

Institute of Historical Research library collection profile

1. Overview

At the time of its foundation in 1921, the IHR library was conceived as “a workshop for historical research” where research students would learn to use historical sources. The library continues this source-based approach. The IHR collection consists mainly of edited primary sources, bibliographies, guides to archives and reference works. The collection covers the history of Western Europe and its expansion overseas from the end of the Roman Empire. Material is usually acquired in the language of origin, and as a result over half of the collection is in languages other than English.

The IHR library is funded to fulfil a national research promotion and facilitation role, and the collections are developed to meet the needs of the international research community at an advanced level. It doesn't distinguish between local and national use, or acquire material specifically for any taught courses, although extensive use is made of the collections by taught postgraduates. All material is reference-only, with no multiple copies, and acquired for long-term retention. The IHR library forms part of the Senate House Libraries (SHLs).

2. Responsibility, committees and collaborative groups

The collection librarians are responsible for the selection of material, in collaboration with the IHR librarian, Senate House Library history librarian and other Senate House Libraries subject staff where appropriate. Major revisions to the collection development policy are agreed in consultation with the IHR library committee and relevant cross-library committees. These include the Committee of London Research Libraries in History, the Committee on Byzantine Holdings in London, and ACLAIR (the Advisory Council on Latin American and Iberian Information Resources).

3. Arrangement

The IHR has an in-house classification scheme, as standard schemes are not detailed enough for the focus of the collection. Items are mostly arranged geographically, with some subject-based collections such as Military and Religious history.

4. Geographic scope

The IHR's collections have historically focused on Western Europe and its colonial history, due to proximity of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (SSEES) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Coverage for British history is particularly comprehensive, but all the Western European collections are of very high quality, and include many titles which are rare in the UK. The IHR collects extensively for European countries outside the former Warsaw Pact. There are strong holdings on local/regional history.

Collections for Eastern Europe are much less consistent, and do not seek to provide more than a complement to the collections of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (SSEES) Library, except in some specialist areas. The IHR collects some source material for the territories formerly within the Habsburg Empire, the Baltic States, and for territories which were formerly part of Germany or Italy, when the texts are in Latin and German. The whole geographical extent of the Byzantine Empire is covered but for new acquisitions the IHR concentrates on the later Empire after the reign of Justinian.

The IHR collection has holdings of sources for the whole of the Americas, and is particularly strong from the colonial period to the end of the US Civil War. These holdings are strong for the remainder of the C19th and some C20th, as a consequence of the fact the IHR was founded before the libraries of the two Institutes for the Americas. It does not collect contemporary history for these areas. These collections augment Senate House Libraries' very comprehensive coverage of the Americas, with good coverage of French publications for Canada and the Caribbean, and of Spanish and Portuguese language material.

Coverage of the rest of the world is less extensive. The proximity of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) influences coverage of India, Africa and the Far East, though the IHR has small holdings relating to early colonisation, travel, imperial administration and diplomatic history in these areas. The IHR collections are limited to the history of European colonies, and in particular those which later formed part of the British Commonwealth. There are also significant holdings for Dutch colonies. Neither IHR nor the Institute of Commonwealth Studies collects the history of territories prior to European colonisation to a significant extent. The later history of British Empire is mostly left to Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

5. Chronological scope

The IHR collections cover from the middle of the fifth century AD (roughly corresponding to the end of the western Roman Empire) to the present, with slight subject variations. It does not cover ancient history; apart from some Byzantine material and unintentional coverage in some broader series and periodicals. Earlier material is covered by the Institute of Classical Studies.

6. Subject scope

The main focus of the IHR collections is on administrative, political, social and economic history. The collections are complemented by the cultural and intellectual history held at the Warburg Institute, so duplication is avoided in this area. History is an interdisciplinary subject by definition, and the collection is used by researchers who are not technically historians and by historians working in areas outside the scope of the collection policy. As the Library is designed as a working collection, the immediate accessibility of the stock is considered as important.

