The British Library has always been a place where research happens. Academics, students and independent researchers alike use our Reading Rooms to undertake detailed study on topics from every disciplinary area, reflecting the national and international collections we care for. More recently, our users have been able to access an increasing body of digitised content, onsite and online, to enable efficient access and support new methodologies.

Yet, we are more than simply a provider of sources for research. Our organisation takes an active role in research, nationally and internationally, as an important contributor to intellectual exchange and understanding. We are proud to count many scholarly experts amongst our staff, experts who themselves generate new knowledge through the research that they do both as research leaders and as collaborators.

The Library’s role as Independent Research Organisation is central to its vision to make our intellectual heritage accessible to everyone. We partner with academia, industry and many other sectors to enrich scholarly understanding, develop new insights, support research capacity and training, and deliver new digital research resources and services. Our cultural programmes, exhibitions, community projects and learning activities engage and involve wider audiences – in person and online – with this research. This synergy is fundamental to our role in the global narrative that underpins the world’s knowledge.

It is a great source of pride and delight that one of our major current research projects, Two Centuries of Indian Print, is a partnership with a number of significant scholarly institutions in India, including the School of Cultural Texts and Records (SCTR) of Jadavpur University, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, alongside SOAS University of London in the UK and a number of other partners. Working together to digitise and make available more than 1,000 early printed Bengali books will enable unprecedented access to valuable historical documents, supporting the development of new findings and shared understanding. Building international research relationships such as this is at the heart of our vision for research; working across cultures, languages and borders we hope to create maximum value and impact for diverse research audiences.

This short publication is the first of its kind to collate, showcase and celebrate the research that we have been involved in over the last academic year. It provides a few examples of the different active research work that we do, from PhD studentships to research collaborations, alongside the outputs of our research which include events, resources, workshops and digitised content. We would like to provide you with a flavour of research at the British Library, which is as varied, intriguing and productive as the organisation itself.
CASE STUDY

“My PhD placement at the British Library gave me valuable insight into the crucial role that archives play in public life. It was an exciting opportunity to enhance my skills in public engagement. This included producing new resources, such as a website on archiving activism, as well as coordinating an event for International Women’s Day on archiving feminist movements. It was a really engaging and inspiring three months, which has prepared me in many ways for my next research project.”

Rachel Tavernor
University of Sussex and British Library
PhD placement student, 2016
Introduction
Allan Sudlow, Head of Research Development

Three years ago the Research Development team at the British Library was established to build our research capability and develop our research capacity as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO). It is from this perspective that we have compiled this publication as an opportunity to demonstrate the range of research expertise and skill across the British Library. Here we provide a snapshot of some of the key research activities that have taken place across the last academic year, October 2016 to September 2017. It does not capture all our research, but we hope it demonstrates the value of this research to partners, funders, the wider research community and public audiences.

The focus of this report is the externally-funded research that we have worked with partners to secure as an IRO. It provides a brief insight into how this research has helped us deliver our purposes as a national library, with global collections. The UK Government and Research Councils, European Commission, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Polonsky Foundation, Newton Fund, Leverhulme Trust, Wellcome Trust and British Academy have all funded research highlighted in this inaugural report. We are grateful to them all for their support.

Recently we celebrated our ten year anniversary as an Independent Research Organisation with the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Our capacity to lead and contribute to world-class research is well-established but the scope of our IRO activities grows, with an increased involvement in projects and programmes that also encompass the Social and Life Sciences, and Digital Research in many different contexts. Within the report, we have also included the voices of research students, fellows and strategic partners and we are indebted to the enlightened, creative and productive relationships they have forged with us.

What this report doesn’t focus on is the immense amount of work that my team has done to help develop the Library’s research profile, improve our research management and governance processes, and evolve our capacity for research across all disciplines. We rely on the co-operation, knowledge, skills, expertise and efforts of many staff across the British Library, and external partners to do what we do. And this inaugural report gives a brief glimpse into what we have achieved together over the past year.

research informs and supports almost every aspect of our daily practice

Our organisation has always been research active, working with a range of partners both nationally and internationally. Indeed, research informs and supports almost every aspect of our daily practice, be it curation, conservation, preservation, resource discovery, digital innovation, cultural programming or learning. Whether it’s a major exhibition or a new way to discover or understand a unique part of our collections, it has been enabled by staff research.
Research Projects

2016/17 ACADEMIC YEAR

The British Library was involved in 43 collaborative research projects

10 projects were led by us (LRO)
4 projects were Co-Investigated by us (Co-I)
29 projects on which we were a Project Partner (PP)

Highlights include the AHRC-funded and British Library-led Two Centuries of Indian Print; Africa’s Sons Under Arms, an on-going collaboration with the University of Warwick, also supported by the AHRC; England and France: Manuscripts, a British Library digitisation project supported by the Polonsky Foundation; and THOR (Technical and Human Infrastructure for Open Research) funded under the EU’s Horizon 2020 scheme which finished in 2017 after 30 months of successful partnership.

We worked with a wide range of partner institutions, from across the UK and Europe.

