THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Library

*Re:*Connect

ANNUAL REPORT 2026









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



Introduction

Jeremy Upton, Director, Library & University Collections

I am delighted to have this opportunity to introduce the Library Annual Report for 2026 which showcases the breadth, quality and strategic value of the work being delivered by my library colleagues. 2026 has been a year of significant challenge for the UK Higher Education sector as a whole and for the University of Edinburgh in particular. The University needs its library, its spaces and services more than ever. The Library and its staff understand the challenge of dealing with problematic and contested viewpoints and have experience of creating spaces where this can be done respectfully and transparently.

Throughout this report you will see strong connections to the four pillars of the **University Strategy 2030:** People, Research, Teaching and Learning and Social and Civic Responsibility. We are providing opportunities for students to work alongside our staff to learn new skills. Our analysis skills are being used to deliver improved research information management. Our heritage collections and data sets continue to underpin high-quality research.

Our liaison teams are innovating in the way we support students at the Medical School and Centre for Open Learning.We contributed to the University's successful application to be recognised as a University of Sanctuary and are designing services to make it easy for the wider community to use our library facilities.

We are strongly committed to the wider University priorities of sustainability and supporting Scottish identity. What is particularly heartening, is to see throughout these stories, the number of occasions individual staff have been formally recognised by others for the quality of their work and the value they deliver

I would like to pass on my thanks to the team behind the production of this report, notably the chair of our Communications Group Daryl Green, Associate Director for Heritage (Research and Curatorial), for bringing this publication together and for once again making it possible for the communities in the University and beyond to gain a greater understanding of the current role of a library in a large multi-disciplinary university.

> ***"The Library has a central place in the delivery of the University's education and research needs, and supports the critical role we have as a civic university supporting our wider community. I am again so thankful this year for all the work our staff put in to deliver such high-quality services."***

GAVIN MCLACHLAN, Vice-Principal, Chief Information Officer and Librarian to the University

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Welcome: Supporting the University's "University of Sanctuary" status

Laura Beattie, Engagement Officer (Communities), **Nel Coleman**, Library Citizen Science and Participatory Research Engagement Officer, and **Ross McGregor**, Research Services Manager (Heritage Collections)

The University of Edinburgh was the first University in Scotland to be accredited as a University of Sanctuary in 2017, in recognition of the support provided to those seeking sanctuary. As part of the Library's EDI work, we are keen to further explore and enhance the role that the library can play in assisting those seeking sanctuary.

Towards this aim, in 2025 we partnered with the Edinburgh Global Communications Team and the Education Beyond Borders team to display their exhibition 'From Sanctuary to Community' which honours the journeys of staff and students who have come to the University of Edinburgh after being forcibly displaced by conflict, war, violence, or persecution. Building on the Refugee Week 2025 theme of 'Community as Superpower', the display shared their voices and their lived experiences to show a glimpse of what is possible, and to underline what can still be done.

The display found its first home on the Mezzanine Floor of the Main Library and used the digital wall to share photographs and videos.

> ***I worked in academia and public administration in Afghanistan for almost ten years, teaching at Kabul University and serving at the Ministry of Justice. I was deeply committed to strengthening the rule of law and had a strong desire to see Afghanistan become a developed and safe country for everyone. That hope still lives with me, and I continue to work toward it.***

> ***I'm conducting research at Edinburgh Law School. My work is focused on justice system design and reform, drawing directly from my experience in Afghanistan. I'm also involved in teaching which is a process of adaptation—especially in law, where teaching requires solid knowledge of local legislation. For an immigrant academic this requires extra time and energy to become familiar with the legal system of the host country. In Afghanistan, I was well aware of the legal system and the context.***

It has since been on tour across the University – appearing at Kings Buildings and the Edinburgh Futures Institute. You can listen to the audio playlist of the exhibition at **https://edin.ac/4ldxEQe**.

We are delighted that the University's Sanctuary status was renewed for the third time in 2025 and we hope to build on the partnership with the Edinburgh Global and Education Beyond Borders teams to contribute further to the university's efforts to make Edinburgh a safe haven for those who have found themselves displaced from their homes.

The work highlighted a range of stories, the following is just one from Amanullah Ahmadzai, who shared his experiences as part of the Community as Superpower project.

As an immigrant, staying in academia isn't easy. Many Afghan academics haven't had the chance to continue their careers in exile. I consider myself fortunate to have received support from the University of Edinburgh and Cara. I believe universities have a moral responsibility to support academics who are at risk around the world. When an academic receives that support, it creates a strong sense of belonging within the global academic community. At the same time, displaced scholars bring unique perspectives and lived experiences to their host institutions, enriching both teaching and research fellowships to displaced academic staff.



Amanullah stands in front of his panel at the Library of Sanctuary Display.

Access: E-Resources in action

Karen Aitken, E-Resources Co-ordinator

Every day, the E-Resources Team, part of the Library's Content, Acquisitions and Access (CAA) Team, works behind the scenes to ensure students and staff can reliably discover and access the online resources they need 24/7 from anywhere in the world- whether you're on campus, at home, or on placement.

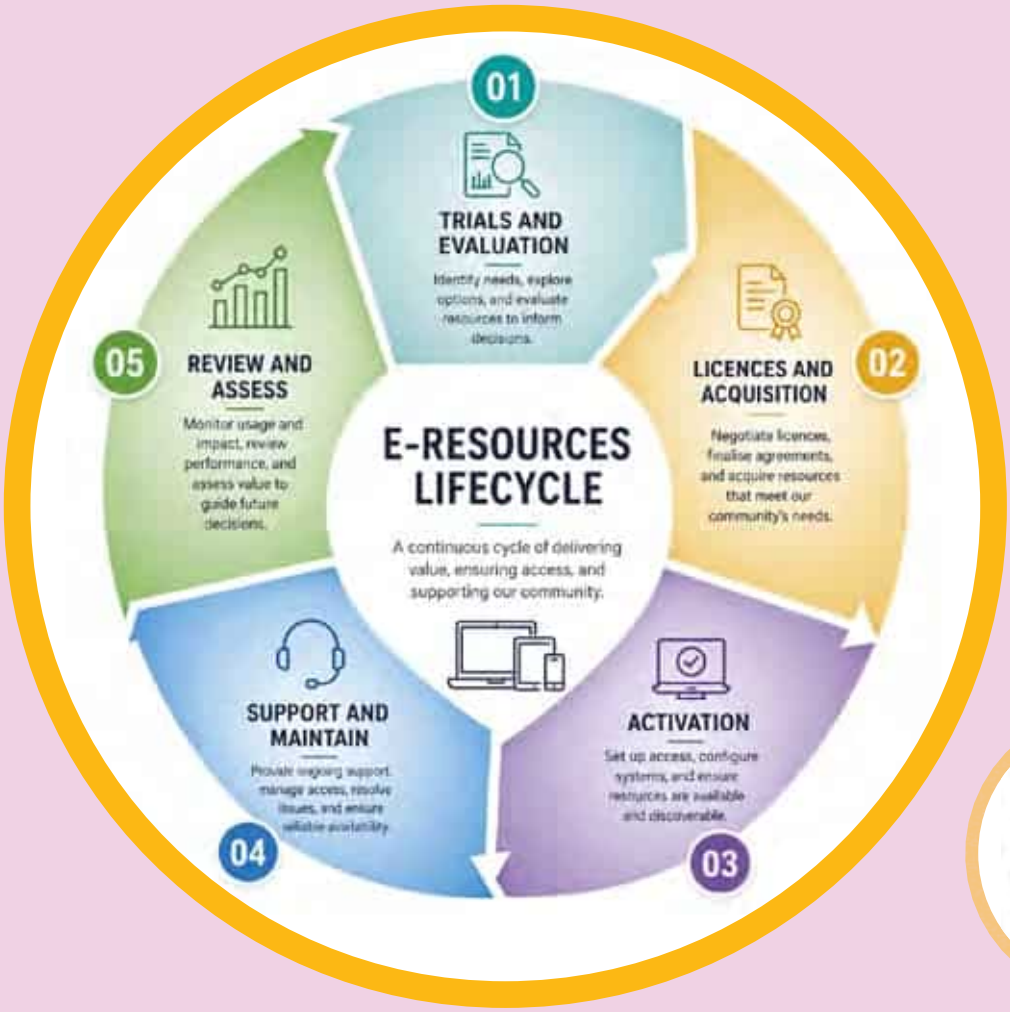
During the 2025-26 academic year, we managed and supported access to one of the largest e-resource portfolios in UK academic libraries - 308,975 e-journals, 2,337,664 e-books, and 1,075 databases, helping students and staff connect to online content at scale.

