

Doctoral Researchers

Below is a sample of some of the doctoral research being undertaken by current PhD students in the Centre for Modern and Contemporary History.

Amy Edwards: The Naturalisation of Neo-Liberalism: Thatcher and British Culture 1975-90

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My research as a postgraduate at the University of Birmingham concerns the cultural atmosphere of the Thatcher era. In particular I am researching how notions of the welfare state came to be seen as outmoded and politically unworkable, and how they were replaced by neoliberalism as a dominant socio-economic and political concept. I will soon be starting a PhD in Contemporary British History on a thesis which follows on from my research as an MA student.

Since 1945 British politics were somewhat characterised by social democratic policies such as extensive welfare programmes and the pursuit of full employment. However, during the 1970s a series of economic 'crises' resulted in mass strikes and an alarming rate of inflation and high unemployment. These crises were used by Margaret Thatcher to form a narrative which condemned the 'socialist' policies of the Left as illogical and dangerous. The crises of the 1970s became, in Thatcher's version of events, a crisis of Keynesianism. This narrative helped Thatcher win the 1979 election. She remained in government for the next decade

During her time as Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher oversaw a series of policies which moved British politics and economics away from social democratic notions of a welfare state and towards the right of the political spectrum. This political and economic shift was also accompanied by a social and cultural shift towards a more overtly capitalist society based on the neoliberal values of free-market capitalism and individualism.

My research aims to uncover the ways in which the Thatcher government sought to encourage this cultural shift and created an 'enterprise culture' in Britain during the 1980s. My MA dissertation has focused on the role of advertising and how the Conservative Party used marketing to sell themselves and their neoliberal ideology. This makes use of two case studies: Saatchi & Saatchi's role in the 1979 General Election campaign, and the marketing campaign preceding the sale of British Telecom in 1984. In my PhD thesis, I hope to look at other areas of culture in which Thatcher's neoliberal message was disseminated, including, education, the printed press, television, and literature.

The University of Birmingham is the perfect place for me to carry out my research. Because the School of History and Cultures promotes taking an interdisciplinary approach to research I can draw upon the academic expertise of historians, sociologists, economists amongst many others. There are also fantastic resources at the University such as access to an extensive online network of journals and archives. Just as importantly, I really enjoy being part of the postgraduate community here which is active, welcoming and is great for meeting other students.

Andrew Jones: Humanitarian NGOs and the Media 1961-1985.

My work looks at the recent history of British humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many of which are household names—Oxfam, Save the Children, or the Red Cross, for example. My specific interest is in how these organisations have undertaken interventions in response to major overseas humanitarian "disasters", and how these interventions have been depicted in the mass media.

I focus on the period 1961–1985 which covers a wide variety of humanitarian emergencies, beginning with the Congo Crisis in early 1961 and ending with the popular Live Aid phenomenon in July 1985. The leading NGOs underwent huge changes in this period, growing from small, amateur bodies into professionalised, international organisations with large resources, global interests and genuine influence.

My research answer questions such as

- What is the nature of the relationship between these NGOs and the media - have NGOs have been able to shape news media reporting and discourses, or have they followed the media's lead?
- How have NGOs and the state interacted during disasters - and has media coverage of humanitarianism been able to influence official policymaking?
- How have NGO approaches to disaster relief related to wider discourses of 'development'?

The Centre's staff have been advancing research in NGOs for several years; my PhD supervisor, Professor Matthew Hilton, has played a key role in these initiatives, and my research largely aligns with his interests. Birmingham is therefore an ideal location for my research, as I can draw on the experience, expertise and research of these projects and individuals. Working under the umbrella of the Centre also provides me opportunities to work alongside a wide variety of excellent faculty members and postgraduates with similar transnational interests. I first encountered many of the themes my PhD explores during my MA in Contemporary History, one of the major postgraduate programmes offered by the Centre. The incorporation of staff from Birmingham's [Centre of West African Studies](#) ([/schools/historycultures/departments/dasa/index.aspx](#)) (CWAS) has also proved very useful for my research, as many have similar interests in humanitarianism and the discourses of 'development'.

Daisy Payling: Activism in Sheffield 1970-1990

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[Transcript \(/accessibility/transcripts/artsandlaw/history/daisy-payling.aspx\)](#)

My research focuses on social and political activism and activist networks in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s. I'm looking at how old social movements, like the trade union and labour movement, and new social movements, such as feminism and the CND, crossed over at a local level and how the participants in such movements

interacted with each other and the local council. The general idea is to track Sheffield's activism in this period, look at how this is relevant on a national level, and to show how new social movements should not be looked at as an isolated phenomenon, but as movements developing alongside other types of movements and local politics.

I've been at the University of Birmingham for five years. I did my undergraduate degree in English and History here, then the MA in Contemporary History – which prepared me well for the PhD I started in 2011, supervised by Professor Matthew Hilton. Birmingham is a great place to study contemporary history as there are many faculty members and post-grads working on similar themes which creates a good research atmosphere. Faculty members have also been very supportive of our growing post-grad community, and of the journal and workshop group we run within the School of History and Cultures.

I was also a research assistant on the [Stories of Activism Project \(http://storiesofactivism.group.shef.ac.uk/\)](http://storiesofactivism.group.shef.ac.uk/). My involvement included:

- conducting a scoping study on activism in Sheffield which included a database of over 300 known activist organisations in Sheffield from 1950s till now.
- facilitating a workshop which was attended by activists to develop ideas around what activism, particularly in Sheffield, constitutes. This workshop enabled activists to guide the focus and progress of the project in the future onto elderly and ethnic minority activists.

I worked with academics from the University of Sheffield on this project, and met and worked with many of the activists involved in my own research.

Jamie Perry: Total Diplomacy? NGOs and Britain's Search for a World Role

My PhD looks at the role non-state actors played in foreign policy in Britain c.1945-1973.

In March 1950, the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced a campaign to establish 'total diplomacy' in which all government departments – with media support – would coordinate their efforts against the Soviet threat. In Britain, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (a.k.a. Chatham House) argued that in order to realise the full potential of such a policy, akin to 'total war', it had to concern each individual man and woman. In democratic nations, it was the duty of NGOs such as Chatham House, to enlighten and engage the public in all aspects of foreign policy, provide the conscience of governments and become diplomats in their own right as transnational actors.

My work assesses the extent to which Britain exercised this 'total diplomacy'; more specifically, NGOs' involvement in British attempts to reconcile itself with the post-1945 world order. I refer to a broad array of sources from across government, political parties, private papers, the media and, of course, the NGOs themselves. My research was much inspired by my time as an assistant researcher on the [NGOs in Britain Project \(http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/\)](http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/) (co-directed by my supervisor [Nicholas Crowson \(/staff/profiles/history/crowson-nicholas.aspx\)](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2011.599641)), along with an [article I authored in Diplomacy and Statecraft \(http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2011.599641\)](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2011.599641), which in part examined the role of non-state actors in the British relationship with China, 1937-1939.

The School of History and Cultures possesses a very friendly, approachable and extremely helpful staff with a broad array of expertise. It also has a vibrant postgraduate community that enables PhD students – from within the university and outside it – to discuss their research with one another on a regular basis. The Birmingham History and Cultures Workshop, for instance, provides opportunities to arrange academic sessions such as its seminar series which I co-head. These factors have been a tremendous aid during my studies, ensuring them to be both stimulating and enjoyable.

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