UK partners
British Museum, British Sociological Association, Institute of Historical Research (University of London) King’s College London, Newcastle University, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, SOAS, University College London, University of Birmingham, University of Brighton, University of Exeter, University of Kent, University of Leicester, University of Liverpool, University of Manchester, University of Oxford, University of Portsmouth, University of Southampton, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of Warwick, University of Westminster, Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource (CLOSER), The Alan Turing Institute.

EU partners
Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, University of Naples, CERN, European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI), PANGAEA.

International partners

OTHER FUNDERS

22 AHRC
7 various EU funding schemes
4 Leverhulme Trust
2 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
8 a range of other UK and international funders.
The British Library was involved in **18 new** collaborative research projects which began this year.

**4** are led by the British Library.

**OTHER FUNDERS**

- 10 AHRC
- 2 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- 2 Leverhulme Trust.

The others receive funding from the British Sociological Association, the European Commission, the National Endowment for the Humanities (US funder), the University of Kent and the Wellcome Trust.

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2016/17 ACADEMIC YEAR

**Studentships**

**PhD Collaborations**

University of Brighton, University of Nottingham, Hanover Medical School (Germany), University of Manchester, University of Birmingham, Royal College of Music (London), University of Sussex (Brighton), UCL, University of Brighton, Royal Holloway (London), University of Sussex (Brighton), University of Warwick, University of Cambridge, Goldsmiths (London), Royal Holloway (London), University of Oxford, University of Manchester, University of Newcastle (Australia), University of Birmingham, University of Liverpool, University of Sheffield, University of York, University of Stirling, University of Durham, Queen Mary (London), University of Bristol, University of Sheffield, SOAS (London), University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, University of Leicester, University of Lancaster, University of Leeds, City University London, Bath Spa University, University of Essex.

(See page 28 for full list)

**The combined value of these 18 grants:**

£14,239,179

**The total value of the 4 projects solely led by the British Library:**

£2,065,255

This figure includes the value of the training grant awarded by the AHRC for British Library collaborative studentships, £1,361,500. This fund is paid directly to our HEI partners.
Supporting Early Career Research

The British Library’s postgraduate and early-career programme supports new research which has impact across the cultural, heritage and higher education sector as well as for the public through our exhibitions, events and other programmes. Our training and professional development opportunities enhance the depth, breadth and agility of the UK’s research base, equipping a new generation with the skills and expertise for wide-ranging research careers.

In the academic year 2016/17, 4 new AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) projects were started in collaboration with Higher Education Institution (HEI) partners. Based on the students spending an average of 18 months on site at the Library during their projects, this represents in kind support for British Library research activities equivalent to around £550,000 of staff costs.

Collaborative PhD Research

We co-supervise doctoral research in partnership with universities from across the country, with 29 projects underway in 2016/17 supported through funding from the AHRC and ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). This research is informing understanding of our content and making a key strategic contribution to the work of teams across the Library.

Current collaborative PhD projects are enhancing our engagement with new forms of digital publishing (Carol Butler, City University London; Alastair Horne, Bath Spa University) and informing our curation of born-digital archives (Helen Piel, University of Leeds). Other projects are making innovative use of large-scale digitised newspaper collections for sociological research on attitudes to migration (Ruth Byrne, Lancaster University) and evaluating early wax cylinder recordings from the Sound Archive to provide fresh insights into the trailblazing fieldwork of an early ethnomusicologist in South Asia (Christian Poske, SOAS). A notable highlight from the past year was the role played by two AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students in the curation of the major PACCAR Gallery exhibition Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths (Katie McElvanney, Queen Mary University of London; Mike Carey, University of Nottingham).

PhD Research Placements

In 2016 we launched a new competition for PhD students to undertake 3-month professional development research placements ‘behind the scenes’ at the Library. Supervised and hosted by Library staff, these projects are specially designed to support the application and enhancement of transferable research skills, complementing university-based postgraduate and early-career research training programmes.

The 25 such placements hosted in 2016/17 have allowed both UK and international PhD students to make ‘hands on’ contributions to the work of the Library – from enhancing catalogue records, convening public events and generating collections-based research case studies, to informing acquisitions strategies and improving engagement with emerging media formats. In the process, placement students have been able to better understand the importance and applicability of their research expertise, gain insights into different career paths and enhance their professional and research networks.

CASE STUDY

The British Library’s research placements are a fantastic way for PhD students to apply their research and training outside the university context. The North West Consortium was delighted to sponsor three placement projects in 2016 as part of our wider engagement with the Library around the professional development of postgraduate and early-career arts and humanities researchers.

Professor Stuart Jones
Director of the North West Consortium AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership, 2014–17

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Professor Stuart Jones
Director of the North West Consortium AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership, 2014–17
Collaborative Research Training

Engagement with the postgraduate and early-career research community enhances our visibility as a research library and Independent Research Organisation. In the last year, we have taken this forward by expanding our research engagement with Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) – regional consortia of UK universities that fund PhD research and training. Complementing a range of existing collaborations around arts and humanities research, in 2017 we joined the North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership, creating a new platform for our staff to exchange knowledge and expertise with the next generation of social science researchers.

These networks help us to engage with emerging research trends across different academic disciplines. They also help us to better understand the changing needs of early-career researchers, thereby informing our research service development. One example from the past year is a workshop and study day with students from the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts (CHASE), White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH) and South West & Wales AHRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) marking the completion of a major project to enhance Reading Room access to the born-digital components of the Library’s archives of writers Hanif Kureishi and Carmen Callil.

Doctoral Open Days

In early 2017 we hosted our annual series of open days for first-year PhD students, including the first ever such event at our Yorkshire site in Boston Spa. Offering those at the start of their postgraduate research journeys a practical introduction to the Library, the open days also provide attendees with a forum to meet curators and reference specialists and to network with other PhD students with related research interests.

The 2017 series attracted over 500 students. With 72 per cent of delegates based at universities outside London, for many this represented their first ever visit to the Library and a unique opportunity both to discover the breadth and depth of the collection and to explore the range of resources and support services available to researchers, on site and online.
Early-Career Research

The past year has seen the launch of a new research collaboration with the British Sociological Association (BSA). The BSA Postdoctoral Fellowship for Sociology at the British Library reflects the strategic commitment of the Library and the BSA to supporting early-career pathways and promoting innovative sociological research. In July 2017 we were delighted to welcome Andrew Rackley to the Library as the inaugural BSA Postdoctoral Fellow. Over the 12 months of his fellowship Andrew worked closely with the Library, the BSA and the wider research community to showcase the often untapped potential of the Library collection for sociological research and inform new initiatives to publicise and promote the Library as a sociological research resource to new users and audiences.

Chevening Fellowships

In October 2016 we welcomed the Library’s first Chevening Fellows to our London site at St Pancras. The result of a partnership with Chevening – the UK Government’s international awards scheme – these 12-month professional development projects are fostering new forms of international collaboration and enhancing our capacity to explore and improve access to a truly global collection that includes materials in almost all languages.

Our 2016/17 Chevening Fellows were Junaid-ul-Hassan Sheikh, an archivist from Quetta (Pakistan) and Oluwaseun Obasola, a librarian from Ibadan (Nigeria). Junaid and Oluwaseun completed projects on South Asian News and Media, and Big Data and Libraries respectively, supervised and supported by British Library experts and benefiting also from the rich programme of training and engagement opportunities delivered by the Chevening Secretariat.
We take an active role in collaborative research with a range of partners, both in the UK and internationally. Our research collaborations enable us to develop new knowledge about the content we care for so that we can better promote its use, both to the public and to the research community. Funding from our research collaborations has paid for the digitisation of important historical content, supporting access by researchers nationally and internationally. Collaborative research has also enabled the development of new material, expanding the range of our content to ensure that future researchers are able to access vital research resources.

Projects

In the past year, the British Library has commenced 18 newly funded projects. Some of these have been led by British Library staff and others are led by universities or other research partners. The examples below of newly funded projects show the diverse nature of the research we take part in and the different forms our research work and collaborations can take.

Digital Delius: Interpretation, Performance, and Analysis

In September 2017, we began working on Digital Delius, a year-long partnership with the University of Oxford, Delius Trust and Villiers String Quartet. Funded by the AHRC’s Follow on Funding scheme, Digital Delius will digitise content relating to British-born composer Frederick Delius (1862–1934) held both at the British Library and the Delius Trust, and create related web-based resources to aid public understanding of the creative process from initial idea to finished score. This collaboration builds on Delius, Modernism and the Sound of Place, a previous project with Oxford which created an online thematic catalogue of Delius’ works. A major output of Digital Delius will be the launch of the first phase of Discovering Music next year. This new web resource will feature Delius alongside other post-1900 composers and will include a unique blend of printed, manuscript and sound material together with short contextual essays and teaching resources. It therefore aims to bring this period of western classical music to life through the lens of the British Library’s collections.
Digitising the Archives of Health and Disease in British India

In October 2016, the British Library curator Dr Antonia Moon received funding from the Wellcome Trust for a 15-month project to digitise and make available approximately 2,000 archives relating to health and disease in the India Office Records. Topics covered by the records include medical topography, nutrition, drugs and cures, military and public health, and medical education, for the period 1780 to 1910. The material is a key source for researchers studying colonial administration and medical policy in British India, as well as for those with a general interest in the history of science. The digitised resource offers new possibilities for collaboration with external partners.

Beyond the Spectacle: Native North American Presence in Britain

The Contemporary British Publications, Americas Collections and Eccles Centre for American Studies teams worked closely with Dr David Stirrup (University of Kent) and Professor Jacqueline Fear-Segal (University of East Anglia) to support a funding bid to the AHRC. This focused on the transatlantic mobility of Native American communities to Britain as well as the cultural and political legacies that resulted from movements across a period stretching from the sixteenth century to the modern day. The bid was awarded funding to start in September 2017. The British Library will benefit from the development of new content about Native North American connections to Britain for our website, the onsite expertise of a research associate employed by the project and the digitisation of select material that contribute to the project.

