

## **The Rationale for GLAM (the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts)**

GLAM is founded on a strong conviction that literary papers are sufficiently 'different' from other archives and manuscripts to justify a special interest group dedicated to their preservation and use.

The majority of university libraries and many other repositories hold literary archives and manuscripts of some kind. This ubiquity is probably unmatched in any other subject area, and represents a common feature unifying repositories which are otherwise extremely different.

The standing of literature as an artistic and cultural phenomenon gives it an appeal and interest far beyond the academic community. Manuscript resources for many other subjects do not have such a diverse audience. As a result, the promotional and reputation-enhancing value of literary archives and manuscripts (besides their value to research and learning) has encouraged their widespread acquisition by libraries. While there may be an emphasis on the 'local', in fact literary material transcends the local through its appeal to broader national and international audiences. Archives and manuscripts relating to many other kinds of local activity have less power to do this.

Archives and manuscripts have a high level of significance for literature, perhaps higher than those for other arts in which the written word is not the ultimate product.

The peoples of Britain and Ireland have achieved world recognition for their ability to create pre-eminent dramatic and literary works. The creative processes which these great works of literature undergo during their composition find expression in archives and manuscripts. Literary archives and manuscripts are therefore of central importance to the cultural history of Britain and Ireland and should be cherished as such.

The desirability of literary archives and manuscripts has also long been reflected in the dominant interests of private collectors, who have in turn made benefactions of literary collections to academic libraries. These legacy collections have subsequently been developed and built on. Wealthy overseas institutions (as well as private collectors) have a long-established hunger for archives and manuscripts of literatures other than their own, above all in English. This has given a sense of urgency to institutional collecting in Britain and Ireland, while driving up the cost of competing. It is important to have collective affirmation that institutions in the British Isles are serious players and recognise the value of their literary heritage.

The market in literary archives and manuscripts has served and fostered demand. While the market for other archives and manuscripts may thrive, that for literature is exceptional. The comparatively high commodity value of individual literary letters and fragments has led to the scattering of collections. The tendency for literary papers to be dispersed is also strong for other reasons: writers – for whom the word has such significance – are often voluminous correspondents, their letters inevitably scattering; patterns of literary publication also transfer related manuscripts to numerous different

locations. These dispersed literary collections speak insistently to each other in defiance of institutional boundaries.

Awareness of the actual or supposed financial value of their archives and manuscripts has affected the practices of literary authors, and continues to do so, more so than with practitioners in most other fields: writers consciously preserve their papers for financial reasons. They are also unusually inclined to preserve their archives and manuscripts comprehensively for personal reasons. Thus ever-renewing supply creates and caters for demand.

Taken together, these features of literary archives and manuscripts support the view that they are 'different' and justify the creation of a dedicated Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts.