

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM
MANUSCRIPTS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Acquisitions Policy for Rare Books
2022

1. Introduction

This policy concerns the rare book collections which form the majority of the published holdings managed by Manuscripts and Special Collections (MSC). Separate policies cover the department's manuscript collections and archives and the local studies East Midlands Collection.

The policy is reviewed as necessary, at intervals of no longer than 5 years.

2. Rare book collections held by Manuscripts and Special Collections

The rare book holdings have developed and are curated as a series of separate named collections, defined by subject or provenance. They comprise library materials that, because of their age or rarity, vulnerable physical condition or other special significance, are housed and managed separately from the general library stock.

There is a close historic connection between the rare book collections and the University's core library teaching and research holdings. The management of library stock seeks to take account of special strengths in MSC and a number of the collections consist of transfers from library branches. Modern critical literature and other sources relevant to the rare book collections continue to be acquired by the Library Content and Discovery section, reflecting the current research and teaching use being made of MSC holdings.

There is also a strong link between collecting priorities for the rare book holdings and for the manuscript, archival and local studies holdings of MSC. A number of named collections are represented in both the rare book and manuscript sequences.

The management of the rare book collections is based on the premise that they have long-term value and significance for research and teaching at the University of Nottingham and for the wider community, and should be preserved for the use of future generations, as well as being made accessible to current readers.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Explain the basis on which published materials are designated as rare book collections.
- Provide guidelines for staff in developing the collections and in assessing possible additions to them.
- Enable academic colleagues and others to propose appropriate materials for donation or purchase, to be included in the current collections or to establish new specialist subject areas.

3. Criteria for inclusion in the rare book collections

The following criteria may determine whether an item is added to the collections:

- Publication was before 1850.
- It is a private press or limited edition publication.
- The copy is autographed.
- The copy is annotated or contains manuscript additions.
- The binding is of particular historic or other interest.
- It contains original photographs or fine plates.
- It is rare or valuable.

- Its physical format, condition, sensitivity, or other characteristic makes it inappropriate for open shelves.
- It complements strengths in the manuscript and archives series or in the East Midlands Collection.
- It relates to the history of the University of Nottingham; this includes all works published by the University, both administrative and academic.

In addition to the above, the item should:

- Add to the existing strengths of the collections, or
- Be pertinent to the teaching or research interests of the University.
- Be in reasonable physical condition, such that it can be safely produced in the Reading Room, or
- Be of such interest, rarity or value that it would justify the cost of conservation work.

The rare book holdings may also include collections on a specific subject, or having a particular provenance, where the individual items may not fulfil any of these criteria, but where the entire body of material has a range and depth of content which justifies its status as a discrete research collection.

4. Collection development and existing strengths

The department seeks to build on the existing strengths of the collections, and to develop new strengths to meet identified curriculum and research needs. Areas which are complementary to manuscript collections are particularly targeted for enhancement through the acquisition of relevant published works.

The following subjects are recognised strengths within special collections, or are the subject of specific discrete collections.

General subjects

- Coal mining
- Children's educational literature 17th - 19th centuries
- Drama of the 18th and 19th centuries
- French Revolution - contemporary or near contemporary accounts, histories and periodicals, including some material on the Napoleonic era
- German politics and history, particularly the German Democratic Republic
- History, geography and other aspects of the East Midlands (Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Rutland)
- History of agriculture
- History of medicine
- Icelandic literature
- Law
- English literature and drama of the 20th century, particularly of the East Midlands region
- Meteorology
- Natural history
- Ornithology
- Theology

- Travel

Collections concerning particular individuals or organisations

- Charles Knight – the 19th century writer, publisher and educationalist.
- Colin Wilson
- Coventry Patmore
- DH Lawrence
- Parish libraries of Oakham (Rutland), Elston (Notts), and Ashby de la Zouche, Coleorton and Loughborough (Leics)
- Nottingham's Medico-Chirurgical Society Library
- Shakespeare editions and commentaries, and the Bacon/Shakespeare controversy
- University of Nottingham

5. Selection and methods of acquisition

Materials are acquired for the collections through gift, bequest, purchase and transfer from general library collections.

Potential acquisitions are assessed against the criteria listed above.

The development of the collections takes account of known strengths and collecting policies of other relevant institutions, particularly within the East Midlands area. Offers of items or entire collections may be refused if there is another more obvious appropriate local library.

In recent years, the availability of digital copies of rare book publications has become relevant to collection development. The department seeks to avoid unnecessary duplication in its holdings of published works and in assessing potential acquisitions looks for evidence of copy-specific value or the strengths offered by critical mass.

The Librarian (Special Collections) is responsible for collection development. Single items are selected on the basis of academic recommendation, the review of second-hand book catalogues, and in response to individual offers. Consultation with academic colleagues is sought before the acceptance of substantial collections or the creation of new collection areas. Acquisition decisions may be affected by the assessment of cataloguing, preservation or other activities which a candidate collection presents.

5.1 Donations and bequests

The rare book collections have benefited greatly from the generosity of the University's friends, staff and alumni over the decades; the principal current collection strengths have resulted from this philanthropic tradition. In addition to the gift of rare library materials, benefactors have funded particular purchases and enabled the creation of endowment funds to support further collection growth.

The department is happy to receive gifts of library materials that fit the criteria outlined above. Potential donors should discuss their intentions in advance, to enable us to assess the relevance of their collections. Approved donations will be accepted on the following conditions:

- Donations become the property of the University of Nottingham.
- They will be added to collections as appropriate, classified according to subject matter, and interfiled with other books. The University cannot undertake to keep

donated books together as a separate collection although this may be done if it is clearly in the best interests of the collection and its users.

- A label bearing the donor's name will be added to each book in accordance with the donor's wishes.
- The University reserves the right to dispose of items within a donation which are not required for its collections. This may include duplicates and multiple editions, which will be assessed to determine whether they enhance the strength of the overall collections.
- Items are not generally accepted on deposit or loan.

5.2 Purchase

Endowment funds and a small annual budget enable a modest level of purchasing. Second-hand book dealer catalogues and other sources are used to select material that is relevant to collection strengths.

The funds are used whenever possible to fill gaps in the provision of material relevant to current research and teaching needs. Academic colleagues are encouraged to make recommendations for purchase.

5.3 Transfer of material from general library holdings

Library policy requires the transfer of all pre-1850 stock from the other seven libraries in the University to Manuscripts and Special Collections. Most of this material has already been identified but further items are transferred on a routine basis. Other transfers to the rare book collections occur within guidelines of the library's Relegation Policy.

6. Access to further related rare book materials

6.1 Published items within the manuscript and archive collections

Manuscript collections and archives sometimes contain published items, which may be retained in their collection context although individually they fit the criteria for transfer to one of the rare book collections.

These items are few in number but can be located in the archive catalogue and, if catalogued to item level, also in the library catalogue.

6.2 Access to digital copies of rare book materials

Some items within the rare book holdings have been digitised in whole or in part, but Manuscripts and Special Collections does not in general seek to acquire rare book holdings in digital form.

The University library has licensed access to extensive rare book titles that have been digitised from national and international research collections. Their purchase and the management of their licensing terms is the responsibility of the Library Collections team.

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