

CONWAY HALL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Collection Development Policy

Purpose

The Collection Development Policy sets out the basis on which Conway Hall Library and Archives will acquire or dispose of printed and archival material. Its purpose is to enable the selection, acquisition, evaluation, maintenance and development of the collections, with the aim of supporting research and learning opportunities.

Background

Conway Hall is owned and operated by Conway Hall Ethical Society, a membership organisation and educational charity (no. 1156033) with a history spanning two centuries. The Society's objective is the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles, free speech and independent thought. The Hall hosts a wide variety of lectures, classes, performances, community events and concerts.

Introduction to the Library & Archive

Conway Hall Ethical Society is the oldest surviving freethought organisation in the world and holds the largest and most comprehensive humanist research resource in the UK. The book and pamphlet collection comprises approximately 10,000 volumes combining those of South Place Ethical Society Library, the Rationalist Press Association Library, the Coit Memorial Library and the National Secular Society's collection.

The Library originated in the nineteenth century as a general lending library for members, but now specialises on material relating to humanism, free thought, secularism and rationalism and embraces works on human and civil rights, the history of science and religion, genetics, evolution, the history of ideas, and the history of ethical and humanist organisations.

The archives form a significant resource for the historical study of Ethical and Humanist thought in the United Kingdom from the 19th Century, holding the archive of the Society's governing body, Conway Hall Ethical Society and that of the National Secular Society. Minutes, financial records, membership records, records of society activities, correspondence, photographs and prints, legal records, and plans from both societies are held. The Archives also include personal papers of the prominent Humanist Harold J Blackham and some other persons connected with the societies.

Also incorporated is the Hawkins Chamber Music Collection. Frank A. Hawkins served as Treasurer of the Sunday Concerts from 1905 until his death in 1929. He collected c2000 pieces of sheet music of principally classical and romantic chamber compositions which were bequeathed to the Society.

In addition to printed materials the Library and Archives holds photographs and a collection of artworks and artefacts.

Mission Statement

To provide a welcoming and inclusive environment that supports freedom of enquiry and provides learning and research opportunities for diverse audiences through access to our collections, supported by a creative learning programme.

Aim

The Library and Archives, in support of Conway Hall Ethical Society's Strategic Policy, will provide a comprehensive, relevant and evolving collection of resources to support research and lifelong learning for researchers and the wider community.

Objectives

- Acquire, catalogue and preserve printed and archival material that enhances the collections.
- Promote the collections as a valuable resource for researchers, lifelong learners and the wider community.
- Promote and assist research in humanism and its related subjects.
- Support and promote lifelong learning through physical and online access to the collections and the development of an enriching learning programme.

Scope of the Library and Archives

Day-to-day responsibility for selection of materials lies with the Library and Learning Manager.

The focus is on books, pamphlets, journals and archival materials (chiefly records relating to the history (textual and photographic) and administrative workings of the Society): other formats including, posters, art works, and audio recordings (chiefly oral history) may be collected within the scope of the policy.

Publications are acquired where the subject content reflects the aims of Conway Hall. Preference is given to English language works in paperback format. The Library collects works in the following areas:

- The history of Conway Hall Ethical Society and kindred organisations
- Humanism, freethought, and secularism
- Philosophy with emphasis on ethics and rationalism
- London radical history
- History of religious ideas
- Human, civil and animal rights where there is a strong element of humanism and freethought
- Social and political reform and activism where there is a strong element of humanism and freethought
- Evolution and genetics

Types of material not held

- Books in languages other than English unless the work is of exceptional merit and an English language translation is not available
- Material written by humanists but with little or no humanist content

- Braille and talking books
- Electronic resources
- Motion pictures, radio and television broadcasts, commercial music recordings

Recommendations and suggestions for acquisition from library and archive users are strongly encouraged and regarded as an opportunity to acquire material on the basis of proven need and interest.

Methods of Acquisition

The Library may acquire material in the following ways:

Purchase

New publications will be purchased, their selection to be based on criteria which will depend on the type of material and the subject area being considered, and may include:

- Correspondence with the scope of the collection.
- Intended audience.
- Availability at other institutions.
- Price and other costs such as processing and maintenance.

