

THE ENGLISH PUBLIC LIBRARY AS AN  
AGENCY FOR SOCIAL STABILITY c. 1850-1919

by

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## ABSTRACT

### The English Public Library as an Agency for Social Stability c. 1850-1919

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Inaugurated by legislation in 1850 the municipal public library had by the end of the First World War become a common feature of urban life. The research and writing of public library history has been myopic; the subject has received little attention from historians working in broader fields. Inadequate methodological and theoretical assistance has been sought from those non-library historical investigations relevant to public library development. Public library history has been characterized by a tendency to chronicle. Recent work has acknowledged the importance of context; but the latter explains only 'how' and not 'why' public libraries emerged. Theories of public library history are lacking. This study presents a theory of development based on the symbiotic relationship between cultural and material pursuits. It is suggested that the Victorian, Edwardian and First World War public library aimed to help deliver social stability by diffusing humanistic culture and by assisting individual and national economic prosperity. These ostensibly divergent preoccupations achieved a high degree of compatibility within the context of the local municipal library. It was an institution which at once emphasized the importance of community and spiritual refreshment; yet sought to promote self-help individualism and tangible gain. Via the medium of the public library humanistic culture was seen to possess material externalities; the intention being to advance industrial capitalism whilst ameliorating its dehumanizing effects. The method employed to support this theory is to identify points of intersection between public library growth and recent debates in wider history. Attention is paid to discussions of emergent class consciousness; economic decline; middle class 'failure'; technical education; social control; the social origins of architecture; and the emergence of the professions. Underpinning the thesis is an exploration of the philosophical origins of the public library in terms of the tension between utilitarian and idealist thinking.



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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

Municipal public libraries originated and developed in the period from 1850 to the end of the First World War as a means of helping to secure social stability. They were intended by their promoters to help spread 'civilization', as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (1893) in the sense of making "civil", of having "proper public or social order", of ensuring a "well-ordered, orderly, well-governed society ... to bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life, and thus elevate in the scale of humanity; to enlighten, refine and polish".<sup>1</sup>

According to this definition a fully civilized society would be one which was socially stable. Social stability has not been a constant feature of English industrial society. However, this is not to say that efforts to manufacture an ordered society have not been strenuous. In the period under consideration stability was pursued in two ways - one cultural, the other economic.

Powerholders and moralists were concerned with improving society's standards of moral conduct. This would be achieved through an elevation in culture, of which an extensive discussion is attempted in chapter 9. For the present, it is enough to say that the word 'culture' is firstly employed here in its humanistic sense of the "art of improvement and melioration", as Dr. Johnson defined it.<sup>2</sup> In this context, culture possesses connotations of urbanity and respectability concomitant with a civilized life. This way of looking at the concept of culture differs considerably from the social anthropology notion of culture as a "whole way of life".<sup>3</sup> Yet, with regard to nineteenth



century English industrial society the two definitions are closer than an initial inspection would suggest. Social critics, uneasy with the changing and fractured society which industrialism had created, set out to rediscover the sense of organic community which science and material progress had diminished.<sup>4</sup> The chief means of doing this was to invoke the efficacy of past institutions, social organization and norms of behaviour. Humanistic culture was akin to this resurrection of a lost culture; by virtue of the fact that cultural pursuits were in essence the product of past endeavour, tapping, as they did, into the stock of man's knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The culture of perfection and the culture of community coalesced in the quest for social stability.

Culture was not the only guarantor of civilized society. Historically, economic and social stability have been tightly intertwined. As one historian has written:

... there is a sense in which the ruling classes in all European countries over the last three hundred years have assumed 'No wealth, no stability; no stability, no wealth' as a motto to justify and explain their direction of affairs.<sup>6</sup>

The idea that anarchy is only three square meals away might be a cliché, but it was a message which the governing classes have well understood. In pre-industrial society sharp price rises had often led to riots calling for the restoration of normal levels in accordance with Tudor law; it was not uncommon for magistrates to intervene in the market to stabilize prices and reduce tensions.<sup>7</sup> It has been pointed out that on numerous occasions in the eighteenth century popular disturbance coincided with a poor harvest.<sup>8</sup> The awareness of the relationship between prosperity and stability continued into the industrial era. Arguably, stability in the nineteenth century rested on two pillars; "the Constitution and the ability of the economy to

produce a satisfactory standard of living".<sup>9</sup> The political economist Samuel Fothergill wrote that:

Food, clothing, and shelter are the first condition of man's being ... the cravings of hunger are so powerful and all absorbing that, when long continued or frequently occurring, they destroy all sense of responsibility, and all fellow-feeling, except in rarely balanced and highly virtuous minds, and give rise to crimes of violence against person and property which, in proportion as they prevail, demoralise the perpetrators and all whose similar suffering leads them to sympathise with all acts of lawlessness. At the same time the community is further impoverished, and that confidence is destroyed which is an essential requisite for the free and beneficial exercise of productive industry. Hunger and revolution are in very intimate relationship.<sup>10</sup>

It is debatable whether economic-motivated social unrest is produced by 'absolute' or 'relative' deprivation.<sup>11</sup> But with regard to the nineteenth century, economic deprivation per se has been seen as conducive to the formation of social protest movements, including trade unions and political militancy.<sup>12</sup> Deprivation was closely linked to the violent trade fluctuations which characterized early industrialism. Initiatives which promised to reduce trade fluctuations and deliver economic stability, and which did not breach the prevailing faith in laissez-faire, were thus warmly welcomed. To quote Fothergill again:

Whatever tends to facilitate and cheapen production is a direct gain to society, and whatever renders production more costly and more difficult is correspondingly injurious.<sup>13</sup>

The public library was one such initiative. It aimed to supply, as far as it was in its power, economic prosperity. Thus, in 1890 in West Ham a public library was proposed:

Because there is no rate from which there is so *immediate and tangible benefit*



as out of the penny rate for support  
of a free library.<sup>14</sup> (My italics)

However, a library was also proposed:

Because they are *educational* institutions,  
and education deepens the sense of the  
*duties and privileges of citizenship*.<sup>15</sup>  
(My italics)

Municipal libraries accommodated both cultural and materialist concerns. They aimed to facilitate national and individual economic advance; whilst the literary knowledge they dispensed emphasized the importance of humanistic culture, which was but the result of human progress through the ages and through cultural epochs mostly organic in nature. Public libraries stood for *well-being*, in terms of their economic dimension. They also encouraged *well-doing*, in the dual sense of pursuing cultural perfection, yet within a communal, societal context.

That the public library combined cultural and material aspirations bestows upon the institution a degree of dynamism. Since the inception of urbanized, industrial society there has existed a tension - first noted by romantic poets of the late eighteenth century - between culture and materialism, between aesthetic appreciation and scientific progress, between the country and the city.<sup>16</sup> Public libraries negotiated the cultural-material divide with a marked success. The means whereby materialism and culture were pursued was education, which was the public library's main province. Further, the postulate of this thesis is that materialism and culture - sought through the public library - each aimed to deliver social stability. The means and the aim were thus shared. Moreover, education (the means) also possessed a social stability dynamic. The social pacification, which both practical and morally oriented education could provide, was explained by the Glasgow weekly, The Commonwealth, in its first issue

in 1853:

The laws of life, of health, of economy, of self respect; the development of the nobler faculties and instincts of human nature - these, in their clear appreciation and power, can never come but through the medium of cultivated minds bearing educationally on the minds of others .... [Education] growingly takes its place as of the highest and momentous import in regard to the permanence of our liberties and the safety and stability of our institutions.<sup>17</sup>

The existence of an antagonism between culture and materialism is undeniable.<sup>18</sup> But the history of the public library shows that such a negative relationship is perhaps an over-simplification. It is not simply that, from the Marxist viewpoint, materialism and culture are linked by a base-superstructure relationship; that culture, and cultures indeed, are determined by modes of production.<sup>19</sup> Nor is it that to view utilitarianism as wholly arid and devoid of culture is dangerous.<sup>20</sup> Rather, was it not the case that the striving for cultural uplift - especially in its evocation of higher moral standards and a cohesive civilized society - provided a rationale for industrial capitalism? The pursuit of culture was justified by its value as an investment for material advance, from which social stability would hopefully flow. Culture and materialism enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Culture provided economic benefits *external* to it. This is a theoretical framework into which the history - if not the current practice - of the English public library can easily be fitted.

To produce a theory of public library development is not easy. This is not simply because of the difficulty involved in choosing a model for analysis - in the case of this thesis, culture-materialist tension - appropriate to the varied aspects of public library provision.



Theoretical assessments are problematic in view of the poverty of theory which has afflicted library history. The research and writing of library history, as a discipline in its own right, is relatively new. For example, the Library Association's Library History Group was formed as recently as 1961.<sup>21</sup> Despite its short pedigree library history has attracted an extensive and varied literature. However, the value and quality of the literature are unquestionably uneven: the major criticism being that too little attention has been paid to wider social, economic and political developments. Library history has been myopic. All too often researchers have taken the records relating to a library, or group of libraries, and examined them with a view to producing a mere chronicle, bereft of references to 'non-library' influences.

This is not to say that the economy of library historiography, which the blind factual approach has engendered, has not been improved upon. For example, studies of individuals who influenced library development become highly valuable when they verge on psycho-history, and avoid a congratulatory approach.<sup>22</sup> Also, analysis has occurred in relation to the library's "coeval social milieu": context has been stressed in an effort to break the hermetic seal on library history. Yet, as chapter 3 will explain, the contextual approach to public library history has been too narrow - in terms of the social, economic and political developments against which library development has been tested. Further, contextual analysis cannot alone extirpate a theory. It explains 'how' libraries came to be. It does not explain the 'why' of development. Ideally, context should not simply be described, but interpreted; in an effort to pin-point the library's social function.<sup>23</sup>

The aetiology of library development requires more qualitative attention. Yet, the contextual approach has not been wasted; it can be diversified and built upon. First, it can be emphasized that

libraries are not only 'of' but 'making of' society. Second, library history can benefit from historical research and debate of those contextual areas which have impinged upon library development. Altick has written of the nineteenth century public library that:

... the issue of public subsidisation of reading was entangled with the far broader issues of social reform and laissez-faire; and the whole subsequent history of the public library movement offers an instructive cross section of English opinion on such matters as taxation for the general benefit, the poverty of drink, poverty, and crime, and the relation of the inferior classes to the ruling one. What seems to us in the perspective of a century, a fairly simple question - shall, or shall not, government provide the people with free reading facilities? - involved all sort of peripheral, if not actually irrelevant, considerations.<sup>24</sup>

There is no reason why libraries should not be examined with reference to the history of leisure, or urbanization, or ideas, or class, or the economy, or culture, etc. Valuable concepts and methods can be borrowed from research in broader, historical fields. Third, contextual explanations can be linked - to help provide an overall 'why' of development. Disparate aspects of library provision are enriched by being juxtaposed - as this thesis will attempt in respect of culture and materialism, as well as less major concepts such as political economy and education in commercial knowledge.

Theories of public library development might have been developed sooner with the assistance of historians working in broader fields. Historians of local government, for example, have ignored the cultural domain of the public library, and have concentrated instead on large and practical issues such as administration, gas, water, transport, education and the poor law. Failure to lift the public library into any



mainstream of historical research has partly been due to the institution's low status as a social service. The public library's low political profile is as real today as it was before the First World War when the librarian W.C.B. Sayers presented it as "one of the least understood of municipal institutions".<sup>25</sup> In 1924, in urging a new library building, the Doncaster Gazette asked if it had ever happened that in any town "a member of the Town Council has had the fear of losing his seat put into him because of his lack of support to the provision or extension of a Free Library".<sup>26</sup> The public library has never interested politicians, demagogues and reformers to the extent of interest shown in other areas of social policy such as education, public health, housing and social welfare.<sup>27</sup> Why is this?

With regard to the pre-1919 period the question of low funding is crucial. Public libraries were subject to a statutory rate limitation between 1850 and 1919 - of one half penny in the pound under the Public Libraries Act (1850) and one penny in the pound under amending legislation in 1855. Other local services such as education, water supply, tramways, electricity and gas were not rate-capped. Given the low level of spending on public libraries it is not surprising that they attracted little political attention. Library committees remained Cinderella bodies. Usually of an executive nature and reporting to the parent organization once a year, committees were essentially non-political entities, with a high proportion of co-opted members, and with relatively small budgets - although it should be noted that by 1914 about sixty library authorities had obtained parliamentary sanction, through local legislation, to charge more than the statutory penny in the pound rate.<sup>28</sup> Attempts to give local libraries financial assistance from central government were easily thwarted. Both William Ewart (the Parliamentary pioneer of public

libraries and mover of the inaugural legislation in 1850) and Edward Edwards (the British Museum cataloguer who provided a substantial part of the evidence to the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849) had been sympathetic to the idea of central funding, along lines similar to the assistance given to education and schools of design. Ewart and Edwards encountered strong non-interventionist opposition. The Public Libraries Act (1850) was thus severely restricted - it was merely permissive, confined to boroughs of populations exceeding 10,000, required a poll of ratepayers and included a rate-cap.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the period under consideration attitudes to public library central funding did not shift. In 1891, at the opening of the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Public Library, Gladstone poured scorn on the idea that even a small dose of central government help - which some in the public library movement were continuing to advocate - was "a sure and infallible specific, supplying all deficiencies, surmounting all difficulties, and curing all social evils".<sup>30</sup>

However, to argue that public libraries were placed low on the political agenda because of low funding is, to an extent, putting the chicken before the egg. Arguably, the low financial priority was less a cause of non-politicization than a result of the public library's lack of popularity. In 1906, the librarian James Duff Brown estimated that just 6 per cent of those in a position to use public libraries did so.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to detect a 'public opinion' with regard to provision; we can speak of a public library movement - but only just.<sup>32</sup> The loudest opinions were of the negative sort.<sup>33</sup> There was considerable ratepayer opposition to culture on the rates. In support of its local library the Islington Daily Gazette, in 1906, attacked narrow-minded citizens who objected to the financial burden of enlightening the community:



They demur at the imposition - however small - of additional rates. They are so selfish that they will not trouble to inquire if the benefits that accrue from the outlay are commensurate with the money expended .... They are blind to all improvement. They shout against progress. They complain bitterly, that their pockets are touched by the necessities of civilization. These are they who may be described as social misers. They are communal Scrooges. They are, in a civic sense, whatever they may be personally, hard fisted Gradgrinds.<sup>34</sup>

Vehement criticism of the library rate came from the petite bourgeoisie whose income depended on property - thereby explaining its not insignificant involvement in local government.<sup>35</sup> The library rate was not large: in many places being less than one penny in the pound. The fear was, however, that once the principle was breached, library expenditure would rise inexorably. An anti-library handbill in York in 1881 argued:

It is said that the Rate will not exceed 1d in the £ per annum, but what security have you that Parliament will not grant a rate of 3d or 4d in the future?<sup>36</sup>

Such arguments influenced working class ratepayers also. In 1884, when the Trades Union Congress discussed public libraries for the first time, it was argued by one delegate that it was not just the well-to-do who thwarted education via the public library - "Many of the working classes were unwilling to pay any rate for the adoption of the [Public Libraries] Act".<sup>37</sup> In 1902, the town clerk of Shoreditch wrote to Andrew Carnegie for financial support for the district's library movement, arguing that:

Owing to Shoreditch being one of the poorest districts in London, the complaints of the people at the high rates they now have to pay, make it practically impossible to increase them.<sup>38</sup>

Even working class residents who did not pay rates directly would not have relished the prospect of seeing their rents - in which rates were compounded - increased due to the erection of a new library.<sup>39</sup> Pelling has argued that the working class was generally hostile to state welfare schemes arising out of a suspicion of an 'intrusive' state;<sup>40</sup> though this general assessment requires refinement.<sup>41</sup>

Whether of working class or middle class origin, ratepayers often opposed library expenditure, whilst perhaps saying less about expenditure in other areas. In 1886, at a meeting of the Gosport and Alverstoke Ratepayer's Association it was argued "that a district whose sanitary arrangements are still in a primitive condition will act wisely in attending to necessities first and luxuries [a public library] afterwards".<sup>42</sup> Clearly, culture dispensed by the public library was not considered as immediately important as the more tangible aspects of life. Hence, public library development was slow.<sup>43</sup> Just 27 library authorities had been founded in Great Britain by 1868; and only 125 by 1886. Thereafter the rate increased markedly so that by 1918 there were 566 library authorities in existence. The rapid increase in the thirty years before the First World War was facilitated by a myriad of minor benefactions and a vast programme of financial assistance given by the Scottish-American steel baron Andrew Carnegie, mostly in the period after 1899.<sup>44</sup>

It is interesting to consider that adoptions escalated, towards the end of the nineteenth century, at the very time when rate charges were increasing. Whereas between 1868 and 1890-1891 average rates in the pound increased nationally by 10 per cent, in the period 1890-1891 to 1898-1899 they increased by 31.8 per cent.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, rates were not the only factor influencing library development. If they had been then



one would have expected to see a marked slowing of library development in the 1890s: whereas the total number of adoptions of the public library acts increased from 169 by 1890 to 348 by 1900.<sup>46</sup>

Other general factors which determined development were the spread of education after 1870, the improvement in literacy, and the growth of civic pride. With regard to the latter, London suffered severely from a lack of public libraries partly because of an absence of civic feeling. The first municipal library in London was established jointly in 1856 by the parishes of St. Margaret and St. John, Westminster. No further libraries appeared until 1883 when Wandsworth began a service - this being followed by a spate of adoptions in London, many in 1887 and 1888 to mark Queen Victoria's jubilee. In explaining the slow pace of development in London the librarian J.Y.W. MacAlister referred to the "congeries of village communities".<sup>47</sup> In 1909 the magazine Sunday Strand explained how the vestries of pre-1899 London were "not distinguished by public-spirit, enterprise or thought of the public well-being", and were thus slow to recognize the importance of libraries. The magazine noted the "absence of a strong municipal spirit amongst the ratepayers [of London], such as marks the life of a big provincial town, and the difficulty in creating such a spirit, especially when it means an increase in the rates".<sup>48</sup>

The rates issue might not explain wholly why municipal libraries developed slowly; it does illustrate, however, that the public did not *clamour* for free literature. There is little evidence to explain why people did not use public libraries. Any evidence that exists originates from providers. This is similarly the problem with ascertaining why people *did* use libraries: the evidence is essentially elitist and administrative in nature.<sup>49</sup> It is not possible to reach conclusions as to the precise motives determining use. More will be

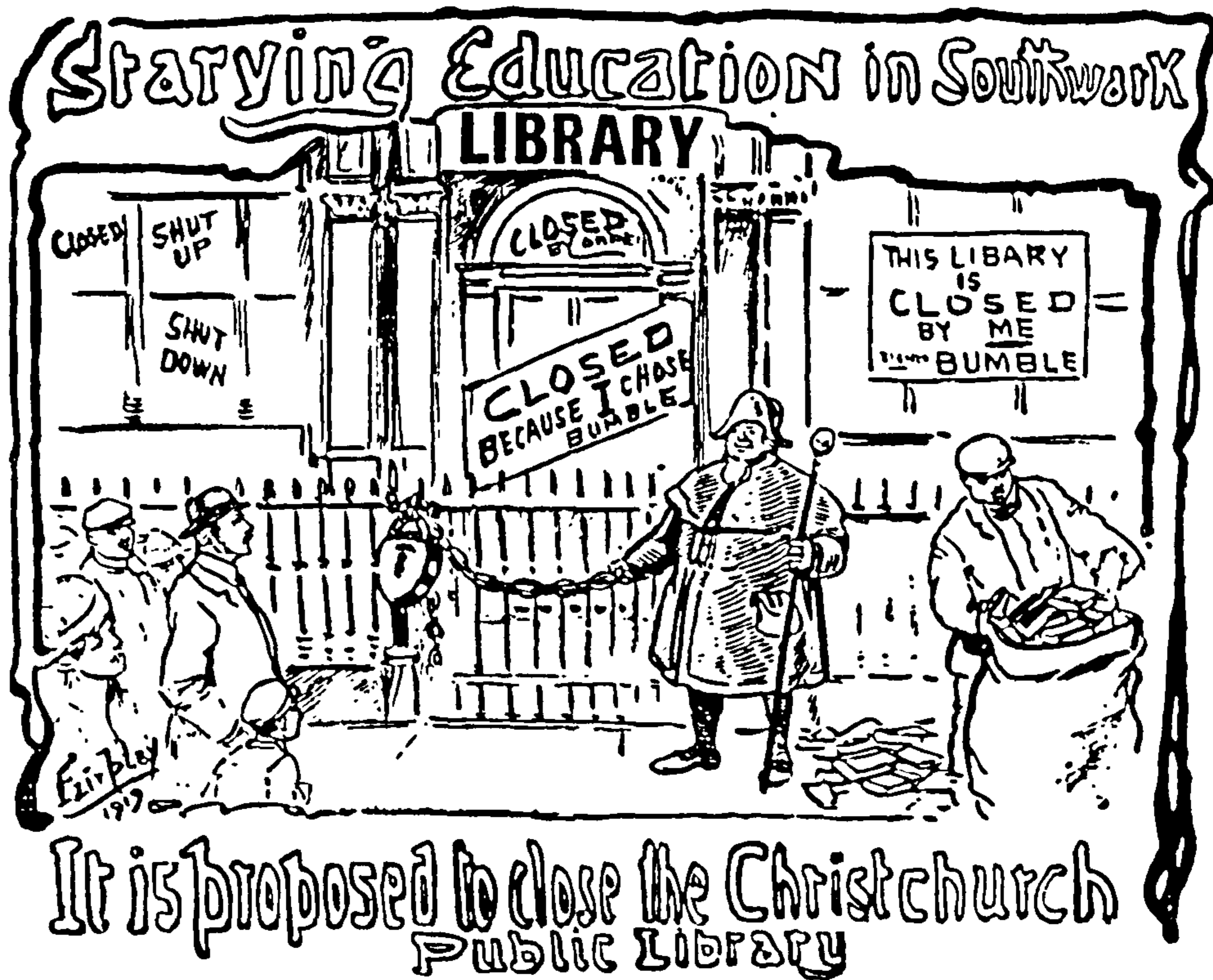


said in this thesis about the impressions of promoters and managers as to why people used, or should have used, libraries.

Although the 'why' of public library use is elusive it is possible to say much about who used libraries, and what was used - though not precisely who used what. Librarians were meticulous in recording their readership's occupation, age, gender and taste. They have bequeathed to the historian a vast archive of statistics - in annual reports and periodic Parliamentary Returns.<sup>50</sup> However, processing these statistics is problematic. Statistics were compiled according to varying criteria and terminology, and must therefore be interpreted with caution. Quantitative evidence must be complemented by qualitative, contemporary views concerning the issue of use. As the librarian E.A. Savage wrote: "Indulged in, statistics are dope; let us never forget their distortions, limitations and reticence."<sup>51</sup>

Librarians were anxious to produce tables of readers' occupations which illustrated a wide social class use, thereby emphasizing the public library's democratic purpose as a 'non-exclusive aristocracy' (see Fig. 1). Two suitable representative examples can be found in the Portsmouth Free Public Library Annual Report (1887-1888) and the Leyton Public Library Annual Report (1902-1903), which are reproduced here in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. These occupational lists show that the majority of public library users in Portsmouth and Leyton were working class. This is true of other towns and of other eras. There was also a significant presence of white-collar and professional occupations - the clerk, for example, begins to make a significant impact on late nineteenth century library statistics.<sup>52</sup> The social width of the readership was noted by Thomas Greenwood in 1886 when he wrote that:

A glance at the published statistics of any  
of the Free Libraries of the country as to



To-day there are in towns and cities public libraries, where whosoever will may come to study the great masters of literature and congratulate themselves on belonging to a non-exclusive aristocracy, and one more distinguished than that of rank or wealth.

Fig. 1. 'Starving Education in Southwark'

Source: 'Save the Christchurch Library': a handbill advertising a meeting against the sale of the Christchurch Library, Southwark (2 September 1919); Southwark Public Libraries, Local Studies, PC021 BCA.



the occupations of the readers shows how widely they are used by every trade and profession .... To all sections alike they are accessible, and to say that the 'great unwashed' alone use them is saying what would not be true.<sup>53</sup>

Opponents of the public library attempted to portray the institution as existing only for the lower classes, yet paid for unfairly by the better-off. This helped deepen the brand of charity which, due to the frequent choice of the prefix 'free', had stigmatized the municipal library since its inception.<sup>54</sup> No doubt the 'soup kitchen' image kept some middle class readers away.<sup>55</sup> But this should not detract from the large numbers of middle class readers who did frequent public libraries - because it made economic sense to do so. Thus, in R.N. Carey's Doctor Luttrell's first patient (1897) a struggling young physician was described as someone who was:

... devoted to Thackeray and thirsted for a complete set of his works, but at present only 'Vanity Fair' and 'The Newcomers' were on his modest bookshelves. Neither the husband nor the wife thought it right to spend those few shillings on the purchase of books when they could make use of the Free Library.

Ostensibly, the public library was for *all* in society. In advocating a library for York in 1881, J.S. Rowntree proclaimed that

Free libraries are used by every class of the population; male and female, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, boys and girls, the blind, the deaf and the maimed, all resort to a good free library.<sup>56</sup>

The rhetoric did not reflect the reality as far as women were concerned. In 1876 at South Shields Public Library only 25 per cent of lending library borrowers and just 7 per cent of reference users were female.<sup>57</sup> Little is known of the occupations of women users. The occupational breakdown given by South Shields Public Library to Parliament in 1876 - given in Appendix 3 - is extremely rare.



The public library was not simply the preserve of males, but of young males. Early this century the librarian James Duff Brown estimated that 16 per cent of users were under the age of 14; 32 per cent were aged 14-19; 34 per cent were aged 20-39; and 8 per cent were over the age of 40 - the ages of 10 per cent of users were not ascertained.<sup>58</sup> Heavy use by the young is a pattern which is applicable throughout the period under consideration; though to an increasing extent from the 1880s onwards, when children's libraries began to proliferate.

Librarians also recorded what their socially diffuse readership was demanding. The evidence of what was read is extensive. The Leicester Public Library Annual Report (1889-1890) offers representative evidence - the classification of issues in lending and reference departments is given in Appendix 4. At Leicester, as elsewhere, fiction was the staple diet of the library borrower. This fact gave considerable ammunition to the public library's critics. The debate over the usefulness of fiction was a consistent characteristic of early public library development. But the debate's frequently heated nature has perhaps given a disproportionate importance to fiction in the overall literature demands of public library users. There is evidence to suggest that the use made of non-fictional works - including such materials as magazines, newspapers, directories, time-tables and patents, as well as 'serious' literature - should not be underestimated.<sup>59</sup> The desire for self-improvement through knowledge was manifest in all classes; its appeal would have been sensed across the whole range of public library users. Albert Blakemore, a railway clerk, recorded in his autobiography how

When the [Shrewsbury] Free Library opened, and I was allowed to borrow books, it was a feast of feasts, of which I never grew

tired. But the time came when I turned to more serious books, learned something of astronomy, geology, biology, and the natural sciences generally. I began to get answers to questions I had long been seeking.<sup>60</sup>

Librarians occasionally (for it would have been a time-consuming exercise) produced tables to show that serious literature was consumed by all types of public library user (see Appendices 5 and 6).

The statistics of public library use are subject to the strictest qualifications. The statistics are not easily synthesized - this is especially true of occupational data. It is safer to analyse the statistics of different public libraries in isolation, with reference to a town's social, economic and political make-up. The diversity of locality should be emphasized. Urbanization did not create a single type of town; each is a complex entity with variations in economic activity, political interests and social formation. This realization is particularly relevant to the study of public library development which was essentially parochial. As the Westminster Review reported in 1872 in looking back over two decades of public library activity:

It is interesting to find that these libraries have been established among different kinds of population, and in almost every sort of town; in large manufacturing and separate towns; in smaller manufacturing places, in metropolitan, university, cathedral and agricultural towns.<sup>61</sup>

Case studies of individual library authorities are thus a crucial aspect of public library research and writing. This is particularly true with regard to assessing the motives of major promoters and benefactors. Victorian and Edwardian urban elites were not homogeneous.<sup>62</sup> Precise reasons for providing a public library would have differed, inevitably, from one town to the next. However, general motives can, and indeed must, be identified. Without a model for analysis research can only flounder in a mass of individual observations



which have no apparent link. Testing evidence against a model facilitates linkage and renders that evidence more relevant; the model's validity can thereby be assessed.<sup>63</sup>

This thesis does not include in-depth investigations of individual public library experiences. Its aim is to evolve a theory of provision which can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to diverse public library development. The model employed, as indicated above, is that of cultural-materialist dichotomy: it permeates the thesis. A number of sub-theories which can be included in this model. Accordingly, attention will be paid to recent theoretical debates in historical fields which impinge upon the public library - discussions of such matters as economic decline, technical education, cultural 'failure', social control, class conflict, the social foundations of architecture and changes in philosophical thinking, are of direct relevance to the formulation of a theory of public library development.

The factual record of pre-1850 public library initiatives will be set out in chapter 2. This will be followed in chapter 3 by an explanation of the socio-economic context of the early public library ideal, with particular attention being paid to cultural and materialist themes of social class development. Chapter 4 explores the utilitarianism which underpinned early public library philosophy; utilitarianism was originally materialistic, but under John Stuart Mill it was modified, and became more sensitive to cultural concerns. The utilitarians who founded the public library movement (chapters 5 and 6) were at once men of culture and supportive of scientific progress. This was discernable in the parliamentary investigation leading to the first public library legislation, especially in the investigation's concern for the material advantages of art education (chapter 7).

An extensive analysis of material and cultural themes follows in



chapter 8 and chapter 9, respectively. Emphasis will be placed - as has not been the case previously - on the public library's economic role. In the cultural sphere, idealism is assessed as a possible successor to utilitarianism as the philosophical flywheel of development. The place of the profession (chapter 10) and of architecture (chapter 11) in the history of the public library are similarly defined by tensions between liberal and scientific education, in the case of librarians; and between a desire for cultural recognition and a demand for function, in the case of architecture.

First World War developments (chapters 12 to 16) will trace the public library's economic and liberal educational response - as fashioned by government, librarians and business, and as illustrated by design considerations - to the instability of total war.

In the conclusion (chapter 17) the central ideas elicited from the text will be drawn together; and an attempt made to place key historical themes of public library evolution in a modern perspective.

