



# THE PIPER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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## 'Our revels now are ended'

*The Tempest, William Shakespeare*

The Party's over! As ever, once the Festival has ended Autumn comes and a new group of burgeoning students arrive to populate spaces recently given over to marvellous mayhem. Fringe venues have given life around the Library a real buzz, many of them staffed by students with an enthusiasm and helpfulness that the confused and lost culture seeker appreciates.

Students have become high profile in other areas and we have dedicated interns working on all kinds of library related projects. The CRC is now involved in a record number of consultations and activities which place it at the heart of the University.

A recent visit of the Friends to the Depository in South Gyle not only showed a State of the Art storage facility with growing space not only for books and musical instruments but also an Archive that cherishes its holdings and, through a digitisation project, is making some of them more widely available. Jo Marshall gave us a fascinating and informative tour and we wish him well at his new position as Associate Director at the NLS where

we know he will keep us in mind! He helped the friends secure many books for the Library that would otherwise have gone elsewhere – purchases of amazing, enhancing diversity.

The University also hosted the 100 year celebration at the EIBF of the founding of the James Tait Black Prize, the legacy of Janet Coates Black. This bequest of 1919 is the oldest Literary Prize in the UK and honours her husband an Alumnus of the University of Edinburgh

and a book lover. Janet was also a devotee of literature and wrote and had published her own poetry. The prize is unique in that it has student readers on the judging panel. Its impressive pedigree of writers began with D.H. Lawrence in 1920. The University supplements the prize which is now awarded to the two categories of fiction and biography.

We have had much to celebrate and value at the Library and elsewhere.

The coming year will have its challenges but we will remain a lively, relevant and robust community of which the Friends is a necessary part.

**Lady Caplan,  
President, Friends of  
Edinburgh University Library**



# A bumper year for services at the Centre for Research Collections

Autumn 2018 marked the ten year anniversary of the Centre for Research Collections. In that first decade the CRC welcomed over 11,000 readers, facilitated 195,000 consultations in the reading room and responded to 73,000 enquiries (Image 1). Those years also provided the foundations for our eleventh year in which service demand has continued to grow apace.

2018/19 has seen a significant increase in demand at the CRC prompting a moment to stop and take stock of the huge achievements of the past year. Services at the CRC include enquiries (in person and remote), consultation of collections in the Wolfson Reading Room, seminar spaces for teaching, and processing of digital imaging orders. These services are delivered by the CRC User Services, a team of nine including a Modern Apprentice in Customer Service.

In the CRC's first full year of operations (2008/09) there were 7,742 consultations. In 2017/18 this rose to 26,801 but this year has seen an immense increase to 41,742 (Image 2). The number of new readers registering to use our services each year has also increased (Image 3). This is due to our expanding online catalogues (for both archives/manuscripts and rare books), increased research activity by student interns and honorary research fellows, plus an increased awareness of the CRC and its unique collections both locally and internationally.

Staff in the user services team have been developing their data skills to allow us to collect and analyse consultation data in a more automated way. We now have calendars of reading room occupancy levels that

will allow us to see which days of the week, or times of the year, are most busy and plan our resources accordingly. Understanding what collections readers are consulting will also enable us to plan digitisation programmes in line with trends of researcher interests.

The CRC seminar spaces continue to be used for collections-based teaching by CRC and academic staff, enabling students to experience hands-on learning with collections. Course seminars this year included *Classical Persian Literature* (Dr Azin Haghghi), *Rosslyn Chapel: Art, Architecture, and Experience in Late Medieval Scotland* (Dr Lizzie Swarbrick) and *Islamic History B: From the Crusades to the 'Gunpowder Empires'* (Dr Marie Legendre) (Image 4).

