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# NEW GENERATION THINKERS

Discover how the arts  
and humanities' best early  
career researchers take  
their research to the BBC



**ON AIR**

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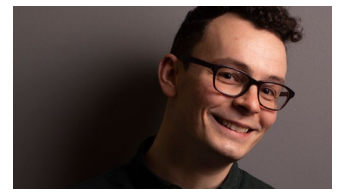
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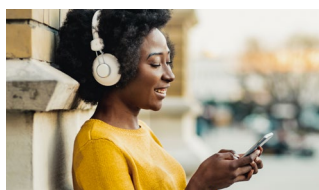
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Anne Sofield

## Expanding horizons

Now in its 10th year, the New Generation Thinkers scheme continues to nurture talent in the arts and humanities community, bringing leading researchers' insightful and innovative work into the spotlight.

The New Generation Thinkers scheme is an innovative, exciting partnership between the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the BBC. Since we launched this partnership over 10 years ago, we have worked to nurture the next generation of leading arts and humanities researchers, and brought their exciting discoveries and insights to the widest possible audience.

Many of the AHRC's schemes are competitive, but none are quite like New Generation Thinkers. Each year we receive hundreds of applications from our research community, covering the vast breadth of research that we fund: from history to literature, design to dance, linguistics to archaeology. We select the 60 very best applicants to workshop their programme ideas with the BBC. Of those, the most outstanding 10 are selected as New Generation Thinkers.

Joining the scheme can transform a researcher's career. The scheme is not simply about technical skills, or how to present on TV or the radio, or how to use social media or any other medium. At its core, it is about learning from and working with top BBC producers so Thinkers can see the big picture in what they do, distil this into its fundamental essence and experience how to present that to an audience. Thinkers become ambassadors and exemplars for the arts and humanities, sharing ideas, bringing people into their world, expanding horizons everywhere.

In today's changing world the arts and humanities are more important than ever. Arts and humanities research provides profound insights into ourselves and the world around us, enabling us to play a full and responsible part in society and to live rich and thoughtful lives. It builds our understanding of cultures, helping us understand and solve problems such as poverty, environmental fragility and infringement on human rights. And it supports our creative and cultural institutions, one of the most important pillars of the economy. New Generation Thinkers are an essential resource for sharing this potential, and one we hope to develop further in the future.

There are now 100 New Generation Thinkers. They present programmes on BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, BBC Four, the BBC World Service, and more. They routinely appear in and present podcasts. They write for major newspapers, present at festivals across the country, have spoken to MPs at the Houses of Parliament, and have published books, films and magazines. They have grown much, and they carry on growing. They are a vital part of our cultural and academic landscape.

In 10 years, Thinkers have gone from a small group of early career researchers to become 100 leading figures in the community. I can't help but wonder: where will the Thinkers be 10 years from now?

Welcome to the first 10 years of New Generation Thinkers.

**Anne Sofield**

Associate Director of Programmes  
Arts and Humanities Research Council



Welcome  
to the first  
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Generation  
Thinkers.

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# WHO ARE THE NEW GENERATION THINKERS?

The New Generation Thinkers scheme aims to develop a new generation of academics who can bring the best of university research and scholarly ideas to a broad audience through working with the media and engaging directly with the public.



The New Generation Thinkers scheme has been running since 2011 and 100 researchers now have the privilege of being able to call themselves an AHRC/BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinker. Many of them have found the experience transformative, not just making them better communicators, but better academics.

The scheme is a chance for early career researchers to cultivate the skills to communicate their research findings to those outside the academic community. Each year, up to 60 successful applicants have a chance to develop their media skills, including programme-making ideas with experienced BBC producers at a series of dedicated workshops.

Of these, up to 10 will become BBC Radio 3's resident New Generation Thinkers and benefit from a series of unique opportunities, such as media and public engagement training with the AHRC. There will also be the possibility of working with BBC TV, putting on events for the Being Human Festival and the chance to become an ambassador for their discipline. Applicants need to be conducting excellent research that demonstrates impact, as well exhibit an ability to explain it in clear and simple terms. They have to be able to talk about other subject areas within the arts and humanities in an accessible and refreshing manner, with an awareness of the wider public audience.

Applicants do not have to be funded by the AHRC to apply; the scheme is open to early career researchers and PhD students studying in all disciplines, as long as their work fuses with arts and humanities research.

Matthew Dodd

## A DECADE OF COLLABORATION

In the past 10 years, the New Generation Thinkers scheme has transformed Radio 3's relationship with academia and with academics.

Our BBC radio station is dedicated to culture and intellectual broadcasting, and right from its launch in 1946 it has given prominence to scholars. Indeed, their work has been hugely influential in our approach to classical music. But, to my mind, it was only in 2010 with the beginning of the NGT scheme that a once informal, intermittent and transactional relationship became something more deep rooted and truly collaborative. These days, the New Generation Thinkers play an important role in the station's cultural programming.

