

Developing an enhanced curation framework for contemporary hybrid archives

Reference: 2022-CB-HAC

Supervisor(s)	Callum McKean (Digital Lead Curator, Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts)
Team and department	Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts, Contemporary British Collections, Collections and 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 Minimum days/week if undertaken part time: 1
Location and working arrangements	Can be offered as hybrid placement (remote with some visits to London, St Pancras)
Context and nature of placement project	
<p>'Enhanced Curation' is defined as the means by which the research value of an archival object can be enhanced through the creation, collection, and interrogation of the contextual and complementary information which surrounds it. Within Contemporary Archives & Manuscripts, this definition of 'contextual' has so far led to the creation of a virtual record of the working life of prominent individuals: through interactive panoramic photography of the writing studio of poet Ted Hughes, for example, and through guided tours and interviews aiming to capture the habits and habitats of depositors. Nevertheless, these modes of creating, collecting and interrogating contextual information - and even the boundaries of what we consider <i>contextual</i> at all - remain open to challenge and re-interpretation. This is especially true in light of the increasingly hybrid nature of many personal archives; containing both paper and born-digital records and their associated metadata. Through this placement, we hope to work collaboratively with a researcher engaged with these open questions - about what collecting institutions can do to 'enhance' their collections through contextual collecting in the digital age - in order to better ground and define the boundaries of what is so far, admittedly, a rather nebulous concept.</p> <p>By bringing together Library collections, curatorial experience and academic expertise, we hope to maximise the potential of our collections by recording for posterity the "privileged moment" of contemporary curation. We hope to make ourselves and our processes accountable and transparent to the communities we serve and the communities of the future, and make our collections more visible and engaging to researchers and the general public too. The resulting final report will establish a framework for 'Enhanced Curation' within the Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts Section – and the wider Library – able to articulate, guide and influence our ambitions in this rapidly evolving space. An accompanying case study, imagining what these 'enhanced' collections might look like in a contemporary or future exhibition space, either in a physical gallery or online, would serve as a test case for expanding our offer in this area.</p>	

Tasks and outcomes

The primary focus of this placement will be to complete a report outlining a framework for Enhanced Curation within the Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts Department, with an accompanying case study outlining the exhibition potential of some aspect of this material, either in a physical gallery space or online.

Typical tasks will include:

- Research into current best and experimental practice for the collection of contextual information both within the Library and in the wider GLAM (Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum) sector.
- Research into the Library's holdings of hybrid personal archives and their associated metadata in order to draw out possibilities for exhibition, either in person or online.
- Liaising with colleagues in Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts to understand the curatorial process for hybrid archives; their acquisition, capture, cataloguing and access work-flows.
- Presenting findings to colleagues across both within Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts and across Contemporary British Collections.

Optional tasks, depending on the student's areas of interest, may include:

- Exploration of technical solutions for the representation of personal digital archives and their contextual metadata, including but not limited to visualisations, emulation, and interactive experiences both in-person and online.

The main outcomes envisaged for this placement are:

- A report establishing a formal framework for 'Enhanced Curation' within the Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts Department; outlining best practice and possibilities.
- A case study taking one 'enhanced' collection and imagining how it might be represented within an exhibition space, either in one of the Library's galleries or online.
- A presentation to be delivered in a Contemporary British Collections staff meeting.

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:

- Work closely with the Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts team and participate in regular meetings and the Library's Born Digital Cataloguing Working Group, including hands-on workshops.
- Access to and hands-on experience of collecting, capturing and processing personal digital archives.
- Collaborate with the Library's Emerging Formats team and their attached PhD Placement undertaking their own Enhanced Curation work (subject to the timing agreed with the students appointed to each placement).
- Access events and workshops delivered by the host department's wide network of contacts in the disparate fields that make up this emerging area, such as archive professionals, digital humanists, and digital preservation experts.

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:

- Good theoretical knowledge/research background in GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) collecting with a particular focus on digital innovation in the sector.
- Familiarity with Digital Humanities techniques for creating engaging user experiences using data.
- An interest in archival collections and/or an interest in at least one of the subject areas in which Contemporary Archives and Manuscripts collects: Literature, Drama, Politics, Science, Activism.
- Basic knowledge of media editing tools for photographs, video, and audio.

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

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>