

By preserving our sound heritage now, in the future we can recreate the past

Sound recordings freeze moments in time: music or theatrical performances, the words spoken by the famous or in everyday speech, or the sounds of our environment. When played back, they allow us to understand, to experience, to be immersed in – to *relive* – those moments.

Yet preserving sound recordings and making them accessible is a huge challenge, not least because sound recordings can rapidly decay and as technology marches forward, formats quickly become unplayable.



Many thousands of archived magnetic tapes urgently need digitising

The British Library's *Save Our Sounds* programme received a tremendous boost when in 2015 a £9.5 million grant was earmarked by the National Lottery. After months of preparation and assessment, prioritising the most significant at-risk sounds collections around the UK and building a network of 10 collaborating institutions, our ambitious project called *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage* is launched today.

Unlocking Our Sound Heritage builds on the generous support of other donors and funders, meaning that the total project funding of £18.8 million is now in place. The funding enables the formation of the first ever UK-wide network of ten sound preservation centres. This network will now come together with the British Library to save almost half a million rare and unique recordings.

The funding allows the British Library to lead this major preservation and access project, sharing skills and supporting the ten centres across the UK in order to preserve their own unique and rare regional sounds and make them more accessible to the public.

The Library and its ten partners will invest in a schedule of public engagement activities, including well-being workshops, learning events for families, and tours, events and exhibitions. A vital element of the project will be a new website for listeners to explore a wide selection of recordings. This website is scheduled to go live in 2019.



Cleaning a shellac disc before digitisation in the British Library's sound studios

Dr Sue Davies, Project Manager at the British Library commented:

“This project has been a long time in development and, over the last 18 months, we have laid good foundations for the next five years. I am excited to be part of this HLF funded project which will make a huge difference to the care of and use of audio

archives across the UK. I am particularly looking forward to working with the ten institutional partners, sharing our skills and making it easier for a wide range of people to engage with recorded sound.”

Unlocking Our Sound Heritage has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Foyle Foundation, Headley Trust, the British Library Trust and the American Trust for the British Library and other kind donors.

The ten centres that will soon begin work on preserving their regional sounds are: National Museums Northern Ireland, Archives + with Manchester City Council, Norfolk Record Office, National Library of Scotland, University of Leicester, The Keep in Brighton with the University of Sussex, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, National Library of Wales, London Metropolitan Archives, and Bristol Culture.

Richard Ranft, Head of Sound and Vision

More information:

[Save our Sounds](#)

[Unlocking our Sound Heritage press release 12/04/17](#)

[£9.5m boost from Heritage Lottery Fund for our Save our Sounds campaign](#)

[Save our Sounds: 15 years to save the UK's sound collections](#)