

Cardiff University

Sharing digital content globally
with an interoperable solution



>80%

of images created in direct response to
research, teaching, or grant-capture activity

£250,000

in research infrastructure funding secured to
purchase state-of-the-art digital capture equipment
and additional Alma Digital storage capacity


"The primary goal of the Special Collections and Archives' digital strategy is to ensure the widest possible interoperable discovery and access to our rare books and unique archives to enrich teaching, research, innovation, and creativity on a global scale."



CARDIFF
UNIVERSITY

About the
Library

Cardiff University libraries and archives are critical to student and academic success, and integral to creating and sharing access to knowledge and trustworthy information. The library's resources, services, staff, and spaces underpin the curriculum, support global research within a Welsh context, and create a sense of belonging to a community of scholarship.



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Alison Harvey, Archivist, Special Collections and Archives

Wider access to a rich set of rare and unique works

The Cardiff University library's collections and content support academic, civic, and global research. Among the resources are a rare-print collection of historical, literary, religious, social, and linguistics works dating back to the 15th century as well as the unique personal archives of renowned artists, writers, and musicians. According to archivist Alison Harvey:

"The primary goal of Special Collections and Archives' digital strategy is to ensure the widest possible interoperable discovery and access to our rare books and unique archives to enrich teaching, research, innovation, and creativity on a global scale. We needed a sustainable solution to make our collections available remotely."

"We were very impressed with the connectivity and interoperability of Alma Digital as a more sustainable solution to integrate our digitized content with our Library Management System. Alma Digital's unique full integration with Alma allows people to serendipitously find our content while searching the catalogue, as well as visually browse by collection."

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Sharing and collaboration without duplication

Alma Digital support for IIIF allows widespread sharing of the digitized collection without duplicating the images, which holds down storage costs among the collaborators. For example, Harvey notes, "The interoperability of our digital collections allows them to be used to support collaborative, grant-funded projects with other institutions. IIIF allowed over 1,000 objects from our digital collections to be seamlessly ingested into a transcription platform developed by the National Library of Wales. The images have not been duplicated, only shared using an existing link."

Ensuring institutional impact and relevance

The library is cognizant of the resources that go into digitizing and storing items and has measures in place to ensure their effective use, as Harvey explains: "We use a single KPI to measure the impact of our digital collections – the proportion of images that are created in direct response to either research, teaching, or grant-capture activity must be more than 80%. This focuses our digital activity on priority business areas, and ensures that our digitization programs are relevant, impactful, and represent value for money. In order to meet this target, we recognize the need to actively advocate for and raise awareness of our collections to ensure their value is appreciated by the wider academic community and ensure their integration into the critical business of the university."

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Alison Harvey, Archivist,
Special Collections and Archives

Tangible recognition of the service's value

The impact of the library's use of Alma Digital has been recognized in a big way, as Harvey reports: "We were recently successful in attracting £250,000 in research infrastructure funding to purchase state of the art digital capture equipment and additional Alma Digital storage capacity through 2026. This represented a significant financial investment, and was a tangible vote of confidence in Alma Digital, IIIF, and the opportunities they offer."

Support for the IIIF framework

A key benefit is Alma Digital support for the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), as Harvey explains: "IIIF support is crucial to showcasing our collections at their highest possible quality and allowing us to effectively collaborate with partners. Through interoperability, it allows our rare books and archives to be shared beyond our institution, to be distributed and re-used in innovative ways worldwide to support teaching, research, and engagement. IIIF is perhaps best known for enabling the fast loading and viewing of very large image files. The IIIF framework applies coordinates to the individual pixels of an image, effectively dividing it up into very small digital tiles. This is significant because if we can isolate a section of an image using a URL, we can share a tiny detail of a manuscript with another researcher on the other side of the world; create permanent links for academic citation; or add annotations to an object and re-use an enhanced version anywhere online."

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