

A photograph of three young women looking intently at a large digital display. The woman on the left is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. The woman in the middle is wearing glasses and a blue and white checkered shirt. The woman on the right is wearing a white polo shirt and has her hair in two braids. The background is a blurred library setting with a red wall and a white display case.

BRITISH
LIBRARY

Delivering a world of ideas and opportunities

Celebrating our impact, supporters
and partners 2023–24

Small businesses

34,000 entrepreneurs

received help across our National Network of small business support centres

Live events

52,000 in-person or digital tickets booked

for one of our events, featuring famous names and fascinating people

Leeds

86,000 people took part in one of our Leeds learning or cultural events, including at Leeds Light Night and in schools

Conservation

5,800 items benefitted from conservation and pre-digitisation work by our expert teams

Learning

230,000 children and families participated in onsite, community or national online schools events

International

1 replica copy of Magna Carta supplied for display to world leaders and policymakers at events alongside the G20 summit in Delhi

1.4

million

visits to a British Library-inspired
exhibition nationwide

A remarkable year

Every one of our supporters and partners made a difference last year. So if you were one of them – thank you. You helped us to support and inspire people across the UK and around the world.

It's been a year of highs and lows. On 28 October 2023 the Library suffered a major cyber-attack. While the collection itself was protected, the attackers severely damaged many of our underlying systems, disrupting the public services people were relying on for inspiration, knowledge or enjoyment. The renewal and modernisation of these services will be a defining challenge for us in the years ahead.

The attack felt all the more shocking as it followed a summer of celebration marking 50 years of the British Library. It was a chance to reflect on the impact our work has had since we were created in 1973 – locally, nationally and internationally too.

- We've protected, cared for and made available to the public millions of objects from our ever-growing collection
- We've helped to spark exciting breakthroughs and creative inspiration, and generate jobs and new businesses
- We've delighted audiences and told fascinating stories through exhibitions and live events nationwide.

None of this would have been possible without you, our supporters. We're grateful to every individual, trust, foundation and corporate partner that has played their part. Not just last year, but in the 50 years before as well.

We hope even more of you can join us on the next part of our journey.