“Among users of the India Office Records, the history of medicine is an increasingly popular field of study. The archives will all appear on the Library’s new digital viewer, enabling researchers to easily use them alongside resources from other institutions.”

Dr Antonia Moon, Lead Curator Post-1858 India Office Records
Two Centuries of Indian Print

The first phase of the Two Centuries of Indian Print project began in March of 2016 with combined funding from AHRC/Newton-Bhabha and The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and has brought together an interdisciplinary team of specialists in digital curation as well as the history of the languages and scripts of South Asia. The project has in its first phase catalogued and made freely available online roughly 1,000 early printed Bengali books, covering a range of topics from religion to medicine and folk tales. It has also generated a series of conferences, workshops and online resources around the newly digitised Bengali collections, in collaboration with our project partners, the Library at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, Jadavpur University in Kolkata and Srishti Institute of Technology, Art and Design, in Bangalore.

Nahrein Network

The British Library is supporting the Nahrein Network – a new ancient history research project for education in Iraq and its neighbours – which has been awarded a £1.8 million grant from the AHRC’s Global Challenges Research Fund. Over the coming years the Library will host two visiting scholars from Iraq for up to two months to undertake research on the British Library’s collections. Based in the Asian and African Studies department, the visiting scholars will receive day-to-day support from Daniel Lowe.

“This is an excellent opportunity for scholars from Iraq to gain access to the British Library’s rich collections on Iraqi history and culture. For example, in addition to unique manuscripts and archives, we also hold rare copies of Iraqi books and newspapers from the early and mid-20th century, some of which are no longer accessible to scholars in Iraq itself. We hope the scheme will build on past relations between the British Library and Iraqi institutions and scholars, and will provide opportunities to build new connections and partnerships”.

Daniel Lowe, Curator for Arabic Collections
Over the past year we have been involved in successful bids that are due to start in the following academic year (2017–2018). The examples below will give you a taste of some of the research work that will take place in the year to come.

The Business of Women’s Words: Purpose and Profit in Feminist Publishing

Building on our successful collaboration with the University of Sussex (UoS) on the project Sisterhood and After: The Women’s Liberation Oral History Project (2010–2013) we are looking forward to working once more with UoS, alongside Cambridge University, on a new Leverhulme funded project about feminist publishing which makes use of British Library archives. The start of the project will see two research associates welcomed to our Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts team working on our Spare Rib and Virago archives, supervised by Dr Polly Russell.

Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource (CLOSER)

Since 2012, we have been working in partnership with the ESRC/MRC (Medical Research Council) funded large-scale project CLOSER which has harmonised data across several major UK longitudinal and cohort studies. The past year has seen the first phase of the project finish, but it has successfully gained a further two years of funding. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with CLOSER on impact and engagement, with Dr Allan Sudlow (Head of Research Development) as a member of their Executive Leadership Team.

FREYA

FREYA is a multi-partner project funded by Horizon 2020 that will directly support global research by improving and evolving persistent identifier infrastructure. Persistent identifiers for research outputs, their creators and related organisations help to give research provenance, making it easier to use, cite and interlink. Following directly on from the Technical and Human Infrastructure for Open Research (THOR) project, the British Library is once again representing arts and humanities requirements within FREYA. The project involves colleagues from across the Library, including our Research Services and Digital Scholarship teams.
We want to ensure that the research that we do develops useful information, services and content for our different audiences and has a meaningful legacy that will evolve and develop over time. As the national library, it is important to us that research enables us to improve records of content and broaden access to it. It is part of wider strategy to make as much content as possible available through digitisation, and many of our research collaborations have digitised and shared content so that it will be more easily accessible both in the UK and internationally. Yet the results of our research work are not just for the research sector; we aim to improve access to knowledge for the general public, including schools and other learners, through our events, website, blogs and other resources. This section shows how the research that we do improves our content, shares knowledge and enables research of the future.

Developing our content

Our collaborative research takes varied forms and brings diverse benefits to our content and users. Some research projects enable the development or acquisition of new content, which we then preserve for future researchers. Others enhance existing content through updating catalogue records, digitisation and the creation of associated online resources and tools. These examples show different projects that bring in new content, or improve existing content for the benefit of our research users.

Interpreting and enhancing the Thea Musgrave collection

Sasha Millwood is undertaking a collaborative PhD to investigate and catalogue the recently-acquired archive of Scottish-born composer Thea Musgrave (1928– ). Drawing on a rich body of primary-source material, his thesis discusses and analyses the composer’s artistic ‘praxis’, as well as reflecting on the process of organising and interpreting the archive. With support from the Annie Dunlop Endowment Fund at the University of Glasgow and an AHRC Research Training Support Grant, he has visited the composer at her New York home to gather valuable oral history material. This will be added to the British Library’s collections once his thesis is complete.
Precarious Publishing in Latin America: Relations, meaning and community in movement

During the academic year we were partners on a successful bid to the AHRC led by the University of Surrey that aims to explore a contemporary publishing form, ‘cartonera’ in Latin America, which is both a social movement and form of artistic expression. Dr Lucy Bell leads the project which will compare this form of publishing in Mexico and Brazil to explore how the content of the books is literary, philosophical and cultural and reflects the way activist communities form and communicate. For the British Library, the project offers the chance to develop its collection of cartonera as an important addition to our Latin American content, as well as a contribution to our content from small scale, diverse publishers and activists. The project was awarded funding to begin in October 2017.

