



# *Re:Connect*

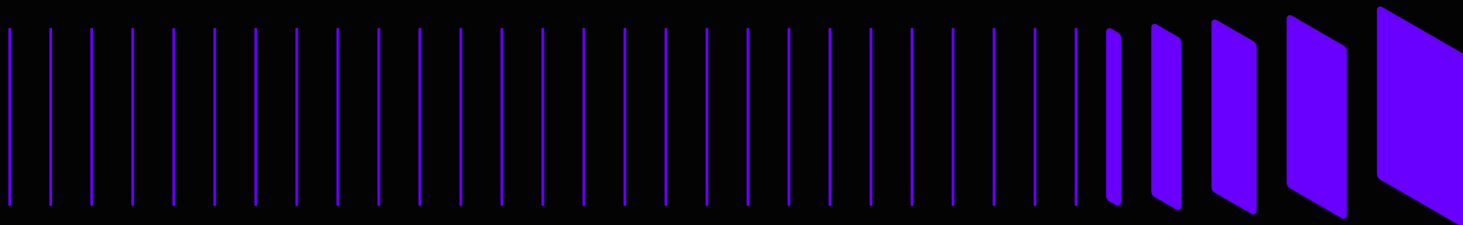
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ANNUAL REPORT

# 2024



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Library

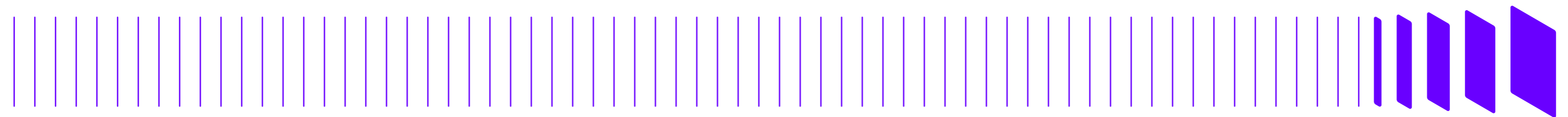


# *Re:Connect*

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ANNUAL REPORT **2024**

**Connecting**  **people**  
with their **past, present, and future** by  
**sharing compelling stories** from our  
**world-class collections.**





# Introduction

“I am very proud of the accomplishments of our Library and University Collections. Our Libraries are at the hearts of our university communities bringing together students, staff and the public; while our collections serve as a cornerstone for our teaching and research, connecting us both with the past and the future.”

**GAVIN MCLACHLAN**  
Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University

It gives me great pleasure to invite you to explore our Library review of the year, **Re:Connect 2024**, and I hope you will find the experience both informative and enjoyable. After the success of the publication of our 2023 review, which focussed on the work of our Heritage Collections teams, we felt there were so many good stories from across the Library that we should now open up the publication to showcase all our teams.

We are passionate about the work we do in the Library; we believe in its value to the University and the communities beyond the University. Numbers and statistics alone cannot convey the full impact of many of our activities. This is why it is so important for us to tell stories about our work. We hope it is an engaging way for us to shine a spotlight on what the Library is delivering.

In all the activities highlighted in this publication, you will see strong connections to the University’s 2030 Strategy and its four key areas of focus: People, Research, Teaching and Learning, and Social and Civic Responsibility. We are

thinking about how our work will change as we become more involved in managing information about University research, and we are supporting our staff through this change. We continue to purchase new material to strengthen our general and heritage collections for the benefits of our own, and other, students and researchers; we have delivered our dissertation festival recognising the need now to help our learners to understand how positively to use AI as a tool; we have continued to work with, and reach out to, the wider communities beyond the University both in Scotland and beyond.

You will see in the stories we tell here that the activities you might traditionally associate with a university library continue to take place, but you will also learn that what is delivered by the Library is changing. We are exploring new areas of activity where our skills, our knowledge and our ability can support new areas of University work. The stories here reflect the adaptability and creativity of our staff as we continue to explore what defines a university library in 2024.

**Jeremy Upton, Director, Library & University Collections**

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# Re-define:

## The Mariette Lydis Archive

**Rachel Hosker**, University Archivist and Research Collections Manager  
**Kirsty Stewart**, Scottish & University Collections Archivist

How can our current collecting practices reflect the changes in our society, in our University for future generations? This is one of the ethical and reflective practices we have actively been applying when considering representation and gender in the University's collections, particularly when it comes to what we take into the collections now. In growing our collections, we operate a rigorous process where academic opinion is sought and we listen to the thoughts of our staff from different Cultural Heritage Professions – Archivists, Conservators, Curators, Librarians, Conservators and Collections Managers, and Researchers. Considerations such as access, ease of use and short- and long-term care all form part of our decision-making process around new acquisitions. In December of 2023, after going through these stages, we welcomed a landmark collection to the University with enormous research potential and one which could be explored in new courses on gender.

The Mariette Lydis Archive first came to our attention in 2021, but we just missed out acquiring it. To our surprise it was again brought to our attention in 2023. The collection includes book illustrations lithographs, working drawings and final works. They include luminous miniatures, watercolour sketches, pencil drawings, etchings. There is a work on the zodiac and limited-edition work such as the Qur'an, with a particular focus on the verses on women.

Mariette Lydis (1887-1970) was an Austrian-Argentine artist who had a considerable reputation during her lifetime as a painter and illustrator. She was self-taught and first came to attention through art circles in Paris in the 1920s. At the end of the 1930s she fled Paris, via England, to Buenos Aires, where she lived for most of the rest of her life with her partner Erica Marx.

There are few contemporary commentaries on Lydis' personal life, but some that state that she lived openly as a bisexual woman, and her work often illustrated and

celebrated lesbian and bisexual relationships. Further research on Lydis' work shows how important this collection is as it brings together examples of, according to Abbie Rees-Hales, the 'artistic, social and sexual autonomy of the modern female artist'. This is particularly true of the Interwar 'Modernist' periods. Rees-Hales from the University of Birmingham, whose PhD is on women artists and the trade in erotic illustrated books in Europe and the United States, c. 1914-1934, describes the collection thus:

“The comprehensive body of illustrated books, print folios and drawings by Mariette Lydis, recently acquired by the University of Edinburgh, constitutes arguably the most important collection of the work of this fascinating but woefully-neglected female artist. The works in the collection, including Lydis's provocative print folios *Lesbiennes* (1926) and *Criminelles* (1927), very much illustrate the artistic, social and sexual autonomy of the modern female artist. These works highlight how Lydis consistently challenged gender-based expectations, prompting critics George Athénas and Aimé Merlo to remark that she as was 'becoming free like the man in Europe without rule and without faith' (*La Vie*, 1928).”

There are only two known copies of her work *Lesbiennes* surviving and we are now actively working through this collection to determine what other unique survivals of her work are present. This collection was already deployed in our classrooms in the second semester of 2023/24, as part of the new MSc in Gender Representation, supported by Gender.ED. Our teams are currently undertaking rehousing work of this collection and are actively discussing how to approach the metadata and interpretation through a combined lens of representation and access which will inform the ongoing work of cataloguing, conservation, and digitisation.

Find out more about how the University's collections have grown in **Re:Collect 2024**.



M. Lydis  
1921

Hand-coloured lithograph from *Le Chant des Amazones*, © Mariette Lydis

# A year in figures

**£1.46 billion**  
of research applications processed in *Worktribe*

**2.4 million**  
eBooks available

**10,133**  
research output records created in *Pure*

**20**  
students employed

**3,400**  
Resource Lists available

**2,349,214**  
downloads from Open Access repositories

**90.3%**  
of University research made Open Access



**2,000,000+**  
books, archives, instruments & artworks in our collections



**117,334**  
books borrowed

**79,346**  
minutes spent watching videos on L&UC's channel

**81,830**  
Views of LibGuides

**98**  
Volunteers and student interns

**2,620**  
students taught with Heritage Collections

**81** to **16**  
Individual objects loaned  
Exhibiting venues

**251,060**  
visitors to exhibitions loaned to

**5,450**  
attendees of public programmes

**226**  
Royal Literary Fund Fellow consultations

**4,434**  
users of uCreate Makerspace

**5,428**  
3D prints made

**56,750**  
Digital images created of collection items

**276**  
attendees of the Dissertation & Thesis Festival

**3,861**  
Data Share deposits

**9,310**  
Heritage Collections enquiries received

**£142,896**  
fundraised for Library & University Collections

**49,069**  
Heritage Collections items consulted



**14,249**  
visitors to our public venues

**20,626**  
attendees of information skills sessions

# Evolve:

## Developing and implementing a Collections Strategy

**Hannah Mateer**, Associate Director, Collections Services

In August 2023 the Library published a new Collections Strategy to provide a clear overview of its priorities and objectives for General Collections. The Collections Strategy has a positive impact on Library users through the development of new user-focused initiatives including the Library Wellbeing Collection.

330,000 e-journals. The Library's General Collections are developed and managed by Collections Services teams, guided by the new Collections Strategy.