August 2018 also saw the opening of the Digital Scholarship Centre, a collaborative space for the University community to use for events, training and knowledge-sharing relating to Digital Scholarship across academic disciplines (Image 5). The situating of the centre within the Centre for Research Collections strengthens the connections between digital scholarship activities in the academic community and the University collections. There have been a huge variety of events throughout the year including seminars on diverse topics from data ethics to the use of social media data in the production of contemporary art, and activities including a DIY Film School. We are working closely with colleagues across the University on the programming of this exciting space, particularly the Centre for Data, Culture and Society.

Each day the CRC receives enquiries from around the world covering a broad range of topics. Some of the

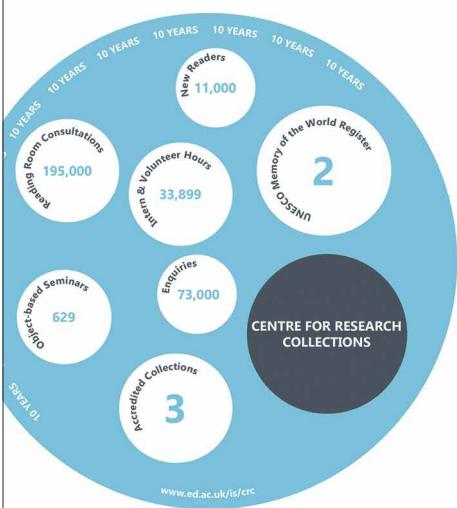


Image 1. Statistics from the CRC's Tenth Anniversary

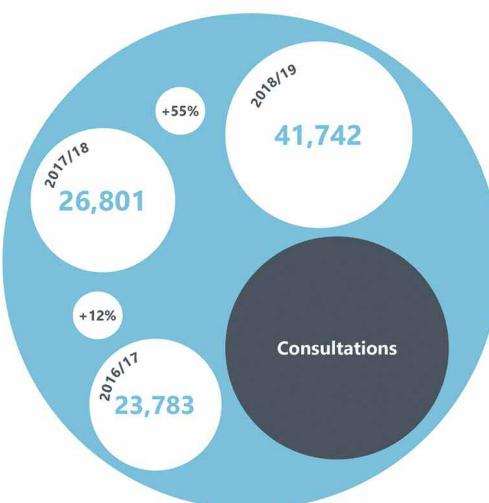


Image 2. Consultation figures for the Wolfson Reading Room



Image 3. New Reader Registrations for the previous three years

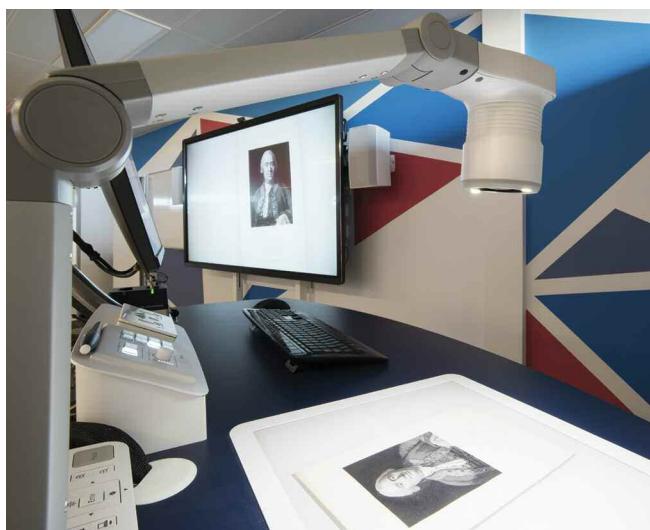
**Image 4.** (Below) f.7r from MS 42 (15th century), used in the Rosslyn Chapel seminar

**Image 5.** (Right) the document camera in the Digital Scholarship Centre

most frequent enquiries concern historic alumni and allow user services staff to delve in to the archives to see what they can find. This year we have found the ECA record of George Gibson who studied as a scenic designer; he later emigrated to the USA and became head scenic artist for MGM and painted backgrounds for the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. We have also been supporting the UncoverEd collaborative and decolonising research project in which a team of eight student researchers have been writing 'social histories of the marginalised student experience'.<sup>1</sup> We discovered student records of individuals such as Yuan Changying (1894–1973), the first Chinese female graduate of the University in 1921. Her amazing career was explored in a blogpost by current research student Dingjian Xie.<sup>2</sup>

