EXPERIENCE THE TERROR OF DISEASE AND DEATH DOWN THE CENTURIES IN OUR WINTER EXHIBITION

PLAGUE!

THE BEAUTY OF BOOKS
Elegant texts on display

MAPPING SCOTLAND’S PAST
Win a book in our competition

DISCOVER
The magazine of the National Library of Scotland • www.nls.uk • Issue 30 Winter 2015
In our modern world, it’s hard for us to comprehend the horror of an epidemic so severe it could wipe out a fifth of the urban population. That, however, is exactly what happened when the plague swept across Scotland 370 years ago.

The epidemic was among the most serious ever to strike the country, but certainly not the last. From 11 December, Plague! the National Library of Scotland’s winter exhibition will tell the story of how the country has coped with outbreaks of the Black Death, cholera, typhus, smallpox and other feared infectious diseases.

Our Rare Books Curator, Anette Hagan, has called upon our diverse collections of printed books, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps, photographs, illustrations and moving images to show the impact of contagious diseases from the 14th century through to the 20th century.

Elsewhere in this issue, we showcase our recent acquisition of delightful intricate pencil sketches from the mid-19th century by a German artist on his tour of Scotland. The Library is also involved in publishing two new books of historical maps, one based on Glasgow through the ages and the other on the Scottish railway network.

And if you were in any doubt about the beauty of the printed word, take a look at our feature on beautiful books, including the products of the private presses of the late 19th century arts and crafts movement.

Enjoy your issue of Discover and all the events coming up at the Library over the winter.

Dr John Scally, National Librarian
e: NationalLibrarian@nls.uk
CONTRIBUTORS...

James Mitchell
Curator, Rare Books, Maps and Music Collections

Olive Geddes
Curator, Manuscript and Archive Collections

Dr Anette Hagan
Curator, Rare Books, Maps and Music Collections

Andrew Martin
Curator, Literature and the Arts

Bryan Christie
Media and External Relations

NEWS
Meet our first ever Fulbright research scholar, read about our announcement at the Gaelic Mod and find out about what our Scots scriever is planning.

BOOK BEAUTIFUL
Our treasures display features some of the most beautiful books ever printed.

PLAGUE!
This year’s winter exhibition reveals the terrifying truths of deadly diseases in Scotland.

SKETCHBOOK
Join a German artist on his journey through Scotland in 1846 where he sketched some famous landmarks.

MAP UP
The Library has teamed up with Birlinn to produce two stunning books — enter our competition to win one for yourself.

LAST WORD
In celebration of the centenary of John Buchan’s The Thirty-Nine Steps, we’ve dedicated our Last Word to the author.

CONTENTS

7 NEWS
Meet our first ever Fulbright research scholar, read about our announcement at the Gaelic Mod and find out about what our Scots scriever is planning.

12 BOOK BEAUTIFUL
Our treasures display features some of the most beautiful books ever printed.

17 PLAGUE!
This year’s winter exhibition reveals the terrifying truths of deadly diseases in Scotland.

22 SKETCHBOOK
Join a German artist on his journey through Scotland in 1846 where he sketched some famous landmarks.

24 MAP UP
The Library has teamed up with Birlinn to produce two stunning books — enter our competition to win one for yourself.

34 LAST WORD
In celebration of the centenary of John Buchan’s The Thirty-Nine Steps, we’ve dedicated our Last Word to the author.

WINTER 2015 | DISCOVER | 5
Age Scotland’s aim is to help Scotland’s people enjoy a better later life. We inspire and support everyone in Scotland to make the most of later life and build communities for all ages.

We help develop and mentor local groups and projects, creating places and activities that bring people together as a community. This, in turn, helps combat loneliness and isolation, and brings joy and a renewed sense of purpose into older people’s lives and support to others who need it most.

We create vital, free information on a range of issues to others who need it most. We help develop and mentor local groups and projects, creating places and activities that bring people together as a community.

However, almost half of our work would not be possible without people remembering Age Scotland in their wills. When you visit your solicitor, and you have taken care of your loved ones, please consider leaving a gift in your will to Age Scotland.

Find out more about us at www.agescotland.org.uk

Age Scotland
Department D(NLS)
Couswayside House
160 Couswayside
Edinburgh
EH9 1PR
Charity No: SC010100

From America to our archives

The Library has welcomed its first Fulbright scholar, who begins a six-month residency in our archives, working on his new book.

Kirk McAuley, a native of upstate New York and Associate Professor in the English Department at Washington State University, overcame stiff competition to secure a prestigious Fulbright scholarship to fund his research. The rigorous selection process began almost a year before Kirk’s arrival, and was overseen by the Fulbright Commission and the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES).

“It is a great honour to be here as a Fulbright scholar, and a pleasure to be based in Scotland,” said Kirk. “Obviously, there is strength that the library has in Scottish literature and culture, but it is also just a really wonderful environment. I’ve worked in other archives and this one is particularly pleasant and accommodating.”

In what will be his second book, tentatively titled Invasive Species: The Economy and Ecology of British Empire Writing – Kirk will offer ‘eco-critical’ readings of select 18th and 19th century texts supported by material in the Library’s extensive archive. The project explores resonances between these materials and contemporary ecological crises. “It looks at what these texts tell us about pressing environmental issues such as biological invasion, crop monoculture, and soil erosion and depletion, among others,” Kirk said.

“I will focus mainly on Scottish authors who composed their texts at the so-called edges of the British Empire: the Caribbean, Africa, and the South Pacific. So, for example, one key figure is James Grainger, a Scottish physician who migrated to St Christopher in the West Indies and wrote a lengthy poem about the cultivation of sugar cane. This particular piece is interesting because it both propagandizes British investment in the sugar revolution and laments the accidental introduction of non-native species, including rats and monkeys.”

The Library has entered an agreement to take in one Fulbright scholar a year for the next four years. It is hoped the programme will raise the Library’s profile in the United States and strengthen links with academia. Chris Taylor (pictured left), who is in charge of the Library’s international collections, said: “We’re honoured to be associated with Kirk’s research. The hope is that scholars will go back and speak positively about their experience at the Library, and more generally about their time in Scotland.”

Watch our videos at www.youtube.com/user/NLofScotland
RARE GAELIC 15TH CENTURY MANUSCRIPT IS TRANSFORMED

The unique volume is now fit to be digitised safely

A unique volume of Gaelic text from the National Library of Scotland’s collections has undergone an extensive conservation treatment, repairing centuries of wear and damage. The 15th century manuscript is considered particularly significant because of its age and rarity. Although it had been identified as a priority for digitisation, the poor condition of the manuscript meant that it needed extensive repair and stabilisation work before this process could be carried out in order to preserve this item for future generations.

The manuscript was taken apart, cleaned, relaxed, flattened and repaired using several techniques, some of which were created specifically for this project. Arguably the most challenging aspect of the process was repairing the large holes near the spine, the edges of which were curled and discoloured.

The conservation treatment has allowed the manuscript to be digitised safely. It has also put the manuscript in a condition that is much more legible for future readers and can be handled safely without causing damage to the volume.

The unique volume of Gaelic text is now fit to be digitised safely.