Each year, 10 New Generation Thinkers are mentored by experienced production staff – and in turn they present fresh ideas based on their specialisms.

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It's all part of Radio 3's systematic drive to boost our role in nurturing new talent. Our New Generation Artist scheme, which supports young musicians, began a decade earlier. And behind both schemes is the belief that secure, rewarding channels of development are necessary for broadcasting to showcase wave after wave of emerging performers and speakers.

Perhaps we implicitly believed the most skilled musicians and researchers would somehow emerge to everyone's attention. Working with the NGT scheme has shown how perilous that idea is. I've now spent 10 years meeting academics who are full of potential and yet who once would have remained on the other side of an invisible dividing line between broadcasting and the academy.

What's more, as the BBC and universities work to diversify their personnel and output, this belief in the importance of well-developed schemes to nurture new talent feels doubly important. Positive action to facilitate new ideas and people can and does make a difference.

Regular listeners to Radio 3's arts and ideas programme *Free Thinking* will have noticed

that impact, too. Broadcasting three nights a week, *Free Thinking* has been at the heart of the scheme's success. Each year, 10 Thinkers are mentored by experienced production staff – and in turn they present fresh ideas based on their specialisms. Slowly and surely, the range of debates and discussions to which Thinkers have contributed has widened. In fact, if the editor is considering a burning intellectual issue or hotly anticipated new book, input from a New Generation Thinker will only increase the chances of its inclusion.

Two further clinching pieces of evidence demonstrate the scheme's significance. Firstly, Thinkers are now trusted contributors on Radio 3: 2011 alumnus Shahidha Bari is now a regular host of *Free Thinking*; and weekly documentary slot, the *Sunday Feature*, is home to programmes presented by NGT graduates such as Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, Corin Throsby, Sarah Dillon and John Gallagher – and many more. It's not just the people who matter: the power of the research means that Thinkers now host their own Radio 3 podcast, *New Thinking*. A true sign that the scheme's intellectual agenda has become an essential part of the station's cultural output.

Finally, behind the scenes lies Radio 3's partnership with the AHRC. In the fast-changing media landscape, partnerships are necessarily often based around large one-off projects. But working with the AHRC for such a sustained period of time has been an enormously valuable way of understanding different priorities, perspectives, and how organisations can work together to share success – and in this case, break open the silos between broadcasting and academia.

Matthew Dodd  
Head of Speech Programmes  
BBC Radio 3



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Shahidha Bari





# A MODERN POLYMATH

Though I didn't know it at the time, being chosen as a New Generation Thinker was the start of an entirely new type of career.

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Academic and *Free Thinking* presenter Professor Shahidha Bari was amongst the first cohort of New Generation Thinkers in 2011. She discusses the scheme's impact on her career and its ongoing mission to spread good thinking.

It has been the most remarkable time. So much has happened that I couldn't have even imagined, let alone predicted when I naively filled in my application. Starting out as a New Generation Thinker back in 2011, there was a palpable sense we were part of a huge experiment.

It was something very new and untried. Everyone hoped it would work, but none of us – not the commissioners at the BBC, the academics, the Radio 3 producers nor the listeners – could have foreseen the impact the New Generation Thinkers (NGT) scheme would have. At that time, academia still felt like a separate, self-contained world. Arts and culture broadcasting was something you might listen to assiduously, as I did, might even credit as having helped educate you, but you didn't think about doing it yourself.

Even when the email came saying I had been chosen as a New Generation Thinker, I naively saw it as an opportunity to share my own research publicly. Though I didn't know it, it was the start of an entirely new type of career. I was very excited by learning about the process of making programmes and the skills of the broadcaster, but I did not anticipate broadcasting and the media would become such an integral part of my life. Most of us in that first cohort believed it would be something we dabbled in 'on the side' with the occasional spot of broadcasting or writing reviews for the newspapers thrown in.

It didn't happen immediately, of course. It has crept up on me really. These days, on my Twitter feed, I describe myself as Academic, Broadcaster, Critic, Eyeliner, in that order. (And it's funny how many people want to discuss the eyeliner part!) For some of the time, I'm a professor and lecturer at the University of the Arts London. At other points, I am a researcher, writing for a small intellectual, academic audience, but I'm also writing for more general audiences with my other books – I write for newspapers, radio, broadcasting, public

speaking, TV – although this variety wasn't anticipated or planned. It is a result of a decade of connections made through the NGT scheme.

In a practical sense, appearances on *Free Thinking* led to an awareness of what I do within the BBC and appearances as a critic and reviewer by Radio 4's *Saturday Review*, *Front Row* and the World Service. That led to work beyond the BBC, on arts strands, TV and writing reviews for the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. The point is that these connections may help you to see beyond your own research and academic specialisms – and move into the world of ideas and culture in new ways. It is a very specific achievement of the NGT scheme, I think. It is no longer deemed unusual to have multiple strands to your life as an academic. Though I've always said the best academics spend more time in the British Library than in Broadcasting House (and I still believe that), and I don't think academics should feel 'obliged' to make their research accessible, to me it feels like a breakthrough. Helping academic ideas find relevance beyond the university has led to so many positive and useful new ideas.

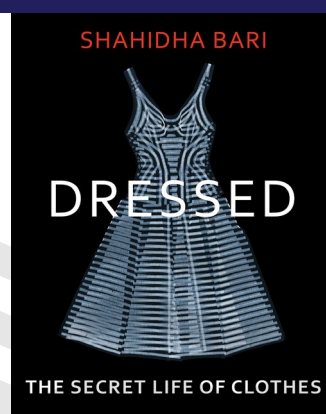
In my own case, there have been huge shifts in perspective in my own academic career. Connections made through the NGT activities led to me moving off in new directions with my research. I had always been interested in philosophy, but increasingly I was being drawn towards visual cultures, too. Talking and engaging with other academics led me to a new lectureship at the University of the Arts and the publication of my book on the philosophy of fashion (*Dressed – The Secret Life of Clothes*, Jonathan Cape, 2019).

**Shahidha Bari is Professor of Fashion Cultures and Histories at London College of Fashion (University of the Arts London)** whose research spans the fields of literature, art and film. She is a regular contributor to national newspapers and magazines, and a presenter of *Free Thinking*, Radio 3's flagship arts and ideas programme. Her book, *Dressed – The Secret Life of Clothes*, is available now (2019, Jonathan Cape).





## Shahidha Bari



## THE PHILOSOPHY OF FASHION

Following her NGT involvement in 2011, Shahidha has been able to explore different directions in her research and career, since becoming Professor of Fashion Cultures and Histories at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. In 2019, Shahidha's book, *Dressed – The Secret Life of Clothes*, was published, in which she draws upon research in literature, art, film and philosophy to delve into the hidden power of clothes and their effect on our culture and daily lives. Shahidha's discussions go beyond fashion and everyday self-expression to examine the unconscious statements our garments communicate to the world around us.

Looking back at the beginnings of the NGT scheme now, I can see these changes with some perspective. When the programme started in 2011, there was a degree of cynicism about the idea of making academic thought more accessible. Many people believed communicating research to the public made us complicit in the 'dumbing down' of intellectual discourse. I never saw it like that, and nor did many others I know in the academic community. In fact, I was attracted to the NGT programme precisely because I believed there was nothing wrong in wanting to talk about your research with as many people as possible. For me, reaching people in this way should be seen as a public good. We saw, quite quickly, that whatever cynicism people might have towards our agenda disappeared when they heard the quality of the discussions in these programmes.

The *Free Thinking* and *Arts & Ideas* podcasts work precisely because we don't try to dumb them down. Through programmes such as these, academics get to lift the quality of public discourse – and I make no apologies for saying that. By tackling complicated things in understandable ways, we drive better and more diverse kinds of thought and connection. That has to be good for everyone. In my experience, accessibility does not imply dumbing down. *Free Thinking* did a programme on Wittgenstein's language problems and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. I am a trained philosopher and I find Wittgenstein incredibly taxing and impenetrable! Yet we were able to find some brilliant philosophers who patiently steered us through it. While I am not sure it is ever possible to completely understand Wittgenstein's ideas totally, there was certainly a clearing in the woods by the end of it.

My experience of making programmes is that great strength of the NGT approach is in these competing tensions between academics who thrive on complexity, presenters, like me, who sit somewhere in between, and the editors

and commissioners who constantly push for simplification, intelligibility and accessibility. This tug of war makes for incredibly engaging programmes. So we make no apologies for asking those challenging but simple questions that often prove so hard for academics to answer: why does what you do matter? In a practical sense, that is how to enhance public debate. First, you need to make it understandable and relevant. Offer listeners a ladder of ideas they can climb up.


There is a perception in some places that intellectual programming is for older, high-brow, educated audiences. There is a belief that arts and culture programming that unashamedly tries to raise the level of public discourse doesn't engage or resonate with young people. My own experience – and my inbox – tell me different. Young audiences are hungry for ideas. This week, for example, my students were asking for resources about Black Lives Matter. I sent them to a *Free Thinking* episode we made about Audre Lorde, the black feminist writer. It is derogatory to suggest that programmes like *Free Thinking* are beyond people.

