Applicant: **Langdon, James**
Organisation: **Independent Scholar**
Funding Sought: **£1,097.00**

NK26\260052

Graphic laboriousness and the scribal handoff

The research will identify and image a typology of ‘handoffs’ between scribes tasked with producing different kinds of textual and pictorial content in Medieval manuscripts. Divisions of labour were commonplace in manuscript production. One scribe might write the main text and handoff to another specialised in elaborate illustrative work or expensive inks. These handoffs were sometimes expressed graphically on the page, in marks defining spaces or in written instructions. Analysis of these practices is the focus of the research.

The research will constrain itself to the extraordinary collection of the Chained Library at Hereford Cathedral, going farther than the existing annotated library catalogue to uncover and document — in photography and non-invasive infrared reflectography — examples of this specific phenomenon. The research will inform one chapter of a larger work on graphic laboriousness and the integration of text and image on book pages from the 12th century to the present.

Type	Other
Name	Independent Scholar
Phone (Mobile)	07592549394
Email (Personal)	jameslangdonstudio@gmail.com
Address	Victoria Cottage Beacon Road Malvern WR144EH Great Britain

Names of Co-Applicants on this application

Please state the names of any co-applicants on this application:

No Response

Section 2 - Research Proposal

Subject Area

Medieval Studies

Subject Area Detail - Medieval Studies

Please select the detail(s) of your Subject Area:

☑ Manuscript Studies

Title of Research Proposal

Please state the title of your proposed research:

Graphic laboriousness and the scribal handoff

Abstract

Please provide a short abstract summarising your proposed research in terms suitable for an informed general audience, not one specialised in your field:

The research will identify and image a typology of 'handoffs' between scribes tasked with producing different kinds of textual and pictorial content in Medieval manuscripts. Divisions of labour were commonplace in manuscript production. One scribe might write the main text and handoff to another specialised in elaborate illustrative work or expensive inks. These handoffs were sometimes expressed graphically on the page, in marks defining spaces or in written instructions. Analysis of these practices is the focus of the research.

The research will constrain itself to the extraordinary collection of the Chained Library at Hereford Cathedral, going farther than the existing annotated library catalogue to uncover and document — in photography and non-invasive infrared reflectography — examples of this specific phenomenon. The research will inform one chapter of a larger work on graphic laboriousness and the integration of text and image on book pages from the 12th century to the present.

Project Start Date

01 April 2026

Project End Date

31 August 2026

Project Duration (months):

5

Proposed Programme

Please give a detailed description of the research programme, including methodology:

Applicants should be aware of the importance that assessors place on the viability, specificity and originality of the research programme and of its achievability within the timescale, which should be specified in the Plan of Action.

As lead researcher, I come from a contemporary visual communication background and have published widely on aspects of graphic design and digital typography. The impetus for this interdisciplinary research is a speculative thesis concerning certain elemental aspects of page layout which persist through centuries of book production, from handwritten manuscripts to the advent and industrialisation of print, and to contemporary computerised techniques. The objective of the proposed study is the observation of precisely how the close integration of text and image on pages has created graphic complexity which is inherently laborious to manage, and how this laboriousness has conditioned approaches to page layout in ways which continue to be reinforced by successive generations of technology and automation. In short: technology quickens the production of pages, but whatever the means of production, pages which closely integrate text and image will presumably have remained relatively more laborious to achieve than those which separate text and image.

The research — however its findings might support or alter this thesis — will provide vital evidence of how divisions of labour in manuscript production influenced the formal organisation of text and image on pages, and will generate the visual material which any publication will require.

The method for identifying relevant manuscripts will initially depend on the existing annotated library catalogue. This publication makes occasional mention of especially prominent or notable examples of handoffs, but given that such features are not its main concern, the working assumption is that many more and more various examples exist. In August and September 2025 I consulted, with the Cathedral Librarian Jennifer Dumbleton, all of the manuscripts in the Chained Library in which handoffs are explicitly mentioned in the catalogue, in the course of preparing a preliminary presentation related to this research for a paper given at the Typography Theory Practice conference at Leeds Beckett University in October 2025. As a next step, the proposed research would identify, using the catalogue, a larger subset of manuscripts which might potentially contain handoffs. This method will likely evolve in response to the material, but it would initially prioritise manuscripts which the catalogue describes as unfinished, since these are more likely to reveal forms of handoff which might later have been erased or obscured in the process of finishing the manuscript. The rhythm of the work will be determined by access restrictions. Library staff are available for appointments three days per week and, based on the preliminary research conducted last year, it is realistic to consult not more than four manuscripts in one session. This imposed tempo has the advantage of allowing reflection and discourse to take place between sessions. The Cathedral Librarian supports this application and is enthusiastic about the research.