Alongside managing a large collection of online resources, our wider team also supports collection development by enabling Library users to recommend new resources for purchase. This year 1,300 books have been purchased in response to requests made by students through the Request a Book (RAB) service and more than 4,000 titles have been added to the collections at the request of teaching and research staff.

E-resources don't "just appear" online and they need ongoing active management so our team:

1. Supports trials **and evaluations** so Schools can assess resources with real users;
2. Manages **licensing and supports acquisition**, including reviewing licence terms, conditions and making Evidence-Based Acquisition (EBA) selections.
3. **Activates** access by configuring platforms, authentication systems and full-text entitlements;
4. Ensures resources are **discoverable** in DiscoverEd and the AZ list and providing reliable links to full text;
5. Provides ongoing **support and troubleshoots issues as they arise**– the team handled 1,113 UniDesk enquiries this academic year.
6. **Reviews and assesses e-resources**, using cost per use data and feedback from Academic Support Librarians to inform renewals and future investment.





Our team also works to ensure that all our users have continued access to the Library's E-Resources. This year, when a publisher introduced a series of major changes to its platform and online content, users began encountering paywalls, broken links and incorrect access entitlements.

Throughout the migration, the E-Resources Team investigated problems as they emerged, worked closely with the supplier to resolve access issues, updated holdings and entitlements, and amended links in DiscoverEd and the AZ list as content migrated to the publisher's new platform. This year the team also managed changes to a financial law e-book collection ensuring continued access while new collections replaced older content. By responding quickly to each issue, the team restored access and minimised disruption to teaching, learning and research.

Our team also creates a number of opportunities for meaningful internships for current Edinburgh students. Over the summer of 2026, student interns supported the team by working on a wide variety of tasks, including: switching over a package of more than 350 databases to a new and larger collection from one of our major content providers, helping with the changeover of 25 databases to a new interface, and web editing and collecting all e-journal and e-book usage statistics for a UK higher education sector annual benchmarking exercise.

We also support lifelong learning by maintaining a curated Alumni e-resources page, helping graduates identify the online resources available to them after leaving the University.

From evaluating new resources to maintaining access and supporting users, the E-Resources Team helps ensure the University's online collections continue to support teaching, learning and research.

A year in *figures* '26

2.1 million visits to University Library sites

5,869 titles catalogued

3786 Resource Lists -- **1,242,937** views of Resource Lists

5086 Scan & Deliver requests

5,600 enquiries handled by Heritage Collections

10,437 scanned book chapters and journal articles

Edinburgh Diamond journals published **198** new articles across **26** open access journals

125% increase in dataset records linked to researcher profiles in Pure

11,785 visitors to St Cecilia's Hall Concert Room & Music Museum

128,000 enquiries handled by User Services

152,000 items circulated

722,837 Open Access Resources

2.34 million e-books available

4,818 uCreate Makerspace users

Over **11,000** open access datasets in DataShare

610,488 article downloads from Edinburgh Diamond Journals

3347 students attended classes taught with Heritage Collections

309,000 e-journals accessible

£1.8bn of research grant applications handled in Worktribe

11,672 Interlibrary Loan fulfilled requests

Researchers can publish for free in **14,005** journals via **30** Read & Publish Agreements

Library saved researchers **£2,393,913** in article processing charges

625 attendees of Dissertation & Thesis Festival sessions

9,349 uCreate 3D prints made

5109 prospective students & visitors introduced to Library

2772 appointments to consult over **8000** Heritage Collections items in our reading room

25,818 digital images captured of the University's Heritage Collections

Over **8000** attendees of Academic Support Librarian classes and consultation sessions

Over **79,000** views of LibGuides

1,344 articles published by Edinburgh authors in the Big 5 deals

Preserve: Protecting conservation skills at risk

Jonathan Santa Maria Bouquet, Senior Conservator

When we talk about conservation and preserving cultural heritage, we often think first about the objects themselves: the physical care of historic collections so they can continue to inform, inspire and connect us with the past. But conservation also depends on something less visible, the specialist skills, knowledge and experience needed to care for those objects in the first place.

This is an important part of what we do in the Conservation and Collection Management (C&CM) team, within the University's Heritage Collections. Alongside caring for the collections, we also support areas of conservation practice where opportunities for specialist, hands-on training are otherwise limited. This is particularly true in musical instrument conservation, a highly specialised field that depends on practical experience as much as academic knowledge. Over the years, we have hosted a number of internships designed to provide hands-on experience, helping emerging conservators gain the kind of direct object-based training that is essential to the profession.

Musical instruments present some of the most interesting and complex challenges in conservation. They are often made from a combination of materials, with fragile structures, moving parts, historic repairs and clear evidence of use. Their significance lies not only in their appearance, but also in how they were made, played, adapted and understood over time. Conserving them requires technical skill, historical understanding and close practical engagement with the object itself.

Development in those areas is the aim of a 12-month Institute of Conservation (ICON) Collaborative Conservation Skills Internship we began hosting in September 2025. Our Intern, Jim Taylor, is undertaking hands-on training in musical instrument conservation with collection items under my supervision.



During the internship, Jim is working with a wide range of objects, including an *Iya Ilu* (or "Talking drum"), a beautiful and rare euphonicon, and a pedal harp made in the 19th century by Sebastian Erard, whilst also gaining broader experience in the care and maintenance of keyboard instruments. So much of what we do is learned through close observation, discussion and practise. These are not skills that can be acquired from books alone; they need time, guidance and repeated contact with real objects. This internship is focused in ensuring that this rare expertise is not lost.

I was recently honoured to receive the Institute of Conservation Award for Protecting Skills at Risk, sponsored by Historic Environment Scotland, and I also obtained Accredited Conservator status from ICON. I see these achievements not simply as personal recognition, but as an acknowledgement of the importance of practical training in specialist areas of conservation and the need to create opportunities for those skills to be passed on.

All of this work demonstrates the broader role for Heritage Collections as active contributors to the cultural heritage sector. Beyond caring for the University's own collections, C&CM is helping sustain professional knowledge, support innovation in conservation practice, and strengthen networks of training and collaboration. This positions the University not simply as a custodian of historic material, but as a key player in shaping the future of conservation.



Jonathan and Jim at work in the Binks Gallery at St Cecilia's Hall

Embed: Academic Support Librarians as active partners in teaching and research skills development

Ishbel Leggat, and **SarahLouise McDonald**,
Academic Support Librarians

Several initiatives from this year showcase how Academic Support Librarians (ASLs) contribute as active partners in pedagogical design and delivery. These examples highlight how ASLs are applying their expertise in course contexts, assessment timelines, and student needs to strengthen learning and build research practice.

The Centre for Open Learning (COL) is dedicated to opening pathways to higher education for all. Several departments offer pre-sessional courses which are a requirement of entry to further study. One such course is the *Postgraduate Pre-Sessional English Programme* (PGPEP).

SarahLouise and Ishbel, our ASLs supporting COL, worked with course organisers to curate activities which best suit PGPEP students, reflecting requests from the cohort about what support would be most useful and when. Following a conversation about the Course Organiser's 'Dream Library Morning', ASLs developed a short programme of activities which met all their requests.

This included research support instruction, live demonstrations, and a tour of the Main Library. The students reported feeling supported and better prepared for the work ahead, and the Course Organiser called it an "exciting teaching/learning moment". This spirit of collaboration is what makes the ASL team effective in their work – bringing a "yes, and..." optimism to teaching and engaging in critical information literacy which makes teaching staff return to us with bigger and better ideas.