Pardaad Chamsaz’s work on Stefan Zweig

Pardaad Chamsaz is currently completing a collaborative doctoral studentship with the British Library on the author Stefan Zweig’s collection of autograph manuscripts. Recently appointed as Curator of Germanic Collections, he is able to draw on his experience as a doctoral student in his new role. His studentship involved curating the 2017 Treasures Gallery display Stefan Zweig: The Magic of Manuscripts, compiling an online guide to the Zweig collection jointly with curators in Modern Literary Archives, European Collections and Music Collections, and writing a script for an evening performance showcasing material from the collection. As part of his research, Pardaad has also written Stefan Zweig: A Prince among Collectors of Autograph Manuscripts. This forms the introduction to the British Library’s new catalogue of Zweig’s literary and historical manuscripts, published in 2017.

CASE STUDY

“It was incredibly rewarding to be involved in the research, planning and curation of Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths. As part of a team working ‘behind the scenes’ with the collections at the Library, alongside my fellow AHRC Collaborative PhD student Katie McElvanney under the supervision of the exhibition’s lead curator, I gained invaluable experience in public engagement and research communication. This has complemented my academic training and enhanced my research. I hope that many more students will have the opportunity to pursue research through a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership.

Mike Carey, AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Student at the University of Nottingham and the British Library, 2014–2017
Building resources and sharing knowledge

The research that we undertake and partner on leads to the development of new accessible resources and tools through which research audiences and the wider public are able to make use of our content. We also develop resources to highlight the research potential of our collections with the aim of inspiring research in the future.

Electronic British Library Journal

The rich research potential of the British Library’s collections has been showcased through the publication of twelve articles in the Electronic British Library Journal in the 2016 academic year. Edited by Dr Barry Taylor (Curator, Romance Collections) and freely available on the British Library website, contributions came from both established scholars and early-career researchers. Subjects ranged from music printing in sixteenth-century Germany (Richard Charteris, Emeritus Professor in Historical Musicology, University of Sydney) to First World War ephemera (Ann-Marie Foster, PhD candidate, University of Northumbria, and British Library placement student).

Knowledge Exchange

We work with our research partners to develop ideas for future projects and to share and build knowledge that is important for policy and practice in our sector. For example, in June 2017 we worked with the AHRC Heritage Priority Area Heritage Futures and the Alan Turing Institute to lead a workshop about Heritage and Data: Challenges and Opportunities for the Heritage Sector. This workshop brought together key representatives from the UK heritage industry and academic community to discuss the challenges and opportunities that arise as digital data becomes increasingly significant across our sector, as well as during a period of innovation in the development of data capabilities. The workshop resulted in a report that is available to access online.

Online Tools

British Library Labs

British Library Labs has continued to support and inspire innovative use of the Library’s digital content. The team have facilitated use of over 180 TB of data, both through download via their portal to 97 freely-available datasets, and supply of additional content directly to researchers.

Poetic Places

The Poetic Places app was developed by Sarah Cole (TIME/IMAGE and Creative Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the British Library) and Stella Wisdom (Digital Curator, British Library). The app situates poetic depictions of places into the everyday world, helping users to encounter poems in the locations described within the literature itself. The app makes strong use of the public domain collection of images created by the British Library and available on Flickr.

LibCrowds

Software developer Alex Mendes created a new platform for hosting experimental crowdsourcing projects, aiming to improve access to the Library’s diverse collections. Current LibCrowds initiatives include In the Spotlight, a collaborative venture led by Dr Mia Ridge (Digital Curator) and Christian Algar (Curator, Printed Heritage Collections) to enhance access to uncatalogued historic playbills from some of Britain’s old theatres.

Members of the public can contribute to the project by transcribing performance titles, dates, genres and names, thereby helping current and future generation to rediscover popular entertainment from the past 300 years.
Equally important are smaller-scale collaborations such as Digiseal, which has provided funding for the digitisation of the British Library’s collection of over 330 Byzantine seals. Funded under an EU Horizon 2020 programme, the project aims to develop the digital infrastructure necessary to create an online scholarly edition of Byzantine seals. Dating from the 4th to the 15th centuries and originating from the eastern Roman Empire, these lead seals are valuable primary sources for those working in the fields of Byzantine and Medieval history and art history.

New light on burnt manuscript fragments
In addition to opening up the British Library’s collections to a wider audience and reducing wear and tear on the originals, digitisation can enable new types of research to be undertaken and longstanding research questions to be tackled afresh.

A case in point is the use of multi-spectral imaging techniques on key remnants of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts from the collection assembled by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631). Funding from the Zeno Karl Schindler Foundation has enabled over one hundred fragments from the famous Cotton Collection to be digitised and published on the freely-available database Fragmentarium.

