British Library PhD Placement Scheme 2021/22 – Project Profile

# Irish Manuscripts in the British Library

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| **Supervisor (name & role)** | Dr Claire Breay (Head of Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts) Julian Harrison (Lead Curator, Medieval Historical and Literary Manuscripts) |
| **Department & Site** | Western Heritage Collections, London (St Pancras) |
| **Start date/Timeframe** | Anytime between May 2021 and December 2021 (exact start date to be agreed with the supervisors) |
| **Duration** | **3 months** (or part-time equivalent) For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of **2.5 days/week** on site at the Library. |
| **Suitability for remote working** | Not suitable for remote working. The student will require access to manuscripts and other resources in the department. |

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| **Context for placement** |
| The Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts section at the British Library has curatorial responsibility for the extensive national collection of British and European manuscripts dating from Antiquity to 1600. These manuscripts cover all fields of knowledge and encompass sources for the history and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and the study of medieval history, religion, languages and literature, as well as illuminated, musical, cartographic, scientific, medical and legal manuscripts, charters, rolls and seals. There are currently ten members of staff and two collaborative doctoral students in the section. We make the collections accessible by cataloguing and digitising them, interpreting them online on the Library's website and though our Medieval Manuscripts blog, and interpreting them onsite in the Treasures Gallery and through the temporary exhibitions programme. We regularly lend manuscripts to exhibitions in the UK and abroad, and we collaborate in international research, digitisation and publication projects. The Library holds a major collection of over 200 Irish-language manuscripts, with particular strengths in medical texts, and important Irish literary and legal works. These manuscripts were catalogued in S.H. O'Grady, R. Flower and M. Dillon, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols (London, 1926–53). The placement student will contribute to the work of the section by creating new summary online catalogue records, and revising existing online records, for Irish-language manuscripts, as well as creating relevant name-authority records. The student will have the opportunity to write blog posts on Irish manuscripts for the Medieval Manuscripts blog, and to contribute collection-item interpretation for the Library's website. |

| **Expected tasks and outcomes** |
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- **Cataloguing**
  Creating and updating existing catalogue descriptions for Irish manuscripts in the Library's manuscript catalogue (IAMS), and updating bibliographies.
- **Digital content creation**
  Writing blog posts and online collection item descriptions to engage the public with Irish manuscripts
- **Events for internal and external audiences**
  Contributing to internal and external Library events with specialist knowledge of Irish manuscripts. Depending on the timing of the placement, this may include showing manuscripts to potential Library donors and taking part in visits by groups of postgraduate students.
- **Digitisation project development**
  Contributing to the development of the scoping and costing of a funding proposal for the digitisation of the Library's Irish manuscripts.

| **Training and development opportunities** |
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All placement students are welcome to access the Library's offer of workshops, talks and training. For further details please refer to the Application Guidelines on the British Library website.

In addition, this placement project will offer the successful student the opportunity to use their specialist knowledge to undertake practical research in a curatorial context by cataloguing manuscripts and interpreting them for the public online. This will extend the range of their existing academic experience and enable them to offer a broader range of skills to future employers. In particular, the successful student will gain:

**Practical cataloguing experience**
- Handling, reading and cataloguing Irish manuscripts
- Learning to catalogue manuscripts online

**Experience of working in a curatorial team**
- Collaborating as team with colleagues with different areas of expertise
- Organising events
- Responding to reference enquiries

**Training in writing for diverse audiences and promoting public engagement with manuscripts**
- Blogging about Irish manuscripts
- Contribution to show-and-tells, visits and other events
- Writing online collection-item pages

| **Required knowledge and skills** |
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Please ensure that you are aware of the general expectations for all applicants, as detailed in the Application Guidelines on the British Library website.

For this specific project, the following additional criteria apply:
- Excellent knowledge of the Irish language
- Experience of working with Irish-language manuscripts
- Strong knowledge of Irish palaeography
- Strong knowledge of Irish medieval and early modern literature, history and culture
- Familiarity with library catalogue records for Irish manuscripts
- Ability to learn to use cataloguing software

Application deadline: 5pm on Friday **18 December 2020**

Further information on eligibility, conditions and how to apply is available on the British Library website: https://www.bl.uk/news/2020/october/phd-placement-adverts-2020