

IMPERIAL

Centre for Languages,
Culture and Communication

Teaching history of science, medicine and technology in a STEM university context.

Dr Jennifer Wallis & Dr Michael Weatherburn (Imperial)

8-10 July 2025

BSHS

THE • BRITISH
SOCIETY • FOR
THE • HISTORY
OF • SCIENCE



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Situating STEM higher education globally.

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2nd in the world
1st in the UK and Europe

QS World University Rankings 2025

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College and Campus

Science

Engineering

Health

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Imperial retains second in the world position in major university ranking

by Joanna Wilson

19 June 2025



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Imperial College London has kept its position as the UK and Europe's top university in the QS World University Rankings.

QS has consistently recognised Imperial as one of the world's top ten universities and this year highlighted Imperial's approach to sustainability, the employability of our graduates and academic excellence.

Imperial's President, Professor Hugh Brady, said: "This is a powerful endorsement of the talent, dedication and ambition that defines the Imperial community."

Imperial targeting Convergence
Science at scale to drive
economic growth

Imperial strengthens ties with India with new Global hub

Imperial opens hub in Ghana with a commitment to boost scientific

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Situating humanities teaching in STEM higher education globally (research by Dr Igor Baranov, Imperial).



- Civil, Liberal, and Global Education Requirement
 - 2 courses
- Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing Requirement
 - 11 courses, at least half can be classified as HSSA
- Writing and Rhetoric Requirement
- Language Requirement



- Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Requirement
- 8 courses, including
 - At least 1 course in each area
 - 3-4 courses in selected HASS concentration
 - 1-2 electives



- Science in Perspective Requirement
 - 6 credits (30 hrs workload each) at undergrad programmes
 - 1 course in Humanities, Social and Political Sciences should be taken by all master students
- 100+ courses to develop new perspectives on STEM issues, such as the historical, moral, legal, economic and political contexts



- Broadening Requirement
 - 12 credits (40-50 hrs workload each), including courses in Arts, Humanities, and Social Analysis
- Foundations Requirement
 - 12 credits for 2 courses in cognitive and behavioural foundations of university education and 2 courses in English and Chinese communications

Imperial is increasingly aware of its heritage and history.

- Official centenary history (1907-2007)
- Humanities at 70 celebration (2020)
- Imperial History Group/Dialogue (2021-)
 - Renamed buildings
 - Renamed prizes
 - Kickstarted new heritage and cultural initiatives
- Renamed Central Library as Abdus Salam Library (2023)
- Increasingly deploying 'rhetorical history' (Suddaby et al, 2023): e.g. 'Our founding mission is "To Be Useful".'



Imperial College London
1907 – 2007

Home
Our past
Historical facts and figures
Timeline
Memories
Our present
Our future
Gifts and downloads

Centenary site nominated for a Webby Award

100 years - 100 stories: Building the Centenary homepage

100 years of living science
100

Memories

[Back to memories](#)

Hannah Gay

(Chemistry 1959-64)
Hannah shares her memories of being mistaken for a corpse

I have written about this period in my book on the history of the college but there are many stories that I omitted. Among them are some personal ones that I remember well, in part because they don't reflect entirely well on me. I think we tend more easily to recall the embarrassing moments in our early lives than the good – though not exclusively. So, here are four stories I recall with mixed emotions.

I was a chemistry student and once, when working in the inorganic practical laboratory, felt extremely tired, climbed on to the bench, lay down, and went to sleep. Why I decided to do such a thing rather than leave the lab escapes me. Unfortunately Professor Wilkinson chose that moment for his weekly round of the lab and I was awakened by a roar followed by a series of expletives addressed more at the poor demonstrator than at me. The demonstrator was sitting at the front of the lab and had not noticed that anything was amiss. The shelves of reagent bottles above the benches obscured his vision. Apparently Wilkinson at first thought that I was dead, perhaps poisoned, and was frightened by what he saw. But fear soon turned to anger – anger that should have been directed at me, too, but was directed at the demonstrator alone. (I have forgotten the demonstrator's name; if he reads this, I hope he will accept my apologies), Wilkinson (Geoff, as I came to call him as a postgraduate) was always friendly but never forgot the incident. He reminded me of it years later when I asked for an interview. I was thinking of writing something about him even before coming to write the history of Imperial College. He willingly agreed to be interviewed but sadly died shortly before we had arranged to meet.

The Centenary Campaign
Through the first decade of the twenty-first century the campaign seeks to raise £207 million from Imperial's alumni, staff and friends, and donations from charitable foundations and industry.