The use of multi-spectral techniques has documented and preserved the deteriorating fragments in their current state and made it possible to extract more information on their content. Historically the source of much scholarly debate, this is particularly valuable as it gives scholars the opportunity to re-evaluate the unique texts and earliest-known copies contained within the fragments.

British Library Blogs

Blogging plays a vital role in communicating the breadth of our research activity to the widest possible audience. Covering nineteen different areas, including Collection Care, Medieval Manuscripts, Untold Lives and Asian and African Studies, British Library blogs engage online readers with multi-faceted collections and the projects and events they inspire. Changes to the platform and better search engine optimisation have resulted in a greater volume of traffic, with the blogs as a whole receiving an average of over 120,000 hits per month, an increase of around 5% from last year. Written by curators, reference specialists, placement students and guest authors, the most popular posts included those on Esperanto as an Asian Language, Anglo-Saxon comics and Jane Austen’s cataracts.

Enabling research through digitisation

Digiseal
The British Library’s ongoing work to digitise its collections has continued to support and stimulate research. A number of large-scale initiatives have been undertaken, including the digitisation of the King’s Topographical Collection and the Polonsky-funded Hebrew Manuscripts and England and France: Manuscripts from the British Library and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, 700–1200 projects.
Supporting our staff

Research training and development
In spring 2017 we continued our series of internal workshops for staff to support research work with a round table event on research funding. Speakers from the AHRC and the University of Kent delivered talks to thirty British Library staff. Many British Library staff are members of professional bodies which support off site research skills training and development. British Library staff participate in academic activity through involvement with peer review panels, editorial boards and advisory groups. Staff members are also involved with the UK funding councils through participation in peer review colleges.

New initiatives
In the summer of 2016 we launched the Staff Research Development Fund, a new fund to which British Library staff can apply for bursaries to enhance and develop research skills. In the past year this new fund has supported six applications by staff to pay for conference attendance, workshops and training.

A recent initiative is the British Library Staff Research Grant Development Break scheme. This has been launched as a pilot project and is intended to enable staff to devote planned time to the development of a research bid. The fund provides British Library departments with additional resource to cover for the time spent by their staff member on bid writing. Two applications for breaks have been accepted and we look forward to reporting on their success in the forthcoming year.

Research events for the public

The British Library runs numerous events aimed at engaging the public with the research we are involved in and at improving access to research by members of the public. Here are some examples of our research events which have shared knowledge with, and we hope have inspired, the public.

Digital
In the past year the Digital Scholarships team has again run their successful Digital Conversations series, addressing topics such as computational creativity and the UK Web Archive to public audiences at the British Library. We have worked with our partners at the Alan Turing Institute on a series of four Data Debates which this year examined the role of data in health and social media, the future of data in public life, as well as our perceptions of Artificial Intelligence and machine learning technologies in science and fiction. Both of these series will continue in the forthcoming year.

Feed the Mind
The end of 2016 saw the launch of our first series of public lunchtime research talks Feed the Mind. These informal, informative sessions brought to life many of the research projects that are currently underway at the British Library, from PhD projects to large multi-partner research collaborations. Topics included the techniques of detection used to understand fifteenth century books; the language used to discuss immigration in Victorian media and; the diversity of contemporary spoken English. The audience enjoyed the opportunity to meet with researchers and ask direct questions about our research work over tea and cake.
Equalities
Our sixth Annual Equality Lecture with the British Sociological Association took place in autumn 2016 with Professor Andrew Sayer on the popular topic of Why We Can’t Afford the Rich. Our most successful Equality Lecture to date, a video of the lecture is available via the British Sociological Association’s Vimeo site.

March 2017 saw us celebrate International Women’s Day in the British Library Knowledge Centre auditorium with our event on Rebels in the Archives. This event was developed in partnership with Rachel Tavernor, a PhD placement student who worked with us on a research project about women’s activism (contemporary and historic) in relation to housing poverty. A short video is on our YouTube site.

South Asia
Our partnership with Dr Helen Paul at the University of Southampton supported our event on A Passage to India: Shipboard Life, in June 2017. Actors performed extracts from the diaries and letters of passengers who had spent time on board East India Company ships, bringing to life the richness of material for research and historical understanding. Dr Margaret Makepeace and Penny Brook presented the British Library’s involvement with the research, and the value of British Library collections to the project.

From August 2017 onwards the South Asia Series of events commenced, based on research from the Two Centuries of Indian Print project. Dr Layli Uddin, Project Curator, organised the series of evening talks which covered topics as diverse as Buddhism, Persian entrepreneurialism, womanhood in South India and the East Indian Company. National and international academics were invited to talk in this series, which also included presentations by PhD students. Podcasts of these talks have been uploaded onto the British Library’s SoundCloud site.
Our Stakeholders

Through working with our research partners we are able to achieve things that would be difficult to achieve alone; we highly value the research partnerships and relationships we have built both nationally and internationally. As an organisation, we benefit from the intellectual and practical knowledge that our partners share with us, helping us develop our content and use it in ways that are creative, innovative and enlightening. For our research partners, the British Library brings access to invaluable and unique content, opening up new worlds of information and providing the expertise to make the best research use of it. As our partners describe below, we play a significant role in the research landscape of the UK, supporting collaborative research and adding value to higher education and education more broadly conceived.

