Senate House Library Guide

Senator House Library

One of the UK’s largest academic libraries for arts, humanities & social sciences

From medieval illuminated manuscripts and rare first editions through to cutting-edge publications and more recent political pamphlets, Senate House Library’s collection of over 2 million books, 50 special collections and 1,600 archival collections is unique in its breadth and diversity of material.

The Library and its collections have been continuously developed since the 1870s and include highlights such as the first folios of Shakespeare published in 1623, a roll depicting the funeral of Anne of Cleves from 1557 and Lord Byron’s unfinished draft for the end of Don Juan dated 1823.

The archive collections contain items such as unique photographs of the Suffragette movement and personal letters from well-known writers such as Virginia Woolf, known for her connection to the Bloomsbury area. There are also letters from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini to Harry Price, a collector on magic and the paranormal who deposited his Harry Price Library of Magical Literature, in the Library in 1936, just as House’s construction was being completed.

Offering Arts, Humanities and Social Science Research in the heart of London’s student and research community, members of the library have access to millions of books and journals, digital resources, and beautiful study spaces. Senate House Library manages the art collection of the University of London, and the Horace and archive collections of the School of Advanced Study’s Institutes of Commonwealth Studies, Modern Languages Research and Latin American Studies.

Senate House Library also invests in contemporary research and runs a public engagement programme with two exhibitions a year, highlighting the research potential in the collection. Alongside the exhibition is a series of events open to the public as well as students and academics to engage a variety of people from young adults through to researchers.

The art deco building, which Senate House Library is part of, is a literary landmark in the heart of Bloomsbury, located next to the British Museum.

Senate House Library occupies the 4th to the 19th floors of the building with member areas on the 4th to 7th floors containing over 430 study spaces.

There are 6 main historic library reading rooms on the 4th floor: - Goldsmiths’ Library reading room - Middlesex South and North reading rooms - Sterling Library / Palaeography room (Special Collections) - Durning Lawrence Library - Periodicals room. Also on the 4th floor is the Durning Lawrence Library and the Dr. Sung Tei Lee Seminar Room which are used for meetings and private hire.

The Library is open to the public as well as students and academics of the University of London - membership is required.

In 1937, after a century of being housed in temporary premises, the University of London and its Library permanently moved to Senate House. The beautiful art deco building was constructed between 1932 and 1937 as the first phase of an uncompleted scheme designed for the University by Charles Holden. It consists of 19 floors and is 210 feet (64 m) high.

During the Second World War the Ministry of Information used Senate House as its headquarters. The building would later become the model for the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. Today Senate House is an architectural landmark in the heart of Bloomsbury and is open to the public for events and conferences. It is also a popular venue for film and TV productions.

Finding journals
Recent issues of printed journals are usually shelved in the 4th floor Periodicals Room. The catalogue will indicate the shelf number. The majority of journals are available electronically and can be accessed onsite or remotely by clicking the links on the catalogue and using your login.

Finding books & materials
Search the catalogue on the Library’s website for an item’s location in the Library and the class mark so you can find it on the shelf. Items marked ‘Stacks’ can be borrowed by clicking the ‘Request’ button on the catalogue. Items are normally delivered within a five hour and can be collected from the Service Hall. Items from the Offsite Store take 24-48 hours.

A brief overview & history of the Library

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