



Civil War Bluejackets

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Research on US Civil War sailors to create a treasure-chest for genealogists and social historians

The lives and experiences of immigrant and African American sailors during the American Civil War are set to be uncovered in a £685,000 study being led by Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Project Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the United States Navy, 1861-1865 is being led by Professor David Gleeson from Northumbria, in collaboration with the University of Sheffield Information Scientists [Dr](#)

[Morgan Harvey](#) and [Dr Frank Hopfgartner](#).

The research, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), will include the creation of newly digitised muster rolls – registers of the officers and men on Union Naval vessels – from the conflict, providing a valuable online resource both for social historians and people looking to discover their family histories.

By focusing on common United States Navy sailors – known as Bluejackets for their short shell-jacket uniforms – the research will also help better understand issues of race, class and ethnicity in the middle to late 19th century America.

Working with project partners, the Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean & Ecosystem Studies and the US Naval Academy Museum, the research project will provide an extensive and detailed analysis of all digitised sailor data, opening further research avenues into social history that are not possible through traditional direct archival research.

Professor Gleeson, who is a Professor of American History at Northumbria's Department of Humanities, explained: "Our research will draw on the personal details from this period such as name, age, place of birth, and pension files, in innovative ways to provide a new and accessible history of the 118,000 or so common sailors who served in the Civil War for the Union.

"As well as providing a fascinating insight for fellow academics and researchers into the social history of the time, it will help bring to life the individual experiences of these sailors – 30 percent of whom were British or Irish, and 15 percent were African Americans.

"Making the findings readily and easily available as a digital archive on the Internet should also be of particular interest to those interested in family history, especially African American genealogists as many of the formerly enslaved first appeared in their own right with full names on ship musters as they claimed equality through naval service."

Project Civil War Bluejackets begins in March 2022 and culminates with a final conference at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in February 2025. More information on the project and an earlier pilot study is available

at www.civilwarbluejackets.com and those with an interest can also follow the work on Twitter @BluejacketsWar.

This is the second study looking at experiences of soldiers of ethnicity to be funded at Northumbria University recently. In September Northumbria was awarded four prestigious [Leverhulme Early Career Fellowships](#), one of which is for a study into the medical treatment of South Asian soldiers who fought for Britain in the First World War. The University is also heavily involved in research that supports the UK Armed Forces community through [The Northern Hub for Military Veterans and Families research](#).

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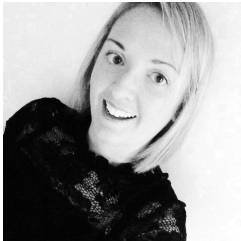
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