

A Study Abroad Adventure in London

By Taylor Atkinson
and Jessica Dai

For a month this summer, we had the great opportunity to study abroad in London, England. Through the University of Southern Mississippi's British Studies Program, twenty-four graduate LIS students from around the US and two USM professors visited about twenty British libraries, archives, and museums. We had the chance to participate in behind-the-scenes tours, see unique items and special collections, and speak to a variety of LIS professionals.

In particular, we want to highlight two of our favorite visits:

As a legal deposit library, the British Library automatically receives a copy of every published book in the UK and Ireland directly from the publisher. Since they have such a large and constant influx of

books, the library has an underground depository, which is the largest subterranean facility in Europe, and an off-site storage building. The library uses an intricate retrieval system to deliver books for use only in the reading rooms, as the books cannot be taken out of the library and the stacks are closed.

In order to use the reading rooms, visitors must have a reader's card. To obtain a reader's card, one must have two proofs of identification and a list of books they require. Basically, the British Library wants to make sure that readers are using their books and not the space for studying and/or personal reasons because space is limited.

The British Library has many functions, but from our tour and research visits there, we quickly realized that the library is geared towards those with research needs.

Since one can only use their materials in the reading room for a limited amount of time – it is not a 24 hours, 7 days a week kind of library – it is not the best place for catching up on the newest issue of *National Geographic* or reading Tom Clancy's latest book. That being said, if they have something you need to reference or use for research, do not hesitate to get a reader's card. It is exciting using primary sources in their rare book reading room or actually getting to use a card catalog in their humanities reading room – two things that Jessica did during her visits there. If you are ever in the area, it is definitely worth a visit.

For our last official class visit, we toured the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). Founded in 1830, it is a highly specialized body that focuses on advancing the geographical sciences. Society is a membership organization, with over 15,000 members and Fellows in 100 countries.



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One of our professors is a Fellow of the Society, and so we were able to have an in-depth tour of some of their collections in the Foyle Reading Room.

RGS's collections encompass nearly 2 million items, which include artifacts, books, maps, manuscripts, and personal effects from famous explorers whose expeditions were partially or fully funded by the Society. Eugene Rae, the Principal Librarian, created what he called a "Hot and Cold" exhibit, meaning it covered exploration from the deserts of Africa to the Arctic and Antarctica.

We were shown the sketches, compass, sextants, and hats of famous African explorers David Livingstone and Henry Stanley, items left behind from Captain Robert Scott's ill-fated final Antarctic expedition in 1912, and the boot and goggles from Mount Everest explorer George Mallory, who died on the mountain in 1924.

Although the Society is essentially a members-only organization, use of the collections and archives is encouraged, though researchers must undergo a registration process similar to the British Library's. In addition, the Society still issues travel grants for expeditions, fieldwork, student research, and teaching. Lastly, various exhibitions

are opened to the public throughout the year at the Society's facilities, and we had the chance to see two: the Environmental Photographer of the Year, and the Travel Photographer of the Year. Both beautifully showcased breathtaking images and films from around the world.

In short, London is full of treasured cultural heritage institutions, and there is something to interest everybody. We had a fantastic time exploring some of these places with USM's British Studies Program, and hope we'll have a chance to return.