So where do we go from here? The Wolfson Reading Room will re-open in September 2019 with a new issuing desk and layout to ensure we have the capacity to welcome growing number of researchers whilst maintaining the friendly and comfortable environment

1. <http://uncover-ed.org/about-uncovered/>  
 2. <http://uncover-ed.org/yuan-changying/>



that our users appreciate. In the same month we will have an assessment for the Customer Service Excellence standard, the national framework recognising excellence in service delivery. We will be welcoming new courses to the seminar spaces, including *Edinburgh Slavery Connections* (Prof. Diana Paton). In this new postgraduate course students will use the CRC collections to research the connection between Edinburgh, as university and city, to the Atlantic slavery-based economy. An exciting programme of collaborative activities is planned for the Digital Scholarship Centre, including the provision of datasets based on the CRC collections for researchers to explore.

**Dr Francesca Baseby MCLIP,  
CRC Services Manager**



# Students love archives!

## Building student experience, skills and knowledge at the Centre for Research Collections

We've had some wonderful student internships, volunteers and placements working with our archive teams across Centre for Research Collections (CRC) and Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA) over the past few months. We could not emphasize enough how valuable we find their input contribution to our work and the importance of sharing the expertise and knowledge at the Centre for Research Collections. This allows us to support and grow our student and professional communities by providing real work experience on collections that develop skills and knowledge.

Working with our archival collections is a unique experience and the CRC has become a hub of student activity. Here are some examples of this work.

### Medieval Manuscripts Interns

One successful example is our project on our medieval manuscripts, which is now coming to an end after months of outstanding cataloguing work and captivating discoveries involving mysterious cyphers and Italian book thieves. In total, our five interns have catalogued almost all of the manuscripts described in the Borland catalogue (230 volumes and fragments), resulting in a user-friendly and searchable catalogue. Because many of the manuscripts are composed of several texts, they have created a grand total of 1135 new entries, which will shed a new light on the multitude of fascinating medieval texts contained in our collection! They also have brilliantly used their research and languages skills to improve and correct the older descriptions, and they have successfully promoted the project and the collection on social media and during conferences. They've created a brilliant resource for students and researchers alike, and all medieval manuscript lovers.

