

## Project Proposal



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council

### SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Native Ground. Moses Roper, Fugitive abolitionist; emancipatory activism, anti-slavery radicalism and Print Culture in Wales		
Project Summary: (Maximum 100 words)	The project examines an unstudied aspect of black history and literary culture, namely the emancipatory writing and activism of Moses Roper, the first African-American fugitive to flee to the UK and publish his autobiography there. It considers the ways in which Roper laid the groundwork for an emancipatory politics and grass-roots activism given shape by national and regional contexts, and by tapping into non-conformist religious networks rather than organized anti-slavery. As significantly, it examines how Roper mobilized the Welsh and English language press in his campaigning, and how therefore black fugitive writing took shape and went native within Welsh print culture.		
Name of non-HE Partner Organisation:	Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/National Library of Wales		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Dr Owain Rhys Roberts	Email Address:	<a href="mailto:Owain.Roberts@llyfrgell.cymru">Owain.Roberts@llyfrgell.cymru</a>
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	English Language and Literature		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if <b>Interdisciplinary</b> ):	History		
Does the project Include a creative practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
If you have listed two subject areas above, do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p><b>If Yes, please briefly state why:</b></p> <p>This Black Atlantic project lies on the interface of literary and historical studies. It will require the student to undertake archival research and to use history methodologies to establish the facts of Roper's life, and the history of his activism. This work will provide the underpinnings of the literary studies analysis, which will examine the writing itself within a complex historical framework that includes North America and the UK, and moves across English and Welsh languages. It will attend to issues including narrative form, publishing history, literary translation, the epistolary, and newspapers and periodicals as vehicles of black writing.</p> <p>(Maximum 100 words):</p>			
<p><b>Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:</b></p> <p>(Maximum 750 words)</p>			
<p><b>Case for Support:</b></p> <p>Black writer and anti-slavery activist Moses Roper is the foundation stone of radical fugitive history in the UK. He published the first edition of his autobiography, <i>Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery</i> in London in 1837. Before 1865, the UK was an important site of black abolitionist activity, part of a transatlantic circuit operated by African-American fugitives and campaigners seeking fundamental political change. It was also an important base for literary activism, with at least 50 slave narratives published there, and</p>			

extensive coverage of the lectures and letters of fugitives in the UK press. Roper lectured widely, providing personal and eyewitness accounts of cruelties, torture and lasting trauma of the experience of enslavement. But unlike many of his African-American compatriots who had established links to American anti-slavery, returned to the United States after their transatlantic sojourn, and had strong support from African-American family and community, Roper to all intents and purposes went native. He married a white woman in 1839, eventually settling with his family in Wales. He is exceptional therefore in that he crosses over between English and Welsh language communities, and in using English and Welsh language print culture as vehicles of emancipatory activism.

‘Native Ground’ will provide the first sustained address of Roper’s life and writing. It will produce a critical study of the UK as an environment for black self-emancipatory writing in the antebellum period and situate that writing within majority (English) and minority (Welsh) language communities, disclosing the liberating effects for black subjects of minority language communities. Roper’s relationship with Wales allows an unfolding of more nuanced understandings of how the fugitive category ‘blackness’ was invented, understood and written about, and how the deep roots of black life and history established themselves differentially in minority language narratives and in British print culture more generally.

#### **Research questions:**

1. What role did Moses Roper play in establishing practices of fugitive writing and anti-slavery activism within British print culture and across minority and majority languages?
2. What does Roper’s publishing and lecturing career in Wales reveal about the formation and maintenance of literary and political networks?
3. Why did Roper use non-conformist religious networks rather than those of established anti-slavery as the basis of his activism?
4. What role did religious non-conformism play in establishing radical links between Wales, England, Scotland, the US and Canada?
5. How does a full understanding of Roper’s family life in Wales reshape our understanding of black history in Britain?
6. What are the methodological and archival challenges and opportunities attending the study of black self-emancipation in the UK in the antebellum period, and how can they be practically addressed?

#### **Methodology:**

This project addresses Roper’s significant presence in British and in particular Welsh linguistic, community and print culture, and his significant absence from Black Atlantic and Black British literary and historical scholarship. It has two distinct methodological components:

1. Primary archival and database research which will involve locating and collating source material including newspaper reports of publications, lectures and other public appearances, responses from individuals and the general public to Roper’s performances, and book reviews, and additionally private correspondence, accounting ledgers, and ephemera. This will provide the basis of the critical work, and the benefit to the partner detailed in 1b, 2b and 3b below.
2. An analytical framework that draws on Paul Gilroy’s ‘Black Atlantic’, but moves beyond approaches that privilege majority languages, urban or metropolitan environments, and established anti-slavery and place black subjects outside family and communal contexts. The PhD’s critical framework will relocate Roper within circles of kinship and social networks particular to his Welsh context, consider the effects of ‘translation’ of both the person and the work into a minority language, and move deliberately towards theorizing an idea of diaspora rooted in the local, the rural and the village.

