

Heidelberg-Manchester 2024.



In June 2024, I participated in a cultural exchange between the Heidelberg Center for Cultural Heritage (HCCH) at Universität Heidelberg and my home institution, the University of Manchester, with fellow students from the Institute for Cultural Practices (ICP). At the time, I had just completed the first year of my Library & Archive Studies MA course and saw this exchange as an opportunity to apply the theories and practices covered in the curriculum thus far, while also looking ahead to my final year of studying. My initial interest in visiting Heidelberg was sparked by the HCCH's lecture series and the collections amassed in the Photo Library of the Institute of European Art History. I wanted to witness another cultural institution's approach to teaching, research, and heritage management and how this experience could inform my own studies. I was truly surprised by the welcome I received from the HCCH staff and students and the varied itinerary that they had orchestrated. Every day incorporated unique activities and different perspectives centred around the fields of Heritage Studies, Archive Studies, Archaeology, and Museology. Throughout the exchange, I felt treated as a peer whenever I discussed collection practices, research, and methodology with the lecturers who shared their work and expertise with me. This report will elaborate on some of my favourite moments from the exchange.

Field Trip to Bodensee

One such unique experience was the field trip to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Bodensee and Konstanz. The trip began with a journey on the autobahn to Unteruhldingen on the shores of Lake Constance. Against this beautiful backdrop stands Germany's oldest open-air museum, the Pfahlbauten Museum, which is a collection of pile dwellings reconstructed from archaeological excavations of the lake floor and surrounding area. This was my first understanding of the approach to curating cultural heritage in Germany. While this has not been the focus of my studies in the UK, it is a field in which I am interested, particularly with how it intersects with libraries and archives. Our visits to the exhibitions, 'Ägypten: Land der Unsterblichkeit' at Reiss-Engelhorn Museum in Mannheim and 'Kunst und Fälschung' at Kurpfälzisches Museum in Heidelberg, later in the month reinforced this dialogue with curators and heritage experts. I found the approach to exhibiting not only the pile dwellings



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themselves but also the museum's history to be refreshing, honest and stimulating. Renewing the interest in and cultural commentary surrounding the exhibits was a clear motivation at the site to ensure that they commune with past as well as future generations of visitors and experts.



On the second day, we travelled to Reichenau to explore the monasteries and their accompanying exhibition displays, which gave us an understanding of how vast these sites once were and how they dominated the island. Out in the sunny cloister gardens of Münster St. Maria und Markus, Dr Roland Prien shared computer-generated images, which he had created based on his archaeological findings, of how the site and the surrounding landscape might have looked during the Middle Ages. The



monasteries on the island continue to inhabit a sense of community with one another as the monastic communities of the 800s no doubt once did too. Later in the day, in Konstanz, Dr Prien and PhD candidate, Steffen Bauer, gave us a tour of the recent exhibition, 'Welterbe des Mittelalters: 1300 Jahre Klosterinsel Reichenau', at the Archaeological State Museum of Baden-Württemberg, which featured some of the digitisation work that they carried out at Reichenau. Hearing their insight into the life at the

monasteries was valuable and led my fellow students and I to make trips to as many monastery sites and ruins in Heidelberg as possible during the remainder of the exchange! A particularly special moment that stood out for me during the 'Welterbe des Mittelalters' exhibition was Dr Prien's detailed explanation of a reproduction of a monastery plan for St. Gallen. This and many other rare books in the exhibition are attributed to abbot, poet and scholar, Walahfrid Strabo, whose ubiquitous presence in Reichenau intrigued me. Numerous rare books were displayed in striking and creative ways alongside statues, stained glass, and other cloister furnishings, making for a stimulating path through the exhibition.

