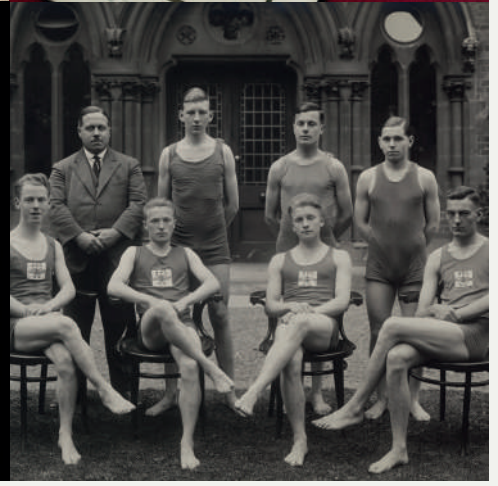
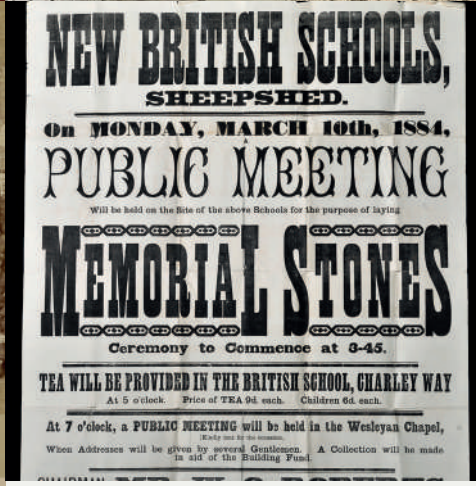
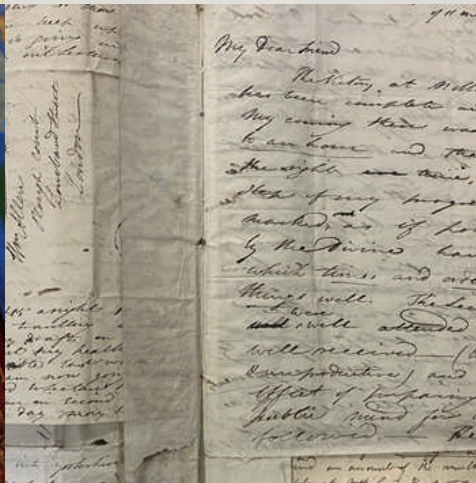
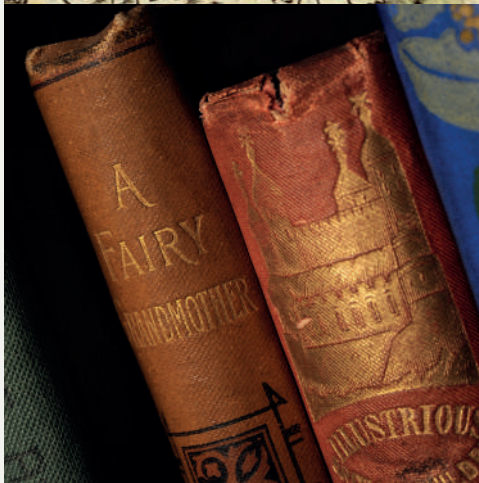
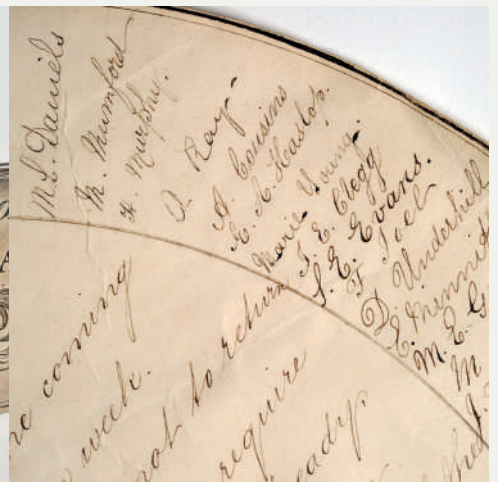


BFSS Archive Annual Impact Report 2026



Innovating Since 1966



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Overview of the year

We are pleased to present the thirteenth British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) Archives Annual Impact Report 2026.

Among the highlights this year are:

- Victoria Rawles joining the team as Records and Archive Coordinator
- Launching the BFSS Geographical Mapping Project
- Collaborating with Brunel University Education Department to incorporate the collection into the course curriculum.
- A visit to the British School Museum in Hitchin.
- Adding 107 entries to CALM from BFSS Foreign Correspondence to Stockwell College records.
- New exhibition space on the ground floor of the Bannerman Library

Over the past year we have received 22 enquiries to the archive relating to the BFSS archives and predecessor colleges, on a range of subjects including the Kindergarten, BFSS Schools, needlework and Thomas Jenkins.