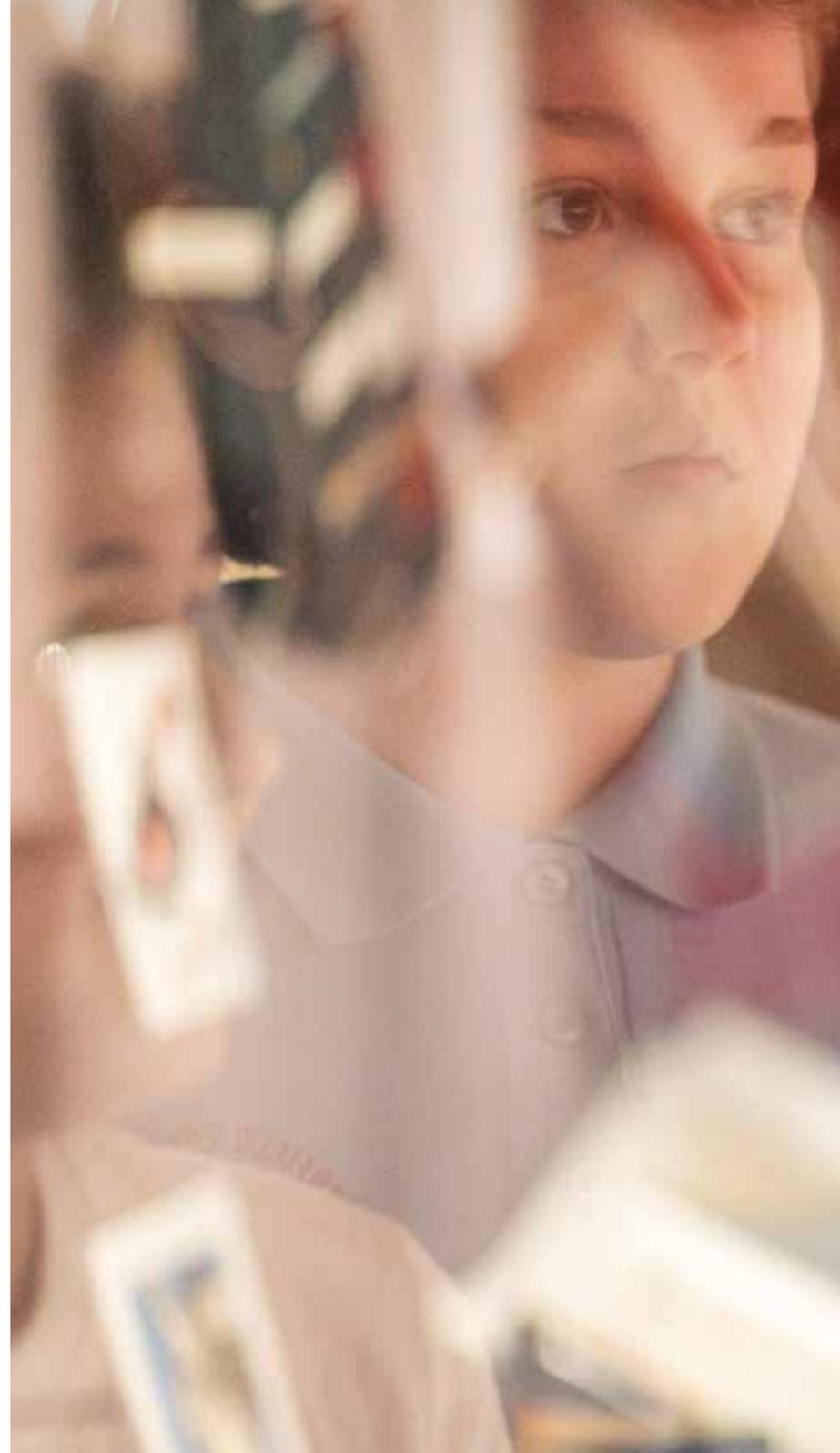
Because knowledge matters

Alongside our 50th anniversary we published *Knowledge Matters*, our new strategy that will see us through to 2030.

It includes some transformational priorities for the rest of the decade:

- **Major capital projects north and south**, including a new British Library in Leeds
- **Increasing access** to help anyone searching for inspiration and ideas
- **Ambitious exhibitions and live events** in London, around the UK and international tours
- **Working with partners to address the climate crisis**, supporting the drive for innovative solutions to some of the world's largest problems
- **Programmes for schools and communities**, including information literacy, so that people can gain the skills they need in an increasingly complex world.

Right: A school group visiting the Library. Photo by Sam Walton.





Caring for our collection

Every item in our collection has the potential to inspire. With over 170 million items in our care, our expert teams ensure they are carefully protected from damage or decay.

Thanks to their expertise we can ensure our collection is available for generations to come.

We're grateful to everyone who helped to fund our conservation work last year. You've ensured that anyone – student, researcher, history lover or simply someone curious – can access the items they need to spark knowledge or inspiration.

Protecting fascinating items

Last year over £28,000 was raised through individual donations to our conservation appeal.

More than 250 generous supporters have helped us to conserve some extraordinary documents. This includes a medieval manuscript that annulled Henry VIII's marriage to Anne of Cleves, a fragile item that sheds light on a key period in history.

It's through documents like this manuscript, which has since been on display in the National Portrait Gallery as part of a major exhibition, that we can better understand the lives of the Tudor monarchs.

Handwritten text in cursive script, likely a letter or document, written on aged paper. The text is partially obscured by a dark object (possibly a book cover or binding) at the top. The visible portion includes several lines of dense handwriting.



Supporting the next generation of conservation experts

This work wouldn't be possible without an incredible team of talented conservators.

Thanks to the Pilgrim Trust, a funder who prefers to remain anonymous and other supporters last year, we nurtured the next generation of conservators through our Conservation Internship programme.

Young professionals like Gee Roxas received one-to-one mentorship, support and the chance to work on some amazing items. Textiles, linens and fibres are especially vulnerable to deterioration. Conservation interns such as Gee are invaluable and, as a former chemist, she's equipped with a unique set of expertise and skills.

Gee has developed her knowledge and confidence, and it's preparing her for a career where she can protect more items with the power to inspire future generations.