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Photo Archive Project

During the exchange, I worked with my fellow students on a photo project for a collection held at the HCCH. This seemingly simple task gave me the opportunity to practice the cataloguing and preservation skills acquired from my MA course. The Photo Library of the Institute of European Art History held at the HCCH was one of my initial interests in the exchange programme as I was keen to learn more about how this library was developed by professors from the Institute. The photographs that we scanned and catalogued were taken by and of archaeologists working in Iraq during the mid-20th century. They document the presence of local people in the archaeological work, including scenes from everyday life and work around the sites, and the research undertaken at the time. Reading and interpreting the handwritten inscriptions on the backs of the photographs was also challenging as we tried to determine individuals, often referring to previous photographs as we began to recognise members of the group. My colleague and I would frequently find ourselves exclaiming 'who are you' at the photographs! Knowing that the project would last longer than the time we were spending in Heidelberg, we ensured that our records were clear and accessible to the next archivist working with the collection. It felt exciting to contribute to a project that reflected the history of the Institute and its members in addition to their archaeological work.



Gutenberg Museum, Mainz

The day trip that we took to the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz during the second week of the exchange was a cultural and educational highlight, and the first of many opportunities to reap the benefits of D-ticket train travel. We spent a day exploring the museum's many displays, including the high-security room containing four Gutenberg Bibles; the memory of seeing these objects will stay with me for a long time. As a librarian, it was a joy to see copies of this important work and detailed depictions of how they had been tailored to those who commissioned them, but also to be approached by the museum staff member in the room who wanted to talk to us about the Bibles. On display elsewhere in the museum were other religious, medical, botanical, and literary texts and works on paper, which demonstrated various experiments in the printing process from the 15th to the 18th century, and reproductions of the equipment used. The Museum was large in scope, covering early printing in East Asia, Gutenberg, his contemporaries and afterlives, through to modern day newspapers and ephemera.

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Manuscript Collection



During one of the seminar classes held in the University Library, we saw items from the manuscript collection, which was reminiscent of our classes at John Rylands Research Institute and Library in Manchester. I was keen to learn how these collections are preserved and managed in the University Archive and how they are subsequently used in exhibitions and in teaching and learning, so it was really promising to be introduced to them in a class in the first week of the exchange. There was a varied collection for us to handle and inspect in the classroom and our Heidelberg peers were kind enough to translate the discussions from German into English for us as we went along.

Digital Cultural Heritage Lecture

One of the lectures that we attended during our visit discussed participatory site stewardship and how this was implemented at Bodie State Historic Park in California. Prof Dr Nicola Lercari from the Institute for Digital Cultural Heritage Studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München presented her work with mobile phone applications and citizen science to the class. She discussed how these approaches to preservation and digitisation decentred white narratives by involving local communities. The work at Bodie also challenged the idea that only heritage professionals possess the intellectual proficiency and manual skills for protecting such sites.



I asked Prof Lercari if, given this success, there are any plans to repeat her techniques at other sites elsewhere in the world. She replied that the methodology employed there was valued by the community and academics alike, which demonstrated its validity; that said, the full scope of the method is yet to be understood and there are impeding challenges and costs. In my spare time, I frequently enjoy attending lectures like this one where I might learn about cultural heritage practices from academics and ask questions of their work. Prior to this lecture, I was unfamiliar with citizen science and participatory site stewardship, but this has given me new methodologies to consider in my studies and how to approach public engagement with research.

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Final Reflections

I would like to conclude this report by remembering the welcome that my fellow Manchester students and I received from the student cohort in Heidelberg. Their hospitality during this month was so warm and they were always looking for ways to include us in their activities, from classes that would interest us to watching Euro 2024 football matches together in the Mensa. On one occasion, we were invited to attend the Völkerkundemuseum with a Transcultural Studies class and explore 'Reflections of the Archive', the exhibition that they had curated as part of their coursework. It was very considerate of them to include us in extra activities such as this and enhance our overall experience in Heidelberg. At times when we were not scheduled to be in classes or workshops together, we still found opportunities to go for drinks and share experiences as students of cultural practices. While developing my professional network, I made lasting, personal connections with these students and am confident that our paths will cross again one day.

