

# Unlocking the National Trust Sound Archive

Project reference number: 2026-1



<b>Supervisors</b>	Dr Madeline White – Curator of Oral History, British Library Lucy Porten – Senior National Curator, London & South East, National Trust
<b>Start date/Timeframe</b>	September 2026
<b>Duration</b>	<b>3 months, full time / 6 months, part time</b>
<b>Location(s)</b>	Due to the nature of the research, the majority of this placement will be on site at the British Library’s St. Pancras site, with provision for home and hybrid working and some site visits to National Trust properties.

## Context for fellowship project

The National Trust Sound Archive is the second largest oral history collection held at the British Library, consisting of more than 1700 items recorded from the 1980s to the present day by 157 National Trust properties. The collection is frequently requested by onsite researchers at the Library, but a significant amount of work is required to enhance discoverability and reusability of the interviews. In particular, work is needed to investigate and ascertain the full copyright status of 1300 of the 1700 recordings in the collection, and to review the interviews for sensitivities under GDPR before access conditions can be determined.

The aim of this project is for a student to undertake the necessary work for the recordings belonging to a minimum of three National Trust properties to be catalogued with enhanced metadata and the rights status ascertained. These ‘case study’ properties have been selected based on the likelihood of their generating a high number of recordings that can be cleared and catalogued, so that the student’s work on them will have immediate and demonstrable results. The student will also work with the Trust and Library colleagues to plan a strategy to roll out the approach to sets of interviews in the collection recorded by other Trust properties.

The fellowship will be hosted at the British Library, offering the student hands-on experience of working with digital audio archives. The student will work closely with colleagues at the Trust and conduct site visits to properties where appropriate, to benefit from the expertise of staff and volunteers in the history of the properties and the oral history collection.

### **Expected tasks and outcomes**

The student will undertake the work required to make publicly accessible approximately 50 oral history recordings created by a minimum of three National Trust properties based in London, the South East and the Midlands. This will be a multi-step process, to include:

- An initial assessment of the paperwork currently held by the British Library and the Trust;
- Liaising with National Trust representatives both centrally and at the relevant property to identify and contact rights holders for recordings where the rights status is unclear;
- Establishing if any recordings have untraceable rights holders;
- Conducting sensitivity reviews for each interview, to identify, and contribute to decision making on any potentially sensitive content that may require redaction under GDPR.

The student may also have the opportunity to write content summaries for some of the recordings, which will be added to the catalogue to aid discoverability.

Depending on the outcome of the rights clearance work, we expect a significant proportion of those recordings to become eligible for online access (currently this is not possible following the cyber-attack on the Library in 2023, but this service will eventually be restored).

The student will also use their experiences working on these recordings to generate a full workflow of rights and sensitivity checking that can be used as a template for future clearance of recordings in the collection, plus an internal report advising the British Library Oral History team and National Trust partners on the next steps to roll out this process for the rest of the National Trust Sound Archive.

Additional outputs may include:

- Outputs for National Trust media and social media
- British Library blog post
- Staff talk for the British Library and National Trust (hybrid in-person and online)

### **Training and development opportunities**

This placement is an opportunity for hands-on heritage work with digitised collections, which will enhance the skills and CV for the placement student as many heritage organisations face similar challenges for digitised analogue collections. The student will be trained in a number of key archival and collections management skills, including copyright clearance, reviewing collections for sensitive data, and summary writing, with specialism in handling audio material and oral history interviews. They will manage a short-term project with regular and defined outcomes, and learn to liaise with different audiences and stakeholders inside and outside the institution through meetings, presentations, blogs and other publications.

The student will have the opportunity to listen to the audio from the National Trust Sound Archive whilst working on the rights clearance process and develop their own research interests accordingly. Many of the recordings in the archive were produced in the 1980s and for some of the recordings little is known today institutionally – either at the British Library or the National Trust – about their content and context, thus this placement will also offer a student the opportunity to explore a valuable but hitherto underutilised historical archive. The collection includes oral history recordings with property owners, local residents, housekeeping staff and National Trust employees, plus radio broadcasts, lectures and some recorded music.

#### Required knowledge and skills

- An interest in/knowledge of oral history (essential)
- Ability to clearly collate information for communication and future use by colleagues (essential)
- Understanding/experience of basic archival processes including cataloguing (desirable)
- An interest in the social history of land ownership and management, the 'country house' and its social structures, and/or architecture (desirable)

#### Additional information:

- This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the National Trust or the British Library.
- This opportunity is open to students who have **not yet undertaken a funded** research placement.
- Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisors in advance and consult their HEI and (if applicable) doctoral training grant provider to ascertain any regulations for interrupting PhD research to take up this professional development opportunity.

Application deadline: Friday 5 June 2026 at **12 noon**.

Interviews will take place online on a date to be confirmed.