

Dear Diary

Credits

The exhibition is a collaboration between King's College London's Centre for Life-Writing Research and The Great Diary Project, supported by the Department of English and presented by Cultural Programming at King's. It also draws on the expertise of the European Research Council funded Ego-Media research group at King's, which investigates life writing in the digital age.

King's College London would like to thank all the galleries and individuals who have so generously lent and contributed to the exhibition.

Exhibition devised by Professor Clare Brant, King's College London and Dr Polly North, The Great Diary Project.

Designed by Mr Gresty (Studio). Films by Derek Eland and Jonah Klein. Editing by Scott Smith, Rob Gallagher and Arko Højholt. Photography by Rachel Smith and Yeshen Venema. DiarApp by Nikita Vorontsov. Music by Sam Jackson. Content contributed by Alex Belsey, Rob Gallagher, Ailsa Granne, Mikka Højholt, Rachael Kent, Frances Long and Rebecca Roach.



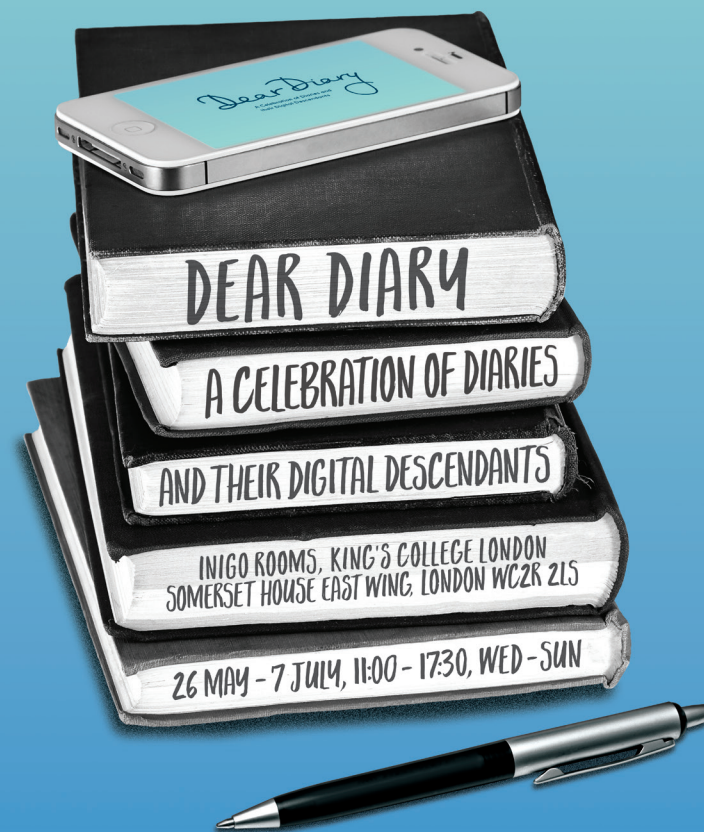
With thanks to: Martin Abrams, Anna Arthur, Boho Berry, The Bodleian Library, The British Library, Joanna Budden, Carolyn L. Burke, Nicola Burns, Calderdale Museums, Bernard Capp, Angela Clare, John Coombe, The British Council, Pixel Crater Ltd, Corin Harper-Davis, Caroline Dawnay, Rebecca Dean, Stefan Dickens, Peter Fletcher, Rachel Foss, Richard Harper, Robert G. Hodge, Rachel Homer, Sophie Jones, Clark Kegley, Richard Kirkland, Mark Krynsky, Andrew Law, Alan Li, Charles Lock, Frances Long, Richard D. North, James Metcalf, Lauren McCarthy, Kyle McDonald, Grace Newton, Christina Owen, Jo Rodgers, Max Saunders, Matt Shaw, Sarah Spiller, Stylist Magazine, Tate, Andrew Turner, Keith Vaughan Estate, Barbara Vesey, Bret Victor, Victoria and Albert Museum, Eric Walters, Andy Webber, Brian C. Wilson, The Whitewall Company, The Wordsworth Trust, Zoe Wilcox and Adam Wulf.