The structure of the Collections Strategy provides a journey from the general to the specific, first setting out how the wider context informs the development and management of General Collections, and then moving to specific strategic objectives to be taken forward.

The vision statement is a key part of the Collections Strategy, informing all aspects of General Collections development and management. The vision statement makes a commitment that the Library will: "deliver quick and effective access to General Collections required for teaching, learning and research, maximising access to online and open content."

The Strategy reflects that, in an evolving collections landscape, there are a number of significant University of Edinburgh, national and international developments and opportunities which have an impact on the management of Library collections. The 'Context' section of the Strategy includes reference to the University of Edinburgh's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and the impact of climate change on collection development.



The Strategy includes guiding principles which inform the Library's decisions, policies and procedures in the management of General Collections. These guiding principles reflect the values of the University of Edinburgh and the Library, and include a commitment to user-focused services and open collections.

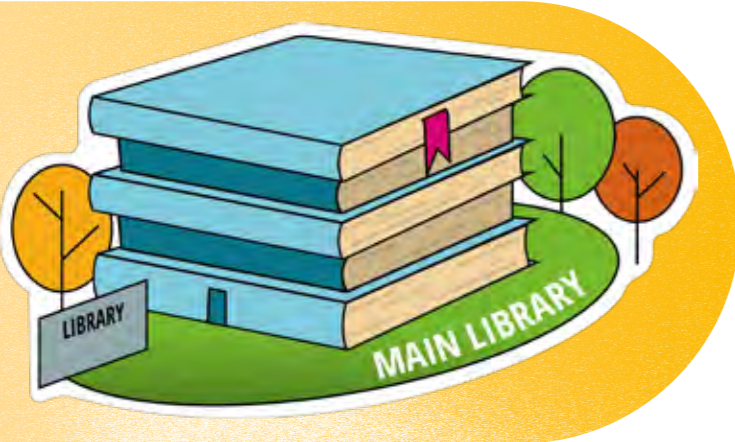
The Strategy outlines ten strategic priorities for 2023-2028. These priorities are being addressed through a *Collections Strategy Implementation Plan*. In 2024, the development of a Library Wellbeing Collection and a campaign to 'Find Yourself in the Library' are examples of initiatives which respond to the strategic priorities.

Following the purchase of relevant print and online content, the Wellbeing Collection launched in April 2024 with a new webpage and a display in the entrance to the Main Library. The new Wellbeing Collection has been very popular, with 225 items borrowed over two months. The 'Find Yourself in the Library' campaign invited students to request items for the Library to purchase to make Library collections more inclusive and diverse.

The Wellbeing Collection and 'Find Yourself in the Library' campaign have both been developed in partnership with EUSA representatives and invited students to select items for Library collections. This aligns with one of the Strategy's guiding principles that the Library provides opportunities for students to participate in the development of collections.

In 2024 and beyond, further Strategic Priorities will be addressed, including reviewing and updating all Collections Services policies and procedures to ensure alignment with the Collections Strategy.

The process to develop and implement the Collections Strategy has been successful and rewarding, leading to greater engagement with stakeholder groups and raising awareness of team activity and services. The Collections Strategy has provided clarity about General Collections priorities and objectives, demonstrating that decisions relating to General Collections are strategic and consistently applied. The Collections Strategy will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.



Development of the Collections Strategy began in 2022 as part of a programme of projects called 'Collections 2025', with an overall aim to ensure General Collections meet the needs of Library users in 2025 and beyond. The Strategy was developed through a process of research and consultation, involving sessions with Library staff, academic colleagues, students and colleagues from other libraries.

The Strategy relates to the Library's General Collections which consist of an extensive range of electronic resources and post-1900 print items. These collections are used by all groups in the University, with staff, students and visitors relying on General Collections for their teaching, learning and research. General Collections include over a million print items located in the University's Main Library, site libraries and offsite store. There are also millions of electronic resources, including over 2.4 million e-books and

# Discover:

## Improving access to Scotland's animal history

Fiona Menzies, Project Archivist (One Health)

In March 2024, a three-year effort saw the culmination of a project which has opened access to some of most critical archival collections focused on animal health and welfare. In 2021, Heritage Collections was awarded funding from the Wellcome Trust to catalogue and conserve three collections relating to veterinary and animal welfare in Scotland from 1850 to the present day. We expected this work would open up research into the world of animals, but what was a surprise was the range of stories and narratives that emerged as the project progressed.

This project involved the cataloguing, conservation and digitisation of three archives: The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies [R(D)SVS], the OneKind charity, and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland [RZSS]. They were selected because of their shared subject matter of animals. There was a twist, however. Animals are at the centre of each of these collections, but each collection has a different approach to caring for animals and therefore have disparate views over the past 120 years!

The first part of the project involved investigating the contents of the three archives. For the archives of the R(D)SVS and OneKind, this task was relatively simple due to them being held within the CRC at the University of Edinburgh Main Library. However, the archives of the RZSS were, at the start of this project, held at Edinburgh Zoo on Corstorphine Hill. After gaining an understanding of the contents, a box listing of the collections was created followed by an archival structure. An archival structure is the process of creating a map to aid in finding information in archives. After this, descriptions of the contents could then be made to make the contents of the archives accessible online.

The conservation work involved in the project was incredibly varied. The work on the R(D)SVS Collection, for example, involved the rehousing of medals, stabilising

the School's practice ledgers and even rehousing the death mask of a stable hand. The rehousing of these objects will lead to them becoming more easily accessible and much more secure in bespoke boxes. An ethical question arose at the very start of the project. Conservator, Mhairi Boyle considered whether it was appropriate to use animal-based conservation material on a collection of an organisation who campaign



Project Archivist, Fiona Menzies, working in the Archive Stores



Project Conservator, Amanda Dodd, cleaning glass plate negatives from the RZSS collection

for animal welfare and promote veganism. Mhairi investigated various recipes for plant-based adhesives as an alternative to gelatine and settled on a cellulose-based adhesive which she used to great effect with the OneKind archive. In the end, Mhairi found the cellulose adhesive to be more effective than the gelatine.

What do these collections offer? These collections, of course, provide an incredibly useful insight into animals in Edinburgh and further afield, but the contents offer a much wider pool of research topics. As part of the grant, we funded a post-doctoral researcher whose responsibility was to identify research streams across the three collections. The work of our researcher, Dr Elizabeth Vander Meer, uncovered potential topics for research including; women in the animal welfare movement, attitudes to care, the benefits of closeness to animals, attitudes towards vaccine hesitancy and alternative medicine, the movement of animals, the spread of zoonotic infections, and many more. At the end of the project, two research papers were submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals; one on the place of animal welfare in public health concerns in Scotland, and the other on women and the politics of care.

It's not worth doing all this work into cataloguing, digitising, and conserving archival collections without

anyone knowing about it. So, one of this project's priorities was getting information about the project out to a wider audience. During the project, we were able to accomplish over 30 outreach activities which ranged from presentations, given to those interested in a career within the heritage sector, to primary school children interested in animal conservation. One of the major events which took place during the project was the bicentenary of the R(D)SVS in 2023. Images and documentation were used throughout the bicentenary celebrations to demonstrate the history of the School both within Scotland and further afield.

When it comes to consulting records relating to veterinary history and animal welfare, you potentially open yourself up to upsetting images and descriptions. To attempt to curb the impact this might have, content warnings have been added to the photographic collections and notes added to the online catalogue to make those consulting the Collection aware that they may find the contents disturbing.

With this work, supported generously from the Wellcome Trust, we hope to now encourage research and engagement in an aspect of our history which is often overlooked: our relationship with animals and their part in shaping the history of the country.

# Write:

## Royal Literary Fund Fellow cultivating academic writing skills

Marshall Dozier, Academic Support Librarian

This past year, the Library has hosted a Royal Literary Fund Fellow, Mary Paulson-Ellis. The Royal Literary Fund (RLF) is a UK charity with a core aim of supporting writers via grants and other programmes. RLF Fellows are placed in universities throughout the UK to support students in developing their skills in academic writing.

Mary Paulson-Ellis is best known for highly-acclaimed and award-winning novels such as *The Other Mrs Walker* and *The Inheritance of Solomon Farthing*. She has also published non-fiction and short fiction, and has brought past experience of tutoring and mentoring roles to her Fellowship.

The offering of the Fellowship was very well received by students and staff. Over the course of the year, Paulson-Ellis had 226 tutorials with students from a wide range of subjects - from theology to pharmacology, architecture to Chinese - and across all levels of study, from first year undergraduates to PhD students. Mary's two-days-per week as a Fellow were fully booked from October through to the end of April.

Mary saw students working on dissertations, theses, essays, briefing papers and journal articles, reports and PhD proposals, amongst other things. Most

of the students who asked to meet with Mary said that they found writing very difficult, even painful, and felt self-critical and frustrated: "I spent a lot of time helping students understand that writing is, in itself, a form of thinking, rather than something that happens once all the 'thinking' i.e. reading/research/note-taking etc has been done."

