

## **Czech collections at UCL SSEES Library**

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Situated in London's Bloomsbury, on the edge of UCL's campus and within easy reach of the British Library at St Pancras, the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies and its library attract students and scholars from all over the world. The School was founded in 1915 as part of King's College London. In October 1915 the Czech academic and future President of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk gave the inaugural address on "The problems of small nations in the European crisis". During the first decades of the School's activities, the Czechoslovak government provided generous funds for the teaching of Czech and Slovak languages, literature and history, and also donated some books to the library. In 1932 the School left King's College and became an institute of the University of London. In January 1939 the School moved to the newly built Senate House, with the help of a gift of £26,000 from the Czechoslovak Government. In 1999 the School merged with UCL.

The School is the largest centre for the study of Central, Eastern and South-East Europe and Russia in the UK. It has almost 700 students: over 500 at undergraduate level and some 200 graduate students on Master's degrees or undertaking PhD research. Over 60 academic staff teach and conduct research in the history, economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, culture, literature and languages of the countries of the region. The School and the Library are housed in a newly purpose-built building in Taviton Street. It was opened in October 2005 by the Princess Royal, in the presence of Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, who gave an address on "The problem of small nations in the European Crisis" to reflect the fact that nearly a century on, Masaryk's 1915 topic of his address of the same title is still relevant today. František Bílek's stone statue called "Spirit of the Slavs", presented to the School by Lord Brotherton of Wakefield, stands guard in the foyer of the building. The library entrance is on the ground floor, and its space occupies four floors of the building. The Library's collections comprise almost 400,000 printed volumes, two thirds of which are on open access. Rare and fragile material is stored in local stores and less frequently used material is at stores in Essex.

Material for the library collections comes from several sources. The library purchases the majority of its books through vendors in the UK or abroad. In the past some material came in as part of various exchange programmes. Throughout the Library's history there have been some generous donations from academics and political figures connected to the School. Periodicals and books were donated by the Government of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Embassy in London. In 1946 a large collection of Czech literature, literary criticism and history was donated by Jan Masaryk and Edvard Beneš after the return of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile to Czechoslovakia. In 1951 the library received a valuable gift of about 300 books from the library of the late Jan Masaryk.

The collection relating to the former Czechoslovakia has been divided into three separate classes to reflect the political changes that have taken place within the region: Cs (works relating to the former Czechoslovakia or works covering both the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Cz (works relating solely to the Czech Republic) and Sk (works relating solely to Slovakia).

The Library holds a large collection of periodicals covering all areas of the School's interests. Currently some 1,100 journal titles and over 90 newspapers

are subscribed to. The library receives Czech newspapers: issues of *Hospodářské noviny*, *Lidové noviny*, *Mladá fronta dnes*, *Právo* and *The Prague Post* arrive on the shelves every week. Czech journals cover a wide range of subjects from Czech literature and linguistics to history, politics and economics. The library subscribes to *Naše řeč*, *Český časopis historický*, *Respekt*, *Mezinárodní vztahy*, *Mezinárodní politika*, *Revue politika*, *Ekonom*, *Prague Economic Papers* and *Ochrana přírody* to name the most important ones. Students and staff of UCL have free access to a vast number of databases, electronic journals and full-text e-resources.

The library's archive material relating to the Czech lands comes from individuals or organisations with a connection to the School. An on-line guide to these unique collections is available at <http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/archives/newguid2.htm>

The most important archive material, containing documents relating to the politics and foreign affairs of Czechoslovakia, is the Seton-Watson Collection. Robert William Seton-Watson, an independent scholar and expert on Austria-Hungary, had influential contacts throughout the British establishment and played a prominent role in establishing the School of Slavonic Studies at King's College in 1915. He was appointed the first holder of the Masaryk chair in Central European history in 1922, a post he held until 1945. The collection contains his correspondence with T G Masaryk and the papers relating to regions that united as Czechoslovakia in 1918. Seton-Watson was in close contact with prominent Czechoslovak exiles in Britain, notably the president in exile, Beneš, and as a result the archive contains interesting correspondence relating to the Czechoslovak affairs in the Second World War. Researchers from around the world visit the Library to study the archive of Karel Lisický, who served in the Czechoslovak diplomatic service from its foundation in 1918. In 1936 Lisický was given the post of counsellor of the Czechoslovak embassy in London. He remained in this position throughout the Second World War. During that time Czechoslovakia was occupied by Germany and the Czechoslovak Government in exile was based in London. Lisický resigned from the diplomatic service after the Communists took power in Czechoslovakia in 1948. He spent the rest of his life in exile in Britain. The Lisický Collection contains documents on Czechoslovak foreign relations, including material on the aftermath of the First World War, the League of Nations between 1934 and 1937, the Munich Agreement and its consequences and the Czechoslovak Government in exile between 1939 and 1945. It also covers the Sudeten minority problem, peace negotiations with Germany and Austria between 1944 and 1947 and the United Nations between 1945 and 1948. The biggest archive collection devoted to the Czech lands is the Masaryk Collection. It contains material relating to the politician and diplomat Jan Masaryk. He was the son of the first President of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Jan was Czechoslovak Minister in London 1925-1938 and Foreign Minister in both the Czech émigré government in London during the Second World War and the first Czech post-war government 1940-1948. He remained in his post after the Communists assumed control in February 1948. He died soon afterwards in obscure circumstances as the result of a fall from the window of the Foreign Office in Prague. The archive contains scrapbooks of his memorabilia, a binder containing his notes on his speeches on the Munich Agreement and his diaries listing his appointments. There are also photographs of T G Masaryk's 80th birthday lunch, the bas relief of T G Masaryk and of Jan Masaryk.

I have been working at the UCL SSEES Library since 1996. At first I was employed on a temporary contract to catalogue a backlog of Russian material. This work led to my obtaining a permanent position as a cataloguer of Slavic collections. Gradually the job developed and these days I also look after the rare books collection, which houses a considerable collection of almost 800 early publications dating from 1531 to 1850. Among the Czech volumes, J.A. Comenii *lanua linguarum reserata*, published

in Amsterdam in 1649, and Melchioris Goldasti Heiminsfeldii, Commentarii de regni Bohemiae, published in Frankfurt in 1719, are highly treasured. The latter came to the library as a gift from the Library of Jan Masaryk. I also participate in curating exhibitions within the UCL SSEES Library and within the wider context of UCL Library Services.

The Library welcomes external visitors who would find the collections interesting and useful. Academic staff from UK and foreign universities and research postgraduates are entitled to free reference access to the Library. Undergraduates and taught postgraduates from other UK universities can access the library free of charge during our vacation. Private scholars and members of public can pay a fee to join the library. Anyone wishing to join the library must bring proof of their ID, such as a driving licence or passport, and also proof of their home address.

To browse the Library's web site, visit <http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/library/index.htm>