Key for us at the moment are the very successful BSA/British Library Annual Equality Lectures [...] and the BSA Postdoctoral Fellowship for Sociology at the British Library, which will demonstrate the potential of the Library’s collections for sociological research. Here are two prestigious educational organisations collaborating to deliver public benefit, bringing sociological insights to the general public and bringing sociological researchers to the British Library. Long may we work together!”

Judith Mudd,
CEO of the British Sociological Association

“The British Library plays a collegiate and proactive role within the Independent Research Organisations Consortium; their staff share their knowledge and expertise of research across all disciplines, and lead on the Consortium’s research agenda for digital challenges. Walk into the Library on any given day and the vast number of students deep in their work is a reminder that, of all the IROs, the British Library is the one with the largest constituency of Higher Education users.”

Suzanne Bardgett, Head of Research and Academic Partnerships, Imperial War Museums, and Co-Chair of the Independent Research Organisations Consortium (IROC)
The partnership between the British Library and AHRC ‘Translating Cultures’ has proved extremely fruitful, allowing the theme to develop its intellectual agenda whilst ensuring that the research has reached new audiences. The launch of the inaugural British Library/AHRC Translator in Residence scheme has further raised the profile of ‘Translating Cultures’ and advanced our commitment to the recognition of translation as a form of research in its own right.”

Professor Charles Forsdick, James Barrow Professor of French at the University of Liverpool and AHRC Theme Leadership Fellow for Translating Cultures

CHASE (Consortium for the Humanities and Arts South East England) is delighted to count the British Library as a strategic partner. Several CHASE students have secured placements through the British Library PhD placement scheme, working closely with curators on subjects such as born digital archives and projects such as the digitisation of Privy Council documents. We look forward to continued collaboration on initiatives for arts and humanities doctoral students in the future.”

Dr Denise deCaires Narain, CHASE Director

Chevening is proud to partner with the British Library. Since 2016, our partnership has offered up to two international Chevening Fellows a year-long professional placement based at the Library. Our partnership enables us to expand our fellowship programme and to offer our Fellows a unique project-based placement with one of the world’s greatest research libraries. As a public-facing, culturally-active research institute, Chevening is pleased to partner with the British Library to offer this one-of-a-kind opportunity.”

Anne Marie Graham, Director of the Chevening Secretariat

All the twenty-eight organisations involved in the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) consortium recognise the important role the British Library plays in delivering our unique programme for research training on a national scale. Over the past five years I’ve worked with the British Library to scope and deliver successful training events for over 250 students. The career day on the cultural and heritage sector, and workshop on good research practice and ethics were particular highlights for our students this year.”

JD Hill, Research Manager, The British Museum and Chair of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships Consortium
Looking Ahead

With an increased emphasis on collaboration, and working between, across and in-between the bounds of current research disciplines, the research landscape for ourselves and our partners continues to thrive. With the official launch of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in April 2018, we see great opportunities to continue to develop our roles, both as a provider of UK research infrastructure, and as an active research partner.

Next academic year will see major new projects develop including The Business of Women’s Words: Purpose and Profit in Feminist Publishing, a Leverhulme Trust funded project with Universities of Sussex and Cambridge which promises to provide a ground-breaking exploration of feminist enterprise and business. On the international front, as part of The Nahrein Network, funded by AHRC through the UK Global Challenges Research Fund, we will be working with partners in the UK and across Iraq to support scholarship and research in cultural heritage and the humanities.

We will be working on a number of projects in the Social Sciences, including an ESRC funded PhD collaboration with the North West Doctoral Training Partnership, using the UK Web Archive to examine post-conflict memorialisation, and see the completion of our first joint fellowship with the British Sociological Association. This coming year also sees our renewed involvement in the Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource (CLOSER), a project co-funded by ESRC and MRC to enhance joined-up discovery, access, training and reuse of these unique data collections.

And finally, to really capture the breadth of what we do, one might just look at the new collaborative studentships and PhD placements commencing this year. With topics including the Writing Traditions of South East Asia, Open Access and the National Library, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, Contemporary British Artists’ Books, Virus Checking in Digital Preservation and North American Migrant Natives, I feel vindicated in saying that we do indeed actively engage in research across disciplines.

Allan Sudlow, Head of Research Development
CASE STUDY

“Chevening British Library Fellowships encourage and develop the transfer of knowledge. You get to learn about the collection at the British Library, the recognised practice and standards. It is a special opportunity because it has the capacity to meet the information needs of various kinds of users, including researchers and students. There is so much to learn from the British Library, and I gained so much during my placement.”

