

The John Rylands Research Institute

Exploring the human experience worldwide, from the earliest times to the present day

At The John Rylands Research Institute we ask one of the most basic but important of questions: what does it mean to be human? We work with researchers in the humanities and the sciences to explore human experience and culture, across the globe, over the last 5,000 years, examining arts and literature, religious faith and politics, and economic systems, trade and communications. We trace the continuities, changes and contradictions in human experiences and cultures that allow us to consider what being human means.

Based at The John Rylands Library in Manchester, we examine the human world through the Special Collections of The

University of Manchester Library. Our Special Collections contain more than 50 languages, and are written on virtually every medium - from papyrus to pixels. We hold some of the most significant printed books and manuscripts ever produced alongside unique archive collections.

Our research incorporates new approaches in digital humanities and scientific techniques in the study of heritage materials. We collaborate with world-leading academics while nurturing the next generation of scholars through our support for PhD students, and by supporting and mentoring postdoctoral fellows at the start of their academic careers. In this way we have created a dynamic community of world-leading researchers at The John Rylands Research Institute, all focused on our core mission to define what makes us human and to explain and celebrate it.

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Our unique collections allow us to research societies and cultures across the globe over five thousand years to explain what it means to be human.

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Professor Hannah Barker
Director of The John Rylands Research Institute

Distinguished Achievements

Our ability to galvanise funders and philanthropists illustrates the quality, breadth and reach of our research.

As a result of a Wellcome Trust grant we are cataloguing the medical archive and visual collections in the Library, including the patient case files of Manchester-based neurosurgeon Sir Geoffrey Jefferson (1886 – 1961), who was

at the forefront of research and practice in the field of neurosurgery.

Our events and research forums, which provide the opportunity for expert scholars and interested visitors alike to engage with our research activity, attract esteemed presenters and participants both from the University and the wider world.



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Our research projects

Research at The John Rylands Research Institute is continually improving our understanding of people, cultures and societies around the world.

We are cataloguing more than 400 items of one of the most important smaller collections of Hebrew manuscripts in Europe, including scrolls and other texts in Hebrew.

Our Syriac Galen Palimpsest project examines a medieval manuscript containing a Syriac translation of Galen's main pharmacological treatise, which provides evidence of the role Syriac translations played in the transmission of Galen's medical and pharmacological legacy.

Using sixteenth-century Italian books in The John Rylands Library, our 'Greek Thought in Italian Renaissance Politics' project investigates the use of the political theory of Greek thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle and Polybius in the political life of the courts and cities of late Renaissance Italy.



More modern collections are being used to research the medical networks of Manchester between 1750 and 1850, the Macklin Bible, and poetry in translation in the UK and Ireland after 1962.

Key events

Our 2016-17 Annual Lecture, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Making of England' was given by Michael Wood, Professor of Public History at The University of Manchester.

Professor Alan Bowman, British Academy, spoke about the use of imaging technology and computer vision in accessing and understanding ancient documents.

Professor Frederic Bauden, Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Liège, Belgium, presented his findings on tracing the provenance and ownership of the Islamic Manuscripts held in The John Rylands Library, as well as running a master class on this topic for academics and students.

Working with stakeholders

Our research on The University of Manchester's Special Collections is supported by a variety of funders including the Arts and Humanities Research Council, British Academy, Wellcome Trust and Leverhulme Trust.

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By preserving these incredible collections and opening access to them we provide rich opportunities to study and understand them, and ourselves.

Rachel Beckett
Associate Director of The John Rylands Library
and The John Rylands Research Institute



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