“Most people may not immediately think of the Library as a place to find historic textiles, so I am grateful for this unique opportunity.

While the aim is to mainly help an emerging conservator such as myself to gain practical experience and develop skills that I will bring with me as I advance in my career, I am also contributing to the care of invaluable resource materials.”

Gee Roxas, Conservation intern

1,000
hours per month
spent conserving
at-risk items in
our collection



Major exhibitions and live events

Our cultural programmes generated over 1.4 million visits last year – in London, online and to partner libraries nationwide.

From ancient times to modern life, our exhibitions and public events shine a light on fascinating people and stories. Last year was no exception.

Exhibition highlights include a national celebration of the fantasy genre; an exploration of digital storytelling; the first survey of iconic British author, Malorie Blackman; and of course, our permanent and free Treasures Gallery.

Through our live and digital events people dived deeper into the stories being told in our exhibitions, or they explored literature, history, music and other themes in our wider annual programme. We are grateful to all our cultural supporters and partners.

Right: Fantasy exhibition launch event. Photo David Jensen.

Our national Fantasy exhibition

In October 2023 we opened *Fantasy: Realms of Imagination*. It was supported by tabletop games retailer Wayland Games alongside the Unwin Charitable Trust and the American Trust for the British Library.

We explored the world of fantasy from its ancient origins to the enormously diverse forms it takes today. It featured rare books and original manuscripts, iconic films and TV, alongside art, gaming and costumes. We also celebrated the fan culture that surrounds this rich and popular genre.

Wayland Games were recognised across the marketing campaign for the *Fantasy* season, at the London exhibition, and on the 80 panel exhibitions in libraries nationwide, in addition to live and digital events.



“Wayland Games is extremely proud to have supported ‘Fantasy: Realms of Imagination’... we are very grateful for the opportunity to have worked with the British Library, celebrating the genre of fantasy and sharing the creativity it inspires with a wider audience.”

Richard Lawford, Managing Director, Wayland Games



Supporting children and communities in London

We have continued to grow our learning programmes, and our local community work in the neighbourhoods that surround our home in St Pancras.

This included activities with local community groups, schools and people with complex accessibility needs. It's part of our mission to bring new audiences to the Library, and ensure we truly are a place for everyone.

Helping families

We're grateful to The Andor Charitable Trust for supporting our family station and its associated events.

Part of our larger programme for families, the family station is an inspiring resource for children and their carers when they visit the Library. It was designed in consultation with families and it's suitable for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

We were also proud to play a small part in helping people affected by the energy crisis. Across the winter months we delivered multiple sessions that provided a safe and warm space for local families to relax in, alongside a drink, creative resources, sensory play and books.

Right: UK Children's Laureate Joseph Coelho speaking at the Library. Photo by David Jensen.

“Very friendly and welcoming. Such a wonderful, creative and free open learning environment. The resources are great!”

Family programme feedback

“This is the best day ever! Thank you for inviting me to your very fun party.”

Daisy (8 years old)

A man with curly hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white t-shirt with a fruit illustration, is speaking at a white podium. He is smiling and looking towards the right. A microphone is positioned in front of him. The background is a blue screen with white text and graphics. The text includes 'FLOWER', 'BIG', 'Longlisted for the CIP Carnegie Medal 2018', and 'Poems'. There are also white floral graphics on the screen.

195,000
primary school
pupils took part in
our national 'authors
into schools' live-
stream events

Longlisted
for the
CIP Carnegie
Medal 2018

Poems



Supporting Camden schools

Thanks to the success of our schools programme, supported by the Old Possum's Practical Trust, we were invited to participate in Camden's *Every Child a Reader* literacy initiative, and join its steering committee. We provided a range of local programming across the year including: writing workshops for primary school pupils; teacher discussion group sessions; and visits to schools during the week of World Book Day.

Our community hub

In 2023 we opened The Last Word community hub on the Library Piazza. It's a new space for the community led by a dedicated Local Opportunities Manager. Offering a range of activities for and by local groups, it draws inspiration from the items and stories in our care.



Left: Schools programme activity in our galleries. Photo by Sam Walton
Right: The Last Word community hub. Photo by Sam Walton.