The ASL team has worked closely with the Clinical Education team for many years, providing guest tutorials, asynchronous presentations, and one-to-one support for students on the online part-time MSc Clinical Education. In recent years, Ruth Jenkins' (our ASL supporting Edinburgh Medical School) involvement has become even more integrated through her role as co-lead of *Critical Literature Review*, a 20-credit course in the third year of the Masters. As co-lead, Ruth runs tutorials, supports students via discussion boards, assesses formative work, and marks summative assignments.



The Clinical Education team receiving their Outstanding Team award, 2026.

Through the stages of identifying, searching for, appraising, and synthesising literature, students develop a reflective and critical approach to the 'construct' of literature review. Ruth uses a critical information literacy lens to teach students not only how to find literature, but also to explore contexts and systems that shape what is discoverable and valued.

Recently, the Clinical Education Team was awarded Outstanding Team in the College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine's Staff Recognition Awards, with Ruth included in the winning team - demonstrating the integral role of ASLs in course support, where librarian expertise is embedded, trusted and valued.

Ishbel (ASL for Education) contributed in 2025-26 to the MSc course *Research Process*, delivering four 50-minute, in-person tutorials during Semester 2. Students attended weekly lectures delivered by research-active staff, then chose tutorial workshops



depending on planned approaches for their research projects: desk-based reviews, quantitative research methods or qualitative research methods.

Ishbel focused on supporting students undertaking desk-based reviews by providing a pre-recorded presentation on developing 'answerable' questions and search strategies. Students accessed recordings and related materials in advance, enabling in-person group tutorials opportunities to undertake hands-on database search activities and gain advice on the literature search process.

From next year the School will move to a new research methods course, and Ishbel has been asked to provide support for developing and delivering the new course.

Record: the School of Scottish Studies at 75

Cathlin Macaulay, Scottish Collections Curator

Set up in 1951 at the University of Edinburgh with a remit for interdisciplinary research, Scotland and its people as its focus, this pioneering institute was the first in the UK to make field recordings in the areas of cultural and community life, folklore and the traditional arts. The School had an international perspective from the start, closely aligned to the Irish Folklore Commission and the Institute for Dialect and Folklore Research in Sweden, both of which had called for an equivalent in Scotland which, with its linguistic and folkloristic links, was seen as the nexus of the Norse and Celtic worlds.

Use of the new open reel recorder, adding duration and longevity, allowed the original tapes to be kept as the primary resource: the unique, unedited voices of the contributors. This core fieldwork from staff, students and associates is held in the Sound Archive along with material from the Place-name Survey, set up to map and archive place-names from different localities, and the Linguistic Survey of Scotland documenting Scots and Gaelic dialects from the late 1940s onwards. Including donated collections, mainly music and oral history projects, there are now some 33,000 recordings in the School of Scottish Studies Archive (SSSA).

The accompanying Photographic Archive holds 30,000+ images, mainly work and domestic life and the material culture supporting this – house construction, farming and fishing practices, crafts and textiles – images from the Borders to St Kilda. A small collection of ethnographic films portrays craft-workers, storytellers and singers. The oldest item is in the Manuscript Archive is a compilation of tunes collected in Raasay in 1812 by Elizabeth Ross. The specialist Scottish Studies Library, built up alongside the archives, enables contextualisation and interpretation.

The collections are used extensively for teaching and research, particularly in Celtic and Scottish Studies. Recordings form the basis of *ÈIST (Listen)*, the cutting-edge Scottish Government funded project led by Professor Will Lamb, presently harnessing AI for automatic transcription of Gaelic audio to text.

People visit the SSSA to seek recordings of a relation, to discover more about a place, a historical event, a local dialect, the medicinal use of a plant. The immediacy of the spoken word and the evocative images in the photographic collections make for an intimate connection to the past. Artists have long been drawn in, seeking repertoire and inspiration, making new works that both reflect and transform. The recent SSSA commission, *A Carrying Stream*, was the first exhibition in the University to focus on audio and to have bilingual signage.

Wider access has been created through publication including journals, *Tocher* and *Scottish Studies*, books, discs and online exhibitions. A ‘small’ selection (40,000 tracks) is available online through the collaborative project, *Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches*. Songs, stories and local knowledge, no longer transmitted orally, return to communities and can be listened to worldwide.

The collections continue to grow through fieldwork by students and recent acquisitions. For an appointment or any other enquiries, please contact **HeritageCollections@ed.ac.uk**

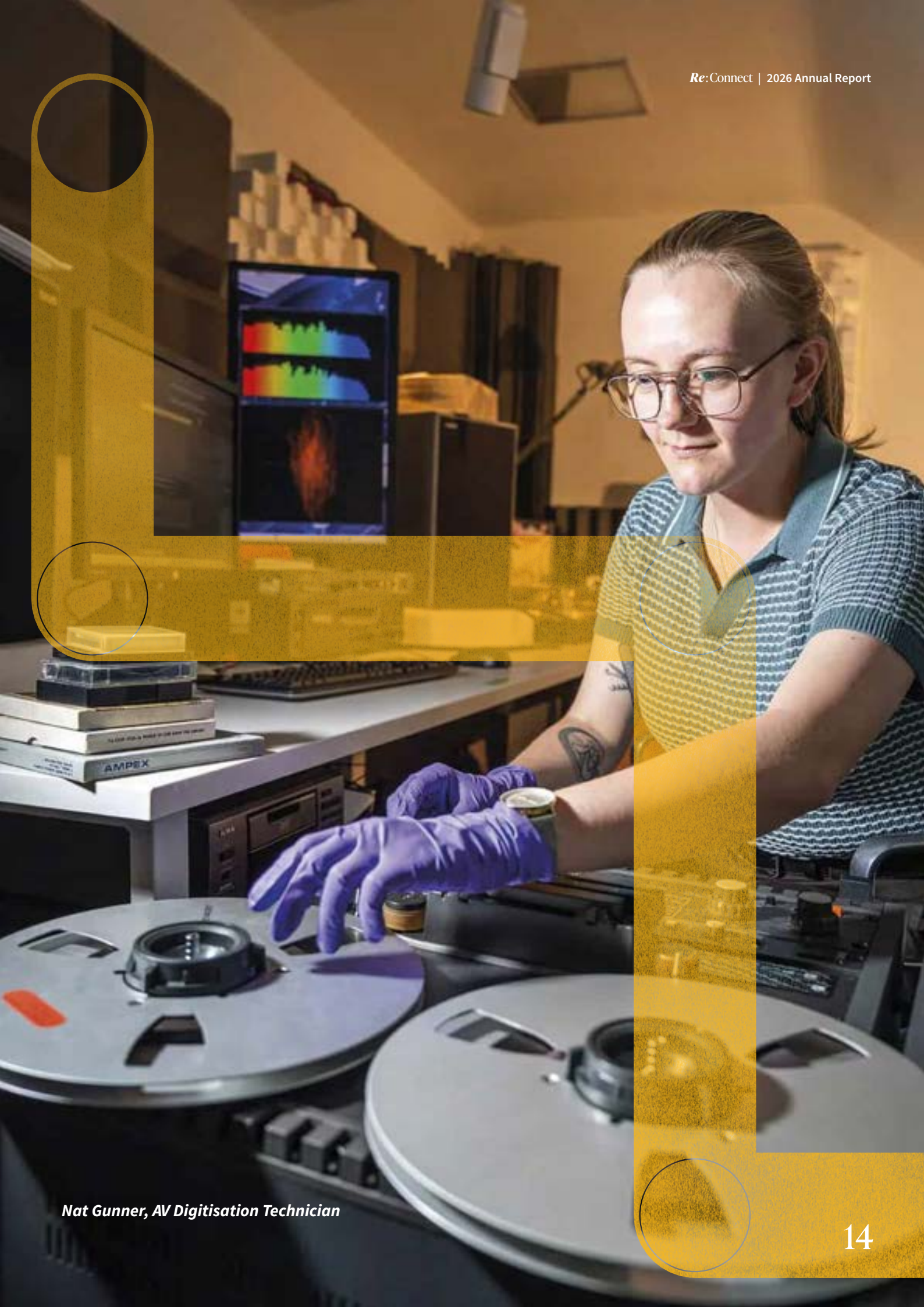
Artistry and everyday life come together in the School of Scottish Studies Archives – the voices of 'ordinary' people describing their day-to-day existence – work, family, food, housing, weather, customs, beliefs…. and the songs, stories and tunes passing through the generations, gems that brighten the hours of darkness and a long day's work.



