



INSTITUTE OF  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH

SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

# Institute of Historical Research

Our Mission and  
Strategy, 2020–2025

[history.ac.uk](https://history.ac.uk)







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# Our mission

As the UK's national centre for history, the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) is a collaborative and publicly focused organisation for those who study the past in the 2020s.

Our mission is to:

- ▶ **champion** the value and importance of history;
- ▶ **enable** and **nurture** the current and next generation of historians, wherever they are to be found;
- ▶ **support** the historical community through the care and development of our important library and archive collections, our publications and our digital resources;
- ▶ **facilitate** and **produce** ambitious and innovative historical research;
- ▶ **connect, listen to** and **advocate for** historians, mobilising our unique national and international intellectual and professional network;
- ▶ **engage** and **include** scholars and the public in historical research in all its diversity and richness.





# What we do

The IHR **champions the value and importance of history** in public life and as an academic discipline. We offer **training and support** to the current and next generation of historians. We provide the **intellectual infrastructure** for historians, through ambitious collaborative research initiatives, seminar series and events, digital resources, and a 200,000 volume specialist library.

Most importantly, we act as a **hub for innovation** in the discipline and in interdisciplinary ways of thinking. We connect scholars, communities, policy-makers, artists, archives, libraries, museums and industry to create new forms of knowledge that speak to contemporary concerns and intellectual challenges.

We are driven by a core set of values that are central to the way we work as an organisation, how we work with others, and what we wish for the discipline as a whole. These are: curiosity, integrity, inclusivity, collaboration, care and equality.



# Our history

The Institute of Historical Research was founded in 1921 to address the limited opportunities for historical research and training in the UK. Born in the aftermath of the First World War, and after the right to vote was extended to some women and more men than ever before, the Institute was designed to be a unique and distinctive organisation that worked for the good of the profession, transforming the study of the past into a powerful tool to inform policy.

The IHR was significant in its aim to place the UK historical profession in a global context, bringing international scholars together in a variety of fora. It was designed to provide historically informed research to government, to serve as a repository of bibliographic information, to be a testing ground for new historical ideas and methods, and a meeting place for historians of all nationalities.

Today's academic landscape is very different from that of the 1920s. However, there is still an urgent need for a special and singular institution both to integrate our now much richer, diverse and more complex historical research culture, and to provide historically informed thought-leadership within and beyond the academy and within an international environment.

**“That there was a need for an historical laboratory, in which historians should be trained to test their materials and investigate for themselves as chemists, physicists, and biologists were expected to do, was a conception that did not occur to men’s minds.”**

Professor Albert Pollard,  
IHR founding director, 1920



**“As the IHR begins its second century, there remains an urgent need to give historians, wherever they are to be found, a home for innovation and free-thinking. The Institute is this home. It must reflect that the strength of the discipline is to be found in its diversity.”**

Professor Jo Fox, Director of the  
Institute of Historical Research  
and Professor of Modern History  
at the University of London



# Why we matter

There is today a glaring need for historically literate discussion and intervention on the most pressing challenges of our time: from the human implications of Artificial Intelligence to mass migration; from climate change to health and well-being; from poverty to globalisation; from political and economic instability to human rights and the survival of liberal democracy. Historians speak to all these issues, helping to explain human behaviour, and identifying and understanding the significance of long-term trends and patterns. History underpins our cultures and informs our identities. Historians have a duty not only to shed light on how these identities have taken shape, but to call to account those who misuse the past in pursuit of political or other ideological ends.

The skills the discipline embeds are urgently needed in societal, cultural and economic terms: critical thinking, creativity, human understanding, empathy, clear expression, and the ability to interrogate an argument and hold it to the highest evidential standards.