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Inigo Rooms, King's College London
Somerset House East Wing
London WC2R 2LS

26 May - 7 July, 11:00 - 17:30 Wed - Sun

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Exhibition Guide

Dear Diary

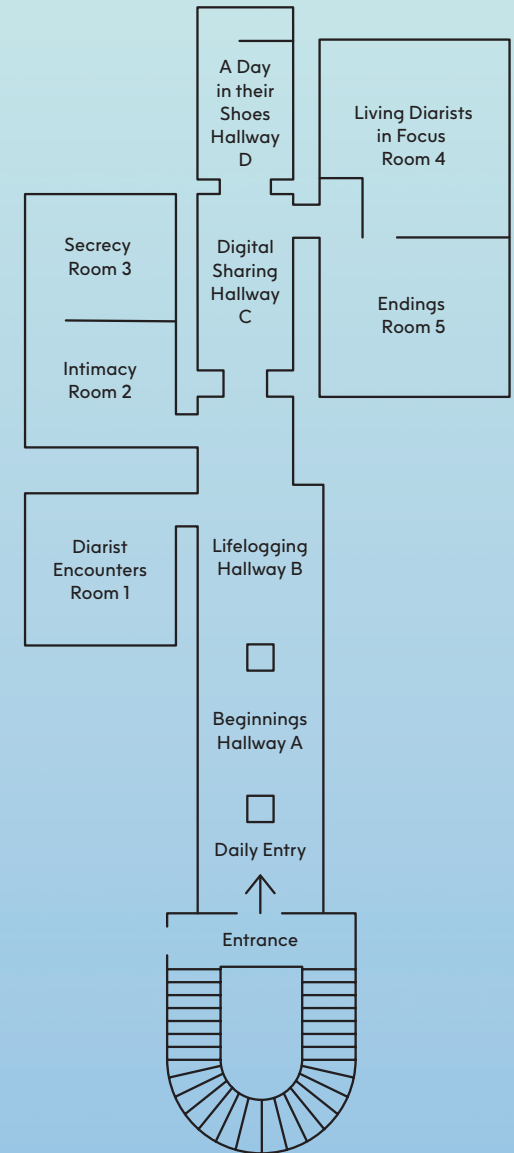
A Celebration of Diaries and
their Digital Descendants

When Dr Irving Finkel and Dr Polly North created the *Great Diary Project* in 2007, Irving explained the need for an archive for diaries: 'Diaries are among our most precious items of heritage... No other kind of document offers such a wealth of information about daily life and the ups and downs of human existence.' Diaries are **profoundly personal** documents, expressing the singularity of an individual's voice and life: a diary is as unique as the person who writes it. Diaries are also a form of life writing through which **shared social history** is lent a fresh and personal dimension. *Dear Diary* brings together a wide range of diaries to explore some of the themes and forms of the genre. Celebrating the diary's appeal over several centuries, it also explores its power to stage **important questions about identity** in the twenty-first century. Diaries, like letters, have been so strongly associated with writing on paper: what's happened to diaries in the digital age? *Dear Diary* shows diaries being reinvented in ways that both continue and depart from earlier traditions.

Dear Diary

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Diaries of Others - a film about the private lives of diarists - Room 4

Derek Eland's film explores the reality of diary-keeping for four living diarists – what drives them to write, their relationship with their diaries and contexts for their personal stories.

Recorded through conversations and interviews with the diarists from 2015 to 2017, the stories which emerge range from the ordinary to the extraordinary, meshing deeply personal reflections and everyday events. Whilst diaries are individual, they also put forward materials to which readers and viewers can relate as fellow humans.

