



Transcribe Bentham, launched in September 2010, is a pioneering and double award-winning crowdsourced transcription project, co-ordinated by University College London's Bentham Project. Produced in association with UCL's Centre for Digital Humanities, UCL Library Services, UCL Creative Media Services, the University of London Computer Centre, and the British Library.

The project digitises and makes available the vast collection of manuscripts written and composed by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the philosopher, reformer, and founder of the modern doctrine of utilitarianism. Bentham is perhaps best known as the originator of the 'panopticon' prison, and for having requested that his mortal remains be preserved and displayed after his death: Bentham's 'auto-icon', or dressed skeleton, now sits in a box at UCL, wearing a suit of his own clothes, and is a constant source of fascination and bafflement to visitors).



As well as being custodians of his corpse, UCL holds a great deal of Bentham's corpus. UCL Special Collections holds about 60,000 manuscript folios written by Bentham (conservatively estimated to contain c. 30 million words), the British Library has a further 12,500 folios (c. 6 million words). Bentham wrote on a wide range of topics, ranging from representative democracy to crime and punishment, from religion to the transportation of convicts to Australia, and from sexual morality to education. The Bentham Papers are a resource of enormous historical and philosophical importance, but the majority have never been transcribed, let alone adequately studied. As a result, our understanding of Bentham's thought is at best provisional, and at worst a caricature.

To help solve this problem, Transcribe Bentham recruits volunteers from around the world to transcribe the digitised manuscripts via a specially-designed website and interface known as the 'Transcription Desk'. No prior background knowledge or qualifications are required to participate, other than an internet connection and a degree of patience.

Find out more!

Dr Tim Causer from UCL and the Transcribe Bentham Project will be taking part in a panel discussion about crowdsourcing at the 2013 MRS Annual Conference, March 19th, in London.



Dr Tim Causer is based at UCL and amongst his many activities Tim lists:

- Co-ordinating the Transcribe Bentham initiative
- Editor of the Journal of Bentham Studies

Transcripts produced by volunteers have two main purposes: first, they are uploaded to UCL's free-to-access digital Bentham Paper repository to widen access to the collection and ensure its long-term digital preservation. Second, the transcripts will make a valuable contribution to research a scholarship, by forming a starting point for future volumes of The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham being produced by the Bentham Project (and volunteers will be fully credited for their work in the volumes to which they contribute. Volunteers frequently transcribe manuscripts which have not been read since Bentham composed them, and can potentially make new discoveries. Transcribe Bentham is thus a partnership with volunteer transcribers who, rather than merely consume the fruits of humanities research, play an active part in its generation.

As of 6 February 2013, 5,004 complex manuscripts (or c. 2.5 million words) have been transcribed or partially transcribed by volunteers, of which 94% have met our demanding quality controls. This is an astonishing amount of work: volunteers currently work on an average of 45 to 50 manuscripts each week, which is more than might reasonably be expected of one full-time researcher.

Find out more at: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham/> and <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project>.