## Notes and References to Chapter 1

1. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English language (1827 edn.) defined 'civility' as "freedom from barbarity ... Politeness; compaisance; elegance of behaviour ... Rule of decency".
2. Ibid. This Arnoldian perception of culture might be a little thin, but is nonetheless clear and cogent; T.S. Elliot, Notes towards a definition of culture (1948), p. 22.
3. This is the definition of culture pursued by the International encyclopedia of the social sciences (1968).
4. See, for example, S. Graver, George Elliot and community: a study in social theory and fictional form (Berkeley, 1984).
5. The evolution of humanistic culture was a piecemeal process. This paralleled the organic view of society - that social and political institutions resulted from a slow, gradual growth of custom and practice. P.W. Buck, How conservatives think (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 26.
6. T.C. Smout (ed.), The Search for wealth and stability: essays in economic and social history presented to M.W. Flinn (1979), p. xvi.
7. J.P.D. Dunbabin, Rural discontent in nineteenth century Britain (1974), p. 18.
8. T.S. Ashton, An Economic history of England: the eighteenth century (1955), p. 227.
9. See the introduction by T. Gourvish and A. O'Day to their Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900 (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 2.
10. S. Fothergill, The Principles of political economy as applied to the wages question (1872), pp. 4-5.
11. R. Quinault and J. Stevenson, Popular protest and public order: six studies in British history 1790-1920 (1974), p. 24.
12. E.J. Hobsbawm's article on economic fluctuations and social movements in his Labouring men (1964) argues that economic downswings provided inflammable material which was ignited in ensuing upswings. See also the conclusion to J. Stevenson, Popular disturbances in England 1700-1870 (1979).
13. Fothergill, op. cit., p. 5.
14. Stratford Express (1 November 1890).
15. Ibid.
16. R. Williams, The Country and the city (1973).
17. The Commonwealth (1 October 1853).



18. Materialism asserts the priority of being, of existence, of matter, over spirit, thought, knowledge and mind. There would appear to be no synthesis possible between these divergent materialist and idealist conceptions. F. Copplestone, A History of philosophy, Vol. 8 (1966), pp. 301-302.
19. Arguably, it is difficult to make the distinctions - as social scientists have in the past - between material and non-material culture; the non-material kind being narrowly defined as "those aspects of culture which govern the production and use of artefacts"; A Dictionary of the social sciences (1964). The Marxist analysis of humanistic culture as purely the product of the socio-economic environment in which it is produced has been described as crude; as has the other extreme of viewing culture as being produced in isolation, by artists and artistic movements independent of society's workings; J. Wolff, The Aesthetics and sociology of art (1983), p. 88.
20. See, for example, I. Britain, Fabianism and culture: a study of British socialism and the arts c. 1884-1918 (Cambridge, 1984), which argues that the uncultured, utilitarian Fabian is a stereotype.
21. From 1964 a paper on library history was included in the Library Association syllabus.
22. See W.A. Munford's William Ewart M.P. 1789-1869: portrait of a radical (1960) and Edward Edwards 1812-1886: portrait of a librarian (1963).
23. The following have lamented the absence of theory in library history: J.H. Shera, 'On the value of library history', in D.J. Ellsworth and N.D. Stevens (eds.), Landmarks of library literature 1876-1976 (Methuen, 1976); first published in Library Quarterly, 22 (1952). R.V. Williams, 'The Public library as the dependent variable: historically orientated theories and hypotheses of public library development', Journal of Library History, 16:2 (1981). P. Sturges, 'Library history in Britain: progress and prospects', in D.G. Davis, Libraries and culture: proceedings of Library History Seminar [USA] VI, 1980 (Austin, 1981).
24. R.D. Altick, The English common reader (Chicago, 1957), p. 225.
25. W.C.B. Sayers, 'Public libraries and public education', Westminster Gazette (20 September 1907).
26. Doncaster Gazette (15 February 1924).
27. P. Sykes, The Public library in perspective: an examination of its origins and modern role (1979), pp. 7-10.
28. W.E. Doubleday, A Primer for librarianship (1931), pp. 113-114.



29. T. Kelly, A History of public libraries in Great Britain 1845-1875 (1977), pp. 14-15. For a detailed analysis of the change from adoption by ratepayers' poll to adoption by council resolution see R.J.B. Morris, 'The Adoption process for public libraries in the United Kingdom', Local Government Review (28 August 1976).
30. Quoted in St. Martin-in-the-Fields Library Commissioners, First report (covering 1887-1891).
31. See Brown's 'Scheme for Islington's public library system' included in the Islington Borough Council, Minutes (2 March 1906). Those who were not in a position to use libraries included the incarcerated, the sick, the disabled, the very young and the very old. The Croydon Guardian (6 March 1915) reported the librarian Stanley Jast as saying that, discounting children under 10 and persons over 70, 1 in 8 of the Croydon population used a lending library.
32. T. Kelly, 'Public libraries and public opinion', Library Association Record, 68 (1966). A great deal of apathy surrounded the public library question. A poll in Bournemouth in 1885 recorded a result of 749 in favour of adopting public library legislation, and 914 against - but 1665 did not vote; C. Riddle, The Library movement in Bournemouth (1913), p. 1.
33. A poster produced by the anti-library campaign in York in 1881 read: "It is not right to ask a ratepayer for a pound, it is not right to ask him for a penny, and all talk to the contrary is moonshine." York Public Library, Scrapbook.
34. Islington Daily Gazette (27 July 1906).
35. G. Crossick, 'Urban society and the petty bourgeoisie in nineteenth century Britain', in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe, The Pursuit of urban history (1983), p. 317.
36. Handbill produced by the York Anti-Library Rate Committee. York Public Library, Scrapbook.
37. Trades Union Congress, Report (1884), p. 46.
38. Letter from H.M. Robinson to A. Carnegie (21 November 1902). Scottish Record Office, records of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, GD281/3/205/L.
39. For an explanation of compounding see M.J. Daunton, House and home in the Victorian city: working class housing 1850-1914 (1983), pp. 203-204.
40. H. Pelling, 'The Working class and the welfare state', in his Popular politics and society in late Victorian Britain (1968).
41. P. Thane, 'The Working class and state welfare in Britain 1880-1914', Historical Journal, 27 (1984), broadly agrees with Pelling's analysis (note 40) but argues that each area of social reform should be assessed individually - some reforms were more popular

than others. Also, though most would have preferred increased wages and regular work to social reform, the latter was occasionally welcomed as a decisive boost to living standards.

42. Sourvenir of the opening of the Alverstoke Free Public Library and Technical Institute (Gosport, 1901), p. 11.
43. T. Greenwood, Free public libraries (1886), p. 140, argued that because ratepayer opposition was so vehement it was politic to proceed carefully: "To make haste slowly should, therefore, be the motto of all friends of the movement."
44. Figures from T. Kelly, A History of public libraries, op. cit., pp. 23 and 112. The number of adoptions relative to the total number of local authorities was extremely small. In 1901, for example, there existed in England and Wales 67 county boroughs, 28 metropolitan boroughs, 1122 municipal councils and 14900 civil parishes; Census of England and Wales, Report (1901), p. 14.
45. Daunton, op. cit., p. 202. Also, in the 1890s the rate of increase in rateable values began to slow.
46. See the table of adoptions in Kelly, A History of public libraries, op. cit., pp. 494-502.
47. The Library, 6 (1894), pp. 212-213.
48. 'Our great municipal libraries .... The Islington Public Libraries', Sunday Strand (May 1909), pp. 428-436. An analysis of London's public library history can be found in Library Review, 33 (1984).
49. One exception here is B. Wiltshire, The Public library in autobiography (unpublished M.Phil., Council for National Academic Awards, 1982), though the majority of works cited in this are of a middle-class origin.
50. The most extensive collections of Parliamentary Returns are those of 1876 and 1877. A comprehensive collection of annual reports can be found at the British Library Information Science Service. A detailed analysis of London's library users appeared in London: A Journal of Civic and Social Progress (26 April 1894).
51. E.A. Savage, A Librarian looks at readers: observation for book selection and personal service (1950), p. 248.
52. An analysis of medium and large public libraries in the 1880s and 1890s has stated that the proportion of users was 63 per cent manual workers, 21 per cent professional and managerial positions, and 16 per cent clerical and non-manual occupations. B. Lackham, The Library and society (1971), p. 5. Luckham makes no mention, however, on how he arrived at these percentages.
53. Greenwood, op. cit. (1886 edn.), p. 139.



54. R.J.B. Morris, Parliament and the public libraries: a survey of legislative activity promoting the municipal library service in England and Wales 1850-1976 (1977), p. 12.
55. The Croydon Advertiser (29 March 1890), in discussing a library for the town, argued that many treated the public library as a charitable institution: "we have known ladies and gentlemen either from misconception or downright snobbishness, actually decline to avail themselves of the benefits of their library, simply because it was called the 'free' library." C. Kernahan, The Reading girl (1925), p. 15, relates that she had been told by a middle-class person that in using a public library they would feel "very much as if I were making use of a soup kitchen - as if I were meanly availing myself of something intended for quite another class".
56. J.S. Rowntree, Free public libraries: an address delivered in the Festival Concert Room, York ... (York, 1881), p. 9.
57. Calculated from South Shields' Parliamentary Return of 1876.
58. J.D. Brown, Manual of library economy (1907 edn.), p. 406.
59. A. Robson, 'The Intellectual background of the public library movement in Britain', Journal of Library History, 11:3 (July 1876).
60. A. Blakemore, Rolling through the years, p. 98: typescript, Shrewsbury Local History Library.
61. 'Free public libraries', Westminster Review, 42 (1872), p. 334.
62. R. Trainor, 'Urban elites in Victorian Britain', Urban History Yearbook (1985), argues that although there occurred a slight democratization of urban leadership before 1914 - in local government, for example - radical change did not come until after 1918. Before the First World War elites remained well-connected to the upper ranks of the middle class. However, their persisting social substance should not cloak their diversity.
63. The importance of models is discussed by R.C. Floud and D.N. McCloskey (eds.), in the introduction to their Economic history of Britain since 1700, Vol.2 (Cambridge, 1981).



PART ONE

ORIGINS

## Chapter Two

### THE FREE PROVISION OF LITERATURE BEFORE 1850

The provision of libraries freely open to the public was not in 1850 a novel idea.<sup>1</sup> The Public Libraries Act of 1850 (and the work of the Select Committee which preceded it) should not be seen as the great watershed it is so often described to be.<sup>2</sup> The issue of public libraries had been raised a number of times in the 1820s, '30s and '40s: the events of 1849-50 were as much a culmination as a beginning.<sup>3</sup> What follows represents the major pre-1850 proposals for public libraries noted by the library historians to date.

1) The first concrete proposal for rate-aided libraries of a general character came from the lawyer C.H. Bellenden Kerr, who approached the educationalist and Mechanics' Institute enthusiast Henry Brougham on the matter. Both were members of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), which Brougham had founded in 1826, and the issue was raised with the SDUK's General Committee with the intention of introducing to Parliament a bill for towns or districts of a given population to tax themselves for establishing a library open to all local inhabitants. The scheme appeared not to reach beyond the confines of SDUK business.<sup>4</sup>

2) In 1834 the report of the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness called for both legislative and moral endeavour to stamp out the intemperance which was so "destructive of the general welfare of the community";<sup>5</sup> was responsible for the "retardation of all Improvement, inventive or industrial, civil or political, moral or religious";<sup>6</sup> and promoted disorder.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of public libraries was suggested as a possible legislative remedy, in addition to the removal of taxes on

knowledge,<sup>8</sup> restrictions on drink in the armed forces,<sup>9</sup> and control of imported distilled spirits.<sup>10</sup> Item '37' of the report called for:

The establishment, by the joint aid of the government and the local authorities, and residents on the spot, of public walks and gardens, or open spaces for athletic and healthy exercises in the open air, in the immediate vicinity of every town, of an extent and character adapted to its population, and of district and parish libraries, museums and reading-rooms, accessible at the lowest rate of charge; so as to admit of one or the other being visited in all weather, at any time; with the rigid exclusion of all Intoxicating Drinks from such places, whether in the open air, or closed.<sup>11</sup>

This recommendation was strongly influenced by the evidence of Francis Place. Government action on drunkenness in the eighteenth century (the gin Acts and increased duties) was seen to have failed.<sup>12</sup> Place nonetheless believed legislation could still help to abate the evils of drink.<sup>13</sup> He observed that working people had become less intemperate since the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>14</sup> (In fact, the trend, for beer drinking at least, had been upward.)<sup>15</sup> This he put down to improved instruction. Evidence from the committee's proceedings illustrates Place's enthusiasm for public library education as an instrument for moral uplift:

Q.2079. The Committee understand that the chief remedy you recommend is, increased facilities for the diffusion of information among the people, and institutions of an entertaining and instructive nature? - Yes, these must inevitably raise their character.

Q.2032. Do you think the establishment of parish libraries and district reading-rooms, and popular lectures on subjects both entertaining and instructive to the community, might draw off a number of those who now frequent public-houses for the sole enjoyment they afford? - Certainly.<sup>16</sup>

3) The chairman of the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness, James Silk Buckingham (Member for Sheffield), presented the first



Parliamentary bill for the provision of public libraries. His Public Institutions Bill (1835) proposed the establishment of public institutions to diffuse literary and scientific knowledge, including libraries and museums. This bill was introduced in tandem with another to secure public walks and open air places of recreation.<sup>17</sup> The wording of the bill regarding libraries was virtually identical to that of the report of the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness. Buckingham abhorred intemperance. In introducing his bill he quoted this report at length in attempting to demonstrate what he believed to be the evil effect and negative utility of drink.<sup>18</sup> Buckingham was so immersed in the temperance issue that he had financed at no personal profit the production of a cheap edition of the minutes and evidence of the 'Drunken Committee' (as it came to be known). Several thousand copies were sold and, in addition, more than a million broadsheets containing an abstract of the report were circulated.<sup>19</sup> Having reached the Committee stage before being abandoned the Public Institutions Bill was reintroduced in 1836 (again in tandem with a bill on public walks) only to fail at its first reading. The same fate befell a further bill introduced by Buckingham in 1837 which integrated the public walks and institutions bills of the previous two years.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for the failure of these bills are not certain, but with regard to the 1835 bill it is relevant that its introduction preceded the Municipal Corporations Act which would perhaps have offered a more acceptable vehicle for administration. Ewart, for instance, supported the bill in principle but argued "its provisions would be better administered by the local Councils under the Municipal Bill".<sup>21</sup>

However, the chief reason for the failure of the 1835 bill was the issue of local taxation. It was envisaged that councils would be empowered to levy a rate for repaying loans secured in establishing

institutions if a public meeting of ratepayers agreed by a two-thirds majority. In opposing the bill Lord John Russell argued that although public education was a national issue, it could only thrive if left to voluntary effort. He believed the public would not be interested in electing the officials who would have to run institutions of public education (whether schools or libraries) and that only voluntary action would ensure enthusiastic management.<sup>22</sup> Another member asserted that "the House would stultify itself if it passed this Bill through the present stage with the Clause relative to the compulsory rate".<sup>23</sup> In fact, the House of Commons Journal records that the chamber did divide, though negatively, once the rating clause was dropped.<sup>24</sup> This Parliamentary episode is significant, therefore, in that it highlights the issue of rates which was to plague public library provision for so long after 1850.

Buckingham's bill had a further implication for future public library objectives in that it recognised the link between moral and material uplift. Libraries were viewed as moralising agencies which would at the same time help eradicate secondary poverty (where income spent unwisely caused unnecessary hardship). As Joseph Brotherton (a future supporter of the 1850 Act) told the Commons:

Anything that tended to promote the comfort and improve the morals of the lower classes deserved the most favourable consideration ... in as much as the country owed much of its prosperity to the labouring classes.<sup>25</sup>

The promotion of 'comfort' and 'morals' resulted from the ugliness of industrialism and a desire to improve the quality of life. It is no coincidence that Buckingham's library proposals were associated with proposals for public open spaces. The latter were seen as an antidote to industrialism. In his evidence to the Select Committee on Public Walks (1833) Brotherton had agreed that in Salford workers were shut up



in manufacturing employment "for a considerable part of the day" and thus required "open spaces for their health and comfort".<sup>26</sup> It is likely that libraries were attributed an equal potential for dissolving squalor. As late as 1885 the public library promoter Jannetta Manners wished that where possible there should be "a recreation-ground in connection with every reading room".<sup>27</sup>

Public spaces were also seen as a means of control. First, the corralling of the masses into public areas would reduce the nuisance of trespass on private property.<sup>28</sup> Second, public perambulation would promote self-respect and good conduct.<sup>29</sup> This last intention was to be repeated by public library enthusiasts who viewed the 'public space' of their institutions as a ground for the class mixing which fostered moral uplift.

4) A further contribution to Parliamentary discussion of the public library issue was provided by the Select Committee on Arts and their connection with Manufactures (1835-36) chaired by William Ewart.<sup>30</sup> Despite the nation's economic advance over the previous half century politicians and manufacturers found themselves concerned in the 1830s about the apparent uncompetitiveness of certain classes of manufactured goods, most notably in the 'fancy trade'. The report stressed the importance for a trading nation such as Britain of the connection between art and manufactures, but questioned the strength of the bond between them in this country.<sup>31</sup> It lamented the "want of instruction in design among our industrious population", and called for an improvement in taste for art through the opening of public museums and art galleries funded by local and central government jointly.<sup>32</sup> It also called for schools of design to be set up along the lines of those found in Germany and France.<sup>33</sup>

The report did not call specifically for public libraries but the



need for them was inferred by reference to their accessibility elsewhere. It was noted, for example, that across the channel:

The free, open and popular system of instruction ... and the extreme accessibility of their museums, libraries and exhibitions, have greatly tended to the diffusion of a love of art, as well as of literature, among the poorer classes of the French.<sup>34</sup>

The minutes of evidence, however, contain a number of pleas for the setting up of public libraries to help extend a knowledge of the arts, particularly in their industrial application. For example, Ewart put the following questions to Philip Barnes, an architect from Norwich:

Q.1353. Do you think that the institution of schools and places of instruction in art would be a great advantage to the manufacturing population of Norwich? - Undoubtedly.

Q.1354. Do you think that the opening of galleries where they might see the most beautiful works of art, and opening libraries where probably such works might also be exhibited, together with books, would not also be a very great advantage to the manufacturers? - I would, decidedly.<sup>35</sup>

This Select Committee raised important cultural and materialist themes which will be discussed in greater detail below.

5) The Mechanics' Institutes contributed to the public library ideal, even if their libraries were not 'public' in the true sense of the word. Munford has described them as the "pioneer ancestors".<sup>36</sup> In 1839 the SDUK published a Manual for Mechanics' Institutions, which aimed at assisting those persons intending to found institutes, and offered advice to those in existence. A chapter on libraries dealt with aspects of provision in the Institutes' own repositories, but also looked beyond the Institutes' responsibility to its members and called for the co-operation of existing town libraries (of all types) in pooling their resources and throwing them open to the public. To encourage this it was suggested that government grants could be made for buildings and

a standard core collection of literature, supported by a local rate also. This funding principle, the Manual suggested, might be extended to the establishment and running of village libraries, perhaps located in schools.<sup>37</sup> This suggestion, like that of the SDUK in 1826, shows that early ideas on public libraries were to a large degree drawn from contemporary enthusiasm for knowledge which was 'useful'.

6) A decade after the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacturers Ewart succeeded in securing one of its recommendations - "An Act for encouraging the establishment of Museums in large towns", 1845.<sup>38</sup> The link between the promotion of good design as applied to manufactures, on the one hand, and the viewing, on the other, of man-made objects or natural history items in public museums had been established by the Committee on Arts and Manufacturers in 1835-36. Ewart's enabling bill passed without opposition, which is a little surprising in that it resembled closely in its provisions the Public Libraries Bill of 1850 (which, of course, sparked an interesting Commons debate). The Museums Act of 1845 contained the following provisions: a) municipal boroughs of greater than 10,000 population were empowered to establish "museums of art and science"; b) money for buildings only could be raised through borrowing, repayable out of the borough's general rate fund; c) a rate limit for maintenance (e.g. salaries, lighting, cleaning etc.), funding was set at  $\frac{1}{2}$ d in the f; d) admission charges were not to exceed 1d.

Three councils took advantage of the ambiguities of the Act<sup>39</sup> to establish free libraries within their public museums: Canterbury (1847), Warrington (1848) and Salford (1849); though it should be noted that at Canterbury and Warrington the penny admission charge to the museum was payable before access could be obtained to the library. Nonetheless, these were the first rate-aided libraries in the country.<sup>40</sup>



## Notes and References to Chapter 2

1. Library nomenclature is problematic. Many libraries before 1850 claimed the description 'public' - for example, subscription, cathedral, endowed, circulating, national, or even small shop libraries - because they were open to the public in some degree, even if payment for use was required, or because they were in receipt of public money, as in the case of the British Museum library. For this reason municipal libraries frequently assumed the title 'Free Library', as an indication of access without payment, and to distinguish them from libraries which had previously employed the word 'public'. T. Kelly, Early public libraries: a history of libraries in Great Britain before 1850 (1966), p. 241.
2. The Library Association has stated that "it is reasonable to say that on 14 August 1850, was started a great social institution which has increasingly, throughout the century, been of incalculable benefit."; Library Association, A Century of public library service (1950), p. 2.
3. R.J.B. Morris, Parliament and the public libraries (1977), p. 1.
4. T. Kelly, A History of public libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975 (1977), pp. 3-4 and 455-457.
5. Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness, Report (1834), p. iv.
6. Ibid, p. vi.
7. Ibid., p. vii.
8. Ibid., p. ix.
9. Ibid., p. x.
10. Ibid., p. ix.
11. Ibid., p. viii.
12. Ibid., Q. 2017.
13. Ibid. Q. 2028.
14. Ibid., Q. 2017.
15. Nineteenth century beer consumption was at a peak, 1802-1803. One of the driest years of the century was 1817. Thereafter, an upward trend lasted until 1835, at which point consumption was 25 per cent less than in 1802. This was followed by a fall, 1835-1855. F.M.L. Thompson, The Rise of respectable society; a social history of Victorian Britain 1830-1900 (1988), pp. 312-313.
16. Select Committee on Drunkenness, op. cit., Q. 2079 and 2032.
17. Morris, op. cit., p. 206.



18. Hansard, Parliamentary debates, 29 (1835), col. 568.
19. Ibid., col. 567.
20. For the texts of these bills see: Parliamentary Papers: Public Bills, Vol. 4 (1835), p. 49; Vol. 4 (1836), p. 713; Vol. 4 (1837), p. 61.
21. Hansard, Parliamentary debates, 30 (1835), col. 652.
22. Ibid., col. 650-651.
23. Ibid., col. 649.
24. House of Commons Journal, 90 (1835), pp. 561-562.
25. Hansard, Parliamentary debates, 29 (1835), col. 576.
26. Select Committee on Public Walks, Report (1833), Q. 861.
27. J. Manners, Some of the advantages of recreation rooms, reading rooms and public libraries (1885), p. 71.
28. Select Committee on Public Walks, op. cit., Q. 830-836.
29. Ibid., Q. 352.
30. The words which appeared on the final report in 1836 were "Arts and their connection with manufacturers". However, the evidence was taken in two parts; first in 1835 on the subject of 'arts and manufacturers', followed in 1836 by evidence on 'arts and the principles of design'.
31. Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures, Report (1836), p. iii.
32. Ibid., p. iii.
33. Ibid., p. v.
34. Ibid., p. iv.
35. Ibid., Q. 1353-1354.
36. W.A. Munford, 'Pioneer ancestors', Library Association Record, 59 (1957).
37. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Manual for mechanics' institutions (1839), pp. 54-57. (This was written by B.F. Duppa.)
38. Museums Act (1845), 8 and 9 Vict. c. 43.

39. The Act referred to buildings being established for housing "all Specimens of Art or Science, and Articles of every description". This description was wide enough to include books.
40. Kelly, A History of public libraries, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

## Chapter Three

### CONTEXT

Early nineteenth century suggestions for public libraries resulted from <sup>an inadequate</sup> free provision of literature. This was particularly detrimental to the working and lower middle classes. Libraries for these classes did exist but were rarely free.<sup>1</sup> Even those libraries which were ostensibly open to all - such as the British Museum Reading Room - were often in reality not so.<sup>2</sup> Relative to the Continent, Britain was believed to be woefully deficient in truly public libraries.<sup>3</sup> Some quasi-public libraries had developed. Religious organizations such as the Religious Tract Society freely distributed small libraries, mostly to schools and churches.<sup>4</sup> Free literature was commonly available in pubs and coffee houses.<sup>5</sup> Employers sometimes provided factory libraries for their employees.<sup>6</sup> However, such libraries cannot effectively be termed public (hence the use of the word quasi) because provision was private and, although material was free at the point of use, restrictions operated whether in the form of buying beer or coffee, being an employee or belonging to a religious group.

The deficiency in public library provision became more glaring in light of the emergent literary needs of an industrialising society. That industrialism and improved literacy were inextricably linked in all areas is by no means certain.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the statistics of literacy show little improvement during the period of proto-industrialisation. In 1754 around 60 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women could reproduce their names in the marriage register. By 1840 these proportions had changed little in the case of men (66 per cent) and not at all for women.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be recognized that marriage



register analysis is not an entirely reliable method for establishing literacy. Many probably did not sign lest they embarrassed their partners: a phenomenon perhaps more true for women than for men.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, it is likely that more people could read than write. This was a tradition which stretched back certainly into the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> A number of commentators have stressed the vitality of early nineteenth century popular literature.<sup>11</sup> It was stated in Seymour's Humerous Sketches (1836) (a light-hearted look at contemporary social life) that: "Literature has become the favourite pursuit of all classes .... Even the vanity of servant-maids has undergone a change, they now study 'Cocker', and neglect their 'figures'."<sup>12</sup> Not just reading, but serious reading also, was indeed a natural corollary of industrialism. Whether it be a railway timetable or a scientific treatise, 'practical' reading complemented the age of progress. Library activity reflected the growth of serious literature.<sup>13</sup>

Socio-economic context has been of keen interest to recent library historians seeking to broaden their subject.<sup>14</sup> The early history of the public library movement has been examined against a backcloth of social and economic development.<sup>15</sup> However, little has been said about class conflict as a determinant of public library origins.<sup>16</sup> Yet, public libraries were conceived in a world riven with social strife and disaffection, with the precise aim of ridding that society of the very divisions which threatened its existence.

The promotion of the public library idea was, in part, a reflex to the unprecedented levels of protest in the turbulent years between the close of the Napoleonic Wars and the climax of the Chartist movement; though perhaps more particularly to the 'Radical' 1830s and 'Hungry' 1840s, the 1820s being a relatively quiet "mildly prosperous plateau of social peace".<sup>17</sup> These were decades of increasing agitation

against the worst aspects of the new industrial order, and the monopoly of political power which went hand in hand with economic exploitation. In the first half of the nineteenth century waves of social unrest broke time and again, most notably in 1811-13, 1815-17, 1819, 1829, 1829-35, 1838-42, 1843-44 and 1846-48.<sup>18</sup> In rural areas unrest was perhaps more due to economic hardship. In industrial and urban areas, however, the economic impetus was invariably linked with some sort of political dynamic, the latter even taking prominence in 1815-19, 1829-32, and above all in the Chartist era. There emerged, therefore, a volatile mixture of economic deprivation and political suppression which fashioned a widespread discontent among working people "who felt themselves hungry in a society reeking with wealth, enslaved in a country which prided itself on its freedom, seeking bread and hope, and receiving in return stones and despair".<sup>19</sup>

By the 1840s British capitalism had entered its first great period of secular crisis, the trough arriving in the catastrophic economic depression of 1841-42. The post-Napoleonic era had been one of rapid capital accumulation in which vast fortunes were made. But it was also marked by violent fluctuations in the trade cycle caused by falling prices.<sup>20</sup> The latter resulted from technological change and over-production. Industrial capitalism has proved inherently unstable because the accumulation of capital has tended to race ahead of the conditions that can sustain it.<sup>21</sup> This was never more so than in the 1820s, '30s and '40s when supply frequently outstripped demand causing downward pressure on wages and rising unemployment.

So severe was the economic depression of the early 1840s that it was not entirely unrealistic to think of the period as "the final agony of capitalism and the prelude to revolution".<sup>22</sup> Contemporary observers such as Engels sensed an impending conflagration. Writing just five



years before the first public library legislation, in his Condition of the Working Class in England, he forecast that "the revolution must come; it is already too late to bring about a peaceful solution". He went on:

The war of the poor against the rich now carried on in detail and indirectly will become direct and universal .... The classes are divided more and more sharply, the spirit of resistance penetrates the workers, the bitterness intensifies, the guerilla skirmishes become concentrated in more important battles, and soon a slight impulse will suffice to set the avalanche in motion. Then, indeed, will the war cry resound through the land: 'War to the palaces, peace to the cottages!' - but then it will be too late for the rich to beware.<sup>23</sup>

Revolutionary insurrection would be the culmination of what Marx and Engels saw as the irrevocable movement in capitalist society towards an urban-based class system polarized between a mushrooming and impoverished proletariat and an increasingly small bourgeoisie controlling ever increasing concentrations of capital. The resultant dichotomy of class interests, perhaps with the catalyst of growing economic competition from abroad, would galvanize the workers into seizing power.

But what was the prospect of revolution in Britain before 1850? Firm conclusions concerning the existence of a threatening working class consciousness are elusive. It is not appropriate in the context of this present discussion to explore extensively the debate concerning the emergence of such a consciousness: this has been done elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> However, a brief analysis is required if the motivation behind the early public library ideal is to be fully appreciated. Divorced from the context of class the aims of protagonists like Ewart and Edwards and the work of the 1849 Select Committee are colourless.

In his seminal work The History of the English Working Classes E.P. Thompson explained that "class happens when some men, as a result of



common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."<sup>25</sup> In other words, Thompson saw class less as a question of homogeneity than of shared differences with others. He further argued that the class experience "is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter voluntarily".<sup>26</sup> That is to say, it is an individual's economic function which determines his/her social relations. It was the Industrial Revolution, says Thompson, which combined these constituent elements in the definition of class and gave rise to an embryonic class consciousness amongst not just factory workers but working people generally (Thompson's analysis included farm labourers, artisans and domestic workers). As he writes: "In the years between 1780 and 1832 most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers."<sup>27</sup> Thus, by 1832 the working class presence was "the most significant factor in British political life";<sup>28</sup> although it must be stressed that the birth of a working class consciousness was "a complex, syncopated process, operating at different speeds in different areas".<sup>29</sup> Thompson's assertion that a widely sensed working class consciousness appeared during proto-industrialization has been supported by Perkin and Foster.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Thompson, who stressed the economic basis of class formation, Perkin primarily discusses social causes, in particular "the abdication on the part of the governors": the middle class entrepreneurial ideal rejected the paternalistic sense of duty to the lower orders which pre-industrial ruling elites had recognized and practised as a means of control. It was this rejection (ultimately enshrined in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 but evolving in the generation before this) which brought a

working class consciousness to fruition during the radical protest of 1815-20. Foster also considers social causes but combines these with economic inputs in an assessment of class which is tangible: class being measured in terms of income, occupation, relationship to the means of production, area of residence and marriage patterns. In a quantitative analysis of the textile town of Oldham he identifies a period of labour consciousness (a marked trade union solidarity) lasting from about 1770-1830, followed by a full-blown revolutionary consciousness from 1830 to 1850. Foster is nearer to Thompson (who sees 1832 as a crucial year) in his timing of a working class consciousness than he is to Perkin. Nonetheless, all three believe that such a consciousness was in place by the time the public library idea came to be discussed.

