

Project Reference: CTE_BBRC_Chris_Cowell_001_25_26

About the Project

This is an exciting PhD opportunity within the College of Technology and Environment (CTE) at London South Bank University (LSBU). The successful candidate will receive a tuition fee waiver beginning in September 2025 for 4 years, including the write-up year.

Project Title

Britain in Asia, Asia in Britain: Architectural Legacies and Decolonised Identities

Project Overview

The School of Architecture & Planning invites proposals for a PhD project investigating the historical legacies of colonialism across architectural geographies and peoples connecting Britain with Asia. In the past two decades, there has been much discussion of practices of decolonisation within academia in Britain. Yet scholars have seldom systematically and imaginatively applied such practices in their research in sufficiently critical and incisive ways, particularly in 'how we might understand, narrate and intervene' in the material inheritances of colonialism (Gupta and King, 2024).

This project calls for a doctoral candidate, situated within the architectural humanities, to explore through long-span historical analyses, a research project of their devising that uses a strategic set of lenses within architecture (whether buildings, monuments, infrastructure, urbanism, and/or landscape) and through media (writing, photography, drawing, mapping, filmic, artefactual, curatorial) to uncover specific ways in which Britain has been deeply involved and entangled with a part or parts of Asia. Importantly, the scrutiny must work both ways and attempt to methodologically 'decolonise' the unilateral narratives often framed in traditional historical analyses. Moreover, the project calls for legible and innovative connections between the 'constructions' of these architectural legacies and aspects of cultural identity.

This reflective and interdisciplinary research project will be supervised by Dr Chris Cowell, an architectural and urban historian of British colonialism in South Asia (India) and East Asia (Hong Kong) across the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries. Prospective candidates are encouraged to expand their own and Cowell's individual or collaborative research on the interdisciplinary material and spatial histories of Asia and to publicly curate and exhibit their research work as part of their output. The project is supported by two LSBU professors with complementary and reinforcing skills within the histories of social and political space, gender, identity (Prof. Caitriona Beaumont) and media, architecture, infrastructure, and workplace (Prof. Igea Troiani). See references below.

This project links to the research centres Building Future Communities and Energy, Materials and Environment. Our university is proud of its significant body of students whose families are directly living this imbricated British-Asian experience. Through our students, we rank third in the world as a university for its effective social inclusion. This project offers a pathway in the candidate's work to build upon our inherent social resources with the possibility to contribute to future grant funding that may draw upon shared research.

Who Are We Looking For?

- Open to any UK or international candidates. Starting in September 2025.
- The candidate must meet the minimum entry requirements for our PhD programme by clicking the ['Apply'](#) link.
- Applicants, should have an academic or professional background in architectural or urban history, history, architectural or urban design, spatial planning, or a related field.
- Previous research experience—academic or practice-based—in architectural or urban history and design is highly desirable though not essential. A completed masters in the architectural humanities or historical geography would be welcome.

- Applicants with strong critical and reflective thinking skills and an ability to engage in a range of historical and theoretical literature.
- Candidates should be motivated to explore interdisciplinary research approaches, drawing on historical, design, and visual culture studies. They must also show experience or interest in identifying and exploring various archives in the construction of their research.
- Candidates with experience in qualitative or practice-led methods, including oral histories, photographic surveying, filmic research, etc., are encouraged to apply.
- An interdisciplinary mindset and openness to wider historical, ethnographic, or reflective practice methods will strengthen your application.
- We welcome applicants interested in rethinking architectural production through the lens of social networks and their associated power relations.