#### **Benefit to National Library of Wales:**

- 1b. The NLW holds rare copies of Roper’s Welsh *Narrative* in its Special Collections. During the course of the PhD, the student will produce an annotated and digitized version of both Welsh editions, with an English translation, and including an introductory essay providing their publication and translation history and details of Roper’s life in Wales.
- 2b. The student will research and catalogue as yet uncollated material by Roper and his family or pertaining to Roper and links to slavery and anti-slavery in the period before emancipation from the Library archive and special collections.
- 3b. The student will curate an online exhibition of materials uncovered during the course of the PhD pertaining to black history in Wales, to include reflection on the challenges and opportunities of the archive in recovering black history.

**Please outline the arrangements for communication between the partner organisation and academic host organisation in regard of the project management and the monitoring of academic progress:**

(Maximum 150 words)

At the outset of the PhD, the supervisory and advisory team will meet to agree objectives, milestones for the completion of the project and a timeline for their achievement. Meetings of the team and the student will be arranged three times a year to provide updates on progress towards milestones, read all work produced, address any presenting difficulties or emerging training needs. Given environmental concerns about travel and the pandemic, these will be held electronically. Supervisors and advisors will also maintain informal contact so that the benefits to the NLW and the progress of the research can be carefully balanced.

**What benefits will accrue to the student and the partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?**

(Maximum 300 words)

**Benefit to student:**

The student will benefit by having direct access to special collections and archives held at the National Library of Wales, from being able to engage with the research material in its local context and by direct support provided by Dr Douglas Jones and Dr Owain Rhys Roberts. This will include in-house support for cataloguing and digitization activities, and the opportunity to work with the Library on public engagement activities. The student will undertake a major editorial and digitization project, a cataloguing project, and curate an exhibition, all of which will help build their cv, provide them with important skills and training, and prepare them for the non-academic as well as academic job-market.

**Benefit to Partner:**

The NLW will benefit directly because on of its important and rare black Welsh literature holdings, the two versions of Roper's Welsh *Narrative*, will be annotated and digitized, with an English translation, and including an introductory essay providing their publication and translation history and details of Roper's life in Wales. This will be an important addition to the Library's 'Theatre of Memory', a digitization project that emphasizes the richness and diversity of Welsh history.

The student will also research and catalogue as yet uncollated material by Roper and his family or pertaining to Roper and links to slavery and anti-slavery in the period before emancipation from the Library archive and special collections, providing the Library with a new finding aid directed specifically at facilitating further research in this area.

The student will curate an online exhibition of materials uncovered during the course of the PhD pertaining to black history in Wales, to include reflection on the challenges and opportunities of the archive in recovering black history, thereby contributing to the Library's ongoing programme of public engagement.

**Please briefly state what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the partner will be making over the duration of the award:**

The National Library of Wales will provide in-kind contribution. It will provide desk space and computer access at the NLW for the duration of the award. The student will have full access to the library collections, including special collections and manuscripts. They will have research finding support, support for digitization and cataloguing activities, and assistance with Welsh language material if necessary.

**Please describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the student will be taking with the organisation:**

(Maximum 300 words)

The collaborative arrangement will involve the student undertaking extensive archival and library research primarily at the National Library of Wales and supervised in that work on a day-to-day basis by staff there, along with regular supervision sessions and oversight by the supervisory team at Newcastle University. Much of the work will involve examining the two Welsh editions of Roper's narrative and conducting further archival research in the holdings of NLW in order to produce the research outputs as described elsewhere in this application. The NLW will provide advice and ad hoc training in order for the student to understand the sources in their broader context. The student will also have the opportunity to work closely with bibliographers, cataloguers, and archivists at NLW to collate relevant material discovered in the course of the research to create resources for future library users interested in the black literary history of Wales, anti-slavery in Wales, and related topics. The student will, in consultation with relevant experts at NLW, develop online exhibition materials and also digital editions of the Welsh versions of the *Narrative*.

## SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Fionnghuala Sweeney	School/Department:	English Literature, Language and Linguistics
Second Supervisor:	Bruce Baker	School/Department:	History, Classics and Archaeology

Additional Advisor:	Dr Owain Rhys Roberts	Organisation/Institution:	National Library of Wales
Additional Advisor:	Dr Douglas Jones	Organisation/Institution:	National Library of Wales

**Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisors will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected student:**

(Maximum 500 words)

Dr. Fionnghuala Sweeney is an expert on slave narratives in the United Kingdom, author of *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (2007), and co-editor of *Liberating Sojourns? African Americans and Transatlantic Reform, 1845-1865* (2012) and *Ireland, Slavery, Anti-slavery, Empire* (2016). She is a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of American Studies* and the Liverpool University Press FORECAST series in African American Studies. Sweeney also has a range of other publications on the Harlem Renaissance, and British and Irish literature and the Black Atlantic. She is interested in the ways in which the slave narrative crosses language boundaries and has published on the only Spanish-language slave narrative, that of Juan Francisco Manzano. She has supervised five PhDs to completion, three of which were interdisciplinary projects jointly supervised by cultural anthropologists and historians. She is currently supervising four PhDs on American and transatlantic literature. <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/elli/staff/profile/fionnghualasweeney.html#background>

