Official Visit of British Ambassador Justin McKenzie Smith to the National Library

2026/01/19



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Ambassador Justin McKenzie Smith was received by Dávid Rózsa, Director General, and Zoltán Lewalt-Jezierski, Head of the Director General’s Cabinet. The discussions covered, among other

topics, the web archiving project implemented in cooperation with the National Library of Scotland in 2025, as well as a lecture series promoting British culture held at the National Library of Foreign Literature. As a gift from the Library, Justin McKenzie Smith received a deluxe facsimile copy of the *Philostratus Corvina.* This was followed by a presentation in the Apponyi Room, where British-themed special items selected from the collections of the National Széchényi Library were introduced by Miklós Janzsó (Manuscripts Reading Room), Zsuzsanna Bakonyi (Early Printed Books Archive), Máté Szentkereszti (Digital Humanities Centre), Anna Laskai and Ágnes Bessenyei (Theatre History and Music Collection).



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Among the exhibited manuscripts was an 8th-century fragment of *Vita metrica Cuthberti* (The Life of Saint Cuthbert) by Venerable Bede (available online at: https://copia.oszk.hu/fragmenta/cod-lat-442-beda-venerabilis-vita-metrica-cuthberti/), [6] the mid-19th-century notebook of Adam Clark, the sketchbook of Teréz Walter Pulszkyné (including drawings made in 1855 of Ventnor on the Isle of Wight) and her diary of her stays in England and the United States, as well as the early-18th-century album amicorum of György Simon Bonyhai, containing an entry by Oxford professor Humphrey Hody.

The Early Printed Books Archive also prepared items of outstanding significance. The parchment-printed presentation copy of the 1488 Augsburg edition of the Chronicle of Thuróczy, produced for King Matthias, is the first book in the world to feature gold printing and—unique in the history of printing—contains a publisher's preface set in gold type. Its woodcuts were hand-coloured at the Hungarian royal court. Another highlight was *A Voyage into the Levant*, published in London in 1636 by the English traveller Henry Blount, which also recounts the author's days spent in Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) while travelling towards Constantinople. The work not only records Blount's personal adventures but also offers comprehensive reflections on, among other topics, the foundations of state governance, the effectiveness of justice, and even the benefits of coffee consumption. Count Sándor Apponyi considered it one of the most enjoyable travelogues of the Middle East, while the Scottish historian John Pinkerton ranked it among the best and most interesting travel accounts in the world. (A Hungarian edition, translated and edited by Zsuzsa Bakonyi, will be published soon.) The displayed documents also included Edward Browne's *A brief account of some travels in divers parts of Europe*, published in London in 1685, which provides detailed descriptions of Hungarian settlements and is complemented by engravings based on the author's drawings, as well as Robert Townson's *Travels in Hungary*, published in London in 1797, in which the English traveller reports on his visit to Nagycenk, his meeting with Ferenc Széchényi, and his appreciative and respectful

impressions of the Hungarian people.



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From the Theatre History and Music Collection, two manuscript scores containing Joseph Haydn’s and Franz Schubert’s arrangements of Scottish folk songs were exhibited, along with the first printed edition of Haydn’s Scottish song arrangements. During the presentation, the Ambassador listened to the *Gyertyafénykeringő* (Candlelight Waltz), which follows the melody of the famous Scottish folk song *Auld Lang Syne*. Scottish-themed theatre history documents from the collection of the National Széchényi Library were also presented, including a selection of set and costume designs for Gaetano Donizetti’s opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The opera is based on Walter Scott’s novel *The Bride of Lammermoor,* is set in 17th-century Scotland, and had its Hungarian premiere in 1948 at the Hungarian State Opera House.

From the Manuscripts Reading Room of the National Library, the algal collection that Lajos Kossuth received as a gift from Scottish natural scientists was also exhibited. Kossuth was an avid plant collector, his herbarium comprised 4,500 specimens. He received the two-hundred-specimen algal collection as a gift in 1874, which reminded him of the Scottish landscape and his friends there.

Following the presentation, the Ambassador also visited the digitalization centre of the library, where Gábor Klinger, Head of Department, provided a detailed overview of its operations and achievements to date. The remainder of the visit included an introduction to the permanent exhibition *Esszencia*, presented both in Hungarian and English, which showcases the diversity of the collections of the National Széchényi Library. To conclude the event, Justin McKenzie Smith viewed the model of William Shakespeare’s birthplace housing a deluxe edition of Shakespeare’s complete works, which Lajos Kossuth received as a present during his visit to England.



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