Derek Eland is an artist from the UK whose work explores what it's like to 'be human' in interesting, challenging and sometimes extreme situations, from the front line of the recent war in Afghanistan to Everest Base Camp. He collects stories and enables them to be seen and read by others in order to challenge perceptions about places, people and events. The stories which emerge are deeply personal, moving and honest and it is through them we are able to help understand what makes us 'human'. Further examples of Derek's work can be found at www.derekeland.com

Your Diary Reflections

We invite you to share your thoughts about diaries. If you would like to join in further research into online identity, please visit Ego-Media's DiaryBox at www.ego-media.org/diarybox

Endings - Room 5

How do diaries end? Few diarists know when they'll die, though the artist Keith Vaughan defies the convention that there is no diary entry for your exit. The result is shocking. Endings also come in material – or virtual – forms of **destruction**: mice, fire and flood are traditional threats whose digital equivalents are breakage, **disappearance** of pages or platforms or corruption. OpenDiary.com was one such platform. Hacked, restored, hacked again, it disappeared. Christina's Elegy pays tribute to her vanished online diary culture. A fear of being forgotten co-exists with privacy in diaries; some diarists overcome this by re-reading, remembering themselves.

Afterlives in print are not uncommon, and diaries circulate beyond words into film and art. Picasso said that painting was just another way of keeping a diary. A diary song, 'Ephemera', written specially for the exhibition by composer Einsam invites you to hear and imagine the diary as unending, as cultural echo.

We hope you have enjoyed the exhibition'. Thank you for coming; please visit again!

Find out more about the exhibition and diaries at www.deardiaryexpo.co.uk

Daily Entry

At the entrance of the exhibition you will find a **quotation** from a diary or about diaries from a range of diarists. There's a different one for every day of the exhibition. Visit again and see another!

Beginnings - Hallway A

Why do modern diaries look the way they do? Besides dated pages, they usually include information on weights and measures, currencies, religious festivals, time zones, telephone codes and international holidays. There is often a page to add information about yourself: for example your address, height and National Insurance number.

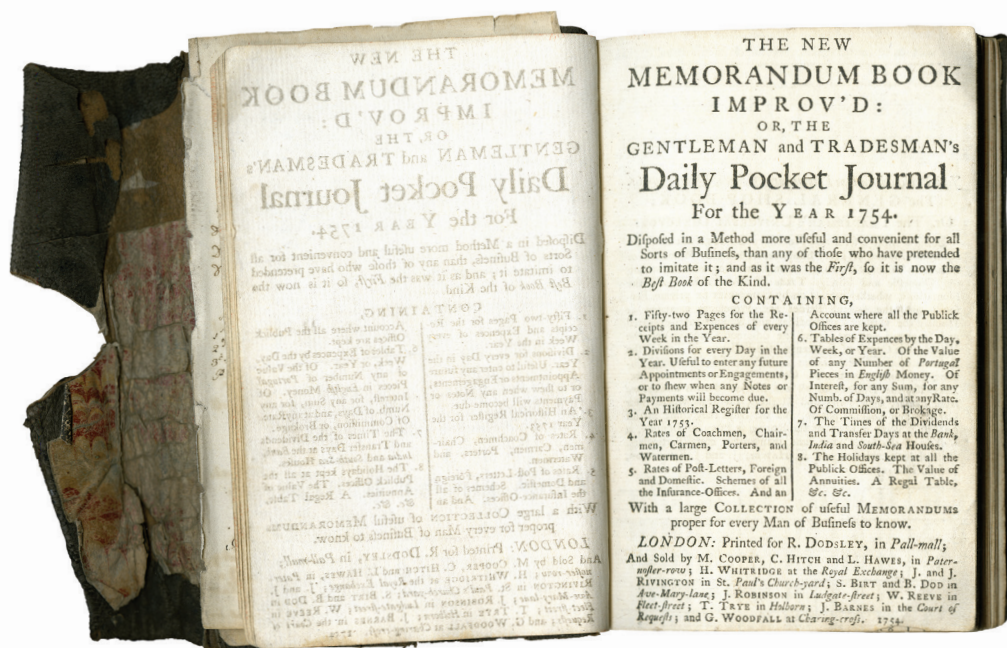
Part of the reason for this design is found in the **almanac**. Around 3,500 years ago ancient astronomers developed tables to predict the movements of stars, planets and heavenly bodies. Such movements linked astronomy to divining the future, and so later printed almanacs came to include horoscopes, astronomical data, religious and agricultural calendars, and medical tips. Almanac meaning 'calendar' appears in Latin in the twelfth century. One possible – and charming – etymology is the Arabic 'al-munak', or making a camel kneel; this term for a halt may have widened to refer to a station in a journey, and hence a measuring point in the journeys of heavenly bodies.