One of the puzzles we are currently mulling over in radio is how to reach these audiences. We need to continue to reinvent things and keep up with changing media habits, particularly. People consume speech broadcasting in drastically different ways now. Back in 2011, I might have listened to *Front Row* as I was chopping carrots at the sink for the evening meal. I might have tuned into *Free Thinking* with a warm drink just before going to bed. This morning, I listened to Rana Mitter's fabulous *Free Thinking* programme on the Wolfson History Prize as I was walking around the grocery store. While we are consuming media in more distracted and interrupted ways, we are also being exposed to many more new ideas more often and in many more places and ways than before. The Radio 3 *Arts & Ideas* podcast is one response to that shift.

Whatever cynicism people might have towards our agenda disappeared when they heard the quality of the discussions in these programmes.

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We must also keep up with changes happening in the wider consciousness, society and culture. We are living through a major shifting of the political and social axis. We are actively discussing the position and treatment of women, the position and treatment of people of colour, issues of equality and social justice. These are dear to my heart, but also have to be 'felt' and made visible in our wider public discourse. We try to reflect this through the programmes we make. *Free Thinking* has just put together what will be an excellent programme on Virginia Woolf's extraordinary novel, *Mrs Dalloway*. We interviewed Paul Mendez, a young gay black novelist who has written about a young gay black ex-Jehovah's Witness boy finding his feet in London. There is an intersection between the two around displacement, issues of place, sexuality and identity. We paired him with the historian Francesca Wade (author of the newly published *Square Haunting: Five Women, Freedom and London Between the Wars*, Faber & Faber, 2020), who offers a historical account of the Bloomsbury set. So, the juxtaposition of those two perspectives on London and identity – one historical and the other contemporary – helps bring ideas and histories into the present.

To me, this embodies the purpose of the NGT scheme, why the *Arts & Ideas* podcast, *Free Thinking*, *Front Row* and the other arts and culture programming the BBC produces remain essential to intellectual debate and the expression of ideas and new agendas. I am certainly proud that my voice as a British Asian Muslim woman is a part of that mix.

## EMPATHY, HUMANNES AND THE ARTS – Why arts and culture remain a social necessity

As we emerge from COVID lockdown to great tension and polarisation within our societies, I remain convinced of the potential the arts has to change things. As life becomes more constrained for many people around the world, and we face up to the enormous challenges of the climate crisis, I passionately believe that one of the best ways in which we can think, debate and understand these issues is through engaging with arts and culture. Reading books, watching films, engaging with art of all kinds, is the very best way to make sense of a changing world. Finding space to pause, think, listen and reflect through the arts and ideas, sustains our humanness and inculcates a kind of empathy between us. I am deeply committed to that as an essential human trait. It's something that will become much more important in helping us all move forward positively in the years to come.



Sarah Peverley

# A faster connection

Professor Sarah Peverley found the speed of media pitches a challenge compared with the longer meditation of academic projects. But the skills developed through NGT have helped her engage more audiences and empower colleagues and students.

Most academics dream of their research being used on radio and television, but since so many of us have little media contact, the New Generation Thinkers (NGT) workshop is a new environment.

The workshop I attended as part of the 2013 scheme was one of the most stressful things I've ever done. You're asked to think on your feet and share your ideas quickly – surrounded by highly intelligent people who could talk eloquently about their research, imposter syndrome kicked in. But being true to yourself and your research is key.

One of the most important things the scheme has taught me is finding the connections my research has to the wider world – and quite often that's via an interesting story. So, what stories can you tell to make a complicated subject more accessible? Academic work involves lots of deep thinking on projects that come to a conclusion at the end of a lengthy research period. The media is almost the reverse of that: programme makers want the conclusions *then* the story of how you got there – an engaging route into the more profound discoveries. While switching between those modes is initially challenging, the NGT trainers put pressure on you in a safe environment in order to build your confidence.

Of all the radio pieces I did, curating a Radio 3 *Words and Music* programme on mermaids is the most memorable. This collaboration allowed me to be creative and indulgent, and also played a part in securing my Leverhulme Trust Fellowship. Media work contributed to my election as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, too, demonstrating my ability to promote the importance of history.

The international reach of the NGT scheme is one of the jewels in its crown, and being able to evidence the global scope of my media work added extra value to my professorial application. I've been asked to fact-check questions for the American equivalent of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, been contacted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio New Zealand for interviews, and written a feature on King Arthur for *Vera*, Virgin's in-flight magazine. So it's not just about broadcasting in the UK: the BBC is a global broadcaster that disseminates new research and ideas to millions of people around the world.

Closer to home, it's been incredibly rewarding to share NGT insights with staff and students, and demonstrate how a connection to the media has the potential to shape their future careers.



