

BRITISH LIBRARY

**Sparking imaginations.  
Creating opportunities**

Celebrating impact, powered by our  
supporters and partners 2024/25



## A year of transition and momentum

We're proud to share this year's report, highlighting just some of the work made possible thanks to our donors and partners.

Over the last year teams across the Library have continued to move forward with an extraordinary range of programmes and services that have – or will have – a positive impact on people of all ages. These include:

- acquiring and sharing remarkable new collection items, enriching research and for public enjoyment
- inspiring thousands of children and families, laying strong foundations for their futures
- helping to spark fresh ideas, launch new businesses and create jobs through the people who access our collections and data
- bringing powerful stories to life through exhibitions and events, reaching audiences across the UK and around the world
- reaching a major milestone in our long-term plans to transform the Library in London and Yorkshire, while also continuing to move forward from the 2023 cyber-attack.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

We hope the stories in this report inspire you to join us now and in the years ahead



## Learning

**253,859 children and families** participated in learning programmes

## Growth

**2,225km of new storage** under construction in Boston Spa

## Live events

**50,000 in-person or digital attendees** to our live events, featuring famous names and fascinating people

## Small businesses

**40,877 entrepreneurs** received help to start or grow small businesses across the Business & IP Centre (BIPC) National Network

## Collection care

**5,600 items** benefitted from conservation and pre-digitisation work by our expert teams

1.6  
million

visits to British Library-inspired exhibitions worldwide

## Our transformation in London

This year marked significant milestones in our ambition to transform the Library, with new spaces and facilities that will enhance our global impact.

At St Pancras, our partner Mitsui Fudosan confirmed one of the largest inward investments into the UK by a Japanese business – the confirmation needed to begin work on a major extension to our iconic London home.

Once constructed the total 600,000 sq ft extension will include 100,000 sq ft of new Library space, for state-of-the-art learning facilities, exhibition galleries, public event spaces and to deliver greater business support opportunities.

We'll be working closely with philanthropists and funding partners to raise the funds needed to fit out these spaces and bring them to life, to help millions more people seeking inspiration and enjoyment.

Above these new public facilities, world-class commercial space will be made available for data and life sciences companies in a major expansion of the UK's science capacity – both in scale and strategic significance.

Our work at St Pancras is part of a far wider ambition for the Library, north and south. It also includes major developments at our longstanding facilities in Boston Spa, which powers the Library's work, and exploring opportunities for a new British Library in the heart of Leeds.

**100,000 sq ft**  
of new world-class  
Library space

Right: An artist's impression of the St Pancras building extension. © RSHP.



## Building our collections for future generations

Keeping the UK's heritage safe and accessible is at the heart of what we do. Last year we acquired more items of national significance that we will make available to everyone.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters we raised nearly £1.3 million towards heritage acquisitions.

Among the many standout items are letters from the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the archive of poet and playwright John Galsworthy and a remarkable collection of rare medieval manuscripts from the Longleat estate.

The Longleat manuscripts are already having a major impact. Digitised and available online, they've received widespread media attention, and featured in an exclusive interview with our curator Julian Harrison on a special episode of Tom Holland's *The Rest is History* podcast.

These acquisitions were made possible thanks to the support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund, Friends of the Nations' Libraries, the British Library Collections Trust, the American Trust for the British Library, and private individuals. We are deeply grateful.

“Each of these five magnificent manuscripts offer unique perspectives and glimpses into medieval life, religion and society.

Now, in their new home at the British Library and through digitisation, they can be discovered and enjoyed by people across the UK and beyond.”

Eilish McGuinness, Chief Executive of the National Heritage Memorial Fund



Right: Richard Rolle's *The Form of Living* and related works: Add MS 89790, 126r.

## Caring for our collections

Thanks to an extraordinary community of donors our conservation work helps us to protect and preserve even more of our remarkable items.

The knowledge held in our collections gives us a deeper understanding of the past and can inspire fresh ideas for the future. That's why the work of our expert conservation teams is so vital. They ensure these stories can be shared safely now, and for generations to come.