In order to meet these critical needs, we require well-trained, engaged historians and historical professionals, drawn from across our wide community of researchers. The IHR brokers relationships among the best-placed experts, wherever they are to be found in order to create research partnerships that will meet societal challenges. We bring together historians and researchers from other disciplines, in our universities and beyond, in the UK and internationally. Collectively, we must devise meaningful research projects in key areas that promise disciplinary and interdisciplinary innovation, and open new ways of thinking in order to engage with issues facing our society and to enrich our culture.

For all these reasons, we must advocate for the continuing value and importance of history as a discipline.



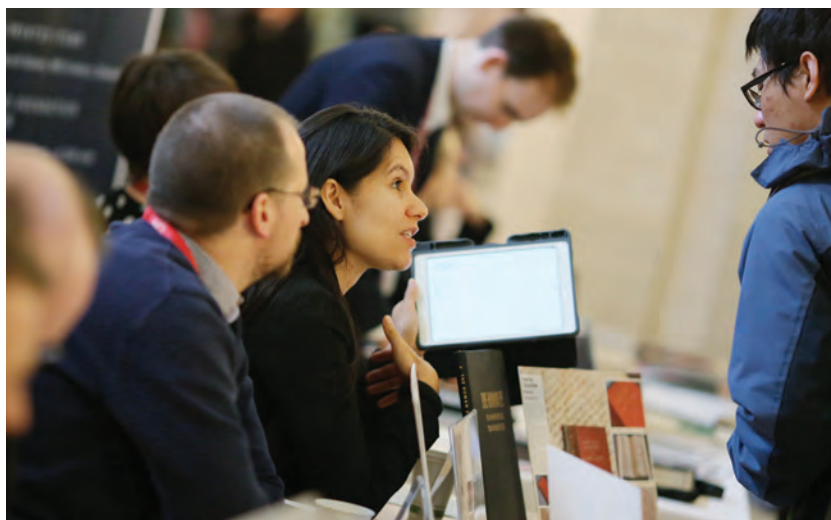
# Serving the profession

The IHR serves the national community of historians rather than any one institution. Our purpose is to actively engage and support historians wherever they are to be found, including those who benefit from our thriving research networks, our cross-sector partnerships, and local expertise. With a track-record in shaping historical studies over the past century, the IHR will do what others cannot do readily: channelling the skills and energy found across the national community of historians to confront broad conceptual and disciplinary questions and to find practical solutions to research challenges and societal problems.


The IHR retains a focus on supporting life-long training and encouraging critical thinking on why and how we study the past. In this way the Institute will be working to anticipate the challenges historians across the discipline will face in the next decade.

Because of this, we must be able to respond in a flexible and nimble way to the dominant concerns of historians in the 2020s: precarity, inclusivity, public history, interdisciplinarity, digital infrastructure, the Research Excellence Framework, the funding landscape, open access, lack of space for departments to think conceptually, next generation web technology to create new historical communities, and the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline.

We will become a natural hub for bringing scholars together in order to meet large-scale research challenges, through our extensive network of partners and without the bias of institutional affiliation. We know how to manage large-scale research endeavours that serve to benefit individual researchers and the ambitious questions they address.





A photograph of a diverse group of people, likely an audience, looking attentively towards the left. In the foreground, a man with a short beard and a blue sweater is looking intently. To his right, a man with a beard and a grey shirt is resting his chin on his hand, also looking in the same direction. In the background, a woman wearing a purple headscarf and glasses is visible. The image has a warm, slightly blurred background, suggesting a large gathering or event.

Our expertise and environment  
make us ideally placed to provide  
thought leadership in the discipline  
and to speak out on issues of  
disciplinary importance. We do so  
with authority – we are trusted,  
and we have a nationally and  
internationally recognised function  
and identity.