We also welcomed five researchers to the reading room to consult material in person plus 85 students from Education, English Literature, Creative Writing and History to consult the collections as part of their teaching.

Staff

TACE FOX

Records, Archives and Special Collections Manager

VICKI RAWLES

Records and Archives Coordinator

**Friendly and helpful staff.
Relaxed atmosphere.
The staff have been great
from my first enquiry to
hosting me on the day.
Excellent.**

Anon 18/09/2024

Archives

The British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) Archive is a unique and extensive collection spanning the years 1798 to 1976. Measuring approximately 178 linear metres, the archive encompasses a remarkable range of materials in diverse formats, including official papers, correspondence, publications, student registers, photographs, maps, architectural plans, trophies, clothing, and furniture.

Among its holdings are Joseph Lancaster's letters (1810–1812), committee minutes and papers, financial records, handwritten student applications accompanied by testimonials and correspondence, student registers, and teaching practice reports. The archive documents the establishment and development of British Schools and preserves nineteenth-century correspondence from schools in both the UK and overseas. It also includes Education Commission returns, records relating to BFSS charities and funds, agents' and inspectors' reports, annual reports, and student publications such as *The B Hum*.

Photographs of staff, students, and buildings sit alongside teaching manuals, lesson books, portraits of college principals, and institutional artefacts including blazers, ties, sporting honours caps, furniture, and memorial plaques.

The collection also contains particularly rare and irreplaceable items. These include a copybook of handwriting and needlework completed by enslaved children attending a British school in Jamaica, presented to the BFSS in 1826; individual sewing samples; sketchbooks; personal memoirs of former staff and students; and silver 'monitorial' medals.

Together, these records provide a rich and detailed account of the Society, its colleges, schools, staff, and alumni, as well as offering valuable insight into the development of education in Britain and overseas throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The archive also holds a substantial collection of educational books and pamphlets, many of them rare nineteenth-century editions, including works by prominent educationalists such as Lancaster, Bell, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, alongside Victorian and Edwardian children's literature.

One notable collection of books was presented by David Salmon, biographer of Joseph Lancaster, former student and tutor at Borough Road College, and later Principal of Swansea Teacher Training College.



Joining Archives and Special Collections



By Vicki Rawles

On 19 January 2026, I was delighted to join Brunel, University of London's Records, Archives and Special Collections team as Coordinator. Being shown around the extensive collections, it was immediately clear that the University's archives represent an exceptional and diverse resource, encompassing institutional records from Brunel and its predecessor colleges, as well as materials from the British and Foreign Schools Society, alongside a wide range of literary and special collections.

A highlight during my first week was the opportunity to work with letters dating from 1810 written by Joseph Lancaster, making these documents of particular institutional significance. The letters have now been digitised and transcribed, enabling wider access and supporting future research, teaching and public engagement whilst protecting these fragile items from extensive handling.

Over the next few months, I aim to develop a deeper understanding of the BFSS material held within the collections, with the intention of digitising and cataloguing as much of this material as possible. This work will help to preserve the original documents while making the collections accessible to a wider audience, supporting research, teaching, and public engagement. Knowing the collection better will also allow me to respond quickly and usefully to enquiries from researchers, students, staff and anyone interested in this rich resource. This year marks 60 years since Brunel became a university, so we also have a wonderful opportunity to showcase materials right back from where we started.



Cataloguing



There are now 7,212 BFSS catalogue entries in our online catalogue. In the past year, we have added a further 107 new catalogue entries for the BFSS financial records including Joseph Lancasters expenditure, the papers of first treasurer William Allen and subscribers. There are now over 7,319 digitised archives on our BFSS catalogue.

Victoria has begun cataloguing the Governance papers from the Stockwell College archive which previously had been catalogued to series level to provide more in depth, item level detail to the catalogue.

Enquiries

Since last year's report we have received 22 BFSS archive enquiries.

The enquiries have covered the following topics:

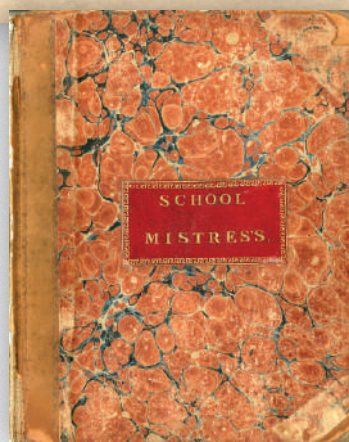
- Annual Reports
- Borough Road
- Educational Record
- Kindergarten
- Leather Sellers
- Maria Grey College Magazines
- Needlework
- Sandbach
- Shoreditch College Students
- South Africa
- Thomas Jenkins
- Visits, Volunteering and Placements