## HOW THE NGT SCHEME HELPS YOU CAPTIVATE AN AUDIENCE

In workshops, producers often asked us, "What's your hook?" For *BBC History Magazine*, I wrote a piece on the medieval chronicler John Hardyng, whose life covered the reigns of five kings. While I could have chosen a big scene-setting battle, I opted instead for a spying mission for Henry V. The piece started with a story of a weary traveller crossing the Anglo-Scottish border. In that hinterland, there's potential for getting attacked, but also a liminal space to reflect on the journey. The NGT scheme is a bit like that – a brilliant space for academic and non-academic worlds to collide in fresh and energising ways.





What stories can you tell to make a complicated subject more accessible? Programme makers want an engaging route into the more profound discoveries.

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**Sarah Peverley is Professor of English Literature at the University of Liverpool,** where she teaches and researches medieval literature and history. As an expert on the Middle Ages and mythical creatures, she has contributed to television and radio broadcasts, including BBC Radio 3's *Words and Music*.

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# FREE THINKING



**Dr Iain Smith is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at King's College London** whose research focuses on the transnational dimensions of popular cinema. He is the author of *The Hollywood Meme: Transnational Adaptations in World Cinema* (EUP, 2016) and has contributed to BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking* and *The Essay* programmes.



## Iain Smith

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The New Generation Thinkers scheme not only helped Dr Iain Smith get his research to a wider audience but allowed him to take a more multi-channel approach to his academic work.

I applied for the New Generation Thinkers (NGT) scheme in 2017 just after my PhD when I'd got a job at King's College London. I'm one of these academics who loves their subject and is vaguely obsessed with it to a disturbing degree. But it's slightly frustrating that I'm only able to share that with small groups of students at a time. I like the idea that I can take my research and make it more available.

There's an implicit idea that film is already a dumbed-down form of art, so to then be dumbing down your scholarship to make it accessible to the public is a concern. What I really liked about this scheme was how the collaboration between the BBC and AHRC made our work accessible without losing its academic weight.

The NGT scheme gives you training in how to frame your research for a wider audience. If you're going to pitch it as a documentary or radio show, how is that going to work? I also found that I was getting more opportunities to put on film screenings and events. As a New Generation Thinker, I had the credibility and confidence to go out and do it.

For years I'd been writing about obscure B-movie remakes of Hollywood films that most people hadn't seen. On the back of NGT, I appeared on BBC Radio 3 with Matthew Sweet talking about *Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam* (aka 'Turkish Star Wars'). Then, through the Arts and Humanities Innovation Fund, King's College paid for a high resolution 2K digital restoration and we did a tour across the UK. I don't think I'd have had that confidence to contact a distributor, send out a press release, contact venues, find a poster designer... Until that point it was just me watching these films and doing research on them.

There's still a place for writing a 100,000-word monograph and doing academic journal articles, but alongside that I think making use of new technologies is invaluable. The NGT scheme has transformed the way I think about research. I love these films; I'd be watching Turkish B-movies and Indian superhero films even if it had nothing to do with my job. But if there's a way of doing research into what this social phenomenon is telling us about the politics of globalisation, then putting on events where some of that enthusiasm and passion is brought to a wider audience is really what I want to be doing.

## THE RETURN OF 'TURKISH STAR WARS'

*Why Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam* deserves your attention

*Dünyayı Kurtaran Adam* was such an incredible film: the sheer audacity of the director to take a print of *Star Wars*, then cut action set pieces into his film or back-project them behind actors. On top of that, it doesn't just steal from *Star Wars* but uses music from *Indiana Jones*, *Flash Gordon* and *Battlestar Galactica*. It's so out there and insane and action-packed that every audience I've screened it to have burst into spontaneous applause afterwards. I think getting that film screened across the UK is the thing I'm most proud of.





John Gallagher

# PAST MASTER

Dr John Gallagher believes that history has a scope far beyond academia. And the New Generation Thinkers scheme has given him the confidence – and connections – to help bring his subject into everyday public conversation.

Writing and presenting a 45-minute BBC Radio 3 documentary feature on the history of the tongue was some of the most fun I've had while at work.

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As a callow youth, I'd applied for the New Generation Thinkers scheme back in 2011 – and got nowhere. But in 2013, I had another go. I was towards the end of my PhD at Cambridge, and I had a strong feeling that what I was working on – vernacular language-learning in early modern England – could speak to a wider audience. I remember getting the email to say I'd been chosen: I absolutely hit the roof. It was a huge boost for my career.

For me, the attraction of the scheme was to bring scholarly research to a wider audience. I'm an academic historian, but I had a background in tour guiding and had written book reviews for newspapers and opinion-based stuff, too. I felt there were stories from history that weren't being told. Also, I was just in awe of the academic media output the BBC was putting together, and was really excited to see if I could be a part of that.