Mary coached the students to "embrace their writing instincts" and consider analytically their own approaches to writing, conveying the message that everyone can find the writer in themselves. She worked to ensure that the students left the tutorials feeling more confident in their writer's voice and abilities as a writer. Feedback that Mary received from students demonstrates the impact of her teaching – just one example:

**It was an absolutely brilliant session, which really flipped a couple mental switches when it comes to writing.**

This is the first time a Fellow has been hosted by the Library, with the number of sessions in Edinburgh being much higher in comparison to Fellows based at other universities. Mary worked closely with the team of Academic Support Librarians, who were able to use existing timetabled training sessions and school communication channels to help the Fellow's role become integrated and to raise awareness of the Fellowship.

Location is also a factor: Mary was situated at the Main Library, which is accessible to, and heavily used by, students from across a wide range of disciplines. Mary's office in the Main Library looks out over the Meadows

with lovely scenery – this in itself had a beneficial impact on students, almost all of whom expressed admiration for the meeting space which appeared to help them feel more at ease. Mary also developed links with the University's Institute for Academic Development, Careers Service, and the Student Wellbeing Service.

We are delighted with the success of our first year hosting a Royal Literary Fund Fellow, and are even more delighted that next year, Mary will return along with two additional Fellows. This will allow us to have a Fellow available five days per week, including availability in the Murray Library at Kings Buildings.



“...as well as the Fellowship programme being helpful to the students, the experience was also deeply satisfying, illuminating and moving for me. I look forward to my second year”

MARY PAULSON-ELLIS







# Involve:

## Discovery Sessions bridging the gaps between collections, communities and research

Nel Coleman, Library Citizen Science Engagement Officer

Traditional forms of academic research allow for only limited involvement of non-researchers. You might donate a blood sample, take part in a test, or answer a questionnaire. You are contributing, but only passively: you are not truly involved. On the other side, a researcher may study the use of green spaces in a town or city without consulting the communities that actually make use of those spaces, and pathways to healthcare can be studied without working with patients using those pathways. The researcher is not including the people who will be impacted by the research.

Participatory research practices remedy this defect in the traditional models of discovery by actively involving the people for whom the research matters – patients, community members, and, indeed, the general public. Going under many guises, “Citizen Science”, “Involvement”, or “Community-Based Research” to name but three of a seemingly infinite list, this approach incorporates the active involvement of non-researchers at key stages of research projects. They are empowered to help guide the research, sometimes in a small way by collecting data, but increasingly often in significant and impactful ways up to and including co-designing the projects.

Last year, the Library created a role dedicated to the support of participatory research, exploring the various

ways in which all services can facilitate involvement. Based in Library Research Support, but working in collaboration with all teams, the role has allowed us to explore the various ways in which the Library can support, encourage, and advocate for involvement in research across the University. One of our great success stories has been our Discovery Session series, a collection of co-produced events involving the Heritage Collections team, community partners, and University researchers.

On the face of it, the sessions follow the same broad structure. Each session includes a series of short talks and a display of items sourced from the Heritage Collections. The first session used items from Lothian Health Services Archive relating to the theme of LGBTQ+ Health and Wellbeing. After this selection process (more on this momentarily), the doors are opened to anyone from across the University and beyond to listen, learn, and engage with the materials– and ideally interact with one another in an informal setting.

This event, then, is the product of co-production and co-creation. The benefits of discovery sessions begin to appear long before the event, where research and community connections are developed in the background. The materials on display are chosen by one of our co-curators. For February’s event, two



Two Sisters from the Order of Perpetual Indulgence co-host an event on LGBTQ+ Health and Wellbeing - February 2024

Sisters from the Order of Perpetual Indulgence selected materials relating to HIV+, health advocacy, community support, and stigma in Edinburgh. They told their story, but also the stories of the queer community from their deeply embedded and personal perspective. Their co-curatorial partners - researchers and collections professionals - offered very different insights, from tales of censorship through to a moment of “found poetry” using classified adverts in the magazine collections.

These sessions are deeply personal and insightful, and they showcase the power of participatory practices. Spontaneous activities during events, such as found poetry sessions on mental health, can only occur when power is shared with participants – with co-curators – and control over the material on display is ceded.

A later session, celebrating the launch of Generation Scotland’s project exploring loneliness in the digital age, led us to delve into the Art Collections. Here, young people (ages 12-17) involved in the project selected materials they felt represented the themes of loneliness. Researchers from various schools, members of youth organisations, and curious members of the public came together to engage with the artwork and the co-curators, exploring the theme of loneliness, but also importantly, making new connections and sowing the seeds of future participatory research. But in this case, the session was

also geared towards addressing a specific research challenge. Recruitment is a consistent, reoccurring problem for every study, and in involved research the problem is multiplied many times over, with participants requiring a much higher degree of investment. This session allowed representatives from numerous Youth organisations from across Scotland to connect with the Generation Scotland Team – but even better – to see the fantastic potential of participatory research in action. With their support, recruitment can be streamlined for both the loneliness project, and future activities.

In this way, the sessions offer multiple simultaneous benefits. They allow us to have direct connections with communities outside the institutional bubble, welcoming them into the Library and hopefully forming long-term sustained connections. They offer new insights into the collections – beyond those possible from the sole perspective of a collections specialist or researcher. And they act as an example of participatory practice in action: showing the power of involvement, and the various ways in which we can open the doors to collaboration.

We are excited to continue these sessions in the coming year – and we already have a busy programme under development, with themes ranging from mental health to green and blue public spaces.



Launch of Generation Scotland’s “Loneliness in the Digital World Study” - June 2024

# Connect:

## Sharing best practices with the Library, Information and Research Communities

**Serena Fredrick**, Student Engagement Officer  
**Fiona Wright**, Scholarly Communications Officer

Part of our work in the wider cultural heritage sector is sharing best practice with the international Library, Information and Research Communities, and we host a number of initiatives which deliver on this objective.



The University is committed to Open Research practices, and in 2020 the Library Research Support Team adopted the League of European Research Universities “8 Pillars of Open Research” as its roadmap to achieving this. Setting up an annual Open Research Conference to give professional services staff and researchers the opportunity to come together to discuss Open Research issues was one of our first priorities.

The first Edinburgh Open Research Conference was held in 2022 as a hybrid conference open to staff and postgraduate researchers from the across University, and other institutions worldwide, to encourage networking and knowledge sharing both within and between institutions. In 2023 we ran the conference again with a focus on *Open Research as a Tool for Addressing Global Challenges* and attracted a wide range of participants from as far afield as South Africa and Lithuania.

This year the theme was “How can open research contribute to positive culture change in research more broadly?” It brought together over 300 attendees, both online and in-person, to hear different perspectives on how aspects of Open Research, such as education and skills, next generation metrics, and research integrity, can contribute not just to Open Research but the wider changes in Research Culture which are so important to ensuring the future of academic research.

With speakers and attendees coming to Edinburgh from institutions across the UK and from countries as diverse as Slovenia and Kazakhstan in 2024 it gave everyone who could join us an excellent opportunity to network and share expertise.

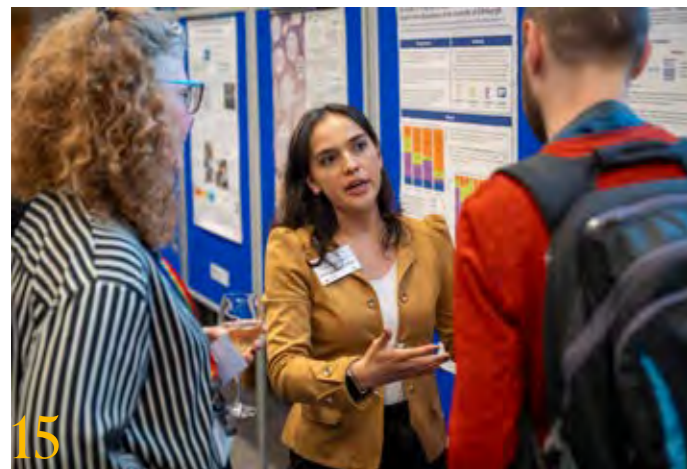
In the spirit of openness, the presentations and posters from all years are available to watch or read on our conference journal site (<http://journals.ed.ac.uk/eor/index>), hosted by Edinburgh Diamond, so that even those who could not attend on the day can still benefit.



Our fifth Knowledge Exchange Week ran from 27 – 31 May 2024 and provided a unique opportunity for library and cultural heritage professionals from all backgrounds and career stages to learn about our work and to share knowledge and best practice with colleagues globally.

The focus of the 2024 programme was the ‘Open Library’ and participants engaged in opportunities to

**PhD student Maria Juliana Rodriguez Cubillos presents at the Open Research Conference poster session (left); Heritage Collections Summer School participants learn how to make book shoes in a conservation training session (right).**



exchange knowledge and experience on a wide range of topics, including: Open Research practices, opening up our collections through digitisation, and leveraging cultural heritage collections for institutional change.

