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# Henry Havelock Ellis collection

This collection consists of about 85 of the personal copies of books published by Henry Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), writer and sexologist. Many of the items are inscribed and some are annotated.

Havelock Ellis was raised in Surrey, but for health reasons travelled to Australia, where he became a young teacher in the outback. Here he began to develop the belief that sexual freedom could bring in a new age of happiness and this directed him towards the scientific study of sex. He subsequently trained for eight years (1881–9) as a doctor at St Thomas's Hospital, London, although he was mainly preoccupied with literary and scientific studies, working on a radical journal, acting as secretary of the Progressive Association and joining the Fellowship of the New Life (a precursor of the Fabian Society).

After pioneering a series of unexpurgated editions of early English dramatists and initiating the highly influential Contemporary Science series of books, he published his own first book, The New Spirit (1890), a collection of essays on Diderot, Heine, Whitman, Ibsen and Tolstoy, which together envisaged an awakening age, based on an enlightened science, the rise of women, and the progress of democracy.

In 1891 he married Edith Mary Oldham Lees (1861–1916), secretary of the Fellowship of the New Life, an independent lecturer and writer. They maintained separate incomes and often lived apart, with Edith satisfying her emotional and sexual passions as a lesbian.

Ellis published his major work, Studies in the Psychology of Sex over a long period of time (1897–1910, with a seventh, supplementary, volume in 1928). The initial volume, Sexual Inversion, was a collaboration with the gay author John Addington Symons (who had died in 1893) and was the first serious study of homosexuality published in Britain. It had previously appeared in German as Das konträre Geschlechtsgefühl (1896), a rare copy of which is in this collection. The first English printing of the book in London, by Wilson and MacMillan (a fictitious imprint for von Weissenfeld), was withdrawn before publication by Symonds' literary executor, acting on instructions from his widow: the copy in this collection is the second ‘first’ English edition, with Symonds' name and some of his contributions removed and an additional ‘Preface’ by Ellis dated October 1897. This book was itself banned by the government following the conviction for obscene libel of a bookseller for stocking it, when it was described as “lewd, wicked, bawdy, scandalous”, and subsequently withdrawn from sale. Later titles in this groundbreaking and influential work were then published in the US.

Following the death of Edith in 1916, from 1918 Ellis shared his life with an acquaintance of hers, Françoise Lafitte-Cyon, also known as Delisle (1886–1974). She was the separated wife of a Russian journalist, and mother of two boys, one of whom was Francois Lafitte, who became Professor of Social Policy and Administration at the University of Birmingham (1958-80), and who donated the books to Special Collections before his death in 2002.

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