Where your support can make a difference
Give now

Staff and student portraits
Imperial's Centenary Year provides an opportunity to recognise and celebrate members of the Imperial community.

View staff and student portraits

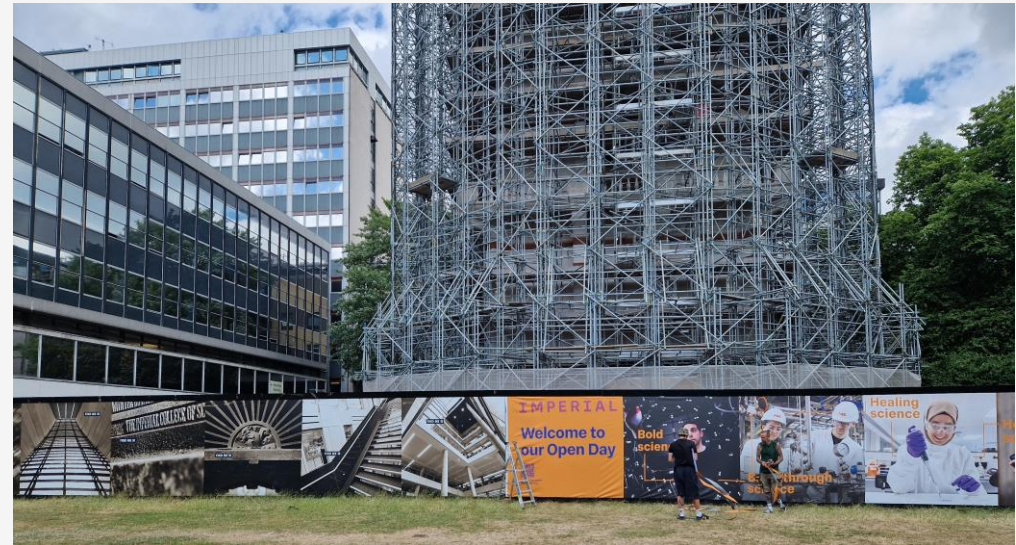
Imperial is increasingly aware of its heritage and history.

Nice summary here:

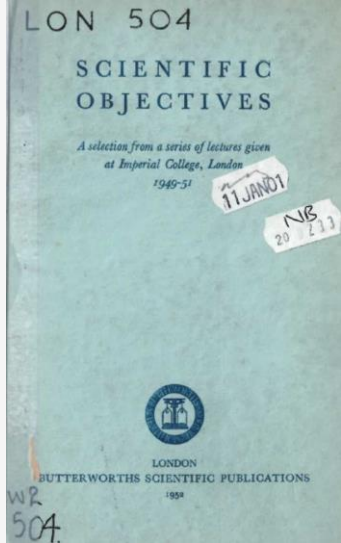
<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/Stories/take-a-closer-look/>

Material culture:

- Technological artefacts distributed around campus (e.g. Spitfire engine, Victorian clocks).
- Small exhibits and departmental museums (e.g. Royal School of Mines)
- Entrance archival display (documents, alumni stories)
- Statues and monuments: Einstein, Queen Victoria, Dangoor Plaza, Dalby Court, within Queen's Tower.
- Campus roads and passageways named (e.g. 'H.G. Wells Way')



Timeline of humanities teaching at Imperial



1925-6 Acland humanities essay prize founded.

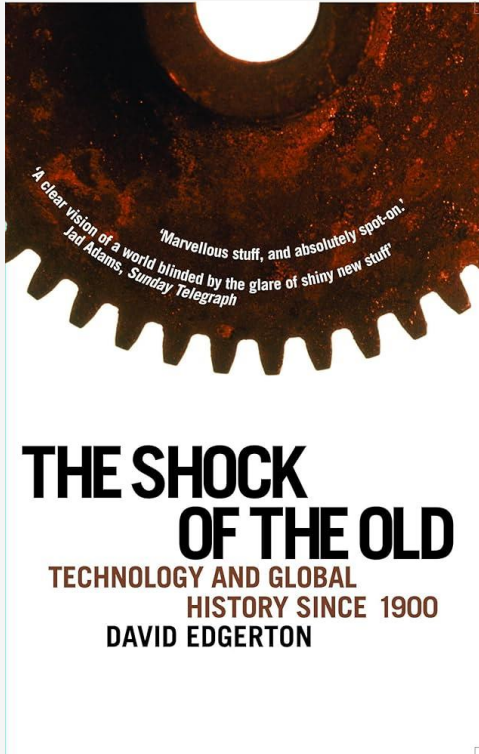
Late 1940s – Scientific Objectives lectures in response to nuclear weapons (to make scientists more aware of consequences of their work)

1950s-70s Touchstone weekends at Sillwood campus.