The funds would cover travel costs for a planned ten visits to the library — a relatively modest cost as I live nearby and overnight stays are not required. The first of these visits would be used to establish the subset of manuscripts to be consulted, in dialogue with the Cathedral Librarian, and to plan the programme of further visits. The programme would necessarily be somewhat responsive to the findings of the sessions as they proceed. It may, for example, become possible to identify a particularly interesting form of handoff and a method for finding more of its kind, or it may become possible to identify a single scribe with a distinctive style of handoff, using techniques which our initial consulting of the catalogue could not have suggested.

In this case there is no alternative to examining the original manuscripts, since existing images of the contents of

the collection held by the library, available online, or appearing in other publications, naturally focus on broadly representative and appealing features of each book rather than technical aspects. The decision to constrain the research to the Chained Library at Hereford Cathedral is both pragmatic and reflects the breadth and national significance of its collection.

The bulk of the funding is required for producing images of the handoffs. The requested budget for this is based on one full day of working with a photographer who would bring specialist infrared reflectography equipment to the library for the purpose, and their subsequent post-processing of the images produced. This technique is used to reveal marks not visible to a conventional camera, in anticipation of it being the case that many handoffs will have been at least partially obscured by the process of a second scribe having worked over any guiding marks left for them, often using opaque inks or foils.

Other Relevant Information Upload

If necessary, please upload any supplementary documents here:

No Response

Plan of Action

Please indicate here a clear timetable for your research programme:

Try to be as realistic as possible, but keep in mind that research programmes will develop over time and this plan of action is not something that is expected to account for every minute and is not unchangeable. But your chances of award will be affected by the assessors' perception of how viable and realistic this plan is.

A first visit to the library would be planned as soon as convenient for the Cathedral Librarian in April. At, and around, this session, a thorough study and discussion of the library catalogue would take place, identifying potential manuscripts to examine and a strategy for the most pertinent order in which to approach them.

Subsequent sessions would take place weekly, or more or less frequently, depending on the institution’s resources — I am relatively flexible being based locally. Should the first session suggest the need to consult any other experts in the field, or other members of the library community with particular familiarity with the material, there is flexibility for this to take place before commencing manuscript examination sessions.

The photographic documentation would be planned for the end of the research period, with a further planning session with the Cathedral Librarian to determine which manuscripts to document and any associated practical considerations probably taking place in August.

Planned Research Outputs

Please indicate here what the expected output(s) from your research programme might be.

As appropriate, please indicate as follows: monograph, journal article(s), book chapter(s), digital resources, other (please specify).

Please outline your plans for publication under Plans for publication/dissemination below:

The research will generate a set of demonstrative images of handoffs on the pages of manuscripts in the the Chained Library at Hereford Cathedral and a more substantial thesis about their significance, as outlined above. These images will likely be made with several optical and digital techniques, as required, to visualise the layering of marks made by multiple scribes and the sequencing of their work.

Plans for Publication and Dissemination

These resources would be immediately shared with the library itself, which may wish to present the images at their website with an article, and will in due course make them available to other researchers according to their normal access protocols.

These images will be used in the preparation of a book chapter for a forthcoming monograph of greater scope, with no publisher confirmed at this time. I have a track record of initiating, authoring and editing volumes with several major publishers in the art and design world, including Sternberg Press, Spector Books, and Book Works. It is normal practice for me to present research in progress at conferences and in journal articles, which in this case I would propose to two journals of which I am a regular contributor: Bricks from the Kiln (UK/US), and Revue Faire (FR), the latter of which has indicated a provisional interest.

Digital Resource

If the primary product of the research will be a digital resource have you obtained guidance on appropriate standards and methods?