The work of such commentators as Hobsbawm and Briggs finds this conclusion to be premature.<sup>31</sup> Hobsbawm views the pre-1850 period as crucial to the eventual emergence of a fully-fledged working class consciousness: he too stressed the importance of labour consciousness. However, in his opinion the final 'crystallization' of a working class self-awareness does not occur until after 1870. Briggs has pointed out that although the term 'working class' appeared early in the nineteenth century, the description 'working classes' endured for many generations, thereby casting doubt on the early formation of working class solidarity. The literature of the public library, to be sure, contained numerous references to the plural even in the 1890s.

Despite arguments over the dating of consciousness it is clear that the upheavals which accompanied the Industrial Revolution and - it would not be an exaggeration to say - tore apart the social landscape of Britain, radically affected the stratification of society and the allegiances held by men and women to the various social groups which



constituted it. Small, stable, vertically integrated communities began to be replaced by large, unplanned, urban environments inherently unstable because of the de-humanizing and alienating working and living conditions in lower class ghettos. To state that the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the creation of a widespread revolutionary working class consciousness might be an exaggeration. However, the existence of a proletariat (albeit fragmented) growing in self-awareness is undeniable.

For the nineteenth century respectable classes the emergence of a proletariat took on sinister overtones, conjuring up as it did images of volcanic social eruption to the extent of the revolution and mob rule experienced in late eighteenth century France. Proletarian protest constituted much more than the sporadic crowd turbulence of the past. The phenomenon of 'the riot' had long existed as the "characteristic and ever-recurring form of popular protest, which, on occasion, turns into rebellion or revolution".<sup>32</sup> Workers had for centuries past combined to dispense a "rough-and-ready" kind of "natural justice",<sup>33</sup> whether in the form of industrial arson, rick-burning, the looting of grain stores, vandalism or violence against persons - these in response to such traditional popular grievances as rack-renting, usury, legal abuses, enclosure, taxation, rising prices, cuts in wages, or, indeed, the intrusion of foreign influences. In the pre-industrial age such actions were the stock-in-trade of rioters who were dismissed by contemporaries 'banditti', 'desperadoes', 'convicts', 'the mob' or 'rabble'.<sup>34</sup>

With the rise of a working class solidarity, however, riotous assembly - or more poignantly, the prospect of it as anticipated by dominant social groups - presented the establishment with control problems of an entirely different order: it was in the first half of



the nineteenth century, that individual working men and women began to display a sense of "sustained commitment to a movement of their own class objectives, and a confidence which enabled them to stand up against the physical and moral resources of their opponents".<sup>35</sup> Local social protest was supplemented by the rise of the social movement (defined as a sustained public demand backed by demonstration that powerholders redistribute power and wealth) which could manifest itself nationally.<sup>36</sup> As stated above, the existence of a single, confident working class by the middle years of the nineteenth century is doubtful. Both the failure of general unionism in the 1830s and the subdued nature of class relations in the mid-Victorian period support this view. Nevertheless, the degree of consciousness which did exist before 1850 was "felt by a considerable proportion of working people"; above all, "it was institutionalized, and [as such] the authority of the ruling class was under challenge".<sup>37</sup>

In middle and upper class eyes the institutionalization of class (illustrated most clearly in the establishment of independent working class organizations) took on its most menacing form in the rise of Chartism, the first avowedly independent working class political movement. This was a movement largely free from the fetters of middle-class leadership or aristocratic patronage. Moreover, although its aims were not out of keeping with previous reform campaigns, its methods were at times little different from those insurrectionary movements which in recent generations the British ruling classes had observed sweeping through Europe, in particular France. This was certainly true with regard to the peak period of Chartist agitation covering the years 1839-42, there being the times of "mass meetings and torchlight processions, secret drillings, clashes with police and soldiers, and talk of revolution".<sup>38</sup>

Rumours of arming, drilling and other para-military operations spread alarm in the minds of the ruling classes. Indeed, that the opponents of Chartism endeavoured to split the movement and discredit the underlying constitutional legitimacy of the Chartist protest by promoting the terms 'moral' and 'physical' force is clear evidence that they took meaningful account of the 'intimidationalist' aspects of the agitation.

But is there a danger of overestimating the fears which the middle and upper classes displayed towards Chartism? It has been argued that in any given era of modern history, but particularly at times of marked social unrest, society has tended to exaggerate its own susceptibility to violence by referring back to some fictitious 'golden age' of law and order - this in an attempt to deplore the excesses of any current wave of turbulent behaviour, perhaps to gain support for the control mechanisms it wishes to apply.<sup>39</sup> However, as far as modern British history is concerned no such 'golden age' has ever existed, except that is, in the imagination of those troubled by the prospect of moral decline and social disintegration. This was true of early Victorian respectable opinion which located the golden age of respect for the law and public order in pre-industrial 'Merrie England', and which consequently overestimated the odds of social cataclysm.

Historians can judge from hindsight that during the Chartist era the ruling classes retained a monopoly on the instruments of control - army, police, special constables, magistrates, the railway and telegraph system - it required to prevent serious social conflict.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, not until 1848 did there exist an external threat (in the form of unrest on the Continent) which might have sapped military strength. The chances of revolution in the years approaching the first Public Libraries Act were slim. Talk of violent social upheaval (though Chartist violence



did occur) was in the main mere bluster. Ministers were not preoccupied with revolution.<sup>41</sup> Chartism was itself divided and unable to call on a mature working class consciousness due to the continuing occupational fragmentation and location of the lower orders. True, it was a movement which embraced a substantial minority of workers, but "a minority is still less than half".<sup>42</sup>

But this is not to say that fears of serious social conflict were negligible. Strong and persistent, indeed, were respectable opinion's social fears. On the evening of the Chartist's Kennington demonstration in April 1848 Gladstone exclaimed in relief that "our hearts feel profoundly the mercies of this remarkable day".<sup>43</sup> Fears were perhaps even greater in the early days of Chartism when a Manchester poster urged: "Be ready to nourish the tree of liberty with the blood of tyrants."<sup>44</sup> The schoolgirl daughter of a respectable Manchester tailor and draper recalled in 1875 the fears of Chartist disturbance she had experienced in 1841:

... in going from Cheetham Hill to Broughton each day, often terrified out of my wits almost, seeing the processions going to Kersal Moor where their great meetings were held ... How the riots commenced I do not know, but a mob got infuriated and set fire to one of the mills. This was followed by a general plunder of provision shops and loaves were taken from bakers' counters and thrown amongst the people. Then special constables were sworn in by hundreds .... Roughs for miles around flocked into town to join in the plunder .... One day a party of ruffians came rushing up to the Cheetham Hill Road carrying with them sacks filled with stones, which they had taken from the sides of the roads where they had been placed in heaps for repairing. These fellows rushed to the doors of the houses threatening to smash both the doors and windows unless something was given them, so some gave money, others bread, everyone had to give in one kind or another. Each day some dreadful outrage or another was committed. The factories had to be guarded by soldiers. Valuable machinery was smashed and many shops plundered of



everything which could be laid hold of.  
This state of things continued for many weeks.<sup>45</sup>

Attitudes towards the criminal tendencies and economic condition of the labouring poor provide a fuller understanding of respectable apprehensions. Anti-social consequences flowed, in part, from the economic conditions of the working classes. But poverty was viewed by much of contemporary respectable opinion to be the result not of the economic system but of ignorance and immorality. Crime, too, which Engels reported had increased sevenfold between 1805 and 1842,<sup>46</sup> was considered to originate from cultural not economic deficiency. The crime which perplexed respectable opinion was twofold. First, that committed by the 'dangerous' classes (defined not as 'revolutionary' or 'ragged' but as the professionally 'criminal' or 'predatorial' classes).<sup>47</sup> Second, there was the crime which contained a political dynamic: a lawlessness which was believed to foreshadow the possibility of political insurrection among the lower orders.<sup>48</sup> The 'dangerous' classes were not seen as a potent threat to existing social arrangements: Marx regarded them as 'scum' who were prone more to reactionary than revolutionary activity (Marx distinguished between the lumpenproletariat and the 'dangerous' classes, even though translators have confused the two).<sup>49</sup> An emergent working class, on the other hand, thirsting for liberation via education, yet retaining a propensity for violence, was much more menacing.

In this respect also fears were exaggerated. As Christopher Thomson (a skilled worker who had established an artisans' library) wrote in 1847:

The thinking man knows, that although he may lack a bread-loaf, he shall not procure one by burning a farmer's corn stacks. Though the thinking man writhes beneath the curse of indirect taxation, he does not expect to cheapen his bread and wine by pulling down a

grocer's shop, or breaking into a warehouse ....  
Until education shall teach a majority of the  
toiling artisans of England to become calm,  
sober, thinking, and self-dependent men, uniting  
themselves in a deliberative league for the  
emancipation of labour, they will continue to be  
at the mercy of the mammon-lovers, who thrive by  
their ignorance and division.<sup>50</sup>

Fear, nonetheless, existed and education became a battle-ground.  
Die-hards saw it as a threat to social stability arguing that ignorance  
prevented imagination, independent thought and social ambition.<sup>51</sup> But  
those in closer touch with progress believed it to be a means of control.  
This was understood by working class leaders like William Lovett and  
John Collins who explained that: "those who stand in the list of  
education-promoters, are but state-stickers, seeking to make it an  
instrument of party or faction".<sup>52</sup> The middle classes sought to  
influence the thirst for reading displayed by the early nineteenth  
century working class.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, promoters of education and culture were not united. In  
August 1839 the Tory inclined newspaper The Newcastle Courant condemned  
Chartism and warned:

Should the movement be not effectively checked  
now, [it] cannot fail to destroy the glory of  
England as a nation. Their aim is to overthrow  
the structures, and uprear the foundations of  
civilized society.<sup>54</sup>

It is unlikely that the opponents of Chartism who read this would have  
been able to agree on a definition of the term 'civilized society'.  
Commentators such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed civil society to  
be under threat from laissez-faire industrialism. As an antidote to the  
latter Coleridge proposed an espousal of culture. His conception of  
culture was divided. First, he viewed it in the conservative-  
anthropological sense of respect for experience and custom (as opposed  
to reason) as informers of character and conduct; industrial society,



he believed, had dissolved the social bonds of a previously responsible, integrated society, and had instigated vicious de-stabilizing trade cycles. Second, he saw culture as high achievement in terms of intellectual excellence, fine arts, and a refined and liberal style of thinking and behaviour - matters which in his eyes little interested the champions of progress.

Coleridge's cultural critique of commercial society stands at the beginning of a tradition embracing Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Morris, Green, Tawney and others.<sup>55</sup> This tradition exhibited unease with industrialism, especially its alienating and brutalizing effect on the masses. Culture was seen as a means of correcting the distortions which had occurred. A society injected with an appreciation for culture would be less likely to tear itself apart in pursuit of a materialism which left ignorance - a prime source of instability - unscathed. Thus, for social critics politics and culture were intertwined.

Conversely, utilitarians believed civilization was enriched by industrialism. They were aware of the squalor which accompanied industrialism but believed progress would eventually eradicate it. A maturing economy required that attention be paid to useful education and scientific culture (which was in itself a cultural pursuit of high worth). Education for material advance would secure social stability; not just because its result would 'buy off' discontent but because it taught the self-reliance and social atomism which negated radical co-operation.

These views on the place of education and culture in early industrial society are divergent. Yet, both 'liberal' and 'utilitarian' perspectives nourished the public library movement from its inception. A recent assessment of public library development has placed the institution alongside other liberal reforms of the nineteenth century



which aimed to stifle workers' discontent by facilitating a measured rise in the standard of living of the labouring classes.<sup>56</sup> This materialist analysis is valid as far as it goes. What needs to be added, as shall be argued below, is that the pursuit of culture to enrich the quality of life and so preserve social order was a key theme of free literary provision: even utilitarians like Edwards and Ewart did not reject culture. On the other hand, utilitarianism was crucial to early public library development.

### Notes and References to Chapter 3

1. See, e.g., A.R. Thompson, 'The Use of libraries by the working class in Scotland in the early nineteenth century', Scottish Historical Review, 42 (1963). Also, chapter 8 of T. Kelly, Early public libraries: a history of public libraries in G.B. before 1850 (1966). The wide diversity of libraries existing in the early nineteenth century has provided a rich source of evidence for library history dissertations on librarianship training courses.
2. See the evidence of Sir Henry Ellis, Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum, Report (1836). The work of this body will be more fully discussed in chapter 6.
3. This was a main message conveyed in the Select Committee on Public Libraries Report (1849). Edwards (Q. 131) blamed the lack of public libraries in Britain relative to other countries on the effects of the Reformation. The latter had destroyed the monastic library which in other countries had been appropriated for fairly wide public use.
4. Between 1832 and 1839 the Religious Tract Society distributed through England and Wales over 4000 collections of around 100 volumes each. The material was naturally of a religious and moralizing nature.
5. See the evidence of George Dawson (Q. 1216 and 1329), Select Committee on Public Libraries, op. cit. William Lovett told the same committee (Q. 2771 and 2773) that a quarter of the 200 coffee houses in London possessed libraries, and that one in Long Acre had over 2000 volumes.
6. Select Committee on Public Libraries, op. cit. The evidence of Samuel Smiles (Q. 1993 and 1994) and George Dawson (Q. 1366) testifies to this. F.M.L. Thompson in his The Rise of respectable society: a social history of Victorian Britain 1830-1900 (1988), p. 213, states that this practice became increasingly common after 1850.
7. W.B. Stephens, Education, literacy and society: the geography of diversity in provincial England (Manchester, 1987).
8. By 1871, however, the respective rates had increased to 80 per cent and 70 per cent. By 1891 rates stood at 94 per cent (men) and 90 per cent (women). By the turn of the century the sexes had achieved parity of 97 per cent. These figures were derived from J. Walvin, A Child's world: a social history of English childhood (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 121; and A. Digby and p. Searby, Children, school and society in nineteenth century England (1981), pp. 3-5.
9. Digby and Searby, op. cit., pp. 3-5.
10. V. Neuburg, Popular education in eighteenth century England (1971), p. 93. A nineteenth century example of reading being more common than writing comes from the opening of the library at the Salford



Museum in 1849. The idea that anyone obtaining a book should enter their name in the register was given up after a few days "not only because it occupied so much time; but because many who came for books were unable to write, and some, rather than confess their inability, would go without the book they desired".  
Chambers Edinburgh Journal, 15 (1851), p. 199.

11. See V. Neuburg, Popular literature: a history and guide (Harmondsworth, 1977); and his 'Literature of the streets' in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), The Victorian city: images and reality, Vol. 1 (1973). Also L. James, Print and the people 1819-1851 (Harmondsworth, 1978), and the first two chapters of his Fiction for the working man 1830-1850 (Oxford, 1963); L. Shepard, The Broadside ballad: a study in origins and meaning (1962).
12. Seymour's Humerous sketches (1836), Scene III.
13. G.E. Maxim, Libraries and reading in the context of the economic political and social changes taking place in Manchester and the neighbouring mill towns 1750-1850 (unpublished MA, University of Sheffield, 1979).
14. See R.P. Sturges, 'Context for library history: libraries in eighteenth century Derby', Library History, 4:2 (1976) and his paper 'Libraries in the Industrial Revolution in Britain', given to the International Seminar on Libraries at times of cultural change (University of Sussex, August 1987). The proceedings of this seminar are forthcoming in Journal of Library History.
15. See, for example, Chapter 1 of W.A. Munford, Penny rate: aspects of British public library history 1850-1950 (1951); and G. Jones, Political and social factors in the advocacy of free libraries in the United Kingdom 1801-1922 (unpublished Ph.D., University of Strathclyde, 1971).
16. There are two notable exceptions here. J. Noyce, Libraries and the working classes in the nineteenth century (Brighton, 1974), and P. Corrigan and V. Gillespie, Class struggle, social literacy and idle time (Brighton, 1978).
17. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English working class (1968), p. 781.
18. E. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (1968), p. 74.
19. Ibid., p. 75.
20. Ibid., p. 58, points out that the price of 1 lb of spun cotton fell by 62.5 per cent, 1812-1832.
21. A. Gamble, Britain in decline: economic policy, political strategy and the British state (1981), p. 8.



22. See E. Hobsbawm's introduction to F. Engels, The Condition of the working class in England (1969), p. 14.
23. Ibid., p. 232, words of Engels.
24. Three succinct assessments are R.J. Morris, Class and class consciousness in the Industrial Revolution 1780-1850 (1979); D.G. Wright, Popular radicalism: the working class experience 1780-1880 (Harlow, 1988); and R. Glen, Urban workers in the early Industrial Revolution (1984), particularly the introductory chapter.
25. Thompson, The Making of the English working class, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
26. Ibid., p. 10.
27. Ibid., p. 12.
28. Ibid., p. 12.
29. H. Perkin, The Origins of modern English society (1969), p. 177.
30. Ibid.; and J. Foster, Class struggles and the Industrial Revolution (1974).
31. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Making of the working class' in his Worlds of labour (1984); and A. Briggs, 'The Language of "class" in early nineteenth century England, in A. Briggs and J. Saviile (eds.), Essays in labour history (1960).
32. G. Rude, The Crowd in history: a study of popular disturbances in France and England 1730-1848 (1964), p. 6.
33. Ibid., p. 6.
34. Ibid., p. 7.
35. Thompson, The Making of the English working class, op. cit. p. 938.
36. C. Tilly, 'Britain creates the social movement', in J.E. Cronin and J. Schner (eds.), Social conflict and the political order in modern Britain (1982).
37. E.H. Hunt, British labour history 1815-1914 (1981), p. 247.
38. Ibid., p. 219.
39. G. Pearson, Hooligan: a history of respectable fears (1983).
40. Hunt, op. cit., p. 237, writes: "there is every indication that more determined attempts to challenge the government would have met equally determined resistance".
41. M. Bentley, Politics without democracy 1815-1914 (1984), p. 127.

42. Wright, op. cit.
43. Bentley, op. cit., pp. 133-134.
44. Quoted in N.J. Frangopulo, Rich inheritance: a guide to the history of Manchester (Wakefield, 1969), p. 50.
45. C.C. Armstrong, 'Manchester as it was' (1875). This manuscript is printed in the Manchester Review, 9 (Spring 1960).
46. Pearson, op. cit., p. 164.
47. G. Himmelfarb, The Idea of poverty: England in the early industrial age (1984), p. 385.
48. As explained by Pearson, op. cit., p. 159.
49. Himmelfarb, op. cit., p. 387.
50. C. Thomson, The Autobiography of an artisan (Nottingham, 1847), p. 170.
51. See introduction to V. Neuburg, Literacy and Society (1971).
52. W. Lovett and J. Collins, Chartism: a new organization of the people (1840); published by the 'Victorian Library', with an introduction by A. Briggs (Leicester 1969), p. 74.
53. This is a central theme of R.K. Webb, The British working class reader 1790-1848: literacy and social tension (1955).
54. Quoted in P. Cadogan, Early radical Newcastle (Consett, 1975), p. 126.
55. W. Stafford, Socialism, radicalism and nostalgia (Cambridge, 1987). Chapter 8 is a discussion of Coleridge's 'A Lay sermon addressed to the higher and middle classes on the existing distress and discontents' (1817).
56. M. Daly and G. Riddell, 'Turning back the clock', History Today (October 1988), p. 7.

## Chapter Four

### UTILITARIANISM

Utilitarianism dominated British thought in the first half of the nineteenth century. It came to the forefront of theoretical discussion in the 1820s, and in its practical applications had its maximum impact in the reforms of the 1830s and '40s. The fact that the philosophy was at its height when free literary provision began to be discussed (as well as the fact that both Ewart and Edwards were heavily influenced by it) suggests that any analysis of early public library development should pay close attention to Benthamite inspired utilitarianism and its later modification under John Stuart Mill. An exploration of utilitarianism will illuminate the events leading up to the Public Libraries Act of 1850. Further, although the influence of utilitarians waned in the second half of the nineteenth century, much of what they said before 1850 was echoed in the public library debate up to 1919, if not to the present day. A discussion of the relationship between utilitarianism and the public library requires that close attention be paid to the meaning and place given to education in the philosophy. Education was a key constituent of utilitarianism: "Scratch a Benthamite or a political economist and one quickly uncovers an educationalist."<sup>1</sup>

#### Towards a Definition of Utilitarianism

The philosophy of utilitarianism has been influential, to the extent that "there is scarcely a writer on moral and political theory who is free from every taint of utilitarianism".<sup>2</sup> The utilitarianism of the Victorian age meant something more than a close adherence to the teachings of Jeremy Bentham or John Stuart Mill for: "What may be



called a utilitarian ethos was pervasive and can be found in representative figures who would not have called themselves utilitarian."<sup>3</sup> The philosophy can nonetheless be analysed with fair precision, even though it came to mean many things to many people.

The evolution of a utilitarian theory of education was firmly rooted in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. "What is known as Utilitarianism, or Philosophic Radicalism", Halevy wrote, "can be defined as nothing but an attempt to apply the principles of Newton to the affairs of politics and morals."<sup>4</sup> The belief emerged that just as in the world of scientific discovery, where there existed fundamental laws disclosed by empiricism, so also in society there were laws which controlled human behaviour, verifiable by observation and experience. The utilitarians sought to evolve "a science of morals on the model of the laws of physical science"<sup>5</sup> - in essence, the application of scientific investigation to the worlds of morals and politics. Moreover, the proposition arose that if the laws of nature could be harnessed by men and women to facilitate the understanding of controlled and predictable experiment, then so also could fundamental social laws be devised by man to change society itself. As the secularist Holyoake wrote: "Men are creatures of circumstances subjected to human influences, the human exhortations and reproof that you see the element of improvability which is in every human nature ... for there is no condition so bad which may not be improved."<sup>6</sup>

Given that men and women of the Enlightenment came to believe that human behaviour and society itself could be changed - and for the better - what was the capability in man which could recognize, through observation and experience, the good or the bad, the useful or the harmful in past human behaviour? Writers and thinkers in the eighteenth century were optimistic about the limits and powers of rationalism; that

human capacity for reason which can be defined as "the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumption or authority".<sup>7</sup> The power of criticism, cultivated through educational endeavour, was considered sacred. The rationalist, armed with reason and critical observation, was consequently in a position to challenge all pre-conceived ideas, exactly because "the rational man would observe society, see what was good, and do it because it was rational".<sup>8</sup>

The rationalist view of society conformed with the concept of utility. According to the utilitarians all people acted in relation to the dictate of self-interest, the objective being to maximize personal happiness (defined as pleasure) by maximizing utility; although it should be noted that utilitarians did not advocate blatant egoism, believing as they did that benevolent philanthropic action often served an individual's own long-term interests.<sup>9</sup> To achieve this goal correct choices had to be made, restraint having to be exercised from decisions and actions based solely on passion and empirical response. Consequently it was to the powers of reasoning and critical observation that individuals should look to improve judgement of what was in the individual's best long-term interest. Powers of reason and criticism would be strengthened through educational pursuit, and "through their increase in intelligence, men would begin to act rationally, give the long-term priority over the short term and recognise their interdependence with other men".<sup>10</sup> Individuals would act rationally when "they calculated the balance of hedonistic consequences".<sup>11</sup> Self-interest in this context would take on an added dimension and emerge as enlightened self-interest. From the cradle to the grave, therefore, men and women should strive to be regulated by the empiricism of experience and observation related to their personal well-being, but



crucially also, to be guided by reason (empiricism and rationalism being exact opposites, but beneficial to increasing utility when combined).<sup>12</sup> If, then, reason (cultivated through education) was a means of increasing utility, or maximizing self-interest, education itself could be considered by the utilitarians as a function primarily of egoism not as a means of self-culture for an ultimate social good.

Benthamite orthodoxy on education has often been referred to as 'mechanical materialism' (by political theorists) or 'passive sensationalism' (by psychologists). The latter term is more illustrative in explaining how utilitarians viewed the essence of education and learning. The mind was accorded a passive, receptive and quiescent role, allegorically pictured as an empty cabinet or dark room or blank sheet.<sup>13</sup> Such a conception had originated with the ideas of the philosopher John Locke in the eighteenth century and was taken up by French philosophers of the period.<sup>14</sup> The vacant mind - a tabula rasa - would register knowledge through the sensation of past experience. The emphasis, therefore, was on the importance of external stimuli - "the mind was acted upon passively receiving and making up impressions from the outside".<sup>15</sup> An individual's character was not innate (heredity was a minor factor): it was made 'for' not 'by' the individual. The theory that "all knowledge consists of generalisations from experience" - that there is "no knowledge 'a priori'; no truths cognizable by the mind's inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence"<sup>16</sup> - formed the bedrock of early nineteenth century utilitarianism (though John Stuart Mill, as will be shown below, came to question the proposition, believing there to be powers of human motivation inherent in the individual and autonomous of external stimuli).

Thus, taking on board eighteenth century theories of existentialism, and combining these with notions of enlightened self-



interest as the basis of morality, early utilitarians came to believe that ideas and actions were linked to sensations of pain or pleasure caused by external stimuli. With the intervention of reason an individual could construct those associations in the mind most conducive to happiness. As such, the perfectibility of man could be envisaged; contrary to the traditional Christian notion of man as wayward and blemished by original sin. Individuals could be improved by 'social engineering' because external stimuli were more powerful than innate characteristics.

### Bentham

Jeremy Bentham was not the creator of the concept of utility. In the eighteenth century David Hume discussed the utility of personal traits: whilst Francis Hutcheson examined how pleasure and pain determined moral sense. Moreover, as discussed above, Bentham had borrowed much from earlier existentialism - this being in keeping with the general prerequisite that: "Every consistent scheme of philosophy requires as its starting-point, a theory respecting the sources of human knowledge, and the objects which the human faculties are capable of taking cognizance of."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Bentham was able to look upon the concept of utility as worked out by earlier thinkers as "a first principle which he could receive as self-evident".<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding Bentham's inheritance of the concept of utility he was nonetheless the thinker who did most to develop and popularize it. His views on self-interest and the pursuit of pleasure as the formation of morality, for example, struck a chord with prevailing ideas on laissez-faire as a key determinant of economic progress. For Bentham, the world was fundamentally "a collection of persons pursuing each his separate interest or pleasure, and the prevention of whom from jostling one another more than is unavoidable, may be attempted by hopes

and fears derived from three sources - the law, religion and public opinion".<sup>19</sup> His "felicific calculus" carried the concept of utility derived from self-interest reason into the area of precise science. His contribution, above all, was ideological in that he attempted to transform a system of ideas into reality. Though detached from much of the real world - J.S. Mill accused him of being a closeted student who knew little of "the most natural and strongest feelings of human nature"<sup>20</sup> - Bentham nevertheless turned his philosophical mind to practical schemes: his was an essentially practical mind.<sup>21</sup> The 1830s saw transforming legislation of a high utilitarian content. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was not only a watershed in the provision of social welfare, it also made the statement that material pursuit was the primary human value in capitalist society. Further, the Municipal Corporations legislation of 1835, though narrower in scope than utilitarians would have wished, provided the framework for future state intervention in society.<sup>22</sup> Practical utilitarian influence could perhaps have been even more extensive if it had not been eclipsed by the Free Trade movement in the late 1830s and early '40s.

It is important, however, not to praise these utilitarian achievements as solely the product of Benthamite thinking. There are two distinct phases to the utilitarian movement of the nineteenth century, the second of which owed less to Bentham than the first. The dividing line was roughly that of 1824. Up until that date Bentham and James Mill had been the undisputed leaders of the group, attracting the loyalty and attention of men such as Francis Place. After 1824, John Stuart Mill and the younger utilitarians began to form the centre of the movement, using as their mouthpiece the Westminster Review, established in that year. This publication was of a high literary form. Esoteric books and articles became the hallmark of the new generation of



utilitarians in contrast to the more practical newspaper writing of the earlier generation.<sup>23</sup>

Under John Stuart Mill utilitarianism evolved into a complex philosophy derived from esoteric debate on new issues related to human activity. The younger group was "more interested in speculative questions than in practical politics or social work".<sup>24</sup> There is a sense, therefore, in which the practical schemes of the early Benthamites have more in common with the practical reality of legislation of the 1830s and '40s. On the other hand, the fundamental concept behind the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 - to take one example - owed much to the interventionist aspects of John Stuart Mill's stance.

#### Self-help Individualism

Utilitarians stood four-square behind the doctrine of self-help. Francis Place, for example, was unequivocal in his advocacy of education (the assimilation of 'information' as he put it) as a means of self-improvement:

As a man's understanding is directed to some laudable pursuit, his desire for information will increase; he will become decent in his conduct and language, sober, discreet, taking reasonable price in his own person and in that of those who are dependent on him. Such a man will frequently rise as the uninformed man sinks; his prospects will not be so invariably hopeless of attaining to a somewhat better condition; he will seldom be without some money, some small property; the Benefit Club will maintain him in sickness, and save his family from immediate distress when he dies.<sup>25</sup>

Self-help was the corollary to utilitarian distaste for the privileged society: power, social position and wealth should be achieved by merit, talent and industriousness, not ascribed by influence (though inheritance was not denounced). Education would be a cornerstone of



this meritocracy. It would result in increased pleasure not only in terms of the tangible benefits it would bestow but also by way of the very act of achieving those results: self-motivation represented positive utility.

But self-help was clearly not a doctrine confined to utilitarianism alone. Radical movements such as Owenite Cooperation and Chartism also espoused calls to individual improvement and progress. Owen, like Bentham, believed that self-motivation in education would enhance materialist society generally and improve individual character. Chartists too believed in the beneficial effects of self-improvement through education. However, the thing which separated Owenism and Chartism, on the one hand, from Benthamite utilitarianism, on the other, was that self-improvement for the latter could be equated with self-interest. That is to say, individuals would welcome education not for the communal good but for personal benefit in keeping with the 'felicific calculus' philosophy that all decisions (whether in business or social life) were to be reduced to a crude calculation of a balance sheet on utility. Bentham was confident in the belief that self-interest, whether pursued through educational endeavour or otherwise, was the factor which underpinned society. Owen saw self-interest as an evil and, contrary to Bentham, looked upon education as a function of community interest. Chartists such as Lovett viewed education as a social right out of which self-improvement would liberate society as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

The Benthamite idea that self-interest was the guiding factor in self-education and other matters came to be challenged not just by radicals, however, but also by utilitarians themselves. The early generation of utilitarians such as James Mill believed education to be a tool of 'character engineering': "Properly directed, it could determine

the thoughts and so the character and disposition of man."<sup>27</sup> This philosophy Mill put into practice in his own life through the education of his son (John Stuart) who was tied at a very early age to a strict regime of systematic rational learning. Later in life John Stuart Mill reacted to his severely utilitarian upbringing, thereby propelling utilitarianism itself in a new direction. Influenced by the writings of Coleridge, he came to speak of "that cold, mechanical, and ungenial air which characterises the popular idea of a Benthamite".<sup>28</sup> Mill came to believe, as Coleridge did, in the existence of innate human characteristics beyond those which 'character engineering' through education could produce, thus dissenting from the view of the undeveloped human mind as a tabula rasa. For Mill the basis of morality was clearly not self-interest measured in levels of utility or pleasure - this was for him "much too complex and indefinite an end to be sought".<sup>29</sup> Rather, man possessed deep intuitive powers which coloured moral judgements. Benthamism, on the other hand, "had no profound knowledge of the human heart",<sup>30</sup> and overlooked "the existence of about half the whole number of mental feelings which human beings are capable of".<sup>31</sup> As far as morality was concerned Benthamite philosophy "can teach the means of organising and regulating the merely 'business' part of the social arrangements. Whatever can be understood or whatever done without reference to moral influences, his philosophy is equal to; where those influences require to be taken into account, it is at fault".<sup>32</sup> Mill saw that Benthamism made no allowance for humane impulses. But he could not accept that the promptings of conscience - whether it be generosity, mercy, compassion, self-sacrifice or love - made no contribution to human motivation.