Kit Sked, Blacksmith, Cousland Smiddy, Midlothian, 1987; Photographer: Ian MacKenzie (SSSA BVlll 7 g1 8781)



Law Library, Old College



Nat Gunner, AV Digitisation Technician

Phenomenal Bodies:

creating accessible exhibitions in Heritage Collections

Mieke Shaw, Heritage Collections Accessibility Intern

Phenomenal Bodies was an exhibition on display in the Centre for Research Collections from September 2025 until January 2026. It formed part of a wider project and series of exhibitions, *Phenomenal Bodies: Exploring Disability in Scottish Academic Collections*, co-ordinated by the University of St Andrews. Designed with accessibility in mind, and shaped by communities with lived experience of the themes they explore, the project aimed to start open and inclusive conversations about the history and representation of disability.

Our display was co-curated by Amy Cawood, Louise Williams, and Malcolm MacCallum. It featured objects from the Lothian Health Services Archive and the University's Anatomy Museum and had two thematic strands. The first related to the history of eye health, eye anatomy, and patient engagement around visual impairment. This included medical watercolours of eye conditions and 3D-printed model eyes, showing the development of teaching tools from 1903 to 2026. The second theme was the development of artificial limbs and featured items created by inventor David Gow. A poster illustrated the development of his 'Limb of the Future' – a pioneering prosthetic arm invented in 1998.

Accessibility was a priority in the design and delivery of the exhibition and a dedicated internship was created for this purpose. As Accessibility Intern, my role was to create an audio described tour of the exhibition specifically for blind and visually impaired people.

Scan the QR code here to visit the online exhibition of Phenomenal Bodies

This was done with training and support from consultants Kirin Saeed and Lonny Evans from cultural accessibility charity VocalEyes. Over 9 weeks, I scripted, recorded, and edited the audio guide to create detailed and engaging descriptions of all 12 objects in the exhibition.

During the scripting, I developed my critical-thinking skills in editing and prioritising information.
Each object had a rich amount of historical, material, and visual information attached to it. However, the audio descriptions needed to be concise and easy to listen to, making it necessary to be decisive in prioritising information for the listener. Doing object-handling training and working up-close with heritage collections were new and exciting experiences for me. We made considered choices when selecting voices for the audio descriptions, prioritising clarity and a diversity of accents. The descriptions were available to listen to online by scanning a QR-code at the start of the exhibition and have now been embedded into the online version.

Through this experience, I learnt a lot about accessibility best practice, which I now apply to my own exhibition-making as an artist. It was an incredible introduction to working in the heritage sector and equipped me with the skills needed to progress to further roles in Heritage Collections and beyond. I am very grateful to the brilliant staff who I have learned so much from.

As a pilot project, it set a standard for accessible exhibitions at the University of Edinburgh. The online exhibition continues that legacy and ensures even more visitors can learn about the history of disability through these objects.

With thanks to Bianca Packham, Daisy Stafford and Margarita Vazquez Ponte in Heritage Collections for their help in bringing this article together.



A poster advertising David Gow's 'Limb of the Future' – a prosthetic arm invented in 1998. Lothian Health Services Archive, LHB71.

Evolve: the role of librarians in research management

Damon Querry, Research Information Systems Manager

"*Standards are great . . . everyone should have one!*" so goes the old engineering joke. Yet within a highly distributed environment where records related to the research management lifecycle are created and curated by multiple teams using sometimes very different processes maintaining data quality is a never-ending task.

Getting to the heart of this matter has been a focus of the Research Information Systems (RIS) Team over the last 12 months. The research management lifecycle is underpinned by many systems and processes, two of which – Pure and Worktribe – are managed by the RIS Team. Identifying appropriate standards and implementing them has helped the Team reduce some of the data quality issues within these two systems. This has also set the groundwork for further interoperability, allowing systems talk to systems, where similar standards have also been followed.

This could be as simple as cleaning up external organisation data in Pure – records that detail which institutions and countries the University collaborates with. This work contributes to the discoverability of our research, reduces some of the granular levels of information (i.e. the sub-sub-sub units of organisations), and focuses questions the University has an interest in, such as getting a better understanding of these international collaborations.

Combining this standardisation approach with persistent identifiers (PIDs) further strengthens data quality across systems. For external organisations this could mean a Research Organisation Registry (ROR) ID, a Companies House number, a charity registration number, or a combination of these. As long as the PIDs match, organisations can be recognised across systems even if they are described differently.

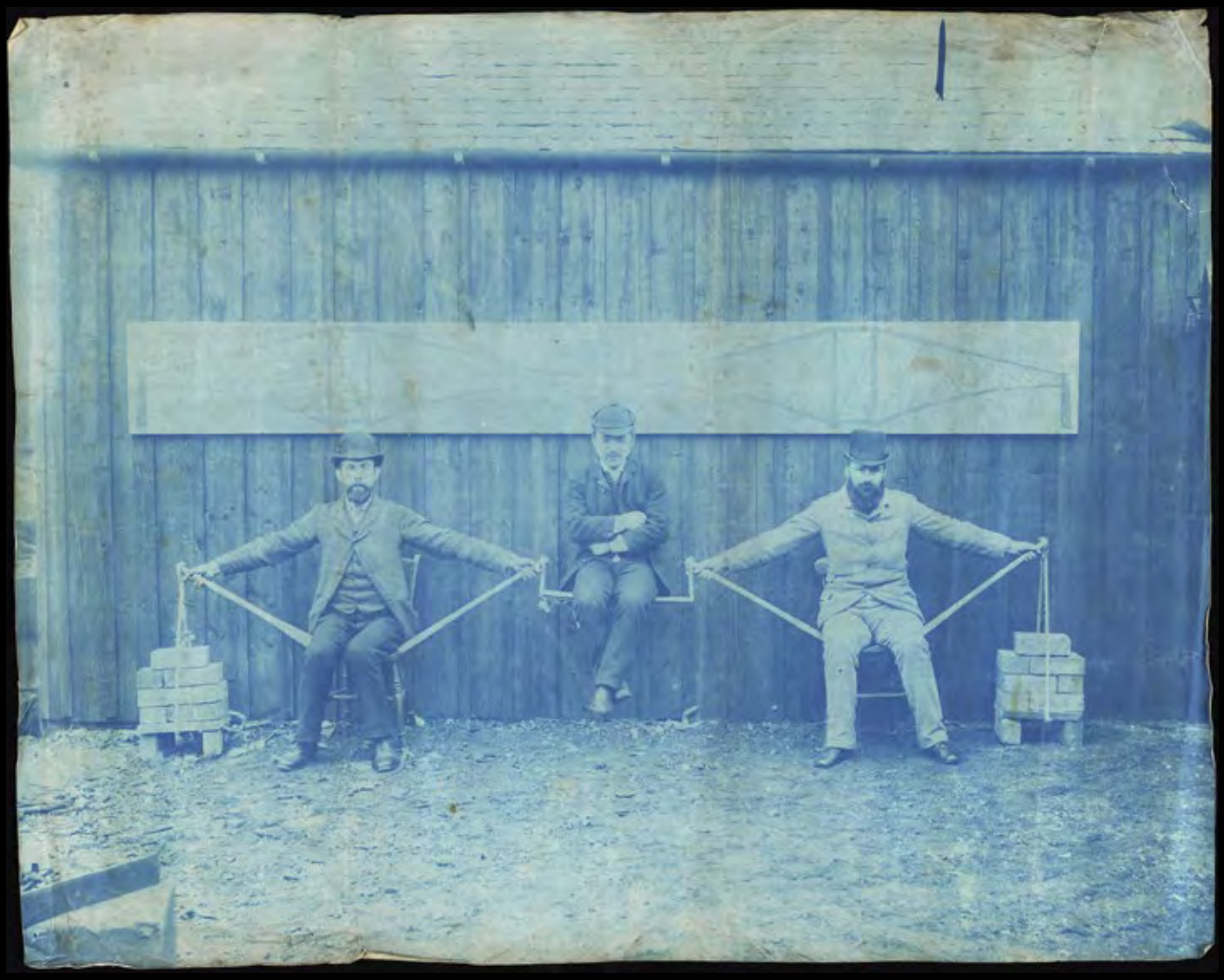
We can interrogate external data sources which also use these PIDs as a mechanism for carrying out data quality checks, augmenting our own local data where we have gaps, but also to explore more about the research information infrastructure beyond the boundary of the University.