*We converse with the
absent by Letters, and
with ourselves by Diaries*

Isaac D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, 1817.

By the late sixteenth century, almanacs were best-sellers. Containing printed information and blank pages and wide margins for people to add personal information, they prefigure both appointment diaries and personal diaries. Their publication each year also set the model for diaries as annual purchases, and the year as a cycle of record. Almanacs have not completely disappeared - *Old Moore's Almanac*, begun in England in 1697, is still going in print and digital editions – and information provided in modern diaries, such as tide tables, lunar movements and measurements, is like the information found in ancient almanacs.

Many modern diaries begin with pre-printed matter tailored to defined groups. Major suppliers like Letts, Collins and Boots have designed diaries for specific groups or trades including farmers, sailors, engineers, gardeners, housewives and theatre-goers. This matter can be described as **paratext**, a preface to the main text of diary entries. Though critics have compared paratext to a vestibule or fringe, it is also text in its own right. What's assumed to be useful information changes over time and between user groups, as we show in a grand selection.



Courtesy of the Great Diary Project

Digital Sharing - Hallway C

We outsource more and more functions to devices: what will the future bring? We showcase **Diarapp**, an experimental diary app designed for *Dear Diary* by King's student Nikita Vorontsov, which tries out some new functions, including sentiment analysis. Ego-Media researcher Mikka Højholt investigates sharing in the world of **Mummyvlogs**, through her film about YouTube video-blogs (vlogs) by mothers documenting everyday life and the complex communities which form around them.

A Day in their Shoes: Diaries - Hallway D

Presented by Professor Brian Brivati, The Stabilisation and Recovery Network and Dr Meg Jensen, Director, Centre for Life Narratives, Kingston University

This installation presents **refugee diaries** in the form of film, photos with voice overs collected by human rights defenders working with refugees in Yemen, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Yazidi refugees in Iraq en route to Germany, and reflections from a refugee camp in Germany by an Azeri exile.

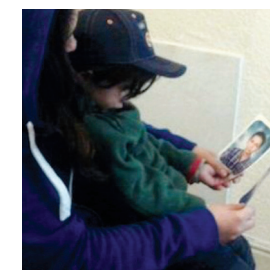
Contributors include Nadine Saba of Akkar Network for Development in Lebanon, which runs a women's shelter for Syrian refugees in Lebanon; Elias Diab of UNICEF in Yemen; Naka Alkhzraji of Faiths Forum for London who supports refugees in the United Kingdom, and Falah Shakarm from the Wadi organisation in Kurdistan that runs a shelter for Yazidi women and girls escaping Daesh (IS).

Unscripted, with minimal editing, these are impressions from lives being lived in the spaces between countries by people displaced by war or working to serve those who have been. These fragments are simply aid workers' immediate responses to our request for a diary entry from the people they are trying to help. And stories told by survivors of Daesh (IS) as they wait to start a new life. Their response to the request for a diary is to tell their story in full or to appeal for help for those with whom they are working.

Can we walk a mile in their shoes through these glimpses into their lives?



Shoes worn by a Yazidi Girl who escaped from Daesh, photograph courtesy of Falah Shakarm.