## Heritage Collections Summer School 2024

Our ever-popular Heritage Collections Summer School continues to go from strength to strength. Several years ago, we identified an opportunity to engage a group of students and the local community to take part in a Heritage Collections Summer School. The aim of the week is to teach best practice in all the areas of our work, and to showcase the many different career paths and opportunities within the heritage sector.

This free course has been designed to give participants a broad but intensive overview of library, archive and museum collections management and curatorial



practices in an interactive, hands-on environment. No prior knowledge or experience is required; previous participants have included school pupils, our own Edinburgh students, students from other universities, people looking to change their career and retired people following their passions. The course proved to be so popular in 2023 we had to host it twice, and we’re on track to run two again in 2024 due to the high level of interest.

Staff from across the Library cover core skills within three broad themes – libraries, museums and archives, and participants also take part in a team challenge based on a current project or area of development. Sessions include overviews of the University’s Art, Musical Instrument, and Rare Books Collections, Archives, and Digitisation Services, as well as sessions on Conservation, Engagement, Exhibitions and Careers.

Since the first Summer School in 2017, we’ve supported over 120 people through the programme and kick started their careers in the sector, and there will be another 40 taking part this year!

“To actually be on the 6th floor at the CRC for a week, surrounded by likeminded people who are interested in all things to do with heritage and special collections, and getting to hear from members of staff about their work and projects was great. I had no previous experience with collections, so getting to handle books and items was exciting ... also really great in getting us to think and realise of the larger duties of Heritage Collections, and not only old books (although old books are super!).”

# Exhibit:

## Immersive Worlds

**Bianca Packham**, Engagement Officer (Exhibitions)  
**Elizabeth Quarmbury Lawrence**, Rare Books and Literary Collections Curator

After a moment of darkness, the hum of the Main Library gives way to a burst of colour and sound, transporting you to a surreal realm. Steadying yourself on the grassy boulders beneath, your eyes scan past the precipice toward the horizon. It's a view both familiar and strange at once. In the distance, an extinct volcano and a hilltop castle command the skyline, while rows of tenements line the winding streets below. It's unmistakably Edinburgh; yet frozen in time two centuries ago.

For the first time in 200 years, visitors to the Main Library's summer 2024 exhibition *Panoramas: the World in 360°* can experience, with the help of virtual reality (VR), the University's 1792 *Panorama of Edinburgh* the way it was meant to be seen.

Long before digital technologies, artist Robert Barker (1739-1806) developed an immersive 360° environment, relying on the mastery of painted perspective, the control of space and light, and an understanding of the psychology of human perception. Supposedly inventing the idea for the panorama in Edinburgh while walking on Calton Hill in 1787, Barker used the iconic image of the Georgian city as his prototype, showing versions of it as a half, then a full circle, in hired rooms in London, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Barker's original vision for the panorama was as a way of presenting the most realistic reproduction of nature as drawing and painting allowed. In his patent, taken out in 1787, he explained it was: "to perfect an entire view of any country or situation as it appears to an observer turning quite round."

To its original audiences a panorama show was a totally captivating immersive experience. The technical breakthrough which made it all possible was Barker's development of a technique for manipulating perspective, so that an image could be painted on the inside of a cylindrical gallery and appear correct to a viewer standing in the centre of the circle.

The VR experience in the exhibition builds on this legacy. Produced in collaboration with uCreate, whose Makerspace provides a wide range of new and transformative technologies to help the University community make (almost) anything, it gives twenty-first century visitors a taste of the immersive experience of its original viewers. It was developed by uCreate Makerspace Student Technician Zita Takacs, a 3rd year Product Design student at Edinburgh College of Art whose interest covers all sorts of design projects, but especially those which involve technical experimentation.



Zita Takacs and Elizabeth Quarmbury Lawrence trial the VR experience of Barker's 1792 *Panorama of Edinburgh*

Made with the Unity game engine, the panorama was first converted to a 360° image. Whereas panoramas would typically be experienced from a viewing platform, Zita explored other options, ultimately filling the space below with 3D models to imitate what Barker might have seen on Calton Hill where the view of Edinburgh was taken.

As a self-taught VR developer who hopes to continue her studies in this field, Zita was excited to build an interactive for the exhibition which for some visitors would be their very first encounter with VR.

The original inspiration for the exhibition was to enable visitors to share some of the excitement which was experienced by the first panorama visitors. The coloured engraving of the Edinburgh panorama, which usually hangs on a wall in the Centre for Research Collections, fascinates everyone who sees it, but it takes a strong visual imagination and a good grasp of the geography of Edinburgh to visualise it in the original 360°. Zita's VR adaptation allows them to see

“The experience is displayed on an Oculus Quest 1 headset which presented certain graphics limitations; I couldn't create a perfect match with the colour and style of the original panorama. I explored the Unity Asset Store for models of plant species native to the UK. I settled on grasses and a birch tree which hides an imperfect join in the original panorama.”  
 - Zita Takacs, uCreate Student Technician

it as Barker intended, while the contemporary format recreates the novelty of the original experience.

In addition to the VR experience, visitors are able to see the Edinburgh panorama in a specially-built rotunda with excerpts from its original guide, as well as panoramas from around the world, from rooftop views of London to the battleground of Waterloo.



# Team Spotlight:

## Research Information Systems

**Nik Tahirah Nik Hussin**, Research Information Systems Manager  
**Dominic Tate**, Deputy Director, Library & University Collections & Associate Director for Library Research Support

Whilst the work of a librarian has changed vastly over the centuries, at its core our work remains all about collection, description, preservation and access to information.

We, in the Research Information Systems team, are the ‘newest’ librarians to the profession. We have no contact with books and other types of physical collections, but we deal with a vast amount of complex information in the two research information systems that we manage for the University community: *Worktribe* and *Pure*.

*Worktribe* is the University’s grant management system, which means that it is the system used to collect and preserve information about how much money the University requests and gets from both national and international funders. When researchers need money for research, from paying for large facilities to test tubes, the research administrators record how much money they need in *Worktribe*. Then when the University receives this money, how the money is spent is also recorded in *Worktribe*. Grants vary in value from hundreds to millions – in fact, *Worktribe* has been used to process over **£9 billion** worth of research funding for the University since 2016.



Any publications, activities, press coverage, and impact that result from research in the University, either funded or non-funded are recorded, preserved and made publicly available using *Pure*. There are hundreds of thousands of records in *Pure*, each of which have been carefully created and curated. This makes *Pure* a rich source of data to help the University understand the research that has been carried out by the brilliant researchers it employs. The information in *Pure* is also used to let the funders know on a regular basis the breadth and reach of the University’s research.

Most of the Research Information Systems team’s time is spent on maintaining these systems, and also ensuring that our users know how the systems function and can access the information that they need for their work. We offer training sessions to make sure that the information that is collected in both systems is correct. Accurate information in the systems will result in meaningful reports on various aspects of the University’s research – we create visually attractive reports and dashboards for research management teams across the University. *Pure* and *Worktribe* are also critical to preserving the research record of the University and will form a rich source within the University’s future archive. We already undertake to make as much information as possible publicly available.

We are a small team and a mixed bunch of trained librarians and IT specialists, and we also have an expert in research funding among us. These different skills enable us to help and collaborate with colleagues within the Library and also across the whole University community. We work with anybody who is an active part of research – if they are involved in research then they will be using either *Pure* or *Worktribe* or both and we work with them to make sure either or both systems facilitate their work.

Call us system experts or super-users or research enablers or just very helpful people - we’re the ‘new’ librarians.



# Remember:

## Digitising LHSA's UK AIDS Memorial Quilt panels

Juliette Lichman, Photographer  
Louise Williams, LHSA Archivist

During a 1985 memorial march, LGBT activist Cleve Jones taped a series of cards to the wall of San Francisco's Federal Building. Each was dedicated to someone lost to the growing AIDS epidemic: stepping back, Cleve thought that together these cards looked like a quilt. This was the beginning of the NAMES Project, which was to become the world's largest community arts initiative. The Project co-ordinated the making of individual fabric panels, each 3ft x 6ft (the size of a grave plot) and dedicated by a loved one to someone lost to AIDS. Eight of these panels could be sewn together to make a section, and these sections assembled into a huge AIDS Memorial Quilt, a crowd-sourced tribute that "shouted" the names of people hidden behind stigma and medical statistics.

In October 1987, the Quilt would be laid out on the Mall in Washington DC. Panels were later exhibited internationally, inspiring NAMES Project chapters to spring up around the world. The UK chapter was based in Edinburgh under the dedicated stewardship of Scottish activist Alastair Hume. We know from Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA) HIV collections that the UK NAMES Project published instructions on how to make a panel, stored panels from across the country, mounted touring displays to raise funds, and conducted an ambitious education program.

