

Investigating Anne McLaren’s Notebooks

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Supervisor	Jonathan Pledge (Curator, Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts, Politics and Public Life)
Department, Location	Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts, Politics and Public Life, St Pancras
Start date/timeframe	The placement can take place any time between June 2018 and April 2019. A mutually convenient start date can be agreed with the supervisor.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent – see below) <i>For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 3 days/week on site at the Library</i>
Remote-working	If required, the placement could be undertaken working from home for 2 days/week (or part-time equivalent).

Context for placement
<p>Dame Anne McLaren (1927–2007) was a developmental biologist who pioneered reproductive techniques that led to human in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Her papers were deposited at the BL in two tranches in 2004 and 2008 and include digital material. All of her papers have been catalogued and are managed by the Department of Politics and Public Life, as part of its Twentieth-Century British Science Collection.</p> <p>The Department of Politics and Public Life is part of the British Library’s Contemporary British Collections section. We work with primary source archive and manuscript material from 1949 to the present, which can include digital material, and we work closely with colleagues in other departments including literary collections, contemporary publishing, sound collections and oral history. Our role is to acquire, catalogue and conserve archival and manuscript material, to raise awareness of these collections and make them available to researchers.</p> <p>The PhD research placement will involve working with primary source material from the Anne McLaren archive. This will involve researching and improving the catalogue descriptions for selected entries along with planning for a digitisation and resource discovery project to enhance and promote this material to researchers and the general public alike. The student will also have the opportunity to publicise their research via social media channels, a blog and a short presentation to BL colleagues in the Contemporary British Collections section.</p>
Expected tasks and outcomes
<p>The student will prepare a descriptive overview of Anne McLaren’s notebooks, which are held as part of the archive (Add MS 83830-83981 and Add MS 89202). This will be used to improve catalogue descriptions of these notebooks in the BL Explore Archives and Manuscripts catalogue and develop an understanding of the type of work, influences and outputs contained within them. They will also locate other material concerning Anne McLaren held at the BL in order to cross-reference this material within the catalogue descriptions.</p> <p>The placement would then focus on McLaren’s Notebook 1955-59 (Add MS 83844), which contains results relating to a number of seminal embryo transfer studies published by McLaren, Donald Michie and John Biggers that were instrumental in the development of <i>in vitro</i> fertilisation. The student would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use an existing template to develop a content description of the notebook encompassing major themes, influence and outputs. This content description will be used to create a narrative, aimed at a general audience, explaining the working life of Anne McLaren through the period covered in the notebook. The construction of the narrative will be carried out under the close direction of the supervising curator. - Take part in planning and preparation for the digitisation of the notebook. This would involve working with the BL Conservation and Digital Imaging Services to ensure that the notebook is digitised to BL standards. The digitised images will then form part of the final narrative presentation as well as being used to illustrate other content such as blog posts. - Use the narrative and digitised content as the basis for a short presentation to Contemporary British colleagues, a blog post for the BL Science blog with the possibility to expand this into an article to be published

in the [Electronic British Library Journal \(eBLJ\)](#). There would also be the opportunity to write further blog posts on material discovered whilst surveying the notebook collection.

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

The student will be based in the department of Politics and Public Life. This is a small close-knit team consisting of three curators, all of whom have different specialisms, and the student would have the opportunity to work closely with them all. In addition, as part of the project there will be the opportunity to work with or alongside other departments including Digital Scholarship, the Web Archiving team, Contemporary Literature, Theatre and Performance Collections and Sound Collections.

The student will receive an introduction to the McLaren papers, the manuscripts storeroom and training on the Library's manuscripts cataloguing system. They would be fully involved in project planning and implementation and would gain valuable experience in working on a small digitisation project. Towards the end of their placement they would have the opportunity to present the outcomes of their research to other curatorial staff.

The student will gain experience in writing, editing and research on the history of science as well as training on the BL's manuscript and archival cataloguing system, IAMS. They will gain an insight into the work of curatorial staff in one of the premier research libraries in the world.

By writing for the BL Science blog, which is geared towards a general audience, they will have the opportunity to develop their writing skills and gain experience in communicating complex research ideas in an accessible manner.

Required knowledge and skills

- A general interest in the history of science and some knowledge of developmental biology
- Excellent writing and communication skills
- Knowledge of the processes involved in digitisation would be useful, but is not essential

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor and Graduate Tutor (or someone in an equivalent senior academic management role) in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.