

# Senate House Libraries

*a profile*



**SENATE HOUSE  
LIBRARIES**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



Welcome to Senate House Libraries, University of London. This profile explores the depth and breadth of our collections across the arts, humanities and social sciences in support of the London, national and international research communities.



# SENATE HOUSE LIBRARIES

Senate House Libraries (SHLS) comprise the collections of the School of Advanced Study (SAS) libraries and those of Senate House Library. The collections range from important supporting materials to some of the finest of their field in the world.



**Christopher Pressler** FRSA  
Director of Senate House Libraries  
University of London

Senate House Library serves the University of London Colleges and the London, national and international research communities. The remit of the School of Advanced Study is to act as a focus for research facilitation in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the United Kingdom. Together, Senate House Libraries provide unparalleled open stack collections in central London.

In an age becoming defined by shared services, our libraries raise the student experience and provide critical support to the research process at the centre of the federal University.

Tens of thousands of students at all levels use Senate House Library itself annually and every year, our libraries support the research activities of scholars from almost one thousand universities around the world.

## THE COLLECTIONS

Senate House Library **Institute of Advanced Legal Studies** Warburg Institute  
**Institute of Historical Research** Institute of Classical Studies **Institute of Musical Research**  
Institute of English Studies **Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies**  
Institute of Philosophy **Institute of Commonwealth Studies** Institute for the Study of the Americas



All of this is performed in central London, as part of the greatest concentration of libraries anywhere in the world. Nowhere else in the UK can offer this combination of open access, collection size and geographical setting.

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Senate House Libraries constitute very large research collections in the arts, humanities and social sciences, totaling over four million books. The collection is complex because it is based on expansion and depth, rather than relegation and recycling as is the case in teaching collections. The scale is important because it affects the libraries' ratio between future print and digital collections, a ratio fast disappearing in smaller institutions.

Libraries in other research-intensive environments share these characteristics. However, there are two additional factors that define the role of Senate House Libraries. Firstly, many of the collections are not only large but are amongst the finest of their field in the world. Secondly, a considerable percentage of these collections are held on the open shelf in central London. This provides a unique provision of internationally important materials made easily accessible, and defines the role of Senate House Libraries in the sector.

The nature of humanities, social science and arts research continues to require engagement with and the development of, large physical collections. The principal research outputs in these fields are often still in printed form. Research libraries in the broader humanities though, are not merely stores. A research project is a partnership between the researcher and the library from the earliest survey of current materials, through the interpretation of materials or digital environments, finally to the placement of that research in the setting of the library.

The Internet does not devalue libraries. It is an additional resource, in the context of extensive printed holdings in research-intensive libraries, to aid the pursuit of research as a constant partnering between the library, its staff and the principal investigator of a project. Research is concerned with discovery. Libraries remain an essential mode of travel.



The role of Senate House Libraries was defined in the early part of the 20th Century: to collect at research level across specified disciplines in the arts, humanities and social sciences. The principal collections of Senate House Libraries are each profiled here.

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**SENATE HOUSE  
LIBRARIES HOLDS  
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HISTORIC  
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ANY UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY IN THE UK**

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#### **Periodicals**

The Senate House Library periodicals collection is the most extensive of any single university library in the UK. The addition of SAS library holdings makes this one of the world's greatest periodicals holdings. The scope, coverage and access are all highly valued by the national research base and the pre-1914 collections in European languages are an internationally important research resource.

#### **Law**

The Institute of Advanced Legal Studies is a national research library in its own right and exceeds the British Library in the field of law. Inclusive of these holdings the central University law collections are of considerable international importance.

#### **Historic Collections**

Senate House Libraries holds the highest proportion of historic collections of any university library in the UK. A significant number of collections of international importance are held, of which the greatest is the Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature. A particular strength is the sheer size and scope of 19th, 18th and 17th Century materials. Historic and special collections range from unique individual items through named collections of thousands of materials to entire libraries, such as the Warburg Institute.

#### **Cultural History**

The Warburg Institute provides an open-stack library devoted to the transmission of ideas between cultures through verbal and visual evidence. This world-leading library, which is especially strong in Italian history, the history of magic, science and religion, medieval and renaissance philosophy and art, and the afterlife of the classical tradition, complements collections in Senate House Library, the Institute of Classical Studies and the Institute of Historical Research.