Oluwaseun Obasola
Chevening British Library Fellow, 2016–2017
Appendices

Hyperlink references

p.14 Nahrein Network: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein


p.17 Zweig Collection: https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/zweig-manuscripts

p.18 Electronic British Library Journal: http://www.bl.uk/eblj


p.18 Poetic Places: http://www.poeticplaces.uk

p.18 Libcrowds: https://www.libcrowds.com


p.19 Hebrew Manuscripts: https://www.bl.uk/projects/hebrew-manuscripts-digitisation-project


p.19 Fragmentarium: http://www.fragmentarium.unifr.ch

p.21 Rebels in the Archives: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxtjnO3qTsw

p.21 Andrew Sayer, Equality Lecture: https://vimeo.com/195609354

p.21 South Asia Series: https://soundcloud.com/the-british-library/sets/south-asian-seminar-series
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<td><em>Scientific Risk Reporting in the UK – pilot for British Library cross-collection thematic research</em></td>
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<td>Wellcome Trust</td>
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<td><em>Digitising the archives of health and disease in British India</em></td>
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* Training grants awarded to HEI partners nominated by the British Library
The following British Library Collaborative PhDs and PhD Placements were underway in this report period

Research on the British Library’s zines collection to improve user access
Exploring American Foreign Policy Resources at the British Library Science in Society
Online access to catalogues of India Office Private Papers foundation collections
Exploring food activism through the archives: the relationship between animal rights campaigns and food activism in the UK 1950–2015
European music print culture in the 16th and 17th centuries
Exploring British Library collections through twentieth and early twenty-first century anti-poverty activism
Understanding the extent digital-only publishing in the UK: sources of data
Contemporary Collecting from Australasia
The Representation and Interpretation of James Cook’s Voyages in the 19th and 20th Centuries
The Representation and Interpretation of James Cook’s Voyages in the 19th and 20th Centuries
Researching the EU Referendum Through Leaflet and Web Archive Collections
Independent, D-I-Y, and activist BAME publishing, in print and online, in 21st century Britain
The Representation and Interpretation of James Cook’s Voyages in the 19th and 20th Centuries
The Representation and Interpretation of James Cook’s Voyages in the 19th and 20th Centuries
Developing Access to the Evolving English VoiceBank
Understanding the Network Power of the Living Knowledge Network
The Representation and Interpretation of James Cook’s Voyages in the 19th and 20th Centuries
Karl Marx and the British Library
Charting the King’s Maritime Collection
The Printed Books of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), Physician and Collector
Open access to scholarly research outside academia
The Richard Ryder Archive
Senses of self: visual self-fashioning among Bamileke women in Yaounde, Cameroon
 Literary Translation – Genre, Process and Collaboration
 Provincial Shakespeare Performance
 Black British Poetry in Performance
 After 1833: British Entanglement with Brazilian Slavery
 Women Reporting the Russian Revolution and Civil Wars: The case studies of Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams and Larisa Reisner
 Picturing the West India Regiments in an Age of Unrest, Civil War and Tourism, c.1850–1914
 The Secret of Creation: Stefan Zweig’s writing read through his manuscript collection
 Islamic Pluralism in the Political History of the Central Sahel: A Critical Study of Arabic Sources for West African History
 The Decca Record Company of the 1960s and 1970s: the legacy of Christopher Reaurn
 The Printed Image 1750–1850: towards a Digital History of Printed Book Illustration
 A transnational comparison of the representation of Empire in poster propaganda from France and Britain 1914–1920
 Maps and the Italian Grand Tour
 Continuity in Change: A Restudy of Arnold Adriaan Bake’s research on the devotional and folk music and dance of Bengal 1925–1956
 Disinheritance and identity constructions in the works and archives of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala

Feaughus Roulston    University of Brighton
Mark Eastwood        University of Nottingham
Mandy Kleinsorge    Hanover Medical School (Germany)
Christian Robinson  University of Manchester
Catherine Oliver      University of Birmingham
Isobel Clarke         Royal College of Music, London
Rachel Tavernor       University of Sussex
Rachel Burns          UCL
Joanne Pilcher        University of Brighton
Mary McMahon          Royal Holloway University of London
Emma Scanlan          University of Sussex
Edward Taylor         University of Warwick
Jen Aggleton          University of Cambridge
Alexandra Bulat       UCL
Chantelle Lewis       Goldsmiths University of London
Ben Pollitt           UCL
Huw Rowlands          Royal Holloway University of London
Rosy Hall             University of Oxford
Eleanor Hill          University of Manchester
Peter Hooker          University of Newcastle (Australia)
Izzy Gibbin           UCL
Jennifer Waghorn      University of Birmingham
Lubaaba Al-Azami       University of Liverpool
Emily Nunn            University of Sheffield
Sky Duthie            University of York
Ewa Majczak           University of Oxford
Deborah Dawkin        UCL
Hannah Manktelow      University of Nottingham
Hannah Silva           University of Stirling
Joe Mulhern           University of Durham
Katie McElvanney      Queen Mary University of London
Melissa Bennett       University of Warwick
Pardaad Chamsaz       University of Bristol
Paul Naylor           University of Birmingham
Sally Drew Gannon     University of Sheffield
Will Finley           University of Sheffield
Cherie Prosser        University of Sheffield
Jeremy Brown          Royal Holloway University of London
Christian Friedrich Poska  SOAS University of London
Pauline McGonagle     University of Exeter
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