

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDP) – CDP3 Cohort 2022/23

Call for HEI Partners/Academic Supervisors

Research Theme 2: Football fanzines and fan communities in the digital age: Challenges for publishing, reading and collecting fanzines

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Context & Summary

This Collaborative Doctoral Partnership project aims to support research that will give greater exposure to the Library's extensive collection of printed football fanzines and its efforts to develop the [UK Web Archive](#)'s collections of sites related to football, zines and fandom. The British Library is responsible for the UK Web Archive (a partnership of all six UK Legal Deposit Libraries) and holds substantial football related collections.

The main purpose of the research will be to investigate the way football fanzines and fan websites communicate with their readers, and how they contribute to building fan communities and giving voice to the concerns of fans, in a forum separate from, and often critical of, clubs and organisational structures.

The Library holds an impressive, but under-exploited, collection of the football fanzines that emerged as an offshoot of punk culture, and it continues to build on those collections. While the late 1980s represent a high point when many new fanzines were established, their transition into the era of digital publishing has been uneven. Some print editions have been replaced by websites and e-zines with fan input, others use their online communities to add to the content of the print edition and extend its reach.

This doctoral project will investigate the extent and impact of digital publishing for football fanzines and consider how fanzines and fan forums can be archived, preserved and made accessible where they transition from print to digital formats or exist in dual formats.

Research Areas

The primary focus of the research will be the extensive collections of printed football fanzines received through legal deposit from the 1970s onwards, alongside the wide range of football-related websites collected from 2005 onwards (with a majority 2013-present). The materials are research-ready, but some catalogue records are basic and there is scope for their enhancement in the context of the research project).

Much of the existing research on football fanzines pre-dates the move towards digital publishing, although there has been some more recent research on fan forums linked to fanzines. There is a growing interest in academic work on zines more generally, with recent studies considering their readership and undertaking ethnographic research on producers of zines. Given the relatively limited

extent of research on football fanzines, there is broad scope for original research, particularly on the impact of new technologies on the ways that fanzines are created, circulated and experienced, and how fans engage with fan websites. The CDP project proposed here offers an opportunity for new research that encompasses both print and digital materials, but it does not seek to prescribe a particular set of research questions, and the material lends itself to a wide range of themes.

The research could take a qualitative approach tracing the development and digital transition of selected fanzines or fanzines related to a single club. Alternatively, the project could be approached thematically (through content analysis or visual research methods), considering representation or expression within the fanzines. Depending on the interests of the academic partner and the doctoral researcher, it would be possible to look at the portrayal of gender and the representation of women both in the game and fan communities, or to consider the representation of sexual identity through fanzines from a critical perspective, both to highlight progressive elements and to understand the challenges to change within the game.

There is scope too to examine racism in football and efforts to challenge and stand against racism within fanzine communities. It is possible that the extension of online fan forums has opened up fanzine websites to the expression of racial hatred or nativism similar to that found on social media more widely, in a way that runs counter to the fanzines' origins in punk and alternative culture. It would be possible to pose questions about editorial control and codes of conduct within fan forums and fanzine websites.

The research could also investigate the way changes in football ownership and ticket pricing have impacted on the social class background and economic status of matchday fans. It may further explore the degree to which fanzine websites and online forums have extended the reach of fanzines and enabled those who follow a team but are unable to attend matches to be part of an online fan community.

Benefits & Training Opportunities for the CDP Student

The project will be an opportunity for the PhD student to work behind the scenes of a major cultural institution and to contribute to an understanding of its wide-ranging collections. The student will have access to an extensive collection of fanzines that is unlikely to be matched by any other repository. The project will directly inform the work of the Contemporary British Publications team and will give the student the satisfaction of knowing that their work can be translated directly into policy and practical actions to improve the collecting and profile of this material. The student's subject knowledge and the research findings will be important to shaping the way collecting of digital and dual format fanzines is managed.

The student will gain access to conferences and training workshops, allowing for both learning and career networking opportunities. The Library's main project supervisor has the brief of engaging externally to promote research on web archives, and the project would allow the student to participate in this work.

In addition to writing for a research audience, the student will be able to gain experience in writing and presenting for a wider / lay audience. Where appropriate, students will have the opportunity to write or contribute to:

- Blog posts written for a general, interested audience (e.g. on the Social Sciences, Web Archive or Digital Scholarship blogs)
- Reports written for policy or operational use by British Library staff (e.g. descriptions of platforms, types of publication or means of identifying digital fanzines)
- Presenting to Library staff, e.g. through our Bitesize Talks or 21st Century Curators series

- Organising or participating in public events, such as our Digital Conversations series

The project is located within the Contemporary British Publications team, and the student will have access to advice and support from across this team, including hands-on experience of using Web Archiving tools. Additionally, the student will be able to learn and gain advice from the Digital Preservation and Digital Scholarship teams. The student will have access to British Library training events, such as the Digital Scholarship programme.

Application Deadline

Completed application forms and brief CVs must be submitted to Research.Development@bl.uk by **Friday 10 December 2021, 5 pm**.

Late applications cannot be accepted.

Before submitting your application, please ensure you have read the *Information for HEI applicants* on the British Library website and are aware of the specific characteristics of the AHRC CDP scheme, the selection criteria and the envisaged timetable.

Contact for Queries

For questions on the application form and process:

British Library Research Development Office
Research.Development@bl.uk

For queries regarding the research theme:

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