Search Results

Ref No	Title	Description	Date	Level
BFSS Saimon	The David Saimon Collection	The Saimon Collection consists of 230 books on the...		Fonds
BFSS Saimon/258	BFSS reports and minutes, shoreditch extracts			
BFSS SS/3	Battle articles	Articles written by George Battle about the BFSS and its...	1970-2004	Series
BFSS 99/3/2	The Records of Borough Road College (1974)	Description of the types of records held in the archives...		Item
BFSS SS/3/6	Joseph Lancaster, Pioneer of Education (1975)	Biography of Joseph Lancaster and his development of his...		Item

Useful Links:
[Using archives and special collections](#)
[Brunel University London Archives](#)
[BFSS Archives](#)
[Maria Grey College Archives](#)
[Shoreditch College Archives](#)
[Blog posts](#)
[Brunel University London Special Collections](#)
[Tweets by theRCN](#)



Researchers

Researcher	Subject	Items Viewed	No of days
Academic (UK)	Leather sellers Technical College Bermondsey	Annual Reports 1878/1910 BFSS/1/5/2/3/8 BFSS/1/5/2/3/9 BFSS/1/5/2/3/10 BFSS/1/5/2/3/11 BFSS/1/5/2/3/12 BFSS/1/5/2/3/13 BFSS/1/5/2/3/16	1
Academic (USA)	Education systems in South Africa during colonisation	Foreign correspondence Africa and West Indies	1
Researcher (UK)	Needlework education in Board schools after 1870	BFSS/3/10/1 BFSS/3/10/3 BFSS/3/10/7 BFSS/2/10/2/1 BFSS/2/10/3/4 BFSS/2/10/2/5 BFSS/2/6/2/4 Needlework samples Salmon volumes	1
Academic (UK)	BFSS schools in Leicestershire	Annual Reports Newcastle Commissions	1
Academic (UK)	Thomas Jenkins	BFSS/1/5/1/8 BFSS/2/6/3 BFSS/1/5/2	1



British School Museum, Hitchin

Last July, I had the pleasure of visiting the British Schools Museum in Hitchin for the first time to attend the Educational Opportunities Foundation Council Meeting, held within the historic former school buildings. From the moment I arrived, it was clear that this would be far more than a routine meeting. It was an opportunity to see the story of the British and Foreign School Society brought vividly to life.

Experiencing the BFSS through the perspective of a museum offered a fascinating counterpoint to our archive collections. While archives preserve voices on paper, the museum captures the atmosphere of nineteenth century education through its classrooms, desks, and carefully preserved spaces. Curators Bee and Max were exceptionally welcoming and guided us through the buildings with enthusiasm and insight. As they explained what school life would have looked like for children of the period, history felt immediate and tangible. From the structured routines of the monitorial system to a visit inside the former Schoolmaster's House, the tour transformed written records into lived experience.