One of the things I'm most proud of is writing and presenting a 45-minute BBC Radio 3 documentary feature on the history of the tongue, which was some of the most fun I've had while at work. That was enormous, being trusted to do the flagship slot on a Sunday night.

It also gave me the chance to do much broader research – it went outside my own interest in language and speech, to think about taste, sex and modern questions.

It's really important that history isn't just the preserve of academics. I'm interested in where history offers an answer to a contemporary question, or can help us have a better public conversation about something. I've heard people say, 'History was never for me.' So, in some ways, what's more difficult is getting past people's preconceptions. There's the old joke (because of what we learnt at school and how history can be presented) that history is basically Tudors and Nazis, and everything else is window-dressing. But that means we miss out on times and people that are incredibly interesting.

Being a New Generation Thinker has pushed me to take that risk and draw the bigger picture as well. It opens you up. You can get so involved in your own period, your own discipline – and keeping an eye out for the new tranche of New Generation Thinkers, and listening to their broadcasts, is a great way to shake up your own worldview.




## NEW IDEAS AND FACES

How the NGT scheme encourages more diverse storytelling

There's much more public engagement with history and the arts now because of New Generation Thinkers. You can see that in things like history festivals, and also the increasing market for more diverse ways of telling history. Look at a show like *A House Through Time*, for instance, or the BBC's recent histories of black Britain. What people want to watch and listen to is really changing.

The scheme is also broadening the pool of experts, and it's great to have that pipeline of new ideas. There's a real commitment to new ideas and new faces.



A close-up portrait of Dr John Gallagher, a man with dark, wavy hair, a full brown beard, and black-rimmed glasses. He is smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a bright yellow button-down shirt over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a lamp and some greenery. The image is framed by a white border on the left and top, and a yellow border on the bottom and right. A dark blue rectangular box with white text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**Dr John Gallagher is Lecturer in Early Modern History at the University Of Leeds**, specialising in the Renaissance and Reformation periods. Since becoming a New Generation Thinker in 2013, he's appeared on BBC Radio programmes including *Free Thinking* and *Today*.

Dr John Gallagher.  
Photo courtesy of the  
University of Leeds

Tom Smith



# T A L K I N G T E C H N O

The New Generation Thinker scheme opened up Dr Tom Smith's research to different audiences and now it's given him the drive to amplify the voices of others involved in the techno scene.

As a New Generation Thinker (NGT) in 2019, I was largely focused on the 30th anniversary of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of the city's techno scene. Now my interest has shifted towards the cultural dialogue between Detroit and Berlin set within the framework of marginalisation. My experience as an NGT is already influencing the outcomes of this project.

During the NGT media training I learned that there is no such thing as a broader audience. You're always dealing with audiences – specifically, the people you're trying to communicate with. It's important to speak to them, rather than just talking about yourself and your research.

Because it's not just about me in the office with my books, separate from the activists, techno fans and club promoters I meet. My research is incomplete if I'm not having diverse conversations – and it's both fun and encouraging to explore where they lead.

Once you start thinking about your audiences, it opens your eyes to the possibility that there are elements of work within your NGT cohort that unite you all. The NGTs in our group worked across a diverse range of areas and yet as soon as we were put on a radio show, or sat together at an event, we discovered these connections.

I'm now in a position where it feels like I'm exploring something with real momentum, due in part to the conversations I've been empowered to have with others involved in techno or working in the area. I've started to understand what really matters to people in Berlin's and Detroit's current cultural scene. As a researcher, I have a responsibility to amplify their voices. I'm really excited to see where this project goes in the next few years.

## Dr Tom Smith is Lecturer in German at the University of St Andrews

whose current research explores experiences of marginalisation in Germany's techno scene. He has appeared on BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking* and his recently released book, *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East German Culture* (Berghahn Books, 2020), is discussed on *The Essay*.



## CONNECTING TO A NETWORK OF THINKERS

A community that provides valuable support and camaraderie

Feeling like part of a network of researchers who have been involved with the scheme for the past decade – and who have done incredible work – was inspiring. The support from the AHRC was equally valuable, particularly the expertise of the communications and press team. It's great to have access to such a supportive community with whom you wouldn't usually meet – academics from different disciplines from a range of institutions – and hopefully this will continue.



Catherine Fletcher



**Catherine Fletcher is Professor of History at Manchester Metropolitan University**, specialising in the Renaissance and early modern Europe. She has appeared regularly on BBC TV and radio, worked as a consultant on *Wolf Hall*, and recently published her latest book, *The Beauty And The Terror* (Bodley Head, 2020).

## History repeating

Despite previous experience in the media, Professor Catherine Fletcher found that the New Generation Thinkers scheme encouraged her to venture beyond the boundaries of her academic discipline, benefitting both her personal studies and the public's appetite for history.