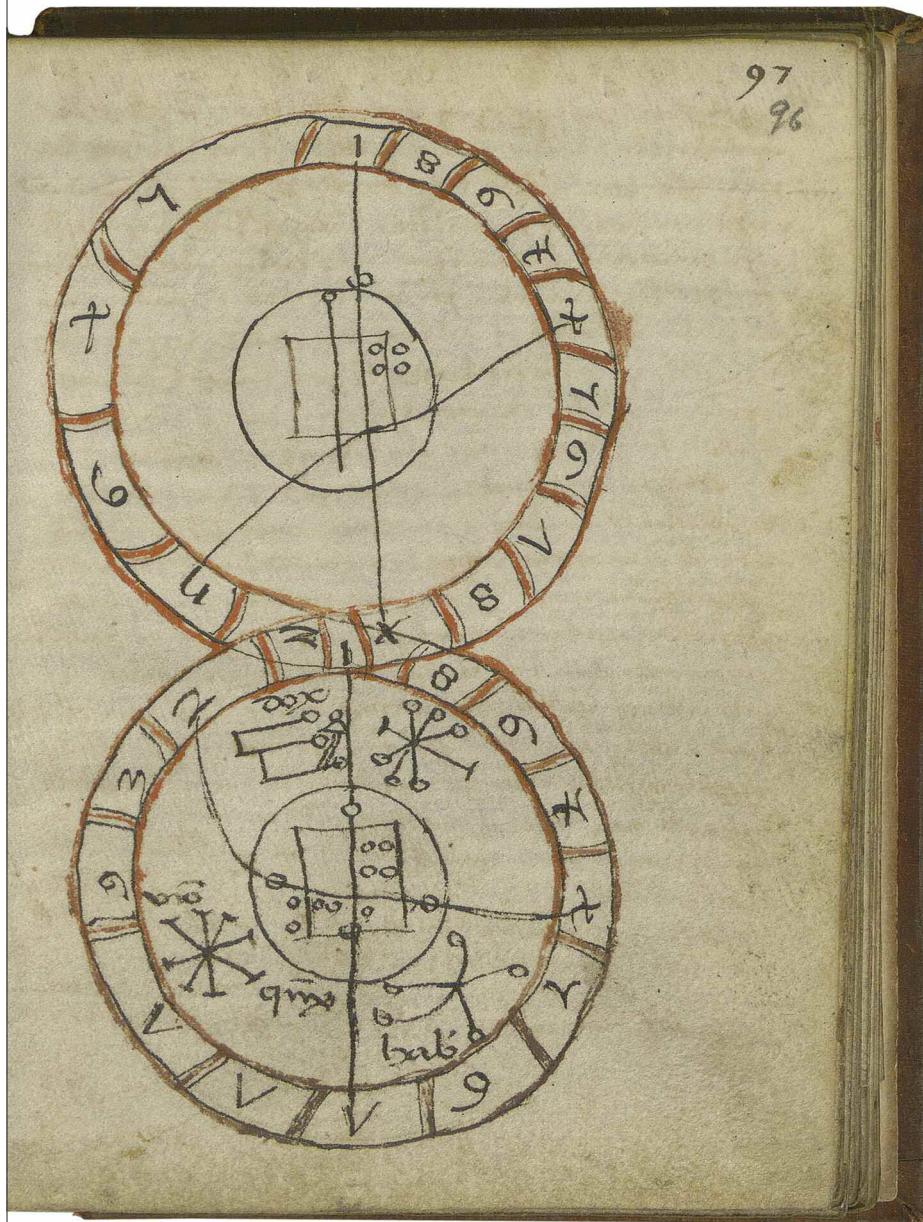


Diagram from a 15th-century alchemy treatise catalogued by Giulia, our intern working on the Medieval Manuscripts. It illustrates previously unknown instructions to summon a demon called Baron. (MS 121, f. 97r)

MS 121 f 65r was created by Florus Infortunatas

The floral border of this page contains the Royal Arms of Scotland, a red lion rampant on a yellow background, supported by two unicorns. Also within the border are three instances of the letters 'P' and 'L' or 'J' joined by a lover's knot. Below one of these, there is a man in green who draws a bow to aim at a long legged grey bird. An illuminated scene within the floral border depicts an episode from the Aeneid. In the foreground, Aeneas, in blue and gold armour, is received by Dido in the forest. Dido is dressed in a yellow tunic with a blue cap.

This image is from a manuscript which student interns catalogued.

**Provenance:** it is possible that this was executed in Rouen but with the Scottish Royal Arms it is assumed it was intended for a Scottish owner and, indeed, it might have been for King James III although this is not certain. The manuscript was presented to the University of Edinburgh by John Colville on his graduation in 1654.



**Right.** Evergreen: Patrick Geddes and the Environment in Equilibrium project intern, Sorina Mihai (second from right), presents Geddes collection highlights to colleagues.

**Right, below.** Elise Newcomer, a volunteer with the 'Body Language: Movement, Dance and Physical Education' project, helping to catalogue the Margaret Morris correspondence.

**Below.** Stephanie Allan, conservation placement who is working on the Patrick Geddes collections.

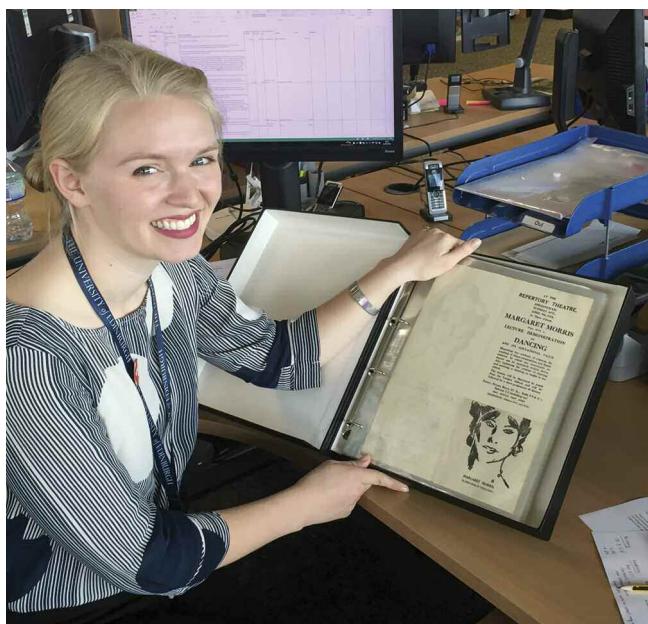


## Wellcome Trust Project Volunteers and Interns

Across two Wellcome Research Resource-funded archive projects ('Evergreen: Patrick Geddes and the Environment in Equilibrium', and 'Body Language: Movement, Dance and Physical Education) we engaged with over 45 volunteers and interns. Volunteers include undergraduate students, post-graduate students, and new archive professionals. They are offered a range of experience including archive cataloguing, research, conservation, preservation and advocacy. Participants have enjoyed discovering and working closely with late 19th and 20th century archive collections which cover topics from urban planning, environmental sustainability, education theory to mental and physical health and wellbeing.

## Lothian Health Services Archive Employed Intern

This summer, Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA) hosted an intern under the Employed on Campus programme. Employed on Campus is a scheme for current students offering paid work experience. This year's Employed intern is Carmen Hesketh, a history student about to enter her final year. Carmen is researching and creating an interactive, online resource about the history of prosthetics in Edinburgh, entirely based around an archive donated by local bio-engineer, David Gow. Gow transformed the field of bio-engineering in 1998 by his invention of a prosthetic arm



with powered shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers. In 2003, he went on to invent the i-limb, the first artificial hand to have individually articulating digits.

As well as becoming a specialist in the history of artificial limbs, the unique environment of the Centre for Research Collections has meant that Carmen has taken advantage of invaluable opportunities to learn more about different activities in the heritage sector, from looking after museum collections to exploring musical instruments through x-ray technology and delivering public engagement workshops. As well as gaining an eye-catching new online resource, the team has also benefitted from Carmen's fresh perspectives and considerable enthusiasm!

**Rachel Hosker**  
Deputy Head of Special Collections

with contributions from  
**Aline Brodin** Cataloguing Archivist  
**Elaine MacGillivray** Project Archivist  
**Louise Williams** LHSA Archivist

# Janet Coats

## Founder of the UK's longest running book prizes

Many alumni will be familiar with the prestigious book awards known as the James Tait Black Prizes, presented each summer by the University of Edinburgh, but fewer know the story behind the prizes which were established by James Tait Black's widow, Janet Coats.

Janet married the Edinburgh publisher James Tait Black in 1884, when she was 39. There were no children from this marriage. Janet's father Thomas Coats of Ferguslie Park, Paisley, was one of the brothers who inherited the thread manufacturing company started by their father, consisting of a small thread mill that had opened in 1826. The company was renamed J&P Coats in 1830 – after James Jr and Peter Coats – and in 1883 the firm became a private joint stock company with mills and interests in the US, Russia, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Spain – all managed from Paisley. In 1890 J&P Coats floated as a public company.<sup>1</sup> Like other Coats of her generation, Janet was extraordinarily wealthy.