LHSA cares for ten UK NAMES Project quilt panels (GD1/152), previously in the custody of HIV and Hepatitis C charity, Waverley Care. Each is a unique creation made from a variety of media: not only fabric (cottons, satins,



velvets, tweeds, felt, ribbon, and wools), but also sequins, leather, and metal. They were assembled by hand sewing, machine stitching, appliqué, crochet, and knitting. As much as the panels' physical nature creates their value, though, it also presents problems for access, storage, and preservation. The panels' size means that they can't be seen in our reading room, nor can they be on permanent display. Fabric can fray, attached items become loose, and repeated handling may exacerbate wear and tear. Heritage professionals' natural instinct is to preserve but what happens when keeping an object's material integrity is not compatible with its primary purpose (here, making marginal lives visible)?

High quality digitisation by the Library's Cultural Heritage Digitisation Service (CHDS) was the natural preservation and access solution. CHDS has encountered a range of different collection items, from penicillin mould to plastic moulded elephants, but the quilt panels were a new, though rewarding, photographic conundrum. Due to their large size, panels had to be laid on the floor on a protective backdrop, with the camera using a 80mm lens at the highest point on the copy stand. Additionally, two very large reflectors at either end were placed to encase these large objects with as much light as possible bouncing off flash units.



Juliette Lichman preparing a quilt panel for photography.

There were certainly challenges during digitisation: at least two photographs, but sometimes as many as four, were needed to capture the front and backs of the quilts in their entirety. These later had to be "stitched" together using imaging software. Panels not being not 100% flat was also a hurdle, especially with textiles that tend to change their surface quality as soon as they are moved. To combat this, panels were gently folded and gently positioned to retain the same creases and valleys where possible so that lighting remained consistent across the image. Some panels also had very irregular sewing, which made image stitching more challenging. This was particularly true of one quilt with a striped backing material which took extra-careful editing to ensure all the stripes lined up along the entire length.

As a result of this painstaking process, extremely high quality images of the panels are freely available online ([images.is.ed.ac.uk](https://images.is.ed.ac.uk)). Not only can viewers see the front and back of each panel, but also selected sections highlighting construction techniques, textures, or vulnerabilities, visible down to the texture of individual strands of wool. In-person visitors to Heritage Collections are still very welcome, but digitisation brings the panels (and the people they commemorate) to a worldwide audience, contributes to a worldwide AIDS Memorial Quilt, and allows for close reading beyond the naked eye.

Most importantly, this digitisation allows the panels to fulfil their original purpose: **to be seen.**



# Educate:

## Advancing AI Literacy through Library initiatives

**Isbhel Leggat**, Academic Support Librarian  
**Robert O'Brien**, Academic Support Librarian  
**Anna Richards**, Academic Support Librarian

When ChatGPT launched in November 2022 it quickly became clear that it could have an impact on user behaviour similar to Google two decades before. Edinburgh's Academic Support Librarians (ASLs) embraced the need to help staff and students understand the opportunities and challenges these new tools could have in all areas of information literacy.

The ASL AI Information Literacy Group was formed in May 2023. The Group includes the Associate Director of Library Academic Support (Elizabeth Williams - Group Lead) and ASLs Anna Richards, Isbhel Leggat, and Robert O'Brien. Our goal is to help students and academic staff effectively and ethically utilise generative AI in their learning, teaching, and research.

Information literacy forms the backbone of what librarians teach students in a university setting, and the introduction of generative AI into the education landscape has introduced a new facet to this - AI literacy. AI Literacy encompasses how to use AI tools effectively and also how to understand their limitations. For example, ChatGPT was trained using a large language model which was based on a large dataset of websites and other online material. This means the answers it gives can reflect the biases and inaccuracies present in this dataset. If a student uses ChatGPT to understand a topic or generate an answer to a question, they could inadvertently be using inaccurate or biased information, as well as risking academic misconduct if they used the answer in an assignment without acknowledgement.

We knew that knowledge of and ability to teach students how to use AI ethically and responsibly could not reside with only a few members of our team, so our first workshop was presented to members of the ASL team. This ensured that colleagues less familiar with generative AI had an opportunity to increase their knowledge and to discuss how these tools could

be used for literature-based research in particular.

On the back of this workshop, we developed our first student-facing session: 'AI tools for literature searching: Opportunities, limitations and responsible use', delivered online as part of the Library's March 2024 Dissertation and Thesis Festival. We then went on to develop a longer 60-minute version, delivered as part of the Digital Skills and Training AI Week (22-26 April 2024). Sessions were delivered on Collaborate, the University's platform for online teaching, and attended by over 60 students and academic staff.

These workshops facilitated discussion about the nature and ethical use of generative AI and practical guidance on using a variety of generative AI tools for specific literature searching and reviewing tasks. Attendees raised interesting questions about prompt engineering, using generative AI for language translation and text summarisation, and how to reference generative AI outputs.

At the heart of our development of AI literacy support are the principles of continuous improvement and iterative development. These sessions have been highly effective in helping us test session content and deliver activities to a diverse range of students and academic staff. We have gained insight into the practical issues students face when using generative AI to support their learning and completion of assessed work.

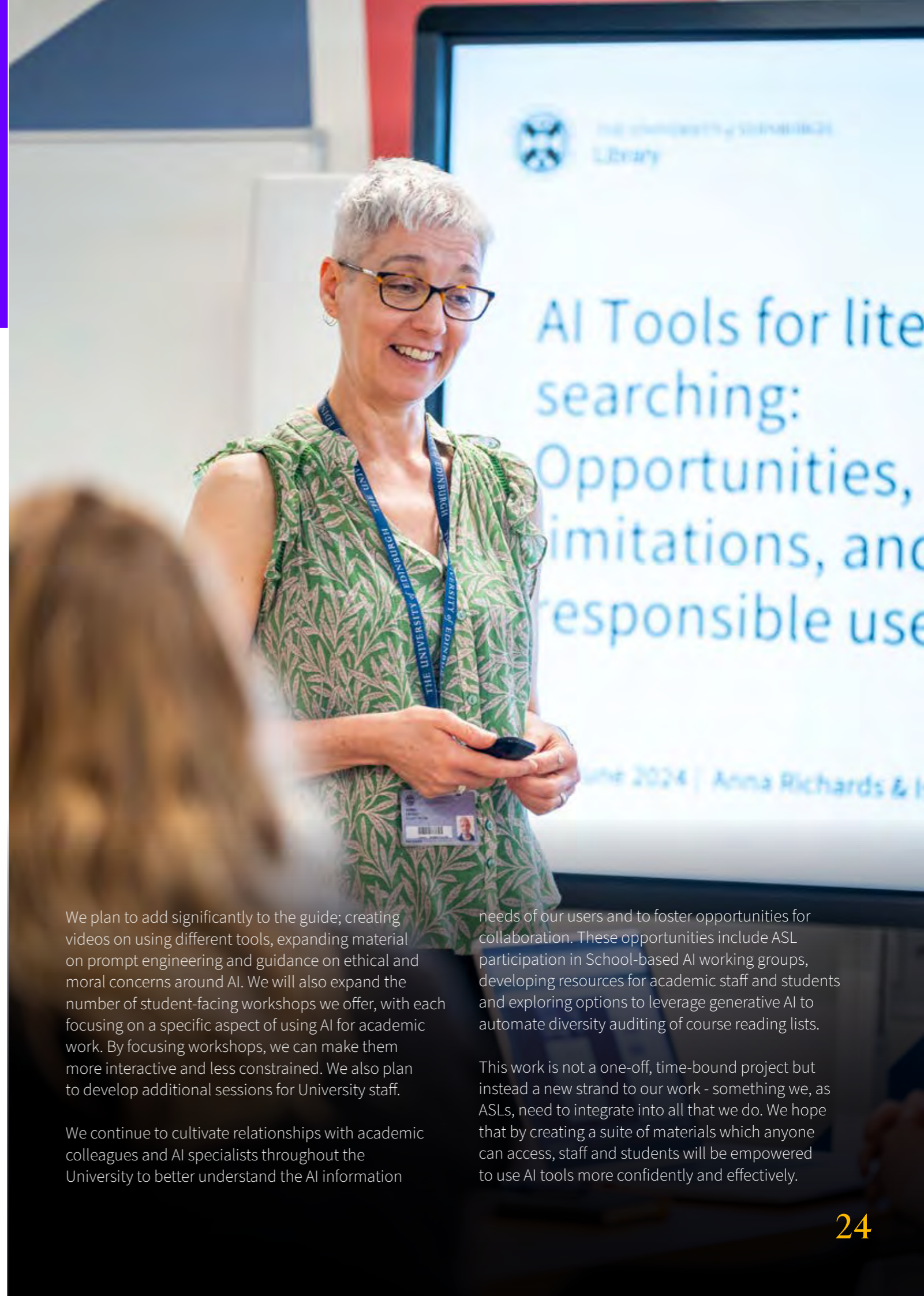
Alongside workshop development, we also recognised the need to provide online resources which staff and students can access as required. We have created an online guide ("Using Generative AI Tools in Academic Work") which mirrors workshop content - ethics and responsible use, literature searching, summarising and analysing research.

