

CIRMMT Inter-Centre Research Exchange 2026

Report Awardee: Mai Lyn Puittinen, Music Technology Master's at McGill University

Thesis Supervisor: Stephen McAdams

CIRMMT Sponsor: Stephen McAdams

Exchange Institute: Birmingham City University

Dates of Exchange: May 18th to June 14th 2026

Exchange Objectives

My research exchange as part of the *Sonic Heritage and Environmental Change on England's East Coast, 1718–present* project with Birmingham City University (BCU) looked to expand upon my perceptual thesis research on everyday sound textures beyond a purely experimental framework. Supervised by Dr. Joanna Bullivant, the internship positioned my work within a broader cultural and historical context, while allowing me to apply and further develop my technical computer science skillset. Over four weeks, my project recorded and interpreted the influence of geophony (the non-biological sounds of the natural environment) through on-site fieldwork in the town of Aldeburgh, Suffolk. I connected site-specific sounds from the flat, marshy landscape and North Sea shingle beaches to the 1925 Aldeburgh-inspired ghost story *A Warning to the Curious* by M. R. James. After completing my fieldwork, I summarized my work as a publicly available online soundmap and accompanying soundscape composition to disseminate my research to the general public.

Fieldwork and BCU Resources

Travelling to the east coast of England presented the opportunity to participate in on-site fieldwork with the Sonic Heritage Team and gain experience with specialized equipment. With the support of BCU, I was able to record and soundwalk the retired military testing site of Orford Ness. Now a nature reserve, I shadowed Aglaia Fouteinou, a postdoc on the project, to produce ZOOM recordings and 360 video of the unique shingle spit. Orford Ness was not my specific research focus, but it provided valuable field-recording practice and unique sounds that I incorporated into my final soundscape composition.



I travelled to Aldeburgh on my own time and with the Sonic Heritage team, where I obtained the majority of my ZOOM field recordings for my project and gained experience with an ambisonic mic. Additionally, we conducted a short morning trip to Felixstowe to record the massive container ships. In the nearby town of Ipswich, I visited The Hold, which houses the Suffolk Archives. Here I was supported in my research of contextualizing Aldeburgh in the early 1900s, culturally and geographically. While in Birmingham, Dr. Joanna Bullivant introduced me to Simon Hall, head of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire's Music Technology area, who provided access to the Richard Tandy Studio to edit and arrange my sound recordings.

Research Outcomes

Through hands-on exposure to field recording, I gained experience with various recording technologies in unique locations on England's east coast. Most importantly, by creating a publicly available interactive webpage, I am contributing to the field of sonic heritage. Using stereo field recordings collected from England's east coast, I created an ArcGIS StoryMap that explores Aldeburgh through a sonic retelling of the ghost story by M.R. James: *A Warning to the Curious*. The webpage includes an interactive map that walks the reader through the story geographically and sonically, which culminates in a soundscape composition. This webpage will be available in connection with BCU's *Sonic Heritage and Environmental Change on England's East Coast, 1718-present* project, to accomplish the goal of soundscape research dissemination to the general public.

Acknowledgements

I extend my deep thanks and appreciation for all the support I received for this project. Thank you to CIRMMT for providing essential funding for this research opportunity. This work would not exist without the support of Dr. Joanna Bullivant, Aglaia Fouteinou, the Sonic Heritage team, and Birmingham City University. Thank you for building and believing in this project with me! Finally, thank you to my McGill supervisor, Dr. Stephen McAdams, for encouraging an alternative perspective on my thesis research.