

Digitisation of archives: benefits and opportunities

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Supervisor	Emma Cass, Business Development Manager
Department, Location	Digitisation - Boston Spa (Near Wetherby, Yorkshire)
Start date/timeframe	Flexible, but preferably after June 2019.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent)
Remote-working	We are flexible in terms of the number of days on site over the period of the research. At the start of the placement there would be an expectation that the student would be on site for at least a couple of days per week.
Context for placement	
<p>British Library Digitisation Services have been providing digitisation and scanning services to external customers for over two decades, both from the library's own collection, but also through digitisation of third party collections. With studios at both its St Pancras (London) and Boston Spa (Yorkshire) sites, the department is responsible for digitising well over 2 million pages per year on behalf of commercial customers. The department is one of the areas of the library that is responsible for bringing in revenue to support Library services and has an ambitious commercial strategy to grow this revenue.</p> <p>Whilst supporting customers to digitise their own archive collections, there is little understanding of what benefits or outcomes there are after a customer archive has been digitised; in terms of how the material is made available, who is using the material, what content they are using, what the drivers were for digitisation and whether the end result meets the initial expectations. Does the digitisation of the archive bring to light valuable previously lost content or bring new insight?</p> <p>The aim of the placement is to gather this information for two archives which have been digitised by the Library for external customers, in order to support the work of Digitisation Services, as well as informing the industry as a whole. It will enable Digitisation Services to advise other organisations about best practice, provide justification for digitisation projects and from a business development perspective ultimately support marketing of the services.</p> <p>On a wider scale the research will support organisations intending to digitise their own collections, through the dissemination of findings via the Digitisation Services website. There is little research which delves into the benefits and pitfalls of digitising, and archives certainly need more support and guidance.</p> <p>Please note that this placement is based at the Library's Boston Spa site in Yorkshire (although some remote working will be possible – see above).</p>	
Expected tasks and outcomes	
<p>The placement student will be expected to assess the benefits, opportunities and issues in terms of digitising hard copy archives through researching and creating two case studies.</p> <p>One of these case studies will be the digitisation of The Tablet magazine, which was a project Digitisation Services were involved in, in 2018. British Library Digitisation Services were responsible for OCR (Optical Character Recognition) processing of The Tablet's digital archive to enable the material to be available via the web in a searchable format. The material covers the period 1840-2018 and will be available to subscribers in Spring 2019 via The Tablet's third party hosting provider. The Tablet has been chosen as a case study as it represents an archive of over a century of material and demonstrates the Library's collaboration with the archive holder as well as their hosting provider.</p> <p>Options for the second case study will be discussed by the placement student and supervisor once the placement has started, taking account of the student's research interests and expertise. Digitisation Services have customers from a variety of areas, including charities, publishers, museums and galleries, government organisations and industry.</p> <p>In undertaking the research for the case studies, we would expect the placement student to use the following techniques, as well as those identified themselves, to gather information:</p>	

- 1) Interviews with those involved in the end to end digitisation process
- 2) Survey of those using the archives
- 3) Questionnaires and interviews to assess how the archives are being used
- 4) Web analytics to assess how the archives are being used
- 5) Report detailing research conclusions and an analysis of each case study

We welcome suggestions from the student for other or alternative approaches. The exact format of the case studies will be agreed over the course of the placement by the placement student and supervisor. It is envisaged that detailed case studies will be made available to British Library staff and the partner organisations involved in the project. There would also be summary case studies made available via the British Library Digitisation Services website and it is envisaged that these would be communicated to other digitisation partners and prospective customers. The intention is that the information would be used by the library and other organisations to advise on the benefits of digitising archives, but also to make those involved aware of the questions they need to consider through a digitisation project.

We will look for opportunities for the student to share their findings externally at relevant conferences or workshops or through relevant newsletters, blogs etc. There will be the potential to begin to draft a paper based on the placement project for submission to an academic journal, either as a sole author or with their British Library supervisor.

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

At the start of the placement, the student will receive an induction to the Library and have 1-1 sessions with key staff in the digitisation department and other associated areas of the organisation. The supervisor would also introduce the student to key staff at the external organisations which are being used as case studies. The student would also be welcome to attend internal digitisation meetings and meetings with new customers in order to understand how the department operates.

The student would be able to attend any relevant conferences which coincide with the placement. There would also be potential to attend relevant training courses, including those run by the Library itself, such as its in-house Digital Scholarship Training Programme. During the placement, the student would be encouraged to visit the members of the Digitisation team that are based at St Pancras in London and to take advantage of any time spent in London to meet other placement students and Library staff. Travel expenses would be covered by the Digitisation Services department.

The supervisor would meet with the student on a weekly basis to monitor progress, with more frequent meetings if required.

Through undertaking this placement the student will have the benefit of utilising their research techniques in a commercial work setting and will be contributing in a real and tangible way to the success of the Library's Digitisation Services. The placement will enable the student to develop their communication and networking skills through engagement with Library partners. The project will enable the student to develop skills and knowledge regarding the digitisation of collections (including digitisation techniques, IPR and copyright, publishing) and will be able to experience at first hand BL processes and procedures, as well as those of the department's customers. The student will be able to use their creativity to suggest ways to conduct the research and be innovative.

Required knowledge and skills

This placement opportunity would suit someone who has some knowledge of either digital archives or publishing.

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>