Thanks to supporters of our conservation appeal, we've completed work on a range of fascinating items, including two 500-year-old rolls of accounts detailing the daily life of the royal prisoner, Mary, Queen of Scots. Intricate parchment repairs have made these manuscripts accessible to the public once again and reveal everything from her creature comforts to her favourite foods.

The generosity of a donor also enabled us to acquire new specialist equipment, unlocking the potential for further new discoveries. The new technology identifies pigments and dyes in our most beautiful, illuminated manuscripts, meaning our conservators can make the safest and most effective decisions on treatment. It's already become an essential part of their toolkit.

Thanks to this type of support, we can preserve more of the past, and help unlock new discoveries for the future.

**Right:** Parchment repairs on manuscript accounts relating to Mary, Queen of Scots.

“It has been a privilege to work on these manuscripts.

As someone who has worked in conservation for almost 20 years, iconic objects such as the accounts of Mary, Queen of Scots never cease to amaze and are a prime example of the wonder of the British Library's cultural heritage collection.”

Kim Mulder, Conservator of the Mary, Queen of Scots Account

**355 donors**  
raised £39,500  
towards vital  
conservation work





*Beyond the Bassline* was named Temporary or Touring Exhibition of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards

## Our groundbreaking exhibitions

Every year our exhibitions bring powerful stories and voices to life – igniting curiosity, conversation and connections across the UK and beyond.

In *Medieval Women: In Their Own Words* we explored the lives and voices of women in the Middle Ages. A highlight was a letter from Joan of Arc featuring the earliest-known example of her signature that had never been displayed outside of France since it was written in 1429. The exhibition combined rare items from our collections with significant loans, alongside a rich programme of events, school workshops and a companion book of essays.

We're grateful to Joanna and Graham Barker and the Unwin Charitable Trust for their generous support and Cockayne – Grants for the Arts: a donor-advised fund held at The London Community Foundation.

*Beyond the Bassline* was the first major exhibition to explore the 500-year impact of Black British music. It celebrated the clubs, carnivals, stages and kerbside auditoriums, alongside the people and voices that contribute to a vibrant scene that continues to shape British music as a whole.

Live performances from Soul II Soul and Ezra Collective brought music to the Library, as did MC D Double E's Rhyme-Antics, supported by G-SHOCK.

Join us for more thought-provoking, illuminating and perspective-changing exhibitions in the year ahead.

Left: *Beyond the Bassline* exhibition © Terna Jogo. Right: *Medieval Women* exhibition.



**66,000 people** visited the *Medieval Women* exhibition

## Live events enjoyed by audiences around the world

Every week our public events shine a spotlight on the world through powerful conversations, performances and live experiences.

From literature to history, LGBTQ+ stories to the climate emergency, you can discover them all through our events – in person at the Library, or online via our live-streaming service.

For the past seven years Food Season has transformed the Library into a delicious hub of culinary exploration like nowhere else. From tastings and talks to martini masterclasses and medieval feasts, featured icons include Prue Leith, Nadiya Hussain, Jamie Oliver and Angela Hartnett.

Our 2024 Food Season was no different, supported for the first time by our sponsoring partner Miele. Household names, rising stars, writers and historians explored the role of food in shaping our identity and culture.

We're thrilled Miele returned as our partner for Food Season 2025, helping us to continue serving bold ideas and brilliant conversations.

Right: Food Season event on the Piazza.



**50,000 people** participated in one of our live events

## Empowering young people with skills for the future

We work with thousands of young people each year to build their practical skills and confidence – preparing them for the future.

One such programme is our Young Creators Lab, a groundbreaking digital co-creation project sparking global conversations inspired by our collections. Thanks to the support of the Helen Hamlyn Trust, we offered 24 creators aged 18 – 24 a platform to explore, experiment and grow – developing digital content, building skills and gaining confidence for the future.

Two groups of Young Creators produced content for our social media channels:

- The first explored our music archives and *Beyond the Bassline* exhibition. They dived into the legacy of Notting Hill Carnival and traced a single music sample from the 1970s to today
- The second focused on changemakers – activists, authors and orators who used words to empower marginalised communities and spark social change.

