Visit Bentham in person

Bentham willed his body to medical science, and requested that his body be preserved and displayed. His corpse was dissected by his friend Dr Thomas Southwood Smith and, after eighteen years of staying at Dr Smith’s house, in 1850 Bentham’s auto-icon (“self-image”) was gifted to UCL.

Today, the auto-icon can be found dressed in Bentham’s own clothes and sitting in his own chair, in a box in UCL’s main building.

You can visit it between 07.30 and 18.00 (Monday to Friday).
If you are unable to come to UCL, you can view the ‘Virtual auto-icon’ at: www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/who/autoicon/Virtual_Auto_Icon

Transcribe Bentham is brought to you by:

UCL Bentham Project
www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project

UCL Centre for Digital Humanities
www.ucl.ac.uk/dh

UCL Library Services
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www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/common/creative_services

University of London Computer Centre
www.ulcc.ac.uk

The British Library
http://bl.uk

Transcribe Bentham is currently funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Scholarly Communications Programme.

“Many hands make light work. Many hands together make merry work”
– your chance to explore the unpublished manuscripts of Jeremy Bentham
Why Transcribe Bentham?

As the philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) wrote in 1793, "many hands together make merry work". In this spirit, we invite you to take part in the award-winning Transcribe Bentham initiative, which affords a unique opportunity to join a community of volunteers in exploring and transcribing a collection of unparalleled historical and philosophical importance: the unpublished manuscripts of Jeremy Bentham.

Your work will support cutting-edge scholarship, as your transcripts will form the basis of future volumes of the Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham by UCL’s Bentham Project, for which you will be fully credited. Your transcripts will also be stored in UCL’s digital library, creating an important electronic resource for students, scholars, and the general public, and ensuring the long-term digital preservation of this priceless collection.

You could be the first person to read a manuscript since Bentham wrote it, and make new discoveries which could change perceptions of Bentham’s life and thought. Volunteers have already transcribed around 3 million words, and found a recollection from Bentham’s childhood, minute details of the ‘panopticon’ prison, and a large, unpublished section of Bentham’s writings on New South Wales. Why not join in, and see what else there is to uncover?

Transcribe Bentham team members are also participating in tranScriptorium, an EU-funded consortium led by the Universitat Politècnica de València, which is developing solutions for the indexing, searching, and full automated transcription of manuscript images, using Handwritten Text Recognition technology. Bentham manuscripts will be used in this highly exciting project, and for more details, please visit www.transcriptorium.eu.

Who was Jeremy Bentham?

Bentham was the founder of the modern doctrine of utilitarianism, and is a hugely influential figure in the fields of legal philosophy and representative democracy. He devised a theory of punishment which emphasised proportionality of punishment and reformation of the offender, his Nonsense upon Stilts is an important critique of the doctrine of natural rights, and he was the first philosopher to advance a defence of sexual liberty.

Bentham is most famous for his proposed ‘panopticon’ prison, but wrote on topics as varied as religion, jury reform, colonialism, political economy, and education. His manuscripts are divided into two main collections: UCL holds some 60,000 manuscript folios (c. 30 million words), and the British Library has about 12,500 folios (c. 6 millions words).

Taking part

You do not require any specialist knowledge, training, technical expertise, or prior approval from us: you just need some enthusiasm, the desire to be challenged, and perhaps a little patience! We provide instructions on how to get started, and offer online support and feedback to support you in your work.

To create a volunteer account and begin transcribing, please visit the Transcription Desk: www.transcribe-bentham.da.ulcc.ac.uk/td/Transcribe_Bentham

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