Take the example of one of the most prevalent PIDs, a Digital Object Identifier (DOI): these contain a wealth of additional information asserted by an authoritative source which could highlight the sorts of relationships which are invaluable to capture to better understand the interconnectedness of the research of the University. DOIs can include links to identifiers for people, their ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID), together with RORs for their affiliations and grant references to the funding which lead to the published research.

Using tools such as Power Query in Excel, we can programmatically analyse thousands of records through open application programming interfaces (APIs). We can retrieve metadata from one service, identify PIDs within that data, and query additional APIs to enrich the information further. This process helps us identify gaps or inaccuracies in our own records and correct them using authoritative metadata.

By focusing on key questions and carrying out targeted checks for data quality and data completeness, we can add considerable value to how we use our research information management systems. This enables us to deliver better insights and support an area of strategic importance to the University.

Ultimately, this work reflects the changing role of the modern librarian and research information professional. Alongside traditional expertise in organising, curating and preserving data, today's roles increasingly require skills in data management and systems interoperability. By combining these established library principles with modern digital technologies, we are enabling the Library to play an increasingly important role in supporting research information management across the University.



Forth Bridge Construction, c. 1885. University of Edinburgh Archives E.2008.39

> *By focusing on key questions and carrying out targeted checks for data quality and data completeness, we can add considerable value to how we use our research information management systems.*

Write: creating an academic writing community in the Library

Christine Love-Rodgers and **Rania Karoula**, Academic Support Librarians

In 2025, we began exploring Shut Up and Write in the Library. *Shut Up & Write!* is a collaborative, non-profit community of writing groups found worldwide (**shutupwrite.com**). Writers get together, get to know each other and then write alongside each other, in silence.

Writing retreats are not new to the University - the Institute for Academic Development had been running them for students, researchers and staff for several years, and some Schools and Colleges offered their own. However, we had never offered writing retreats as part of our academic skills provision in the Library.

Before launching, we reached out to colleagues at other university libraries running similar sessions. Manchester University, for example, runs an established programme of online and in-person writing workshops every 2 weeks throughout the year. Like Manchester University, we decided to make our sessions open to students in all levels of study and chose the Main Library, our site with the biggest student footfall, as the venue. We planned our first pilot session as part of our biannual Dissertation & Thesis Festival, in October 2025. Following positive feedback, we ran a series of monthly Shut up and Write workshops from January to June 2026. A typical session lasts for up to 3 hours, and includes a welcome and warm up activity, structured blocks of writing time and brief study breaks.

The 2026 sessions welcomed 40 students from across the university, reflecting broad, interdisciplinary interest. The School of Social and Political Science led participation at 17%, closely followed by Health in Social Science and Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, each at 15%. Smaller but meaningful representation came from the rest of the schools, demonstrating that the need for dedicated writing time resonates well beyond any single discipline or college. A growing number of students also returned month after month — an encouraging sign that the sessions are achieving their core aim of building a genuine writing community.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting the value of a calm, structured environment and the quiet motivation that comes from writing alongside others.

> ***"The sense of community created by the organizer (Rania) was really conducive… [it] took away the stress of writing."***

> ***"The most useful thing I learned was how effective a structured and quiet writing environment can be… even a relatively short period of concentrated work can be very productive when there is a clear structure and a supportive atmosphere."***

As facilitators, delivering these sessions has been genuinely rewarding. It was particularly gratifying to see students return each month with the same energy and commitment, growing visibly in confidence as writers. We were also struck by how quickly a sense of belonging took hold within the group — faster and more organically than anticipated, underscoring how much students value feeling part of a community during their time in university.

Given the success of the programme, we will continue running Shut Up and Write sessions into 2026–2027. We are also exploring ways to expand the offering, including inviting colleagues from the Academic Skills and Digital Skills teams to showcase their services with attendees, and welcoming Academic Support Librarians and Royal Literary Fund Fellows to highlight their support.


Shut Up and





At work at the Lady Smith of Kelvin Veterinary Library



St Cecilia's Hall Concert Room & Music Museum

Engage: providing community access to Edinburgh University Libraries

Paul Gorman, Head of Help Services

Each year, the libraries at Edinburgh University handle approximately 4,000 external applications from the general public, alumni, and members of reciprocal access schemes. We have, at any one time, approximately 10,000 active external library members, greater than the total student population of many universities. This high level of external membership applications underscores the pivotal role of the Library in extending the University's resources beyond its immediate academic community and embodying the institution's commitment to serving the wider Edinburgh community.

At the heart of this process are the EdHelp helpdesks within the libraries, which serve as the frontline for managing and processing these applications. Their role is crucial in ensuring that each applicant is efficiently integrated into the library community. The staff at these desks are tasked with guiding applicants through the application process, assessing eligibility and providing support once access is granted.

To efficiently handle the volume of applications, we have implemented streamlined procedures that include both digital and in-person support systems. By using integrations between an online registration form, our Visitor Management System, Identity Management System, Card System and Library Management System, they can ensure that applications are processed quickly. This technological support significantly reduces waiting times and helps maintain a steady flow of service.

Beyond systems and procedures, it is the dedication of the EdHelp staff that truly facilitates the integration of new members.

External members of the library come from a wide range of backgrounds and can have varying levels of IT literacy and knowledge of using libraries, meaning that each user may require differing levels of support from the helpdesk staff.

Balancing the needs of diverse applicant groups - from alumni seeking resources for professional development to members of the public requiring IT support, the helpdesk staff must be flexible and adaptive.

Staff members actively engage with new external library users and can familiarise them with available resources and services. This personalised approach fosters a welcoming environment and helps demystify the access process for those unfamiliar with academic libraries, or in the case of some alumni, those who have not used academic libraries for a long time.

Thousands of visitors are processed via this route, and satisfaction has remained high with our most recent customer satisfaction score showing 94% satisfaction rate.

One significant challenge is managing peak periods, such as at the start of academic terms and revision and exam periods, when our libraries are at their busiest. During these times, our online appointment system for joining the library helps to manage foot traffic and allows us to spread appointments across our libraries and, where necessary, we redirect external users to other libraries when we know, for example, that the Main Library is very busy.

Our efforts in welcoming external applications reflect the University of Edinburgh's broader commitment to community engagement. By opening its doors, the Library is providing a valuable resource for all who seek knowledge beyond the University's walls, supporting lifelong learning and professional development and contributing to the intellectual and cultural fabric of the city.


Where can I get
support with
my student card?

Spotlight: the Digital Library Development & Systems Team

The *Development & Systems Team* in Digital Library is responsible for maintaining and supporting much of the digital infrastructure that underpins the Library. This includes systems that provide access to physical and digital library resources through the three catalogues of record: DiscoverED, ArchivesSpace and our Museum Catalogue. Our work also includes maintaining and developing the University's research data management infrastructure, open scholarship platforms, and access to digitised and digital heritage collections. The team hosts and supports systems used by external universities and partners across Scotland, extending the impact of our work beyond the University of Edinburgh.

