

# Semester Abroad at the University of Manchester

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As part of my studies in Heidelberg, I had the opportunity to spend a semester at the University of Manchester, where I attended courses in Heritage Studies and Library & Archive Studies.



*University of Manchester, The Whitworth Building*

From the very beginning, my fellow German students and I received a warm welcome, and events for international students helped us settle in quickly. Manchester proved to be a dynamic and exciting place to live and study, offering a fascinating mix of academic challenges and cultural exploration.

## **Heritage Management: From Theory to the Streets**

My Heritage Studies course, Heritage Policy and Management, began with a theoretical foundation before transitioning to field trips throughout Manchester. That was truly brilliant, as it gave us the chance to apply what we had just learned while also discovering many facets of the city we might otherwise have missed. We examined the challenges of preserving natural heritage through the example of an urban park, traced the transformation of industrial districts like Ancoats, and discussed the legacy of the women's rights movement. Additionally, we explored adaptive reuse projects, such as the conversion of old viaducts into green spaces.

For our final assignment, we were asked to select a heritage site in Manchester and compile a portfolio on it. Since I lived in Ancoats, I chose to research the rich history of Hope Mill Theatre, housed in a former cotton mill. In 2025, it will celebrate its 10th anniversary, while the building itself marked its 200th birthday in 2024. Hope Mill Theatre was a fantastic research subject, as it has received financial support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, enabling it to engage deeply with both its own history and the local community. Researching the mill's past posed some challenges – scholarly coverage was sparse, and time constraints prevented me from fully



*Emmeline Pankhurst: Manchester's queen bee of the suffragette movement*

delving into the Central Library’s archives – but it offered a refreshing change from the more conventional term papers I was used to writing in Germany. The theatre’s outreach and project managers, Naomi and Alyx, were incredibly helpful, inviting me to a volunteer meeting and generously sharing insights during a dedicated session at the theatre.

**Special Collections: All Greek to Me (At First)**

At the start of my Archives and Special Collections course, much of the material felt completely



*Group photo in the historic reading room of the John Rylands Library*

foreign to me – but it quickly became one of the most enjoyable and enriching experiences of my semester. The highlight was undoubtedly the setting – our classes took place in the grand and atmospheric historic reading room of the John Rylands Library. The course struck a great balance between theory and practice, providing insight into the library’s impressive holdings, including a remarkable parchment roll signed by Elizabeth I. Over the semester, we worked on five

assignments, such as drafting a selection policy, designing an exhibition brochure, and even writing a grant application. (For anyone wondering – I now have extensive experience pretending to be an expert!)

**Exploring Manchester**

Naturally, my semester abroad wasn’t just about academics. Between classes and coursework, I took every opportunity to explore Manchester and its surroundings. The city offers an abundance of activities, from world-class museums (most of them free!) and theatres to concert halls, art markets, and a rather infamous club scene (which, of course, I avoided purely out of academic dedication). The Whitworth Art Gallery, affiliated with the university, captivated me with its remarkable collection of textile patterns, offering a glimpse into Manchester’s past as the



*Paddington visited Manchester on his UK tour – and I managed to sneak in for a photo with him!*

‘Cotton City.’ During my stay, they also exhibited works by Barbara Walker, a Birmingham-born artist whose work engages with identity and the past through archival materials.

Whenever the characteristic Manchester drizzle took over the city, I often found myself at HOME, a cultural hub with a cinema, theatre, gallery, and bar. Their film selection ranges from

indie productions to blockbusters. I particularly enjoyed *The Spoils* and *Dahomey*, both of which tackled the topic of artwork restitution, each in its own way. And, of course, I also made



*The beautiful interior of Chetham's Library*

time for lighter fare – *Paddington in Peru* was an absolute delight. After all, one should never miss the chance to see a polite bear on an adventure!

One of the true highlights of my time in Manchester was exploring its many libraries. Chetham's Library, the oldest public library in the English-speaking world, was particularly memorable. Not only is it an architectural gem, but it also played a key role in history, as it was here that Marx and Engels worked on *The Communist Manifesto*. The library also offers engaging workshops, such as one on letter-locking, which might just inspire you to swap text messages for handwritten letters!

The Makers Market quickly became both a favourite weekend activity and a financial hazard. Featuring local ceramics, jewellery, and handmade crafts, it was a feast for the eyes – and a definite threat to my budget.

Reconnecting with the first Manchester cohort to take part in the exchange program was fantastic – they had visited Heidelberg in June 2024. They also introduced me to the Hallé Orchestra at Bridgewater Hall, where students can attend concerts for just £3 – a true bargain for world-class classical music in a spectacular venue.

If you ever find yourself in Manchester and want to get a crash course in its history, I highly recommend the Free Manchester Walking Tour, which departs daily from the Alan Turing Memorial at 11 AM. The guides offer an engaging and often humorous insight into the city's past. Afterwards, stopping by The Old Wellington – Manchester's oldest pub – for a cider and pie is an absolute must.

**Beyond Manchester**

Manchester's Piccadilly Station is one of the major transport hubs in the UK, making it easy to take day trips to nearby cities. Whenever possible, I visited places like Lancaster, Chester, Leeds, Todmorden, and Hebden Bridge. A particularly memorable trip was to Liverpool, where I, of course, paid homage to The Beatles. Unfortunately, the main building of the



*A snapshot of The Beatles*

Tate Liverpool was temporarily closed, but I still got to see an intriguing exhibition on brickworks at their temporary space in RIBA North.

During Reading Week, I embarked on an ambitious three-day whirlwind tour of Scotland, dividing my time between Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St Andrews. Admittedly, each city deserves



*The coastal charm of St Andrews*

far more than a single day – but I do love a challenge! It was a mad dash between museums, but absolutely worth it. A personal highlight was the *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–1990* exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. To balance all that art with a bit of the outdoors, I took advantage of the golden autumn weather for an early morning hike up Arthur’s Seat. The breathtaking views over the city, the surrounding hills, and the nearby sea made the climb entirely worth it. On my second day, I visited St Andrews, where a friend was spending her semester abroad. I don’t think I’ve ever been quite so overwhelmed by a place’s beauty – the dramatic coastline and medieval ruins were an incredible contrast to the urban energy of Manchester. Glasgow, meanwhile,

required an equally packed itinerary, including stops at the Gallery of Modern Art, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, and the hauntingly beautiful Victorian Necropolis.

### **Final Reflections**

I had a splendid time in Manchester, and it all went by way too quickly. The warm welcome, the kind and open people, and the wealth of new experiences made this semester truly unforgettable. I’m incredibly grateful for everything I’ve learned – both academically and personally – and I know these experiences will stay with me far beyond this semester. It was wonderful to reconnect with the students from Manchester who visited Heidelberg last year and to meet new ones. I’m already looking forward to seeing some familiar faces in the next exchange this summer! This experience reaffirmed the value of international exchange and cultural dialogue – showing how they broaden perspectives, foster connections, and encourage openness to new ideas. And one thing is certain – I’ll definitely be back someday!