus on traditional publishing or look at self-publishing in print and/or online. If they decide to look at online content there may be the possibility of curating a collection of archived websites for use as a resource by Library users.

The Student will write a series of [blog](#) posts on their research experience and findings, to highlight the process of research at the British Library and expose the range of lives and experiences that can be explored using British Library collections. The will be encouraged to develop an online presence to connect with working-class writers, performers, academics, activists, publishers and other potentially interested audiences.

The second part of this Placement will be to apply the knowledge gleaned from exploring this content to examine the question, 'Can working-class fiction be thought of as class activism?' The Student will use their academic skills in research and analysis to begin to research this question, if appropriate, the Student might present their findings on the [Archiving Activism](#) website (WordPress), in a new section. The Student will be encouraged to use their findings to develop and build their own academic portfolio, and will be supported to draft an article for peer-review to submit to relevant academic journals, which could include the [Electronic British Library Journal](#).

The Student will be given the opportunity to present their work to different audiences – internally at the British Library and externally, perhaps via an event or podcast which will be uploaded to the British Library SoundCloud system. If relevant, they will be encouraged to make contact relevant writers and activists in this field, or indeed publishers who have published the work of working-class authors.

They will be offered the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a public event with the Cultural Programming Team at the British Library. There may be the possibility of organising a workshop for working-class writers to inform them about the BL and how their work can be made available.

#### **Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement**

The Student will become part of the Research Development Team, a small dynamic team with the remit to support research across the British Library.

The student will:

- Develop their understanding of a world-class research library, its content, its structure and its remit which may add value to their future research career.
- Apply their skills and knowledge to a different mode of work, producing outputs of relevance to a public audience which also have strategic value for the British Library
- Develop their skills in working with others; the student will be supported within the RD team but will work with curators and other colleagues across the British Library
- Develop their skills in stakeholder engagement and communication, producing outputs for curatorial staff, the wider public and the academic community
- Be given the opportunity to develop ideas for a public event, developing skills in events planning and delivery
- Develop skills in writing for the web, sourcing images and other appropriate content
- Be supported to contact academics and writers in this field, for consultation and advice
- Develop their understanding of research using archival materials, including online research content

#### **Required knowledge and skills**

- Research background or demonstrable understanding of some or all of the following: British social class, class and culture, working-class writers/literature/autobiography, cultural studies, literary theory, class activism
- Able to work independently, using own initiative
- A high level of IT literacy
- An open approach and willingness to share ideas
- Strong skills in communicating, both in writing and verbally

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>