

CAL Undergraduate Research Scholarships Scheme 2017
Project Proposal Form

Project Proposer/s:	Dr Malcolm Dick
School/Dept:	History and Cultures/ Department of History
Project Title:	James Watt 2019
Project Summary	

The School of History and Cultures is running a project on the life, times and significance of the inventor, industrialist and Enlightenment thinker, James Watt (1736-1819), who worked in the Birmingham area with his business partner Matthew Boulton for most of his adult life. The project is linked to the 200th anniversary of Watt's death in 2019. Though Watt provides the focus, the project moves beyond the celebration of a 'great man' to look broadly at his context, impact and legacy. Led by Malcolm Dick, it is intended that the project will form part of History's contribution to the next Research Evaluation Framework in 2020. The website: www.jameswatt2019.org provides an introduction to activity so far. Much of the work involves activity with heritage organisations including Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) and the Library of Birmingham (LoB). The research conducted by the successful applicant will also connect to a new Arts Council funded BMT project, 'Birmingham Manufacturers' <http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/blog/posts/birmingham-museums-trust-shines-a-spotlight-on-birmingham-manufacturers?category=press-release> which is exploring and cataloguing objects to illuminate Birmingham's industrial history. Hence the research not only contributes to important university research, but also links to widening public knowledge of Watt and his times through the Museum.

Two of the important areas on which we lack knowledge are the nature of the workforce which constructed the Boulton and Watt steam engines and the type of work they pursued. It is envisaged that the successful applicant will conduct initial research into this area, beginning with relevant but limited secondary material, but primarily focussing on documentary and visual material in the Boulton and Watt Archives at LoB. This work will feed into the new interpretation of the oldest working steam engine, the Smethwick Engine, which is located at ThinkTank (a branch of BMT) at Millennium Point, as well as extending our knowledge of the skills and knowledge of the workers who made steam engines. Jo-Ann Curtis, the History Curator at BMT describes the research which the successful student will pursue as 'hugely beneficial to the Museum'. Depending upon how much time is available, you will also have the opportunity to gain experience of working with museum collections, and identifying Watt material which requires cataloguing.

It is envisaged that you will provide some insights and pointers to further investigation. Some of these results, however, may be presented in two publications, edited by Malcolm Dick on James Watt to be published in 2018 or 2019. If so, the work of the student will be fully acknowledged in the publications.

What the researcher will do

- Meet regularly with Malcolm Dick to plan the scope of the project and review progress.
- Review and summarise secondary literature on Boulton and Watt steam engines to find out what has been written about the work and workforce which created steam engines in general and, especially, the Smethwick Engine.
- Conduct primary research at the LoB to create a database of information about work and the workforce behind the creation of the steam engine.
- Write a summary of the findings of the project (length to be determined) for www.jameswatt2019.org and add any other information to the website which is deemed necessary, including your profile as a researcher.
- Meet with Jo-Ann Curtis and her team at the start of the project and at the end, to discuss how the research can connect with 'Birmingham Manufacturers'.
- Work, as appropriate, with collections at BMT.
- Possibly contribute a short talk, if you so wish, on your work at a public day school, Birmingham History Day in November 2017.
- Possibly write an article of about 2,000 words for the Revolutionary Players website: www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk (an additional payment of £100 will be provided for this work by the publisher of the website).
- The nature of the work conducted is flexible and it will be possible for the student researcher to pursue

themes which interest them as long as the research connects with the overall aims of James Watt2019.

Skills required by the Scholarship holder

- An interest in eighteenth and early nineteenth century history and/or industrial history and/or the history of Birmingham and the West Midlands.
- Good written communication skills.
- Experience in working with archives and primary sources or a willingness to engage with these materials.
- An ability to construct a relevant database of information and write material for a website.
- An ability to work independently and set short-term goals, but with support guidance from Malcolm Dick.

How will your Project benefit the Scholarship holder?

- Developing research skills by using archival material which will support year three dissertation work and possible future postgraduate study if you want to pursue this aim.
- Contributing via www.jameswatt2019.org as a named researcher and author to a major University of Birmingham Project.
- Working with curators to understand the needs and activities of heritage organisations and developing cataloguing skills. This will help to support a possible future career in the heritage sector, if you wish to follow this route.
- Pursuing possible opportunities to present research findings to a wide audience at Birmingham History Day and to write an extended article for www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk
- Having an opportunity to attend events connected with James Watt in 2017 and 2018.
- Building the content of your CV.

How will the Scholarship benefit your Project?

- Contributing to both the research outputs and impact activities of the James Watt 2019 project via publications, websites and engagement with heritage organisations.
- Adding to an understanding of a little understood subject, the nature of work and the activities of the workforce who manufactured and assembled steam engines.