The new Peltz Gallery was opened in Birkbeck’s School of Arts in Gordon Square in 2013. Generously funded by Birkbeck alumnus Daniel Peltz (MA Renaissance Studies, 2009) and his wife Elizabeth, the venue will host digital and material displays, small-scale performances, lectures and meetings.

The first major – and free – exhibition, called Touching the Book, ran from July to October 2013, and explored the history of embossed literature for blind people in the nineteenth century. It was curated by Dr Heather Tilley, of Birkbeck’s Department of English and Humanities, and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through its Sharing Heritage programme.

Dr Tilley said: “The first embossed writing systems were developed largely by sighted people, often fuelled by their desire to make the Bible accessible to blind people. However, these early systems used the Roman alphabet in a raised form – a format which is much friendlier to the seeing eye than the touching finger. “During the nineteenth century, a number of embossed systems were developed by blind creators and co-existed for a while, each with their own group of ardent supporters. The exhibition took visitors through the journey which culminated in the widespread adoption of Braille, and the near extinction of other embossed writing systems.”

Professor Annie E Coombes, Acting Director of the Peltz Gallery, said: “The Touching the Book exhibition demonstrated the extraordinary potential of the Peltz Gallery as a gallery and exhibition space, which showcases the various intersections between research and the broader public that are possible not only within the School of Arts but in Birkbeck as a whole”. 

For a digital version of Touching the Book, with regularly updated articles, visit: www.blogs.bbk.ac.uk/touchingthebook

For current exhibition information, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/peltzgallery