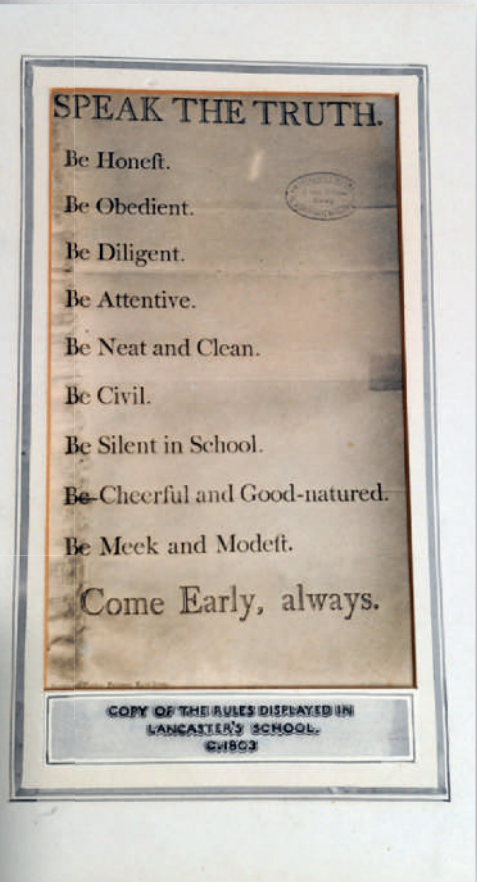
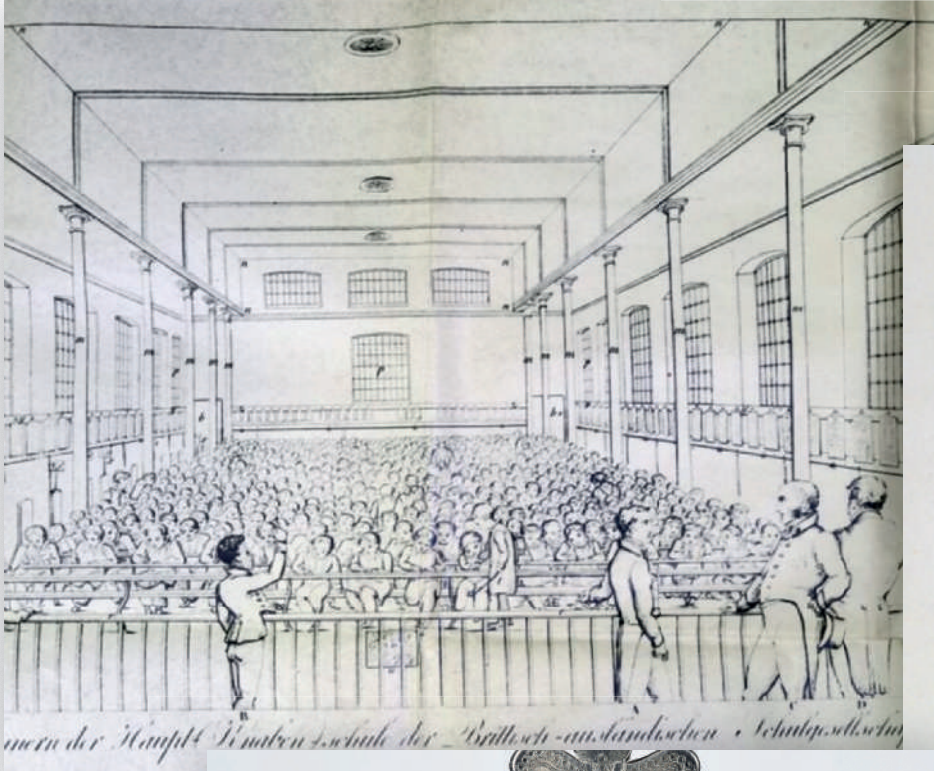
The Council Meeting itself was equally memorable. It provided a valuable opportunity to connect with members and trustees of the Educational Opportunities Foundation and to celebrate an

important milestone with the launch of the new BFSS history booklet. Sara Gaines and David Crowther delivered an engaging and thoughtful talk about the research behind the project, highlighting the Society's legacy and ensuring its story continues to reach new audiences. It was a privilege to be present for the launch.

I was fortunate to return to the museum in October, this time accompanied by the Director of Library and ASK at Brunel University. Our conversations focused on how the archive and museum might collaborate more closely in the future, exploring ways to strengthen and support each other's work. Many promising ideas were discussed, but the first project we are now developing, and one I look forward to sharing more about, is the Geographical Mapping of BFSS schools. The initial phase will focus on schools across the United Kingdom, with a second phase tracing the Society's expansion overseas and examining its broader international impact. This collaboration marks an exciting new chapter. I am especially enthusiastic about involving both archive and museum volunteers in this research initiative, creating new opportunities to connect collections, uncover stories, and broaden access to the remarkable history of the BFSS.

[A Great Day Out in Herts | British Schools Museum](#)





Mapping the Growth of Education: The British and Foreign School Society Geographical Mapping Project

A new digital initiative at Brunel University of London will transform how we understand the reach and influence of the British and Foreign School Society. The BFSS Geographical Mapping Project will create an interactive map tracing the spread of the Society's schools across the United Kingdom and, in time, internationally. By linking places to archival records, the project will offer an innovative way to explore the development of education from the late eighteenth century onwards.

The Society began in 1798 when Joseph Lancaster opened a non-denominational school in Borough Road, Southwark. His monitorial system, in which older pupils taught younger ones under supervision, made it possible to educate large numbers of children at low cost. This model expanded rapidly during the nineteenth century, leading to the establishment of hundreds of British and Foreign School Society schools across England, Wales, and overseas. Alongside school provision, the Society also supported teacher training colleges and played an important part in the professional development of teaching. Over time, as state involvement in education increased, the role of the Society evolved. Its legacy continues today through the Educational Opportunity Foundation

The archive of the British and Foreign School Society, held at Brunel University of London, forms the foundation of the Mapping Project. Extending to around 178 linear metres, the collection includes student registers, correspondence, annual reports, teacher training records, architectural plans, photographs, medals, and rare educational publications. Together, these materials document the activities of the Society and the wider development of education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Drawing on this material, the first phase of the project will plot at least 3,800 Society schools across the United Kingdom by February 2029 using verified location data from the archive. Each mapped site will link directly to relevant catalogue records, including

annual reports, evidence submitted to the Newcastle Commission, pupil records where they survive, and architectural drawings. In this way, users will be able to move seamlessly between a geographical location and the surviving historical documentation.