We plan to add significantly to the guide; creating videos on using different tools, expanding material on prompt engineering and guidance on ethical and moral concerns around AI. We will also expand the number of student-facing workshops we offer, with each focusing on a specific aspect of using AI for academic work. By focusing workshops, we can make them more interactive and less constrained. We also plan to develop additional sessions for University staff.

We continue to cultivate relationships with academic colleagues and AI specialists throughout the University to better understand the AI information

needs of our users and to foster opportunities for collaboration. These opportunities include ASL participation in School-based AI working groups, developing resources for academic staff and students and exploring options to leverage generative AI to automate diversity auditing of course reading lists.

This work is not a one-off, time-bound project but instead a new strand to our work - something we, as ASLs, need to integrate into all that we do. We hope that by creating a suite of materials which anyone can access, staff and students will be empowered to use AI tools more confidently and effectively.



# Experience:

## Embedded student posts within Conservation and Collections Management

Ruth Honeybone, Conservation & Collections Manager

The Conservation and Collections Management team has a long tradition of providing a high-quality vocational learning experience for those interested in a career caring for our shared cultural heritage. This year we have made a positive addition to our established volunteer and internship programme, with the creation of a brand-new position – the Collections Care Assistant. This role, tailor-made for Edinburgh students, is designed to expose them to the full range of activities the team undertake to preserve the University’s globally-significant heritage collections and make them accessible now and for the future. This position differs from our other learning opportunities in that it is part of, rather than alongside, the team, creating a richer experience over an extended period.

We have welcomed Abigail, Ella and Isabela to the role this year.

### Abigail Miskin, MA Fine Art (4th year)

“I have long been eager to gain experience in arts and heritage conservation, and the Collections Care Assistant

role has enabled me to explore the heritage sector and figure out which areas appeal to me the most. I expressed an interest in paper conservation and am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work on the Panoramas: the World in 360° exhibition, curated and installed by Heritage Collections staff. I was given the chance to learn paper cleaning and tear repair techniques as well as creating display mounts for presentation. It was exciting to work on a variety of tasks as a part of such a talented and passionate team, and fascinating to experience the complex work that goes into caring for objects and staging an exhibition. As I have been considering a Masters programme in Conservation, the role has helped me hugely in consolidating my areas of interest and has provided experience that will benefit me greatly when pursuing a postgraduate degree.”

### Ella Joyce, MA History (2nd year)

“I have been shown every aspect of the collections management process, from initial acquisition to long-term storage, and I am currently undertaking a rehousing project for the University’s Draft Senate Minutes. This involves cleaning the documents using special sponges before flattening them in preparation for storage, improving their long-term preservation by reducing the need to unfold them for access. I am very grateful to have also been able to experience the wider work that the team undertake, including delivering collections handling training at a community archive. Starting this position knowing little about different roles within the heritage sector, the diverse range of tasks I have been able to undertake has allowed me to develop a new-found focus on pursuing a career within preventive conservation. My improved understanding of the wide contents of the University’s collections will be very useful for the rest of my studies, as my focus on Scottish history regularly correlates to the material I am working with in Heritage Collections.”

### Isabela Tapia Hernandez, MScR Collections and Curating Practices

“The Collections Care Assistant role has given me the chance to continue developing my object handling experience after finishing a placement with National Museums Scotland, where I focused on curatorial skills. And I was curious to learn more about the equivalent work with our own University collections! I have been working on an inventory and barcoding project for the Musical Instrument Collection. This involves re-labelling every item to improve accessibility for teaching, research and engagement, and updating Vernon (the collection management system used to keep records for the Musical Instrument and Art Collections) so that searches produce better results. Beyond this project, it has been wonderful to be able to witness and contribute to the work of a diverse human group from multiple backgrounds and

experiences, such as the Conservation and Collections Management team. Coming from a history background, I am eager to continue the route into the heritage sector, staying as close to historical objects as possible, and I am confident this experience is the beginning of exciting things to come.”

Not only has the Collections Care Assistant role benefitted Abigail, Ella and Isabela, but we have been able to extend our impact on the collections through them. A bespoke condition survey has been developed in order to identify suitable future work for this role, and we look forward to securing funding to offer this experience to our students in 2024-25 and beyond.



Ella, Book Conservator Amy Baldwin, Abigail and Isabela.





# Access:

## Providing Library resources online

**Hannah Mateer**, Associate Director, Collections Services  
**Amy Jennings**, Collections Manager  
**Angela Laurins**, Library Learning Services Manager  
**Elize Rowan**, Content Acquisition & Access Manager

In addition to continuing to develop print collections where required, providing access to resources online is a strategic priority for the Library. This is reflected in the vision statement in our Collections Strategy: “We will deliver quick and effective access to General Collections required for teaching, learning and research, maximising access to online and open content.” Effective online access to resources supports all Library users wherever they are based, including the 10% of University of Edinburgh students who undertake their study fully online.

In 2024 the Library has continued to increase online access to resources, including through the purchase of,



New College Library

and subscription to, resources in a range of digital formats including e-books and e-journals. This represents the continuation of a long-term focus on online resources, with an e-preference acquisitions approach in place in the Library for more than 15 years. An example of the ongoing increase in e-content is in the number of e-books which can be accessed, increasing from 1.4 million in 2020, to 2.2 million in 2023 and then to **2.4 million in 2024**. Today over 90% of the library materials budget is spent on online resources.

The effective discovery of online resources is provided through DiscoverEd and relevant webpages. The Resource Lists Service provides access to online library resources to support teaching, with 88% of essential content on Resource Lists available online.

The Library provides an e-textbook programme to provide access to essential textbooks online, with concurrent online access to content provided for all students on a course. The programme has been a great success with year-on-year growth in both the number of titles available and in the usage of the materials provided.

As well as purchasing new e-resources, the Library provides online copyright-compliant scans of chapters, articles and extracts from print content in the University’s libraries. Scans of print materials identified by Course Organisers are made available to their students through Resource Lists and scans are also provided direct to Library users through the Library’s on-demand services.

On-demand services include Scan & Deliver which was introduced in 2021 to deliver online access to print content on shelves in the Main Library, site libraries and the University’s offsite store. Scans are provided direct to students and other service users, and Scan & Deliver has been hugely popular, with over 7,500 requests a year.

In recent years the Interlibrary Loans (ILL) service has evolved to provide online access to resources held in other libraries. “Rapid ILL” has been widely implemented by U.K. libraries to provide library users with fast online on-demand access to remote content held in partner libraries worldwide. The service now responds to around 3,000 requests from University of Edinburgh students and staff each year.

In addition to the provision of online access to post-1900 General Collections, the Library continues to increase

online access to the University’s heritage collections through digitisation and remote consultation sessions.

The provision of access to such a wide range of online resources is valued by those who use the University’s libraries. In a recent annual National Student Survey comments about University of Edinburgh libraries included: “The online library was a big positive; I could work from home and save money on books” and “Digital library access is great, a huge amount of content available easily.”





# Publish:

## Edinburgh Diamond and Open Access Publishing

Rebecca Wojturska, Open Access Publishing Officer

The *Library Publishing Directory 2023* lists 159 library publishers across the world, with many more operating that aren't included. The UK itself has seen a rise in library-based publishing services over the years, including the University of St Andrews Journal Hosting Service (2011), Liverpool John Moores University Open Journals Service (2017), Glasgow Open Journals (2023), and, of course, our own Edinburgh Diamond (2009).

Edinburgh Diamond, situated within the Library Research Support team, offers free publishing services to support Diamond Open Access (OA) books and journals created by University of Edinburgh staff and students. The service includes use of a publishing workflow system, a hosting platform to publish content, ongoing technical support (including bug fixes and upgrades), indexing, annual reporting, guidance around publishing best practice and processes, and more.

When asked about the service, the editor of *IUPHAR/BPS Guide to Pharmacology CITE* said: "Our experience in using the Edinburgh Diamond service has been very good. Our relationship with the hosting service has really been a collaboration where we've benefitted from their expertise, knowledge and experience." And the editor of *Himalaya* and *The South Asianist* said: "The Edinburgh Diamond team at the University of Edinburgh Library has been an absolute joy to work with over the past 10 years. It has truly been an extraordinary experience."

Diamond Open Access means there are no costs to use the service, no costs to publish in our books and journals, and no costs to access our content. The service opens up publishing opportunities to staff and students across the University, and helps their work reach a wider audience and gain a higher impact. And since our launch, Edinburgh Diamond has made a huge impact.

From modest beginnings of one or two journals, we now

host 19 journals, 72 books (a mix of monographs, edited collections, textbooks, reports, portfolios and projects), and a handful of conference proceedings. We also host award-winning content. For example, in 2023 the US Society of Psychological Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association awarded the prestigious annual Stirling Award to an article published within our journal, *Medicine, Anthropology, Theory*.