1963 – history becomes institutionalised at Imperial. Interestingly, no modern historians employed as this counted as science rather than history (Edgerton, 2023).

1980-90s – industrial sociology develops into management school, then Imperial Business School (2003).

CHOSTM at Imperial



Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine.

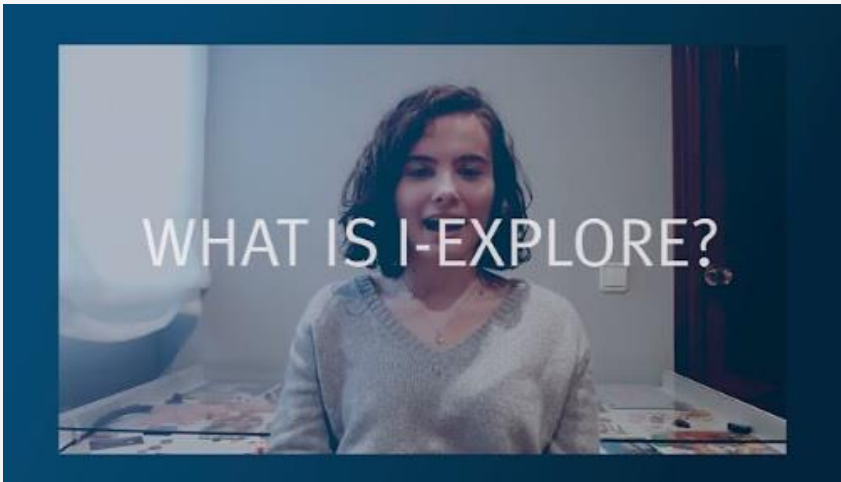
1992-2012: CHOSTM delivers teaching in lunchtime lecture format: politics, ethics, history of technology (which became *Shock of the Old*, 2006) and European history.

Formed London Centre MSc with UCL STS Department and Wellcome Centre, c1990s-2010s.

Top UK history department in REF 2008.

2012: CHOSTM relocates to KCL History Department.

Horizons/ I-Explore programme overview



Horizons, founded 2012, initially split into four fields:

- Business and Professional Skills
- Global Challenges
- Languages
- Science, Culture and Society (SCS)

In 2019: SCS absorbed BPS and rebranded as humanities and social sciences (HSS). Also Global Challenges as Changemakers.

Also 2019, I-Explore launched, including STEM, BPES and multidisciplinary projects. I-Explore now includes all Imperial undergraduates as part of their degree.

Plus, the majority of UGs also opt-in to at least one additional Horizons option during their degree.

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/centre-for-languages-culture-and-communication/i-explore>

History teaching at Imperial



Current options, all elective:

Y1: History of Science & Empire

Y1: History of Modern Medicine & the Body

Y2: Revolutions & the Making of the Modern World

Y3: History of Science, Technology, and Industry

Y3: History of Intoxication

Y2-3: Humanities Projects

Y4: Advanced Humanities Projects

Total elective history capacity c.150-200 annually.

Context of humanities teaching at Imperial



Uli Harder/Flickr

‘Albertopolis’ envisaged Exhibition Road as a cultural/educational hub

The Science Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, and Natural History Museum all created with profits from the 1851 Great Exhibition

