

Assessing the impact of the British Library's major heritage acquisitions

Reference: 2019-16-LIM

Supervisor	Dr Karen Limper Herz, Lead Curator Incunabula & 16th Century Books
Department, Location	Printed Heritage Collections – St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	From July 2019
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent). For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 3 days/week on site at the Library.
Remote-working	Remote working is not possible for this placement due to its reliance on data that can only be accessed onsite.
Context for placement	
<p>Heritage acquisitions are items of a unique or highly distinctive status used as primary sources for research. The British Library acquires such material on a daily basis through purchase or donation. Heritage acquisitions may be large (e.g. an archive comprising hundreds of boxes) or small (e.g. a printed book, musical score or single letter).</p> <p>To prioritise investment and provide guidance and support to staff involved in acquiring this material, the British Library Heritage Acquisitions Group (HAG) develops and oversees policy and strategy relating to major heritage acquisitions. Like all other heritage acquisitions, major heritage acquisitions require due diligence, expert selection and prioritisation, and rigorous appraisal of value and life cycle costs, i.e. costs for conservation, preservation, storage and cataloguing.</p> <p>HAG would like to look at the impacts that have resulted from the acquisitions it has supported between 2010 and 2018. Outward-facing impact activities include (but are not limited to) research projects, publications, exhibitions, creative outputs, web-pages, blog posts, social media, print media, public events and commercial activities. Internal impacts include conservation and preservation time, cataloguing and storage considerations.</p> <p>The placement student will work closely with the secretary to the Heritage Acquisitions Group and in consultation with curators across the Library to produce a report on the external and internal impact of major heritage acquisitions since their arrival at the Library.</p>	
Expected tasks and outcomes	
<p>The student will produce a report of around 5,000 words on the impact of heritage material acquired with HAG support between January 2010 and December 2018. In addition to data recorded as part of the HAG process, this will draw on the number of reading requests, hits to any digitised versions on Digitised Manuscripts and/or the Universal Viewer and loan requests.</p> <p>The report will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an executive summary • an overview of the impact of the material acquired (closely relating it to the Library's mission by summarising the volume of acquisitions and the types of use for research, inspiration and enjoyment) • a small number of case studies on specific items covering a range of types of acquisitions and time periods • recommendations on how to maximise the impact of HAG acquisitions • a conclusion of the findings. <p>The report will also consider the internal impact an acquisition has had, e.g. in terms of conservation work required, shelf space needed, or cataloguing required to make the material accessible.</p> <p>In advance of the placement, the secretary to HAG will produce a corpus of data for the student to use. This will be supplemented with quantitative data (e.g. on reading room and loan requests) that the student will request and analyse when the placement starts. To gather qualitative data, the student will be expected to speak to staff involved in acquiring heritage materials. They will be given a set of</p>	

suggested cases study topics to choose from, balancing their own interests whilst ensuring that a range of different types of acquisition are considered.

As well as writing the report, the student will give a talk to staff summarising their findings.

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

The secretary to HAG will introduce the student to HAG and the processes of the group; to the data to be analysed, including any sensitivities around its handling; to curators and other colleagues to be contacted, including those overseeing material suitable for the report's case studies and those to be contacted for other statistical information; to the Library more widely; and to where HAG fits into the wider picture of the Library and its heritage acquisitions.

The student will sit in the same office as the secretary to HAG but will work closely with colleagues in other departments. The secretary to HAG will have weekly meetings and update sessions with the student and will introduce them to colleagues as and when necessary. The secretary to HAG will discuss training needs with the student and provide training that is directly relevant to the tasks in hand.

The student will also have close links with colleagues in Research Development, and will spend at least half-a-day shadowing there to understand how new acquisitions interact with their work, including funded research projects and collaborative doctoral studentships. This will be supplemented by ad hoc meetings as required. In addition, the student will spend time with at least one curator to see how heritage material is acquired and processed within the Library. Further job shadowing opportunities can be considered according to the student's interests.

By the end of the placement, the student will have:

- A better understanding of the workings of a major research library.
- An understanding of the concept and ethics of 'cultural property'.
- Knowledge of acquisition methods, due diligence and related processes connected with major heritage acquisitions.
- An understanding of the life-cycle of heritage acquisitions.
- An understanding of the different kinds of impacts acquisitions can have.
- The ability to interpret data, and produce basic data visualisations.
- Experience of researching and writing a business report.
- Experience of communicating with colleagues working in various roles across the Library.
- Experience of handling sensitive and confidential data.
- Experience of public speaking.

Required knowledge and skills

- Full proficiency in Microsoft Office Excel.
- Excellent writing skills.
- Excellent verbal communication skills.
- Good ability to analyse and contextualise data.
- Good ability to work independently (with guidance) and with others across the institution.
- Awareness of considerations when handling and communicating sensitive and confidential data.
- An interest in how library collections are built and used.

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 in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>