Donation

Donations make an invaluable contribution to the collection and are welcomed.

Donations are evaluated for condition and relevance to the Library's collection policy. Large donations may be accepted when not every title has been examined. In such cases the Library reserves the right to dispose of duplicate copies and content not meeting the aims of the collection (see Retention and Disposal).

Large gifts involve several activities all of which need to be adequately resourced: viewing, checking contents against existing holdings, transport, storage, cataloguing, re-shelving once catalogued and conservation. Finding aids may be required with large donations where the size of the collection is likely to render the material inaccessible until processed and catalogued.

On acceptance of a donation the material becomes the property of the Library.

Exchange

The Library seeks to acquire relevant journals and newsletters on an exchange basis for the Society's periodical Ethical Record.

Long-term loans

In exceptional cases custody and responsibility for material may be transferred to the Library whilst the depositor retains legal ownership. Specific agreements on the nature of the loan and any conditions of use or access will be made on a case-by-case basis, although the Library strongly prefers deposits to be donated.

Retention and Disposal

The amount of space in the Library is finite. The emphasis is to maintain on the open shelves a working collection of practitioner material.

Where material is old (for example when later editions are available), fragile, is rare, or has a low usage by members it may be moved to Reserve Stock and the location noted on the catalogue record.

For unwanted duplicate copies, or works from a donation which do not match the requirements of the collection policy the aim is to offer the material to a more suitable repository; if this is not possible material will be offered to booksellers, sold in the Library book sales, or disposed of using an environmentally responsible method.

Access and Facilities

The Library is freely open to members of the public three full days a week. Research and general enquiries regarding the collections can be made via the online enquiry form, telephone or by post; the Library will respond within five working days.

An appointment is not necessary to visit the Library but readers undertaking detailed research should contact the Library Manager in advance and be advised on the availability of material.

Readers requiring access to material marked 'Reserve Stock' or 'Reference' on the catalogue are also strongly advised to contact the Librarian and make an appointment as it may not be possible to retrieve the works from basement stacks or the Archive or Journals rooms immediately.

Wireless internet access is available.

Laptop computers may be used; there is no dedicated computer for researchers but staff are happy to access the online catalogue on the researcher's behalf.

Photocopies may be supplied at the discretion of the staff in accordance with copyright law and considering the suitability of material to be copied. A fee may be charged.

Conway Hall is a Grade II listed building and there is currently no wheelchair access to the first floor on which the Library is situated. When possible alternative arrangements will be made for wheelchair users to access materials on the ground floor of the building.

Loans

Books marked 'Standard loan' in the Library catalogue are available for loan to Conway Hall Ethical Society members only. 4-week loans are permitted at the discretion of library staff and will usually be restricted to works which can be replaced easily and without due expense if lost or damaged.

Material which cannot be borrowed:

- Material marked 'Reference only' in the catalogue. This material includes:
- Books published before 1850
- Items containing original artwork
- Items with manuscript material or annotations
- Rare or very fragile books and pamphlets
- Books with an important provenance or association
- Any items from the Archives collections
- Individual and bound volumes of journals

Documentation

The Library aims to document all acquisitions within a month of receipt. The cataloguing of large donations is dependent on staffing resources.

Cataloguing and indexing standards are defined in-house and are intended to meet the research requirements of the library staff and the general public.

Fully catalogued records for books, pamphlets and archival material are available on the Heritage online catalogue. <https://conwayhall.org.uk/library/search-the-catalogue/>.

Collection Care

The Library will provide guidance to readers in handling old and fragile material and will provide book supports, cushions and weights when appropriate. Photocopying of such material is at the discretion of the library staff.

Storage

The Archive and Journals rooms, and the basement stacks housing reserve stock, are monitored. Material in the Archive room is stored in acid-free boxes.

Security

Rare books (broadly defined as published pre-1850) and later works which are very fragile are stored in locked cabinets in the main Library. Basement stacks housing Reserve Stock and the Archive and Journals rooms are locked with restricted access.

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

Conway Hall Library and Archives will review this policy by July 2021.