



Food-miles: the imaginings, politics and practices of food distribution in the UK, ca 1920-1975

Fully Funded PhD studentship

Applications are invited for an AHRC-funded PhD working on food distribution networks between 1920 and 1975. 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 Colin Divall (University of York) and Ed Bartholomew (National Railway Museum, York). The studentship, which is funded for three years full-time equivalent, will begin in September 2013.

The Studentship

How and what we eat is high on public and political agenda. While the particulars are new, the underlying issues are long-standing. Industrialization of the UK's food supply from the late-C18th enabled unprecedented levels of urbanization and population growth but destroyed local, regional and even national sources, encouraging consumption based more on price than nutritional value. Today's globalized food-chains can deliver huge amounts of high-quality food: but they also allow unscrupulous suppliers to escape the scrutiny of national and even international regulators.

This project explores one critical shift in Britain's food supply in the last century: the change over the roughly half-century from 1920 from a rail- to a road-based system of distribution within the UK: from port to market, from farm yard to manufacturer, town shop or supermarket. This change was perhaps not inevitable: while the railways' inter-war battle with road hauliers reflected traditional concerns such as price, reliability and security, neither service provider was able to demonstrate a clear advantage. Hence there was considerable scope to *persuade* consignors; the railways' interest in marketing passenger traffic had some purchase with regard to goods. How did the railway companies imagine, market and deliver the distribution of food between the world wars? Railway publicity suggests that the high profile given to food distribution was partly an attempt to win public and political opinion to the companies' case for more regulatory freedom. And how did road hauliers (including own-account operators like the food retailer Sainsbury's) respond to such initiatives before 1939? What did consumers think?

The Second World War is sometimes portrayed as a temporary period of reprieve for rail distribution before the 'inevitable' victory of road haulage. But this project might explore whether the war and the following decade of austerity prevented the railways acting soon enough on pre-war ideas about how to handle food. It will also complement existing studies of British Railways' attempts to reform freight services from the 1950s by analysing the particularities of food distribution. While exogenous factors such as better lorries, state-funded improvements to roads (notably motorways) and wider changes in food retailing (especially processed foods and just-in-time deliveries to supermarkets) arguably increasingly favoured road distribution, BR continued to develop and market services

targeted at food suppliers and retailers until around the mid-1970s. How did BR work with the food industry? Did Beeching-era ideas like Freightliner have any role in the motorway age? Could the railways have kept more of the bulk transport of imported foodstuffs? Did food manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers drive innovations in food distribution, or did they adapt to initiatives from the haulage industry? And how did the road and rail operators 'sell' their competing notions of modern food supplies to consumers and politicians?

This is chiefly a qualitative study that will draw out the connections between the *imagining* of food distribution systems, the *politics* of building food chains, and the *practices* of using them in the period ca 1920-75.

How to Apply

Applicants must have a good undergraduate degree in history or other relevant discipline, and should normally also hold a master's (or equivalent) degree in an appropriate subject. A full statement of the AHRC's criteria for academic and residency eligibility is available on the AHRC website www.ahrc.ac.uk.

Applicants should submit a short curriculum vitae and a brief letter outlining both their qualifications for the studentship and their ideas about how the research might develop. This should be in the form of a single MS Word, Open Office or PDF file no more than three pages in total, using a typeface no smaller than 11 point. The names and contact details of two academic referees should also be supplied. Applications should be sent to Colin Divall at colin.divall@york.ac.uk to arrive no later than 12.00 Wednesday 12th June 2013. Applicants should *not* at this stage make a formal application to the University of York.

Interviews for short-listed candidate will be held at the National Railway Museum, York, in the morning of Friday 28th June 2013.

For further information, please contact either of the project supervisors: Colin Divall colin.divall@york.ac.uk or Ed Bartholomew ed.bartholomew@nrm.org.uk.