The chief merits of the collection are the consistency with which it has been maintained and the completeness of coverage of the most important printed sources, especially for the earlier periods. The entire Library is regarded as a special collection, but the following collections may be regarded as particularly outstanding: medieval and early modern western Europe in general, especially chronicles, cartularies, Episcopal registers and visitations and civic records; French history, especially medieval Normandy, the French Revolution and inventories of Departmental archives; Dutch history; the colonial history of the Americas; the US Civil War; British parliamentary history; English local history. Coverage of particular subjects, and relationship to collections in other libraries, is described below.

6.1 Historiography

Works on historiography, historical methodology, the philosophy of history, as well as individuals historians are collected throughout the library with the greatest concentration being in the library's General collection. Recently the library has also endeavoured to collect works on memory and memorialisation and the influence history has in society as a whole.

6.2 Religious history

This collection focuses on the political aspects of ecclesiastical history, and the history of the Western church, primarily the papacy, although works on hagiography and on various religious orders are also collected. It tends not cover the spiritual and theological aspects of religious history as this is covered elsewhere. The collections are strongest for the C12th to C17th period. However works are also collected for the modern period too, especially regarding the modern Papacy and both Vatican Councils. Additional material on church history is shelved in the national collections, and there is also a separate collection of the Crusades.

6.3 European Jewish history

Jewish history material focuses on the geographical remit of the collection. Books on Jewish history are shelved within their relevant collections, but recently an additional classmark has been created to bring the more general material together in one place. The strengths of other collections, specifically the Weiner Library and UCL, influence the acquisitions policy for new material which isn't core to the IHR's remit.

6.4 Legal history

IHR collects early legal sources of interest to historians. The greatest strength of the collection is in the period up to the C17th, especially for Great Britain, and little is collected for the modern period due to the proximity of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. Works on medieval canon law are also collected and are part of the library's religious history collection.

6.5 Diplomatic history

The IHR collects published diplomatic documents of European and world powers. The collection is most systematic for Europe and the United States, but this is being expanded into other parts of the world as work is published.

6.6 Military and naval history

The IHR's collection is dominated by sources covering conflicts and forces of the major Western powers with particular strengths being memoirs and letters from the Napoleonic Wars and both World Wars. Collections of conflicts post 1945 are still small but the library collects them as they are published. Moreover, given the wide nature of research in the history of warfare the library continues to collect accounts from combatants of all ranks as well as non-combatants too.

6.6 History of Education

The IHR has a collection of matriculation registers of universities and also collects registers of British public and grammar schools. However, in general, modern educational history is not extensively collected, and the history of pedagogy and modern curricula are largely excluded. The holdings of the Institute of Education library influence the collection policy.

6.7 History of travel and exploration

The IHR collects in this area, with a focus on both travel in the geographical areas covered by the collections, and on travel accounts of people from these regions.

6.8 Archaeology

IHR collects archaeological reports exclusively for the post-classical UK, to complement its collections for British local history, given the rich collections in the Institute of Classical Studies and UCL's Institute of Archaeology. There is very little foreign archaeology.

7. Languages of collections

The IHR library purchases material almost entirely in the original language and more than half of the collection is not in English. Translations are acquired if there is useful editorial matter but usually in addition to the original language edition.

English, Latin, French, German, Spanish and Italian account for the bulk of the collections, but there are also significant holdings in Dutch, Portuguese, Greek and all Scandinavian languages, small collections in all Slavonic languages, Finnish and Hungarian, and some titles in Catalan, Basque, Welsh and Arabic. The sources on Eastern Europe collected are those in Latin or western languages (normally German), and mostly for the medieval and early modern periods, although the introductory material may be in the relevant national language. Little is collected in Cyrillic alphabet, except on international topics. About 40% of periodical titles are foreign language.

8. Format of material

8.1 Monographs: Monographs form the basis of the collection, and are purchased where they fall into the following categories:

- Sources and edited texts
- Collections of data e.g. list of office holders or householders, statistics
- Secondary works with significant appendices with the above content
- Monograph series, e.g. record society series
- Festschriften - generally only collected for people whose work focuses on edited sources.
- Research tools
- Modern reference works, especially historical encyclopaedias, biographical dictionaries, chronologies and handbooks on subjects such as genealogy and heraldry.
- Methodological and historiographical works
- Archival guides, inventories and bibliographies. These include significant holdings of historical bibliographies, bibliographies of incunabula and early printed books, published library catalogues and works concerning other types of printed material such as official papers and theses.

