

# Right Up My Street: A place-based approach to the cultural heritage dimension of street names



WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award based in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Sheffield, with Sheffield City Council

## Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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## Project summary

Street names communicate place-based legacies of power and civic identity. This project will examine colonial legacies of street names by exploring the interdisciplinary heritage context of street naming and examining responses to contested street names. It will develop a theoretical and methodological framework for the study of street names as cultural heritage, advance a strategy for communicating their heritage value and generate implementable objectives for policymakers.

The successful student will work with cultural heritage specialists at the University of Sheffield and Sheffield City Council (SCC). They will also join Roots and Futures - a place-based project which aims to elevate the voices of people underserved by heritage policy and practice in Sheffield. The partnership will

include an extended placement with the SCC Economy, Skills and Culture department, to explore ways of communicating street name legacy in Sheffield.

### **PhD Project description**

The naming of streets after historical figures and events reflects a complex legacy of nation-building, perceptions of the past and a sense of civic identity that draws directly upon place-based cultural heritage. In the 21st century, communities and institutions of governance across the globe are engaging more deeply with colonial legacies of street naming. Social justice activism has brought about a reckoning with cultural legacies that valorise and celebrate colonisers (Holtorf and Högberg 2020) and citizen activism has brought into sharp focus the destructive legacies of who and what was chosen to immortalise in our urban landscapes - a situation for which the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol has become emblematic. Compared to statues (Massing 2021) and street art (Mokak 2017), street names have received comparatively little attention, yet are the most ubiquitous way in which celebration of colonial heritages is perpetuated in public spaces.

This project will:

- characterise the significance of street names as cultural assets
- undertake a critical interdisciplinary exploration of the heritage context of street names using an intersectional approach which centres racial marginalisation and colonial legacy
- examine four international case studies (including Sheffield) to assess how cities have responded to colonial legacies in street names
- create a theoretical and methodological framework for civic responses to street names which perpetuate colonial legacies
- Through a placement with SCC, work with key public and governance stakeholders to advance and deliver a strategy for responding to, and communicating, the colonial heritage of street names in Sheffield, thereby obtaining experience in local government policymaking, project management and collaborative working

A tailored theoretical and methodological framework for the study of street name evidence will be developed through critical study of interdisciplinary research and four international case studies (Sheffield, and three of the student's choosing). The political dimensions of toponymic commemoration have already been explored by social scientists (e.g. Oto-Peralías 2017) and the UN has created value-based criteria for geographic names as heritage. This includes their ability to create a sense of belonging and "capacity to clearly embody a cultural, geographical, historical, social or other reality that is specific

to the place and an essential component of local, regional or national identity" (UNGEN X/3).

Case studies will examine street names as an element of contested colonial cultural heritage in city spaces. Street names will be critically viewed as both an intangible and tangible heritage archive, with attendant attention to questions of preservation and representation in relation to their removal or change.

This enquiry will be rooted in cultural heritage discourse and frameworks of felt experience and place (Madgin 2021). The placement with SCC will build upon the research by offering the student the opportunity to design a strategy that reflects colonial histories embodied in Sheffield street names in ways that acknowledge and communicate their significance. The successful candidate will have freedom to develop a placement output that suits their interests, for example delivering a prototype communication strategy (e.g. QR codes, VR environment, creative or artistic outputs) or focusing on policy-based advocacy with SCC.

### **About Sheffield City Council**

Sheffield City Council is the local authority for the City of Sheffield. They provide approximately 550 services to a population of more than half a million people and are a major employer in the city, with more than 8,000 employees.

This project builds upon two key reports produced by SCC in the past three years, providing them with a deeper evidence base for the work and new opportunities to deliver key outcomes. In 2021, a report on colonial legacies in their cultural holdings concluded that "the Council needs to develop a policy for how representation and [street] naming is managed in the future" (Skelton et al. 2021: 8.0). This project will build an intellectual and methodological context for this work within the framework of cultural heritage studies. In 2022 SCC published a Race Equality Commission report. This project will deliver part of this high-priority social and governance project for the city, in particular speaking to action 29b "... to devise and implement a strategic approach to ensure that Sheffield's history is both accurately told ... and is also representative of Sheffield's rich diversity".

Through supervision embedded within the Council, the successful candidate will be able to work alongside key teams in Culture and Heritage, Highways and the Sheffield City Archives, and meet with Councillors who make policy decisions in this area.

The placement with SCC Economy, Skills and Culture department will develop a strategy for delivery of the recommendations from the cultural holdings report. It will include archival research into Sheffield street names, working across multiple teams to produce an evidentiary and advisory report for

decision makers and delivery of a heritage intervention for street names in Sheffield.

### **Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives**

This project will require collaboration, public engagement and dissemination tailored to maximise the impact on local government policy and benefits to society. These will provide the student with extensive experience of knowledge exchange and the partner with an immediate benefit.

The project will include a small number of public consultation and outreach events with residents of streets identified for heritage interventions. The successful student will be able to work alongside Sheffield-based multimedia artist Dr Yuen Fong Ling, who was a contributor to the Sheffield report and is specialist in colonial legacies in public art. The Sheffield City Archives have agreed to support primary research into Sheffield street names and archive reports from the Sheffield-focused parts of the project.

Should the student decide to focus on the ways in which histories behind street names can be communicated, a prototype of their delivery method (e.g. QR codes, VR environment) will be developed and impact measured during their placement.

There will be varied opportunities to communicate this research beyond academia. A public talk is planned as part of the 2026 Migration Matters Festival (PhD month 18). A report on the project findings and placement outcomes will be presented to Sheffield City Council during the last 6 months enabling the legacy of the research to be directly implemented.

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### **Financial support**

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2024; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a maintenance grant (£18,622 in 2023/24). The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of Sheffield for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time by the terms of their visa.

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## Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Distinction at Master's degree (or be working towards one) and/or professional experience relevant to the scope of the project. The supervisory team welcomes applications based on professional experience equivalent to the stated academic qualifications and candidates with lived experience of relevance to the topic.

## Requirements of the Studentship

WROCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and to engage with Internationalisation.

All WROCAH students must submit their thesis for examination within the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WROCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

Before applying for any WROCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WROCAH webpages about the WROCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>

## How to apply

By 12 noon Wednesday 6 March 2024, applicants are required to submit to WROCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

*The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:*

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.

- How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
- How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.

Applications must be submitted via [this Expression of Interest form](#).

- 15 March 2024: decision on short-listing. The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Friday 15 March 2024.

- *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.* If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of Sheffield. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.

- Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024: interviews

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

**For more information about this project contact**

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