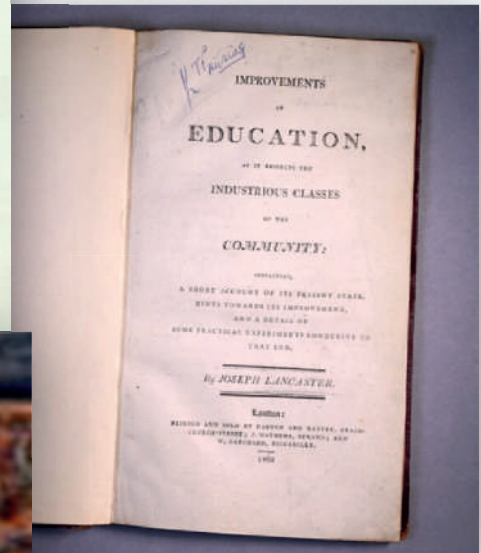
The project is intended not only to improve access to archival material but also to provide a clear visual representation of how educational ideas and institutions spread across regions and communities. By placing schools on the map, it becomes possible to see patterns of growth, areas of concentration, and the broader reach of the Society over time.

Volunteers will play an important part in achieving these aims. Working under staff guidance, they will assist with researching individual schools, checking place information, transcribing documents, and ensuring accurate connections between locations and catalogue entries. Their contribution will extend the reach of the project while providing meaningful experience in archival research and data management.

Once completed, the interactive map will be made publicly accessible through the websites of Brunel University of London, the Educational Opportunity Foundation, and the British and Foreign School Museum. It will also support talks, exhibitions, and teaching activities, opening the collection to new audiences.

By transforming detailed archival records into an accessible geographical resource, the British and Foreign School Society Geographical Mapping Project offers a new perspective on the history of education and makes visible the scale of a movement that helped shape schooling in Britain and beyond.





Thank you; Tace Fox could not have been more helpful. The person in whom I was interested did not show in the Maria Grey records, but the information I was given allowed me to 'prove a negative' and I am most grateful.

Student MA 08/10/2024

I've been very pleased with the service I have received and will happily give you a 5 rating.

Researcher 21/12/2025

Interns and volunteers

The British and Foreign School Society (BFSS), established in the late eighteenth century by Joseph Lancaster, played a transformative role in expanding access to education for disadvantaged children in Britain and across the globe. Today, that legacy continues through the work of our dedicated volunteers and interns, whose efforts are vital to preserving the Society's historic records. Through Lancaster's innovative monitorial system—where older pupils taught younger ones—the Society's model spread rapidly throughout Britain, Africa, the West Indies, and beyond, creating a lasting international educational impact.

As demand grew for trained teachers, the BFSS responded by establishing teacher training colleges and supporting candidates seeking appointments both at home and overseas. Thousands of aspiring teachers wrote letters requesting references and endorsements. Now preserved within the BFSS

Archive at Brunel University London, these letters provide rich insight into individual ambitions, career pathways, and the global reach of the Society's work.

A major focus of this year's activity has been the continued cataloguing and preservation of this unique collection. Volunteers and interns have worked with care and precision to transcribe correspondence, verify names and details, and repackage fragile documents to ensure their long-term preservation. At the same time, they have expanded access by creating detailed entries within the CALM database, with a particular focus on teaching appointments from the 1860s.

This year, we were pleased to welcome three dedicated volunteers, alongside two students from the Education Department undertaking their required 72-hour placements. Their commitment has significantly accelerated progress on the project, improving both the accessibility and preservation of the archive.

The impact of this work extends beyond the collection itself. We are especially proud that two former volunteers have secured places at University College London, where they will begin training as qualified Archivists and Records Managers this September—a reflection of the skills and experience gained through their involvement. Their success highlights the value of hands-on archival experience and reflects the vital role that volunteer and intern engagement plays in building skills, confidence, and future careers in the heritage sector.



