# John Rylands Library reopens after £7.6m revamp to mark 125 years



The John Rylands Library, often affectionately dubbed 'Manchester's Hogwarts', is celebrating a significant milestone as it marks its 125th anniversary this year. Since its inauguration on January 1, 1900, after a decade of meticulous construction, the library has grown from a collection of over 70,000 books and manuscripts to housing more than 300,000 items that span a remarkable five millennia of history. Situated on Deansgate, this Grade I-listed treasure is not only a sanctuary for bibliophiles but also a cultural cornerstone for the city.

The library has recently undergone a comprehensive refurbishment, with the renovation costing approximately £7.6 million and lasting 15 months. This renovation modernises the facility while preserving its rich historical character. With the reopening of its galleries, visitors can now explore two newly curated collections that highlight both extraordinary artefacts and the historical significance of the library itself.

Among the items on display are a parchment signed by Queen Elizabeth I, a 14th-century Qur’an manuscript in three languages, and original handwritten lyrics by the Pet Shop Boys. Additionally, the Collections Gallery will feature notable artefacts such as Shakespeare's First Folio and personal items from eminent figures like Elizabeth Gaskell and Alan Turing, thereby weaving together the threads of literary and scientific history in one celebrated location.

Elizabeth Gow, Special Collections Manuscript Curator and Archivist at the library, expressed the intricacies involved in selecting which items to showcase, stating that the process was not only about telling a narrative but also about revealing the vast richness of the collection. "We couldn’t get everything out, but we got a team of curators together and looked at which of the things we wanted to display that we haven’t been able to display before," she noted. This reflects the library's commitment to making its hidden gems accessible to the public.

The library also prides itself on its diverse collections, evident in the Special Exhibitions Gallery, which is currently hosting "The Secret Public: LGBTQ+ Pop 1955-1985". This exhibition showcases the vibrant contributions of LGBTQ+ artists to popular music and culture during a time of significant social change. Curated in collaboration with Professor Jon Savage, it features an eclectic mix of objects, from magazine covers to photographs of iconic figures such as David Bowie and Joy Division's Ian Curtis. The exhibition aims to spotlight the often overlooked narratives of LGBTQ+ individuals within the entertainment industry, illustrating their undeniable influence on the cultural landscape.

Jon Savage articulated the exhibition's purpose, expressing a desire to reveal the profound impact of LGBTQ+ artists: “It was all sort of this big secret… [T]hey were, and remain, part of the public and are not separate from everybody else, which is what some might like us to be.” The exhibition, running until November, seeks to commemorate the bravery and creativity of these influential figures, especially during an era when homosexuality faced legal and social stigmas.

For the academic community, the John Rylands Library serves as a significant research resource. Over the years, the collection has expanded to include an array of LGBTQ+ materials, demonstrating a commitment to preserving not only historical artefacts but also the lived experiences of diverse communities. This commitment aligns with the library's ongoing initiative to expand its archives, ensuring broader representation of LGBTQ+ personal and cultural histories.

The John Rylands Library, a vital part of The University of Manchester, stands as a testament to the dedication of Enriqueta Rylands, who built the library in memory of her husband, John Rylands, with the vision that it would serve the people of Manchester. Today, it remains the third largest academic library in the UK, a veritable monument to knowledge and cultural heritage.

As the library embarks on this new chapter, it invites visitors to experience not only its rich collection but also the carefully curated exhibitions that celebrate the multifaceted narratives contributing to our shared history. The library is open from Wednesday to Saturday, with free entry, encouraging all to explore the storied past and vibrant present that define this remarkable institution.

**Reference Map**

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraphs 4, 5, 6
3. Paragraphs 6, 7
4. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
5. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
6. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4
7. Paragraphs 5, 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/historical-gem-described-manchesters-hogwarts-31632991> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/special-collections/subject-areas/lgbtq-plus-collections/> - The University of Manchester Library's Special Collections offers an extensive LGBTQ+ archive, encompassing materials from the 18th century to the present. This includes manuscripts, letters, and publications related to notable figures such as Edward Carpenter, Frances Power Cobbe, and Eva Gore-Booth. The collection also features works by poets like William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, as well as materials from the British Pop Archive, highlighting the contributions of LGBTQ+ individuals to popular culture. The archive is continually expanding, reflecting the library's commitment to preserving LGBTQ+ history.
3. <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/news/new-exhibition-the-secret-public-lgbtq-pop-1955-1985/> - The John Rylands Library in Manchester is hosting 'The Secret Public: LGBTQ Pop 1955 – 1985,' a major exhibition running from May 15 to November 15, 2025. Co-curated with Professor Jon Savage, the exhibition showcases the significant impact of LGBTQ+ artists on popular culture during this period. It features materials from the British Pop Archive, including posters, magazines, and record sleeves, highlighting the contributions of LGBTQ+ performers to mainstream pop culture. The exhibition aims to uncover lesser-known stories of LGBTQ+ figures in the entertainment industry.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Rylands_Research_Institute_and_Library> - The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, located in Manchester, England, is renowned for its vast collection of rare books and manuscripts. Founded by Enriqueta Rylands in memory of her husband, John Rylands, the library opened in 1900. Designed by architect Basil Champneys, the building is a prime example of neo-Gothic architecture. The library became part of The University of Manchester in 1972 and now houses the majority of the university's Special Collections, making it one of the largest academic libraries in the UK.
5. <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/about/our-history/> - The John Rylands Library was established by Enriqueta Rylands in 1900 to honor her late husband, John Rylands. Commissioned from architect Basil Champneys, the library is a notable example of neo-Gothic architecture. Enriqueta personally acquired significant collections, including the 2nd Earl Spencer's collection of printed books and the Earl of Crawford's manuscripts. In 1972, the library became part of The University of Manchester, housing the majority of the university's Special Collections and serving as a major academic resource.
6. <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/historical-gem-described-manchesters-hogwarts-31632991> - The John Rylands Library in Manchester, often referred to as 'Manchester's Hogwarts,' is celebrating its 125th anniversary with the reopening of its galleries. The library's vast collection includes over 300,000 items spanning five millennia, many of which have never been publicly displayed. Notable artifacts include a parchment signed by Queen Elizabeth I, a 14th-century trilingual Qur'an manuscript, and handwritten lyrics from the Pet Shop Boys. The library has recently undergone a £7.6 million refurbishment to update the space for future use.
7. <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/about/news/new-exhibition-the-secret-public-lgbtq-pop-1955-1985/> - The John Rylands Library in Manchester is hosting 'The Secret Public: LGBTQ Pop 1955 – 1985,' a major exhibition running from May 15 to November 15, 2025. Co-curated with Professor Jon Savage, the exhibition showcases the significant impact of LGBTQ+ artists on popular culture during this period. It features materials from the British Pop Archive, including posters, magazines, and record sleeves, highlighting the contributions of LGBTQ+ performers to mainstream pop culture. The exhibition aims to uncover lesser-known stories of LGBTQ+ figures in the entertainment industry.