

Everything to Everybody Overview

Background

The University of Birmingham (UoB) and Birmingham City Council (BCC) are collaborating on a £1 million plan to revive the city's almost-forgotten Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library (BSML) - the first, oldest and largest Shakespeare collection in any public library in the world and one of the UK's most important cultural assets.

The 'Everything to Everybody' (E2E) project unites the Shakespeare archive with the George Dawson Collection (GDC) - a wealth of documents relating to the nonconformist preacher, lecturer and activist, who founded the Library as part of a pioneering 'Civic Gospel' which helped make 19th-century Birmingham the world's most progressive modern city.

The main objectives of this National Lottery Heritage Fund project are focused on the following areas:

1. Heritage will be better managed

Neither the SML nor GDC Collection have been thoroughly assessed for at least 50 years, and their potential to excite new engagement untapped. Project staff members, a team of volunteers and paid Heritage Ambassador Scheme (HAS) placement students will identify, research and digitise key items from the collections. They will produce a digitised catalogue of the BSML, enhance the records for the GDC, and add links across the two catalogues. This will be available online 24/7 to everyone.

They will create new digital content, focused on the digitised highlights, to be shared on existing platforms (such as UoB and BCC webpages) and bespoke platforms, including the Everything to Everybody website, in order to increase access to and awareness of the heritage exponentially. New content will be shared by staff members and volunteers from partner organisations via their own (digital) channels.

2. Heritage will be in better condition

Volunteers, working alongside the Collection Librarian, Archivist, Digitisation Officer and LoB's Conservator, will survey various strands of the collection. They will identify and select items which need specific conservation, to be carried out during project delivery. The condition of many items from the collection will be maintained via display, in bespoke book cradles and exhibition cases. The condition of the First Folio will be maintained through its tour in a bespoke display case.

3. Heritage will be better interpreted and explained

Digitisation of the collection, carried out by project staff and volunteers, will facilitate new interpretation. Currently uncurated and unexplored, the project will result in new interpretation materials and publications, including podcasts, blogs, books, study guides and articles. Project partners and community groups will produce new and innovative content relevant to diverse audiences as online galleries, blogs, podcasts and exhibitions on the project website, BCC, UoB and national and international partner websites.

The project team and volunteers will work with community organisations on co-curated exhibitions and popular engagement events, at the LoB and across Birmingham. The project will provide a series of engagement opportunities for different communities.

In line with the main project aim of making the BSML and GDC genuinely public resources, we will facilitate an ambitious programme of re-interpretation through co-production. The project will work with subject

specialists, as well as community collaborators, education settings, and local groups to develop new narratives for different audiences across the city. Key items will be interpreted by and for specific audiences in Birmingham.

A programme of engagement activity will encourage people to reimagine libraries, history, Birmingham and Shakespeare for themselves.

Actively sharing the collection is fundamental to the project and will re-establish the collection's original ethos of public ownership and diverse participation.

4. Heritage will be identified/ recorded

The project will unlock the SML for everyone. The project team, working with volunteers and paid student Heritage Ambassadors, will uncover, catalogue, survey, digitise and share key items from the collections through a new online catalogue, website, blogs and social media. Working with community groups, the project will identify aspects of the collections that are of particular relevance to particular communities, for example there is material in 93 different languages. The heritage, previously hidden, and difficult to access, will be made available to the public. Archive research, undertaken throughout the volunteer programme, will help to record and identify the heritage and its significance. The project intends for Birmingham citizens to take ownership, once again, of this important part of the city's heritage and value it.

5. People will have developed skills

A Heritage Ambassador Scheme will allow 10 students to take part in paid placements, based at the LoB, to research and interpret the collections for a range of audiences.

Volunteers will develop a range of skills from archiving and research to public engagement and social media marketing.

The project will also work with a large number of community groups and participants, who will develop new skills as they co-produce and deliver activity, from family days to neighbourhood productions and exhibitions.

Volunteers, students and staff will be given appropriate training and development opportunities throughout the project.

'Everything to Everybody' is committed to engaging a wide range of people with its heritage. Project activity has been designed to allow people and communities from across Birmingham to take ownerships of the collections, creating new responses to it.

6. People will have learnt about heritage

Most of the E2E's public facing activities provide opportunities for learning, but some are more obviously learning-focused. The project's democratic mission is to revive the collection for everyone. Learning outcomes are focused on increasing knowledge of the collection and its story among the people of the city of Birmingham.

The physical sharing of unique heritage assets with people is a key element of the project. The SMR will host community-curated exhibitions, inviting new audiences to learn about items and themes from the collections. School groups and other educational organisations will be invited to take part in workshops, open days and other engagement activities, through which they will access, learn about and respond to the heritage.

Digitisation of the collection will facilitate learning, including online and anywhere in the world, for free. Project staff and volunteers will share key items, new research and interpretations of the collection via a range of channels, including the project website, project blog, online catalogue and social media channels.

A broad range of engagement activity will give a diverse range of people the opportunity to learn about the heritage.

7. People will have changed their attitudes and/ or their behaviour

The project will invite a diverse range of groups and individuals in Birmingham to think differently about the city's Shakespearean heritage, George Dawson's vision for the city, and why this matters today. It will inspire Birmingham citizens to access, engage with, learn about and create new work in response to the heritage.

Community partners and participants will be invited to explore and interpret project themes, using personal connections and relevancies as a starting point. The project will invite new and creative responses and interpretations to the collection. The project will support communities to tell their own stories in relation to the heritage, changing their attitudes towards the SML, Shakespeare and Birmingham's history.

