



CASE STUDY

NACBS-Gale Digital Scholar Lab Fellowships

Gale Digital Scholar Lab Takes Research in British Library Newspapers to New Level with Digital Humanities Approaches

In partnership with NACBS (North American Conference on British Studies), Gale invited five fellows to spend the 2023–24 academic year working in depth with our [British Library Newspapers](#) and [Digital Scholar Lab](#) to explore how a digital humanities approach could elevate their research.

Join us as the NACBS-Gale Fellows take a look back on their experience—and imagine what Gale can do for both your research and your students' learning!



AVERILL EARLS

Assistant Professor, History, St. Olaf College, United States

Project: From the nineteenth century on, Irish nationalists claimed that homosexuality was an English import. In the nascent Irish Free State, the newly-formed An Garda Síochána were tasked with excising homosexuality (and female prostitution) from Ireland's streets and country lanes. In the first twenty years of Ireland's independence, over 200 men were arrested in Dublin alone for same-sex sex crimes. Significantly, policing was pretty limited to public expressions of same-sex desire. The emphasis was on white-washing Ireland so that it appeared sexually pure. And yet, somehow, two of Ireland's biggest celebrities were Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards: a gay English theater couple that moved to Ireland in 1928, just as the state was constructing a policing apparatus to erase visible evidence of queerness. Mac Liammóir and Edwards founded the Gate Theater, which continues to be one of Ireland's preeminent stages, and enjoyed immense success. Their romance was never in doubt, their camp never under wraps. When "Mac Liammóir"—born Alfred Willmore—took a Gaelicized name, adopted a Cork accent, and played an Irishman for the rest of his life, he was neither scorned nor sent packing. For all intents and purposes, he and his lover subverted everything that the Free State seemed to stand for, in terms of rejecting Englishness, homosexuality, and public evidence of same-sex desire in Ireland.

AVERILL EARLS' REFLECTIONS ON THE FELLOWSHIP

Classroom Impact:

For my Queer Lives course, the collections and the *Digital Scholar Lab* was extremely useful. I pulled a sampling of newspaper articles about Park and Boulton (two 'cross-dressers' from the 1870s who were put on trial) and a sampling of newspaper articles about 'female husbands' from across the 19th century. I also ran a sentiment analysis of a larger set of newspaper articles for both topics.

The sentiment analysis wasn't useful for Park and Boulton, because the tool didn't allow for a zoomed-in look at the sentiment over the year or so that the trials took place, but the sentiment analysis of 'female husbands', a search that spanned the 19th century, was a useful data point to include in the sampling I provided students. I put the class in groups, and each group set half of the students to reading about female husbands, and half read about Park/Boulton.

Research Impact:

The exercise was really successful. Students thought about how to use sentiment analysis to construct a thesis and outline a paper, and how to use newspaper articles as primary sources for historical research. I could see clearly how access to the *Digital Scholar Lab*—with lots of coaching and time—could also be useful to students' independent research projects. I intend to follow up with my library to see if we already have the *Digital Scholar Lab* available to our students.

Plans for future use in the classroom:

I teach Digital History courses, and if the *Lab* was available to my students, I could imagine constructing a course around learning the tools available to design DH projects.

Plans for future use in research:

My plan to run a sentiment analysis and text analysis of *British Library Newspapers* (BLN) on Mac Liammóir and Edwards was less successful. Part of the issue was that the BLN Irish newspapers are not the newspapers that would have reported on Mac Liammóir and Edwards. In the BLN, despite its expanded materials, there were under 100 [hits], almost all were from the Irish newspapers—which meant I couldn't compare British and Irish results the way I wanted to—and most were about Edwards alone. That made some sense, as he was the director and business manager of the Gate Theater. These results answered a research question: about how little the British thought about Edwards/Mac Liammóir.



“This guided experience demonstrated to me how useful the Gale collections—and *Digital Scholar Lab*—are and can be as teaching tools.”

—Averill Earls, Assistant Professor, History, St. Olaf College, United States

ABOUT BRITISH LIBRARY NEWSPAPERS

Unparalleled in depth and scope, *British Library Newspapers* consists of collections from the British Library, which span 300 years of newspaper publishing in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The rise of newspapers in Britain was a phenomenon that characterized a new age. The newspaper was increasingly a medium for information required by the commercially minded societies of major cities and regional centers.

Taken as a whole, the huge production of newspapers in Britain provides an enormous resource for research in all topics relevant to British life, both urban and rural.

[Learn more](#)

ABOUT THE NACBS-GALE FELLOWSHIPS

Gale and NACBS offered five Gale-NACBS Non-Residential Fellowships to support research or teaching projects that rely on *Gale Primary Sources*, including those held in *Gale's British Library Newspapers* series and Decolonization collection, and use DH methodologies.

Each fellow received a stipend of \$2,500 to support the equivalent of one month's full-time work (160 hours). Awardees could dedicate four consecutive weeks to the fellowship project or spread their work out over a longer period. Applicants from all countries were eligible to apply for the fellowship. Eligible applicants were required to be members of NACBS and be either doctoral students or have Ph.Ds.

[Learn more](#)

How can Gale *Digital Scholar Lab* and *British Library Newspapers* expand and enliven your research?

Contact your Gale representative for more info.