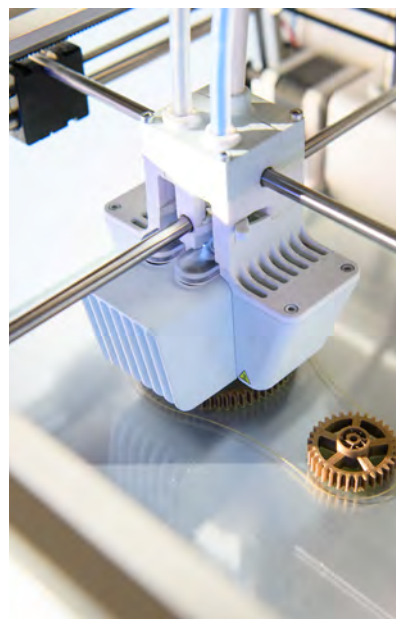


# Our priorities

## Digital history

We have been a leading innovator in digital history since its early inception. The IHR is also an established champion of technology's value in generating and promoting new historical research. We are well-placed to build on that tradition, repurposing it for the 2020s. In today's IHR, digital is central to everything we do, and to how we frame and approach the past. The digital age presents new challenges as to how we record and preserve our past: what will be the historical evidence of the future? What should we archive and how? What new skills will historians, librarians and archivists need to analyse and store our archival trace?

Our specialist teams will surface the transformative effects of new technologies on disciplinary practice, drawing on their capabilities in developing widely used online research tools, such as the **Bibliography of British and Irish History** and **British History Online**, and mapping the effects of digital technologies onto historical method. Their work will represent a way of thinking that cuts across all aspects of the Institute's research and that of the wider historical community.