The book prizes seem to have been Janet's own idea and they were certainly an innovation – only the Prix Goncourt for fiction existed prior to 1917 when her will

1. Brian Coats, *Seams Sewn Long Ago. The Story of Coats the Threadmakers*, 2013, pp. 206–207.



was drawn up. All the bequests in her will took the form of shares in J&P Coats. In the case of the book prizes, the funds came from Preferred ordinary stock and shares in J&P Coats, to a value of £11,000.

Moreover, Janet was her father's daughter and advised that the shares should be 'held invested' – a far-sighted choice given the later success of the company.

The book prizes were intended as a memorial to her husband who had dedicated his working life to his family's publishing firm, A&C Black. The couple initially lived at Gogar Park (now owned by Royal Bank of Scotland), but by 1890 they had moved to London. Their other properties included a villa in Sanremo, a house in Ayr, and also a property near Keswick, called Underscar. It was here that Janet Coats died shortly after Armistice Day in 1918.

In the order of appearance in her will, the first book prize was for 'the best biography or literary work of that nature [published] each year', the second 'for the best novel or book of that nature of each year judged from a literary standpoint but taking the word in its fullest and widest meaning'. Therefore, the prizes were not only for fiction but also for biography, a unique feature at the time.

What is also important to stress is that from the outset the prizes were to be decided by an academic

Left to right: Lindsey Hilsum, biography winner, broadcaster Sally Magnusson, Olivia Laing, fiction winner. Photograph courtesy of University of Edinburgh, copyright © Lesley Martin



Left to right: Julie Galante winner of Janet Coats Black Prize with Dr Lucinda Byatt. Photograph courtesy of University of Edinburgh, copyright © Lesley Martin

judge. Over the years this has proved a distinctive characteristic. It is particularly interesting because Janet was not an academic, yet she set store by academic judgement not by commercial success which might have been her husband's yardstick of merit.

The will stipulates that the prizes should be judged by 'the Professor of Literature of Edinburgh University whom failing the Professor of Literature of Glasgow University' – for which he would receive a fee! Edinburgh's professor at the time was Sir Hugh Grierson and he ensured that the bequest came to this University, where they were awarded for the first time in December 1920, for books published in 1919. They have been awarded every year since then, making them the UK's longest running book prizes.

After being overlooked for many years, Janet Coats Black is now back at the heart of the prizes, where she rightfully belongs. As part of the centenary celebrations, for the first time, a creative writing prize for a short story submitted by a matriculated postgraduate at the University of Edinburgh was awarded in Janet Coats Black's name. It is a fitting tribute to the woman who had the vision to establish these book prizes and it is thanks to the university that has continued to award them. The Janet Coats Black prize now joins the annual prizes for Biography, Fiction, and Drama (the latter was launched in 2013): all the prizes further Janet's desire to recognise and reward the finest writing.

The biography and fiction prizes have been presented in conjunction with the Edinburgh International Book Festival since 2007. The centenary event was held there on Saturday 17 August and the inaugural Janet Coats Black prize was awarded to Julie Galante for her winning entry. This was followed by in-depth discussions of the eight outstanding shortlisted

books (full details are on the university website). The judges were Dr Simon Cooke and Dr Alex Lawrie, and the winners of the biography and fiction prizes were Lindsey Hilsum (*In Extremis: The Life of War Correspondent Marie Colvin*, Chatto & Windus) and Olivia Laing (*Crudo*, Picador), respectively.

By founding these prizes, Janet Coats Black showed a remarkable ability to look beyond the present – and in particular, beyond the horrors of war that surrounded her when she wrote her will in December 1917. The University of Edinburgh has ensured that her foresight has endured, one hundred years and counting.

#### Dr Lucinda Byatt

**Teaching Fellow in History at the Centre for Open Learning and tutor in the Italian Department. She is also a literary translator.**

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If you have not previously provided a Gift Aid Declaration and now wish to do so, please complete the appropriate section of the Membership Application Form on the Friends' website. Please send the signed form to the Friends' Administrator.

#### AGM for Friends: 12 November 2019

3pm: Rachel Hosker will give a talk on the Thomas Nelson Archive



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