Across this diverse digital estate, the team ensures that more than 100 websites and services remain secure, reliable, accessible and responsive to changing user needs. This work happens behind the scenes with engaged staff committed to maintaining the technical infrastructure necessary to keep these sites up and running. Much of that infrastructure is built around open-source systems. Many in the team are passionate about the principle of supporting openness and publicly available software. Using open-source systems allows us to both benefit from, and contribute back to, the international galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) professions.

The team collaborate with colleagues across Library & University Collections, providing essential support for their work. Many of the platforms the team support are central to colleagues' daily work and we are involved in many cross-team projects offering technical advice, systems expertise and practical solutions. Strong relationships with other parts of the University's Information Service Group (ISG), including IT Infrastructure, Information Security, Help Services, and Service Management colleagues are also vital in helping us deliver sustainable and resilient services.

Over the past few years, the team has moved towards a more cross-functional model of working. This has reduced single points of failure, strengthened service continuity and improved support across a complex and ever evolving portfolio. For a relatively small team managing a broad and specialised range of



systems, this has been an important step in building resilience and ensuring knowledge is shared more effectively. The team is proud of the infrastructure improvements made, streamlining workflows using modern technologies and embracing the shift-left ethos.

Recent years have also brought new challenges. Like many cultural and research institutions, the Library has seen increasing pressure from large volumes of automated bots and crawlers seeking to harvest the Library's rich content for training large language models. Working closely with colleagues across ISG, the team has put in place a range of mitigations to protect services, preserve performance and attempt to ensure legitimate users can continue to access the Library's digital collections.



Members of the Development and Systems Team: Ronan Burnett, David Speed, Lucy Pennington, Greig Christie, Laura MacNeil, Gordon Andrew, Ianthe Sutherland, Scott Renton and Patryk Smacki

The coming year will also bring exciting new collaborative developments, including a new digital collections platform, the launch of a digital preservation service, and a refresh of DiscoverEd, our library catalogue.
All three of these developments are the culmination of extensive effort on the part of the team (in some cases years of work) and collaboration with colleagues from across the Library. It's an exciting time to be part of the Digital Library and we're looking forward to these valuable contributions from our team coming to fruition.

Reuse: sustainable Heritage Collections transit

Robyn Rogers, Technician (Collections Care)

Every week the University's heritage collections are transported around campus to be viewed in our reading rooms. Books, archives, and artworks are carefully retrieved, packed, and delivered by our Research Services team. Previously, these collections had been transported in aging plastic crates that were padded with bubble wrap. Collections were vulnerable to knocks in transit, and the bubble wrap quickly became dirty, necessitating frequent disposal and replacement. This project, reimagined this transit process and was made possible by three student Collections Care Assistants. The result is a new packing system that better protects collections, repurposes otherwise reject material, and has a long lifespan with minimal waste.

Consultation with the Research Services team quickly revealed that a new collections packing system was required. This system needed to be user friendly, protect collections and, most importantly, be sustainable. While single use materials are sometimes unavoidable in collections care interventions, the Library is committed to using more sustainable alternatives wherever possible. After prototyping several different options and seeking feedback from the Archive and Library Assistants who would be packing collections, we decided that a crate padded with reusable, washable pillows and pillowcases was the easiest to use and most sustainable solution.

We purchased new crates from UTZ, a company that is committed to sustainability. The crates are modular, meaning that in the event of damage only the affected component is replaced. Rather than procuring new materials to make the pillows and cases, we invited colleagues in Information Services to donate unwanted fabric and padding in the form of old duvets, bed linen and even undyed T-shirts. These materials were supplemented with a large donation of abandoned student bedding from the University Accommodation, Catering and Events team.

The sewing of the pillows and their cases, as well as the screening of materials and filling of each crate, was completed by our three student Collections Care Assistants. Between them a mammoth 130 cushions and 175 removable covers were produced – the culmination of over 200 work hours. The students used waste materials as much as possible throughout the process: sewing templates were made from carboard boxes, and fabric scraps were used as padding. The new packing pillows are easy to monitor for mould, dirt and debris, helping us to ensure that collections are clean and safe to view when they arrive at our reading rooms. The dirty cushion cases can be washed and reused indefinitely, preventing the waste of materials that would otherwise be destined for landfill. Collections Care Assistant, Ciara Weber has said, "this project has gathered positive feedback from the reading room staff implementing the new crate system. Myself and my fellow CCAs are happy to have contributed to the completion of this sustainability initiative, and have mastered our sewing-machine capabilities along the way!".

The Conservation and Collections Management team continue to prioritise environmental sustainability in our work, and we are proud that this project sits among our other successful initiatives including nitrile glove recycling with the School of Chemistry, and the design of recyclable mounts for exhibition and display. This project in particular has gained sector interest and recognition, with a poster selected for display at the Institute of Conservation 2026 Conference. We continue to share our methods and process via studio tours, sector events and on our blog, *Preservation Perspectives*.





Investigate: uncovering pattern through a modern lens

Juliette Lichman, Heritage Collections Digitisation Photographer

In May 2025 the British heritage skill of hand quilting in a flat frame with a rocking stitch was classed as critically endangered on the UNESCO Red List of Endangered Crafts. We are fortunate enough to own a rare survivor of this patchwork and quilting tradition, the Regency Quilt [NDS952] c. 1820 in our collections. Donated to Edinburgh College of Art in 1962 by the Needlework Development Scheme, this 200-year-old textile has been used as a practical teaching aid for more than 60 years.

Lindy Richardson, Programme Director of Textiles (2000-2021), led 15 years of community engagement working with the wider textile collection culminating in the exhibition *Touching Stitches* at the Main Library (2019). During this period, volunteer groups worked on rehousing, and the quilt and textile conservator Madeline Hibbins-Cline produced a condition and treatment report including reference to the quilting on the reverse, until then entirely overlooked in the object records.

This prompted a new commission of digital photography of the entire object. Existing images of this quilt were produced in 2011, focused exclusively on the front patchwork design but lacked the higher resolution to see fine details. This year, I was tasked with taking new photographs using the Phase One 100MP camera.



These new images now reveal incredible detail of the intricate prints of the patchwork front, as well as the complexity of the white-on-white quilting pattern on the back, down to individual stitch level.

Photographing both sides of the quilt required precise planning and setup for handling, capture and post-processing. Due to its fragile nature, it was laid on large sheets of plastizote on the floor, and with assistance, was folded gently for each section being captured. Each side required 15 photographs which were later digitally stitched together to create one final image. Lights were kept static to ensure even lighting across the textile, and crucially with textiles, as soon as the object is moved, new folds, creases and shadows emerge, so keeping a clean and focused capture process was important.

The final images exceeded 20,000 pixels wide.

PHD candidate Deborah McGuire (LCF) used these images to create a digital tracing of the reverse pattern and presented a case study at the Centre for Research Collections with a focus on the process of making. Guided by Deborah and Dr Jess Bailey, attendees were introduced to hand quilting techniques and stitches, directly following the pattern revealed from the digital tracing quilted on NDS952. Their project, *Within the Frame* advocates for keeping this practice alive, engaging with the public through practical stitch workshops around a central frame, one of which they hosted recently at The National Museum of Scotland.

This single object has brought together academics, researchers, technicians, volunteers and community groups. The ongoing development in digital technology - not only to record objects visually, but as a tool to reveal complexities of design and making - has helped us to understand practical processes more clearly and has contributed to keeping this endangered craft from expiring.


PHASE ONE



School of Scottish Studies Archive



Main Library,
George Square

Connect: research narratives in Graphic Design

Elizabeth Quarmby Lawrence, Rare Books and Literary Collections Curator, and **David Lemm**, Lecturer in Graphic Design

Students from MA Graphic Design visited Heritage Collections for the first time this year, using material from the Rare Books collections as the basis for a project to expand their understanding of visual communication and introduce them to new ways of developing ideas.

David Lemm, *Research Narratives* Course Organiser, first approached Heritage Collections having been inspired by the Expect the Unexpected exhibition catalogue. Recognizing an opportunity for students to use the collections to develop research skills and inform design-led storytelling, a selection of artefacts was assembled in conversation with Elizabeth Quarmby Lawrence and the brief set for the students during Semester 2, 25/26.

