

## ESRC-funded PhD Studentship

# Mosslands in early modern Lancashire: carbon, community and conservation, 1500-1800

University of Manchester and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust

A full-time, fully-funded PhD research studentship is available from September 2019 on the project 'Mosslands in early modern Lancashire: carbon, community and conservation, 1500-1800'.

This PhD project will explain the historical decline of mossland landscapes in the North West and contribute to the restoration and reintroduction work of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. Mosslands are wetland peat landscapes that are the second largest carbon stores on Earth, and are home to unique species of flora and fauna. Despite their ecological value, the UK's mosslands now cover just 3% of their historic maximum. By producing a history of these mosslands before industrialisation, this project will provide vital historical data to underpin ongoing conservation and restoration work, will demonstrate the historical and cultural value of mosslands, and will explain their role in the transition to an industrial fossil-fuel economy.

The project will focus around three core strands:

- From peat to coal: energy transformations and the industrial revolution
- Governing the commons: managing peat as a fragile common-pool resource
- Creating a carbon landscape: the historic characters of a changing mossland environment

The studentship is a collaboration between historians at the University of Manchester and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT). The student will be required to work at both the University, and on-site at the LWT office and reserves, including Astley Moss, and Cadishead and Little Woolden Moss. The student will work with the LWT to present their findings to the public. A full project brief is included below.

### **Supervisors:**

Dr John Morgan (University of Manchester), Prof Sasha Handley (University of Manchester), and Mike Longden (Lancashire Wildlife Trust)

### **Project start date:**

Monday 16 September 2019

### **Closing date for applications:**

Monday 25 February 2019

### **Funding:**

NWSSDTP ESRC CASE (<https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/collaboration/>) The successful applicant will be required to submit a full application for a PhD in History, at the University of Manchester, with the support of the supervisors.

**Qualifications applicants should have/expected to receive:**

Candidates must have a good undergraduate honours degree at first or upper second class level and a suitable master's degree at Merit level or above (or appropriate progress towards a master's degree at Merit level or above), in History or a related discipline.

**Amount of funding available and eligibility:**

Full Home/EU fees and stipend at UKRI rate (£14,777 p.a.)

**Nationality restriction:**

Home/EU students only. Candidates must meet the eligibility criteria set out in the NWSSDTP +3 and +2 Application Guidance document available at <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/>

**Contact for further information:**

For further information about the project, and all enquiries, please contact Dr John Morgan, Lecturer in Early Modern History [john.morgan@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:john.morgan@manchester.ac.uk)

**How to apply:**

Applicants should email the following to [john.morgan@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:john.morgan@manchester.ac.uk) by **Monday 25 February 5pm GMT**:

- An academic CV (max. 2 pages), including two named referees (one of whom should be your most recent academic tutor/supervisor)
- A copy of your first degree and Master's degree transcripts (or anticipated grade if masters is on-going)
- A letter of application (not exceeding two pages) outlining your suitability for the CASE studentship and how you would anticipate approaching the research.

Please note, the successful candidate will be required to submit an online application for a place on the PhD History programme based on the project brief by Thursday 7 March 5pm GMT, with the support of the supervisors.

# ESRC CASE award: Mosslands in early modern Lancashire: carbon, community and conservation, 1500-1800

## Project outline

This PhD project will explain the historical decline of mossland landscapes in the North West and contribute to the restoration and reintroduction work of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. Mosslands are wetland peat landscapes that are the second largest carbon stores on Earth, and are home to unique species of flora and fauna. Despite their ecological value, the UK's mosslands now cover just 3% of their historic maximum. By producing a history of these mosslands before industrialisation, this project will provide vital historical data to underpin ongoing conservation and restoration work, will demonstrate the historical and cultural value of mosslands, and will explain their role in the transition to an industrial fossil-fuel economy.

The project will make contributions to economic and social history around three core themes:

- From peat to coal: energy transformations and the industrial revolution
- Governing the commons: managing peat as a fragile common-pool resource
- Creating a carbon landscape: the historic characters of a changing mossland environment landscape

First, this project will explain the role of fossil fuels in the economic transformation of the early modern North West. The North West of England has been characterised as the first industrial region (Stobart 2004), enjoying a series of geographical, climatic and demographic convergences that enabled the assembly of fuel, goods and people into an internationally-significant centre of manufacturing. This growth was powered by coal, mined from the accessible seams across Lancashire and Cheshire. Elsewhere in Europe, earlier but stunted industrial transformations were kick-started by peat (Wrigley 2010). In England, peat has been acknowledged as regionally significant but nationally unimportant, yet no attempt has been made to quantify its contribution to the regional or national economy (Warde 2007). What role did peat play in the proto-industrial economy of the North West? To what extent did the use of coal follow the use of peat? Was the adoption of coal a break from past fossil fuel use?