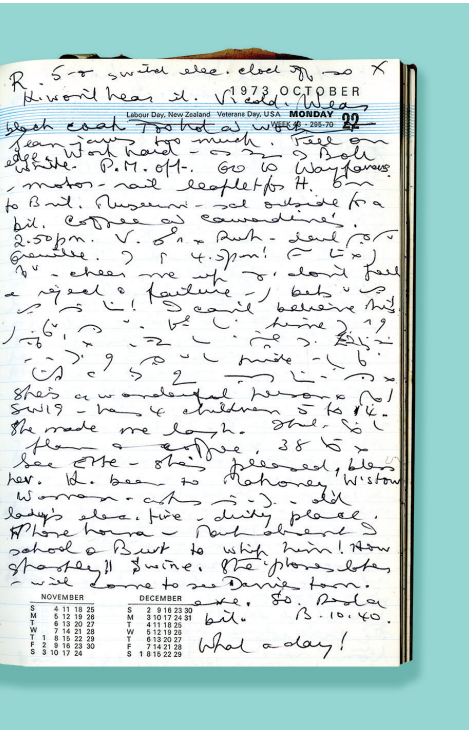


Angelina, Syrian mother now in UK, photograph courtesy of Naka Alkhzraji.

Films provided by Professor Brian Brivati, Director, The Stabilisation and Recovery Network and Dr Meg Jensen, Director, Centre for Life Narratives, Kingston University.

I could have protected the document with a password or padlocked or hidden the computer, but I didn't care enough to inconvenience myself. The diary wasn't a trove of secrets; it was, simply, everything. I might as well have hidden myself from view.

Sarah Manguso, *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (Graywolf Press, 2015)



Courtesy of the Great Diary Project.

Secrecy - Room 3

'Beastly Sneaks Keep Out!' warns one diary. The strong associations between diaries and privacy easily turn into a language of secrecy. Samuel Pepys and Anne Lister invented their own codes; others wrote in shorthand. Verbal ciphers, external locks and digital encryption keep diaries secret, reinforcing the idea of diaries as confessional or illicit. Where a secret diary lets a child have space to itself, it also turns a diary into a thing to be hidden, with associations of shame and fear of discovery. Sex and money star in ideas of secrets for adults; as Great Diary Project examples show, real secrets can be painful. Secrecy is also defined by the state: censors decide what to keep secret from readers. In wartime, apparently harmless information may be felt to threaten the community. Online, anonymity keeps identity a secret. While online anonymity is often associated with disinhibition, the anonymous or fictional persona online serves various purposes besides self-protection.

Lifeloggging - Hallway B

Featuring quotations from diarists, critics and writers thinking about what goes in to a diary and why, this section explores how quantifying the self relates to the record keeping of earlier diary practices. Benjamin Franklin recommended logging thirteen virtues every day - a practice now converted to digital in an app. Some activities like dieting, exercise and looking for work still use paper records, which can be compared to the digital traces of Rob Gallagher's 'headprint' capturing the diversity of a day's activities online. Ego-Media researcher Rachael Kent explains in a film about fitness apps how online health diaries involve self-presentations and fictions. Whilst investing in the diary's therapeutic narrative and immediacy, lifeloggging replaces an ethos of privacy with one of sharing and performance. Where paper



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diaries suppose 'I am what I write', lifeloggging promotes 'you are your data'. That data may be spread over different platforms, with different relationships to communities and confidentiality. Sharing joins writing in helping us feel better. Where paper diaries reflect on the formation and nature of self in writing, lifeloggging aggregates and synthesises the self to make it understood through body consciousness. Two exhibits show how sleep and sneezing data can be differently organised to express subjectivity, and how self-organisation can be helped through surveillance by oneself, peers and communities. Lifeloggging devices expand a tradition of diary-keeping as therapy and prosthetic memory, which diarists on paper still continue, for instance in grappling with dementia.

