

PhD Studentships Collections-Based Research Programme

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Museums, Collections and Archives at the University of Reading

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The University of Reading is recognised for the exceptional diversity and quality of its museums and collections, including three designated collections of national and international importance. It also holds departmental research and teaching collections (such as those of the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication, and the Herbarium), as well as smaller teaching sets such as a fine representative collection of sixteenth to twentieth century drawings by European artists in the Department of Art.

Museums

The University of Reading's three accredited museums contain collections of outstanding quality relating to the history of rural England, the archaeology of Ancient Greece & Egypt, and comparative anatomy.

The Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), with designated collections of over 1 million objects, archives, photographs, film and other library materials, is a pre-eminent resource for rural heritage: No comparable centre of collections, information and associated knowledge and expertise in the subject area exists elsewhere in the UK. The Museum was founded by the University in 1951 to record and interpret change in farming and the countryside over the centuries. Its collections are the most comprehensive of their kind and comprise extensive holdings relating to agricultural technology and rural life; an archive of technical, business and institutional records connected to the countryside; photographic, film and sound records; an outstanding specialist library of books and journals. Distinguished for pioneering the systematic research-focused development of rural collecting in the 1950s and 60s, including ethnographic-style fieldwork and the creation of the MERL classification, it also provided the genesis for many later local and regional collections.

MERL is a widely recognised centre for research into food, farming and countryside and for the innovative dissemination of research outputs across a broad spectrum of the humanities, social and applied science with strong links with international partners and scholars. The Museum promotes a regular seminar, symposia and lecture programme and supports and sponsors a range of internships, research fellowships and postgraduate and postdoctoral research.

The **Ure Museum** is a departmental teaching collection that encompasses a range of artefacts from the ancient Mediterranean, especially Greece and Egypt. In particular, it

contains the fourth largest and most important collection of Greek ceramics in Britain (after those of the Ashmolean and Fitzwilliam and British Museum). Named after Professor P.N. Ure, the first Professor of Classics at Reading (1911 to 1946), and his wife and former pupil Annie D. Ure, the Ure Museum was established to aid the teaching of Ancient History and Greek Archaeology. It includes Egyptian antiquities (Petrie bequest [1909]; British School of Archaeology in Egypt [1910]; Barry bequest [1913]; British Museum [1914]), alongside collections developed through departmental research.

The **Cole Museum of Zoology** is one of the most important and complete surviving collections of comparative anatomy in the UK (described in *Nature* as ‘being without a rival’). Assembled principally during the period 1907 to 1939 by the first Professor of Zoology at Reading, Francis Cole, the collection reflects the diversity of animal life. Around 95% of the specimens are in nine phyla called the “big nine” which reflects the fact that 95% of all animals are members of one of these phyla (Annelida, Arthropoda, Chordata, Cnidaria, Echinodermata, Mollusca, Nematoda, Platyhelmintha and Porifera). Unlike similar collections at other UK Universities, the Cole Collection remains intact.

All three museums have undergone major re-displays in recent years, reflecting a transformation of their role in providing regular public access and opportunities for schools and other forms of lifelong learning. Like MERL, the Cole and the Ure Museum originated as specialist academic collections, and have continued to pursue rigorous and selective acquisition and disposal policies in line with research and teaching and learning needs.

Standards of collections access, management and care across all University of Reading museums and collections have seen a step change in the past 10 years, most notably through MERL’s move to new environmentally-controlled premises in 2005 and a series of conservation initiatives that have tackled longstanding shortcomings and areas of need; for example securing AHRC funding to renew knowledge of specialist skills in preservation methods for spirit and other specimens for the Cole Museum and funding to conserve Coptic textiles and Ancient Greek ceramics for the Ure Museum. The service has an established reputation for its collections care expertise, employing a specialist conservator, and routinely provides support through advice and services for local and other sector-specialist museums. MERL has just received confirmation of HLF funding to support the development stage of a major redevelopment project that should transform its interpretation, learning facilities and activity programming over the next 2-3 years.

UMASCS has achieved Volunteer England’s ‘Investing in Volunteers’ standard and its commitment to workforce development and wider community engagement is reflected in the strength of its volunteer, placement, work experience and intern programme. Up to 100 people are involved in our programme at any one time working in all areas of collections management and our public-facing activity across all the University’s museums and collections. Our leadership in this area has been recognised through a number of successful externally funded projects that have seen the Service supporting the development of volunteer management amongst other museums. We offer internships to the wider HE sector and work experience to schools and will be developing a new externally funded internship programme, targeted at those who would

otherwise be unable to undertake work experience of this kind for economic reasons. We will also be organising and delivering a dedicated placement programme for Reading students in collections-related fields as part of new Museum Studies undergraduate degrees from 2013.

Special Collections

The University rare books and archives are accessible through a reading room that is open to all via a dedicated reading room, supported by extensive online databases and resource discovery. Printed materials include the Overstone Library, largely collected by the nineteenth-century political economist J.R. McCulloch; the Cole Library of Early Medicine and Zoology; the library of the historians Sir Frank Stenton and Doris, Lady Stenton; the literature collection of the composer Gerald Finzi; the Children's Collection; the Robert Gibbings Collection.

Samuel Beckett Archive

The collection comprises around 8,000 items and is the most extensive collection of materials relating to the author and dramatist Samuel Beckett (1906 - 1989) in the world. Dating back to the 1930s it is unique in the richness of its manuscript holdings including manuscript, typescript drafts, notebooks, annotated production texts, and books from Beckett's personal library. The 'Stage Files' document over 700 international productions. There are also over 1,000 texts and critical works in more than 20 languages, 550 offprints, around 170 periodical titles, dissertations, cuttings, audio and video recordings, posters, photographs and paintings, as well as 600 autograph letters and large publishing collections. The archive is supported by a library of editions of Beckett's work, critical and biographical works and the recently purchased collection of James and Elizabeth Knowlson, compiled in researching and writing the biography of Beckett, *Damned to fame*, published in 1996. In 2008/09 the collection was significantly enlarged with the addition of further material collected by James Knowlson.

The Archive of British Publishing and Printing

The archive comprises some 15,000 boxes of manuscripts and printed items, as well as many metres of ledgers, bound records and books, bringing together the world's most extensive collection on British publishing activity in the 19th and 20th centuries up to the present time. The emphasis of the collecting policy is on literary, general and educational publishers, including material from sixteen major companies (such as Allen & Unwin, A & C Black, Heinemann Educational Books, Longman, Macmillan, Routledge, Random House) as well as substantial holdings for many smaller companies and subsidiaries. The Random House collection includes material on the significant publishers the Bodley Head; Jonathan Cape; Chatto & Windus; the Hogarth Press; and Secker & Warburg.