A shared national resource of research depth built over the very long-term.

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**HOLDINGS IN  
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#### **Palaeography**

Acclaimed as the finest open-access research collection of its kind in Europe, the collection is the UK's national focus for palaeographical and diplomatic research.

#### **Classical Studies**

The collections comprise those at Senate House Library and those of the Institute of Classical Studies, supported by the Hellenic and Roman Societies. Cumulatively, the Senate House Libraries holdings in classics are amongst the most important in the world.

#### **English Studies**

The collection is drawn from British, Irish and post-Colonial literatures and is the largest English literatures collection on open-access in the UK. Its profile defines it as internationally important in size and depth at over 500,000 volumes, and it acts as the library for the Institute of English Studies. The collection has added depth in related materials and manuscripts in Historic Collections.

#### **Germanic Studies**

The combined collections of German language and literatures from the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies and Senate House Library are amongst the most important holdings in the UK. Contributions are made by learned societies and by the German, Swiss and Austrian embassies. Close collaboration exists with the British Library, the German Historical Institute, the Goethe Institute and the Wiener Library.



A unique provision of internationally important materials made easily accessible.

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**THE PSYCHOLOGY  
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**Psychology**

The psychology collection at Senate House is the most significant of any UK university. Acting as the library of the British Psychological Society it supports the certification of psychologists across the country. It is also an essential resource for health and behavioural sciences curricula in the University of London.

**History**

The Senate House Library and Institute of Historical Research collections in history are the largest combined holdings of any UK university. A particular strength is the comprehensive collection of British significant monographs and there are many other history collections across SHLS. Collaborative collecting has been practiced with Colleges for much of the 20th Century.

**Commonwealth Studies**

The collection of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and relevant materials in Senate House Library are unique as the only research library in its field in the UK. The libraries of both the Canadian and Australian High Commissions are held by SHLS and the collection is exceptionally strong on South Africa and Cyprus. Historic collections, particularly on African nations enhance the international reputation of the collection.

**Philosophy**

SHLS holds the major philosophy collection in London, and one of the finest in the UK. The collection acts as the library of the Royal Philosophical Society and has a strong multi-lingual profile. The collection is enhanced by important historic collections.



The music collection at SHLS is the deepest single research collection of any UK university, and the best in Europe outside the British Library.

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THIS IS THE UK'S  
NATIONAL  
RESOURCE FOR  
RESEARCH ON  
LATIN AMERICA

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#### **Latin American and Caribbean Studies**

As one of the principal area studies collections, this is the UK's national resource for research on Latin America, being complementary to the British Library. Collaborative collecting has existed since the 1960's with University of London Colleges.

#### **Romance Languages**

The SHLS collections in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese are the principal research collections of the federal University of London. For many years, the University has collected these languages at SHLS, Asian-Pacific languages at SOAS and Slavonic languages at SSEES (UCL). Smaller Romance languages, such as Galician, Romanian and Occitan are also well represented and the SHLS Catalan collection is the finest in the UK. Historic collections holdings in French and Spanish are exceptionally strong and the SHLS collection of modern French and Spanish literatures are each the largest in the UK.

#### **United States Collections**

Now acting as part of the library of the Institute for the Study of the Americas, the founding collection is that of the United States Embassy. It is the largest US collection in the UK and is unique in the world in that all subjects, with the exception of music, relating to the US are held together. A particular strength is US art history, where SHLS has the strongest collection of any European university. There are close research links with other collections held by SHLS, such as the library of the Canadian High Commission and those of Latin America and the Anglophone Caribbean.

#### **Music**

The music collection at SHLS is the deepest single research collection of any UK university, and the best in Europe outside the British Library. Particular strengths are the collections of score editions, historical sets



The art history collection is a major resource in its field, comprising over 20,000 volumes and supplemented by many other collections.

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and facsimile manuscripts, although the collection is also noted for its strengths in French, Spanish, Italian and German materials. An internationally important collection, it also provides essential support to University of London Colleges. Over 1000 first edition music scores from the 15th Century to the present day are the historic core of the collection.