A key idea was to encourage an engagement with the library resources available at the university, a call to find inspiration beyond seemingly diminishing circles of visual influence and the tendency to an increasingly homogenous visual culture. An emphasis was also placed on physical exploration, considering how analogue images and printed media were actually made, as well as the cultural or material context in which they originally existed - often difficult to understand through online and screen-based sources.

At the beginning of the course the group visited the Centre for Research Collections and were presented with designated objects, which had been chosen with the intention that they would find them both unfamiliar and intriguing. They were guided through a classroom session introducing each item, before considering, handling and documenting to generate the source material they would need to develop their work. Following this session, students were encouraged to visit the Reading Room independently to undertake further enquires.

Back in the studio, tutorial exercises focused on strategies to develop the initial documentation and primary research.

Physical and wider thematic characteristics of each object were extracted, analysed and abstracted to produce imagery and form a toolkit, vocabulary, or palette of sorts. Students were tasked to collate these initial experiments into a single page of a collaborative newspaper, which was presented at the annual Edinburgh College of Art artist's book and zine fair, *BOOKMARKS*. A copy of the newspaper has been added to Heritage Collections.

Following the initial research phase, the brief asked students to expand on their findings to produce their own artefact. This could be in any form which could be justified as a publication; outcomes included conventional books, but also a set of prints in a portfolio, 3D printed objects, boxed compendia and games.

The response to the objects was a mixture of excitement, curiosity and confusion. Many very unexpected conversations took place in the classroom, and many insights were gained. This approach to creating work was quite new to the majority of the cohort, and whilst challenging, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive with students inspired to discover new possibilities and methodologies.

The ability to take obscure and unexpected source materials as a starting point to conceive design outcomes will hopefully prove an invaluable skill; transferable to industry practice and future research endeavours.

The project was such a success that there is every intention to run it again.



Student outcomes by Shiying Zheng (1), Maki Shigentai (2) and Zin Li (3)

Rehabilitate: bringing our collections to Scottish prisons through 'Taking Museums Inside'

Laura Beattie, Engagement Officer (Communities), and **Sean McGugan**, Learning Inside Enabler

The key aim of the Heritage Collections Civic Engagement Service is to engage underrepresented communities with our collections for the purposes of positive social impact. We have been working with people with experience of the criminal justice system since 2019 and running learning programmes in Scottish prisons since 2023. Last year, we were fortunate to be awarded a Museum Development Grant from Museums Galleries Scotland to fund our work in prisons from March 2025 - 2027. This has allowed us to hire a part-time Enabler for the project, to provide trauma-informed practice training for staff, develop a dedicated Handling Collection and bring onboard new prison partners including HMP Shotts and HMP Edinburgh.

From our very first sessions with learners, we noticed how well they responded to object-based learning which informed our need for a more extensive handling collection. Based on the Heritage Collections, we chose objects to offer further context for learners while providing opportunities to discover, problem solve, and communicate their own ideas. Several facsimiles of original objects from the collections have been created including the phantasmascope stand and disks, and 'The Castle of Edinburgh' tunnel book.

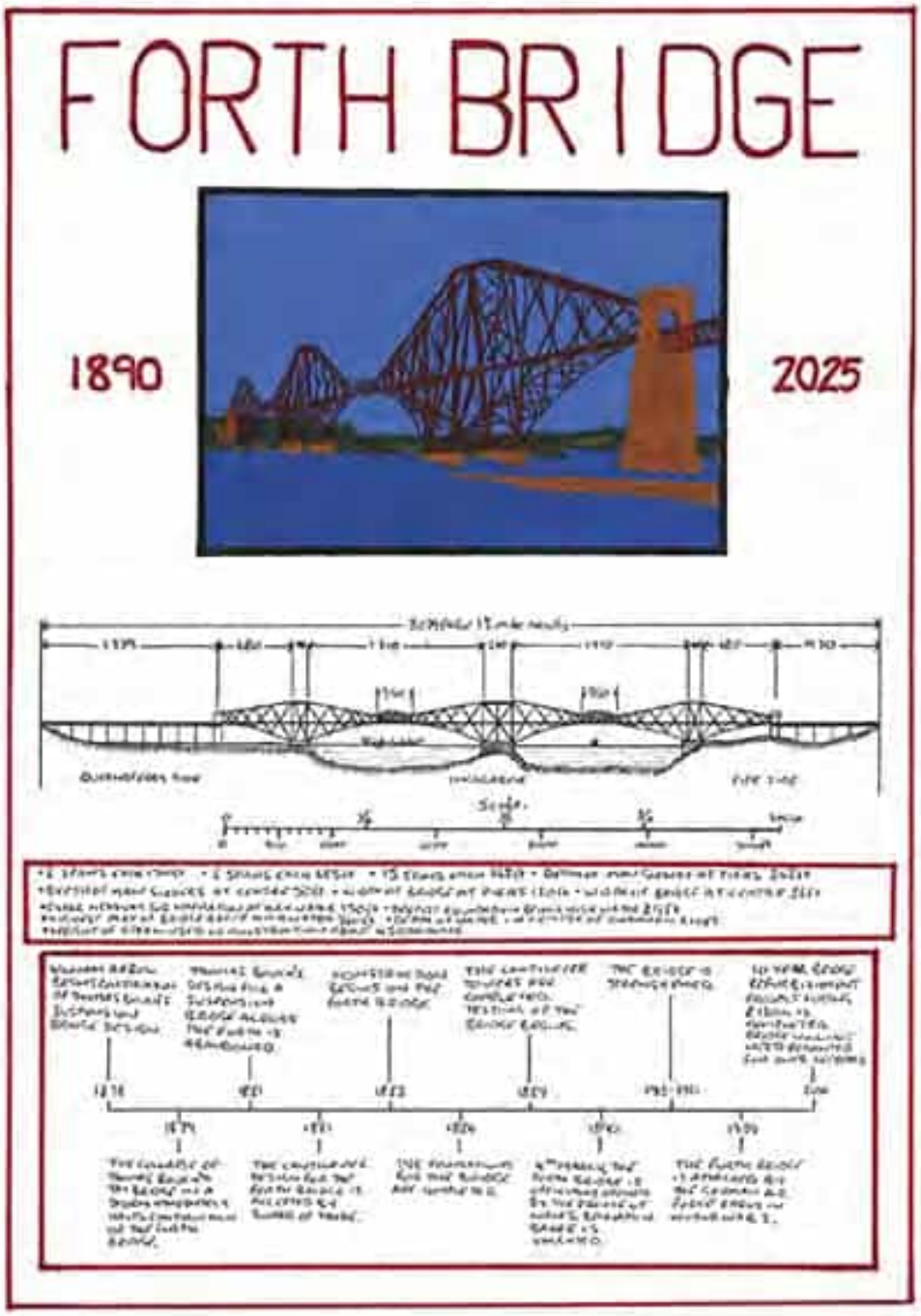
We also worked with University of Edinburgh students and staff from the Makerspace to design, develop, and 3D print a model of the Forth Bridge, musical instruments from St. Cecilia's Hall, and anatomical models. The Museum Galleries Scotland funding has also allowed us to buy a number of original 19th century antique objects, including an original stereoscope, and carbolic acid sprayer invented by former Regius Professor of Clinical Surgery Joseph Lister. The use of handling objects within the programme has allowed learners greater opportunities to question, discover, and understand art, history, and science.



Learner projects on Tunnel Books, Geology and more.

We have worked together with prison education staff and learners to co-create these programmes as much as possible. Last summer, when we first began working with HMP Edinburgh, we were given the opportunity to hold a six-week consultation session with learners. One idea that the learners came up with during these sessions was to implement a peer learning scheme.