**Good Service,
thank you. Have
been contacted
about my query and
arrangements made to
follow up.**

Researcher 14/03/2025

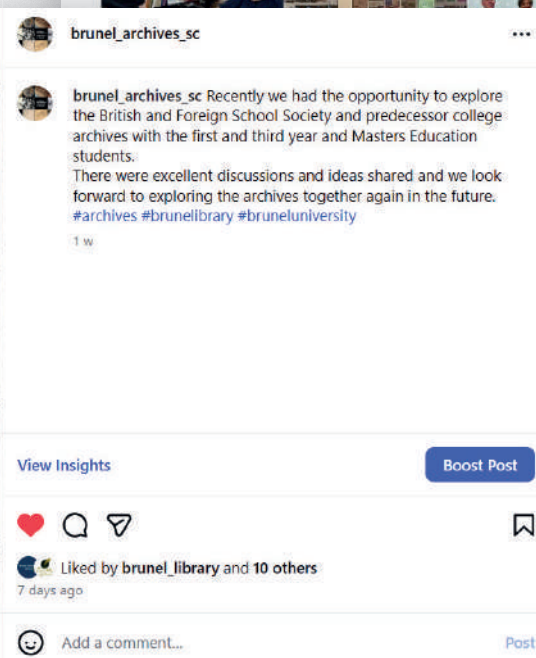
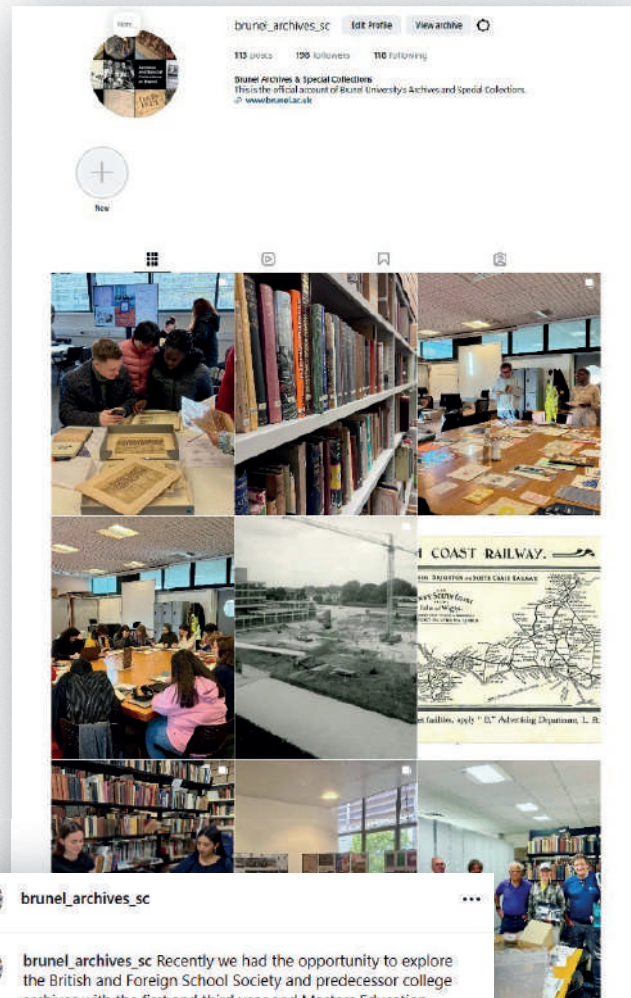
Outreach

Follow our page to see what exciting discoveries we will feature this year.



We continue to develop our Instagram profile with 202 followers and 9 new posts. Due to staffing changes, we haven't had as much time for social media as we would like, but we are excited to expand our social media platforms in 2026-2027.

We featured the BFSS archives in a series of posts relating to our teaching and outreach with Brunel University Education Department.



Teaching sessions

This year, the Archive worked closely with the Education Department at Brunel University London to bring the history of teaching to life through the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) collections. In dedicated first, third year and master's student sessions, hosted in the Bannerman Library, students were introduced to the origins of the BFSS and the development of teacher education in Britain, beginning with Joseph Lancaster and the revolutionary monitorial system.

The session explored how early nineteenth-century educational reform laid the foundations for modern teacher training, connecting national policy changes, such as the growth of certificated teaching and the impact of the 1870 Education Act, to the training institutions that would ultimately form part of Brunel's own heritage.

The sessions were designed not only as a lecture but as an interactive archival experience. After an introduction to the distinctions between records, archives, and special collections, students had the opportunity to handle original materials from the BFSS Archive, including correspondence, student records, annual reports, and teacher training documentation.

Through guided activities, they examined how these sources reveal the professionalisation of teaching, gendered experiences within training colleges, and the expansion of mass education across the UK and overseas. By engaging directly with primary sources, students were able to see how policy, practice, and lived experience intersected, gaining a deeper appreciation of how historical developments in teacher education continue to shape the profession today.

The collaboration has reinforced the value of archives as a teaching resource. By situating educational theory within its historical context and encouraging hands-on exploration of original material, the sessions have supported critical thinking, historical awareness,

and professional identity among future educators. As we continue to strengthen ties with the Education Department, the BFSS collections remain a powerful tool for connecting Brunel's past with the training of tomorrow's teachers.

Our engagement with teaching and learning also continues to extend to English Literature and Creative Writing programmes, using the collections as creative and critical prompts. Creative Writing Master's students recently explored the theme of journaling through the BFSS Commonplace Books, scrapbook-style volumes produced by students at Borough Road College between 1871 and 1919. Filled with poems, personal reflections, sketches, postcards, photographs, and multilingual entries, these books offer vivid insight into student life and self-expression in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They provide a powerful springboard for thinking about voice, memory, and the materiality of writing.