When it comes to the service, the editors of *Medicine, Anthropology, Theory* said:

“Keeping *Medicine, Anthropology, Theory* open access would not have been possible without the support of Edinburgh Diamond. The whole team has been fantastic from start to finish, providing guidance and assistance at every step of the process. We are so excited to be part of Edinburgh's OA community and to be able to work with such an experienced and dedicated team.”

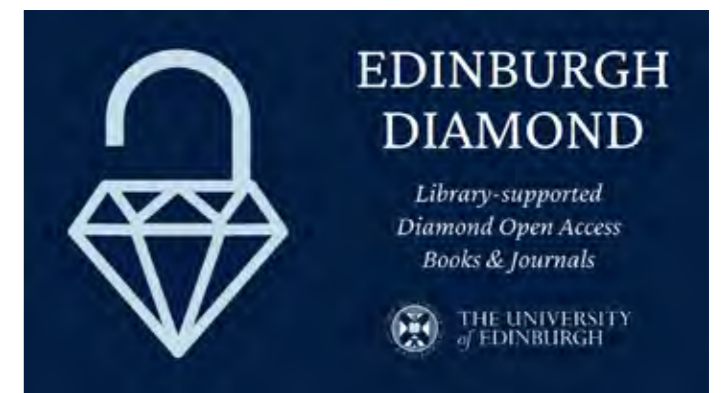
Publishing this way also means we can highlight the rich variety of projects throughout the University. For example, we host *Fundamentals of Music Theory*, an open textbook that was created from content for a popular Coursera MOOC and adapted for an on-campus course. The result? A convenient and reusable open textbook suitable for use by staff and students both within and beyond the University. *Fundamentals of Music Theory* has been downloaded nearly 28,000 times, and was even shortlisted for a 2022 Open Education Global award.

Not only have we made a positive impact internally, but we have been spreading the power of library publishing around the globe. Our team members have presented in the USA, Norway, Switzerland, the UK and online to global



audiences, and information about our work has been published in many journals, blogs and interviews. We have received consistently positive feedback, and other institutions have reached out for advice on launching their own library publishing programmes.

The Edinburgh Diamond team also spearhead the SCURL Open Hosting Shared Service, which provides the technical infrastructure other Scottish institutions need to launch and manage their own publishing initiatives. We are truly proud to be actively promoting collaboration between institutions, all to make publishing more accessible, and believe the service truly shows the power of Diamond Open Access and how the University of Edinburgh is paving the way to a brighter future.



# Archive:

## Collaborating to archive the University's web pages

Alice Austin, Web Archivist  
Sara Day Thomson, Digital Archivist

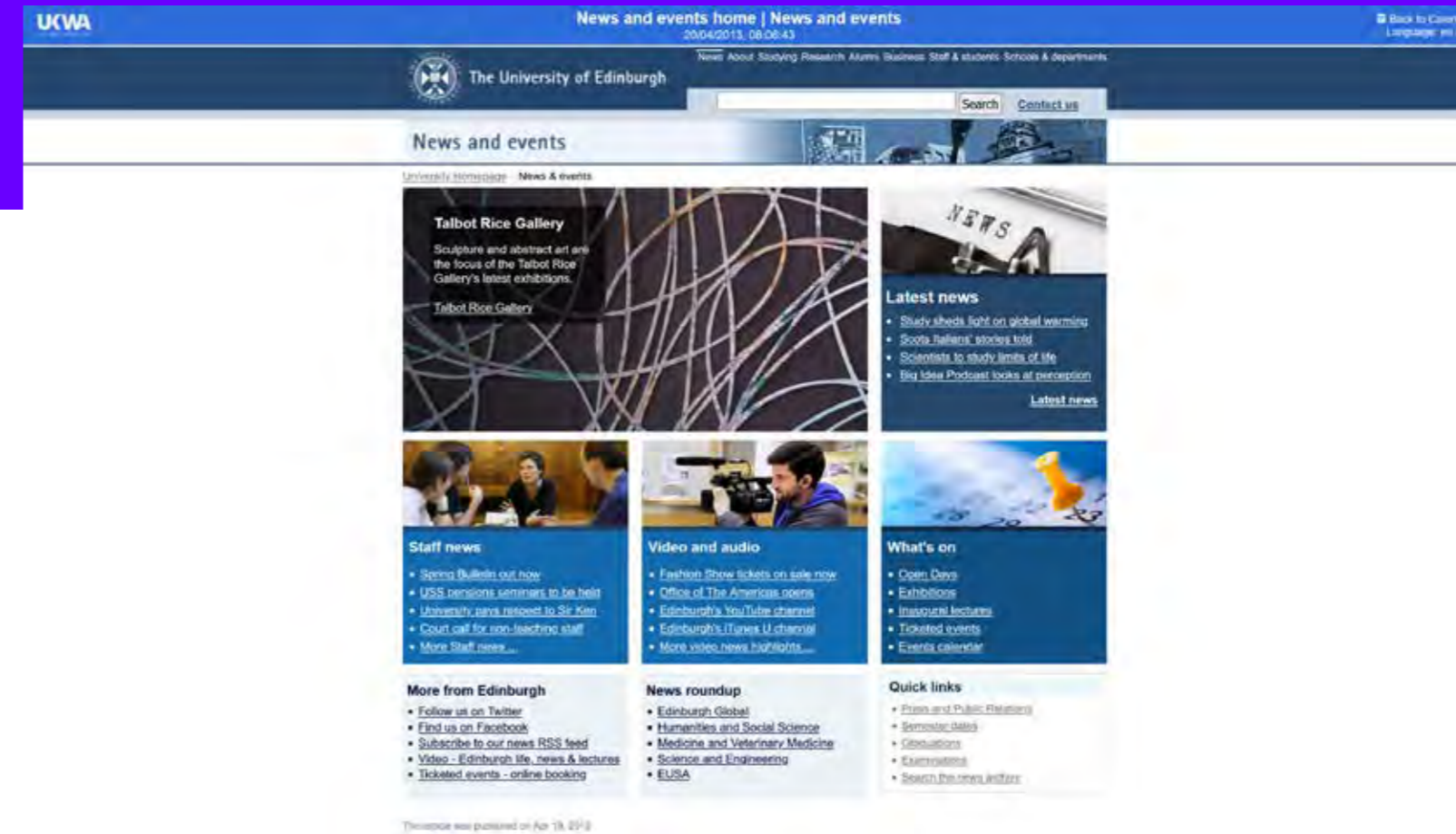
This year both the Web Governance Group and the University Collections Advisory Committee endorsed an Umbrella Licence to make archived captures of the University's vast Web Estate more accessible to content creators, researchers, and the wider public. Since 2013, the UK Web Archive (UKWA) – a shared initiative of the six UK Legal Deposit Libraries – has been capturing web pages within the ed.ac.uk domain. However, under the Non-Print Legal Deposit legislation that allows them to collect the open UK Web, archived web pages can only be viewed on premises in Legal Deposit Reading Rooms. The Umbrella Licence enables more robust access to archived copies of University of Edinburgh web pages (or will, when the UKWA comes back online following the cyber-attack in October 2023).

Almost every Library service and resource depends on some web-based component. From guidance pages to research project websites to blogs about important initiatives undertaken by staff, the Web provides a record of the recent past. More widely, the Web makes up the context and often main point-of-entry necessary to facilitate learning, teaching, and research at the University.

While it may not seem important to have accessible archives of websites when you can just search for a website in your browser, web content disappears at a more rapid pace than other types of digital information. Web technologies evolve quickly, making it an ever-increasing challenge to maintain information on live IT infrastructure. According to analysis by the UKWA team at the British Library, approximately 40% of URLs disappear after just two years. A 2014 study by Harvard Law School discovered that more than 50% of links in US Supreme Court opinions don't work. Without archival records of the Web, it will be impossible in the future to interpret and contextualise the late 20th and 21st centuries. Our history will be full of *404s* and *Pages Not Found*.

To address this challenge, Heritage Collections has been closely collaborating with Website and Communications in Learning, Teaching, Web (LTW) to develop a collaborative Web Lifecycle Management programme. The Website and Communications team provides web services to support the University's many communities and help ensure a healthy and sustainable Web Estate. However, after many years with no clear guidance on how long to keep a website or who has responsibility for it, many valuable web resources have been lost or remain unstable due to technological obsolescence. Abandoned websites remain floating on the Web with no clear plan for maintenance or upkeep. Keeping all this old information online for prolonged periods creates confusion for users and increases our carbon footprint. Without intervention early in the lifecycle of websites (or any digital resource) it can be challenging to archive it successfully. Five or more years after a website is created, it may be impossible to track down a site owner and many earlier iterations of the site may already be lost.