How does the peer learning scheme work? Learners who have completed a programme with us before volunteer to take part again as a peer learner. We give them special training in mentoring before the programme begins and they then then help their peers to complete classroom activities. Over time, the learners have asked us for more responsibility including running ice breaker activities at the start of



A Learner project on the Forth Rail Bridge. Photo credit: Sean McGugan.

classes and delivering presentations on subjects of interest. We have been so impressed with the increase in confidence that we've seen in our peer learners.

We are using the University's Digital Badge scheme as a way to give recognition and a sense of achievement to our learners. To earn the badge, learners' complete weekly reflections on their learning and choose a final project to create over the programme's last few weeks. Thanks to the MGS Funding, we plan to publish the project outcomes in a booklet that learners will be able to share with family and friends.

Very many thanks to colleagues from across Heritage Collections and the Digital Library team who have contributed in a wide variety of ways to the programme: from delivering sessions to supporting us with building the handling collection.

Archive: making valuable research data available for reuse

Jennifer Daub, Research Data Support Manager

What happens to the data outputs when the research project funding ends? Who pays for the storage cost and who prepares the data for archiving? Most research funding now requires that research data outputs are preserved and shared for reuse, and costs and planning for archiving must be made at the start of the project. In the Research Data Support team, we support researchers to preserve their data for reuse via our institutional data repositories and the work of our data librarians in archiving legacy research projects.

To showcase this work, we turn to the Mouse Atlas Programme of research began at the MRC Human Genetics Unit, Edinburgh in 1991 and was funded through to 2018. This multi-disciplinary project, led by Principal Investigators Duncan Davidson and Richard Baldock created a valuable community resource for developmental biologists and others interested in anatomy, embryology, biomedical imaging, molecular biology and related fields. The eMouseAtlas (eMA) data was accessible to users via a bespoke web interface, delivering a large volume of images and data managed in a relational database and specialised image servers. While official funding for the project ended in 2018, the website and servers have been hosted by the IT support team in the University of Edinburgh, Institute of Genetics and Cancer. Although the website is still being accessed, there is no funding to maintain the software dependencies of the website and there has been increasing urgency to find an end-of-life solution for the large volume of legacy data.

The functionality of the eMA website cannot be captured using a web archive service (UK Web Archive) but the raw data itself can be preserved. In anticipation of the end of funding, in 2015 the research team deposited a large proportion of their image data (over 1100 items) into Edinburgh DataShare, an open access digital data repository provided by the University for research data. Here, deposited data are stored indefinitely and appropriately licensed for reuse.



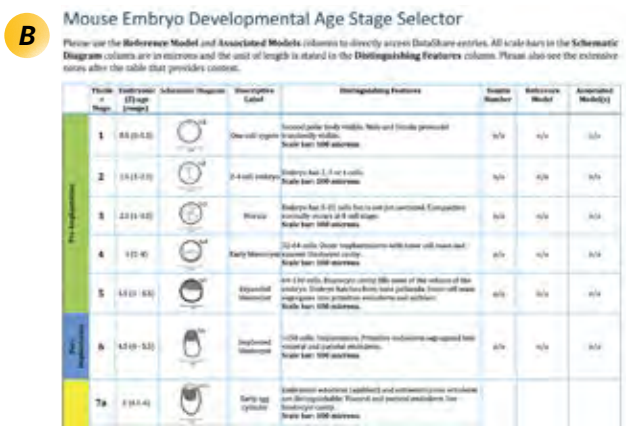
Between June 2024 and July 2026 our team collaborated with the now retired lead researchers to complete the archiving process of supplementary data, videos, SQL database dumps, gene-expression images and mapped patterns. We helped the researchers: (1) identify the optimal structure for the remaining data to be archived; (2) create appropriate instructions and documentation needed to assist making the data reusable; (3) create a video tutorial on how to make use of the images as 3D resources and to replicate some functionality of the original website.

Archives of the raw data cannot replicate the bespoke functionality of the eMA website but we are confident we have stored as much of the data for reuse as currently possible. Without this institutional commitment to archiving the data and the collaboration of our team, this popular dataset may have become obsolete when the primary website was dismantled. The lead researchers, continue to be contacted for copies of the data, particularly for AI purposes and they can now be confident, the data remains active and available for reuse, for as yet unknown future purposes.

The eMouseAtlas data can be browsed in Edinburgh DataShare: **https://hdl.handle.net/10283/821**

A more detailed description of the eMouseAtlas project, its significance to the research community and the beautiful data it created is showcased on the RDS blog: **https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/datablog/2026/07/07/edinburgh-mouse-atlas/**













(A) Screenshot of the original eMouseAtlas web resource landing page, (B-G) Example images and data as deposited in Edinburgh DataShare.

(doi.org/10.7488/ds/7855, doi.org/10.7488/ds/2168, doi.org/10.7488/ds/1171, doi.org/10.7488/ds/7994, doi.org/10.7488/ds/7947, doi.org/10.7488/ds/3141)

Unseen: inside St Cecilia's Hall while closed to the public

Arianna Rigamonti, Assistant Musical Instruments Curator (Mirrey Endowment)

When St Cecilia's Hall closed its doors to the public for five months in January 2026, it might have seemed that the Museum and Concert Room had fallen silent. Home of the University of Edinburgh's Musical Instrument Collection and the oldest purpose-built concert hall in Scotland, the Museum undertook essential building works to improve the insulation and environmental controls in the keyboard galleries. The closure, however, was not a pause, but an opportunity. Behind the scenes, Heritage Collections staff maintained engagement activities and access to the Collection, while continuing to support the care and research of our world-leading Musical Instrument Collection.

Throughout the redevelopment works, the building remained very much alive. Galleries and museum spaces were thoughtfully repurposed to better accommodate the many projects and activities continuing behind the scenes, and the Concert Room became a temporary safe home for the keyboard instruments usually displayed in the Binks and 1812 Galleries.

The Wolfson Gallery was temporarily transformed into an expanded conservation studio to support an ambitious programme of treatments. Among other projects, two keyboard instruments were treated to restore their long-term stability and playability. Senior Conservator Jonathan Santa Maria Bouquet carried out an extensive treatment on the 1784 clavichord by Christian Gottlob Hubert (MIMEd 4338), and Musical Instrument Technician Esteban Mariño Garza carried out extensive work on the 1773 harpsichord by Robert Falkener (MIMEd 4316). Sharing the space was our current ICON Collaborative Conservation Skills Intern Jim Taylor working on the treatment of the nineteenth-century harp by Sebastian Erard (MIMEd 0176).

The Laigh Hall and Education Room became the dedicated space for teaching, research visits and community engagement activities. University lectures and seminars continued uninterrupted, with the Collection remaining very much a living resource. On occasion, instruments were carefully removed from their displays to be examined up close, used in teaching sessions, and sometimes even played by lecturers, allowing students to experience history through material objects and sound. Without public visitors around, it was easier to facilitate and welcome international researchers for longer visits to study the Collection in depth. Their work ranged from measuring, examining, and photographing, to X-ray fluorescence analysis, as well as performance. On some days, the Museum echoed with the rich voices of historic tubas, serpents and violins.

Other days the Museum resounded with the music from members of Notable Difference, a creative health programme for men's mental health, part of the University's Prescribe Culture initiative, led by the Heritage Collections Civic Engagement Manager. Prescribe Culture utilises heritage and creativity and a co-design approach to develop and deliver early interventions for mental health.

Activities also extended beyond the walls of St Cecilia's Hall. Significant progress was made on the long-term project to inventory the musical instruments stored in the Main Library, thanks to the dedicated work of the Curatorial Team with Museum Assistants Hannah Chalmers, Justina Gedgaudaite, and Margarita Vazquez Ponte. Over the course of five months, more than 670 instruments were inventoried in our collection management system. Locations were verified and updated, conditions and needs were assessed, and new barcodes were applied as part of an improved labelling system.

What may have seemed like silence was, in fact, a time of dedication and collaboration across the teams who worked to keep the Collection accessible, implement its documentation, and ensure its long-term care. Visitors, concerts and events have now returned to St Cecilia's Hall with an extensive programme that can be explored on our website (**https://www.stcecilias.ed.ac.uk/whats-on/**).







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