A volunteering programme and paid student placements will encourage participants to consider a career in heritage or to get involved with other Library projects beyond this 3-year project.

8. People will have had an enjoyable experience

By working with project partners from the planning stage, 'Everything to Everybody' will ensure that programme activity will be designed in order for it to be enjoyable, empowering and meaningful for those taking part.

Consultations and audience surveys have sought to identify what activity people would find enjoyable, and informed activity planning for events such as Family and Community Days.

The volunteering programme will encourage a diverse range of people to get involved, working with the project team, on an ambitious programme. The focus is on creating rewarding volunteering opportunities that would suit a range of people's needs, from increased social interaction and improved wellbeing to developing new skills. 7 volunteer 'Thank You' events will celebrate the achievements of volunteers. Inclusive materials will also ensure that the project will enable all people to get involved with the heritage.

9. People will have volunteered time

This project will create considerable opportunities for people, aged 18 and above, to volunteer. Volunteering activity will engage a wide range of people with the heritage of Birmingham's SML, throughout the delivery phase, and beyond. Volunteers will make a significant contribution to the day-to-day delivery of the 'Everything to Everybody' Project, with a focus on supporting staff with and enhancing the following areas of activity:

- Designing and delivering engagement and education activity at the LoB and at partner venues
- Conserving, researching and digitising the catalogue collections at the LoB
- Marketing the project to a wide range of people and audiences

To make it worthwhile for the volunteers, new skills should be gained as well as benefits such as increased self-esteem, feelings of connection and purpose, and a greater sense of wellbeing.

10. Negative environmental impacts will be reduced

The project will deliver events in various communities across Birmingham, as opposed to hosting them all in the city centre library. The First Folio will tour 15 venues across Birmingham, travelling to specific audiences, instead of asking them to travel to the city centre.

11. More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage

By unlocking the collections, the project will enable more people to engage with the heritage, and this audience will be more diverse than before the project. Digitisation will widen the audience base, enabling people access from anywhere in the world. More locally, the project will work with a range of community partners and other organisations to co-deliver activity. Various activity strands will be targeted at specific audiences, for example Neighbourhood Productions will engage communities of various ethnicities and social backgrounds. Sense will work to create inclusive materials to engage people living with complex disabilities, enabling them to experience the heritage in exciting ways. Evaluation and reporting throughout the project will track which people have engaged with the heritage.

12. Our local area/ community will be a better place to live, work or visit

The project will be focused on engaging, and working with, local Birmingham residents. It will re-tell Birmingham's story, as a city of culture for everybody. New display cases and interpretation panels in the Shakespeare Memorial Room will make it more attractive, engaging and will encourage local residents to visit the heritage. The project will instil a greater sense of pride in Birmingham, which is much needed.

13. Our local economy will be boosted

The project will attract people to Birmingham by diversifying the city's cultural and heritage offer, both at the LoB, and through community-delivered activity across the city. This additional footfall will drive secondary spend and associated economic impact. The project will also coincide with the Commonwealth Games, diversifying the cultural offer to visitors throughout the summer of 2022. It will seek to encourage more people to stay and spend time in Birmingham.

14. Our organisation will be more resilient

The project will achieve greater resilience and a secure future for the collections. This will be achieved through: an increased pool of volunteers, greater local involvement with the heritage, new partnership working with a diverse range of groups, new online catalogues available publicly and worldwide, and the creation of a legacy Collection Librarian post beyond the end of the project.

Audience for Everything to Everybody

The proposed audiences will be:

- Shakespeare Enthusiasts – local national and worldwide – including academics, writers, performers, teachers, students, theatre-goers.
- Local Heritage Enthusiasts – local and national – including academics, writers, students, journalists, amateur and professional historians.
- Birmingham Families – the project will deliver a series of free fun and engaging events at the Library of Birmingham and through partnerships across the city. Events will include elements designed for different age groups.

- Birmingham Teachers and Schoolchildren – the project will deliver a series of products aimed specifically at local schools including Shakespeare and Local Heritage themed learning events and study packs.
- Young Citizens – in addition to children in families and schoolchildren, young people. Approximately 16 to 25 are an important audience for engagement as both co-creators and consumers of project outputs. The future relevance of the Shakespeare Collection should be partly shaped with this audience in mind.
- Current LoB Visitors – LoB receives more than a million visit each year from borrowers, students, researchers, tourists, event attendees, casual visitors, socially excluded – most will be unaware of the Shakespeare Memorial Library – some visit the Shakespeare Room, but still don't engage with the Library's content.
- Current Local Library Users – Community Libraries around Birmingham receive a further million visits each year. At present, many people who use local libraries do not use LoB.
- Birmingham Citizens - See more specific Birmingham audiences below
- National Lottery Players – This audience is specified by the NLHF and includes both current players and people who could be encouraged to become lottery players.

Although Birmingham Citizens generally are a broad target audience, the project will necessarily focus on a number of more tightly defined audiences within Birmingham. We will use the 5 Project Themes derived from the Collections to inform our more targeted audiences:

- Working Class Communities – Develop an up-to-date version of "Mullins' List" – Possibilities could include nail bar workers, retail workers, call-centre workers, transport workers, manufacturing workers, health and public sector workers.
- Non-Conformist and other Religious Communities – including Baptists, Quakers, Muslims, Sikhs, Humanists.
- European Communities including Polish and Irish communities through organised social and community groups
- Commonwealth Communities – Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, African – through, for example, "multicultural neighbourhoods" i.e. Handsworth, Aston, Bordesley
- Local Creative Sector including digital companies, jewellery companies, architects, students, photographers, designer-makers, artists, craftworkers, culture/heritage workers.