⦿ Yes

Deposit of Datasets

Please provide details of how and where any electronic or digital data (including datasets) developed during the project will be stored, along with details on the appropriate methods of access:

It is a condition of award that all data be freely accessible during, and beyond, the lifetime of the project.

The digital images produced during the research will be integrated with the Chained Library's existing representation in the Medieval Libraries of Great Britain 3 (MLGB3) database at the Bodleian Libraries.

Through my experience as a graphic design practitioner I am very familiar with processing and handling digital images, and I will be able to complement the skills within the team at Hereford Cathedral to facilitate this.

Overseas Travel - Country

If your research involves travel abroad, please select the relevant country/countries:

No Response

Overseas Travel - Country

If your research involves travel abroad, please select the relevant country/countries:

No Response

Overseas Travel - Country

If your research involves travel abroad, please select the relevant country/countries:

No Response

Overseas Travel Institution

Please indicate if your research involves working in a particular overseas institution, and/or add other countries to which you will travel in connection with this application:

No Response

Research Leave Granted/Permission Obtained

Please indicate if you will need to be absent from your employing institution in order to undertake the proposed research, and if so, whether the necessary permission has been obtained:

No Response

Links with the British International Research Institutes

No Response

Language Competence

No Response

Other Participants

Please give the names, appointments and institutional affiliation of any other participants in the proposed research. If detail is not known yet, please indicate numbers and status of people who might be involved:

Jennifer Dumbelton, Cathedral Librarian, Hereford Cathedral

Expert in manuscript documentation, tbc

Role of Other Participants

Please describe the contribution to the project to be made by other participants, citing any particular specialisms and expertise:

Jennifer has been in post for a number of years and has deep knowledge of the library's manuscripts, as well as related secondary academic materials which will be pertinent to the project bibliography. She will consult on the selection of manuscripts to examine, and will personally supervise examination and documentation sessions.

The library has some existing suppliers of digital imaging but none presently providing infrared reflectography. Once a precise specification for the documentation work is established, I will consult Jennifer in the process of determining an appropriate supplier.

Added Value of Collaboration

Please provide any comments you wish to make on the particular relevance, timeliness or other aspects of the collaboration, and the benefits envisaged:

No Response

Endangered or Emerging Subject Area

Applicants should be intending to pursue original, independent research in any field of study within the humanities or social sciences. There are no quotas for individual subject areas and no thematic priorities. The primary factor in assessing applications will remain the excellence of the proposal. The Academy will, however, where appropriate, take into account the aim of providing particular support for certain important fields, either emerging areas of scholarship or areas of research that are endangered or under threat.

Presently there is significant cultural separation between manuscript studies and the study of contemporary graphic design. The former being primarily an academic discipline and the latter more typically appearing in journals and conferences aimed at practitioners and requiring less rigorous credentials of their contributors. This research positions itself as a bridge between these discourses.

My PhD dissertation (RMIT University, 2022) already established a suitably broad historical purview in its discussion and comparison of early printed books with aspects of 20th century graphic design, and I have been engaged, since 2010, in projects which draw on the academic field of analytic bibliography with relation to practices in 20th century artistic publishing.

My experience as both a graphic design practitioner and an academic mean that I am able to create an audience for such an emerging field of research, with the hope that this will generate interest in the field of manuscript

studies among design practitioners, and suggest new connections between historical labour practices in manuscript production and their bearing on contemporary computerised graphic design which are deserving of further academic investigation.

Ethical Issues

Are there any special ethical issues arising from your proposal that are not covered by the relevant professional Code of Practice? You must answer yes or no:

⦿ No

Have you obtained, or will you obtain ethical approval from your employing institution or other relevant authority? You must answer yes or no:

⦿ Yes

If the answers are yes to special ethical issues and no to having obtained prior approval, please describe here the non-standard ethical issues arising from your research and how you will address them:

If the answer is no to special ethical issues please enter N/A

n/a

Source of Funding

Have you/any co-applicants made any other applications in connection with this project? If so, with what results?

No.

Section 3 - Lead Applicant Details

PRIMARY APPLICANT DETAILS

Title	Dr
Name	James
Surname	Langdon
Organisation	Independent Scholar
Tel (Mobile)	07592549394
Email (Personal)	jameslangdonstudio@gmail.com
Address	Victoria Cottage Beacon Road Malvern WR144EH United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the)

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS