Living and Learning in London

In May 2011, five doctoral students studying eighteenth-century British literature were given the chance to take their research and scholarship to the next level by spending a month working in the libraries and archives of Great Britain. Accompanied by Dr. Paula Backscheider and Dr. Emily Friedman of Auburn University and Dr. Dan Ennis of Coastal Carolina University, the students spent their first two weeks meeting with archivists and learning how to use specific collections. During the second two weeks, they were allowed to research independently, using the skills and resources developed in the previous weeks. When they were not working, the students got to experience life as Londoners: catching the Tube home at rush hour, shopping for groceries at Sainbury’s, going for walks in their Chelsea neighborhood, and relaxing in their flats at Nell Gwynn House. They also enjoyed trips to London’s many free museums, seeing several plays and West End shows, and touring historic buildings and monuments.

“The London Experience was one of the most enlightening parts of my education. Being able to see the places discussed in the literature allows me to read texts with new insights. Learning how to navigate archives and spending time with actual editions from the eighteenth century will help my scholarship for years to come.”

~Samantha Batten-Ondyak

“The most exciting thing about working in the archives was finding things I didn’t even know existed. I never thought that I wouldn’t be able to put down a nearly 900 page court document for a divorce, but it happened. I have future projects for years to come that will be informed by treasures I found while in London.”

~Kellye Corcoran
The first archive that the group visited was the Guildhall Library, founded in the 1420s by Richard Whittington. Guildhall specializes in the history of London, and among the library’s extensive collections are records from the London guilds, Christ Hospital, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Lloyd’s of London, and the stock exchange. The group was met by Dr. Peter Ross, a senior archivist, and treated to a tour of the Old Guildhall Library and the Guildhall itself (where the Queen is known to eat), as well as taken behind-the-scenes to see the archive stacks. Dr. Ross also prepared a selection of library “treasures” for the group to see, including eighteenth-century maps, the Tallis London Street View books, and ephemera from Bartholomew and Frost Fairs.

Kellye Corcoran and Lacy Marschalk discovered an early nineteenth-century scrapbook of articles and drawings related to the fairs and became particularly fascinated by the story of George Wombwell, a notorious menagerie owner whose traveling exhibition included a dead elephant. Other students were impressed by the archive response time, with Samantha Batten-On dyak noting that court records she requested were typically delivered in less than seven minutes.
Touring the Old City

After spending the morning working in the Guildhall Library, the group dined alfresco in the gardens of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Then the students were treated to a walking tour of the Old City, led by Dr. Backscheider. Students were able to see many sites important to British literature and history, such as Paternoster Row, the Old Bailey, Spitalfields Market, St. Bartholomew Church, Wesley’s Chapel, and Bunhill Fields Cemetery, where John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, and William Blake are buried.

Clockwise from top: Priory Church of St. Bartholomew the Great, Defoe’s tombstone in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, and St. Paul’s Cathedral.
The National Archives

The group spent the next two days researching at the National Archives in Kew, home of the longest continuous archive of government and public documents in the world, with documents spanning from the eleventh-century to the present. They were first given a full tour by Ms. Katy Mair, who took them behind-the-scenes, helped them navigate the collection, and showed them items related to their individual dissertation topics. Students were then allowed ample time for individual research.

On Working in the National Archives

“If I hadn’t gone to London, I really wouldn’t have had an idea of where to go or where to start when writing about dogs in the eighteenth century. I can’t find the papers about . . . family dogs [online], but I got to read them, touch them, and photograph them in London. That I even found documents about dogs told me that my project could work: I could write about dogs in the 18th century because these documents proved their importance.”

~Cassie Boze

Behind the Scenes at the LMA

The group spent Thursday and Friday at the London Metropolitan Archives, where they were treated to a tour by Claire, an LMA archivist. The LMA houses an enormous collection of maps, books, records, and documents related to London, including more than 350,000 photographs. Included in the behind-the-scenes tour was a trip to the conservation studio, where Tim, a conservationist, showed the group some of the tools the LMA uses to repair books, including volcanic sponges, wheat starch paste, and Japanese paper. Tim exhibited items at various stages of disrepair and explained the process for restoring them. Perhaps the most fascinating item was a 225-year-old book burned in a fire. The book’s vellum pages had melted together, yet the book (and many others like it) had been saved for centuries with the hope that one day conservationists might be able to separate the pages.
Claire also introduced the group to Jeremy Smith, a specialist in maps and images, who exhibited some of the archive’s rarest and most unusual works for the group to peruse. Included in the exhibition were Hogarth engravings, the trade cards of women who had taken over their husband’s businesses, and many eighteenth-century London maps, including the first map to show house numbers.

“At the LMA, I made many of my most surprising and exciting finds. Because I work with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women who visited India, I wasn’t expecting to find much of use in an archive devoted to the London area. Among my many exciting discoveries, however, were the original floor plans of the East India House, which showed me that there were different spaces designated for men and women visitors; letters from people in India to their friends in London; political cartoons satirizing Fox’s East India Bill; and one British family’s photo album chronicling their life in India, including tiger hunts, rides on elephants, and visits to Hindu temples. I left the LMA with notes, images, and copies of primary documents that will inform my research through the dissertation and beyond.”