**“This has influenced how I am in the rest of my life. I speak up now and ask for things instead of keeping quiet.”**

Right: Young Creators filming content.

Participants developed skills in filmmaking, storytelling and content creation, alongside core skills including research and information literacy.

For the Library, their work brought fresh perspectives to our platforms and helped younger audiences to connect with our collections in new ways. On TikTok alone our followers have grown by 138%, supported by their creativity and insight.

We're proud to have championed the next generation of cultural storytellers and excited to see where their creativity takes them next as they continue to work with the Library as part of a newly-formed youth collective.

**Over 1 million**  
views on TikTok,  
YouTube and Instagram



## Our growing impact in Yorkshire

Our cultural and learning programmes in Leeds and surrounding areas continues to thrive – building skills and inspiring communities.

We have ambitious plans to open a new British Library in Leeds, where the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has confirmed a £10 million investment to breathe fresh life into Holbeck's historic Temple Works building – paving the way for it to become the British Library in the north. It's part of a wider transformation of the Leeds South Bank, supporting regeneration and impact at a local, regional and national level.

Ahead of that, we've been collaborating with local people and partners to deliver a rich and inspiring learning programme for the region's children and families, alongside major exhibitions and displays.

Thanks to a three-year grant from Old Possum's Practical Trust, we are working with local primary and secondary schools, as well as local institutions such as Royal Armouries and Thackray Museum of Medicine to boost young people's skills, opportunities and cultural experiences.

Our in-school workshops and cultural study days are improving literacy skills, which have a powerful impact on life outcomes, through creative writing, storytelling, poetry and our immensely popular digital resources.

School requests for this programme have far exceeded expectations, and we are now seeking further support to meet demand to work with even more pupils and teachers across the city.

**“Honestly, I can't say enough how much of an impact you've made on the children.”**

Teacher attending Gothic Literature study day.

Right: Schools activity in Leeds. Photo by Jules Lister.

**48%** schools in Leeds have engaged with our Learning programmes since 2020



## Transforming Boston Spa: the engine of the Library

Work is underway to transform our home in West Yorkshire – unlocking the power of our collections for millions more people, while building a greener future for generations to come.

Our 44-acre Boston Spa campus is the engine behind the Library. It holds around 130 million items, or three-quarters of our national collections, ready for people north and south seeking knowledge or inspiration. But with 8 km of new shelving needed each year, as every new item published in the UK is added, we're rapidly running out of space.

By the end of the decade our current storage will be full.

That's why we're not just expanding, we're reimagining how we care for and share the nation's knowledge. Thanks to major government investment and legacy grant support from The Foyle Foundation, work is underway on a world-leading, low-carbon storage facility.

Once completed in 2026 this cutting-edge development will significantly increase our capacity while reducing our environmental impact – helping us meet the UK's target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It's a bold step forward in sustainable preservation.

We're also opening-up access like never before. The new Foyle Learning Centre and Foyle Viewing Gallery will welcome learners of all ages, from across Yorkshire and beyond, connecting more people with the stories, ideas and discoveries held in our collections.

This is more than a building project. It's a transformation of how we preserve, share and inspire – now and for the future.

Right: Architect's impression of the viewing gallery of the proposed new storage facility at Boston Spa. Slab / Carmody Grooke.



## A national library – for everyone

Our work across the UK is just as vital to us as those around our buildings in London and Yorkshire.

One way we fulfill our promise of being a library for everyone is by spreading our exhibitions nationwide, so thousands more can benefit.

This is made possible through our unique collaboration with libraries across the country, the Living Knowledge Network, where we present regional iterations of our London shows, often with a local twist.

A highlight for last year was our *Beyond the Baseline: 500 Years of Black British Music* panel exhibitions across 46 high street sites nationwide.

It was the first major exhibition of its kind to document the 500-year musical journey of African and Caribbean people in Britain and their contribution to the British music scene. Our regional partners added stories and items unique to their area to their exhibition.

