

Curating the manuscripts in the Lady Eccles Oscar

Wilde Collection: provenance, preservation and access

Reference: 2025-WH-OW

Supervisor(s)	<p>Catherine Angerson, Curator of Modern Archives and Manuscripts (lead supervisor)</p> <p>Alice Zamboni, Curator of Modern Archives and Manuscripts (co-supervisor)</p>
Team(s) and department(s)	Modern Archives and Manuscripts (1600–1950) team, Western Heritage Collections
Start date/timeframe	<p>Earliest start: June 2025</p> <p>Latest end date: March 2026</p>
Duration	Three months (or part-time equivalent)
Part time/Full time	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Full time only</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Part time only</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full time or part time</p> <p>Minimum days/week if undertaken part time: 2.5</p>
Location/Working arrangements	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can only be offered on site at St Pancras</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Can be offered as fully remote placement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Can be offered as hybrid placement (remote with some visits)</p> <p>A small part of this placement could be undertaken remotely (1 day per week or part-time equivalent), but most of the work is expected to be completed on site.</p>
Application deadline	Friday 21 February, 17.00 GMT

Eligibility criteria, funding information and details of how to apply are available on the British Library website: [Research collaboration - The British Library](#)

Context and nature of placement project

This placement offers an exciting opportunity to work with one of the British Library's major literary collections, the Lady Eccles Oscar Wilde Collection, also known as the Eccles Bequest. Bequeathed to the British Library in 2003 following the death of its namesake, collector Lady Mary Eccles (1912–2003), the collection consists of printed books, manuscripts, ephemera and artworks relating to the Irish playwright, poet and author Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). The focus of this placement is on the papers and manuscripts in the Eccles Bequest (Add MS 81619–81884). Among them are some of Wilde's notebooks and letters, drafts of his poems, lectures and plays, as well as correspondence of notable figures connected to Wilde, including Lord Alfred Douglas and George Bernard Shaw.

The primary focus of this placement is to undertake research to document the history and the provenance of the manuscripts collected by Lady Eccles. Additionally, the placement student will create catalogue descriptions for eight correspondence files that remain uncatalogued and help curatorial staff to assess the conservation requirements of the collection. The outcomes of this placement will enhance access to the collection and help to facilitate further research and future outreach activities, such as digitisation, exhibitions and loans.

The placement will be supervised by curators in the Modern Archives and Manuscripts team within the Western Heritage Collections department. The Modern Archives and Manuscripts team is responsible for archive and manuscript collections in English and other European languages dating from 1601 to 1950, including historical, literary and scientific collections.

Tasks and outcomes

Typical tasks will include:

- Undertaking research into the history of the Eccles Bequest, gathering detailed provenance information on a selection of high value manuscripts from the collection;
- Creating file-level catalogue records for eight slipcases of correspondence between George Bernard Shaw and the publisher Constable & Co. (1891–1950);
- Helping curatorial staff to audit the collection to identify manuscripts that require rehousing and/ or conservation treatment.

The main outcomes envisaged for this placement are:

- A research report on the provenance of selected manuscripts in the Eccles Bequest to be published in the Library's [Research Repository](#)
- Catalogue entries for eight files of early 20th-century correspondence
- A blogpost for the [Untold Lives](#) or the [English and Drama](#) blog based on research undertaken during the placement
- Potential to give a talk and/or the opportunity to organise a show and tell of the manuscripts for Library staff.

Training and development opportunities

PhD placement students are welcome to access a wide range of workshops, talks and training available at the Library. Supervisors will offer advice on which opportunities may be of particular relevance. Depending on availability, these wider training opportunities may include, for example, the Digital Scholarship Training Programme, Cultural Property Training, Research Roundtables, Business & IP Centre workshops and staff talks.

In addition, this particular PhD placement will provide the following opportunities:

- Training in handling, cataloguing and identifying the preservation requirements of manuscripts and archives
- Learning about the wider work of a curatorial department by participating in Modern Archives and Manuscripts team meetings and discussions
- Obtaining valuable insight into the day-to-day operations of a major national library, research organisation and cultural hub, highlighting potential future career paths
- Opportunities to visit and meet staff in other teams and departments.

Required knowledge and skills

All applicants will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- Ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing, internally and externally
- Working knowledge of Microsoft Office applications and online meeting tools
- Ability to follow instructions and policies, in particular with regard to Health & Safety and the safe use of collections
- Ability to work effectively with others while also completing tasks independently
- Clear reasons for applying to a specific placement and good understanding of the project purpose

In addition, this specific placement project requires the following:

- Good knowledge of late-19th and early-20th-century history and culture
- A research interest connected to 19th or 20th-century literature, book history, visual arts, or theatre and performance studies
- Interest in provenance research and the history of collecting
- Experience of handling and using manuscripts, archives or other special collections for research
- Ability to read handwritten documents, or willingness to develop skills in this area.