~Lacy Marschalk

Top to bottom: 1) Claire discusses the LMA’s holdings with the group; 2) Jeremy Smith shows the group one of the LMA’s many rare maps of early London; 3) Tim shows an old advertising scrapbook to Dan Ennis and Kellye Corcoran.
The group spent Saturday and Monday working at the British Library, where they were given a tour by Dr. Jennie Batchelor, Senior Lecturer and Co-Director of the Centre for Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century at the University of Kent, and Auburn’s own Dr. Emily Friedman. Students toured the different reading rooms for rare books, manuscripts, and the Asian studies collection and had ample time to conduct individual dissertation research. During their free time, students could visit some of the library’s treasures in the permanent gallery and a special exhibition on science fiction literature. In the permanent gallery, students were able to see one of the four remaining copies of the Magna Carta, Jane Austen’s writing desk, the manuscript for *Jane Eyre*, and Shakespeare’s first folio, along with many other priceless texts.

On Sunday the students were given the day off to see some of London and to attend a performance at Shakespeare’s Globe, a reconstruction of the Elizabethan Globe Theater on London’s South Bank. For many students, this was their first opportunity to see such famed landmarks as Westminster Abbey, Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square, and Whitehall. The group took time to wander the arcades and markets at Covent Garden before taking the Tube to Mansion House and walking across the Millennium Footbridge to the Globe. There they were treated to a fresh, lively interpretation of *As You Like It*.

Many of the students liked the Globe production so much that they returned in the following weeks as “groundings” (theatergoers who stand in front of the stage as opposed to paying for a seat) and had the chance to see a critically acclaimed production of *All’s Well That Ends Well* and an all-star version of *Much Ado about Nothing*. 

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“A Day Off—Shakespeare’s Globe


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“Dan Ennis, AU Ph.D. 1999, went on the London Experience as a graduate student, and it was great to have him back as a faculty facilitator and expert.”

~Paula Backscheider

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LONDON EXPERIENCE
A Day of Art & Theater—The V & A

After a busy Monday at the British Library and an evening performance of Sheridan’s *School for Scandal* at the Barbican, the group reconvened on Tuesday for a busy day exploring the three different collections housed by the Victoria and Albert Museum—the National Art Library; the Prints & Drawings reading room; and Blythe House, the theater collection in Olympia. At the NAL, Lacy Marschalk was able to see engravings, published sketchbooks, and watercolors by British women who visited India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At Blythe House, Kellye Corcoran saw prompt books and images of actors in character to further her research in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, and Cassie Boze researched performing animals (and especially dogs) at Bartholomew Fair.

Scouting a Collection

On Wednesday each student was sent to a different London archive or library to do research and learn more about the collections of smaller research facilities. Samantha Batten-Ondyak went to Lambeth Palace, Cassie Boze visited the Prints & Drawings room at the British Museum, Kellye Corcoran scouted the Wellcome Institute, Jamie Kinsley explored the St. Bride Printing Library, and Lacy Marschalk visited the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library. That evening, everyone gathered in Dr. Backscheider’s flat to share their experiences and findings. Dr. Friedman also regaled the group with stories of her time working at Chawton House, while Dr. Ennis and Dr. Backscheider talked about working at Colindale and Dr. Williams’s Library, respectively.
A Visit to Oxford

On Thursday Dr. Dan Ennis and Dr. Emily Friedman accompanied the students to Oxford to see the university and visit the Bodleian Library, one of the oldest libraries in Europe and the second largest library in Britain. Dr. Ennis led the group on a walking tour, pointing out many of the university’s most prestigious colleges, such as Christchurch and Magdalen, as well as Radcliffe Camera and St. Mary’s. Students were then given free time to have lunch and explore the small college town. Samantha Batten-Ondyak, Kellye Corcoran, and Lacy Marschalk visited the “Eccentricity” exhibit at the Museum of the History of Science, where they saw, among many “eccentric” items, cameras and photography equipment that once belonged to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (a.k.a. Lewis Carroll). Jamie Kinsley and Cassie Boze visited the Oxfordshire dinosaurs at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. Some students also took time to shop at Blackwell’s, the famous Oxford bookshops housing rare books, maps, and music collections.

That afternoon, the group was given a special tour of the Bodleian by librarians Clive, Allen, and Sarah. Students were taught how to use the Bodleian catalog and gain access to the collections, and Sarah showed them useful search techniques for finding unusual items. The group was allowed to visit the reading rooms and were taught about some of library’s most interesting treasures, such as Jane Johnson’s fairy stories from the 1740s. Afterward, the group enjoyed discussing the day at the Turf Tavern, a thirteenth-century ale house, before returning to London by train.
The National Portrait Gallery Archive

On Friday the group spent their final structured day together at the National Portrait Gallery Archive, where they were able to see portraits of many of the writers and people of interest important to their research. Cassie Boze also found many paintings and portraits that included dogs for her research, and Lacy Marschalk found illustrations of Anglo-Indian balls and parties, as well as portraits that families and military officers commissioned with Indian landscapes in the background. Jamie Kinsley was able to see portraits of Mary Robinson that she had previously only read about. The students then said good-bye to Dr. Backscheider and prepared for two weeks of independent research.

Working Independently

After two weeks of training and work within some of the most important libraries and archives in London, the students were now ready to spend the next two weeks focusing on their dissertations and working in the places that were most important to their individual research. While they all found themselves at the National Archives or British Library again during the next two weeks, some also spent time in smaller collections. Cassie Boze visited the Kennel Club library to learn more about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dog breeding, and Samantha Batten-Ondyak and Kellye Corcoran returned to the collections they had scouted for the group (Lambeth Palace and the Wellcome Institute). Jamie Kinsley went back to Oxford to visit the Magdalen College library, and Lacy Marschalk spent most of her time in the India Office Records housed in the British Library. On Sundays and the Bank Holiday, they found time to see more of London and the surrounding area, including trips to Bath, Greenwich, and Kew Gardens, and visits to see eighteenth and nineteenth-century art and artifacts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Courtauld Gallery, Tate Britain, and National Gallery.

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