

Up from the Archives: Research at the Houghton Library *April Pierce*



Nestled in an unassuming corner of the Harvard University campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Houghton Library is full of surprises. After receiving a Maxwell and Meyerstein Award for

research-related travel, as well as permissions from the T. S. Eliot Estate, I was granted access to the library's Eliot papers. The collection consists of a range of notes, unpublished essays, public addresses, and personal letters spanning the entirety of the poet's admirable career. Over the course of my research in the archives, I grew increasingly fond of the library and its staff.

With a specialisation in rare books and manuscripts, the Houghton Library boasts impressive holdings of major British and European authors, American historical figures, and Canadian writers, among other assets. Houghton is a major resource for researchers of Samuel Johnson, Emily Dickinson, John Keats, and Lewis Carroll, to mention only a few names. Each day of my visit, I arrived as the library was opening, and left as it closed. I looked forward to the peaceful daily routine of depositing my books and bags, walking into the library's research wing, and sitting in the same high-backed chair (underneath original portraits of Yeats and Roosevelt—unlikely wall partners) with a new box of manuscripts.

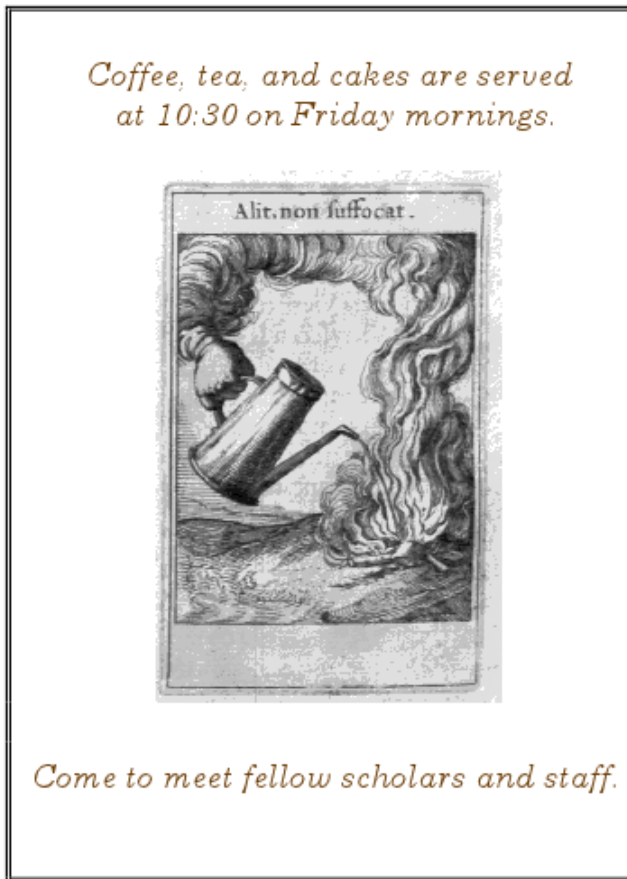
Although the library claims its stack space is currently maximally occupied, research is restricted to a single room. At any given point, the room hosts between one and

twenty researchers, which made for an intimate and quiet study environment. Researchers are encouraged to speak to one another, however, so the library also fosters conversation. For example, whilst attempting to track down connections between Eliot and early phenomenology, the librarians encouraged me to speak with a fellow researcher who happened to be working on Eliot's early writings as well. A long lunch and fruitful discussion later, I was directed to an obscure article on Eliot and Husserl by the researcher's professor in Korea.



Figure 1. Harvard University Campus
Photo Courtesy: April Pierce

The librarians at the Houghton Library were exemplary in their careful attention to the needs of the research community at Harvard, as well as their warm welcome of international visitors. Another way the staff at Houghton foster dialogue is by providing a complimentary Friday coffee, tea, and cakes session. Invitations are passed out early in the day, and researchers leave the main research room to adjourn to another wing of the building.



Researching at the Houghton was one of the most rewarding work experiences I've had during the course of my DPhil. I returned to Oxford with a wealth of information, as well as the warm memories of conversations and discoveries made while at Harvard. Those personally tailored days of study have enhanced my understanding of what research can be, and what is achievable in just a short period of intensive study.

Figure 2. Houghton Library Invitation to Tea.
Photo Courtesy: Susan Halpert, Houghton Library,
Harvard University.