Secondary monographs are generally excluded, and the collections at Senate House Library and Warburg (particularly foreign language material) are considered to be complementary in this area. Facsimiles of manuscripts are not acquired, unless they form part of the only or best edition of a source.

8.2 Periodicals: The IHR subscribes to about 300 current periodicals, mostly core history periodicals within the geographical and chronological scope of the collections. The current policy is to add as few periodicals as possible, due to space and financial limitations. New titles are only acquired if they are seen as important and core to the collections; interdisciplinary titles are avoided. Duplication within Senate House Libraries is avoided, and the IHR has terminated some subscriptions which are held within other libraries and not core to the collection. There has been some discussion about further de-duplication.

Electronic journal provision was centralised within the Senate House Libraries, although there is still a grey area with journals subscribed to only by the IHR which needs addressing. The clarity of information on the catalogue and varying usability of publishers' sites remains a barrier to streamlined access to these. The IHR is likely to retain printed copies while they are available, and until reliability and stability of electronic access improves, although space availability is increasingly problematic.

8.3 Electronic Resources: The majority of electronic resources are shared across the Senate House Libraries, although the IHR does subscribe separately to one or two more specialist resources. Price precludes the acquisition of some electronic resources. Licence restrictions are a problem as most licences will only allow offsite access to an institution's own faculty members, and this contradicts with the expectation of the IHR's national and international research community and the remit to facilitate research for this audience.

8.4 Theses: The IHR has copies of most University of London theses awarded by the History Subject Panel until 2006. After this date they are kept by the relevant University of London college. The IHR library continues to receive a copy of IHR students' theses.

8.5 Microfilms: The IHR has a collection of microfilms, mainly of archival and manuscript material with limited access.

8.6 Maps and Atlases: The IHR holds a small collection of maps mainly consisting of facsimiles of historic maps. Maps are not generally acquired at present due to the extensive Senate House Library collection. Historical atlases are purchased where they fit into an existing topical/geographical collection.

8.7 Archives: The records of the IHR are not managed within the IHR Library, and other than theses no unpublished material is held.

9. Gifts

Gifts are accepted where they are in line with the collection development policy, and increasingly with regard to space availability.

10. Related collections

The notable geographical and chronological limitations resulting from the proximity of SSEES, SOAS and Institute of Classical Studies have been noted. The following are also significant, and affect decisions on purchase of IHR material to varying extents.

- Byzantine and Greek history (KCL, UCL, Dr Williams's Library, Institute of Classical Studies for the earlier period)
- Dutch and Scandinavian history (UCL, although IHR continues to collect source material)
- International and socio-economic modern and contemporary history (LSE)
- History of science (Imperial College) and medicine (Wellcome Library)
- Modern church history and the religious and spiritual side of church history (Heythrop College)
- English and Welsh nonconformity (Dr Williams's Library)
- Military and naval history (KCL, the relevant museum libraries in London – National Maritime Museum, National Army Museum, Imperial War Museum, RAF Museum)
- London history (UCL and Guildhall Library)

- Archaeology (UCL Institute of Archaeology, Society of Antiquaries of London)
- German history (German Historical Institute London, tends to collect secondary works while IHR collects sources; Institute of Germanic Studies collection in SHL is mostly literary but has some overlaps, e.g. political and other exiles in the C19th and C20th, travellers within Germany and German travellers elsewhere, and the reunification of Germany at the end of the C20th)
- Commonwealth Studies (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, IHR has less focus on recent material due to this overlap)
- History of education (Institute of Education)
- Cultural and intellectual history (Warburg Institute)
- Art history (Courtauld Institute)
- Holocaust studies (Wiener Library)
- Palaeography and Book Studies (Senate House Library, IHR no longer collects but has some old material previously retained for courses - potential for withdrawal due to duplication)
- Latin American Studies (Senate House Library)
- United States Studies (Senate House Library)
- Genealogy (Society of Genealogists, the IHR doesn't collect material of purely genealogical interest)

Informal arrangements have existed throughout the development of the libraries, and have helped to define the strengths of the collections. Existing holdings of the British Library and other national collections are taken into account when considering the purchase of titles which are marginal to the collections, or expensive.