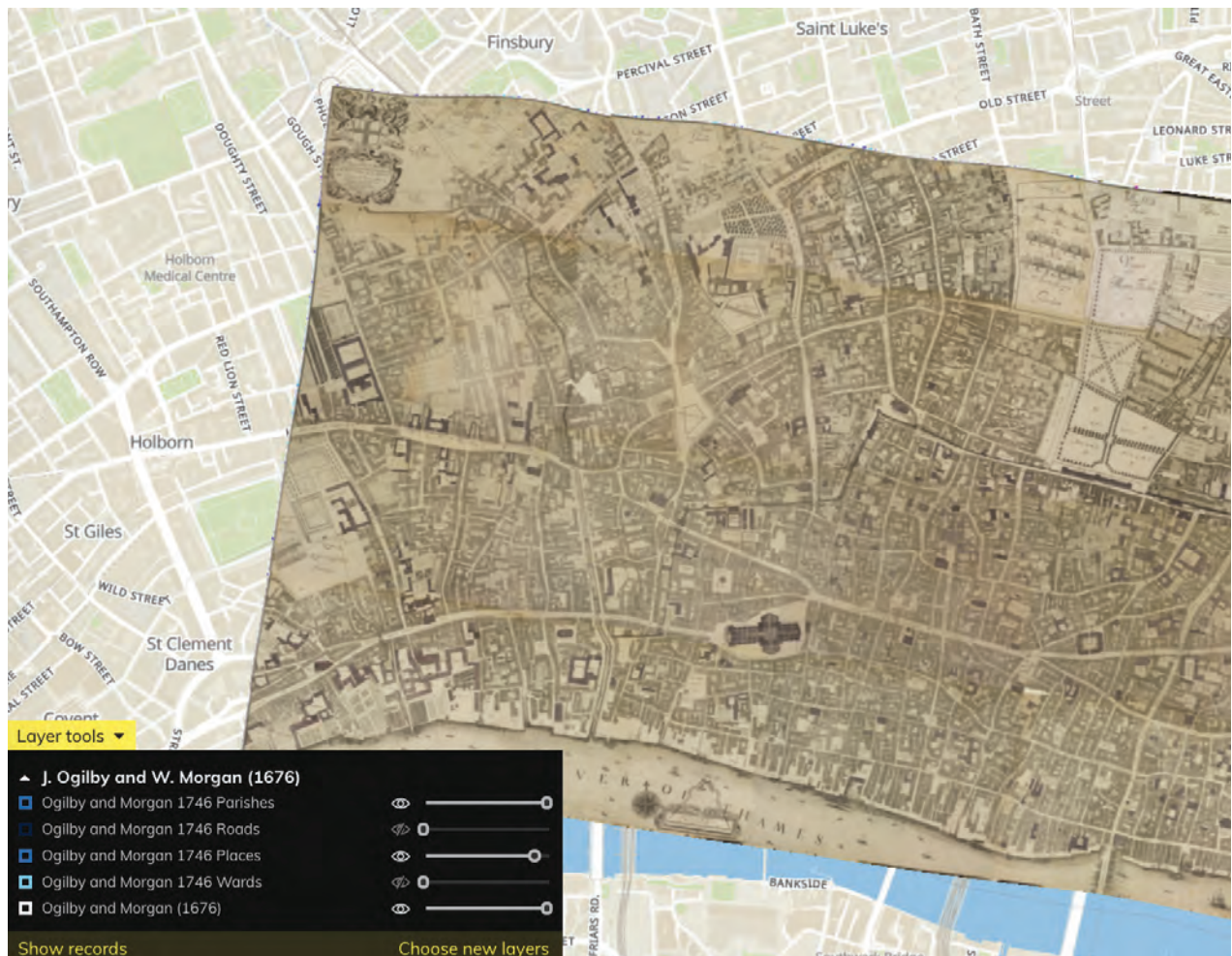


## Centre for the History of People, Place and Community

The IHR's newly created Centre for the History of People, Place and Community positions local and urban histories in a global context. The Centre will make a distinctive contribution to community engagement, by demonstrating how organic research has profound implications for the future of the discipline and for the creation of the 'archive' in the 2020s, as well as co-producing engaging content for wider public audiences.

The Centre is home to the **Victoria County History (VCH)**, a 120-year-old research project that combines the highest quality research and publishing with new technologies: in 2020, the VCH launched its first smartphone app which enables users to access local histories of England from anywhere in the country.

The Centre is also home to the cutting-edge Heritage Lottery Funded project, **Layers of London**. A digital mapping project, Layers of London creatively engages communities in charting the capital's rich, diverse history, and regularly features as a model example of engagement-focused research.



## Inclusive histories

The Institute's new focus on inclusive histories provides a welcoming intellectual space for the further development of marginalised or 'silenced' histories. In this way, we seek to transform what we understand a 'historian' to be, working to ensure that our community of historians is rich in its diversity. Providing a home where the voices of under-represented groups across the discipline may be heard is of critical importance. The IHR will work closely with disciplinary partners at the Royal Historical Society and Historical Association to advance critical work on gender equality, BME representation and advancement, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and the rights of scholars and students with disabilities.

The IHR's concern is not only with ensuring greater representation and diversity within the profession, but also ensuring that 'silenced' voices and marginalised histories are included in our renderings of history in schools, in research agendas and public engagement. We are currently working with the Runnymede Trust and the Stephen Lawrence Research Centre on initiatives to 'decolonise' the history curriculum, and to address an attainment gap between BME and white scholars in the historical profession.





## Public initiatives

History is ever-present in our lives, and there remains extraordinary public interest in the discipline. Whether through cultural expression, in the arts and creative industries, or through expert advice to policy makers, historians have never been more important to public life. The IHR will specialise in creative and innovative events to excite the public's interest in the past and to provoke discussion and provide historical advice on issues of national and global importance.

Instances of recent and regular initiatives include public debates, historically themed performances and concerts, family history workshops, wikithons, and the launch of the IHR's podcast and blog series. The past matters to all of us. The Institute will work hard to provide public access to events and activities informed by the latest research, and to offer services to policy-makers seeking to benefit from informed and new thinking in order to confront societal challenges. Our public initiatives and events take place both at the IHR's home in London and nationally and internationally through institutional partnerships – bringing the Institute's work to new audiences, across the UK and overseas.