An essential division, then, between John Stuart Mill and the early Benthamites (including his father) was on the question of



personal interest (the self-interested pursuit of pleasure) as the fundamental motive guiding human actions. To think of happiness all the time, said Mill, would if anything make an individual unhappy. He looked at his father's laborious life and concluded that he had scarcely any belief in pleasure.<sup>33</sup> Surely, he asked himself, there were innate, intuitive forces driving him on?

So where did the issue of self-help stand in the context of the utilitarian philosophy following Mill's "intellectually strenuous modification"?<sup>34</sup> The immediate answer is that its stock was little diminished. Mill's endeavour to modify Benthamite utilitarianism in a direction similar to that taken by Coleridge did not rob self-help individualism in utilitarian eyes of its practical applications in everyday living; it merely stated that not all self-help endeavour was born of self-interest. Self-help clearly did have a profoundly practical side. John Stuart Mill remained committed to individualism throughout his life and it continued to be central to utilitarianism.

Yet, utilitarianism under John Stuart Mill became associated with the very antithesis of self-help individualism, namely state action (to be discussed in the next section). As stated above, John Stuart Mill's conception of the human mind differed from Bentham's in that he identified the presence of innate qualities which facilitated self-development beyond the dictates of experience and the pursuit of pleasure. This, allied to his realization that the orthodox utilitarian objective of satisfying majority preferences did nothing for the rights of individuals in the minority, emphasized the intrinsic good of individuality as opposed to the Benthamite notion of socially activated, mechanistic units. This led Mill to advocate state action in those circumstances where hindrances to fuller self-development could be removed and where basic citizen rights (minimum levels of subsistence



and equality of opportunity) could be protected. State sponsored education was a case in point. It would teach individuals how not to infringe the freedom of others, whilst providing the basic furniture for self-development.

Despite these interventionist tendencies self-help survived, no more so than in the area of voluntaryism. Where local government would or could not provide a service - such as a public library - then private action might be called upon to by-pass blocked official channels and provide the service required (that is to day, benefaction). This was the world of 'private politics' which was to be crucial to the development of the public library.<sup>35</sup> Private action (voluntaryism) and legislative intervention, as the history of the public library shows, were not incompatible. As far back as Buckingham's attempts to bring in public library legislation in his Public Institutions Bill (1835) the legislative remedy was set alongside that brought about by private agency. In his speech supporting his Bill Buckingham had spoken of the achievement of "moral ends" by "private agency and association" (for example, through the diffusion of knowledge), as well as legislative remedies (which could be financial, or in the case of public institutions interventionist).<sup>36</sup> The fact that the Public Libraries Act of 1850, though legislative, provided provision only for materials to be donated to such institutions illustrates the continuing faith in the power of voluntary effort - a faith, moreover, which later benefactors were to inherit.

#### Intervention and Local Government

It is a myth that there ever existed in the industrial age an epoch of pure laissez-faire. Nor was it the case that the classical economists called for complete non-intervention. For example, Smith,

James Mill and Malthus all called for state intervention in the field of education. For Bentham also education was merely "government acting by means of the domestic magistrate".<sup>37</sup>

Benthamite utilitarianism taught that where government intervention was for the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" it was justified. Intervention was often advocated in the context of savings made elsewhere in the public domain. Thus, in debating the 1835 Public Institutions Bill, one member had supported the idea of such institutions (which included public libraries) because: "They were indispensably necessary as some set off against the multitudinous and enormous barracks, gaols, and workhouses, which in their splendour were a deep disgrace to the country."<sup>38</sup> But more than this, it was the first principle of government, indeed, that government should intervene to protect the public safety in any instance. The Select Committee on Drunkenness (1834), for example, concerned as it was with the eradication of disorderly conduct, brought about by drink, stated: "That the 'right' to exercise legislative interference for the correction of any evil which affects the public weal, cannot be questioned, without dissolving society into its primitive elements."<sup>39</sup> Hence, Benthamite-inspired Parliamentary activity such as this saw no harm in promoting state action if "social utility" was the beneficiary. Even the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which stood as the epitome of laissez-faire economics, its aim being to disengage as much public money as possible from the provision of welfare, included in its provisions the interventionism of central administration and system of inspection seen as necessary for an efficient prosecution of the theory behind the legislation.

In accepting the efficacy of state influence in certain areas utilitarians were originating the idea of the "coercive welfare



state".<sup>40</sup> This was a theme common to both early and later generations of utilitarian thinkers. Though John Stuart Mill questioned Bentham's notion of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" - which did not necessarily maximize the personal happiness of each individual member of society and in fact ignored individual claims to justice<sup>41</sup> - he did not abandon the belief that government could intervene to enhance society's happiness and the happiness of individuals. In taking this line he was influenced not only by Bentham but also by Coleridge. Mill saw that Coleridge was "at issue with the 'let alone' doctrine, or the theory that governments can do no better than to do nothing". Though conceding that governments should not "chain up the free agency of individuals", it did not follow from this stance that

... government cannot exercise a free agency of its own - that it cannot beneficially employ its powers, its means of information and its pecuniary resources (so far surpassing those of any other association, or of any individual), in promoting the public welfare in a thousand means which individuals would never think of, would have no sufficient motives to attempt, or no sufficient powers to accomplish.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, though refining and deepening his liberalism in the 1840s Mill at the same time found himself able to adopt an almost socialist outlook:

While we repudiated with the greatest energy that tyranny of society over the individual which most socialist systems are supposed to involve, we yet look forward to a time when ... it will no longer either be, or thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in producing benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to.<sup>43</sup>

It was this willingness to escape from the apparent ruthlessness and barbarity of laissez-faire, along with a further inheritance from Coleridge rejecting the 'self-interest' aspect of Benthamite philosophy (as discussed above), which John Stuart Mill was eventually to pass on



to late nineteenth century Fabians and idealists. It is no coincidence, then, that just as Fabians and idealists were to espouse local government as the key instrument of social policy, so also utilitarians fought for a representative local authority system with meaningful administrative powers.

The Municipal Corporations legislation of 1835 had won support for four basic reasons. First, to provide towns with effective policing. Second, to reflect more truthfully the changing balance in society towards the entrepreneurial classes. Third, to extend representation, and lessen corruption and privilege. Fourth, as a corollary to the franchise reform of 1832,<sup>44</sup> utilitarians saw Municipal Reform in 1835 (and more importantly, amending legislation of 1837 enabling non-chartered towns to be brought under the provisions of the Act) as a blow against the rights of privilege and a move towards that representative system of government which would bring both social harmony and middle class domination. Moreover, democratically elected corporations (though in some cases property restrictions reduced the local authority electorate below that of the Parliamentary) would enhance the bid for 'social utility'. Utilitarians such as Place and J.A. Roebuck "glimpsed a municipal future which might indeed lead to a form of local socialism".<sup>45</sup> In urging municipal reform Roebuck, for example, argued that the new corporations should be endowed with extensive administrative powers in such areas of social policy as gas, lighting, police, public charities and public markets.<sup>46</sup> Whilst Place, in his prospectus for town corporations, hoped that

... the powers of the council were to include the control of the magistrates, police, and gaols, of paving, lighting, water, markets, bridges, docks, harbours, sewars, etc., the making of bye-laws, and the administration of all town property and trusts for hospitals, schools and charities.<sup>47</sup>

However, the legislation of 1835 did not bestow upon local councils the range of powers which utilitarians had advocated. The assumption of such powers was to proceed in a piecemeal fashion at a pace set by general legislation. The public libraries legislation of 1850, limited as it was particularly in terms of its permissive nature, should be viewed in this context. With central government taking little interest in conferring interventionist powers on local authorities the onus therefore fell on local initiative to evolve social policy.<sup>48</sup> As far as the public library issue was concerned this fact often acted against the development of a creditable service, or indeed any service at all. As Edward Edwards was to write in 1869:

In relation to matters intellectual and education there had existed, for a long time, a social prepossession against extending the functions of Local Councils and Parish Vestries, and a social prejudgement that in the hands of town corporations and of parish vestrymen any powers of dealing with such matters would be pretty sure to be abused on the one hand, or to be neglected on the other.<sup>49</sup>

Though Edwards looked back on municipal reform as an important development he was nonetheless clearly disappointed with the dull-headed, unimaginative approach of councils in general to issues like public library provision. He believed that "professional men, men of independent social position, and educated men had been as little represented on most councils ... as artisans",<sup>50</sup> with a result clearly observable to all. Little had changed by 1878, according to George Dawson, who believed the government of towns over the years had sunk into "the hands of the vulgar, and the self-seeking, and the mean".<sup>51</sup>

The evolution of local authority based social policy raised the vexed question of local taxation, even though this grew slowly early on. Economy remained the order of the day. The petite bourgeoisie, for



example, though much of it had been politically radical in the early nineteenth century, became, in the wake of its enfranchisement in 1832, depoliticized relative to its previous commitment. The role of the petite bourgeoisie in local affairs and politics, however, was strong in the post-1832 era. The line usually taken was that of retrenchment to protect their own ratepaying position.<sup>52</sup> The thought of the local council spending large sums "filled the brewer, the baker and the candlestick maker with alarm", for the unprogressive tradesman class was, generally speaking, "not accustomed to deal with big transactions and high figures".<sup>53</sup> Not that hostility to spending was a trait only of the petite bourgeoisie. Members of the substantial bourgeoisie were only to adopt a pro-spending position later in the century, whilst working class ratepayers could be found also objecting to the imposition of local taxes.<sup>54</sup>

The argument that ratepayers should not tax themselves for services they were not going to use was to prove a stumbling block to public library provision throughout the century. The rejoinder to this argument was equally familiar. When, for example, James Silk Buckingham met opposition to his Public Institutions Bill on this very issue he pointed to examples of collectivism already in existence: namely, that the British Museum was supported by a compulsory assessment, levied on the country, and so was the National Gallery.<sup>55</sup> The debate was to continue along these lines for many decades. Ratepayers found it a hard fact to swallow that their taxes were for the communal good even if they received little direct benefit. This point of view was also held by working class ratepayers whose numbers were on the increase in the late nineteenth century, and who "were by no means always committed to doctrines of higher spending and higher rates for public purposes".<sup>56</sup> Reformers on the other hand battled away trying to establish what was in essence the utilitarian principle of justifiable



public spending to increase not only social but also individual utility.

### Capitalist Materialism

The relevance of materialism to the utilitarian philosophy is illustrated by the fact that by the early twentieth century the two were sometimes seen as synonymous. At the jubilee celebrations for Manchester Public Libraries, the Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee spoke of how the provision of literature could help balance the greed of day-to-day living. Manchester, he believed, was essentially "a city whose chief characteristic has been the deification and pursuit of material achievement". This "sole aim and end of life", he continued, was called utilitarianism; though falsely in his opinion .<sup>57</sup>

This juxtaposition in the public mind of material pursuit and utilitarianism (however interpreted) was not as crude as might at first appear, for a main thrust of Benthamite inspired utilitarianism was indeed the transformation of society in keeping with emergent industrial capitalism. Education was seen by utilitarians as a crucial factor in strengthening the capitalist order. This partly explains why they became so deeply involved in the formulation of educational policies, in the work of educational movements and in Parliamentary promotion of measures for a more educated society.<sup>58</sup>

In respect of economic activity utilitarians were prominent in attempts to create a scientific culture through technically orientated education - the SDUK and the Mechanics' Institutes being prime examples. Until the nineteenth century 'useful' education (as distinct from apprenticeship) had been the preserve of a middle-class scientific sub-culture. It was not just that - early industrialism had little need for scientific knowledge or technical education, based as

it was on long-standing skills. There was also little money for educational investment. Interest in materialist-oriented education only advanced when, after around 1810, the economy moved into a position of abundance in terms of investment resources.<sup>59</sup>

Bentham believed that a diffusion of knowledge would aid scientific advance which could not be brought about by society operating on a privileged, elitist basis. As he wrote regarding the arts and sciences:

There is no method more calculated to accelerate their advancement, than their general diffusion: the greater the number of those by whom they are calculated, the greater the probability that they will be enriched by new discoveries. Fewer opportunities will be lost, and greater emulation will be excited in their cultivation.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, Bentham proposed the establishment of district libraries to provide books on the "art of legislation, history in all its branches, moral philosophy and logic, comprehending metaphysics, grammar, and rhetoric", as well as materials in support of advised lectures on medicine, surgery, midwifery, the veterinary art, chemistry, botany, natural history, agriculture and branches of trade. He suggested that to aid all these subject areas the government "might establish in each district [certainly where lectures had been arranged] ... an increasing library appropriate to these studies. This would be at once to bestow upon students the instruments of study, and upon authors their most appropriate reward."<sup>61</sup>

For the utilitarians the pursuit of a capitalist society not only resulted from a conviction in the benefits to be derived from the free play of economic forces, but also from the notion that a confident and advancing capitalist society was contributory to social stability. As James Mill put it in 1818: "When the people are wretchedly poor, all



classes are vicious, all are hateful, and all are unhappy."<sup>62</sup> The crisis which befell capitalism in the generation after 1815 appeared to redouble the efforts of those who hoped to bring about social stability through a bolstering of the capitalist mode of production. At a time when confidence in many sectors of manufacturing (such as cotton) was being undermined by the acceleration of cost-cutting investment, the introduction of new technology and the resultant downward pressure on wages and employment; when it was becoming more apparent that, despite economic advance, oscillation between bouts of depression and recovery were growing ever more violent; when, indeed, the very survival of industrial capitalism itself was perceived by some as without guarantee, utilitarians stood firmly behind the belief that industrial capitalism was secular, that it was ordained by natural laws of economic behaviour, and that it could be managed successfully, to ensure social tranquility. Early nineteenth century proposals for 'useful' education - including public libraries and, as shall be discussed in chapter 7, better design education - must be viewed partly in this context of faltering confidence in capitalism's ability to deliver social harmony.

The diffusion of a scientific education was viewed by utilitarians as crucial to the health of industrial capitalism. But more than this, a knowledge of capitalism was viewed as an education in itself. In short, through an assimilation of powers of reason the masses would come to accept capitalist principles. Utilitarians arrogantly believed that capitalism was morally correct and would be proved to be so simply by coming to understand its workings, not just through direct education in political economy - though this was not unimportant<sup>63</sup> - but by educating people to be more intelligent, more receptive.

Bentham believed that men should be swayed by reason: that they should "scrutinise political and social institutions through the eyes of



reason".<sup>64</sup> Failure to adhere to reason, he argued, was a consequence of the man-made world of politics where, unlike the natural, physical world, no fundamental laws operated; and so in keeping with this analysis utilitarians set out to create laws and institutions which did have a scientific basis. In the economic sphere, by contrast, utilitarians thought they could see the existence of fundamental iron laws, with which governments should not interfere: "There was an iron law of wages and of rents, a law that determined price according to the supply of and demand for a commodity, and a law, of evil portent, that showed that population rose faster than the means of feeding it."<sup>65</sup> And at the root of this market society was the perceived freedom of the private ownership of property, which since the seventeenth century had "become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom".<sup>66</sup>

Further, it was argued that because economic laws were fundamental they could be harnessed by men and women to make reality of Bentham's own guiding tenets - "profit maximised, expense minimised"<sup>67</sup> - in the same way that science could bring about progress and prosperity by subjugating the forces of nature to the human will. Education was seen as the great emancipator because it taught men and women through observation, judgement and reason how to make use of the laws of economic behaviour. It taught them how to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the most expensive, whether the commodity be goods, capital or labour; in effect, how to be 'at one' with the acquisitive nature of capitalist society.

In an era of unprecedented economic activity and progress, therefore, education for the utilitarians became a moral issue whereby values corresponding to the free market society and possessive individualism were considered non-negotiable: after all, the laws

governing economic activity were themselves unbending. The educational content of utilitarianism added to its role as a justificatory theory of market society. All that was required was for individuals to be inculcated with the reason and knowledge which would make the existence, nature and operation of economic laws self-evident. Reason, through education, would enable the minds of individuals to absorb the external stimuli of practical economic behaviour and capitalise on their realizations, thereby contributing to their personal utility. For most people, as Simon has argued, this meant that they

... must come to understand that their interests coincided with those of the industrial capitalist; that their prosperity, like that of the middle class, was dependent on the institution of private property, and the free play of capital. Such appreciation of the harmony of interests would be the inevitable outcome of the spread of 'enlightenment'.<sup>68</sup>

The utilitarian prescription for educating the lower orders was to tie them in with the dominant tenets of middle class political philosophy. Above all, "it was necessary to control and direct the thoughts and actions of the workers - to win them as allies in the task of establishing a capitalist order".<sup>69</sup> This could best be achieved by appealing to workers' powers of reason by which means they "would understand that it was in their best interests to become calm, orderly and acquiescent".<sup>70</sup>

Having become familiar with the mechanics of capitalist society it was believed workers would then be able to participate in the capitalist 'game' instead of standing outside the arena and calling for its destruction. Utilitarians therefore made a direct association between the assimilation of 'useful knowledge' and the opportunity for acquiring worldly pursuits which capitalism appeared to offer.<sup>71</sup> As Francis Place put it: "the best-paid classes are the best informed".<sup>72</sup>



A key constituent of the utilitarian concept of education, then, was offering the means of 'getting on' in capitalist society. Bentham taught that all subjects should be considered with reference to their practical utility in normal day-to-day life - "knowledge in his view must serve a social function"<sup>73</sup> - which in the industrial age meant the application of science and technology. Utilitarians therefore emphasized, as none had before, the vocational principle in education: that is to say, the utility-bearing capacity of skills training which fitted pupils for division of labour. Even popular elementary education was seen to possess a materialist end. As Altick has written:

A reasonable bit of elementary schooling made better workers: it increased production, reduced waste, assured more intelligent handling of machinery, even increased the possibility of a workman's hitting upon some money-saving short cut.<sup>74</sup>

In their enthusiasm for 'useful' education utilitarians can thus be found attacking the received wisdom of traditional educational pursuit in the fields of theology, the classics and 'dead' languages.<sup>75</sup> These might be of use to the professional classes, but were not relevant to the dynamism of industrial capitalism or the materialist ambitions of the industrial bourgeoisie. The utilitarian affinity with capitalist materialism meant that the nation's education curriculum was to be made more appropriate to the advancing industrial society.

### Political Power

The belief in the power of education to buttress the capitalist order was not the monopoly of the utilitarians. Whigs also proclaimed the propagandist potential of education, for they saw, certainly by the 1830s, that "educated labourers would be brought more easily to understand the infallibility of McCullochian economics, the folly of



Chartism, and the merits of thrift and birth limitation".<sup>76</sup> Faith in the powers of reason, in economic matters at any rate, was clearly not exclusive to utilitarianism. However, what did set utilitarianism apart from the educational theories of other political philosophies was the link which it recognized between education and political reform.

Tories saw education as a de-stabilizing force because it gave the lower orders ideas above their station and an understanding of anti-social teachings. Blackwood's proclaimed in 1825 that "whenever the lower orders of any great state have obtained a smattering of knowledge they have generally used it to produce national ruin".<sup>77</sup> Utilitarians, on the other hand, saw education as the inevitable and essential concomitant to emergent democracy and a shift in political power.

Utilitarians, unlike the majority of Whig members of Parliament, believed that political reform in 1832 had not gone far enough. Those who, like John Stuart Mill, argued for a further extension in the franchise, did so for two reasons. First, they were convinced that good government (that is to say, administration which displayed efficiency and freedom from corruption) could only be arrived at by granting meaningful political representation to all in society: "The only form of government which can protect the individual and in which there is security for good government is a representative system."<sup>78</sup> This did not mean, however, that a universal franchise was envisaged. It was argued, for instance, that the interests of women, younger men and, of course, children could be conveyed by the political representation of male elders only. Some utilitarians advocated a property qualification although this was more akin to Whig policy on electoral representation. Second, they were convinced that history was on the side of the masses in that a wider share of political power in

society was inevitable. Utilitarians observed that power was passing from individuals to the masses, and considered this trend to be beneficial in principle. The argument was summed up by the philosophic radical J.A. Roebuck who, writing in the wake of municipal reform in 1835, stated:

Day by day we see the people gaining power - day by day therefore the necessity increases for the possession of information by the people. We do not suppose indeed, that the mass of mankind can become legislators - or even acquire the knowledge which a legislator ought to possess. But we do hope and confidently trust, that the people generally may be so far instructed as to be able to judge accurately of the intellectual and moral worth of those whom they select as their representatives.<sup>79</sup>

For utilitarians, therefore, education was part and parcel of the electoral reform process - the natural corollary to further franchise extensions. Quite simply, an educated electorate would "bestow the necessary degree of attention on the information provided, and arrive at correct conclusions on the issues of the day".<sup>80</sup> For this reason, utilitarians were strenuous in their advocacy of a free press and fought alongside working class radicals for the abolition of the taxes on knowledge. A free, liberal press was likened to a Newtonian conception of the universe - a free flow of ideas, or forces, out of which there would arise a perfect balance of reasoned argument leading to correct decisions and actions.

The eradication of ignorance became a familiar battle cry. Speaking in favour of Buckingham's 1835 Public Institutions Bill (1835) one member (Mr. Wakely) was of the opinion that "the public mind was in a state of the most melancholy ... mystification". He related to the House an interview he had conducted with some farmers on a recent trip to Devon:



"Would not you prefer coming in an independent way to vote, and not being brought in your landlord's train?"

"Can't zay (said the man), I generally comes a horseback."

He asked another farmer, "Would you not like to go to poll by way of the ballot my friend?"

"Don't know sir" (said the farmer); "I've been always used to go by way of Daalish."<sup>81</sup>

Such ignorance, it was feared, placed individuals under the evil sway of political demagogues and agitators. As Henry Brougham wrote: "The more widely science is diffused, the better will the Author of all things be known, and the less the people be 'tossed to and fro by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."<sup>82</sup> Ignorance was certainly seen as a contributory factor in social unrest. Place, for example, in a pamphlet of 1831 expressed the belief that if there had been a free press in existence the agricultural disturbances of the previous year would not have occurred.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, a free press, he believed, would have induced the establishment of other educational agencies (including libraries) fighting to eradicate ignorance:

Had there been an unshackled press knowledge would have been spread in so many ways, and in so many directions, so numerous would have been the schools, the reading clubs, the local libraries, so multifarious the cheap publications, so accurate the knowledge and so extensively would it have been spread, that not one of the terrible evil we deplore, the consequences of ignorance would have been inflicted on the community.<sup>84</sup>

It is no coincidence, furthermore, that during the Chartist era interest in education was noticeably quickened, "for ignorance as well as poverty were considered essential for it to flourish".<sup>85</sup> This was the very time, moreover, that intense interest in public libraries by utilitarians came to the fore.



At one end of the political spectrum, then, utilitarians hoped to use education as a means of incorporating working class political aspirations into a democratic representative system. At the other extreme it was intended that a move towards a democratic society (on utilitarian terms) would strike a blow at the traditional, corrupt society which thinkers like Bentham so despised. Bentham himself—variously referred to as "the great questioner of things established" or "the great subversive"—aimed his thinking at "an assault on ancient institutions".<sup>86</sup> He unrelentingly attacked the British monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>87</sup> Privilege and exclusivity were particularly distasteful aspects of the old order. Interestingly, anger over these had been expressed in relation to public access to libraries. An article in the utilitarian Westminster Review in 1827 stated that it could not:

... believe that any nation under the canopy of heaven can equal, much less surpass us in locking readers out of libraries: we are unrivalled in all exclusions .... The principle of exclusion is unhappily most prevalent and it is the sure mode speedily to render everything worthless.<sup>88</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that utilitarians intended that the new society which they advocated - characterized by increased educational opportunity, openness, and representative government - would be dominated by the ambitions of the masses in the absence of traditional, aristocratic rule. On the contrary, it was considered inevitable that the middle classes would emerge as the dominant social formation - this by virtue of the intellectual power attained through the reforming of existing educational institutions - grammar and public schools, and the universities - and the establishment of new ones. Public libraries, for all the talk of their establishment for the working classes, were also proposed as a means of furthering middle class educational endeavour. After all, public money would be

able to assemble stocks of books far beyond the resources of voluntary effort in the form of subscription libraries, book clubs etc.

Consequently, the middle rank in society, in touch as it was with the rigours and requirements of the age of industry, would provide leadership and exert influence over other social groups. Clearly, this scenario was elitist in the extreme. It was also founded on notions of control: the natural working of the educational system would inject into society "the insights and aspirations of gifted individuals, by diffusing into the mass of the population the elevated standards of a highly educated elite, and at the same time raise the economic, intellectual and cultural levels of the labouring classes".<sup>89</sup> These sentiments (of John Stuart Mill) convey, therefore, not just a consideration of standards, but also one of dissemination of values.

Utilitarians intended that education, and the electoral reform that went with it, would unite the masses behind the middle class in common cause against aristocratic oligarchy. Potentially disruptive working class aims would be undermined by the natural supremacy of middle class educational achievement and values, whilst established interests in land and church would likewise be weakened by a confident, advancing middle class. Two birds would be killed with the one 'educational' stone, thereby bestowing upon the bourgeoisie their rightful hegemonic position in the modern industrial civilization.

### Good Citizenship

Utilitarians hoped to engineer 'good citizens'. The term is an amorphous one. It has been suggested that it originated in the Enlightenment: that it was a hangover from the 'social darkness' that had gone before.<sup>90</sup> During the Enlightenment history had been seen as "a saga of rudeness and barbarity tempered by depotism", the English



Civil War being the prime example. Consequently, the Enlightenment:

... sought to replace militancy with a civil and political order. These required civility and politeness .... Rudeness had to yield to a new moral order of refinement.<sup>91</sup>

As urbanization threw people together in close proximity, in an anonymous environment where informal social controls were significantly weakened, the pressure on citizens to become more 'sociable' increased. People became more 'clubbable', to borrow Dr. Johnson's phrase.<sup>92</sup> The first half of the nineteenth century was an era when people came together as never before for mutual material benefit, amusement or intellectual stimulation; whether in the masonic lodge, the tavern meeting, the coffee house, the friendly society, the book club, subscription library or the Mechanics' Institute. The ethos of such organizations incorporated consensus and cooperation: they flourished as "free republics of rational society".<sup>93</sup> 'Good citizens' were educated and could display tolerance to others in social affairs and the transactions of daily existence; they were politically sophisticated, sound in practical judgement, cultivated in common sense, loyal, reliable, responsible and dutiful. Utilitarians were party to these exalted manifestations of rationality.

Such qualities were said to enhance the dynamism of industrial capitalism. The market society was also deemed conducive to harmonious citizenship. Division of labour produced a harmony of interests in that the principle underlying it was a trading of acquired skills which was mutually beneficial. The acquisitiveness at which division of labour was aimed was not, according to early political economists, anti-social but socially stabilizing: there existed an intimate link with others who, not in direct competition, sought the same material rewards. As such, an extensive division of labour was thought to coincide with a



highly civilized society. As Charles Babbage wrote in 1835: "it is only in countries which have attained a high degree of civilization ... that the most perfect system of the division of labour is to be observed".<sup>94</sup> In short, individuals were to be civilized by the 'collision' which the dynamism of industrialization wrought. Individuals were like the parts of a machine, and had to work together harmoniously if the entity of which they were a part was to run smoothly.

Beyond this economic sphere utilitarians also sought a harmony of interest in political and civic matters. 'Good citizenship' was bound up with the presentation of the municipality as the dominant institution of town life: the council was the focus of citizenship. A representative system of local government afforded a channel down which the political energies of townspeople could be drawn. The process of electing a council constituted a safety-valve for more dangerous forms of political agitation. A 'good citizen' expressed political opinions through the narrow confines of established political institutions, unlike the bad citizen who sought a redress of grievances via uncontrolled, perhaps extra-legal, methods.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, 'good citizens' were characterized by a degree of cultural refinement. Utilitarianism was not just a practical, materialist oriented philosophy. John Stuart Mill was more aware than first generation Benthamites of non-rational factors in the shaping of society. He wrote in his autobiography that following his nervous breakdown he:

... never turned recreant to intellectual culture, or ceased to consider the power and practice of analysis as an essential condition both of individual and of social improvement. But I thought that it had consequences which required to be corrected, by joining other kinds of cultivation with it. The maintenance of a due balance among

the faculties now seemed to me of primary importance. The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed .... I now began to find meaning in the things which I had read or heard about, the importance of poetry and art as instruments of human culture.<sup>96</sup>

Whereas James Mill had seen the arts - poetry, for example - as merely a vehicle for refining the sensibilities and sharpening observation, his son was more convinced of their inherent joyfulness.<sup>97</sup> He questioned the 'nurture' his father had given him, where non-scientific culture was said to have no connection with political philosophy. He turned instead to the 'nature' content of Wordsworth's poetry which addressed itself to rural objects and scenery.<sup>98</sup> In sympathy with liberal culture he advised that individuals should "know something of everything", not simply "everything of something" as pure utilitarianism taught.<sup>99</sup> He defended the study of the classics.<sup>100</sup> Thus, culture and utilitarianism (as it developed under John Stuart Mill) were not strange bed-fellows. Refinement was not to be achieved simply through 'useful' learning but through the liberal arts also. This was clearly so in the case of the philosophic radical and public library pioneer, William Ewart.

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8. Ibid. p. 133.
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10. R. Pearson and G. Williams, Political thought and public policy in the nineteenth century: an introduction (1984), p. 19.
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12. That is to say, action based on empirical observation alone is merely mechanical, whereas action resulting from reasoned judgement makes use of human capacity beyond the ability merely to receive external stimuli - the definition of reason being "to recognise truths, not cognizable by our senses"; Mill, Mill on Bentham, op. cit., p. 110.
13. Halliday, op. cit., p. 22.
14. M. Sanderson, Education, economic change and society in England 1780-1870 (1983), p. 49.
15. Halliday, op. cit., p. 22.
16. Mill, Mill on Bentham, op. cit., p. 109.
17. Ibid., p. 109.
18. Ibid., p. 91. That Bentham did not start from scratch is an important point to stress. David Hume had used the term 'utility' frequently. However, he wrote of traits of character which were agreeable or useful. He did not speak of utility in terms of what actions individuals might best take. Previously, Francis Hutcheson



defined virtue as that which gives pleasure, which was but a short way from the Benthamite notion of equating utility with pleasure. Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1967). Vol. 4, p. 100 and Vol. 8, p. 208.