Selection Criteria:

- **Academic Qualifications** - You should normally have at least a 2.1 honours degree from a UK University or an equivalent qualification in engineering, computer science, etc.
- **Research and Analytical Skills** – Ability to research subjects using libraries, the internet, and other information resources, ability to conduct comprehensive literature reviews, experience in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, strong research design and methodology skills, ability to independently collaborate with stakeholders, and excellent academic writing and communication skills.
- **Professional Skills** - Project management and organisational skills, ability to work independently and as part of a team, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and adaptability and willingness to learn new skills.
- **Software and Modelling Experience** - Experience developing and utilising spreadsheet-based models (e.g., Microsoft Excel) to an advanced level. Experience with other software packages relevant to the discipline would be an advantage.
- **Communication Skills**—The candidate should be highly motivated, able to collaborate, have good visual, oral, and written communication skills, and communicate the work's outcomes to commercial, industrial, and scientific audiences.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration** - Ability to work with industrial and academic supervisors.
- **Language Proficiency** - Overseas applicants must have a minimum English language IELTS score of 6.5, with at least 5.5 in any of the components.
- **Understanding of Equality and Diversity** - Able to demonstrate an understanding of equality and diversity and their practical applications.
- **Visa and Legal Requirements** - Non-EU/EEA nationals may need to apply to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for clearance from the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS).

Training & Development Opportunities

Doctoral students at London South Bank University ([LSBU](#)), through the London Doctoral College ([LDC](#)), benefit from a rich and structured training environment designed to support academic excellence and professional development. All PhD candidates are offered a comprehensive programme of workshops and seminars covering essential research skills, including research design, data analysis, academic writing, ethics, and project management. These sessions aim to support students through every stage of their doctoral journey—from literature review and methodology to thesis completion and viva preparation. Postgraduate researchers can access advanced, discipline-specific training aligned with their research focus. LSBU's doctoral training environment is designed to build deep expertise in a chosen research area and the broader skills necessary for successful careers in research, industry, and beyond.

About the College

The College of Technology and Environment (CTE) at London South Bank University (LSBU) is a newly formed academic college, launched in January following the university's recent reorganisation. Led by Executive Dean Professor Chris Harty, CTE brings together four schools: Architecture & Planning, Construction, Property & Surveying, Engineering & Design, and Computer Science & Digital

Technologies. The college fosters a collaborative and interdisciplinary environment, addressing the complex challenges of the built and digital environments. CTE strongly emphasises research, with doctoral students playing a key role in shaping and contributing to the college's research agenda. CTE prepares students to become future leaders through innovation, industry partnerships, and a commitment to sustainability. With a focus on real-world impact and academic excellence, the college is set to drive forward LSBU's vision of delivering applied knowledge that transforms lives and communities locally and globally. The university has five centres, and any academic staff and students in the college can join. These research centres are described below.

About the Bioscience and Bioengineering (BB) Research Centre

The [Bioscience and Bioengineering Research Centre](#) advances understanding of health and disease through biological research and innovative technologies. Our interdisciplinary team focuses on improving diagnostics, treatments, and patient management across healthcare settings. Areas of expertise include cancer biology, bioinformatics, pharmacokinetics/pharmacodynamics, microwave and ultrasound sensing, and image analysis. We also explore human biomechanics and the mechanical properties of muscle and tendon in both healthy and diseased states. By integrating science and engineering, we strive to translate cutting-edge research into real-world healthcare improvements that benefit patients and practitioners alike.

About the Building Future Communities (BFC) Research Centre

The [Building Future Communities Research Centre](#) supports inclusive, participatory research on real-world transformation and social justice. We work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders—charities, community groups, local authorities, and more—to co-create research with impact. Using an intersectional approach, our work spans funded research, enterprise, consultancy, and researcher development. BFC is a creative and unifying umbrella for projects prioritising community voice and engagement. Our goal is to drive positive change through research that reflects and responds to the needs and experiences of communities, with a clear commitment to inclusion, equity, and collaborative practice.

About the Digital x Data (DD) Research Centre

[Digital x Data Research Centre](#) is a university-wide interdisciplinary research centre exploring the impact and potential of digitalisation and datafication. We focus on cutting-edge AI and data science developments, addressing opportunities and challenges through a responsible, explainable, and sustainable lens. Rooted in LSBU's commitment to social justice, our research fosters equity by integrating science, technology, the arts, and the humanities. We drive innovation through applied research and strong partnerships with industry, academia, and the public sector and ensure that our work delivers real-world, transformative outcomes. Our approach is collaborative and future-facing, aiming to inform policy, practice, and public understanding.