I became a New Generation Thinker (NGT) in 2015 – third time lucky. Before I went into academia, I had worked in TV news so I was already interested in taking research to wider audiences, and the NGT scheme seemed a good way to build on that.

The scheme is well recognised now and gives you that marker of quality, not only in the media but also within academia amongst people who may be appointing new jobs.

I've contributed to BBC Two's programme *A Fresh Guide to Florence with Fab 5 Freddy*, talking about my research on Duke Alessandro de' Medici,

a mixed-race prince in 16th century Italy and the subject of my 2016 book, *The Black Prince Of Florence* (Oxford University Press).

At the moment, I'm working on some articles about guns and their early use in Europe. This follows a BBC Radio 3 programme I contributed to about gun culture a few years ago, looking at Beretta – which we all know as James Bond's gun, but it actually first turns up in 1526. The arguments over guns 500 years ago are remarkably similar to those in the United States today – a real example of how the past connects to the present.

The NGT scheme has encouraged me to be a little more experimental, too – to explore books and exhibitions outside of my field. That's the advice I'd give to prospective applicants: think outside of your immediate topic. I personally get asked to do all sorts of things, from consulting on a theatre script to stand-up comedy. There's a genuine public appetite for history and arts coverage now, so it's great that the New Generation Thinkers scheme has helped to generate that.



### WILD THINGS

Catherine recalls her consultancy role on 2015's *Wolf Hall*

Working on the BBC adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*, I dealt with queries from the team as they were dressing the set, about what exactly was appropriate in terms of props and the look of things. They were very committed to all the authentic detail and wanted to ensure that when they *did* make a compromise with the historical detail for artistic reasons, that it was a conscious decision. My favourite question: "What shape is a Tudor coffin?"

## Podcasts

# PODCASTING: TELL YOUR RESEARCH STORY

Discover from the experts why podcasts are a great way to share academic research with a wider audience – and how to get your content right.

We're lucky; we have all this great content that people are genuinely interested in hearing about. It deserves to be made public to as many people as possible

Dr Sarah Turner, Deputy Director for Research at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art



In July 2019, the AHRC launched a new podcast series in partnership with the BBC Radio 3. *The New Thinking* podcast features the AHRC's New Generation Thinkers in conversation with researchers and specialists, telling the stories of the amazing arts and humanities research carried out across the UK.

Just over a year on, more than 20 podcasts (and counting) have been recorded, raising the profile of a range of projects from nature writing to tackling modern slavery, the impact of being multilingual to Neolithic revelations. And with each episode clocking up thousands of listens, it is easy to see why a growing number of academics are looking at the role podcasts can play in reaching new audiences.

While research can be communicated through journals, reports and blogs, podcasts provide an opportunity for academics to tell the story in their own voice, in an accessible way, and to a wider – often global – audience. Crucially, this is an audience that really wants to listen.

"Remember, they've found a show, pressed subscribe, then choose to hit play each week. Our data shows that

most listen to the end," says Matt Deegan, who co-runs the British Podcast Awards and is Creative Director of audio-content specialist Folder Media. "This means appearing on a podcast gives you a quality, engaged listener. If you find shows connected to your subject, then you'll really cut through."

Podcasts began to be widely consumed in 2005 when Apple introduced support for them in iTunes, but it is only over the past few years that their popularity has really taken off. In 2019, one in eight people in UK listened to at least one podcast a week (up 24% in a year) and the figure is even bigger in the US where 22% listen weekly.

Recent lockdowns have seen podcast audiences "skyrocket", says Dr David Musgrove, Content Director of *BBC History Magazine*, whose hugely successful *History Extra* podcast moved from weekly to daily earlier this year. "Podcast use was already building quickly, but the pandemic moved everything even further forward. The number of available podcasts is also booming. In our field, we're seeing dozens of new launches in recent months, including many by established historians."



### Engaging the public

Hearing experts explaining what they do and, importantly, why it matters, provides a very effective bridge between university research and public understanding. Successful podcasters move away from the more formal tone of journals or lectures, and instead bring research to life with a more accessible voice.

“There’s an intimacy to podcasts that you don’t get from a lot of academic writing,” explains Dr Sarah Turner, Deputy Director for Research at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. Her *Sculpting Lives* podcast on 20th century women sculptors takes the form of a lively discussion with co-host Jo Baring, Director of the Ingram Collection, plus curators and artists.

She says: “I imagine talking to my own friends and family who are not art historians but are interested in what I’m doing and what I’ve seen. There is such a wide community of people who are interested in academic work but perhaps don’t have access to university libraries or the journals we publish in, and podcasts open up research to them in a rich and meaningful way.”