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## Chapter Five

### WILLIAM EWART

The Benthamite process of reform has been defined as consisting of three stages.<sup>1</sup> First, the development and discussion of ideas in Benthamite cliques, and the transmission of those ideas to 'second-degree' Benthamites. Second, public pressure for reform through the press and the manipulation of enquiries. Third, the securing of official employment for the reform's supporters to oversee its implementation and possible extension. To these should be added the very particular process of promoting and guiding a bill through Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The efforts of William Ewart and Edward Edwards in obtaining the inaugural public library legislation of 1850 match the framework outlined above. Edwards' contribution, which will be discussed in the following chapter, was his enthusiastic agitation for reform, including his evidence to the Select Committee and his pamphleteering. He was also influential in implementing and reinforcing utilitarian prescriptions for free libraries by filling the top job in public librarianship.

What of Ewart? It should be remembered that there was no popular agitation leading to the establishment of a Select Committee in 1849 or the subsequent legislation: public libraries were imposed from above rather than demanded from below. Ewart was the leading figure in this esoteric agitation. He enrolled Edwards in the small knot of public library enthusiasts from public life. Most importantly, he complemented ideally the detailed propaganda supplied by Edwards by translating theory and argument into legislative reality: he controlled the work of the Select Committee and guided its proposals through Parliament.



Thus, it is with reference to Ewart's dual role as public library spokesman and practical politician that any investigation of the early public library movement should proceed. This chapter will throw light upon the public library debate of the 1840s by examining in detail the political philosophy of the man who, more than anyone, rendered substance and reality to the free library ideal. Specifically, Ewart's thoughts on education and reform will be analysed in attempting to establish his links with utilitarianism. This approach will prove advantageous in that ideological input, largely ignored in the past, is crucial to any comprehensive explanation of early public library ideas. The ideology of key individuals is as important as the wider social influences which brought reform. As Ewart himself observed: "The historian who wishes to judge accurately of the times which he describes should endeavour to descend into the station of the politicians who lived within their sphere."<sup>3</sup>

The nature of early Victorian political representation impels us not to undervalue Ewart's endeavour for public libraries. The early Victorian age was an era of embryonic social reform. Yet it was also a time when the necessities of electoral popularity, as manifest in the formulation of party programme and attention to social policy, played little part in the evolution of social reform. The period 1832-37 was indeed the 'golden age' of the private Member and, consequently, we should not devalue the efforts of individual Parliamentarians in creating the social legislation of the day. The Parliamentary impetus behind the reform initiatives of the second third of the nineteenth century were nothing if not the result of unstinting personal effort - even though, as Ewart's biographer has pointed out, time has tended to "de-personalize" this phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

In a satirical poster released by their opponents in the

Liverpool election campaign of 1835 Ewart and his running partner are depicted as a pair of broken-down 'hacks' ready to be sold off to the highest bidder. Ewart himself is described as a "nonentity ... being of no use for any other purpose" than appearing at auction.<sup>5</sup> But 'nonentity' is emphatically not an apt description when considering the public life of this radical reformer and Parliamentarian, despite the fact that after his death "William Ewart was soon forgotten nearly everywhere".<sup>6</sup> It is true that he was no political heavyweight, and that it is only relatively recently that he has attracted the attention of a serious biographer.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, to contemporary opinion he was by no means obscure, as Edwards noted in assessing the 1849 Select Committee: "To him the country is already under deep obligation for untiring efforts to amend the laws, to diffuse education and culture, and to promote in various ways the social and economical well-being of the people."<sup>8</sup> Ewart has faded in the memory because he concentrated less than many of his more illustrious radical colleagues in Parliament on the great issues of the day, even though his political interests were wide ranging and included topical issues.<sup>9</sup> Ewart turned his attention mostly to minor (by early Victorian standards) measures, particularly the intellectual well-being of society.<sup>10</sup> Public library provision was one such educational issue. Being a relatively unimportant area of social policy Ewart's contribution in this regard was recognised only gradually. Thus, late in his life Gladstone (whose christian names were taken from his godfather, being William Ewart's father of the same name) spoke of the public library pioneer as:

... a cultivated man, a scholar, highly respected in every relation of life, and his name deserves to be recorded in that he was upon more subjects than one a pioneer, working his way forward doing the rough



introductory work in his country's interest, in the interest of the nation, upon subjects which at the time very few had begun to appreciate. The appreciation of his work in regard to libraries, which produced the Act of 1850, has been an appreciation gradually progressing.<sup>11</sup>

Ewart never held office nor sat in Parliament as a member of any great party. But that is not to say he held weak ideological allegiances. On the contrary, he was closely associated with utilitarian principles and worked alongside those who aimed to make a reality of this philosophy. Munford has concluded that "Ewart's vote in the House of Commons Division was almost but not quite invariably given in true radical fashion and, on innumerable occasions, as one of a gallant but hopeless minority."<sup>12</sup> An edition of the Spectator in 1837 included Ewart in a hypothetical radical cabinet,<sup>13</sup> and Harriet Martineau cited him as being in alliance with the radical utilitarians Grote, Molesworth and Roebuck,<sup>14</sup> He was also in contact with Francis Place.<sup>15</sup> Though Ewart displayed much independence of thought in his political career - like many back-benchers of his day - he was linked to and influenced by philosophic radicalism.

Philosophic radicalism, as the term implies, consists of dual but interlocking roles - a link, in essence, between philosophy and political practice. The philosophy in question was essentially that of Benthamite-inspired utilitarianism; although philosophic radicalism has been described as "an amalgam of three related strands of ideological consciousness, Malthusian population theories, utilitarian jurisprudence and political philosophy and the economic doctrines of classical political economy".<sup>16</sup> In terms of practical politics, it is important to recognize that it was Bentham's lasting contribution to transform a system of ideas into a living ideology, for he was above all "a practical thinker concerned not simply with the development of



theory but with detailed reform".<sup>17</sup> His inspiration did not exist in an intellectual vacuum; many of his associates occupied positions of influence in the worlds of politics, administration, law and culture.<sup>18</sup> (This corresponds to the final stage of the Benthamite reform process outlined above.) Consequently, the way was open for serious intellectual theorising to be combined with political ambition. And combined it was, through philosophic radicalism, providing us with perhaps "the most striking example in the nineteenth century of a group of intellectuals active in politics, of the attempt to link theory with practice".<sup>19</sup> In discussing the ideology of the philosophic radicals, therefore, it is important to avoid from the outset the misconception that all utilitarians were philosophic radicals; though the reverse relationship, that all philosophic radicals were influenced by utilitarianism is undeniable. Quite simply, the philosophic radicals possessed an added dimension in that they aimed to give realistic expression, through Parliament, to their theoretical criticisms and plans for reform. Attention to organization for the sake of carrying theory into effect marks the difference between philosophy and ideology; it is in this context that we must view the work of William Ewart, eager as he was for a radical, thorough transformation of society, and involved as he was with the 'nuts and bolts' of reform and with the business of simply getting things done. In terms of the practicalities of the political and legislative process his connection with the 'doer' element in philosophic radicalism are obvious: "His struggles, achievements and failures appeared to be wholly in the translation of ideas into practical forms and in persuading his fellow members to accept them."<sup>20</sup>

But to what extent can we associate Ewart with the utilitarianism of philosophic radicalism? At a time when party cohesion and loyalty

were at best elusive, attaching labels to political figures of the first half of the nineteenth century can be a precarious exercise, no more so than with reference to those described as 'radical'. As one historian has pointed out:

The boundary lines between middle class radicalism and orthodox Whig attitudes are not easy to draw, and men like Place and Brougham moved effortlessly across them. Within the Whig-radical-utilitarian range of attitudes it was easy to be more or less moderate, seek one or another combination of limited reforms, and act within a changing network of alliances.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding such problems it is possible to make a fairly precise assessment of Ewart's political commitment. As stated above, on many issues Ewart found himself consistently in the radical camp, both physically (in terms of the division lobby) and intellectually. On major issues such as suffrage extension, religious equality and commercial freedom this was clearly the case.<sup>22</sup> His economic liberalism should be emphasized. He was intimately conversant with commercial questions,<sup>23</sup> and took copious notes on political economy.<sup>24</sup> However, Ewart was concerned with less sweeping political issues which, by way of establishing his utilitarianism, can be divided into three categories: reform of the criminal law; the freedom of administration from corruption; and education.

Munford has argued that the greater part of Ewart's drive for criminal law reform was derived from his study of the humanitarian aspects of Blackstone's Commentaries on the laws of England and the work of Cesare Beccaria.<sup>25</sup> That Ewart possessed humanitarian traits there appears little doubt. Maccoby referred to him as "that active wealthy, and experienced Parliamentarian, the humanitarian Ewart".<sup>26</sup> Hamburger relates Thomas Babbington Macaulay's assessment of the "effeminate mawkish philanthropy" of men such as Ewart.<sup>27</sup>



Nevertheless, although Beccaria's ideas on punishment contained humanitarian impulses they were also born of reason and logic, which attracted Ewart to the thoughts of Bentham whose own brand of utilitarianism set out a comprehensive plan for criminal law reform. Bentham believed that capital punishment, for instance, had no justification since it was efficient in only one of the aims of the criminal law, incapacitation, but not in the other three: deterrence, reformation and compensation. Quite simply, victims were not compensated, the perpetrator of the crime was obviously denied the chance of reform, and deterrence was seen to depend (or rather should depend) on the certainty of being apprehended, not the severity of the punishment. Armed with the logic of these Benthamite arguments Ewart succeeded in promoting Acts to abolish the death penalty for horse stealing, cattle stealing and stealing in dwelling-houses (1832); and for letter stealing, sacrilege and returning from transportation (1834). Further, his dogged determination to see through the abolition of capital punishment for all crimes secured for the first time an investigation in the form of a Royal Commission in 1864. Other reforms in the criminal law promoted by Ewart included an Act of 1834 to abolish the practice of exposing dead bodies of criminals in chains and his Act of 1836 providing prisoners with a right to legal defence. These were perhaps as much the result of intuitive and humanitarian thinking as of utilitarian rationalism.

Ewart's efforts to free administration from corruption, however, were utilitarian to the core. The utilitarians had a deep distrust of government power, believing the rule of the old aristocratic order to be open to corruption, for "Just as in the individual the self-regarding interest is predominant, so too in government".<sup>28</sup> Moreover, whereas in respect of economics it was believed that fundamental laws



existed to control human behaviour, in the world of politics no such controls pertained and, consequently, the practice of government was subject to human error and self-interest. Concurring with these arguments Ewart in 1845 moved that Civil Service appointments be subject to examination. He later proposed, in 1849 and 1852 respectively, that exams also be instituted for prospective army officers and candidates to the Diplomatic Service. For Ewart this ethical and efficiency-procuring approach held true for other institutions - hence his insistence on university entrance exams, and his distaste for the monopoly of the Royal Academy. Similarly, his enthusiasm for public libraries was based in part on his desire to see increased equality of opportunity.

But it is in the field of education that we can identify most clearly Ewart's links with utilitarianism. Ewart himself once described education as "the most important of all subjects".<sup>29</sup> This conviction was based not simply on a humanitarian impulse which sought to diffuse education for its own sake. For Ewart education possessed a concrete political dynamic. As Munford has written;

His interest in that cause was well established and his whole political philosophy was securely based upon it.<sup>30</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that we find in the field of education Ewart's "most ambitious, provocative and far-reaching efforts".<sup>31</sup> Certainly, "by the middle of the 1840's [if not earlier] he had thought out a full programme of educational reform which he pressed on mostly unreceptive Whig and Tory governments".<sup>32</sup> As was the case with his other political and parliamentary crusades he consistently eschewed the dictate of party: "Mr. Ewart and his colleagues", proclaimed the Illustrated London News in a 'Parliamentary Portrait' of the radical reformer, "have gone beyond the comparatively narrow ground of party

politics, and given social wants something of their study."<sup>33</sup> That is not to say, however, that Ewart's philosophy of education, particularly in terms of the social role he discerned for it, was unique; for as his commitment to a national system of education is explored below, it will become clear that his basic motivation bears close resemblance to that of the utilitarians.

Throughout his political career Ewart championed the extension of educational opportunity to all classes. His enthusiasm was unequivocal - the adoption of a system of national education, he promised in a Commons debate of June 1839, would be "the glory of the age".<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it was his belief that those who opposed him on this issue "went to restore society to a state of savage barbarity".<sup>35</sup> Ewart's relentless engagement in the education issue (including public libraries) is commendable. But it is not enough to praise his contribution without relating it to some kind of socio-political dynamic. As a practical politician and social reformer it would be surprising if such a dynamic was found missing. In fact, he did not promote the value of education exclusively for its own sake in respect of the development of the mind and spirit, but for reasons of control aimed at the preservation of a social order based on private property, possessive individualism and the capitalist mode of production.

Ewart believed that education was an important means of stabilizing and strengthening industrial capitalism (his belief in the direct economic value of education will be discussed below). He was aware of education's potential as a subtle means of counter-attraction for those elements in the lower orders indulging themselves in irrational, socially immoral pastimes: "if the poor were deprived of innocent sports", he argued, "they would be driven to what was bad".<sup>36</sup> In 1854 he informed his sister that public libraries had done much to



turn people from "Alehouses and Socialism".<sup>37</sup> However, notwithstanding his belief in the diversionary powers inherent in rational recreation, it would be wrong to view Ewart simply as a social controller pre-occupied with efforts to impose counter-attraction and indoctrination from above. Such an assessment would belie his adherence to self-help and voluntary effort. He did not desire, for example, an extension of education in the form of central government control. He urged that government should rather "aid and support the tendencies of the people in favour of education, than force it on them." It "should not attempt to interfere with opinion, least of all with religious opinions".<sup>38</sup> In respect of popular educational provision in the 1840s, he aimed not to destroy the voluntary system but to supplement and encourage it through central government action: "My object is to develop, not control."<sup>39</sup> He viewed the German popular education model - a "colossal Continental system" in his words - as unsuitable for Britain. "Do not impose uniformity", he argued, "but give an opportunity of freely adopting voluntary uniformity .... I think we may induce and persuade where we cannot force."<sup>40</sup> Ewart's stance on education, then, does not tally with the classic description of the social controller employing on behalf of those in positions of power overtly propagandist measures as an integral part of a programme of popular education. Such coercive methods were absent from his political make-up. He urged that institutions and political procedures should "recognise the government as the instrument of the people, not the people as the instrument of government".<sup>41</sup> Similarly, his belief in voluntary effort must be set against any tendency to view Ewart's idea of education as simply a counter-attractive force.

But this is not to say that he rejected any link between education and strong government, though he realized that it could not



be forged by coercion or overt control. Rather, he believed good government would be all the stronger for "having enlisted in its favour the affections of the people";<sup>42</sup> and in keeping with the utilitarian optimism in the power of reason he ventured to suggest that such affection would be forthcoming, as a matter of course, once rationality had itself been spread by an extension of educational opportunity. His faith in the powers of reason are perhaps best illustrated in his prescription for reduced criminality. Criminal laws, he summarized, tended to give people only a "horror of punishment". What was required was to give people "through the agency of education, a horror of the crime".<sup>43</sup> That is to say, individuals should obey the criminal law not out of fear of punishment, but out of an application of reasoned thought encouraged through education. Thus, like his philosophic radical peers and many other thinkers of the period, Ewart saw order as naturally flowing from the reason which intellectual development and education nurtured. The development of reason pointed the way to good government and, above all, Ewart would have argued, to the considered, gradual reform of society, rather than to a radical, perhaps violent, transformation in its fundamental socio-economic basis.

For Ewart this gradualist approach was the key to preserving social harmony. Time and again he can be found making reference to the desirability of "prevention" and "precaution" rather than "cure", in addressing the great social and political problems of the day. For instance, in March 1832, on the occasion of a Commons debate on a petition calling for an enquiry into the Peterloo Massacre of some thirteen years previously, Ewart commended the strategy of prevention arguing that "if they met the question openly and at once the agitation of it would be at an end .... instead of permitting it, at some further period to explode, when its explosion might occasion

danger and detriment to the country".<sup>44</sup> Some might see such advocacy as political adroitness, or simply good common sense. However, when one examines further Ewart's adherence to the strategy of prevention in social affairs it becomes apparent that his motives were not based entirely on the wisdom of expediency in political self-preservation for himself or his radical colleagues, but on a deep-rooted belief in the need to defuse trends in society which spelled danger and anarchy to the social arrangements he espoused.

Ewart identified clearly the role of education in the strategy of prevention. His political faith was based on two basic principles:

I humbly venture to think that the prosperity and safety of the country are mainly based on these two great principles; - first, freedom of trade; and secondly, national education .... To freedom of trade I look as the best source of prosperity; to the extension of education I look as the real source of order and safety, for until the poorest man should be taught by education how much he was interested in maintaining order, in obeying the laws, and extending the general prosperity of the country, there can be no solid defence against occasional turbulence and disquiet.<sup>45</sup>

In a Commons debate on education in April 1841 further evidence can be found of Ewart's conviction that education could counter agitation for a revolution which threatened the existing propertied and ordered nature of society. Although from hindsight we can see that he overestimated the potential for revolutionary tumult emanating from the countryside his line of thought is nevertheless revealing. Ewart warned that "a grossly ignorant rural population when once excited, was the most dangerous, because [it was] the blindest slave of tumult and revolution." That is why in Germany, he pointed out, government paid more attention to the education of the rural population. There was cause for concern, therefore, that "even within twenty miles of the metropolis" the rural population existed in "a state of blighted



ignorance". He was also concerned about education standards amongst the industrial working class - "Our artisans, he was sorry to say, though the most skillful workmen, had been shewn ... to be far less cultivated in their tastes and intellectual in their pursuits ... than the artisans from countries in which the State exercised a vigilant superintendence over education." But at least the British artisan, unlike the farm labourer, "received daily, in the common intercourse of their lives, a species of practical education. They learnt in the interchange of commerce and the intermingling of society, a knowledge of the value of property and the benefits of order."<sup>46</sup> The crux of Ewart's message can therefore be described as a necessity to educate in order to remove potential volatility in revolutionary agitation. Moreover, education could be geared to the practicalities of daily activity in industrial capitalist society for the purpose of encouraging respect for order based on a respect for property. The similarity here with the utilitarian philosophy that education meant a growing familiarity with the fundamental laws of economic activity in the free market is indeed striking.

History has shown that Ewart's anxiety over the prospect of radical social change was groundless. Unlike the Continent, Britain experienced "no Commune, no barricades, no rivers of blood".<sup>47</sup> However, as stated above, the possibility of serious conflict was envisaged. Ewart was no exception in this respect. On the eve of the 1848 Chartist demonstration at Kennington he expressed his anxieties in a letter to his sister Charlotte Rutson:

We are kept in a boiling, or at least a bubbling, state by the threatened procession of the Chartists tomorrow. I believe that they will be perfectly quiet. Policemen, however, and troops abound in all directions, and almost every gentleman, servant, and shopkeeper (besides many operatives) in London have been sworn in as



Special Constables. I and my servants of course .... But the Chartists, in their proclamation today, deprecate all intentions of violence.<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding Ewart's confidence in the security forces, and his judgement of the Chartists' doubtful will, a sense of disquiet does come through in reading this correspondence: society was not stable in his view but "bubbling". Not that Ewart (as was the case with Edwards, but even more so) was wholly unreceptive to Chartist grievances. He believed that there was indeed "some injustice at the bottom of it all", and that the real cause of discontent was "the ascendancy of the landed interest".<sup>49</sup> He had told the Commons in 1834 that "if any fatal mark characterized the present times, it was a pampering of the landed aristocracy at the cost of a pauperized and uneducated people".<sup>50</sup> He believed he "could not approve of everything in this country".<sup>51</sup> Yet he viewed "order indispensable" and called for "tranquilly and cautiously amending what is wrong".<sup>52</sup> As Greenwood observed: "The spirit of true and cautious progress governed his soul."<sup>53</sup>

Ewart regretted that some who had once sought a "sound and rational reform of society",<sup>54</sup> as he did, had now taken up too radical a position: "I regret that the middle class of Reformers should be unhappily at variance with the more popular class, who seemed recently to have run wild - severing their connection with those who might have guided them".<sup>55</sup> But he reserved his sternest criticism for those who had chosen the path of violence: "I for my part abjure violence, and hope for improvements through the determination and energy of the really liberal part of the community."<sup>56</sup> Needless to say, the "liberal part of the community" was in Ewart's opinion also that part most disposed to education, for he trusted that "the spread of education would teach those who were disposed to violence, that it was not by a sanguinary

movement that they could attain their end, but a steady progress founded on claims of substantial justice".<sup>57</sup>

Ewart clearly believed that an educated people would be less likely to lend support to violent agitation (in this instance, violent Chartism). To him it appeared obvious that a people imbued with reason would be more likely to identify itself with the peaceful and progressive process of representative democracy; and it was to education that Ewart looked as the basis for popular participation in the political system, believing as he did "that a strong and sound democracy must rest upon an intelligent and well-informed populace."<sup>58</sup> Ewart was convinced that the passing of a certain amount of political power to the masses was inevitable. At the time of the 1832 Reform Bill's passage through Parliament he had urged that "the speedy passing of such a measure was absolutely necessary for the salvation of the country".<sup>59</sup> Yet, in the wake of the legislation which followed he grew disappointed with the restricted limits of its effect. His Reform of the Reform Bill, published in 1837, had expressed a clear indignation with the inadequacy of political reform to date; but more than this, it serves to illustrate emphatically the essence of Ewart's philosophy of education and reform. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine this document in detail.

For Ewart, "the peace of society, the maintenance of order, must be presupposed to be the objects of every good citizen. The question is, how, in the present times, these objects may be best attained."<sup>60</sup> The answer, he ventured, lay in the exploitation of virtues inherent in the representative system of government: "The use of the representative system is, that, by reflecting as it were with clearness and truth the opinions of society, it may prevent or diminish those political shocks which a variance of opinion between the government and the people it



governs is always more or less likely to engender."<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, however, this consensus model based on the flow of opinions from people to government was, in his opinion, stunted unjustly by the continuing influence of the old order. The scattered fragments of the ancient system, he regretted, "too incautiously left overlying and encumbering the new one ... have constructed a strong-hold of violence and corruption, from which if they be not dislodged, the country and its liberties will be subject to ceaseless and dangerous depredations".<sup>62</sup> He considered it essential, therefore, to render the country's laws and political institutions "less feudal and oligarchical".<sup>63</sup> The Reform Act of 1832 had not gone far enough, and so he called for a simple household suffrage, a just distribution of the electoral localities and vote by secret ballot.

The results of not reforming the prevailing system, he cautioned, could prove devastating: "The smothered fire of popular indignation will at length find a vent, - the more dangerous for having been suppressed - and in some moment of severe distress or of violent excitement, the people will extort a Reform of the Reform Bill."<sup>64</sup> And he viewed the possibility of demands upon government issuing from an aggressive populace as part of a trend stretching back to the French Revolution which

... was not a solitary, isolated fact. It was part of a comprehensive whole. It was a mighty wave in a troubled sea, - the sea of human opinion, - which has set in, as in the time of the religious reformation, and which will continue, as then, to flow uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Such crisis in our social state may unfortunately assume, if they are misconducted, the form of revolution; or,

he goes on,

they may silently subside, leaving behind them the blessed effects of simple, but thorough reformation.<sup>65</sup>



Thus, despite the awesome power of opinion emanating from below, Ewart viewed that such opinion could be placated by governments which resorted to "precautionary reform",<sup>66</sup> and so he asserted that:

To prepare for and give scope to the inevitable tendency of opinions and events at such a period should be the aim and effort of every wise and patriotic government. Such a course of policy is infinitely safer than the falsely deemed conservative, but which may more appropriately be termed 'cumulative of evil'; since it suppresses complaint till it rises into disorder, and withholds the remedy till the disease is at its height.<sup>67</sup>

As far as the aftermath of 1832 was concerned he consequently questioned whether it was not wiser "to prevent this explosion by doing justice to the principles of the bill".<sup>68</sup>

The entire direction of Ewart's political outlook, if his thoughts on electoral reform in the 1830s are anything to go by, is apparently aimed towards conciliation and defusing potential crisis. Insurance against confrontation could be taken out by the promotion of reform, including social reform, in which field Britain, he regretted, had "frequently been in arrears of the less liberal (but highly enlightened) governments of the continent".<sup>69</sup> Education was a weapon which Ewart considered to be a powerful force in the avoidance of damaging social confrontation. Moreover, poor education amongst those who sought a redress of grievances combined with government corruption and inefficiency was a recipe only for conflagration: "The danger to be apprehended from revolution", he wrote, "is in a ratio combined of the ignorance of the people who emancipate themselves and the badness of the government under which they previously lived. Education is the enemy of revolution."<sup>70</sup> That is to say, an educated populace could play its part effectively, and without resort to revolutionary design, in a system of government which was based on openness and representation, not

corruption and privilege.

It is appropriate that Ewart's Reform of the Reform Bill has led us into a final assessment of Ewart's ideology, for it spells out with precision his guiding political doctrine which can be summed up in three words - preservation, prevention and precaution.

The first of these political priorities he illustrated in a letter to Charlotte Rutson: "I am sorry to see you call me a Radical, that I am not; except in the reformatory sense. If to amend is to destroy I admit your inference. But to amend in my opinion is to preserve."<sup>71</sup> Not that he was opposed to all change, for he looked with favour upon the process whereby the "slow and silent tide of opinion [was allowed] to flow in upon ancient institutions."<sup>71</sup> He did not countenance change, however, which threatened in any way the fundamental social arrangements of industrial capitalism, of which he himself was a social product, or "the inviolable rights of property",<sup>73</sup> which he defended.

Ewart argued that to preserve these fundamental principles which underpinned a civilized society the confrontations which precipitated excessive change had to be prevented. It was pointless, he argued, to deal with revolutionary agitation at its peak: if possible "ceaseless and dangerous depredations"<sup>74</sup> had to be nipped in the bud and not be allowed to develop.

It followed, therefore, that measures had to be implemented which acted as precautions against unwanted social turbulence, and so in keeping with this requirement Ewart's political career developed into a "long record of persistent and tireless service for reform".<sup>75</sup> He promoted education to a very great extent as a result of his belief in the necessity of insurance against a revolutionary transformation of society, and supported reforms in the economic sphere which would increase prosperity and consequently undermine any challenge to the

capitalist mode of production.

It is in the light of these arguments that we should approach any investigation into the establishment of public libraries in this country. Ewart was the key figure in their creation and early history. Indeed, since his death in 1869 "there has been no other parliamentarian who could promote the cause of public libraries with utmost interest and zeal, and to whom we can refer with the same respect and gratitude not only in England but elsewhere too".<sup>76</sup> Public libraries were for Ewart not simply a hobby, as the Times once suggested.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, they were an essential element in his ideas for a national system of education which would impart that spirit of rationality so essential to the preservation of capitalist society. They would act as a force for social cohesion, not division:

I have always thought that one of the good results of such institutions would be the bringing of all classes together.<sup>78</sup>



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66. Ibid., p. 30.
67. Ibid., p. 32.
68. Ibid., p. 14.
69. Ibid., p. 24.
70. Ibid., p. 22.
71. Letter from Ewart to Charlotte Rutson (May 1852), quoted in Munford, William Ewart, op. cit., p. 134.
72. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 20 (27 March 1829), Col. 1499.
73. Ibid.
74. Ewart, op. cit., p. 7.
75. W.A. Munford, Penny rate: aspects of British public library history 1850-1950 (1951), p. 14.
76. P.N. Kaula, 'Centenary of William Ewart', Herald of Library Science, 9:3 (July 1970).
77. Munford, William Ewart, op. cit., p. 137.
78. Letter from Ewart to John Pink (1864), quoted in Munford, William Ewart, op. cit., p. 150.

## Chapter Six

### EDWARD EDWARDS

Edward Edwards was a prophet and pioneer of the public library movement, yet "forgotten even while he lived".<sup>1</sup> To this day he remains an obscure historical figure, despite the opinion expressed by his biographer that "it was to him more than any other man, that we owe the municipal library in the form in which it has developed".<sup>2</sup> Without Edwards' investigative and statistical backbone the cadre of the public library argument would have been significantly weakened, to the extent of delaying public library provision beyond 1850; perhaps until the agitation for further electoral reform, and the natural corollary to it, the establishment of a national system of education in 1870. William Ewart's work in organizing the Select Committee would have counted for little but for the propaganda supplied by Edwards who "appears as the leading and moving spirit alike in the proceedings of the committee and its copious appendices".<sup>3</sup> As Greenwood put it, he kept Ewart's arsenal furnished with ammunition.<sup>4</sup> Edwards' diary entries for 1849 reveal extensive correspondence and consultations with Ewart.<sup>5</sup> However, in concentrating on his commendable efforts in this regard public library historians have paid inadequate attention to the political philosophy of a man who, surely out of some kind of ideological belief, found such intense motivation from his desire to promote the free provision of literature, without the prospect of any significant financial reward. For Edwards, public libraries most definitely possessed a socio-political dynamic. In his eyes they were, primarily, a means of increasing opportunity for self-education. He himself was a classic example of self-help in this regard.<sup>6</sup> He was aware of the role which education could play in maintaining social stability through a diffusion

of culture. Thus, in seeking to explore his political philosophy, his thoughts on education are an appropriate departure point.

From early in his adult life Edwards interested himself in the problems of spreading education. In his twenties he became involved with radical and anti-establishment friends who agitated over questions concerning the diffusion of culture. One such friend was the architect George Godwin who sought to improve the sanitary conditions of working class dwellings. Edwards and Godwin were chiefly responsible for the establishment of the Literary Union, a monthly magazine intended as a chronicle of literary and scientific institutions.<sup>7</sup> They were also involved in a mutual self-improvement group called the 'Society of Wranglers' whose members were "full of earnest purpose and zeal for the widening of educational facilities in every direction".<sup>8</sup> A common designation among the society's members was that of 'soul-squeezers': socially concerned individuals who were willing to render service in the solution of early industrialism's human problems. Theirs was a reforming not a revolutionary quest:

It was not so much a question with them that the world was out of joint and required putting to rights, as it was one of their individual readiness to help in adjusting things that in their eyes needed readjustment.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Edwards was socially engaged in this way is of critical importance to an understanding of his public library work. It is also relevant to a revision (which appears in chapter 10) of the traditional image of the detached librarian.