Supporting and inspiring people across Leeds

We've expanded our exhibition, live events and learning programmes in Leeds as we work towards opening a new British Library in the city.

We want to help more local people to develop their skills, feel inspired and realise their potential. It builds on our decades-long commitment to Yorkshire.

Highlights last year included our large-scale installation for Leeds Light Night; exhibitions and partnerships with Leeds Library, Leeds Art Gallery and other organisations; the culmination of Leeds Year of Culture 2023 and the gift of a special book for every child born in Leeds that year; and workshops for pupils in local schools.

“It was an amazing opportunity that formed friendships between us... The premiere helped us to see our efforts on a big screen and realise the size of our project.”

Pupil from Elliott Hudson Sixth Form College

Right: An installation at Leeds Light Night. Photo by Abbie Jennings.

Helping creative young people to flourish

With support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund we developed a creative arts project for young people in Leeds. It was designed to help talented pupils build the skills they might need for a career in the arts, and to strengthen local pride.

Led by 15 students from Elliott Hudson Sixth Form College, the pupils worked with local artists, arts facilitators and British Library staff. Together they developed a unique animated film – *Myths and Legends: A South Leeds Odyssey* – celebrating the rich heritage and stories of South Leeds. It drew inspiration from Anansi, the revered Ghanaian-Caribbean folklore spider trickster.

The students commissioned Leeds-based poet Khadijah Ibrahiim to craft a new narrative for the film, and two graduates from the Northern Film School helped them to bring their story to life.

The project culminated with a red carpet premiere in the city to celebrate the students' achievements, and the film has since been on display in libraries across Leeds.

18,000
people viewed our free arts
installation, part of Leeds
Light Night



Impact across the UK

Our work extends far beyond our home in Yorkshire and London. We reach deep into communities across the country.

As the UK's national library we support local activities and help to inspire regional audiences.

For example, last year we facilitated 80 panel exhibition displays as part of our *Fantasy* season across a network of regional library partnerships. We also delivered *British Library on Tour*, which provides support to local institutions alongside major items for public display.

751,000
people enjoyed
one of our Fantasy
exhibition displays
across 80 libraries
nationwide

Right: Iconic First Folio engraved portrait of William Shakespeare, published 1623.

Sharing Shakespeare's First Folio with Lancashire

Last year we were delighted to collaborate with the recently-opened Shakespeare North Playhouse in Prescott, Lancashire, through our *British Library on Tour* programme.

Alongside the advice and support the programme provides, we also lent the Playhouse an iconic item from the national collection – a Shakespeare First Folio. It featured in their exhibition commemorating the 400th anniversary since this book of plays was published, alongside their theatrical production of *The Book of Will*, which tells the story of the Folio's creation in 1623.

Programmes such as these – supporting communities through their local cultural institutions – make a real difference. Particularly for areas that may have suffered economic challenges and hardship in recent years or feel left behind.