## Training and support

For a century and more, the Institute has provided historians with training and guidance in research methods and skills. In doing so, we have developed an expertise in providing state-of-the-art, relevant and professionally targeted training. We focus on research practices at a discipline level that are often lost between teaching and personal research, and we assist researchers in translating those skills and methods into interdisciplinary and non-academic environments. We will be updating our training programmes to meet the needs of researchers in the 2020s. We do so with confidence: the IHR has a breadth and depth of experience in training that is unsurpassed in the UK.

We have a track-record in supporting postgraduates across the UK, regardless of affiliation, with doctoral and post-doctoral training opportunities. In addition, the IHR's established fellowships programme supports and nurtures some of our most talented early career historians at a key stage in their professional and intellectual development.





## Our library collections and spaces

Our library, designed specifically to facilitate original research, and our spaces, designed for study, events, seminars, and conversations, occupy a central London location at the heart of Bloomsbury's knowledge quarter. We are open to all and free to access.

The majority of our library collections can be consulted immediately within our reading rooms, and represent one of the world's greatest concentrations of published primary materials, journals, archival guides and supporting historical reference works in British, European and American history. Research is also supported by a staff of expert librarians and extensive digital resources. The library and archives will extend its support for history librarians across the UK, continue to open up and diversify its collections and underpin the IHR's developing research and training programme.



## Publishing and scholarly communications

The IHR is well known as a high-quality history publisher with responsibility for a range of titles: from our academic journal *Historical Research* to dedicated series for edited collections and scholarly monographs. The IHR website, now redesigned and relaunched, serves the discipline as an accessible source of information for historians worldwide.

The early 2020s will see important initiatives in IHR publishing. These include an open access book series for early career researchers; experimentation in publishing formats; closer integration of print and digital publishing technologies; innovations in online communication and information sharing; and a close partnership with the new University of London Press.

The coming years will also bring challenges to established forms of publishing. Working with others, the IHR will serve as a neutral arena for debates in history publishing, and play a leading role in promoting sustainable publishing models, of value to historians as authors and readers.





# The IHR in numbers

(Figures refer to the academic year 2018–19 unless otherwise stated)

12.5 million

page views of IHR digital resources

2000

contributors to the Layers of London  
digital mapping project

615,000

records of books, articles and chapters in  
the Bibliography of British and Irish History  
(January 2020)

700

individual research seminars held at the IHR

200,000

published primary sources and guides in  
the IHR Wohl Library

120

years of the Victoria County History (VCH)

62,000

downloads of IHR books and chapters, as free  
open access

75

seminar series run from the IHR

25,000

visits to the Library

21

junior fellows based at the IHR (2019-20)

2500

attendees of IHR events other than seminars

17

English counties currently researching their  
history for the VCH

# What the IHR means to historians

(Responses taken from the '#myihr Survey', summer 2019)

'The IHR is the centre of historical research in the UK'.

'The Institute provides leadership in the discipline'.

'IHR digital resources keep me up-to-date with new thinking and publications in my field'.

'The Library! It has unparalleled research content and is a great place to work'.

'The Institute hosts an amazing range of seminars, with the highest-quality speakers'.

'IHR events generate numerous networking opportunities'.

'It's the best place to meet historians of all kinds from around the country, and overseas'.

'The IHR is a home for the research community. Research can be isolating and there's nothing like the Institute anywhere else'.

'The people I've met at the IHR have remained colleagues throughout my life'.

'The IHR provides essential and wide-ranging support for early career historians'.

'The Institute's open and available to all, at every career stage, and also vitally to researchers without an affiliation'.

'The IHR is unique as a home for History in the UK'.





## Become a part of our community

We welcome historians of all kinds to take part in activities and research opportunities at the IHR. Join a research seminar, come to our public lectures and events, use our library, attend a training course, become a student, or partner with us on one of our strategic initiatives. Get in touch to learn more about our 2020–2025 Strategy and how you can be a part of it.

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