#### **Art History**

The art history collection is a major resource in its field, comprising over 20,000 volumes and supplemented by many other collections. As is common at SHLS there are strong holdings in French, German, Italian and Spanish materials. Historic collections add to the materials, particularly in the field of Soviet art and the collection is developed alongside holdings at University of London Colleges. The addition of the Warburg Institute collections, especially in the Renaissance period raises SHLS collections to international importance.

#### **Politics**

The collection strength is primarily in its coverage of British and European politics. It is underpinned by internationally important historic collections and is itself particularly strong in political philosophy. Related materials can be found in many other SHLS collections forming cumulative research strength in the field.

#### **Maps**

The map collection at SHLS is the University of London's principal holdings of topographical, physical, thematic and antiquarian materials. There is a large percentage of material not duplicated in the British Library and holdings have been developed in collaboration with University of London Colleges.



Our environment – Senate House was designed to stand at the centre of the third great English university. It was to be a building rooted in the contemporary world, and only at home in the world's capital.

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**INTEGRITY IS  
DERIVED THROUGH  
CLEARLY STATING  
PURPOSE**

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In 1932, the architect of Senate House, Charles Holden began building this art deco masterpiece. The library is designed to be a building that would only stand naturally in London. There are echoes of the lives of other great universities, such as in the inclusion of cloisters, but Holden did not design faux-medieval or classical copies. Senate House was born of clear design principles.

For a research library of the intellectual depth of Senate House, no detail should be considered too small. That the collections are held in a building formed from design principles of modernist simplicity is an important current opportunity. Senate House confirms its function and usability by adhering to those principles. Integrity is derived through clearly stating purpose. The purpose of Senate House was made physical by Holden and will be secured for the future by allowing the objects and designs of the contemporary world to integrate with their art deco surroundings.

Every technology, every sight line, every website, every product and every service in such an important building needs to be considered in terms of design, as something people interact with. Everything we do in the library must have a rationale.

Apart from the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and the Warburg Institute all the libraries and collections are within Senate House itself. Our aesthetic accountability for this environment is to Charles Holden. We must, as far as is possible, place nothing in these spaces that wrestles with the original design. We should create services within the building and on our websites that are true to Holden's ideas on simplicity and usability. The Senate House design principles were written in 1932 and are now reinvigorated for the 21st Century.



All of the world's greatest libraries offer exploration. Senate House Libraries provide distinctive ways of interacting with digital and printed materials beyond single disciplines, languages and cultures.

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**CHARLES HOLDEN'S  
TOWER STILL  
ENABLES A HIGH  
PERCENTAGE OF  
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INTERPRETED VIA  
OPEN SHELVING**

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#### **Historic Collections**

The historic materials of Senate House Libraries are comprised of some of the greatest named collections in the UK. Rare materials from Shakespeare's First Folio to Sir Terry Pratchett's manuscripts can be viewed in attractive reading rooms in the heart of Bloomsbury. Materials pre-dating 1850 and other archives provide evidential depth to almost every research collection.

#### **World Collections**

The collections that branch across specific areas of the world are a particular strength of the libraries. The Commonwealth, Germanic and Romance cultures, and the Americas all have designated collections. This focus on area studies has facilitated key partnerships with many embassies, High Commissions, societies and other libraries from around the world.

#### **Interdisciplinary Collections**

Arts, humanities and social science libraries on this scale inevitably result in collections that are readable beyond specific classifications. Disciplines such as philosophy, art history, literatures, performance, law, psychology and history operate both as defined collections and support new research through the discovery of previously untraveled paths between collections.

#### **Multi-lingual Collections**

Major collections in Spanish, French, Italian, Catalan and German can be found in associated Institutes and at Senate House Library, but also throughout Historic Collections and within other disciplines. Music, art history, classical studies and philosophy all contain multi-lingual materials. Lines in many languages can be drawn from antiquity to the contemporary.

#### **Open Collections**

Charles Holden's tower still enables a high percentage of material to be interpreted via open shelving, and yet more to be held on site and requested within a short space of time. The particular characteristics of the building itself allow for extraordinary levels of unexpected discovery in a unique, comfortable and beautiful environment.

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[london.ac.uk/libraries](https://london.ac.uk/libraries)



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