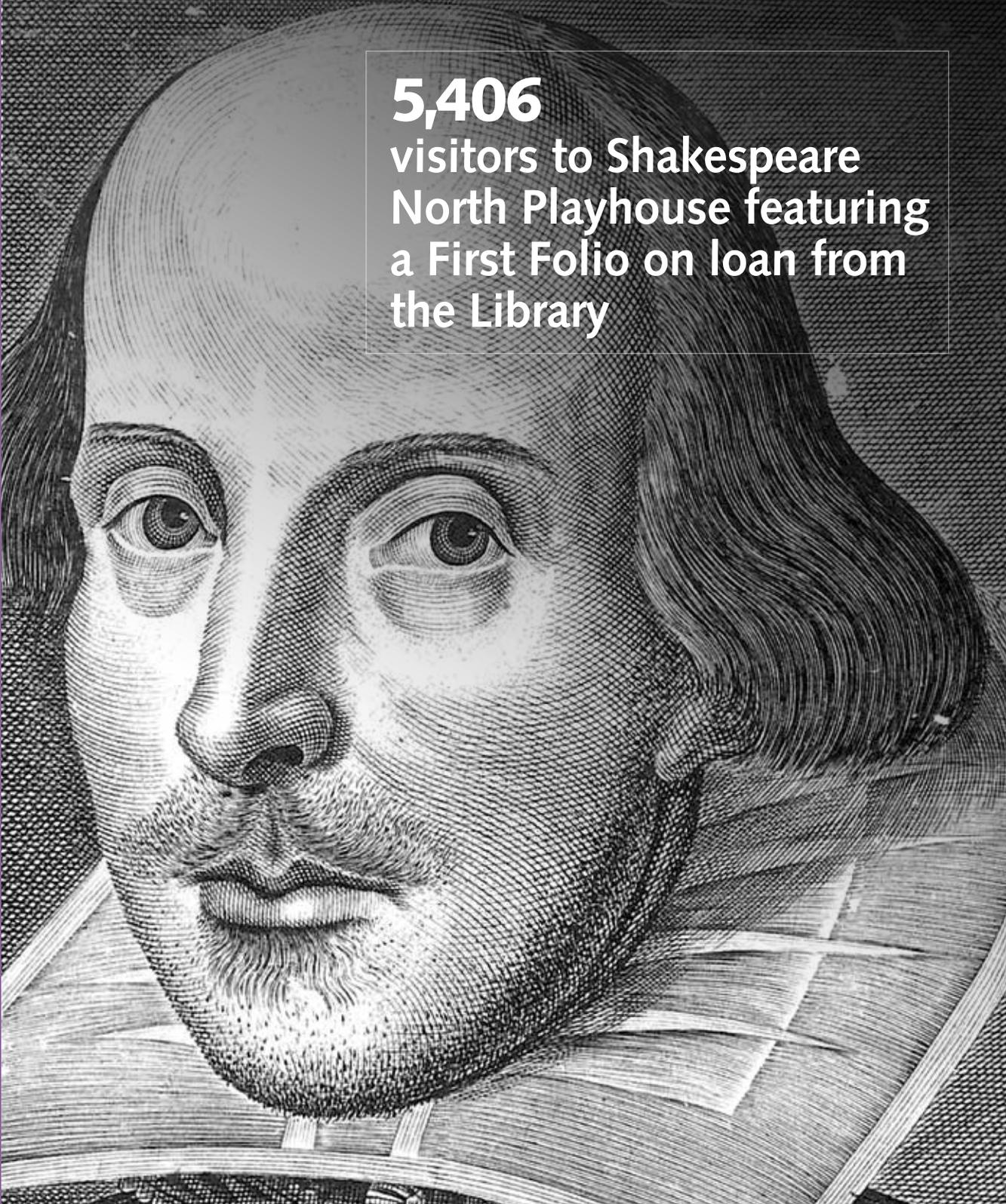
There was a real sense of pride in hosting such a prestigious item, and the impact

locally was strong. The Playhouse was able to reach new audiences and break down barriers. 45% of visitors had never visited it before, while for 1 in 20 visitors, it was their first experience of ever seeing an exhibition. Staff also valued the collaboration. So much so, they have since decided to expand their exhibition programme.

This transformative impact demonstrates the power of such partnerships. We're grateful to The Dorset Foundation for making this project possible, and look forward to touring more treasures to further venues in the years to come.

“Just brilliant! We feel so privileged to have visited the exhibition – and in our home town of Prescot.”

“[It's] good to have a 'national treasure' so close to home!”



5,406
visitors to Shakespeare
North Playhouse featuring
a First Folio on loan from
the Library

Around the world

We build connections across borders and collaborate with international partners to support research, innovation and understanding.

In recent years we've worked with organisations around the world, including France, India and China, leading to a range of positive outcomes.



Bringing the Silk Roads to the world

One example of our deep commitment to global partnerships is a pioneering collaboration: the International Dunhuang Programme (IDP). We're grateful to its many supporters, including the Bei Shan Tang and Dunhuang Foundations and the Sino-British Fellowship Trust among many others.

One of the most important discoveries in the last century was in a sealed cave near Dunhuang, China. It contained thousands of documents, paintings and other artefacts that shine a light on life and culture along the Eastern Silk Road trading network.

In 1993 we hosted an international gathering of conservators and curators from around the world, who agreed to collaborate on a unique joint programme.

Left: International Library Leaders Programme delegates. Photo by Eugenio Falcioni.

