

# LITERARY AND THEATRICAL ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION GUIDE

[www.britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/english-and-drama/](http://www.britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/english-and-drama/)

## INTRODUCTION

This collection guide provides an overview of the British Library's literary and theatrical archives and manuscripts from the 16th century to the present day. Listed here are the most significant individuals and organisations represented in the collections, including novelists, poets, playwrights, translators, theatre directors, actors, critics and literary agents, as well as corporate archives including those of publishing houses and literary societies.

This guide refers predominantly to English language materials, although some foreign language material exists, particularly where associated with translation to or from English.

The guide by no means constitutes an exhaustive list of the Library's holdings. For a more comprehensive list of all literary and theatrical archives and manuscripts please consult the [Archives and Manuscripts](#) catalogue.

Please note that some of the archives and manuscripts covered in this guide will not yet have been catalogued.

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## 1. WHAT'S AVAILABLE AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY?

### 1.1 Manuscripts and Personal Archives

#### Renaissance and Restoration

It is unusual to find manuscripts written in the hand of the author for this period. Rare examples of manuscripts written wholly, or in part, by the author exist for the following writers:

- Launcelot Andrewes
- Samuel Butler
- Thomas Browne
- John Dryden
- Fulke Greville
- John Harington
- Robert Herrick
- Ben Jonson
- Philip Massinger
- John Milton
- George Peele
- Katherine Philips
- Walter Raleigh
- William Shakespeare
- Thomas Traherne
- Thomas Wyatt

#### Eighteenth century

Many more autograph manuscripts survive from the eighteenth century compared to earlier periods, sometimes with multiple drafts of the same work. Writers include:

- William Blake
- Robert Burns
- William Cowper
- Daniel Defoe
- Thomas Gray
- Samuel Johnson
- Alexander Pope
- Allan Ramsay
- Samuel Richardson
- Laurence Sterne
- Jonathan Swift
- Mary Wortley Montagu

#### Nineteenth century

By the nineteenth century publication was firmly established as the means by which most works were read, with a resulting surge in collecting of authors' original manuscripts as prized cultural artefacts. The Library holds manuscripts by the following writers:

- Jane Austen
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- Anne Brontë
- Charlotte Brontë
- Emily Brontë
- Robert Browning
- Lord Byron
- Lewis Carroll
- John Clare
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Charles Dickens
- George Eliot
- Thomas Hardy
- John Keats
- Edward Lear
- Mary Shelley
- Christina Rossetti
- Walter Scott
- Percy Bysshe Shelley
- Algernon Swinburne
- Alfred Tennyson
- Oscar Wilde
- William Wordsworth

## Twentieth and twenty-first century

The twentieth century saw a burgeoning in the collecting of literary manuscripts. From the latter half of the century onwards, the development of professional archival practice led to the collecting of archives – more comprehensive bodies of material produced by an individual or organisation – as opposed to single or small collections of manuscripts. The Library holds manuscripts or archives relating to the following literary and theatrical figures:

### Literary

- W H Auden
- Beryl Bainbridge
- J G Ballard
- John Berger
- James Berry
- John Betjeman
- Rupert Brooke
- Angela Carter
- G K Chesterton
- Bob Cobbing
- Joseph Conrad
- Wendy Cope
- Arthur Conan Doyle
- Lawrence Durrell
- T S Eliot
- E M Forster
- Stella Gibbons
- Kenneth Grahame
- Ted Hughes
- B S Johnson
- James Joyce
- Philip Larkin
- Laurie Lee
- Katherine Mansfield
- Andrew Motion
- Wilfred Owen
- Mervyn Peake
- Sylvia Plath
- Jean Rhys
- Isaac Rosenberg
- Andrew Salkey
- Stevie Smith
- Graham Swift
- Meary James Thurairajah Tambimuttu
- Dylan Thomas
- Edward Thomas
- Keith Waterhouse
- Virginia Woolf