Without the other, neither team can support the lifecycle from start to finish. Over the last two years, Website and Communications and Heritage Collections have been building new workflows, guidance, and services to bridge this gap and build a leaner, cleaner Web Estate that better serves University communities and reduces environmental impact. However, none of these new approaches could be implemented without the Umbrella Licence. A highly specialised researcher might make the journey to one of the designated Reading Rooms to review web pages one-at-a-time from a dedicated terminal. It is not practical, however, for website creators or curators to make the journey to review every new archive capture of every web page for a Web Estate with hundreds of thousands of pages, many captured on a weekly basis! University publishers need a way to see for themselves that their old web pages – no longer updated or maintained – are safe and sound in one of the world's



An archived webpage from the University from April 2013.

oldest and most trusted web archives before having the confidence to retire it from the live web.

As the Web Estate spans the entire University and represents many stakeholders – internal and external – the due diligence to understand the impact of this Licence was no mean feat. As part of the risk assessment, the Umbrella Licence was reviewed for impact on copyright, personal data, and other information policies in place across the University. The proposal has been reviewed by Legal Services, web service owners, and representatives from every School and College on senior committees in LTW and the Library. The Licence will not change the copyright terms of any individual content and a Takedown Policy will be supported by Heritage Collections' Web Archivist in line with the conditions of the UKWA's own Takedown Policy. We continue to keep our doors open for feedback and concerns and hope this

process will raise awareness of the fragility of web content and the need to consider the long-term plan for our valuable digital outputs.

With this Licence, we join the ranks of only a handful of UK Universities. We hope, though, that this collaborative approach at the University of Edinburgh will demonstrate a robust and risk managed approach to securing important historical records and enable cleaner, greener web services across similar institutions.

To read more about the University's Web Archiving service and partnership with the UK Web Archive, please read our guidance pages: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/heritage-collections/collections-and-search/archives/digital-archives-and-preservation/web-archiving>

# Uncover:

## Exploring South Asian artworks across the collections

Claire Walsh, Art Collections Curator

A collaborative project aimed at widening the visibility of South Asian artworks in Heritage Collections was initiated in 2023 by Dr Yashaswini Chandra, Lecturer in South Asian Art History, and Heritage Collections curators Dr Lucy Deacon and myself, Claire Walsh.

The aim of the project is to draw attention to significant examples of artworks produced in South Asia between the 17th and 19th centuries that are held within the MIWSA collection of manuscripts from the Islamicate world and South Asia. This has involved critical engagement with the colonial routes that brought the works to the University in the first place and the impact their classification as 'Oriental Manuscripts' has had on how they are accessed and engaged with today. Often overlooked as artworks in their own right because of this, our project aims to make them visible as part of the Art Collection, with its vast holdings of paintings, sculpture, printmaking and other artforms.

As part of this initiative, digital links have been created between the separate online catalogues of the Art and MIWSA collections, with a dedicated landing page on the University's online archive database, created by Cataloguing Archivist, Aline Brodin. Alongside this, we organised a special public event in collaboration with



the Edinburgh India Institute (EII) that took place in April 2024, showcasing a selection of these works at the Centre for Research Collections.

The event, which included a rich display of works from both collections, was circulated through EII's networks, primarily made up of members of South Asian communities based in Scotland and academics focusing on South Asia at the University. Dr Chandra introduced the audience to the range of artworks and shared insights into the multiple histories they contain, with Professor Roger Jeffrey, Associate Director of the EII, contributing context on the historic links between Scotland and India. As Art Collections Curator, I spoke about a contemporary installation by Edinburgh College of Art graduate, Amna Sheikh, titled *The Richer A Persian, The Finer His Rugs* (EU5892).

Amna's work helped to demonstrate the blurred lines between the two collections and provoke discussion about how these works might be understood in relation to one another. *The Richer A Persian, The Finer His Rugs* references the linguistic aspects of British colonial histories in South Asia, with Sheikh combining imagery of Persian textiles with extracts of Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English. Her exploration of this history connects the installation with the MIWSA works which were collected in the colonial period, in part for their writings in South Asian languages including Persian, Sanskrit and Bengali.

Alongside *The Richer A Persian, The Finer His Rugs*, we displayed a selection of paintings from an album of late Mughal and Indian court paintings (Or.Ms 374) acquired and compiled by Robert Blair Munro Binning in the 19th century. Binning was an East India Company official and linguist in Arabic, Persian and Hindi, who amassed a huge collection of manuscripts from Asia and Africa, which he later bequeathed to the University. The examples presented from Binning's album are inscribed in Persian



Dr Yashaswini Chandra at the April 2024 workshop.

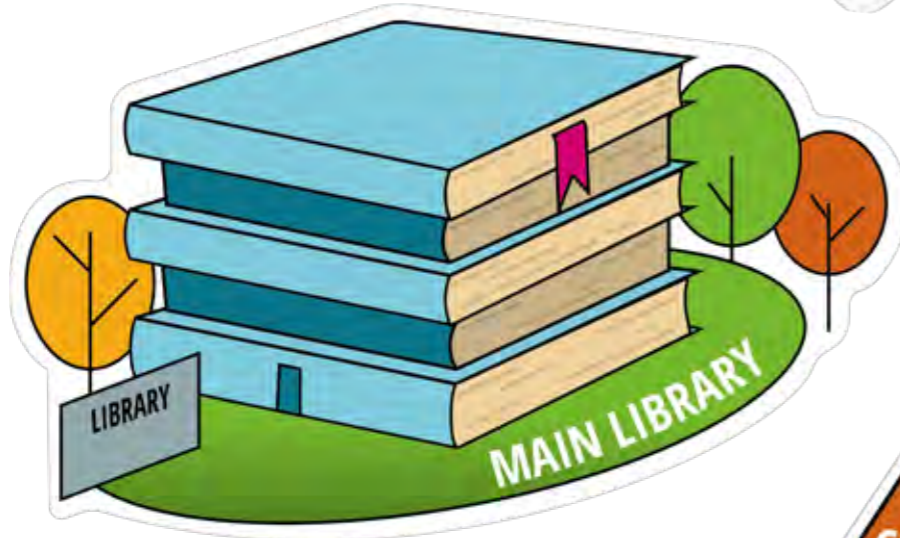
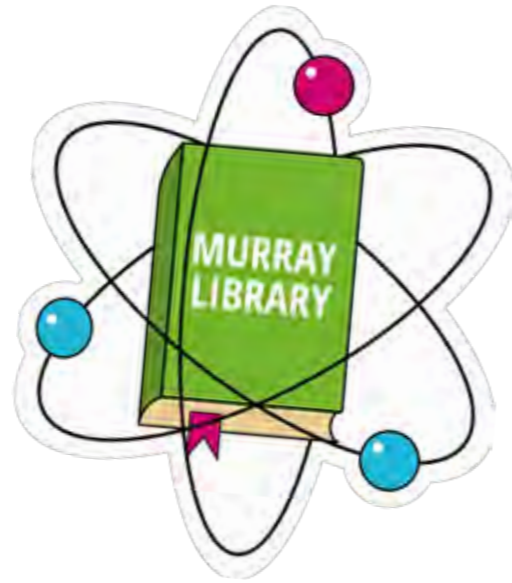
and depict a range of subject matter, from historical figures and romantic scenes, to elephants.

The display also included a lavishly decorated 18th-century scroll of the Mahabharata (Or.Ms 510), measuring over 70 metres, and a richly illuminated 17th-century Indo-Persianate manuscript (Or.Ms 106), a pair of miniature illustrated scrolls of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Devi Mahatmya* (Or.Ms 674 and Or.Ms 675), dating to the early 19th century and works from two collections of Ragamala paintings, depicting musical modes and different moods, from Hyderabad (Or.Ms 114) and Jaipur (Or.Ms 437). Together these works reflect the art of the book and religious scripture as well as album-making in South Asia at the time. Their historic cataloguing as 'Oriental Manuscripts' (Or.Ms) reflects the colonial routes by which they reached the University.

Ongoing provenance research by Dr Lucy Deacon, Dr Andy Grout, Sarah O. Abou-Zied, Aline Brodin and others has shown that the large donations that formed the basis of the wider MIWSA Collection were predominantly

from collections assembled by officials of the East India Company, including civil and military officials, company directors, merchants, surveyors and scholars. Many of these individuals were graduates of the University and the collecting and donating of this type of material to their Alma Maters reflects the wider role academic institutions held in accumulating knowledge and wealth from the colonies of the British Empire.

Our project connects to other work happening across Heritage Collections that critically reconsiders the continuing impact of these legacies. In particular, with the work of Dr Lucy Deacon and Aline Brodin who have described the process of renaming the collection as the Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia (MIWSA), in a recent paper titled "Renaming (and Reshaping) The University of Edinburgh's 'Oriental' Manuscript Collection", in *MELA Notes* (2024). These initiatives represent wider shifts in thinking about how historical categories hinder visibility of artworks from the Global South and the frameworks through which they are presented and engaged with in the present.



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Selected photography by Laurence Winram

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