There is no such thing as a typical diarist... There are as many diarists out there as stars in the night sky.

Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary* edited by Jeremy D. Popkin & Julie Rak
(University of Hawaii Press, 2009)

Diarist Encounters - Room 1

From the infinite variety of diaries, this room samples **themes and forms** which recur amongst diarists from roughly the last century and a half. Diarists often repurpose off-the-peg diaries or turn blank notebooks into their own type of diary. Although the personal diary is usually understood as a medium for subjectivity created through expressive writing, many diaries serve specialist interests. Examples shown include diarists who record weather; chronicle journeys, holidays or trips; log birdwatching, gardening and hobbies; write down dreams; explore the joys of romances, the hopes and disappointments of relationships and the griefs of bereavement. Probably a majority of personal diaries are **paratactic** – that is, they include different sorts of content which are given equal weight. The actor Kenneth Williams used different kinds of handwriting in his diary to record different subjects; more commonly, diarists like Kathryn Anne Green (Great Diary Project 38) use individual styles of exclamation to give emphasis. Others personalise with different coloured pens, stickers or pictures, in sensuous pleasures still promoted by bullet journaling.

With so much variety in paper diaries, what does digital offer? Included in the wall vitrine are some early digital diaries and logging devices which mimicked paper diaries in the way information is organised and personalised. **Diary apps** appeal to new generations of diarists by promoting an idea of 'me time', offering therapeutic and creative tools, and by adding pictures and audio; entries can also be tagged, shared, synced and made searchable. Diary apps present digital diarising as prosthetic memory: your app will remember your life for you. Some prompt the diarist with questions, turn moods into graphs and promise greater self-knowledge. As descendants of paper diaries, apps offer options to be private or public.

Where **front-matter paratext** offers worldly information, **pages at the back** of diaries are often set up for **accounts**: careful, precise financial records are an important convention in diaries.

I like to read my diary occasionally to remind myself what a miserable alienated old sod I used to be.

Jo Brand, interview with Ben Thompson,
The Independent, Sunday 7 January 1996

Intimacy - Room 2

The experience of reading someone else's diary can feel intrusive, transgressive and voyeuristic. Many diarists subscribe to the idea that diaries are emphatically private, not to be read by others in their lifetime. Many diarists can also simultaneously believe in a sympathetic, ideal or future reader who validates their diary and the enterprise of keeping it. How should we read someone else's diary? Given the incremental representation of self in daily entries, do we assume cohesion of self when that self changes over time? This section of the exhibition invites you to get closer to some diarists and explore **intimacies of reading**. An unusual visual diary runs counter to the usual intimacy in diaries with a diarist's textual voice but not body. Three more diaries from the Great Diary Project archive, each distinctive, present intimacy of situation and voice; a fourth, a child's version of world news and daily events in 1968, offers us intimacy with precocious and remarkable political attention.

Intimacy in digital contexts was initially very experimental. *Carolyn's diary* was a pioneering example. Online from January 1995 to 2 May

2002, Carolyn L. Burke braved a world of unknown response when she posted daily entries about her life and relationships. Writing publicly about her boyfriend, friends and family was, she argued, necessary because honesty required no limits to privacy. 'When I started writing here, it was to make a point - that we have nothing to hide from each other', wrote Carolyn in 2004, when she withdrew her diary from open view to the world, and circulated it in parts only to close friends. (You can still read all the original diary online at <http://diary.carolyn.org/>.) Intimacy defined an early phase of digital history when openly sharing a personal life was new and bloggers were less certain of readers and responses. Today, online diaries can be found for instance on Reddit, whose Diary sub-thread has rules which encourage intimacy through openness, providing no personally-identifying information is included.

Intimacy of diarists with their former selves is explored through three short films from a batch made for *Stylist Magazine*, in which women read diaries written by their younger selves. Written intimacies contribute to intimacy with a type, girls growing up.