

Edinburgh University Library

Selection and Acquisition Policy: Rare Books and Manuscripts

This policy covers acquisitions of rare books (very broadly defined as non-current printed material) and non-Edinburgh University Archives manuscripts and archives, whether by purchase, donation or transfer. It follows from the 2005 Library Collections Policy (LCP).

What we take

1. Books and papers by staff or students of Edinburgh University. This is the first priority and we will always consider e.g. works by Walter Scott, Adam Smith. We do not aim for comprehensive collections of translations of such works, but we want a representative selection.

2. Books and papers which fill gaps in existing collections or enhance existing collection strengths. Following the list in the LCP, we will focus on:

- recent literary figures (e.g. Hugh MacDiarmid, Norman MacCaig, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, W.H. Auden)
- the history of science, technology, engineering, medicine and veterinary medicine
- the history of education, including the history of Edinburgh University
- the history of architecture and town planning
- Islamic and Middle Eastern material, particularly examples of early printing and manuscripts with textual significance
- theology and church history, including Christian-Muslim interactions
- Scottish history, particularly relating to Edinburgh and Edinburgh University

3. Books and papers which relate to current teaching and learning needs. E.g. the Centre for the History of the Book needs books which provide evidence for the book as a material object – different examples of printing, books with original bindings / wrappers, unbound / uncut books which reveal the architecture of the book. We will build up a handling collection. In the case of papers, we will consider personal papers of Edinburgh university staff and alumni. Other possible areas which can be developed if funds and academic support are available: European book history; history of illustration.

4. Books and papers which present key research opportunities.

4a. Copies of unrecorded hand-press books. These can be on any subject and from any place, if they are likely to stimulate university research.

4b. Copies of books with important provenance, extensive annotations or other marks by readers – an important and growing area of research.

4c. Unpublished or unrecorded manuscripts of importance.

5. Books and papers which offer major opportunities for income generation e.g. through digitisation or through publication if an unrecorded work.

6. Printed books which represent important new work, in either literary or publishing terms, ideally both – not necessarily Scottish. We will identify new writers, e.g. poetry or fiction, and small presses, e.g. producing pamphlets or artists' books, where we can build up a comprehensive collection and establish a relationship of lasting mutual benefit. To start this area we would seek a specific endowment or ring-fenced funding for that purpose.

When we say no

- We do not accept items which the Rare Books Librarian or other relevant curator feels do not sufficiently match the selection criteria above
- We do not acquire duplicates unless there are compelling copy-specific reasons
- We do not accept deposits unless in exceptional circumstances, and then only following an agreement with an inbuilt review period
- We do not automatically buy items already held in the National Library of Scotland; if there is an NLS copy, we should be clear that there is a case for a copy to be available in Edinburgh University Library. In some specific cases we would defer to NLS, e.g. for Aldis items not already in NLS.

Joe Marshall
Rare Books Librarian
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