### Theatrical

- Neil Bartlett
- Gordon Dickerson and Kenneth Ewing
- John Gielgud
- Cedric Hardwicke
- Ronald Harwood
- Peter Nichols
- Laurence Olivier
- John Osborne
- Harold Pinter
- Margaret 'Peggy' Ramsay
- Terence Rattigan
- Ralph Richardson
- David Rudkin
- Michel Saint-Denis
- George Bernard Shaw
- N F Simpson
- Max Stafford-Clark
- Tom Stoppard
- Ellen Terry and Edith Craig - on loan from the National Trust, catalogue available [here](#)
- Kenneth Tynan
- Timberlake Wertenbaker
- Michael White

## 1.2 Corporate and Institutional Archives

The Library also holds archives of businesses, societies and charities including:

- Macmillan & Co (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century)
- Poetry Book Society
- *Punch* magazine (1841-2002)
- Royal Literary Fund (1790- ) - on loan
- The Society of Authors (1876-1982)
- Turret Books/Bernard Stone
- Virago Press (1954- )

## 1.3 Lord Chamberlain's Plays

Until 1968 it was necessary under the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 and the Theatres Act of 1843 for all plays intended for public performance to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for examination and licensing. The plays submitted between 1824 and 1968 are now part of the Modern Literary Manuscripts Collection. Plays submitted from 1743 to 1824 are in the Huntingdon Library, California, but may be consulted in the Manuscripts Reading Room on microfiche: MS Fiche 253/1-1297 and MS Fiche 254/1-1070.

Plays licensed from 1824 to 1863 and the Lord Chamberlain's Office Day Books (the registers of plays received by the Lord Chamberlain's Office) are searchable via the [Archives and Manuscripts](#) catalogue.

For plays from 1863-1968 and for the Lord Chamberlain's Plays Correspondence files please see the card indexes in the Manuscripts Reading Room.

For more information on the Lord Chamberlain's Plays and other collections, please consult our guide to [The Play Collections](#).

## 1.4 Modern Playscripts

The 1968 Theatres Act ended the Lord Chamberlain's power to pre-censor theatre. It also stipulated that a copy of every new play performed in a licensed venue in the UK should be deposited at the British Library. This includes new translations, adaptations of original works, musicals and pantomimes. Over 13,000 plays have been submitted to date, although the collection does not provide as comprehensive a record of drama post-1968 as was kept during the era of censorship.

The Modern Playscripts Collection is searchable via the [Archives and Manuscripts](#) catalogue.

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## 2. ACCESSING THE ARCHIVE AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

These archives and manuscripts are held in the British Library in London. To use them, you must be a British Library registered reader. For information about applying to become a registered reader, please see:

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/inrooms/stp/register/stpregister.html>. Registered readers

may consult archives and manuscripts in the Manuscripts Reading Room at St Pancras, London.

Catalogued archives and manuscripts held by the British Library are searchable via the [Archives and Manuscripts](#) catalogue and can be ordered from the Reservation List page.

Please note that, in general, access will not be provided to material which has not yet been catalogued. Requests for access to uncatalogued material will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Contact the [Manuscripts Reference Team](#) for further advice.

For information on restrictions governing access to manuscript material see [Consulting Western Manuscripts](#). Further information on the use and copying of manuscripts is available here: [Consulting Western Manuscripts – specific conditions of use](#).

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### 3. USEFUL SOURCES

C. Fletcher (ed.), *1000 Years of English Literature* (London: The British Library, 2012).

J. Johnston, *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

H. Kelliher and S. Brown, *English Literary Manuscripts* (London: The British Library, 1986).

The National Archives, 'National Register of Archives', <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp>.

'The Play Collections', Manuscripts Collections Reader Guide 3 (London: The British Library, 2007), <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/pdfs/readerguide3.pdf>.

D.C. Sutton (ed.), *Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters, 18th and 19th centuries*, 2 vols. (London, 1995).

D.C. Sutton (ed.), *Location Register of Twentieth Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters*, 2 vols. (London, 1988), [www.locationregister.com](http://www.locationregister.com).

D. Shellard, S. Nicholson and M. Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets; British Stage Censorship and Readers Reports From 1824 to 1968* (London: The British Library, 2004).

J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage: A Calendar of Plays & Players: 1890-1959*, 18 vols. (N.J. & London: Methuen, 1976-1993).

#### 4. FURTHER INFORMATION

Please direct all enquiries or comments to:

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