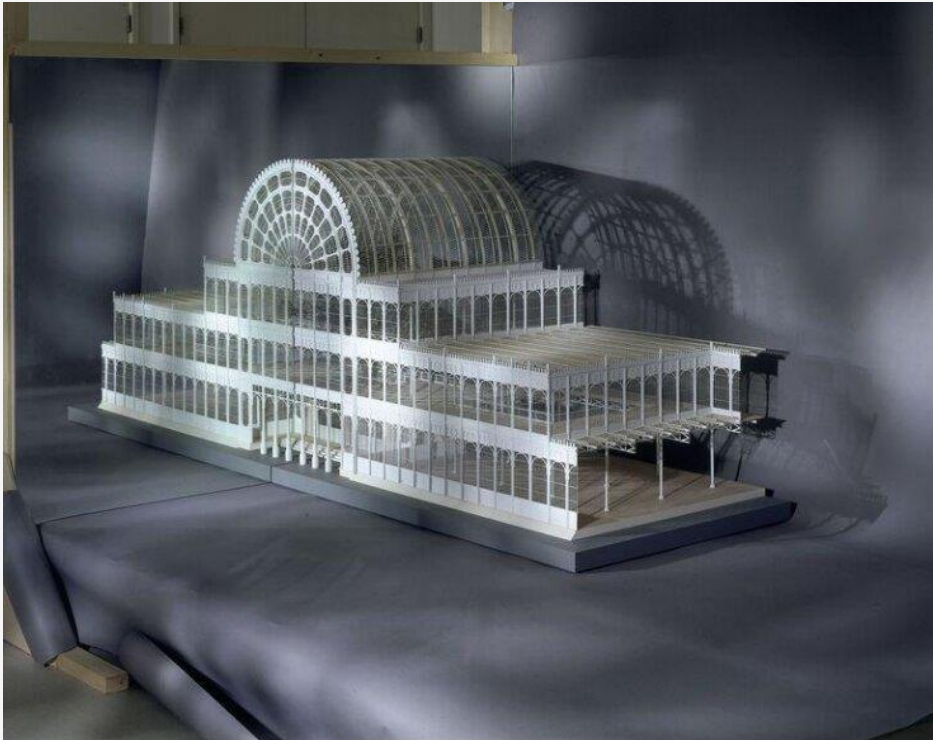
The Imperial site itself once housed a host of exhibitions about science and industry e.g. the International Fisheries Exhibition, 1883

Our neighbours include the Royal Geographical Society and Royal College of Art

Collaborations with other London institutions e.g. Chelsea Physic Garden

Informal clubs, e.g. Imperial Classic Cars Club, History Society, Medical Humanities Society

Education case study 1



Richard Armiger/V&A Museums

History of Science & Empire (Year 1): a long-running module, recently redesigned to anchor each week's topic to an object: maps, the Crystal Palace, machine guns, skulls, tonic water, taxidermy, rice, the mask of Tutankhamun.

Hands-on wherever possible e.g. tonic water tasting.

The Crystal Palace week begins with a visit to the V&A 19th Century galleries to see a model of the Palace, original exhibits, and plans.

Students then consider the engineering challenges of the Palace back in the classroom.

One assessment involves writing a label for an object.

Education case study 2

Year 3/4 elective History of Science, Technology and Industry module. C.30-35 students per class.

Formative exercise example:

- Student historical discovery.
- Monumentalism exercise using Imperial campus.

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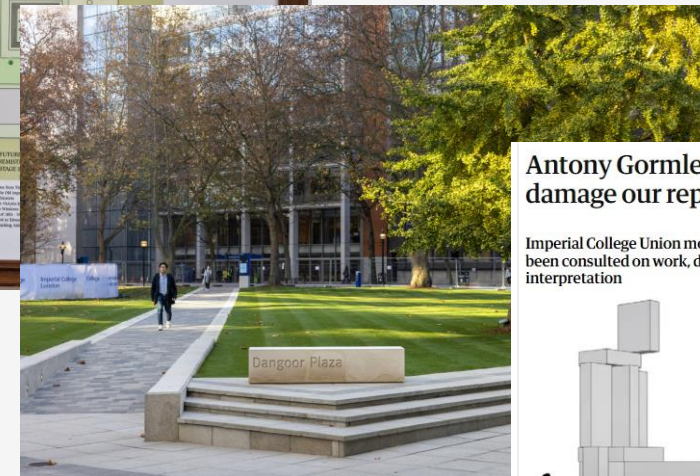
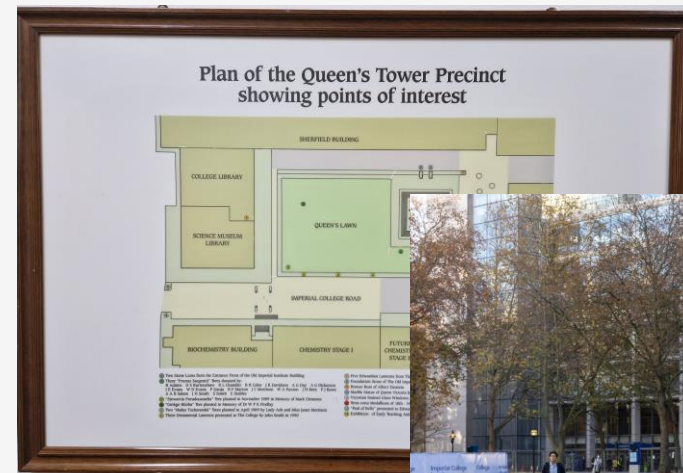
Imperial Horizons

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History of Science, Technology & Industry

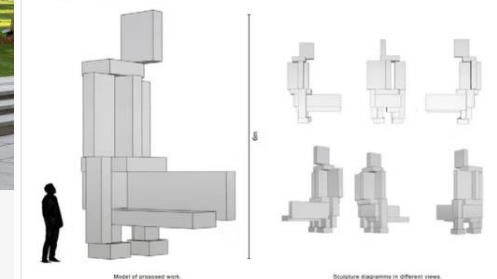


The global history of science, technology and work, from classical antiquity to the present day



Antony Gormley's 'phallic' statue may damage our reputation, say students

Imperial College Union motion says students should have been consulted on work, due to 'obvious' erect penis interpretation



The sculpture is meant to resemble a squatting human figure.