Edwards believed there to be a "duty incumbent upon the state to promote the universal education of the people by all means within its power".<sup>10</sup> What explains his preoccupation with the need for improvements in general education? His commitment arose, in part, from



his upbringing as a Dissenter: this fostered an aptitude for investigation and criticism of social norms in areas outside religion.<sup>11</sup> Truth would be revealed by educational endeavour. Self-education was thus a companion to him throughout his life. His academic interests were highly diverse.<sup>12</sup> He displayed a genuine respect for scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Had he not been of such humble origins (his father was an East End bricklayer) Edwards can be pictured in a scholarly career. As it was his achievements were exceptional. He was author of numerous works on bibliography, library history and librarianship. One of his earliest publications was a commentary on the work of the Select Committee of 1835-1836 investigating the affairs of the British Museum.<sup>14</sup> After this had been brought to the committee's attention he was called as a witness in 1836 at the remarkably young age of 24. A high point in his life was his appointment as Manchester Free Library's first librarian in 1850. These achievements confirmed him in the conviction that everyone was entitled to the opportunity of education. This was an essentially Benthamite prescription: he was, as Munford has put it, a utilitarian "who knew his wealth of nations".<sup>15</sup> He was well connected with other utilitarians.<sup>16</sup>

Of all Edwards' writings Metropolitan University (1836) conveys most clearly his leanings toward Benthamite radicalism. This pamphlet welcomed the government's intention to grant a charter to London University, but criticized its decision to go ahead with the idea (which initially it appeared to favour) that a central examining board be established. Edwards argued that professors at Oxford and Cambridge (and London, once chartered) had a stake in the number of degrees conferred; whereas such would not be the case with "a board of examiners entirely independent of the professors of the subordinate colleges, having no pecuniary interest in the number of degree

conferred".<sup>17</sup> Moreover, he believed a central university would give greater opportunity to those who for various reasons were prevented from attending 'Oxbridge' or who could not travel to London, but who could nonetheless obtain an education in the provinces even at an unchartered seminary. The central university idea was built on two fundamental principles. First, "that degrees should truly represent what they profess to represent, viz. certain positive requirements or general ability". Second, "that such degrees should be attainable by all, without exception, possessed of those requirements or that ability, in what way soever obtained".<sup>18</sup> Edwards chose to support these points by quoting Adam Smith: "Whatever forces a certain number of students to any College or University, independent of the merit or reputation of the teachers, tends, more or less, to diminish the necessity of that merit or reputation".<sup>19</sup> He followed this with a classic Benthamite plea for wider opportunity by saying "that every man ought to have within his reach the means of obtaining a degree, if he have acquired the knowledge a degree professes to represent, whether the place wherein he acquired that knowledge shall have been a cloistered college, a populous city or a secluded village".<sup>20</sup>

Edwards' proposals were radical, involving as they would have done sweeping and centralizing legislation. Here again is witnessed a Benthamite trait: "The great curse of this country is bit-by-bit legislation", wrote Edwards.<sup>21</sup> It was such outspoken argument which, as stated above, forced him to the attention of the Select Committee inquiry into the affairs of the British Museum. Edwards' thirst for self-education led him to frequent use of the Museum's reading room from which experience he was able to assess the poor condition of the service and, ultimately, the need for extended education opportunities in the form of public libraries. His unease with standards of service at what



was, after all, the nation's premier literary collection led him to attack standards of higher education provision generally:

Whatever may be our other claims to the distinction - we have not the shadow of a pretention to be considered 'the first nation of Europe' in respect to the condition, organization or management of our literary and scientific establishments.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding the management of the British Museum he deplored its dismissive attitude to the question of accessibility. "It is worthy of observation", he wrote, "that in this instance, precisely as we descend the scale of official authority, we appear to find a more catholic perception of the objects of the Museum. A dread of the inroads of the 'vulgar class' [meaning apparently, the manual-labour classes in general] does not seem to dwell in any breast of less dignity than that of principal librarian."<sup>23</sup> The latter, in the form of Sir Henry Ellis, had objected to ideas on wider accessibility, both for the reading room and the Museum as a whole. If the Museum was opened in the evening, he told the Select Committee, "I think the most mischievous portion of the population is abroad, and about at such a time". Evening opening would attract a "more vulgar class" merely intent on gazing at the curiosities, and merely rendering the place unwholesome.<sup>24</sup> Ellis also had restrictive ideas on reading room use, believing that evening opening would encourage "lawyers' clerks, and persons who would read voyages and travels, novels and light literature: a class of person I conceive the Museum library was not intended for, at least, not for their principal accommodation".<sup>25</sup> Though not wishing to see the doors of the Museum library flung open to all without safeguard, Edwards was nonetheless highly critical of the elitist management of the institution regarding access. He agreed wholeheartedly with Panizzi's words to the committee that the poorest student in the kingdom should have the same means of



"indulging his learned curiosity, of following his rational pursuits, of consulting the same authorities, of fathoming the most intricate enquiry" as the richest.<sup>26</sup> However, Edwards found at the British Museum little evidence of the equality of opportunity which his Benthamite leanings taught him to expect.

In giving evidence to the Select Committee on the British Museum Edwards was steered clear of the question of wider access. Instead, his evidence centred on the best means of improving internal organization and efficiency - matters of cataloguing, book supply, staff organization etc. Nonetheless, the anti-privilege zeal which characterized his ideology was not dampened. He continued, through his membership of the Art Union of London (see chapter 7) and in his writings, to challenge the elitist stance of certain educational bodies. He called, for example, for the Royal Academy to be funded by central government.<sup>27</sup> This, he believed, would bring art into the public domain, for art should be of popular benefit, not just catering for elite taste.<sup>28</sup>

These anti-privilege (almost anti-authoritarian) sentiments stayed with Edwards throughout his life. In one of his scrapbooks, for example, he attacks the notion of the 'keeper' librarian, arguing the "public stock of learning in book and press" should be made "useful to all". An "exclusive" library was no more than "a talent dugged in the ground" and those who used such a library "made it an idol to be respected and worshipped for a raritie by an implicate faith, without anie benefit to those who did esteem of it far off".<sup>29</sup> Edwards was, therefore, convinced of the need for universal exploitation of education, of which libraries were an integral part. He was concerned at the "waste of talent that lay sterile for lack of culture and opportunity".<sup>30</sup> To exploit this potential for cultural uplift the accumulators and keepers of literary culture, including librarians, had a duty to oversee

its diffusion. Edwards "initiated the considerable professional literature of modern librarianship".<sup>31</sup> He was the first to emphasize the importance of the librarian reaching out to his readers. He believed in the efficacy of systematic classification: "For a librarian to say that he prefers not to classify his books, is much as though a cutler were to say he liked steel best when unpolished".<sup>32</sup> Edwards had little sympathy with the alphabetical arrangement of titles and authors in catalogues: this, he believed, was useless to 90 per cent of the users of a popular library. But a scientific classification system was not all that was required to open the library to its users. He also favoured the idea of staff going amongst the readers to assist them.<sup>33</sup> His dream was one of maximum accessibility, the ultimate definition of which was the right to use a library without any formal recommendation or even a ticket (a ticket would of course be required for borrowing).<sup>34</sup> He believed the dangers of popular use to be minimal.<sup>35</sup>

His advocacy of accessibility came from his belief, as stated above, that education was not the prerogative of the rich but the birthright of all. It was in this sphere that he chose to make himself useful to his fellow citizens, an ambition which he held from an early age. Through librarianship he would be able to respond to his anxieties concerning social affairs. In this respect Altick's assessment of Edwards as "deaf, reclusive, and utterly humourless", is misleading.<sup>36</sup> Deaf and serious he undoubtedly was, but the word 'recluse' does not fit with his obvious social commitment. His utilitarianism was, after all, not abstract theory, but found practical expression. The free provision of literature in public libraries, for which Edwards fought, supports this assertion.<sup>37</sup>

Edwards believed that education had a key role to play in the preservation of social order. Education as a means of control was



preferable, in his opinion, to the alternative of coercion: "Truly the masses need guidance ... more than they need repression".<sup>38</sup>

Highlighting his interest in the fine arts he wrote in 1840 that: "if it be true ... that these arts of design may be employed with such powerful effect in the great work of popular education, it were strange if the wanton neglect of them were altogether to continue, at a time when the preservation of social order itself is loudly threatened by the unhappy combination of ignorance and discontent".<sup>39</sup> In the same publication, and in the same vein, he chose to quote the Bishop of London on the matter as follows: "Whatever of necessity affects the moral condition, the usefulness, the well-being of the people at large," said the Bishop in a speech to the House of Lords in 1839:

"in its results the very existence of social order must fall within the State's directing and controlling power .... Education must needs be a State question."<sup>40</sup> Edwards was thus keenly aware of the social urgency for widespread educational reform.

Edwards believed education could reduce social strife by removing ignorance. He agreed with the notion that dangerous political agitation was fostered out of ignorance among the masses; that those at the forefront of the fight to overthrow the social system were using their demagogic power to sway the beliefs of those inadequately informed as to the true virtues of industrial capitalism, or for that matter, the evil consequences that would flow from social revolution. As argued above, respectable opinion viewed that in place of ignorance, the uneducated lower orders could be inculcated with reason, through an educational process geared to establishment views. Certainly Edwards' belief in the powers of reason to combat social turbulence was unshakable: "What can be more likely to defeat turbulent passion than calm appeals to reason? What can be better adapted to make men



attached to what is good in existing institutions, and contented to seek by peaceful means the improvement of what they may chance to be defective?"<sup>41</sup>

For Edwards, public libraries were an indispensable weapon in education's armoury: "If libraries are not educators they have no claim whatever to legislative attention, howsoever serviceable in other respects."<sup>42</sup> Because education had the potential to bring about public peace, so also did the educative agency of the public library: "The artisan who delights in visiting a Public Museum on his rare holiday, or in spending some portion of his scanty leisure in a Public Reading Room ... will repress crime in the very heat of insurrection, and practice moderation even amidst the excitement of victory."<sup>43</sup>

Edwards was aware of the squalor of industrial society. He himself reacted to it by developing an enthusiasm for the countryside.<sup>44</sup> He was depressed by the urban environment's effect on human existence:

No one can have walked through the more crowded and obscure parts of London on a Sunday, with an observant eye, without shuddering at the dreadful amount of utter idleness, degradation, and consequent drunkenness, and almost every other vice, then so particularly observable.<sup>45</sup>

How could such evils be lessened? Edwards told the Select Committee on public libraries that:

... the want of some provision, from the public resources, of amusements of a rational and improving character, has led to the introduction, to a large extent in our towns, of brutalising and demoralising amusements.<sup>46</sup>

Edwards believed that rational recreation (for which public libraries stood) would dispel the idleness, listlessness and drunkenness which afflicted society. It would also serve as a social healer. Edwards saw class division as a pressing issue:

The great problem of the age is the diminution, by gradual and peaceful means, of the glaring

disparities between the refinement, the luxury, and the splendour which exist at the summit of society, and the destitution and brutishness which grovel at its base. If this can be effected, not by the depression of the lofty, but by the elevation of the lowly society will have safely bridged over the great gulf which, in more countries than one, is now fearfully yawning at its feet.<sup>47</sup>

But divisions could be overcome, he proposed, by instigating "a high order of mental culture".<sup>48</sup> Referring to rational recreation he wrote:

Everything which extends a man's sympathies, which makes him a social rather than a selfish being, and which leads him to seek pleasures beyond mere sensual gratification, is a good, just in proportion to the contrary influences which ordinarily act upon him.<sup>49</sup>

His confidence in the intrinsically 'social' nature of humanity thus coalesced with his enthusiasm for education as an elevating force. Education would help "dispel that ignorance which lends to social disparity its most alarming aspect".<sup>50</sup>

Yet the uncultured, said Edwards, could not elevate themselves. They required both administrative and intellectual assistance. He wrote: "If Prussia can pervert the benign influences of education to the support of arbitrary power, we can employ them for the support and perpetuation of free institutions [i.e. public libraries]".<sup>51</sup> Edwards advised not indoctrination but intellectual guidance from above. He believed society's reading habits could be modified by enticing people with 'good' reading:

Those who can read will never be without reading of some sort .... To place good literature within everybody's reach is certainly the best way to counteract the empty frivolity, the crude scepticism and the low morality of a portion ... of the current literature of the day .... To make books of the highest order freely and easily accessible throughout the length and breadth of the land, were surely to give no mean furtherance to the efforts of the schoolmaster, and of the Christian minister,



to produce under God's blessing a tranquil,  
cultivated and a religious people.<sup>52</sup>

Edwards initially hoped that public libraries would engineer higher reading tastes. He thus thought it "a matter of some regret" that borrowers from his Manchester Public Library chiefly demanded "books of amusement".<sup>53</sup> His dream had been one of duplicating the reading room of the British Museum (albeit on a smaller scale) in the provinces and various London districts. A public library for Edwards was one of education (not, it should be noted, for esoteric research), at the disposal of any person seeking elevation. He never wavered from the belief that public libraries should, in essence, be 'town' libraries belonging to the entire community.<sup>54</sup> In this sense it is difficult to see him as a social controller, despite his concern that the lower orders required most educational attention.<sup>55</sup>

His desire to diffuse culture to assure social stability was based on no reactionary political stance. Of the 1848 revolution in France, for example, he recorded in his diary that "news came of insurrectionary movements in Paris to which I earnestly wish success".<sup>56</sup> Two days later he praised "a glorious day ... for the downfall of the delusive, corrupt and retrogressive government of Louis Philippe in France".<sup>57</sup> In the area of social order, therefore, Edwards was not a conservative (though he did, of course, defect to Toryism later in life).<sup>58</sup> Rather, his sympathies during the 1840s, when he was agitating for the establishment of public libraries, rested with utilitarian reformism. "We look indeed for no fool's Paradise as conceived by a St. Simon or an Owen", he wrote in 1848, but for a world in which:

... every man, however, may by patient exertion be enabled to earn honest bread, to cultivate the faculties within him, both for his life and for the life to come, and to acquire some direct and legitimate influence upon that legislation which affects his interests the more powerfully,



the poorer and humbler may be his sphere of labour; all authority shall be limited and responsible, and that in king and magistrate, as in peasant or servant, it shall be everywhere made visible that what a man soweth, that shall he also reap.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, in order that the individual be given "some direct and legitimate influence upon that legislation which affects his interests" he supported Chartism in its 'moral' manifestation. At the climax of the Chartist agitation in 1848 he refused to be sworn in as a 'special constable' to help defend the property of the British Museum.<sup>60</sup> He also signed the Charter.<sup>61</sup> His diary entry for the day of the Kennington demonstration recorded that he found himself in "a minority in condemning the course taken by the government and strongly advocating a wide extension of the electoral franchise".<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Edwards' view on the general political climate of the late 1840s was far from what one might call alarmist, supporting as he did, in broad terms, the demands of the Chartist movement. He certainly did not share the trepidation of one of his colleagues at the British Museum who had read in the official organ of the Chartist movement, the Northern Star, that "an organization existed in England to burn down London, Liverpool and the other Babylons of England, and massacre the loyal inhabitants";<sup>63</sup> and who also appeared to give some credence to the rumours surrounding the Kennington assembly ("this new Runnymede") that "the morning of the eventful day arrived, and a revolution was prophesied without fail before sunset".<sup>64</sup> It is perhaps more likely that he would have concurred with this same colleague's more rational and considered comments that in the wake of the 1848 revolutions in Europe "there were certain indications in the political atmosphere of our own country, that made thoughtful and observant men a little apprehensive";<sup>65</sup> and that as to the cost and inconvenience of such

military precautions as were taken in 1848 for the safeguarding of law and order "we must seek a cheaper, less troublesome, and more summary way of suppressing and putting down such a nuisance".<sup>66</sup> In respect of this last assertion, Edwards proposed public libraries as an alternative, effective means of control.

Despite his espousal of the Chartist cause, and accepting that he was no alarmist in observing the contemporary socio-political climate, it is difficult to believe Edwards could not have been troubled, to some extent, by the agitation which caused a significant section of respectable opinion to sense an impending social cataclysm. Edwards was no social revolutionary. Rather, his support for the Charter was derived from the Benthamite belief in the efficacy of representative government to dissolve corruption, inefficiency and privilege.

Given his belief in education as a means of forging social cohesion and maintaining social stability, then the avoidance of abrupt social change must be counted as a prime factor in explaining his enthusiasm for the public library ideal. As he testified in 1849:

At this time especially, upon general grounds ....  
I think there could be no more wise and prudent  
expenditure of public money than in the promotion  
of libraries. At a time when we know that there  
are a great many subversive doctrines afloat about  
property it would have an excellent effect.<sup>67</sup>

Edwards recognised the march of history and destiny of power which awaited the lower orders. This he accepted and, as far as can be judged from his political outlook, welcomed. But he did so reservedly, in the knowledge that serious social conflict could only be avoided if the masses were educated out of their ignorance in advance of their being offered power. Edwards was convinced that there was "nothing in any State so terrible as a powerful and authorized ignorance." "Powerful and authorized the classes that are ignorant must eventually become",

he wrote, but "society has yet to decide whether the removal of ignorance shall, or shall not, precede the attainment of power."<sup>68</sup>



## Notes and References to Chapter 6

1. Words of the librarian W.B. Sayers, Library Association Record, 40 (1938), p. 352.
2. W.A. Munford, Edward Edwards 1812-1886: portrait of a librarian (1963), p. 7.
3. Richard Garnett quoted in L.S. Jast, Inauguration of the Edward Edwards Monument at Niton, 7 February 1902, p. 3.
4. T. Greenwood, Edward Edwards (1902), p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
6. K.A. Manley, 'Edward Edwards: the first professional public librarian', Library Association Record, 88 (1986), p. 143.
7. Greenwood, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
10. Edward Edwards, The Administrative economy of the fine arts (1840), p. 325.
11. Munford, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
12. Edwards' personal scrapbooks contain notes on a bewildering variety of subjects. Included are items on education, poetry, English language and literature, history of localities, history of European countries, history of ancient and modern libraries, foreign languages, and Napoleon. See Edwards' unpublished Manuscript scrapbook, Book 'E' on Libraries, etc. (1860-1876); Manchester public Library Archives. The width of his intellectual interests is also shown in the contributions he made to the 8th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica: these range from 'Newspapers' to the 'Post Office', and from 'Tea and the tea trade' to "Woolen and worsted manufacturers"; Greenwood, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
13. K.A. Manley, 'Edward Edwards: a humble librarian at Oxford', Library History, 7:3 (1986), p. 74.
14. Edward Edwards, Remarks on the minutes of evidence ... on the British Museum (1836). The investigation's full title was Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum, which reported in 1836.
15. Munford, *op. cit.*, p. 19. Edwards was unquestionably an economic liberal. In his youth Edwards had been influenced by the democratic and economic ideas of the radical free trader William Fox. Sir John Potter (Manchester's mayor and first chairman of the public libraries committee) once referred to Edwards as "a radical of the Cobden school"; Greenwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 23 and 114.

16. With the utilitarian Joseph Hume he was on terms of more than a passing acquaintanceship; Greenwood, op. cit., p. 13. He knew Ewart certainly from the late 1830s when they both served on the governing committee of the Art Union of London; see chapter 7.
17. Edward Edwards, Metropolitan university: remarks on the ministerial plan of a central university examining board (1836), p. 9.
18. Ibid., p. 10.
19. Ibid., p. 10, from Smith's Wealth of nations.
20. Ibid., p. 11.
21. Ibid., p. 15.
22. Edwards, Remarks ... British Museum, op. cit., (1839 edn.), p. 9.
23. Ibid., p. 12.
24. Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum, Report, Q.1320-1322 and 1325.
25. Ibid., Q.1313.
26. Ibid., Q.4795.
27. Edward Edwards, A Letter to Sir Martin Shee on the reform of the Royal Academy (1839), p. 12.
28. Ibid., p. 13.
29. Edwards, Manuscript scrapbook, op. cit., p. 189.
30. Jast, Inauguration, op. cit., p. 6.
31. L.S. Jast, Libraries and living (1932), p. 1.
32. Greenwood, op. cit., p. 127, quoting Edwards' Memoirs of libraries (1859).
33. Greenwood, op. cit., p. 44. Edwards told this to the Select Committee on the British Museum, op.cit.
34. Greenwood, op. cit., p. 86.
35. Edward Edwards, Free town libraries (1869). Opposite p. 192 is a list of recent negligible losses.
36. R. Altick, The English common reader (Chicago, 1957), p. 223.
37. Further evidence of his utilitarianism is seen in his advocacy of central government grants and an inspectorate for public libraries. Greenwood, op. cit., p. 88.

38. Edwards, *The Administrative economy*, op. cit., p. 271.
39. Ibid., p. 345.
40. Ibid., p. 272.
41. Edward Edwards, Remarks on the paucity of libraries freely open to the public ... in a letter to the Rt. Hon. Earl of Ellesmere (1849), pp. 34-35.
42. Edwards, *Free town libraries*, op. cit., p. 16.
43. Edward Edwards, A Statistical view of the principle libraries in Europe and America (1848), pp. iii-iv.
44. His diary for 1849 is filled with affectionate descriptions of his country walks with Ewart; Greenwood, op. cit., p. 69. He wrote in 1867 a work entitled 'Commons, parks and open spaces near London; their history and treatment considered in regard to public health and recreation ...' This manuscript is in the Manchester Public Library Archives, according to Munford, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
45. Edwards, *Remarks ... British Museum*, op. cit., (1839 edn.), p. 43.
46. Quoted in Greenwood, op. cit., p. 88.
47. Edwards, *A Statistical view*, op. cit., p. iii.
48. Ibid., p. iv.
49. Edwards, *Remarks ... British Museum*, op. cit., (1839 edn.), p. 44.
50. Edwards, *The Administrative economy*, op. cit., p. 333.
51. Edward Edwards, A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Binney on the present position of the education question ... (1847), p. 25.
52. Greenwood, op. cit., p. 63, quoting from Edwards' *Remarks on the paucity of libraries ...* (1849).
53. Manchester Free Public Library, Annual Report (18569, p. 9.
54. This principle is enshrined in the title of his Free town libraries, op. cit.
55. He told the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849) that even great writers needed public libraries to further their intellectual pursuits. Highlighted by Greenwood, op. cit., p. 71.
56. Edward Edwards, Diary, unpublished manuscript (entry for 23 February 1848).
57. Ibid., (entry for 25 February 1848).



58. One of his scrapbooks from later in his life contained two detailed newspaper articles on Disraeli: the first covering an attack of gout suffered by the Prime Minister; the second reporting on the unveiling of Beaconsfield's statue outside Parliament, on the second anniversary of his death in 1883. Edwards, Manuscript scrapbook, op. cit., pp. 25 and 27.
59. Quoted in Munford, op. cit., p. 58, from British Quarterly Review, 10 (1849).
60. Edwards, Diary, op. cit. (entry for 4 April 1848).
61. Ibid. (entry for 8 April 1848). Part of this entry read: "On the way to the Museum, saw the disgraceful proclamation ... declaring the meeting ... illegal ... I resolved immediately wavering all minor disagreements to sign the petition for 'The Chartists'."
62. Ibid. (entry for 10 April 1848).
63. R. Cowtan, Memoirs of the British Museum (1872), p. 146.
64. Ibid., p. 147.
65. Ibid., p. 145.
66. Ibid., p. 157.
67. Select Committee on Public Libraries, Report (1849), Q. 3395.
68. Edwards, The Administrative economy, op. cit., 1 p. 312.

## Chapter Seven

### CULTURE, MATERIALISM AND THE SELECT COMMITTEE (1849):

#### THE CULTURAL MATERIALISM OF ART

Ewart and Edwards approached the public library question from a utilitarian standpoint; though cultural concerns also, as shall be argued, both motivated them and complemented the utilitarian impulse behind the concept of books on the rates. The utilitarian aims of the two protagonists were supported by equally authentic utilitarian methods. The public library ideal was furthered by a Select Committee on the subject, established in 1849.<sup>1</sup> This Parliamentary inquiry resulted from both practical and philosophical considerations.

The format of a Select Committee was chosen in preference to a Commons resolution; the latter, according to a constitutional rule, would have disallowed requests for a grant of public money. A Select Committee, on the other hand, kept open the option of central funding.<sup>2</sup> It also afforded publicity. Ewart expected that a Select Committee would draw attention to the issue: "it would awaken interest in the matter, and would undoubtedly lead to efforts being made for the formation of public libraries".<sup>3</sup> The public library lobby needed all the propaganda it could muster in the face of vehement opposition from non-interventionists.<sup>4</sup> The argument that literature was affordable in the market-place was a potentially serious obstacle for free library protagonists to surmount.

The theory underlying the choice of the Select Committee method was derived from the reforming essence of utilitarianism and the associated notion of "vigorous research and enquiry prior to legislation so that the full and impartial facts could be exposed".<sup>5</sup> The quest for

scientific, social legislation based on objective research was not unworthy. However, Parliamentary investigation was in practice far from impartial. Utilitarians shaped the direction of the Select Committee on Public Libraries in the same fashion as they had orchestrated inquiries on questions like the poor law and municipal reform, which attracted Royal Commissions in 1832 and 1833 respectively.<sup>6</sup> Ewart stage-managed the Select Committee's proceedings. As chairman he mapped out with meticulous care the course of the Select Committee's work. He was closely assisted in this task by his chief witness, Edwards. Munford has described how Ewart and Edwards went "to immense trouble to prepare in advance both Ewart's questions and Edwards' answers; other witnesses, carefully selected, were brought in to support Edwards' arguments".<sup>7</sup> The proceedings were engineered to precision, to the extent that: "If it were possible in 1849 'to leave no stone unturned' Ewart and Edwards had done it."<sup>8</sup> The result was a convincing report, notwithstanding the inclusion of some inaccuracies such as those concerning the extent of alleged public access to libraries on the continent.

The type of witness called before the Select Committee, and the nature of the evidence submitted, broadly matched the strategy laid down by Ewart in a letter to Edwards immediately prior to the commencement of the proceedings. Ewart called for the following areas of knowledge and expertise to be tapped:

1. General Evidence.
2. Evidence of travellers and frequenters of Libraries here and abroad.
3. Evidence of persons who can speak on such subjects as Parish Libraries.
4. Evidence of persons conversant with the working classes, and literature as connected with them.
5. Evidence of parish clergymen.
6. There are a train of men called 'Lecturers' who could give evidence.



7. Evidence of members of the Municipal Councils in our large towns.
8. Evidence of perhaps some of the working men themselves.
9. Evidence of the Librarians of existing libraries.
10. Evidence of some founders of modern Village Libraries to show their results.
11. Evidence of the rate at which books could be supplied.<sup>9</sup>

A reading of the report - comprising 12 pages of text, but over 200 pages of evidence - shows that all the areas which Ewart set out to investigate were covered. There was a variety of witnesses, but most can be categorized as possessing a knowledge either of literary consumption (including libraries) and/or of the social habits of the masses.

The value of the committee's evidence to the social historian lies not in the brief which Ewart set himself (in his letter to Edwards), but in the detail of sociological references which the witnesses provided. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge described the committee's report as "one of the most valuable and interesting documents which Parliament has added to the stock of blue-book literature for many years".<sup>10</sup> This was, said the Society, partly because, aside from the central public library aspect,:

Other questions of importance arise out of the evidence ... - such as the present state of the social habits, the virtues and vices, of the mass of the labouring population, the history and contents of certain rare books and manuscripts, the rise and progress of a new race of itinerant lecturers, and so forth.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the wealth of data on popular culture in the report - as yet largely ignored, it should be added, by social historians - has resulted in confusion amongst library historians concerning the committee's motives. The committee's diverse preoccupations have not been analysed effectively. Instead, motives have been expressed in general and vague

terms, such as "educational and moral improvement";<sup>12</sup> "the appeasement of the masses";<sup>13</sup> or "the altruistic work of good and great men".<sup>14</sup>

What explains the failure of library historians to analyse with a wider vision the events of 1849? First, the vast amount of information contained in the report has, arguably, proved difficult for library historians, neglected by historians in broader fields, to process: they have lacked the necessary equipment and methodology. But this has been a failing of library history generally, not just of those investigating the work of the Select Committee. A more definite explanation might be found in the common desire of librarians and library supporters to improve standards of service. Efforts to extend library provision have been seen as a struggle. Using hindsight it has been easy to construe development as a teleological growth from lowly beginnings. Public library history has been given a Whiggish 'onwards' and 'upwards' interpretation which strongly infers an inauspicious start. Both the Public Libraries Act of 1850 and the work of the Select Committee which gave rise to it - while recognized as important landmarks - have been considered unhelpful to the development of free libraries. The limited nature of the Act is seen to have bestowed a legacy of slow and tortured development. Kelly has written that the legislation:

... is sometimes spoken of as though it were a magic wand which brought a national public library service into being overnight. Nothing could be further from the truth. The powers given by the Act were exceedingly limited and inadequate; they were, moreover, permissive not compulsory. It was only after long and often bitter struggles, and much supplementary legislation, that the library service as we know it came into existence.<sup>15</sup>

Such accusations cannot be levelled at the Select Committee which called for state assistance in funding municipal libraries.<sup>16</sup> However, the intentions of the early protagonists, which the Select Committee



enshrined, have been classed as too vague for a truly effective free library system to develop. As Murison has argued:

For many reasons ... legislation and administration did not keep pace with ... philanthropic enthusiasm, and the progress of public libraries was painfully slow. Not the least of the reasons were the variety of aims which were set for the libraries.<sup>17</sup>

Confusion over what induced the earliest pioneers to support the public library ideal is unnecessary. The essence of early public library philosophy is not polyglot and vague, but uncomplicated and precise. The Select Committee might have traversed a wide variety of issues, but in the final analysis it possessed merely a dual thrust: namely, concerns for cultural elevation and material advance, both of which held implications for social stability.