English Literature students have also worked with a volume often referred to as the "Slave Book," containing specimens of pupil work from a BFSS free school established in Jamaica for the children of formerly enslaved families. Examined in relation to Victorian literature and themes of race, empire, and representation, the volume has prompted thoughtful discussions about authorship, education, and the politics of the archive.

Finally, we have continued to support the History Department through primary source training sessions. These workshops equip the students with the practical skills required for independent research, while highlighting the richness of the BFSS collections for studying education, social reform, empire, and community life.

Together, these collaborations demonstrate the versatility of the BFSS Archive. Whether informing future teachers, inspiring creative writers, challenging literary interpretation, or training historians in archival practice, the collections remain a dynamic and central resource for teaching across the University.

We look forward to exploring how we not only continue to offer these opportunities in the future, but build upon them with the students, academics, alumni and researchers.



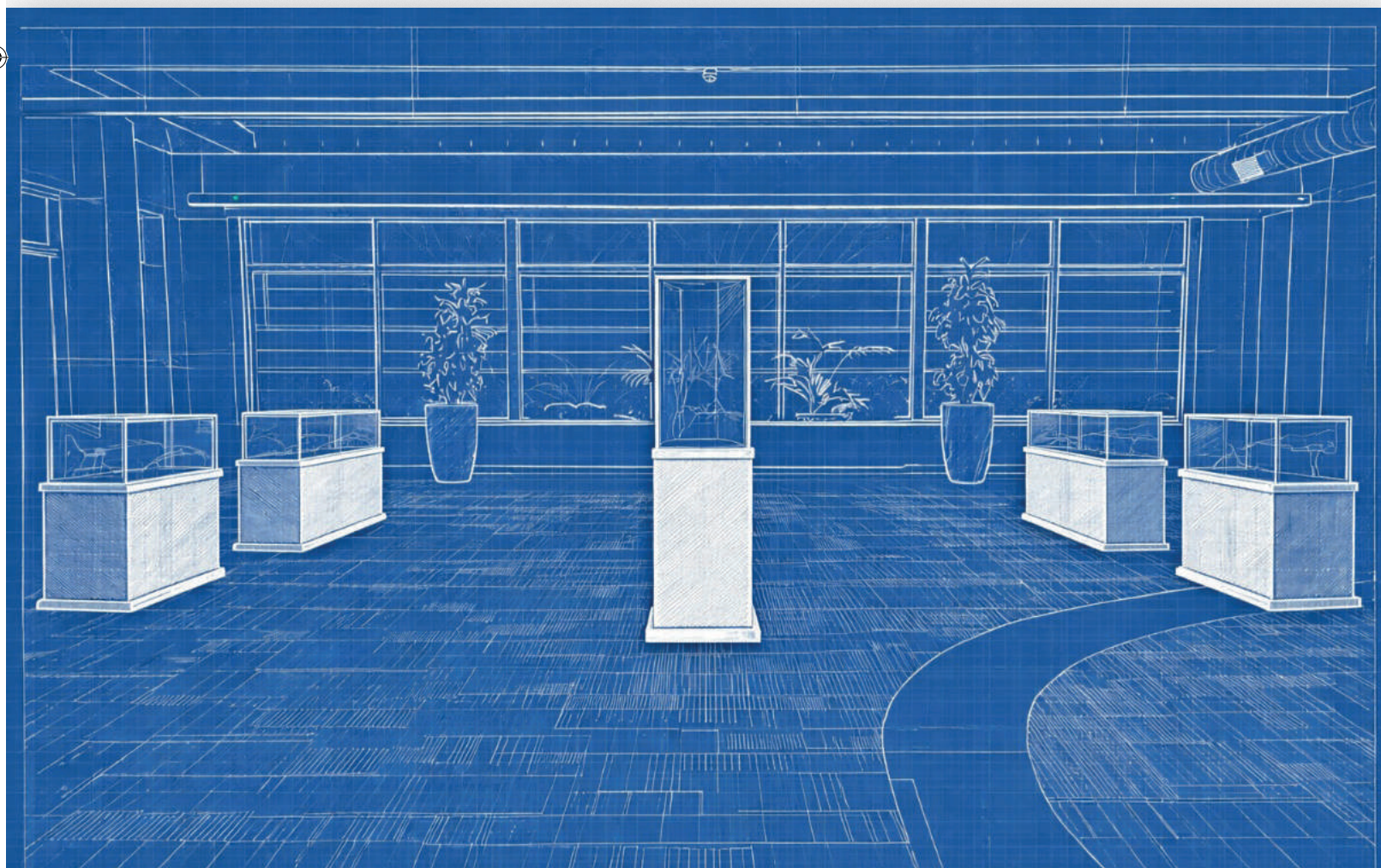
I found your session very interesting, and I thank you for sharing and allowing us to engage with some of your archives, special collections, and records. Learning about the history of Brunel and more was so fascinating! Thank you so much.