Dr. Bruce E. Baker is a wide-ranging scholar on the history of the United States in the nineteenth century, with a particular focus on the American South, publishing several books and many articles on topics including racial violence and oral traditions. Baker is currently supervising two Northern Bridge-funded PhD students. He has served as external examiner on a PhD at the University of Leicester (2014), and was external examiner for American history at Queen Mary, University of London (2014-2016). <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/hca/staff/profile/brucebaker.html#background>

Roberts and Jones will act as the advisory team at the National Library of Wales. Roberts is Director of Collections and Public Programmes and will oversee the development and implementation of the cataloguing and digitization of material from the collections, and the public-facing elements of the project. Jones is an historian and Digitization Programme Manager at the NLW, and has extensive experience in digitization of the Library's collections. He will provide assistance in accessing material, support and training in exhibiting and digitizing Library material, and with cataloguing. Roberts and Jones are Welsh speakers and will provide support with Welsh language material.

The student will build on engagement work already done and in process by Sweeney, Baker, Roberts and Jones. Sweeney and Baker have recently published a scholarly article on Moses Roper (2020) and have another in press. In addition to providing supervisory experience to enable the student to put the results of her or his research into the broader contexts of transatlantic literature and history, they will be able to use their own research on Roper to connect the findings of the student's research with the whole of Roper's life both before and after the period he spent in Wales. With connections to international communities of American history and literature scholars in Britain, Europe, and the United States, the supervisory team will also be able to help the student look beyond the completion of the PhD project and consider how best to develop a longer term research and publication agenda.

### SECTION 3: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

**Please provide details about the research environment the selected student will be joining and its suitability:**

(Maximum 500 words)

The School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics (SELL), and History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) at Newcastle HCA provide a strong research environment, with a record of successful PGR training and completion. HCA has an Americanist cluster, which includes Dr. Ben Houston (Civil Rights history), Prof. Susan-Mary Grant (US Civil War history) and Dr Jane Webster (Black Atlantic archaeology) as well as Baker. Historians of nineteenth-century British radicalism relevant to the PhD project proposal include Dr. Joan Allen and Dr. Matt Perry. Likewise, SELL, where the student will be based, has a strong Americanist and Black Atlantic cluster. This includes in addition to Sweeney Dr Hannah Durkin, (African American literature and film), Prof Neelam Srivastava (Post-colonial print culture), and Professor James Procter (Black British literature). SELL also has a strong research cluster focusing on nineteenth-century studies (Dr Ella Mershon, Dr Jacob Jewusiak, Dr Kirsten McLeod and Dr Ella Dzelainis).

Both SELL and HCA have a thriving community of PGRs. In HCA, there is a dedicated PG lunchtime weekly seminar series, and an annual PG conference, both of which are organised and run by the postgraduates themselves through the Postgraduate Forum (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/subjects/history>). SELL also has a postgraduate student research culture network, and organizes a seminar series, and PGRs organize a seminar series and an annual conference. This is in addition to individual seminar series run annually by the departments of Literature and History, and which emphasize a diverse programme representing the research interests of the departments. In SELL, the annual Literature seminar series includes one speaker nominated by PGRs

The faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences also supports and funds nominated cross faculty research groups. Of particular relevance to the project is the Post-colonial Research Group, which covers research in colonial, postcolonial, black Atlantic, and African-American and Caribbean studies, as well as studies in contemporary migration and social justice.

## SECTION 4: STUDENT SPECIFICATION

**For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:**

<b>Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)</b>	Fionnghuala Sweeney	<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:Fionnghuala.Sweeney@ncl.ac.uk">Fionnghuala.Sweeney@ncl.ac.uk</a>
<b>Expressions of interest must be received no later than:</b>		01/02/2021	
<b>Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation:</b>		A letter of application making a case for the individual's suitability for the project. A personal statement explaining their interest in the project and the subject matter. A two page cv.	
<b>Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:</b>		Week commencing 22/02/2021	

## APPLICANT SPECIFICATION

***Note, applicants must also meet the criteria for the acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service.***

<b>Education and Professional Qualifications</b>	Essential Criteria	MA in English Literature, History, American Studies, Celtic Studies or a cognate discipline.
	Desirable Criteria	Undergraduate degree in English Literature, History, American Studies or Celtic Studies. Written or spoken knowledge of Welsh.
<b>Research and Impact Experience and Training</b>	Essential Criteria	Completion of a piece of independent supervised research at undergraduate or graduate level, or peer reviewed publications.
	Desirable Criteria	Interest in community engagement and commitment to actively pursuing an inclusive agenda. Experience of and/or training in impact.
<b>Professional Practice and Job-related Experience</b>	Essential Criteria	Experience of working in the education, voluntary (non-profit), state or related sectors. Experience working in a team. Experience of working independently. Willingness to undertake training in digital humanities skills.
	Desirable Criteria	Experience of translation, skills in digitization, cataloguing or exhibitions.
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	Essential Criteria	Strong written communication skills. Strong written communication skills. Ability to engage sensitively with a diverse range of people and histories.
	Desirable Criteria	
<b>Other Factors</b>	Essential Criteria	Willingness to undertake some Welsh language training if the candidate has no previous knowledge of Welsh.

	Desirable Criteria	
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