Senate House Library Guide

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

From medieval illuminated manuscripts and rare first editions through to clandestine 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 Senate House’s construction was being completed.

Offering Arts, Humanities and Social Science Research in the heart of London's student and social science research, the Library permanently moved to Senate House. The beautiful art of the 'Ministry of Truth' is also the model for the ‘Ministry of Truth’ in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four.

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
- Middlesexes South and North reading rooms
- Sterling Library / Palaeography room (Special Collections)
- Durnling Lawrence Library
- Periodicals room
- Also on the 4th floor is the Durnling Lawrence Library and the Dr. Seng Tee Lee Seminar Room which are used for meetings and private hire.

Senate House Library was formerly known as the University of London Library. The University of London in 1836 and, two years later, in 1838 it received its first donation of 200 books. The first known mention to the University of London Library appears in 1846. Only in 2004 was it renamed Senate House Library.

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.

Contact us

In person: 4th floor Service Hall
Email: senatehouselibrary@london.ac.uk
Phone: 020 7862 8500
www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk
This guide is available in other formats upon request.

Computers & WiFi
Library members can borrow laptops for use in the Library from the Service Hall.

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 online or remotely by clicking the ‘view’ link on the catalogue and using your login.

Borrowing
You can browse books and take them outside the Library by putting them through one of the turnstiles or ‘self-issued points’ in the Service Hall. The due date will be stamped in the book or printed on your receipt. Books can be renewed if not requested by other readers. Subject to terms and conditions.

Library card
A Library card for these services in the Service Hall and/or online. You can copy, scan and release print jobs using the machines on floors 4, 5 and 6.

Finding books & materials
Search the catalogues 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 time and can be collected from the Service Hall. Items from the Offsite Store take 24-48 hours.

For Archives & Special Collections enquire, email archivespecialcollections@london.ac.uk

Getting Started

Operational Hours

MAIN LIBRARY
Monday - Thursday: 09:00 – 20:45 (17:45 out of term)
Friday: 09:00 – 18:15 (17:45 out of term)
Saturday: 09:45 – 17:15
Sunday: Closed

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS READING ROOM
Monday - Friday 10:00 - 16:30

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Membership
Membership is available for the largest research libraries in the world:
- University of London Students & Staff: Free*
  (with presentation of current institutional ID)
- Public: £10 for 24 hours, £25 for 48 hours, £50 for 7 days
  (proof of address required)
- 3 months membership: £20 (equivalent to 72p per day)
- 12 months membership: £52 (equivalent to 50p per day)
  (proof of London address or London student card)

* Subject to terms and conditions.

Getting Started

The Welcome & Service Halls on the 4th Floor are the main Library hubs for enquiries and services. Study space is available in the historic reading rooms on the 4th floor as well as in the 5th-7th floors. Please keep your Library card with you at all times so you can access all services.

Opening times vary in and out of term times. Please check the Library website and social media for the latest updates. Entry to the Library ceases 15 minutes before the advertised closing time.