Student 05/02/2026

New Exhibition Space

2026 will mark an exciting new chapter for the archives at Brunel University London as we launch a dedicated exhibition space on the Ground Floor of the Bannerman Library. Located at the heart of campus life, the new space will bring the remarkable collections of the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) into clearer public view, expanding on the exhibitions already staged in the Eastern Gateway and creating a more visible, accessible home for our shared history.

For the first time, students, researchers, staff and visitors will encounter rotating exhibitions woven directly into the daily rhythm of the library. The space has been conceived not only as a display area, but as a platform for storytelling, revealing how the BFSS transformed education in Britain and across the globe, and how that legacy ultimately helped shape the institutions that became today's Brunel.



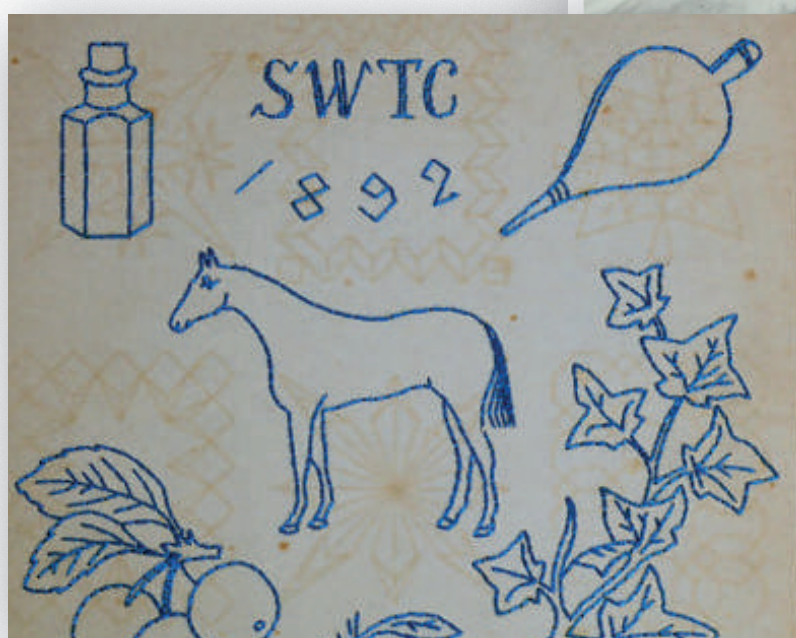
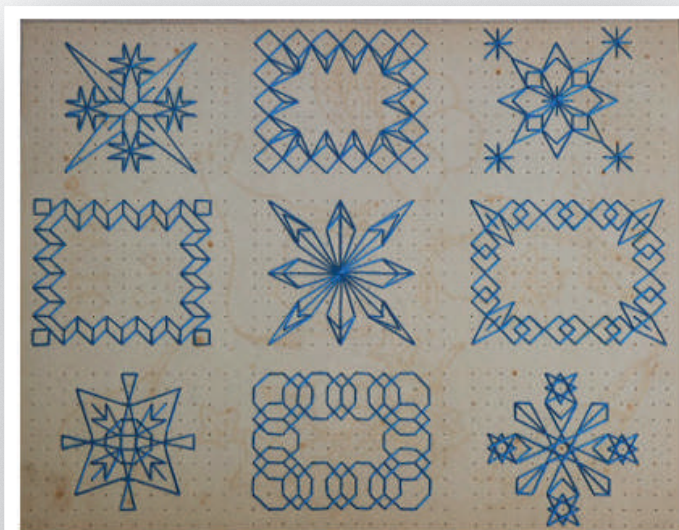
Looking forward to 2026-2027

We look forward to the launch of the geographical mapping project in 2027, welcoming volunteers from Brunel University's student body, the British School Museum and potentially creating a history society within the Educational Opportunities Foundation who can offer advice, and expertise.

We are also excited to complete the cataloguing of Stockwell College and begin more in-depth cataloguing of Saffron Waldon.

Our plans also include:

- Making records from the BFSS collection available to researchers on Figshare, starting with the Joseph Lancaster letters and transcriptions.
- Making the Predecessors College archives as accessible on the catalogue as the BFSS.
- Launching the geographical mapping project.
- Offering archive placements to Education students at Brunel University to work with the collections.
- Run more teaching sessions incorporating the BFSS archives.
- Showcase the BFSS collection in the new exhibition area in the Bannerman Library.
- Welcome new volunteers, researchers and continue to support the enquiry service.
- Promote the collections digitally on the website and social media.



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Blessings for ever on the Lamb
Who bore the curse for wretched man
Let angels sound his sacred name
And every creature say — Amen

12 I have

Caroline Porter

How to get in touch

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