Second, the project will explore the management of peat as a common-pool resource. Much of the mossland of the North West was historically common land, accessible to 'commoners' who exercised rights to often large areas of unenclosed land as a collective. Following Tine De Moor (2015), the student will explore mossland commons governance. Mosses offer an unusual case study of a landscape characterised by relative soil infertility due to waterlogging and acidity. Rodgers et al (2011) have argued that pre-modern practices of commoning promoted sustainable resource use. The student can test this thesis on mosslands managed as a common-pool resource. The student will also examine the impact of enclosure and the end of commoning on mossland economy and society. The mossland experience of enclosure was distinctive: peat was an important fuel source for the poor, and enclosure was accompanied by industrial transformation. Therefore, the student will be able to contribute to debates in economic history over the differential social impacts of enclosure (i.e. Shaw-Taylor 2001).

Third, the project will contribute to the historical understanding of preindustrial anthropogenic landscape change. Part of this project will focus on the changing size and shape of the mosses (looking, for example, at the dramatic Chat Moss bog burst of 1526), and

recovering information on the different species living on the moss. Much of the post-industrial conservation work on the mosses is focussed on reversing the damage caused by industrial and commercial activity. Environmental histories can provide evidence of the nature of the historic landscape, its species and its ecology. The Lancashire Wildlife Trust will provide the student with vital ecological knowledge, enabling the project to identify historical ecological relationships, and contribute to the restoration of the mosslands.

### Collaboration

Collaboration with the LWT will enable the project to make two further contributions:

- Peatlands past and present: engaging communities through human stories of environmental change
- Recovery to restoration: finding historical precedents for species reintroduction

First, writing the social and economic history of the moss will enable the LWT to engage the local community with their mossland. The LWT's longstanding mission to engage communities with wildlife will provide the student with an excellent opportunity to both disseminate their work to a public audience, and to feed into conservation efforts aimed at raising awareness of the importance and value of mossland landscapes. The LWT has faced issues with anti-social behaviour and theft linked to a lack of community understanding of the value of the moss. Providing a social and economic history of the changing mossland will enable the student and the LWT to engage the local community with stories of environmental change at a human scale.

Second, the student's research will help the LWT meet international evidential thresholds for species reintroduction. International Union for Conservation of Nature guidelines require any reintroduction programmes to provide evidence of the historic indigenous range of any locally extinct species. The project will inform this Heritage Lottery funded reintroduction work by building up a picture of the historical ecology of the mosslands. This work would not be possible without the input of Mike Longden, the LWT's Chat Moss Project Officer, whose knowledge of the modern mossland landscape and ecology will help the student piece together historical ecological relationships from documentary evidence.

### Research questions

- Apprehending environmental change – how did early modern people comprehend environmental change in mosslands? How did mossland communities value their landscape?
- Governing the commons – how did early modern communities regulate the use of peat and mossland commons? How were competing interests mediated, and what principles guided decision making? Were mossland commons 'sustainable'?
- Carbon communities – how did the availability of a fossil fuel impact on social and economic organisation? To what extent were mossland communities 'carbon communities'?
- Unearthing peatlands past – how did the character and extent of the North West mosslands change over the period 1500-1800? How have populations of flora and fauna changed since the preindustrial era?
- Shaping a carbon landscape – how did the preindustrial era shape the 'carbon landscape'? To what extent were industrial patterns of landscape change and resource extraction a product of the preindustrial era?
- Transitions to an inorganic economy – what role did peat play in the breaking of the 'photosynthetic constraint' of a wood-fuelled economy, and the transition to an inorganic, fossil-fuelled economy?

About the CASE award:

From <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/collaboration/>

Engagement with non-HEI partner organisations is an ESRC priority, and the North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership is committed to working in partnership to facilitate academic collaboration – supporting internships and collaborative studentships – to ultimately help drive innovation and growth.

The North West have an established history of collaboration with a range of organisations across the private, public and third sectors.

There are many significant benefits for non-HEI partner organisations in engaging with NWSSDTP funded students; not least you can gain access to top quality, highly talented, skilled and knowledgeable students who can help drive innovation and growth in your organisation. Collaboration between organisations and students can take effect in a number of different ways: some emerge from informal network contacts between individuals, while others result from a formal approach to an institution.

The NWSSDTP runs an annual collaborative studentship competition (CASE) where academics from the four NWSSDTP institutions can apply for funding towards postgraduate projects that will be co-supervised with a representative from a non-HEI partner organisations. Successful applicants will then be invited to recruit a postgraduate candidate to undertake the project.

References

- De Moor, Tine, *The dilemma of the commoners: Understanding the use of common-pool resources in long-term perspective* (Cambridge, 2015)
- Rodgers, Christopher, Eleanor Straughton, Margherita Pieraccini, Angus Winchester, *Contested Common Land: Environmental Governance Past and Present* (London, 2011)
- Shaw-Taylor, Leigh, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and the Emergence of an English Agricultural Proletariat', *Journal of Economic History* 61 (2001), 640–62.
- Stobart, Jon, *The first industrial region: North West England, c.1700-60* (Manchester, 2004)
- Warde, Paul, *Energy consumption in England & Wales 1560-2000* (Naples, 2007)
- Wrigley, E. A., *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010)