

Britain's Railways in the Great War, 1914-1918

Fully-funded AHRC PhD studentship

Applications are invited for an AHRC-funded PhD working on Britain's railways in the First World War. This studentship is one of eight fully-funded awards made by the newly-established Collaborative Doctoral Partnership managed by the Science Museum Group. The project will be supervised by Professor Tony Heywood and Dr Ben Marsden (University of Aberdeen) and Tim Procter (National Railway Museum, York). The studentship, which is funded for three years full-time equivalent, will begin in September 2013.

The Studentship

This project will produce the first full-length academic study of how Britain's railways were managed and operated during the First World War. The project will be based on extensive archival research to be undertaken mainly at the National Railway Museum (York), the National Archives (Kew) and the National Archives of Scotland (Edinburgh). Funds will be available to help pay for the necessary research travel.

The project will address six core inter-connected themes - political, administrative, economic, technical, cultural and social - both to explore the basic questions of how, and how well, the railways coped and to serve as a framework for future research. The geographical scope will be limited to the lines under state control via the Board of Trade and Railway Executive Committee - in other words, excluding Ireland's railways, which were managed separately. Case-studies might be used to analyse the performance and impacts on selected strategic routes (such as the lines to the Channel ports) and fixed assets such as major workshops. The assessments are expected to be mainly qualitative, with statistics used where appropriate to identify basic trends.

The research will need to start by reassessing pre-war preparations and mobilisation, especially J.A.B. Hamilton's view that the network entered the war with a sensible and workable organisation largely as a matter of luck, and A.J.P. Taylor's claim about the mobilisation timetable's inflexibility: could the network have coped with an order to send the army to, say, Antwerp instead of France? As for the subsequent reaction of the railways to the war emergency, key issues for analysis are likely to include the meaning of 'total war' in relation to the network; state control (for example: how did it affect operations, infrastructure, finances and inter-company relations?); traffic performance (how did the demands change? where were the key bottlenecks?); relations with the armed forces (how effective was the coordination? how were military demands communicated and implemented?); the infrastructure (how far were railway supply needs met? does poor management explain the wagon shortages? how did the railway workshops contribute? how bad was the maintenance backlog by 1918?); and the workforce (how did losses of skilled staff affect the railways? how important were female employment and strikes?). And in the immediate aftermath, how did the war experience affect the government's decision not to nationalise the network, but instead to create four large geographically-based private companies?

How to Apply

Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree in history, geography, or other relevant discipline, and will need to satisfy AHRC academic and residency eligibility criteria. Preference may be given to candidates with prior experience in working with business or railway archives, though others are encouraged to apply.

Applicants should submit a short curriculum vitae and a brief letter outlining qualifications for the studentship in the form of a single Word file no more than three pages in total. The names and contact details of two academic referees should also be supplied. Applications should be sent to Tony Heywood no later than **5 June 2013**.

Interviews are scheduled to be held in the National Railway Museum, York, in the week of **17-21 June 2013**.

For further information concerning the project, please contact Tony Heywood (t.heywood@abdn.ac.uk).