### Project Title

Colonial Wordsworth: Rewriting Romanticism

### LEAD INSTITUTION

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<tr>
<th>Name of HEI institution</th>
<th>University of Leicester</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lead regional city</td>
<td>Birmingham ☐, Coventry ☐, Leicester ☒, Nottingham ☐</td>
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### PARTNER ORGANISATION

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<tr>
<th>Name of organisation</th>
<th>Dove Cottage and the Wordworth Museum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Website URL</td>
<td>Home - Wordworth Grasmere</td>
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### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Colonial Wordsworth: Rewriting Romanticism will combine historical, literary and museological research to provide a foundation for major reinterpretation by a prominent literary house museum. Dove Cottage, in Grasmere, was home to William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy between 1799 and 1808. Dorothy Wordsworth kept her famous Grasmere Journals during this period. Dove Cottage is an important literary and historical site, since it was visited by Walter Scott, the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson, Charles and Mary Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It later housed Thomas de Quincey, whose account of opium addiction and other writings link to Britain’s Opium Wars with China. This will be the first systematic investigation of this literary circle’s engagement with colonial ideas, finance and investment.

This PhD project will explore previously unexamined archival materials to shed new light on the relations between colonialism and English Romantic writing. Its case study will be the writing of William and Dorothy Wordsworth together with their friendship circle: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles and Mary Lamb, and Thomas De Quincey.

Wordsworth’s residence at Dove Cottage coincided with a period in which imperial Britain controlled a quarter of the globe.¹ The Wordsworth circle was immersed in colonial enterprises, from investment in East India voyages to Mississippi bonds, but these attempts to gain colonial capital, and its conflict with Romantic and abolitionist sentiment, have received little scholarly attention. This history is underrepresented in the Wordworth Trust’s programming and interpretation.

### Research Questions

As influential shapers of Western thought, which colonial ideas did the Wordsworth circle absorb, promote or resist in their writing?

How were Romantic literary cultures underpinned and shaped by colonial opportunity, trade and investment?

What kinds of conflicts arose between public writing and private financial investment, given the Wordsworth circle’s abolitionist friendships, and how were these manifested?

Given that literary house museums and visitors are increasingly interested in colonialism, how might Dove Cottage incorporate relevant research findings into its interpretation?

### Research Context

This PhD addresses the need for detailed and careful understandings of colonial history’s connections to canonical English figures. Investigating such connections can be a sensitive business. Controversy followed the inclusion of William Wordsworth’s house in the National Trust’s 2020 report. The Times, the Telegraph, and a direct family descendant were hostile to discussion of the Wordsworths’ colonial links. Colonialism is integral to the history of William and Dorothy, including their father’s employment by a West India planter and Westmoreland landowner and their brother John’s career as an East India Company captain. John’s ship, The Earl of Abergavenny, sank in 1805 bound for Bengal, claiming his life and his siblings’ investments.
The PhD will explore how the Wordsworths’ material circumstances, personal lives and writings were shaped by this experience of grief, profit and loss; a vivid example of empire’s costs - emotional and financial - at home and abroad. Using a wide range of archives at the Wordsworth Trust and elsewhere, the research will reveal the intergenerational, circumstantial and globally-brained nature of colonial enterprise, showing how colonialism facilitated the Wordsworth circle’s writing in practical ways: from the early support of the sugar-merchant Pinney family to the role of Charles Lamb, whose East India House postage rights enabled a brisk exchange in books and letters amongst his Romantic connections.

**Methodology**

A literary-historical methodology will combine close reading of Romantic literature with detailed archival research. There is a wealth of contextual secondary material on the Wordsworths and their circle, the East India Company and the British Atlantic world. In addition to relevant Indian material held by the Wordsworth Trust, the Lowther family papers are held at the British Library, Natwest Archives and Cumbria records office. Extensive records pertain to the *Earl of Abergavenny* (many letters are reproduced digitally) and associated accounts of opium-trading activity. The Royal Asiatic Society holds extensive records relating to the Wordsworth circle in Asia.

**About Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum**

Dove Cottage receives 40,000 annual visitors and Colonial Wordsworth will be a landmark CDA. Dove Cottage was purchased by the Wordsworth Trust in 1890 and opened to the public in 1891. In 1997, the Trust’s collection of books, manuscripts and painting was given designated status as a vital part of England’s natural cultural and artistic heritage. The Trust promotes accessible and inclusive scholarship. Its programmes of formal education, community outreach and responsive exhibitions all benefit from close collaboration with national and international universities. Inclusivity and participation are key principles in all areas of its work.

**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE**

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<tr>
<th>Lead HEI Supervisor:</th>
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1 Bolton, p. 541.