The literary and intellectual interests of the Select Committee's membership were reflected in the call for improved library facilities. It was noted that one result of Britain's inferiority in respect of public libraries was that "our own literature (as well as our own people), denied the benefit of such institutions, must have proportionately suffered".<sup>18</sup> A picture was drawn of great writers and thinkers hindered in their intellectual pursuits by poor library provision.<sup>19</sup> It was argued that free libraries would be particularly relevant to students in the provinces.<sup>20</sup> Further, they would be welcomed by teachers, who "required the best implements of education";<sup>21</sup> by journalists, who frequently needed to consult "political, historical and literary works";<sup>22</sup> and by itinerant lecturers, whose work would consequently be rendered "less superficial".<sup>23</sup>

Cultural improvement was not to be confined to the educated and middle classes. A wider diffusion of culture was considered by the



Select Committee. It was noted that the recent experiment in making culture more widely accessible - that is to say, the establishment of art galleries, museums and schools of design, and the throwing open to the people the doors of the National Gallery and the British Museum - had not been marked by abuse. Rather, it was said, that "much rational enjoyment and much popular enlightenment have distinguished it".<sup>24</sup> It was believed that the cultural standards of the masses had recently undergone an improvement - one which free libraries could help sustain:

Testimony, showing a great improvement in national habits and manners, is abundantly given in the evidence taken by the Committee. That they would be still further improved by the establishment of Public Libraries, it needs not even the high authority and ample evidence of the witnesses who appeared before the Committee to demonstrate.<sup>25</sup>

The perceived "increased qualifications of the people to appreciate and enjoy" institutions like public libraries appeared to complement the "vast and increasing number of new popular works, cheap in price, condensed in form, and valuable in substance".<sup>26</sup> The awareness of both these developments invited the establishment of free libraries.<sup>27</sup>

The spread of humanistic culture was one of the Select Committee's intentions. It also aimed - in the socialization, anthropological sense of the word 'culture' - to reinforce cultural norms. It was hoped that wholesome literature, made widely available in free libraries, would attract the public away from immoral pastimes like the tavern and barbaric sports. For example, one witness testified how in Birmingham bull-baiting had disappeared and dog-fighting was dying out, not because of the interference of the authorities, but because the 'taste' of the people had been improved.<sup>28</sup> The Select Committee questioned the wisdom of abandoning "the people to a low, enfeebling, and often pestilential literature, instead of enabling them to breathe a more pure, elevated

and congenial atmosphere?"<sup>29</sup> This did not mean that the masses should be taught to read only classic literature. True, there was an awareness, as John Stuart Mill articulated, that the mass proliferation of literature militated against "the laborious and learned" and worked in favour of "crude and ill-informed writers".<sup>30</sup> But 'light' literature, provided it was morally sound, was to be encouraged for its counter-attracting potential. As Ewart retorted to the clergyman who complained that the availability of Walter Scott novels at the local subscription library had distracted one young mechanic from attending church: "But is it not better that they should read Walter Scott's novels than they should do something worse?"<sup>31</sup>

It was not just in the social sphere that deviance could be corrected: it was hoped that free libraries might also reduce the influence of politically unacceptable literature. The Select Committee classified unsavoury political writings as immoral. It noted in the same breath - as if to suggest an inseparable link - its distaste for both immoral and politically deviant literature:

It is also truly observed that the establishment of such depositories [free libraries] of standard literature would lessen or perhaps entirely destroy the influence of frivolous, unsound and dangerous works.<sup>32</sup>

One witness highlighted the depressed area of Spitalfields and expressed concern over the possible inflammatory effect in such an area of "dangerous" French novels of "doubtful social character", which promoted "loose ideas on the subject of society".<sup>33</sup> It was envisaged that free libraries would negate the influence of seditious and dangerous political ideas, not by performing a positive, propagandist role, but by presenting themselves as agencies purveying uncontroversial political (and religious) material; the public



library would underwrite political norms by being a-political.<sup>34</sup>

Implicit in the work of the Select Committee, therefore, is the question of control. A fuller discussion of the argument that the public library was conceived as an agency of social control will follow in Part Two. It is enough to say here that, notwithstanding the nuances and defects in the social control thesis, sufficient evidence can be gleaned from the deliberations of the Select Committee to warrant such a discussion. The question of control - in terms of preserving both social order and 'the' social order - was on the public library agenda. Whereas the odd traditional voice was raised against the extension of education which libraries would bring - one M.P. feared free libraries might become "normal schools of agitation"<sup>35</sup> - most who debated the issue were of the persuasion of John Bright who was:

... quite sure that nothing would tend more to the preservation of order than the diffusion of the greatest amount of intelligence and the prevalence of the most complete and open discussion, amongst all classes.<sup>36</sup>

However, this is not to say that control was successful. Nor is it the case that the public library was simply an instrument of control: the Select Committee closed its report, it should be stressed, by describing a recent *spontaneous* development in the "love of literature and reverence for knowledge" - a trend which it was hoped the public library would foster.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, the quest for cultural uplift possessed a certain autonomy. It was a quest, moreover, in which all social classes were involved. As the envisaged middle class use of public libraries demonstrated, the cultural sphere was not one from which the middle classes would disengage in deference to a culturally hegemonised working class.

Nonetheless, the argument that public libraries began as subtle



attempts at control is lent some weight by the institution's utilitarian pedigree. The utilitarian faith in the industrial market society was shared by public library protagonists, and is evident in the work of the Select Committee. That utilitarianism was a powerful influence in 1849 is shown by the fact that culture was discussed only from the perspective of 'improvement'; there was no specific reference to literary culture for recreation. The early public library debate is only occasionally marked by appeals to the value of non-utilitarian recreational reading, such as that made by the Times in 1852:

In the working of public libraries we can expect no other results than what we already obtain from the cheapness and abundance of books in private hands. Most will read merely to pass the time, and if in doing so they can forget a few cares, and go to bed rather calmer and happier, they will be no losers by their books, whatever it may be.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the preoccupation with 'useful' literature, little attention has been paid to the utilitarian content of the 1849 report, especially its economic dimension. Utilitarianism permeates the report. As stated above, there was no attempt to shy away from intervention. Voluntaryism was not eschewed, but state involvement in assisting the public library to disseminate knowledge was justified on the grounds of the increased social utility which would result.<sup>39</sup> The Select Committee persistently pursued an anti-privilege line.<sup>40</sup> The efficacy of self-help in connection with free libraries was frequently alluded to, as befitted the achievements of the committee's membership.<sup>41</sup> Much was made of the need to evolve amongst the masses powers of reason for a better understanding of political and economic matters.<sup>42</sup>

More needs to be said of the Select Committee's materialist concerns. References were made to the need of business libraries,

partly for education in political economy. The report highlighted the evidence of the German Dr. C. Meyer, Secretary to Prince Albert. He had spoken of the famous Commercial Library in Hamburg, which was said to have had "a most beneficial influence on the character of the merchants" of the city.<sup>43</sup> Similar institutions were considered appropriate to Britain:

It would seem that in our large commercial and manufacturing towns, as well as in our agricultural districts, such libraries would naturally spring up [as a result of public library legislation], illustrative of the peculiar trade, manufactures, and agriculture of the place, and greatly favourable to the practical development of the science of political economy.<sup>44</sup>

Topographical libraries (and museums) were also suggested.<sup>45</sup> These would contain not only a record of "local events, local literature, and local manners", but also collections of science and art materials "illustrative of the climate, soil, and resources of the surrounding country".<sup>46</sup>

Free libraries were proposed as educators in economic practicalities: "The people may be taught many lessons which concern their material (as well as their moral and religious) welfare."<sup>47</sup> But materially useful information was not to be confined to the improvement of social habits. A more direct form of "valuable information" - as the report referred to it - was literature on emigration. It was proposed that by providing such information to those seeking a more prosperous life overseas the public library would, in advance "make the people well acquainted with our different colonies, the mode of reaching them, and all the requisite measures to be adopted by a settler".<sup>48</sup>

The utilitarian aims of the Select Committee were not pursued in



isolation from its cultural concerns. At a general level the public library was viewed as an intrinsically cultural institution which could advance materialism. In one specific area - the provision of art and illustrated books - the public library was the perfect match-maker. Early public library pioneers were concerned with art and design in a way which merits the description, 'cultural materialism'.

The Select Committee deliberated on the question of collections of illustrative materials for improved manufacturing.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, part of the evidence of the evangelical lecturer George Dawson is worth lengthy consideration.

Q.1252. Would it not be desirable that manufacturers, whose business is connected with design, should have ready access to such books as are connected with that design which belongs to that particular department? - Yes. In Birmingham everything depends upon design now.

Q.2387. Would you say that any library professing to be a public one, should contain among its various literary riches collections of works of design as a matter of course? - Yes.

Q.1288. ... [In Birmingham, said Dawson,] the materials have always been good, but the forms have been formerly rough and coarse; the continental manufacturers have always excelled in that.

Q.1290. Have you found that works on the principles of art have been much read or inquired for? - Yes, in towns where design is used. In Coventry, for example, where ribbon making is much carried on, it is of great importance.

This evidence reiterated the results of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacture (1835-6). This is not surprising in view of Ewart's chairmanship of both the inquiry into arts and manufacture, and of that into public libraries. Ewart was keenly aware of the importance of good design to the success of home manufacturers in international



competition; and was similarly knowledgeable of Britain's unfavourable standing in this regard. Like other 'gentlemen' of his time Ewart had undertaken a Grand Tour, on which he would have been able to note the supremacy of much foreign design. Moreover, the wealthy merchant family firm of Ewart, Myers and Co. "handled too many products of British factories and mills for Ewart to be unaware of contemporary standards".<sup>50</sup> Nor was he alone in his criticism of the neglect of design education. For, as Bell has written, when:

... it became clear to the manufacturers of textiles, ribbon, ornamental metal-work, paper hanging, furniture, pottery and many other varieties of fancy goods, that the customer did not want the product of British factories, despite their admitted technical excellence; when it became obvious also that employers were spending large sums on the importation of foreign designs and foreign artisans, the representatives of industry in the House of Commons were painfully interested.<sup>51</sup>

The Select Committee on Arts and Manufacture had given rise to a number of experiments aimed at improving standards of design. These included a new building for the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square (1838); a revitalised and more accessible British Museum; the establishment of municipal museums and art galleries; and schools of design assisted by central government. These initiatives represented an "exposure of the masses to works of art, on a scale which had only been previously available to the middle and upper classes".<sup>52</sup> In the 1830s and '40s the art education of the working classes was pursued with a "missionary-like fervour", to reduce the attachment of art education to "Conservative connoisseurship" and introduce into society a wider and heightened appreciation.<sup>53</sup>

The improvement and extension of artistic taste had a strong utilitarian dynamic. This assertion, taken at face value, appears to

be a contradiction in terms; scientific materialism being the antithesis of aesthetics. But the democratization of art - radicals like Ewart and Edwards hoped to break the monopoly of the British Academy<sup>54</sup> - and the anti-privilege aspects of utilitarianism were in truth highly compatible. In the laissez-faire tradition, it was argued that a freer circulation of art - a "universal cultivation" - would foster talent.<sup>55</sup> It mattered not that art would become cheaper as a result: for cheap art could also be good.<sup>56</sup> The idea that the "march of improvement" was now quicker, because of the "collision of mind with mind", was seen as wholly relevant to the sphere of art.<sup>57</sup>

Further, art education's material value in improving product design had implications for the social stability which utilitarianism predicted would flow from greater prosperity. Protectionists argued that free trade was a destabilizing influence. A petition in 1850 stated:

We humbly and respectfully submit ... that recent legislative measures have driven the industrial classes of our countrymen into an unequal and unjust competition with foreigners in the home market; which has occasioned grievous distress and excited great and general discontent, now rapidly ripening into disaffection ... by the 'Free Importation' of foreign commodities ... multitudes of artisans and labourers in this country, having lost their means of employment ... [are] driven on the Poor Rates - we seriously apprehend that they may, from destitution and despair, be induced to take proceedings dangerous to the existing institutions both in Church and State ... such flagrant injustice and oppression may at length become absolutely intolerable, and may, as we fear, lead to anarchy, and to all the horrors of a social revolution.<sup>58</sup>

The prospect of intensifying competition thus placed a premium on improving British manufactures. It is important to stress that the



Great Exhibition (1851) was not an unqualified success. As Richard Cobden remarked:

Did any reflecting man walk through the Great Exhibition without feeling that we are apt to be a little under a delusion as to the quality of men in other parts of the world, and their capacity to create these arts of utility of which we are apt to think sometimes we possess a monopoly of production in this country. I don't think we can wait.<sup>59</sup>

Such pleas to guard against commercial complacency were based on the fundamental belief that prosperous industrialism produced a civilized society. In 1848 one art journal predicted that everyone who visited the Great Exhibition:

... would see in its treasures the results of social order and reverence to the majesty of law .... Industry is the child of order, and a country will only prosper when the labourer is as strongly convinced of this fact as the employer.<sup>60</sup>

It is in this social stability context that the genesis of the public library should be seen. The Select Committee on Public Libraries, like the Great Exhibition, was characterized to a degree by a pessimistic perception of Britain's standing in the world, and the implications this had for domestic order. The Select Committee noted that the country's library provision was "unworthy of the power ... of the country".<sup>61</sup> This deficiency included a poor library provision for art education. The public library was presented as an institution which could remedy the narrow diffusion of art education - the latter thus became a recurrent theme in public library development. Not only were public libraries to run art classes;<sup>62</sup> they also provided illustrative material of direct relevance to workers whose trades included a design input. In 1871 it was stated that:

A very large proportion of the persons using both the [Birmingham] Reference Library and the Art Gallery are ... persons who copy from



books and works of art for sale and trade purposes.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1840s art was seen - perhaps more than now - as pertinent to the practicalities of life. Technical education was essentially art education; the term 'industrial art' was commonplace. What was said about art education was of relevance to technical education generally. Although the Select Committee on Public Libraries heard evidence that workers were little interested in trade books,<sup>64</sup> it was also told of the importance of books for trade purposes. Indeed, recent research has noted a demand for technical education (in terms of design knowledge) from workers shorn of technical skills by the specialization which industrialization encouraged.<sup>65</sup>

But the growing demand for technical education was derived not simply from a desire to increase personal or national prosperity; it was felt that the alienation brought about by specialized and monotonous work processes might be countered by restoring to workers a knowledge of stages in the production process other than those in which they worked. In this regard, technical education was of cultural, as well as of economic, importance. This was especially true of art education.

Edward Edwards, like Ewart, recognized the material value of art. At twenty-six Edwards produced what was, for his young age, an exhaustive and accomplished examination into "the state and prospects of painting, sculpture and architecture, in practice and in public appreciation - The Administrative economy of the fine arts (1840).<sup>66</sup> In this he stressed the necessity of good design in boosting demand for British manufacturers. "The prosperity of the manufacturers of this country", Edwards wrote, "depends on an improved taste in design characterising our productions and enabling them to compete in the markets with those of our neighbours."<sup>67</sup> He repeated this message to

the Select Committee on Public Libraries, arguing that the excellence of French designs was due to accessibility of books.<sup>68</sup> Yet, Edwards also believed in the ennobling influence of art. He urged that every individual should "minister to the craving intellect as well as the craving appetite, - to cultivate his moral being as well as his physical being"; in this regard, he argued, art appreciation was the "capacity of receiving cultivation by the perception of beauty in form and in colour".<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere he wrote that:

No augury can be more happy, if it be indeed a truth that the lore of the Beautiful in form and fitness which the Arts induce, carrieth its influence into daily life, and teacheth to see preferably the Beautiful and the Fit therein also.<sup>70</sup>

Ewart too looked beyond art's material value. He displayed a keen aesthetic appreciation of the fine arts.<sup>71</sup> He was aware of the cultural importance of the arts generally; he once said that he would "be gratified if, in a sordid age, when nothing but dividends and percentages absorbed men's minds, an opportunity could be given of inviting them to the more ennobling pursuits of literature".<sup>72</sup> He thought it a "mistake to think the mechanic's hand was employed more than his head".<sup>73</sup>

Because of its potential for cultural elevation, Edwards and Ewart urged that art be brought within the reach of the masses. Both joined the Art Union of London, established in 1837. Edwards became extremely active in the union, being for a time its Honorary Secretary.<sup>74</sup> The Union was a product of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacture which had advocated art unions on the German model.<sup>75</sup> The Union would purchase works and distribute them to subscribers. All purchases would later be shown at public exhibitions.<sup>76</sup> The ethos of the Union was that "every man has an interest in the highest possible prosperity of the



Fine Arts".<sup>77</sup> It was established to:

... extend a knowledge and love of art throughout all classes of society, and affect the highest interests of the community as well as the arts and manufactures of the kingdom. By placing specimens of good art within the reach of all, making the eye familiar with forms of beauty, the latter must necessarily be benefited. The great end of art, however, is to develop the mind, to refine and exalt it .... The elevation of art is but the means; the elevation of the mind is the end. The operation of our association is to advance art by the improvement of public taste, and to advance civilization by the improvement of art.<sup>78</sup>

This meeting of material and cultural objectives was set in a social stability context when the Union stated that by opening works of art:

... to the contemplation of the people will be found a powerful means of lessening such moral and intellectual difference as there may be between the upper and lower orders, not by injuring one but by improving the other. An acquaintance with works of art gives dignity and self-esteem to the operative, a matter of no slight value as regards the stability of society, besides making him a better workman; and furnishes him with delight, independence of position, calculated to purify and exalt.<sup>79</sup>

Such ideas on the social value of art - its role as a means of material advance juxtaposed with its capacity for ameliorating the social dangers inherent in materialism - can be applied equally to early proposals for public libraries. That Ewart and Edwards should have been involved with an organization like the Art Union of London is not surprising. They were at once men of culture and believers in scientific material progress.<sup>80</sup> This dual nature was reflected in the Select Committee on Public Libraries when it reported:

The great practical education of an Englishman is derived from the incessant intercourse between man and man in trade, and from the



interchange and collision of opinion elicited by our system of local 'self-government', both teaching him the most important of all lessons, the habit of self-control. But it would be wise to superadd to these rugged lessons of practical life some of the more softening and expanding influences which reading and which thought supply.<sup>81</sup>

Though utilitarianism dominated the Select Committee and the early public library debate, cultural concerns were not obscured. The public library question showed that utilitarianism was neither both purely atomistic or mechanistic, but was tinged by social awareness and a desire for spiritual uplift. This was evident in the quest to improve standards of taste - a quest in which the public library was avowedly involved.<sup>82</sup> Ewart hoped the public library would "promote the extension of solid learning and refined taste".<sup>83</sup> But what was meant by 'taste' in the context of the early public library? On the one hand, taste has been seen as 'intrinsic' and independent of reasoning. Value is of individual not social relevance; the evaluation of beauty and harmony is purely personal.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, taste has been ascribed a social utility; something which individuals can only be educated into. It also extends beyond the arts and comprehends "the whole circle of civility and good manners, and regulates life and conduct, as well as theory and speculation".<sup>85</sup> It has been seen as a civic virtue encompassing intellectual and social self-development. Taste in this regard is associated with social harmony and order. It was in this sense that early public library promoters spoke of taste.

Art has been highlighted in this chapter because artistic taste was in the 1840s part of a larger conception of taste connected with social stability. A discussion of the material and aesthetic aspects of art education has revealed the social stability aims of institutions, like the public library, which sought to further an appreciation of art.

The latter had a rich soil in which to grow. There existed a significant working class interest in art; even in classical art.<sup>86</sup> In 1849, at the opening of the Salford Museum and Library, one speaker said that "pictures were the poor man's books"; moreover, he was quite sure that the objects placed in the museum "would awaken the attention of the working classes, and lead them to use the library".<sup>87</sup> Public library enthusiasts were hopeful that other cultural interests would similarly take root and flourish. However, due to the public library's early utilitarian heritage it is to the institution's developing economic role that attention must now be turned.

## Notes and References to Chapter 7

1. Select Committee on Public Libraries, Report [including minutes and evidence] (1849), hereafter in these notes referred to as Report. The committee produced subsequent reports in 1850, 1851 and 1852. The reports of 1851 and 1852 were largely statistical in content, and are of little use here. The report of 1850 is noteworthy in that it contained further evidence from Edward Edwards, and from Antonio Panizzi (librarian of the British Museum) who had been enraged by Edward's criticism of the British Museum Reading Room expressed to the Select Committee in 1849.
2. T. Kelly, History of public libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975 (1977), p. 12 (note 3).
3. 'Free town libraries', Westminster Review, 42 (1872), p. 335.
4. The local tax charged in some areas, since 1845, for the provision of a museum had earned the derogatory title 'beetle rate'; evidence of George Dawson, Report, op. cit., Q. 1298. In debating the public library issue in the Commons in 1850 one Member "supposed they would be thinking [next] of supplying the working classes with quoits, peg-tops, and foot-ball"; Kelly, op.cit., p. 14. The Illustrated London News (18 May 1850) stated in respect of free libraries: "The education of the adult people by their own agency without the aid of government grants or the interference of officials and officious functionaries, is a result in the highest degree desirable, and will be one of the gratifying proofs of our advancing civilization." Finally, it is important to note that the 1850 Act was a diluted version of the original, more interventionist bill which had stipulated no minimum population level for a town to establish a library, and which had made no arrangements for a ratepayers poll on the issue; R.J.B. Morris, Parliament and the public libraries (1977), pp. 23-24.
5. D. Fraser, Power and authority in the Victorian city (Oxford, 1979), p. 6.
6. Ibid., p. 6.
7. W.A. Munford, William Ewart M.P. 1789-1869: portrait of a radical (1960), pp. 184-185.
8. Ibid., p. 131.
9. Letter from Ewart to Edwards (26 March 1849), printed in J.J. Ogle, 'Edwards and Ewart and the select committee on public libraries of 1849', Library Association Record, 1 (1899).
10. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 'Public libraries', in the Society's Companion to the British almanac; or, year-book of general information (1850), p. 53. In its 'Review of the report of the select committee on public libraries ...', the Athenaeum (1 September 1849) was equally enthusiastic; the report was said to be "one of the best blue-books connected with literature that Parliament has given to the public for a very long time".



11. Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, op. cit., p. 53.
12. See, for example, T. Kelly, 'Public libraries and public opinion', Library Association Record, 68 (1966). Kelly argues that the main motives of 1849-50 were moral and educational, and in that order. By late century, the argument continues, the same motives behind provision are clearly identifiable, but education had by then taken preference.
13. J.H. Wellard, Book selection (1937), p. 9. In Wellard's opinion, appeasing the masses was one of three main motives to be identified in the Select Committee's deliberations. On the other two motives he concurred with Kelly's moral and educational assessment; see note 12.
14. See, for example, T. Greenwood, Edward Edwards (1902).
15. T. Kelly, Early public libraries: a history of public libraries in Great Britain before 1850 (1966), p. 238. Similarly, W.J. Murison, The Public library: its origins, purpose and significance (1971), p. 79, writes of the Act's partiality as a weak foundation of the British public library system. P. Sykes, The Public library in perspective: its origins and modern role (1979), p. 33, has argued that the permissive nature of early legislation "served to emphasise the aura of impoverishment which enveloped the library service in its formative decades".
16. Report, op. cit., p. x.
17. Murison, op. cit., p. 50.
18. Report, op. cit., p. iii.
19. Ibid., p. iii.
20. Ibid., p. viii. It was anticipated (p. ix) that provincial free libraries would essentially be libraries of 'education', as opposed to national 'deposit' libraries of 'research'. However, the transfer of duplicates from 'deposit' to provincial libraries would bestow upon the recipients a partial 'research' status.
21. Ibid., p. xii.
22. Ibid., p. viii.
23. Ibid., p. viii.
24. Ibid., p. iii.
25. Ibid., p. vii.
26. Ibid., pp. vii and viii.

27. In an article about the Marylebone Free Library (not municipal) the Lady's Newspaper (14 January 1854) stated: "The advancement in the taste and knowledge of the working classes in this country is shown by the great improvement in the illustrations and matter of our cheap periodicals; and in the great demand for good and practical books, when the price comes at all within the means of the mass of English mechanics."
28. Report, op. cit., Q. 1276.
29. Ibid., p. viii.
30. In his essay 'Civilization' Mill warned that literature would become more ephemeral as the democratization of society proceeded, and as power drifted from individuals to the masses. To reverse the decadent trend affecting literature he appealed for "national institutions and forms of polity calculated to invigorate individual character". G.H. Bantock, The Minds of the masses 1760-1980 (Studies in the history of education theory, Vol. 2) (1984), p. 186.
31. Report, op. cit., Q. 2076.
32. Ibid., p. viii.
33. Ibid., Q. 2695-2698. For a description of the social problems affecting early nineteenth century Spitalfields see P. McCann, 'Popular education, socialization and social control', in P. McCann, Popular education and socialization in the nineteenth century (1977), pp. 2-5. Spitalfields was characterized by economic distress, great numbers of weaving poor, a high and increasing density of population, a high incidence of juvenile delinquency, and a declining allegiance to the church. From the 1820s an 'islanded' bourgeoisie existed in perpetual fear of insurrection. William Lovett was asked if he knew of a liking for French novels among the working classes, and if he thought "useful publications" would reduce the circulation of "immoral and anti-social publications"; Report, op. cit. Q. 2814 and 2818.
34. It was argued that public funding would not attract religious or political animosity because free libraries would not stock controversial material; Report, op. cit., p. x. The Mechanics' Institute manager John Langley reminded the committee that religion and politics were largely excluded from Mechanics' Institutes; Report, op. cit., Q 2452.
35. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 109 (1850), Col. 847.
36. Ibid., Col. 846. In the same debate (Col. 841) Brotherton said public libraries would "provide the cheapest police that could be established".
37. Report, op. cit., p. xiv. The Report (p. viii) also stated that: "There can be no greater proof of the fitness of the people for these institutions than their own independent efforts to create



them." An increasing desire for self-education in many poorer areas was also noted; p. vii.

38. Times (4 September 1852).
39. The former librarian of Yale related how in the U.S.A. book donations were commonplace; Report, op. cit., Q. 1662. The Report (p. x) stated that the public library was "one of those cases in which a comparatively small aid may accomplish a large proportion of public good". The Times (7 April 1854) referred to the 1850 Act as the "point of the wedge" in terms of mounting library legislation. The Athenaeum (18 March 1854) stated that: "A Free Public Library in every large parish will soon be considered as much a necessity as the baker's shop."
40. See the evidence of E.R.P. Colles of the Royal Dublin Society; Report, op. cit., Q. 2844-2848. The Report (p. iv) stressed the greater accessibility of libraries on the continent.
41. See especially the evidence of Samuel Smiles. Charles Dawson testified that the self-education which libraries gave was more valuable than taught education; Report, op. cit., Q. 1309. G. Jones, Political and social factors in the advocacy of 'free' libraries in the United Kingdom 1801-1922 (unpublished Ph.D., University of Strathclyde, 1971), p. 134, has observed that the Select Committee was "a body comprising industrialists, career politicians, litterateurs, an ex-officer, the son of a trader, and a child of the working class ... a significant proportion of the membership of the committee, either in their own persons, or in their family annals, exemplified the social mobility possible through study and application".
42. The London missionary Charles Corkran spoke of the existence of cheap publications which touched upon the question of labour, and the relationship between master and men; Report, op. cit., Q. 2698. Charles Dawson explained how free libraries could aid balanced political analysis and help reject demagogy; Report, op. cit., Q. 1266, 1318-1320 and 1323-1327.
43. Report, op. cit., p. xi. For Meyer's full evidence concerning the Hamburg Commercial Library see Report, op. cit., Q. 2159-2169 and 2208-2212. Further information is given by C.W. Black, 'Commercial libraries', International Library Review, 5 (1973), p. 96. Hamburg's commercial library was established in 1735 - it is the earliest recorded institution of its kind - as a supplement to the town's main library. It became, and it is now, the library of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce. Edward Edwards described it to the Select Committee as "a model of what a library upon commerce ought to be". A similar local chamber of commerce library was established in Bordeaux in 1845 and opened to the public in 1854.
44. Report, op. cit., p. xi.
45. Ewart's question to the Italian librarian W. Libri; Report, op. cit., Q. 1920.



46. Report, op. cit., p. xi.
47. Ibid., p. xi.
48. Ibid., p. xi.
49. Ibid., Q. 2503-2504.
50. Munford, William Ewart, op. cit., p. 77. Greenwood, in his biography of Edwards, op. cit., p. 15, described Ewart's father as a "well-to-do representative of the yeoman class". Arguably, he was more than this. The son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister, he began as an apprentice to a firm of cotton manufacturers, but eventually built up one of the largest merchant enterprises in Liverpool.
51. Q. Bell, Schools of design (1963), p. 46.
52. B. Denvir, The Early nineteenth century: art, design and society, 1789-1852 (1984), p. 18.
53. Ibid., pp. 207 and 216.
54. See, for example, E. Edwards, A Letter to Sir Martin Archer Shee on the reform of the Royal Academy (1839).
55. Art Union of London, Annual Report (1852), pp. 11-12.
56. Art Union of London, Annual Report (1846), p. 15.
57. The Art Union Monthly Journal of the Arts, 10 (1848), p. 5.
58. National Association for the Protection of Industry and Capital throughout the British Empire, Form of address [to the Queen] recommended by the National Association (1850).
59. Quoted in D.K. Jones, The Making of the education system 1851-1881 (1977), p. 2.
60. Art Union Monthly Journal of the Arts, 10 (1848), p. 5. The Exhibition itself became a symbol of a new respect for order. The Art Journal, 3 (1851), p. 293, stated: "I know no higher test of civilization than this; that a woman, neither of robust health nor intrepid spirit, could, without a moments hesitation, go alone in the midst of 100,000 people of every class; certain of civility, order, decorum, and if it were needed, protection."
61. Report, op. cit., p. xiv.
62. E.J. Hunter, The Role of the public library in the development of technical education in Great Britain and Ireland during the nineteenth century (unpublished M.A., University of Sheffield, 1973).
63. The Sunday question again: shall the free libraries and the art gallery be open on a Sunday? (Birmingham, 1871), p. 10. Librarians

were to show persistent interest in the provision of materials for art education. One question in the Library Association's professional exams in 1909 asked entrants to: "Describe the ways in which collections of pictures may be helpful to readers", Library Association Year Book (1909), p. 84. The Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 31, said pictures of authors and their hounts was a "direct and simple method of developing literary skill".