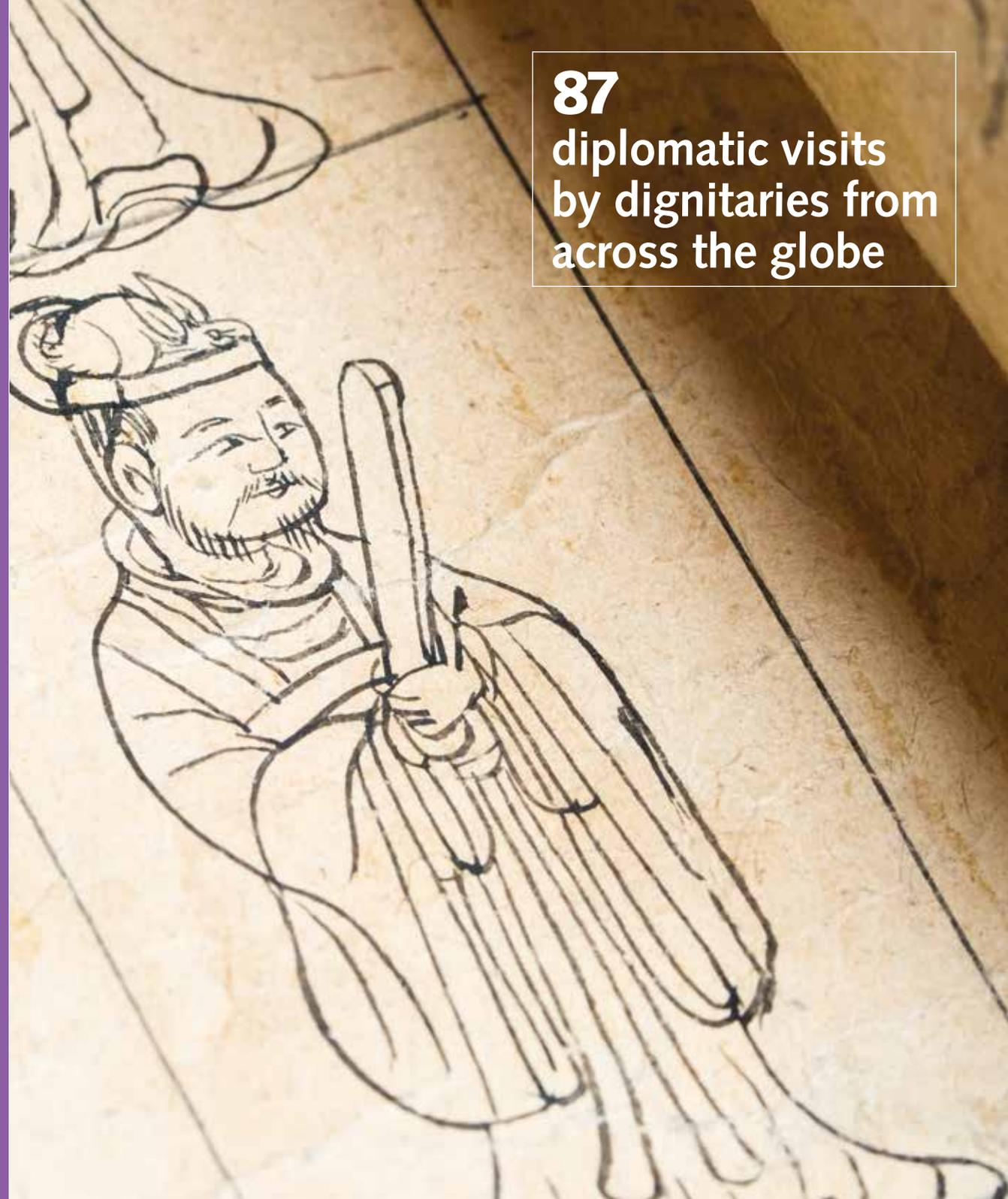
From this start, we went on to launch a website that brought these once dispersed collections together again online. But as technology advanced, the site no longer met people's needs.

So last year, with generous support from The Polonsky Foundation, we launched a new IDP website – a single entry point for researchers and the general public. It features enhanced capabilities, a new learning resource for the public, and there's more content to come.

