Introduction

The Special Collections Centre cares for the University's large inheritance of printed material, acquired since its foundation at the end of the 15th century and enriched by donations and bequests from teachers, graduates and benefactors. Until 1856 these donations were added to the Library's general stock; since then, many have been kept intact as separate, named, special collections.

Our major chronological collections, with their identifying shelfmark prefixes, are:

- **Inc**: incunabula, i.e. books printed pre-1501
- **P**: 1501 to 1600 (European), 1640 (English) and 1780 (Scottish)
- **SB**: all other pre 1841 material, plus scientific and medical material to 1860
  - **SBL**: books printed locally in Aberdeen to 1800
- **Lib R**: all other rarities, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, including topographical material, to 1860.

In addition, there are many separate named collections which cover a wide variety of interests, including classical literature, early science and medicine, Jacobitism, 19th century literature, children's books, pharmacology, psalmody, Rabbinica, railways and travel, printing, and theology. We also have collections from individuals and families associated with the University and the north-east, such as the Gregory and Melvin Collections, and collections of material of and by individuals, such as the Bernard Lloyd Walter Scott Collection.

Please visit our webpages or follow this link [www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/documents/OpenAccessPeriodicals.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/documents/OpenAccessPeriodicals.pdf) for details about the scope and content of individual printed collections.

The Provenance Database provides information on the past ownership of printed books in the collection: [www.abdn.ac.uk/library/provenance/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/provenance/).

Accessing and consulting printed collections

Closed collections

Most Special Collections materials are not on open access and advance notice is generally required to fetch individually requested items from storage areas for consultation in the Wolfson Reading Room. Materials are fetched for 12.30 and 14.30 daily and can be made available for 9.30 if requested the previous working day. To request materials please email speclib@abdn.ac.uk or fill out request cards in the Wolfson Reading Room. Please allow half a day's notice, and please provide shelfmark and bibliographic details.

Please visit our web page [www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/) for further information and please do feel free to contact us in advance of your visit with any queries about the availability of specific materials. This will enable us to fetch material in time for your arrival so as to make the most of your research time, particularly if you are travelling from outside Aberdeen.

Please note that although Special Collections materials may have a catalogue status or due date of 'on shelf', this does not indicate that they are on open access shelves. Only three of our printed collections are on open access and do not need to be requested in advance.

Open access collections

The three collections are on browsable open access in the Reading Room are;

- **Local Collection** – covering the north-east corner of Scotland and the former Grampian Region with special emphasis on the University and its history.
- **S Collection** – relating to the study of books and manuscripts and complementing our printed and manuscript collections.
- **Periodicals** – including historical society publications, journals and serial titles, dating mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries.

For a list of periodical titles on open access in the Wolfson Reading Room please follow this link [www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/documents/OpenAccessPeriodicals.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/documents/OpenAccessPeriodicals.pdf).
Many of the more modern items in the S and Local collections can be borrowed and will be issued to you in the Reading Room office; you will need to bring your library card with you if you do wish to borrow material.

Searching for and identifying printed materials

Online Library Catalogue

Records for the great majority of our printed books, pamphlets and periodicals, including the earliest or oldest, incunabula, are entered in the main library catalogue available at http://aulib.abdn.ac.uk/F. Different collections are distinguished by a prefix in the shelfmark e.g. pi, SB, GY, MN, and will have the location or sublibrary of Special Collections Centre.

Printed catalogues

There are, in addition, published catalogues of some of the individual collections and covering particular subjects, e.g. incunabula, and European books 1501–1600. The principal printed catalogues, copies of which are available to consult in the Reading Room, are:

- Mitchell, W. S., Catalogue of the incunabula in Aberdeen University Library (Aberdeen University Studies, 150, 1968)
- Drummond, H. J. H., A short title catalogue of books printed on the Continent of Europe 1501–1600 in Aberdeen University Library (Aberdeen University Studies, 156, 1979)
- Subject catalogue of the Phillips Library of pharmacology and therapeutics (Aberdeen University Studies, 47, 1911)
- Catalogue of the Taylor Collection of psalm versions (Aberdeen University Studies, 85, 1921)
- Catalogue of pamphlets in the King, the Thomson, and the Herald Collections (Aberdeen University Studies, 104, 1927)
- Allardyce, M. D., Aberdeen University Library, MacBean Collection (Aberdeen University Studies, 126, 1949)

Factsheets

There are many factsheets available as well, organised by type, subject and geographic area. See here: www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/search-catalogues/factsheets-61.php

Further reading

- Beavan, Iain; Davidson, Peter; Stevenson, Jane, Library and archive collections of the University of Aberdeen: an introduction and description (Manchester: Manchester University Press with the University of Aberdeen, 2011)
- McLaren, Colin A., Rare and fair: a visitor’s history of Aberdeen University Library (Aberdeen, 1995)