Making Sense of Shelfmarks

The classmark or shelfmark will tell you where to find a book on the shelves. You can find out an item's shelf mark by looking on the library catalogue.

We use the Dewey system which works like this:

Books are shelved numerically digit by digit according to the number on the spine label:

809.3  is shelved before 809.4 which is shelved before 809.409

Within each subject books are shelved alphabetically according to the author or first word of the title:

823.8 DIC [Author is Dickens] is shelved before 823.8 SHE [Author is Shelley].

When we have a book about a specific writer, poet or dramatist we also use an additional code between the number and the author's name. The aim of this is to keep all books about a person together.

823.8 DIC SMI (a book on the writer Dickens by Smith) is filed before 823.8 SHE ROB (a book on Shelley by Robertson)

Why aren't my books all in one place?

Dewey breaks down subjects into broad areas known as classes

These are:

100  Philosophy and psychology
200  Religion
300  Social science
400  Language
500  Science
600  Technology
700  Arts and recreation
800  Literature
900  History (by country and Geography)
Because of the way Dewey treats subjects it doesn’t follow that all books that have a historical slant are placed in the 900s, the way that our classification treats them is to put them with the subject.

The 300 section is an area where many history books end up, mainly because this class deals with social science – that is, people, education, society, economics, law, crime, politics and political systems etc.

For example,

A book about women in the nineteenth century will be found with the books about women, this number is in the Social Science section (300s); so the number for women is 305.4

A book about Darwin would be placed in the Science section (the 500s); while a book about the history of education would be placed in the Education section (the 370s)

This means that books for the history modules will be found in many different sections of the library.

You will find this in any academic library using the Dewey Decimal Classification system.

Because history crosses all subject areas you will need to use the catalogue to search for books.

**Common factors**

There are some things that you can look out for:

If a number ends or contains 09 it means that the book has an historical treatment.

* e.g. The class for women workers is 331.4

331.409 would be women workers – historical aspects

If the number contains 941 or 942 then the book will be about Great Britain or England. 941 is British Isles and 942 is England.

* e.g. 305.5230942 is about the history of landed gentry in England