Elsewhere, we secured a major grant from The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future with our partner CILIP (the UK's library and information association). This groundbreaking climate action project will create ten Green Library Hubs across the country, to facilitate community awareness, behaviour change and grassroots action on climate change.

“It was so refreshing to see more different kinds of culture rather than just Newcastle's history... [it] just further affirmed that this is a welcoming place and that people from all different backgrounds are welcome.”

A library member

Right: *Beyond the Baseline* regional panel exhibition at Birmingham Library.



**790,737 people**  
visited a regional  
panel exhibition

## Celebrating 20 years of generating small businesses

It's been two decades since we launched the Business & IP Centre (BIPC) – now one of the UK's most vital services for entrepreneurs.

Every day founders across the UK turn to the BIPC for impartial, trusted support – a rare combination in today's world.

We offer one-to-one guidance and specialist workshops, inspiring events and access to premium market data and intelligence, alongside a thriving community of entrepreneurs from all walks of life.

We spoke with its founder Isabell Oswell BEM, Director of Business Audiences, to reflect on the journey so far.

Right: Isabell Oswell at BIPC events.

### 20 years of the BIPC. What are you most proud of?

It's the scale and impact of what we've been able to achieve. We've helped over half a million people start or grow a business, many fulfilling a lifelong dream of becoming their own boss. And businesses supported by the BIPC are more likely to succeed, with 90% still trading after three years, compared to the national average of around 50%.

I'm also proud of our huge impact on groups that are traditionally under-represented in UK start-ups, including



women, people from global majority backgrounds and people with disabilities.

### Any standout moments?

Our expansion into a national network of BIPCs is a major highlight. Today we can be found on over 70 high streets. All based in libraries: trusted accessible spaces at the heart of our communities.

### Any favourite success stories?

Brands like Tangle Teezer, Trunki and Ella's Kitchen stand out as they've become household names. But there are thousands more – creating jobs, adding millions to our economy, and developing innovative solutions. One example is Naked



Energy, who went on to deliver the UK's largest solar heat project – right here at our St Pancras site.

### What's next?

We're evolving to reach even more businesses – whether in person across the National Network, or online. And we're excited about the proposed redevelopment of the Library at St Pancras, which will include co-working and maker spaces to spark the next wave of innovation.

We're grateful to all of BIPC's funding partners over the last 20 years. If you would like to support our impactful work with entrepreneurs, please get in touch.



## Looking forward

Building on the work shared here, we're creating even more opportunities for people of all ages to develop their skills, feel inspired and learn.

There has never been a better time to join us. Whether you're passionate about culture, young people, communities or innovation, there's a project that will align with you.



## We're seeking partnerships and support for:

### New spaces north and south

- We're expanding the Library in London, transforming our iconic home with new and cutting-edge exhibition, learning and event spaces
- A major new home in the heart of Leeds will deepen our roots in Yorkshire. It will create opportunities for over ten million people and provide a catalyst for regeneration.

### Business and entrepreneurs

- We're celebrating 20 years of the BIPC and helping more people to turn their great ideas into thriving businesses.

Left: An artist's impression of the St Pancras building extension. © Miller Hare.

### Cultural

- Major exhibitions will explore fairy tales (for children and families), Agatha Christie and the Normans
- A vibrant programme of live events will include Literature at the Library and history-themed talks.

### Collections and curators

- We'll be saving more precious items for the nation and providing them with expert care
- We will share more treasures from the collections with communities across the UK and around the world – in person and online.

From top left: The National Newspaper Building at Boston Spa, photo by Peter Carr; conservation work, photo by Sam Walton; the *Story Explorers* exhibition; Trinny Woodall at an Inspiring Entrepreneurs event.



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support.bl.uk

#### Charitable Status

The British Library is a charity under the 2006 Charities Act. However, as an Exempt Charity we are not regulated by the Charity Commission but instead by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We are registered with the Fundraising Regulator, and act in line with the Code of Fundraising Practice.

A gift to us attracts the same tax benefits as to any other charity.



Cover: Children visiting the Library.  
Photo by Sam Walton.

Right: Inspiring Entrepreneurs Fireside Chat.