The website is helping to strengthen the world's understanding of this story, and it's sparking exciting new projects too. For example, we'll be shining our own spotlight on the Silk Road as part of an exhibition you can enjoy in autumn 2024.

87
diplomatic visits
by dignitaries from
across the globe

Right: Ink on paper Chinese manuscript from year 978, featuring the 12 spirits of the zodiac animals, each portrayed as officials. Or.8210/S.612



Looking ahead to our gardening exhibition

Join us as we celebrate one of Britain's favourite pastimes, featuring exhibitions nationwide and a series of live events.

We spoke to lead curator, Maddy Smith, to find out what visitors can expect.

Tell us about the exhibition

People in Britain love gardening. Enjoyed by millions, up and down the country, it's a rich and deep story just waiting to be told.

In our exhibition we will reveal the impact gardening has on people, communities and the environment. Visitors will experience how it has changed over the centuries and the part it plays in our lives today, including its role in helping to tackle the climate crisis.

Below: Details of tulips from Hortus Eystettensis. Originally published in Nuremberg, 1613.



We will feature personal stories and newly-commissioned films, alongside a remarkable range of books, manuscripts, sounds and artwork drawn from our collection. But our exhibition in London is just the start. There will be a diverse programme of live events with major names, dozens of regional exhibitions across the UK, alongside school and family activities. We can't wait!

Why did your team choose gardening as a theme?

First and foremost, given how popular it is we thought it would make a fantastic story to explore. But we were also aware of just how often gardening and its related areas feature across our collections. So the Library is uniquely placed to explore this story: how it's evolved across the centuries and is still developing today.

Tell us some of the items visitors can enjoy?

We'll be displaying some fascinating items from our collection. It includes some of the world's earliest known gardening manuscripts, such as an Anglo-Saxon illustrated herbal, describing plants and their

characteristics, and King George III's copy of Hortus Eystettensis (1613) – the most valuable botanical work in existence. Among the more contemporary items, we're excited to commission new films with gardeners and community groups to bring a modern view to the show.

We're grateful to our gardening season supporters, including the late Mel Seiden whose bequest is supporting both the exhibition and the fantastic book that will accompany it.



Looking forward

There's lots going on as we look ahead, including new or expanding programmes delivering positive change.

With so much taking place there is bound to be a project that aligns with your interests too. So please get in touch and let's have a conversation.

Together we can bring inspiration, knowledge and enjoyment to more people and communities nationwide.



You can help us to...

Exhibitions and live events

- present major exhibitions over the next few years including on gardening, secret maps and fairytales
- host our annual live events, such as Literature at the Library, Music and Performance, LGBTQ+, and Food Season
- share more collection items and exhibitions with people across the country and all over the world.

Collections and curators

- add more items to the collection through major acquisitions, or by supporting the work of our expert curatorial teams
- provide expert care to more precious items so they're around for future generations to enjoy.

Business and entrepreneurs

- support anyone with a great idea, so they can turn it into a successful and growing business.

Left: Artist impression of the entrance to the British Library at Temple Works, Leeds.

Learning and communities

- inspire more children and families across London and Leeds, and expand our programmes for people with complex and additional needs.

Climate action

- support scientists and innovators as they seek solutions to the climate crisis, using the rich data and ideas held within our archives.

New spaces north and south

- transform the reach and impact of the Library with a new, permanent site in Leeds, supporting local regeneration – just as it did around our home in St Pancras
- redevelop our London site, including state-of-the-art exhibition, learning and event spaces fit for the 21st century and beyond.

From top left: Conservation work, photo by Sam Walton; a Business & IP Centre *National Women's Enterprise Week* event, with Alison Cork; artist impression of the St Pancras building expansion; a family visit to one of our galleries.



supporters@bl.uk
support.bl.uk

Charitable Status

The British Library is a charity under the 2006 Charities Act. However, as an Exempt Charity we are not regulated by the Charity Commission but instead by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We are registered with the Fundraising Regulator, and act in line with the Code of Fundraising Practice.

A gift to us attracts the same tax benefits as to any other charity.

Cover: A school group visiting the Library.
Photo by Sam Walton.

Right: Audiences enjoying a live event inside the Pigott Theatre.

