Postdoctoral Research Associate: Attitudes to Biological Purity

Department: History (hosted by the Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity)

Hours of work: Full time / 37 hours a week

Contract type: Fixed-term / 3 years

Salary: £32,817-£40,322 a year / Grade 6
**Introduction**

The Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity (LCAB) is a new research centre funded by The Leverhulme Trust to increase knowledge of the changing relationship between humanity and the natural world, and how we might maintain and develop a sustainable Earth.

This Research Fellow position is available full-time for 3 years to engage in research on ideas of biological purity. The person appointed will be supervised by Associate Director, Mark Jenner, Reader in Early Modern History and University Research Champion for Culture and Communication, along with other appropriate members of LCAB.

The Centre represents an interdisciplinary collaboration between the University of York, the University of Sherbrooke (Canada), the Australian National University and the University of St Andrews.

Human-caused changes to the world are so great that we increasingly think of the Earth as having entered a new geological epoch, the ‘Anthropocene’, which is as much a culturally-defined state of human thinking as it is a scientific phenomenon. This disruption has already resulted in the extermination of many species and could eventually lead to the “Big Sixth” mass extinction event of our planet’s history - a sense of human loss. However, transformation of our planet is enabling many species to thrive in parts of the world that they would not otherwise have reached, and to hybridise with species from which they were previously isolated. The rate of evolution has increased to such an extent that the human epoch may eventually be seen as one of the greatest boosts to Earth’s biological diversity. These gains are often ignored and disliked, seen as evidence that the Earth system has moved away from a more desirable state of nature, located somewhere in the historical past.

The Centre will redress this imbalance, recognising biological gains as well as losses, changes that are beneficial to humans as well as ones that are harmful, and identifying the circumstances under which changes are perceived as either positive or negative. It will aim to understand and thus inform and influence society’s response to these changes.

We are looking for a creative postdoctoral fellow with strong communication skills. They will be critical to the Centre’s endeavours to understand human attitudes to, and models of, natural biological systems and will contribute to the development of research priorities within the Centre. The postholder will be a member of the University of York History Department and LCAB, and will work with colleagues across disciplines.
Main purpose of the role

United Nations and national definitions of biodiversity typically distinguish between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ forms, between indigenous genotypes and hybrids, and between ‘intact’ and ‘human-modified’ ecosystems. Many environmental historians and palaeoecologists emphasise the extent to which these distinctions are exercises in cultural boundary drawing, rather than absolute categorical differences in fundamental states of nature. In order to extend and develop our understanding of these processes, the researcher appointed to this role will:

1] undertake their own investigations to further our understanding of how such cultural boundaries emerge, are drawn, operate and dissolve. This work will be either a case study or comparative in approach and we welcome research focused on any period (including contemporary history) and on any geographical region or regions. We recognise that these themes can be illuminated through the analysis of all kinds of source material, including visual and material culture, literary texts, archival and print resources, and physical records, and so welcome applicants from any relevant humanities or social scientific discipline. We anticipate that this research will occupy about 60% of the researcher’s time (averaged over three years).

2] take a lead role developing a cross-cutting theme within the Centre, bringing together all its researchers in a programme of work and collaboration designed to build a transdisciplinary understanding of the development and functioning of attitudes to biological purity in the context of ‘non-native’ species, hybrids and/or the nature of ecosystems from the past to the present. You will be interested in exploring these issues in conjunction with a diverse group of researchers drawn from all three faculties. This will take up approximately 30% of the researcher’s time (averaged over three years).

3] play an active role in LCAB’s general intellectual life, contributing to and developing the range of research interaction and discussions, and offering expert guidance and contributions to the other strands of the Centre’s research. This will take up approximately 10% of the researcher’s time (averaged over three years).

Overarching tasks will be:

- To develop and undertake historical research under the supervision of senior colleagues, and contribute to the production of research outputs
- To collaborate with, and advise, other researchers to increase the effectiveness of transdisciplinary research in the Centre
- To develop understanding of human conceptualisation of Anthropocene change

Key responsibilities

(Role holders will be required to undertake some or all of the duties below)

- To plan, coordinate and carry out world-leading research, with the assistance of project leaders
- To develop and coordinate a Leverhulme Centre cross-disciplinary theme in the area of biological novelty
- To communicate effectively, collaborate with, and advise researchers with different types of expertise, from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, so as to facilitate Centre research projects
- Writing-up research findings for publication, and other forms of communication
- Attend research group meetings to develop research projects
- Contribute to the development of future research proposals
### Person specification

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<th>Essential / Desirable</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills, abilities and competencies</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Personal attributes</th>
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<td>Essential</td>
<td>PhD in an appropriate subject or equivalent relevant experience</td>
<td>Excellent knowledge of the relevant source material in their specialism</td>
<td>Ability to develop and carry out your own and joint research projects</td>
<td>Experience of carrying out both independent and collaborative research</td>
<td>Enthusiasm for research in the area of Anthropocene change</td>
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<td>Desirable</td>
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<td>Broad knowledge of key concepts, approaches and debates in this field</td>
<td>Enthusiasm for learning, developing and adopting new approaches</td>
<td>Experience of writing up research work for publication</td>
<td>Commitment to high quality work</td>
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<td>Good understanding of the methodologies which can be used for research in this area</td>
<td>Capacity to advise and communicate effectively both orally and in writing with researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds with different levels and forms of expertise</td>
<td>Experience of developing appropriate analyses and interpretations</td>
<td>Collaborative ethos, with a willingness to develop collaborations and work proactively with colleagues in other work areas</td>
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<td>Ability in and track record of writing up research work for publication in high profile journals</td>
<td>Experience of working across disciplines</td>
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<td>Able to make presentations at conferences, and engage in public dissemination</td>
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- **Skills, abilities and competencies**
  - Ability to develop and carry out your own and joint research projects
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  - Ability in and track record of writing up research work for publication in high profile journals
  - Able to make presentations at conferences, and engage in public dissemination
  - Able to learn quickly, think creatively and show initiative
- **Experience**
  - Experience of carrying out both independent and collaborative research
  - Experience of writing up research work for publication
  - Experience of developing appropriate analyses and interpretations
  - Experience of working across disciplines
- **Personal attributes**
  - Enthusiasm for research in the area of Anthropocene change
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