

# William Blake at the British Library

Reference: 2018-6-MYR

<b>Supervisor</b>	Felicity Myrone, Lead Curator, Western Prints and Drawings
<b>Department, Location</b>	Western Heritage Collections, St Pancras
<b>Start date/timeframe</b>	Ideally this placement would be held at some point during the period June 2018 – December 2018
<b>Duration</b>	<b>3 months</b> (or part-time equivalent – see below) <i>The placement would need to be undertaken on a full-time basis initially. However, there would be scope for the placement to be done on a part-time basis after a period of full time training</i>
<b>Remote-working</b>	After an initial period of full-time office-based training, there is the potential for the placement student to work from home for 1-2 days a week, if required.

<b>Context for placement</b>
<p>William Blake’s notebook (British Library reference: Add MS 49460) is well known, and has a strong presence on the Library’s <a href="#">website</a>. What is less appreciated is that the British Library also holds a large collection of prints by Blake, mainly produced in his role as a commercial engraver. The exact size of this collection is unknown at the moment, as Blake is not reliably recorded in the Library’s records for books containing his work. However, while his prints are currently un-catalogued at the Library, they are relatively easy to identify using secondary sources. This PhD research placement aims to help the Library to identify all William Blake prints in its collection and to create a definitive list of its holdings for the first time. This research would also inform plans for a small display proposed for the Library’s <a href="#">Treasures Gallery</a> in 2019.</p> <p>Although Blake is one of the most scrutinised figures in western art and literature, his commercial engravings have been relatively neglected. There are several reference works seeking to identify his commercial engravings and provide basic catalogue records, including Roger Easson and Robert N. Essick, <i>William Blake, Book Illustrator, 1972/79</i>, David Bindman and Deidre Toomey, <i>The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake, 1978</i>, Robert N. Essick, <i>William Blake Printmaker, 1980</i>, Robert N. Essick, <i>William Blake’s Commercial Book Illustrations</i>, and G.E. Bentley, <i>Blake books, 1977</i> and <i>Blake books supplement, 1995</i>. This project would build on this work to extend and rationalise this record, with specific reference to the holdings of the British Library.</p> <p>The British Library’s prints collections as a whole are vast, far outnumbering the holdings at the British Museum. But they are largely unknown, primarily due to their relative inaccessibility. The Library appointed its first curator for prints and drawings in the rare books, manuscripts and maps collections in 2015, and the PhD student would be supervised by this curator, in the Printed Heritage section of the Western Heritage Collections department. The BL supervisor is leading a temporary specialist project team who are cataloguing George III’s maps and views, and the placement student would work alongside this team and with the guidance of colleagues from the Library’s Metadata Services and Processing teams.</p>
<b>Expected tasks and outcomes</b>
<p>The placement student would survey the existing scholarship on Blake and book illustration and use this to search our catalogues, order up and examine our copies and thereby create a copy-specific definitive list which covers all British Library prints designed by Blake and/or engraved by Blake (i.e. including the commercial book illustrations he engraved after other artists).</p> <p>The Blake listing would be done on a specially-designed spreadsheet, ensuring the data captured could be ingested into the Library’s <i>Explore</i> catalogue in the future. The student would be asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and list each copy of any book Blake has illustrated, recording any copy-specific information such as signs of previous ownership and the secondary citations for export into the existing bibliographic records</li> <li>• create a short analytic record for each illustration, if time allows, or list plates by title for export to the bibliographic record</li> </ul> <p>During the placement, we would encourage the PhD student to apply their research skills to highlight their</p>

work, depending on their interests and experience. For example, the placement outcomes might be publicised through writing for the Library's [Untold Lives](#) blog, tweeting at @BL\_prints, giving a lunchtime talk or organising a study day. They would be encouraged to consider publishing their Blake BL checklist in [The Electronic British Library Journal](#) or [Blake Illustrated Quarterly](#). Specific outputs along these lines will be discussed and agreed with the BL supervisor at the start of the project.

The student will also have the opportunity to propose highlights for the possible 2019 display, draft potential exhibition labels, and liaise with colleagues within the Library's Conservation and Culture and Learning teams.

#### **Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement**

The placement student would be trained in how to use the British Library's catalogues and handle collection items. As far as the Blake listing is concerned, they will be given detailed guidance in how to approach this, in line with best practice across the Library. Regarding the anticipated blog posts, they will receive support and feedback regarding the use of social media tools and the development of writing skills, in accordance with departmental guidelines and practice.

The placement will involve flexible working alongside colleagues in Printed Heritage Collections (particularly the King's Topographical Collection cataloguing team and Lead Curator of Western Prints and Drawings), Collection Metadata Systems, Metadata Processing and Culture and Learning. The placement student would be encouraged to meet and potentially work-shadow other colleagues in Digitisation, Printed Heritage, and Culture and Learning, gaining understanding of how the Library's collections are being made more accessible through current cataloguing, digitisation and display projects.

The placement also brings with it the opportunity to build networks with experts at other institutions that hold collections of Blake works, notably Tate Britain and the British Museum, and the John Rylands Library, which led a project to identify prints by the artist that culminated in a widely-covered exhibition in 2013.

Working with colleagues around the planned 2019 display proposed for the Treasures Gallery will give the placement student a valuable opportunity to engage with and learn from colleagues involved in the Library's cultural programme, and offers a unique insight into the preparation and presentation of collection highlights for public displays such as this (including the writing of concise and informative text for exhibition labels).

More broadly, the placement offers an opportunity to gain experience of:

- ingesting records and applying other research skills for a practical purpose that supports the needs of a national library
- identifying and describing 18th- and 19th-century prints
- creating and enriching MARC catalogue records via an Excel spreadsheet
- taking part in daily curatorial life at the Library by attending staff meetings, training courses etc. as appropriate
- writing for a broad public audience through BL blogs and using other social media channels to engage audiences in research

#### **Required knowledge and skills**

The placement would suit a PhD student with strong Excel skills and an interest in item-based research. A demonstrable interest in printmaking, Blake or book illustration would be advantageous but is not essential.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor and Graduate Tutor (or someone in an equivalent senior academic management role) in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.