University students at Imperial College London are battling to prevent the installation of new sculpture by Antony Gormley over concerns that the work is "phallic".

Education case study 2

Year 3/4 elective History of Science, Technology and Industry module. C.30-35 students per class.

Summative assessment example.

1st assignment chosen from set questions list at end of Term 1 (note AI issues).

Term 2 shapes up individual project ideas across five weeks of exercises, followed by a class presentation and feedback. Then, students prepare final 1500-2000 word essays.

This year's A+ examples:

- Impact of alchemy on scientific revolution.
- Enlightenment debate on infinitesimals.
- Eugenics in New Zealand.
- C20th music tech impact on music composition.

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Imperial Horizons

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History of Science, Technology & Industry



The global history of science, technology and work, from classical antiquity to the present day

BSc Humanities



Clara Canning-Jones



BSc Medical Sciences with Humanities, Philosophy & Law: a year-long course in Year 4, for both Imperial and visiting students (c.25 in total)

Core teaching (history of medicine, narrative medicine, etc.) is supplemented with guest artist workshops: graphic novels, life drawing, acting...

Workshops are directly applicable to assessments (posters, verbal presentations, podcasts, visual narratives). The dissertation project includes an un-assessed art piece.



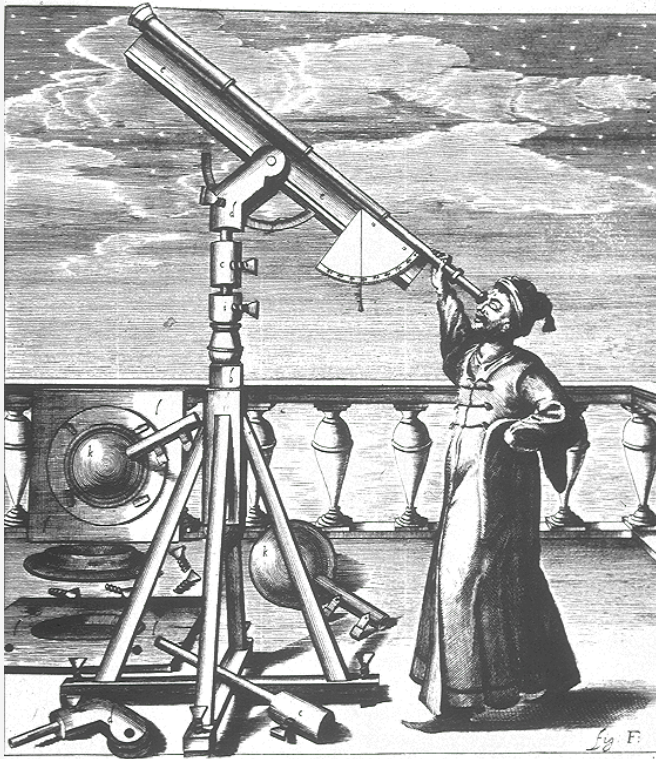
BSc Humanities



“Even the most hardened humanities-sceptic medical educators cannot argue in good faith that medicine exists in a vacuum of objective, black and white, facts, separated from the grays of society, its people and their problems. For us, [the humanities] provide an opportunity to look at these gray areas, and a framework for studying them carefully.”

(Olding et al, ‘Black, White and Gray: Student Perspectives on Medical Humanities and Medical Education’, *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 2022)

Future ambitions



1. Acland essay prize centenary, AY 2025-26. See: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/centre-for-languages-culture-and-communication/history/the-acland-prizes>
2. Humanities & Arts Special Interest Group.
3. Alumni shapers
 - Aims to reveal the hidden value of humanities, social science, arts and languages education in a STEM context.
 - Research publication submitted.
4. Enhancing student belonging using history.
5. The challenges facing humanities scholars teaching in medical schools is a core concern of the new Network for Medical Humanities Scholars Teaching in Medical Schools (JISC: TEACHMEDHUMS).

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