For New Generation Thinker Dr Jade Halbert, Lecturer in Fashion Business and Cultural Studies, University of Huddersfield, the *New Thinking* podcast enabled more direct engagement: “Having my segment broadcast as part of the *New Thinking* podcast has amplified it so much and taken it further to different audiences, and I’ve had some really fantastic discussions with students, designers, and recyclers as a result of that.”

### Speaking to specialist audiences

Podcasting also offers opportunities to open up a wider academic discourse between researchers and build connections between institutions.

At a time when in-person gatherings are restricted, a podcast can create a platform for scholarly discussion. Dr Anna Reid, Head of Research at Paul Mellon Centre, aimed *British Art Talks* at the expert audience who would have attended the centre’s seminars.

With around 6,000 listens across the series, it has widened the reach compared with seminars, but the value is also in the format of the content, says Dr Reid. “There is a very important role for high-level, well-articulated discussions that are presented in a digestible, accessible way,” she explains. “It creates a new tier of discourse that helps scholars improve the circulation of their work and also encourages discussion among an academic community.”

Regular presenter of the *New Thinking* podcast, Dr Hetta Howes, Lecturer in Medieval and Early Modern Literature at City, University of London, says being involved with the podcast helped her make connections, too. “I’ve identified some surprising cross-connections with my own research. It’s been great for networking, too, as I’ve made a number of research contacts at other universities through presenting.”

### In-depth connections

Bear in mind that whether you are talking to an expert audience or general public, the nature of podcasts means your listener is likely to be doing something else at the same time.

“People listen to podcasts while they’re walking the dog, doing the washing up, and so on – they are not dedicating their entire concentration to it,” says Dr Musgrove. “This means you can’t expect them to engage with very complicated ideas that are not explained in a simple, coherent fashion. It also makes it very difficult to get

a response to a call to action, for citizen science for example.”

However, a greater level of engagement is possible by making use of a podcast’s show notes. “You can insert links to your research, or the survey you want them to fill in, and make a point of directing them to the notes during the podcast,” suggests Dr Musgrove.

The innovative AHRC-funded BBC Radio 4 *Forest404*, set in a dystopian future where forests no longer exist, cleverly mixed drama podcasts with expert discussions. Its website directed listeners to an online experiment assessing the effects natural sounds have on mental health and wellbeing, drawing on many of the sounds featured in the podcast.

### Improving communication skills

Appearing on a podcast, whether as a guest or presenter, requires academics to communicate in a way that is concise, engaging and easy to understand. Honing these skills can also translate into more effective public events, teaching and even communication among peers.

Ultimately, sharing your research through podcasts also increases the communication of arts and humanities ideas. “At a time when the arts and humanities are facing so many pressures, we have this opportunity to communicate why the work we do matters to the world,” says Dr Turner. “But we’re lucky; we have all this great content that people are genuinely interested in hearing about. It deserves to be made public to as many people as possible.”

The experts’ guide  
to podcasting



Being a guest on an established podcast is a good way to reach a larger audience.

Dr David Musgrove,  
Content Director of  
BBC History Magazine

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## THE EXPERTS' GUIDE TO PODCASTING

### Be a guest

*History Extra's* Dr Musgrove says: "The podcast market is now so saturated that unless you have an absolutely amazing original idea for a one-off podcast, or a huge social reach, it's very hard to cut through and gain listeners. Making a podcast isn't technically difficult, but it could mean a lot of time spent for very little return. Being a guest on an established podcast is a good way to reach a larger audience."

### Research your pitch

Dr Musgrove says: "If you're going to pitch an idea to a podcast, check what they have already covered and how they approach a subject. Being active on social media can also help. I follow a lot of medieval historians on Twitter. If I see an interesting thread, I often drop them a line to see if there's potential for a podcast on the subject."

### Prep but don't script

Find out who is going to be listening – most established podcasts will have data on average age and location.

Dr Musgrove says: "It's perfectly acceptable to ask in advance for the sorts of subjects you might be covering, and it can help to write some bullet points of key things you'd like to say. But don't be tempted to read off a script. It will just sound stilted."

### Launch your own

If you do decide to create your own series, listen to lots of podcasts first.

British Podcast Awards' Matt Deegan says: "Think about what's good and bad about them, and try to ape some of the techniques. Make sure you have a listener-focused hook. The *Geoff Richards* podcast isn't very exciting but the *How Not to Have a Research Disaster* podcast might be more engaging. Make sure your show has a solid concept that solves a problem for a listener."

### Ask for help

Your university communications team is likely to be able to help with the technical issues involved in producing a podcast.

*Sculpting Lives'* Dr Sarah Turner says: "There can be issues with copyright and GDPR, too, so seek the advice of your university's legal and intellectual property experts."

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