About the Energy, Materials and Environment (EME) Research Centre

The [Energy, Materials and Environment Research Centre](#) leads interdisciplinary research on sustainable energy systems and material innovation. We address climate change by developing whole energy systems, spanning generation, storage, distribution, and consumption. Our research draws from materials engineering, policy, and societal impact to understand and influence the complex relationships between energy, economy, and society. With expertise in multiscale systems and cross-sector collaboration, we aim to shape policy and technology that supports the transition to a low-carbon future. Our work informs sustainable development strategies that balance environmental, economic, and social needs across local and global contexts.

About the Health and Wellbeing (HW) Research Centre

The [Health and Wellbeing Research Centre](#) promotes understanding how to protect and enhance health and wellbeing across all life stages. We focus on underserved populations and the services and professionals supporting them. Our research, grounded in social justice and inclusion, aims to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes through knowledge mobilisation and real-world application. Collaborating with academics across disciplines and health and social care partners, we explore lived experiences, service delivery, and workforce development. Our work informs policies and practices that support more effective, inclusive, and responsive health and social care systems.

For Enquiry

Contact Person

Before applying, please contact the main supervisor, **Dr Christopher Cowell**, full-time lecturer in architectural history and theory at the School of Architecture & Planning, College of Technology and Environment at LSBU explaining your conception for the supervised doctoral project. Co-supervisors include Professor Igea Troiani (PhD), Head of the School of Architecture & Planning, LSBU, and Professor Caitriona Beaumont (PhD), Professor of Social History, School of Law and Education, LSBU.

E-mail: chris.cowell@lsbu.ac.uk

In your email, include:

- Details of your current level of study and academic background.
- A summary of any relevant experience.
- A brief paragraph about your motivation for pursuing this PhD project.

Fee Waiver

The fee waiver is available for 4 years (48 months), including the writing-up year, examination period, and submission of the corrected thesis.

How to apply

Applications should be submitted via the programme page using the links below:

<https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/study/course-finder/architecture-phd>

You should upload the problem statement, qualifications, CV, and other relevant documentation to the application portal. Remember to state the correct reference number and the appropriate supervisor.

List of References

Beaumont, C., E. Colpus and R. Davidson, eds. (2024). *Everyday Welfare in Modern British History: Experiences, Expertise and Activism*. London: Palgrave. ISBN 978-3-031-64986-8.

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Cowell, C. (2025) 'The Height of Health: Sections, Sanatoria, and Settler Colonialism in Northern India, 1815–1842'. *Architectural History* 68 (2025). (The Hawksmoor Medal Essay. Forthcoming.)

Cowell, C. (2024) *Form Follows Fever: Malaria and the Construction of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press. ISBN 978-9-882-37290-0.

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East in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Art and Culture from the Pre-Raphaelites to John La Farge. London: Anthem Press, pp. 133–162. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvr339qc.12>

Cowell, C. (2016) 'The Kacchā–Pakkā Divide: Material, Space and Architecture in the Military Cantonments of British India (1765–1889)'. *ABE (Architecture Beyond Europe) Journal* 9–10. <https://journals.openedition.org/abe/3224>

Gupta, T. & S. King, eds. (2024). *Reclaiming Colonial Architecture*. London: RIBA Publishing. ISBN HBK: 978-1-915-72236-2. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003581291>

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Troiani, I. ed. and author and H. Campbell eds. (2019) *Architecture Filmmaking*, Chicago, Bristol: The University of Chicago Press/Distributed by Intellect Ltd. ISBN: 978-1-783- 20994-1.

Troiani, I. and Zaman, Q. M. eds. (2017) *Transdisciplinary Urbanism and Culture: From Pedagogy to Praxis*, Switzerland: Springer Verlag. ISBN HBK: 978-3-319-55854-7.