

Re-discovering prints at the British Library

Reference: 2022-WH-PR

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| Supervisor(s) | Felicity Myrone (Lead Curator, Western Prints and Drawings) Alice Tod (Curator, Prints and Drawings) |
| Team and department | Western Heritage Collections, Collections & Curation department |
| Start date/timeframe | Earliest start: June 2022 Latest end date: March 2023 |
| Duration | 3 months (or part-time equivalent) |
| Part time/Full time | Full time or part time The project would need to be undertaken on a full-time basis initially, and at least 3 days a week thereafter. |
| Location and working arrangements | Can only be offered on site in London, St Pancras After an initial period of full-time office-based training, there may be the potential for the placement student to work from home 1-2 days a week, if required |

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| Context and nature of placement project |
| <p>A recently re-discovered historical finding list records some of the most valuable and vulnerable engravings now in the British Library being temporarily transferred to the prints and drawings room of the British Museum in the early nineteenth century. They are currently not easily located by existing British Library catalogues, and in many cases may not be identified at all. The PhD student will use the list to identify this overlooked collection of art at the Library.</p> <p>The finding list dates to 1812 and was written by then British Museum Keeper of Prints, William Alexander. The document lists about 500 books (or albums which could be stored vertically alongside books) which were deemed “proper to class with the engravings” when the “collections of engravings” were removed from Printed Books in February 1807 to go to the new Print Room above the Townley Gallery. Antony Griffiths, former Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, discovered the list in March 2020. He estimates that 80–90% of the books of prints listed are no longer in Prints and Drawings and has traced archival evidence indicating they were returned to the Library in 1820, where they are likely to remain.</p> <p>An initial audit of this list has been undertaken by Simon May, collections audit officer at the British Library with Felicity Myrone. The placement student would work with them Curator Alice Tod and other colleagues from the Library’s Conservation and Metadata Services and Processing teams. We anticipate a large portion of the prints will be from the collection of Sir Hans Sloane, and this work would feed into wider Library efforts to identify his collections and acknowledge his links to the slave trade. As with larger ongoing efforts to identify and record prints and drawings in the collections, this would be an opportunity to make accessible highly significant but largely unknown art materials in the Library.</p> |

Tasks and outcomes

The primary focus of the placement will be to physically examine the library's copies of the works in the 1812 list, recording information which will be used to enhance their discoverability on 'Explore the British Library' and working with colleagues to ensure their security for posterity.

Typical tasks will include:

- Examining the works and counting and numbering their plates.
- Adding previously unrecorded information to an Excel spreadsheet. This may include their condition, any signs of mutilation, signs of ownership and of use, and previous shelfmarks.
- Working with relevant colleagues to oversee any necessary processes such as stamping and boxing.
- Drafting a report on the scope of this part of the collection and what physical evidence remains of its previous history.

Optional tasks, depending on the student's interests, may include:

- Recording further information in an Excel spreadsheet which can be used to enhance the records in due course, such as printmakers, artists, publishers, titles, mediums, dates and subjects of plates.
- Conducting archival research on the acquisition of the prints and their movement within the Museum and Library.

We would also encourage the student to engage in supervised social media activity. They could, for example, guest host the [BL prints Twitter account](#) and write at least one post for the [Untold Lives blog](#).

The main outcome for the project will be an audit for internal use of the current location and condition of the prints.

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 opportunities to:

- Apply research skills for a practical purpose that supports the needs of a national library.
- Handle collection items.
- Identify and describe a wide range of prints, in different media and dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries.
- Develop knowledge of historic prints, print collecting and the history of the Library collections.
- Create and enrich MARC catalogue records via an Excel spreadsheet.
- Take part in daily curatorial life at the Library, attending staff meetings, training courses etc. as appropriate.
- Write for a broad public audience.
- Use social media to engage audiences in research.

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:

- A demonstrated interest in print history, visual art and collecting history (desirable).
- Working knowledge of Latin, French, Dutch or Italian (desirable).

The placement would suit a student with Excel skills and an interest in collections-based research.

Application deadline: **Friday 25 February 2022 (5 pm)**

Eligibility criteria, funding information and details of how to apply are available on the British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/research-collaboration/doctoral-research/british-library-phd-placement-scheme>