64. Report, op. cit., Q. 1754-1755 and 2425.
65. T. Kusamitsu, British industrialization and design 1830-1851 (unpublished Ph.D., University of Sheffield, 1982). This thesis argues that a de-skilling of workers due to the Industrial Revolution was a main reason for the growth of design education between 1830 and 1850: for example, in Mechanics' Institutes, Schools of Design and through Industrial Exhibitions.
66. Edwards sent copies of his book to a number of friends. One wrote back saying he was "glad that the subject has met with so able and judicious an advocate. That the Book will do much good to the cause [i.e. of the arts] I cannot doubt and that the learning and research you have bestowed on it may be duly appreciated by the public." Letter from Henry Hayward to Edwards (12 August 1840) in Letters to Edward Edwards, Vol. 6 (1839-1849); Manchester Public Library Archives.
67. E. Edward, The Administrative economy of the fine arts (1840), p. 325.
68. Report, op. cit., Q. 3396.
69. Edwards, The Administrative economy, op. cit., p. 36.
70. Edwards, Letter to ... Shee, op. cit., p. 13.
71. According to his great grandson, also named William Ewart, the public library pioneer collected a sizeable library of books on art and architecture, a collection now dispersed; interviewed August 1988. The unpublished Ewart family records (items 55 and 58) contain three small travel diaries (1821-1822) and two large diaries (of Ewart's Grand Tour) which contain highly detailed descriptions of artefact and building design, and some sketches by Ewart of architecture and people.
72. 'The Public library movement in London ...' (1894), newspaper cutting, source unknown; Croydon Public Library Cuttings (1894-1900), p. 40.
73. Unpublished notebook on the import and export trade 1828-1833, Ewart family records, item 56.
74. Edwards' brother-in-law, Henry Hayward, was a prime mover of the union; Greenwood, op. cit., p. 13. It is possible that Edwards was also a joint founder, along with the architect George Godwin;



- Ogle, op. cit., p. 623. Edwards' heavy involvement can be judged from his numerous Art Union correspondence included in Letters to Edward Edwards, Vol. 4 (1833-1837) and Vol. 5 (1838-1839); Manchester Public Library Archives.
75. W.A. Munford, Edward Edwards 1812-1886: portrait of a librarian (1963), p. 23.
  76. The Art Union [of London], Report on the meeting of 21 March 1837 to establish such a society (1837), p. 2. The Union described itself as "a society for the advancement of the fine arts".
  77. Ibid., p. 3.
  78. Art Union of London, Annual Report (1846), pp. 13-14.
  79. Art Union of London, Annual Report (1851), p. 10.
  80. Ewart wrote in his notebook (unpublished) on the import and export trade (1828-1833) that: "Commerce assists and profits by discoveries in Science"; Ewart family records, item 56.
  81. Report, op. cit., p. vii.
  82. Report, op. cit., Q. 1933-1936; to the Italian librarian Libri. Ogle, op. cit., p. 623, has pointed out that the forerunner of the public Libraries Act, the legislation on free museums in 1845, had resulted from a meeting held in 1844 (which the library enthusiast Joseph Brotherton attended) to discuss means of improving popular taste.
  83. Letter from Ewart to Sir John Potter (Mayor of Manchester) (15 August 1852). Sir John Potter, Autograph Letters Collection, Vol. 1; Manchester Public Library Archives.
  84. G. Tonelli, 'Taste in the history of aesthetics from the Renaissance to 1770', in Dictionary of the history of ideas (New York, 1973), p. 353.
  85. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury writing in 1831, quoted in B. Denvir, The Eighteenth century: art, design and society 1689-1789 (1983), p. 63.
  86. P.J. Anderson, 'Pictures for the people: Knight's "Penny Magazine", an early venture into popular education', Studies in Art Education, 28:3 (Spring 1987). J. Seed, 'Commerce and the liberal arts: the political economy of art in Manchester 1773-1860', in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), The Culture of capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class (Manchester, 1988), p. 63, has argued: "Art was everywhere in Manchester by the mid-nineteenth century." A particular working-class favourite was the 'penny portrait' or 'good likeness' (pp. 64-65). Janetta Manners in her Some of the advantages of easily accessible reading and recreation rooms and free libraries (1885), p. 43, wrote that: "The love of the poorer classes for pictures and illustrations is well known."
  87. Report on the opening of the Salford Museum and Library (1849).



PART TWO

DEVELOPMENT 1850-1914

## Chapter Eight

### ECONOMIC CONCERNS

In Part One it was shown how the public library ideal was nurtured in its embryonic stages by utilitarian-inspired efforts. Utilitarianism offers a theory explaining early development. Moreover, the momentum which utilitarianism provided meant that facets of the philosophy frequently surfaced in the public library debate - for not only was there considerable opposition to public libraries but vigorous discussion within the movement concerning objectives and methods - throughout the pre-1914 period. Indeed, it is argued that the utilitarian heritage has informed even modern librarianship philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

#### Useful Knowledge<sup>2</sup>

The quest for utility in terms of material gain was an enduring theme strengthening the public library after 1850. Propagandists constantly stressed the tangible benefits which library use would bestow. During an adoption campaign in Clerkenwell in 1887 a local clergyman declared that a public library for the area would give residents "something by which they might benefit themselves, materially and morally".<sup>3</sup> Of these two benefits library historians have said more about the latter: materialist objectives and achievements have been largely ignored. Why? One answer is that the positive notion of material gain has traditionally been eclipsed by the negative view of the public library as a provider of non-utilitarian, merely recreational materials for the few from the taxation of the many. The most vehement attack on the public library in the nineteenth century was set in this interventionist context. M.D. O'Brien's essay on free libraries in

T. Mackay's A Plea for Liberty: an argument against socialism and socialist legislation (1892) defined them as "Socialist continuation schools".<sup>4</sup> They were institutions where knowledge was at a discount and sensation at a premium: the question was whether ratepayers should subsidize sensation and amusement which people could afford from their own pockets.

It is important to note that the introduction to the book in which O'Brien's essay appeared was written by Herbert Spencer, whose widely read treatise Education (1861)<sup>5</sup> had posed the question: 'What education is most worth?', to which he answered 'Science'. Spencer accepted that all subjects had some value but argued that there had been in the past too much emphasis on things which "constitute the efflorescence of civilization", and too little on the education which taught individuals their daily business (which invariably had a scientific basis) for self-preservation.<sup>6</sup>

Spencer's Education displayed a "cocksureness about the Victorian gospel of science".<sup>7</sup> However, his deep-seated belief that "the value of a subject depended on its real use in life"<sup>8</sup> - that a subject gained in educational value as it aimed in practical value - sat uneasily beside his traditional utilitarian distaste for state intervention. In his social Darwinist oriented Man versus the State (1884) he equated collectivism with socialism and the latter, because society became the owner of the individual, with slavery.<sup>9</sup> Yet, to be propagated effectively - as the German and, indeed, the British experience had shown - scientific knowledge required a measure of state action. This line of reasoning was pursued in the late nineteenth century by a new generation of economists such as Alfred Marshall and the public library supporter Stanley Jevons who challenged classical laissez-faire doctrine and acknowledged the role of the state in increasing social utility in



areas such as housing, public health and education.<sup>10</sup>

In his widely acclaimed essay The Rationale of free public libraries (1881) Jevons reiterated the public library's place in a utilitarian tradition by arguing:

The main raison d'être of the Public Libraries, as indeed of Public Museums, Art Galleries, Parks, Town Halls, Public Clocks, and many other kinds of Public Works, is the enormous increase of public utility which is thereby acquired for the community at a trifling cost.<sup>11</sup>

He applied to free libraries "the principle of the multiplication of utility": books shared were more useful than books confined to a single owner. Jevons explained that in areas like communal ownership of literature state intervention facilitated a "multiplication of utility", thereby delivering the utilitarian aim of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number".

A modern commentator on public library history has misinterpreted the 'multiplication of utility' principle as the process whereby an input multiplies production: that is to say, books, like machines, produce increased economic activity and wealth.<sup>12</sup> This is not surprising in view of contemporary opinion on public libraries as investments for material gain. The public library supporter Sir John Lubbock explained in 1892: "As a mere matter of pounds, shillings and pence ... it was clear that books and education were an investment, not an expense".<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a proponent of a proposed library for Widnes described in 1885 how:

Widnes was a town which essentially depended for its prosperity and development upon the growth of knowledge .... In considering this question they should look at it not immediately from a pounds, shillings and pence point of view; for if they wished to see the town grow and prosper it became essential that the residents should have every possible opportunity

of extending their knowledge. Literature, both scientific, historic and poetic, should be readily available.<sup>14</sup>

Not only was it said that library expenditure would repay itself in generating wealth,<sup>15</sup> but it became a cliché of the public library movement that money spent on libraries would be money saved "in the reduction of poor rates and Government expenditure on crime [for example, gaols]".<sup>16</sup> A lecture in favour of a public library in Lambeth in 1886 was entitled 'Crime and Culture: Which Costs the Most'.<sup>17</sup>

Pre-1914 public library enthusiasts never doubted the direct economic return their institution made. The librarian Stanley Jast could not understand "pre-eminently 'practical' people" who believed that "the movements of the great world of intellect have little or no practical importance". They had failed to learn, said Jast, "one of the great fundamental facts in the history of man ... that the world in which they wholly live, a world of material events, is in truth only the body of the intellectual world".<sup>18</sup> Jast was correct in arguing that the public library purveyed literary knowledge which was both directly pertinent and indirectly beneficial to economic activity: it was an agency which provided 'useful' knowledge for an expanding industrial capitalism.

### Economic Decline

It is no coincidence that interest in the public library escalated as anxieties over the nation's economic future grew markedly from the 1870s onwards. The high number of adoptions of the legislation for public libraries in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods was to a considerable extent the result of perceived national economic problems. Economic historians have previously described a post-1870 worsening in

Britain's economic performance in relation to both her own record and the performance of competitors. The high rates of growth which marked the 1850s and 1860s, it is said, fell away in the 1870s: 1873 is seen as a key year in this regard.<sup>19</sup> Particularly worrying was the progress made by international rivals, as reflected in Britain's weakening position in world trade. Between 1870 and 1913 Britain's share of world trade declined from 31.8 per cent to 14 per cent, whilst in the same period that of Germany and the United States increased from 13.2 per cent to 15.7 per cent and from 23.3 per cent to 35.8 per cent, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Such statistics have been taken at face value by some historians to indicate national economic failure.<sup>21</sup> However, this received image has been questioned. Analysis of decline is too often set in the 'might have been' school of history; the perfect 'alternative road' not being clearly delineated.<sup>22</sup> It has also been argued that the notion of a late nineteenth century black-spot has arisen partly from the lack of data for earlier periods.<sup>23</sup> Because the performance of early industrialism - even the mid-Victorian economy - cannot be assessed with sufficient accuracy, the benchmark against which the late Victorian economy is measured is unreliable. Notions of failure would thus be exaggerations. Moreover, even if expansion in early periods was much more rapid it is perhaps unreasonable to measure late nineteenth century performance against what was possibly an unprecedented phenomenon in Britain's economic history. "In the last resort", explains Saul:

maybe we ought to rethink the whole nature of Britain's development over the last two centuries. Possibly we must come round to accepting that the upsurge of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century was the unique feature in Britain's economic development.<sup>24</sup>

The late Victorian and Edwardian economy was certainly no desert.



Mechanization is a case in point. The rapid spread of the steam engine after 1870 should be noted.<sup>25</sup> Contemporaries believed mechanization was high on the industrial agenda:

In the working out of the greater problems of industrial effort which now present themselves for solution we may, perhaps, achieve the lead, as we have done before, but we should be all the stronger for giving closer attention than we have done to improvements in detail, and to labour-saving contrivances in particular, mechanical or otherwise.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the range of technological advance widened considerably for example, the development of steam turbines (which revolutionized shipping); the internal combustion engine; improvements on the railways; high precision engineering (of particular relevance to machine-tools); higher grade steel; synthetic dyes and drugs; and electrical power. All of these advances encouraged a spread of machinery and a decay of the hand trades.<sup>27</sup> Some, such as electricity, made for a movement away from a reliance on staple industries (though these remained dominant). Electricity wrought industrial change and built confidence:

In the application of electricity generally Great Britain has lagged behind, but present indications would seem to promise that in the near future this cause of reproach will be removed.<sup>28</sup>

Where new technologies were applied to older industries this often meant a diversification in products.<sup>29</sup> These instances of mechanization and technological advance belie accusations of failure. If entrepreneurs chose not to innovate this did not mean they had failed. Rather they were acting rationally, seeking and perhaps achieving cost minimization in industries which they believed offered adequate rates of return on investment - in some key sectors of the late Victorian economy profits

held up well.<sup>30</sup>

Though Britain lagged behind Germany and the United States in many areas this should not obscure the fact that significant change was occurring in the British economy in the half century before the First World War, but with variations of pace among different sectors of industry and regions. Thus, failure is not a word which describes accurately Britain's economic problems of the period. It is more appropriate to speak of anxieties sensed by contemporaries. These grew not from any concrete perception of past growth rates but from the challenge being mounted by international competitors. Even the distortion of hindsight cannot deny the international challenge, unlike images of failure, as a fact of Britain's economic past. These assertions are supported by the utterances of the public library movement on the question of economic malfunction. Enthusiasts who saw an economic role for the public library spoke less in terms of absolute decline relative to past epochs than confidently examining means of checking disadvantageous foreign competition. As Greenwood wrote in 1887:

The national need is that we be not placed at any disadvantage in the neck-and-neck race of competition with the Germans and the Americans, which has become inevitable .... National sentiment alone should lead every town and large rural district where a Free Library does not already exist, to at once see about the adoption of the Act.<sup>31</sup>

The foreign trade menace provided a context for many public library developments. Two can be mentioned here.

A public library was proposed in Oldham in 1881 for the specific reason of countering foreign competition in manufactures. The library committee considered that:

Oldham is probably the largest Town in England without its Free Library .... If we are to keep pace with the intellectual progress of other manufacturing Towns on the Continent of Europe and America, we must neglect no means of cultivation or improvement, nor must we complain of the cost of attaining them.<sup>32</sup>

It is noteworthy that the public library opened in Oldham in tandem with an Industrial Exhibition promoting the quality of British engineering and design. Moreover, sections of the museum (which was in the same building as the library) were to be given over to a permanent display of industrial wares.

In 1907 in Manchester local businessmen and industrialists, organized by the Chamber of Commerce, formed a deputation to interview the Free Libraries Committee in an "endeavour to establish a complete expert branch of the free libraries replete with up-to-date information on the position of all the industrial arts dependent upon scientific knowledge".<sup>33</sup> Members of the deputation were drawn from the chemical and engineering sections of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Society of Chemical Industry, the Manchester Gas Engineers Association and the Manchester Chemical Club; whilst generally it was said to command the support of "many bodies interested in science, chemistry, geology, electrical and general engineering, and other industries".<sup>34</sup>

The effort was mounted against a backcloth of anxiety over German competition, coverage of which permeated the pages of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce's Monthly Record. The previous year (i.e. 1906) was described in one issue as the moment when the German trade challenge had reached its zenith: "the high-water mark in the economic development of the German nation".<sup>35</sup> Amongst other materials the deputation called for an increase in the number of technical



journals (and their location in a separate department) taken by Manchester's central library. Comparison was made with such provision in the United States. It was reported by the Chamber of Commerce that the New York Public Library took 6,000 periodicals (many technical) per annum compared with Manchester's 370.<sup>36</sup> Technical data, it was said, was essential to meet the German challenge. However, even the spectre of German European economic hegemony, as raised by Manchester's commercial and industrial community in 1907, was not enough to force the establishment of a separate technical library; the library committee arguing that technical literature in existing reference services was sufficient.<sup>37</sup> Businessmen had to wait until the First World War for a separate technical library.

#### Technical Education

Technical education was a prime concern of the pre-1914 public library. Its role in this respect had legislative backing.<sup>38</sup> The 1855 Public Libraries Act allowed for the provision of science and art classes subsidised by the Department of Science and Art, established 1853 (the Select Committee on Public Libraries, 1849, it should be recalled, dealt extensively with the importance of library lectures). This power was reiterated in the Public Libraries Act (1884). The Technical Instruction Act (1889) (allowing local authorities to raise a local rate for technical education provision) was adopted by many library authorities; in areas where library committees were already providing technical education classes the relief on the library rate was considerable. In a large number of cases - around 100 by 1901 - technical schools and public libraries shared the same premises.<sup>39</sup> However, the 1902 Education Act placed responsibility for all technical education in the hands of education committees. The public library thus

lost a role which it had been permitted to perform for half a century. Kelly has argued that this resulted in a loss of status.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the public library's image continued to benefit from the increasing emphasis on raising educational standards as a means of economic regeneration: the institution continued to be an important source of literature pertinent to economic activity.

Any explanation of Britain's post-1870 economic problems should be multi-causal incorporating not simply economic phenomena but an analysis of political and social institutions.<sup>41</sup> The social institution of education has thus provided one point of departure for economic historians. Specifically, technical education has been attributed a label of failure similar to that posted on the post-1870 economy.<sup>42</sup> Historians who have spoken in terms of general economic failure have referred in a derogatory fashion to the 'regulatory' nature of the British state, as compared to the concept of the 'development' state most closely associated with Germany. In other words, Britain did not achieve the level of state control conducive to economic stability.<sup>43</sup> Education - especially technical and scientific - is seen as one of the victims of disadvantageous regulatory control, one result of which was the failure to invest in innovative, high-yield, science-based industries such as electrical engineering, chemicals, dyestuffs, pharmaceuticals, glass optics and scientific instruments.

A mature industrial economy, it is argued, cannot function efficiently without adequate educational and research provision. It is claimed that human capital formation, defined as "investment by individuals in their own education and training, and by states, firms and other institutions in the provision of education and training facilities", is as important as gross domestic fixed capital formation (for example, machinery and buildings) in determining economic growth.<sup>44</sup>



A low level of Research and Development is offered as an important factor in understanding poor British export and productivity performances of the past.<sup>45</sup> Yet a correlation between education and research on the one hand, and economic performance on the other is uncertain.<sup>46</sup> In modern times, for example, a relatively strong Research and Development input has not guaranteed satisfactory economic growth.<sup>47</sup> Historically, technical innovation could have been derived primarily from increased demand rather than educational advance.<sup>48</sup> The nature of demand is also a factor. In 1868 Jacob Behrens (a spokesman for the Associated Chambers of Commerce) informed a committee on scientific instruction:

It is perfectly true that in some, even in most, instances the superiority of foreign produce may consist merely in a more careful attention to what we are here too much in the habit of considering small matters. Sometimes it is in the finish, or a closer study of each country's peculiar taste or special requirements.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, it is possible that industrial progress has depended as much on low wage costs and periods of peaceful industrial relations as on scientific advance: the report of the Select Committee on Scientific Instruction (1868) argued that these were the major reasons why European rivals were progressing so quickly.<sup>50</sup>

Notwithstanding the lack of evidence linking educational advance with economic growth, technical education came to be seen by many in the late nineteenth century as important to economic regeneration. "What England seems to need most," observed a writer on industry in 1904, "is a quickened activity and a higher technical skill."<sup>51</sup> In an 1892 Oldham library lecture it was argued that technical education was a replacement for a decline in apprenticeship - although in reality apprenticeship proved durable.<sup>52</sup> The Industrial Revolution, it was said, had poisoned



the close relationship between master and apprentice. Following the introduction of mechanized production, explained the lecturer:

Master and man in most trades belonged to quite a different rank, the master often being a wealthy man, and never entering his workshop. The apprentices or learners had to learn in the workshop, not from the master but from the workman alongside of them. The workman had no interest whatsoever in teaching the apprentice, and he was jealous of him as a competitor in the market in a few years .... Thus it followed that the old system of apprenticeship had been killed in great part by wholesale manufacture. Therefore, as the wholesale system had ruined apprenticeships, they must enrich and make effective apprenticeships by giving education wholesale instead of retail.<sup>53</sup>

Such arguments in favour of technical education, as a means of replacing the decline in traditional means of training, were no doubt compelling.

But there was also considerable opposition to technical education. In industry it was widely viewed as expensive, a viewpoint possibly derived from the atomistic nature of British industry, characterized as it was by small enterprises operating in a highly competitive environment with constant pressure on profit margins.<sup>54</sup> Some employers believed technical education encouraged those engaged in it to share with others the technical secrets of their own enterprise.<sup>55</sup> Workers of independent character, it was said, rejected its supposed association with charity.<sup>56</sup> Many trade unions objected to technical education because it was seen as mostly beneficial to employers; only craft unions welcomed it as a means of replacing lost skills.<sup>57</sup>

The extent of opposition to technical education is a possible reason why historians have perceived it as having failed. Because it has been considered to be a key factor in economic performance it is easy to see how the notion of technical education deficiency was applied to explanations of economic decline. This is not surprising given that

some contemporaries not only objected to technical education per se, but viewed that current provision was inadequate: it was based on deficient elementary education; evening classes meant irregular attendance by weary workers; and teaching was deficient.<sup>58</sup> But failure can only be determined in relation to some conception of what is success. The benchmark against which British technical education was measured was the German system. Stanley Jast declared in 1903 that unlike Germany we only 'play' at technical education.<sup>59</sup> The place given to science in German education was widely admired. With regard to higher scientific research this admiration was perhaps valid.<sup>60</sup> However, in respect of non-university science and technical education there is little evidence to suppose that the German model was the one which Britain should have emulated. Misplaced admiration of the entire German technical-scientific establishment was perhaps the product of xenophobic fears of increasing German power (and the accompanying Anglo-German antagonism) in the military and international political fields.<sup>61</sup>

The type of technical education (as opposed to higher scientific research and learning) provided in Germany was of a 'general' nature. Floud has distinguished between 'general' and 'specific' approaches to technical training.<sup>62</sup> The former is defined as the assimilation of skills which are transportable: a worker's knowledge is not confined to the operating processes of one firm. 'Specific' training, on the other hand, describes the assimilation of skills applicable to a specific job and firm. 'Specific' training was a characteristic of the United States where apprenticeship (which was not narrow, but bestowed a wide range of skills) was weak and the 'American System' of specialized machinery widespread. 'General' training was a characteristic of Germany, where technical education was compulsory, and where duly assimilated skills



could be practised in any firm - though there was specialization in terms of the categorization of institutions by trade. Britain, Floud argues, fell somewhere between these two extremes. Contrary to widely held belief, apprenticeship persisted, thereby giving workers a wide range of skills and flexibility. To this manual proficiency was added part-time education in theory. Such education was attractive in that it entailed no formal qualifications. These were in any case unnecessary as there were no formal barriers to vertical mobility, 'time-serving' being an important factor in promotion. Yet 'specific' skills were not neglected, but continued to be taught in the workshop.

This 'middle way' was conducive to producing highly motivated, promotion seeking, intelligent yet practical workers: it was these who formed the supervisory grades which, being endowed with both 'general' and 'specific' skills, were of substantial benefit to the industries in which they worked. Whereas Britain might have been less successful than Germany in higher scientific fields, at lower levels (particularly intermediate) late Victorian and Edwardian technical education cannot be classed a failure. As More has written: "contrary to what is sometimes said or implied by historians, Britain provided more technical education for more workers than most countries did".<sup>63</sup> The result of the British system was a steady supply of proficient foremen, overseers and lesser managers. The need for these was noted at the time:

... the great aim of a system of Technical Education whatever system be adopted, must be to pick out the best men, and so train them that they be fitted for responsible positions, foremen, overmen, and the like. It is a universal cry, both from masters and men, that there is a want of good foremen. The employer suffers from scamped work and wasted material, while the men feel they are put under control of one who is selected because he is a good 'slave driver', as they say, not because he is the



most competent man to plot out the work,  
and to supervise its execution.<sup>64</sup>

Employers acknowledged the efficacy of good supervision and so keenly sought workers with such skills.<sup>65</sup>

But theoretical technical education did not just produce intelligent industrial supervisors. Many workers in industries, such as gas and electricity, even if they did not achieve substantial promotion, needed to know the theoretical basis of currents and pressures.<sup>66</sup>

Further, theoretical technical education served the rapidly growing white collar occupations - clerks as a percentage of the occupied population increased from 2.9 per cent to 4.6 per cent between 1881 and 1911.<sup>67</sup> The clerks who flocked to enrol in evening classes assimilated theoretical knowledge which was at once eminently practical in developing the mental faculties appropriate to their work - though commercial subjects like shorthand and bookkeeping, it should be added, had little theoretical content.<sup>68</sup>

In the light of these arguments the theoretical content of British technical education is not a cause of regret. Those who framed the Technical Instruction Act (1889) knew exactly what they were aiming at - and its value. Before 1900 the term 'technical instruction' meant the teaching of principles; 'technical education' implied the transmission of practical skills specific to a particular job; that is to say, purely vocational learning. In the twentieth century the meanings have been transposed.<sup>69</sup> Late nineteenth century public opinion was confused over the matter. If a definition of technical education was requested from the average citizen, proposed the English Mechanic in 1887:

The answer which will be given with some hesitation will probably have some not very distinct reference to instruction in

the use of tools ... or will, perhaps, be some mention of chemistry, or other branch of science, or, as a final resort, 'something to meet the German competition'.<sup>70</sup>

Such confusion did not characterize technical education legislators in 1889: 'instruction' stood for theory, and the latter for value. As early as 1868 evidence had been given to the Select Committee on Scientific Instruction on the value of principles in learning:

I should be the last to say that philosophy without practice, was the needful thing, but neither is practice without principles; indeed I believe that the need now felt is for instruction in the 'principles' of science. Practice is learnt empirically, but the principles, the laws of nature and their relations to each other, are not taught in the workshop or laboratory, and are not understood. The need is disguised when people talk of 'technical education'; it is not education in 'technicalities' which is wanted, this is learnt during apprenticeship, but education in the principles which are practically applied, but not understood, and, therefore, not made the most of.<sup>71</sup>

This advice was adopted in the 1889 Act which allowed rates to be spent on: "instruction in the principles of science and art applicable to industries".<sup>72</sup>

The theoretical nature of technical education as defined by legislators and as taught in practice meant that it was essentially a form of secondary education. As much as for their intrinsic value science subjects were promoted as: "the best discipline in observation and collection of facts, in the combination of inductive with deductive reasoning, and in the accuracy of both thought and language".<sup>73</sup>

Technical education also helped to foster reading skills irrespective of content. As the librarian W.E.A. Axon wrote:

The object of reading is not simply to get information, to stuff your mind with crude facts; it is to train your mental faculties



so as to have them always obedient to the word of order, and ready at any time to perform any duty you may impose upon them. This can only be done by mental discipline, whether by the study of classic literature, or of English literature, or of history, or of ethics, or of political economy, or of natural science or of mathematics.<sup>74</sup>

By building on elementary education skills, therefore, technical education enlarged the constituency of intelligent workers: "an intelligent artisan is always preferable to an ignorant one", a textile manufacturer informed the Technical Instruction Committee in 1884.<sup>75</sup>

In 1901 Quentin Hogg (founder of the Polytechnic movement) urged upon workers to put intelligence as well as power into their work: "There was a time when the workman were called *hands* but the time was coming when they would be called *heads*".<sup>76</sup> Further, intelligence can produce adaptability and receptiveness to new ideas. Theoretical technical education made for flexibility in a workforce subjected to recurring division of labour; Adam Smith had advocated education as an antidote to the narrow-mindedness of manufacturing employment in his Wealth of nations (1776).<sup>77</sup> Hence, at the Manchester Technical Schools annual prize-giving, Sir Philip Magnus urged that:

... the artisan student must look to technical education to correct the personally injurious effects of the increasing development of division of labour in every trade .... Emerson has well said that by division of labour 'the art is improved, the individual is deteriorated. The incessant repetition of the same handiwork dwarfs the man, robs him of his strength, wit and versatility. Efforts should be made to develop individualism.' It is in the technical school that individualism is encouraged as a set-off to the socialism of the factory. In the technical school, the intelligence is cultivated as supplementary to the mechanical training of the workshop.<sup>78</sup>

The development of the public library before 1914, in terms of its economic role, is made understandable by the preceding discussion



on technical education.

Public libraries, like technical education, were seen as receiving inadequate attention from the state in the fight for economic survival. An article in Greater Britain in 1891 called for state aid for public libraries, and noted:

The English, we must admit, are a commercial nation, and England's position as a nation is due to her trade. Now we are being outrun by other nations, and if England is to hold her place among the leading powers of the world, she must adapt a complete system of education of which public libraries are the 'sheet anchor'.<sup>79</sup>

Education was at the time considered essential for economic regeneration.

A pro-public library circular in Lewisham in 1896 announced:

In our ceaseless competition with foreign nations it is our duty, if we do not wish to fall behind in the race, to provide the very best opportunities for people of all classes in the matter of self-education, and for the acquisition of useful information.<sup>80</sup>

Scientific and technical education was especially attractive in this regard. In opening the Eastbourne Public Library and Technical

Institute in 1904 the Duke of Devonshire asserted that "it is through the study of science that we alone can hope to maintain our national progress and prosperity".<sup>81</sup>

A Bermondsey worker in 1900 went as far as to produce a "beautiful and perfectly finished model of Bermondsey Public Library": it was explained that England was behind Germany in technical education; but such latent talent could be developed by the greater opportunities which the public library offered.<sup>82</sup>

The public library provided the materials which complemented the theoretical nature of technical education (though some materials, notably for art and design, had practical uses).<sup>83</sup> True, a municipal library could sometimes be a dumping ground for literature not required

elsewhere<sup>84</sup>: the librarian F.T. Barrett called for "the most liberal and comprehensive admission and preservation of the waifs and strays, the flotsam and jetsam of literature".<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence to support the argument that the public library was a crucial compendium of technical education provision. Beyond the fact that some public libraries provided their own theoretical class instruction,<sup>86</sup> their major role was to supply the books and periodicals which technical education students required. In 1904 the Library Association sent out a questionnaire to public libraries asking, amongst other things, how they encouraged serious reading.<sup>87</sup> Answers to this question highlighted the close relationship between public libraries and technical education institutions. Chelsea replied that "we are the library for the South West London Polytechnic Institute .... its teachers and its students are given special facilities". Camberwell related: "we assist students at our school of arts and crafts in every way. Technical and art works of a special character are provided, and full lists exhibited in the classrooms." Wimbledon answered: "There is close connection between the Technical Institute and the Library. Lists [of books] are exhibited in the Institute and the Teachers urge the students to make use of the library." It was said that the "junction of the library with the Technical School is ... a most fortunate arrangement: it strengthens both institutions".<sup>88</sup> It was also a necessary arrangement: few technical education institutions could afford their own libraries.<sup>89</sup> This was unlike Germany where libraries were attached to almost all the institutions for technical education.<sup>90</sup>

Technical literature in public libraries wasn't just for the enrolled student. Workers not taking courses were invited to use the library to keep abreast of developments in their trades.<sup>91</sup> In 1904 Bingley's librarian reported that books dealing with the town's trades



were occasionally exhibited, and when this happened: "typewritten invitations were posted in all the workshops asking those interested to come and examine their trade books". It was said that: "The manner in which these are appreciated has far more than exceeded our highest anticipations, especially for apprentices".<sup>92</sup> Propaganda supporting the campaign for a public library in York in 1881 promised that: "Artisans in every trade will enjoy the opportunity of reading the best books, and seeing the best papers bearing upon their particular handicrafts".<sup>93</sup> Thomas Greenwood believed apprentices, in particular, benefited from public libraries: "The arts and mysteries of manufacture are no longer taught by word of mouth alone ... the master workmen of the nineteenth century speak through books to all".<sup>94</sup>

Public library technical literature was also at the disposal of the professional. In his seminal paper on technical libraries, given to the 1903 Library Association Conference, Stanley Jast defined the technical library's constituency as wide, ranging from unskilled to professional workers: "the fully-fledged architect, or engineer, or anything else, must keep himself abreast of the literature of his profession or trade - the technical library will provide him with the means of doing so".<sup>95</sup> Aside from the professional societies it was believed that the public library was the best means of securing contact with recent literature on any trade.<sup>96</sup>

Technical literature was expensive. Proceeds from the public library rate allowed for only moderate expenditure in this direction. Between 1890 and 1902 some libraries received increased funds for technical purchases from the revenue (known as 'whisky-money') raised by the Local Taxation Act (1890) which placed a duty on spirits. Liverpool's first grant of 'whisky-money' was £1,500. Such sums were welcomed, but only twenty-six libraries, it should be noted, benefited



from 'whisky-money' in the twelve years it was available.<sup>97</sup> Yet, the supply of technical literature in public libraries should not be underestimated. A report prepared for the London County Council's Technical Education Board in 1896 revealed a widespread demand for technical materials (in London's public libraries at any rate) and, to an extent, this demand was met. The librarian J.D. Stewart stated in 1910:

Modern works on technical subjects of all sorts are receiving ever-increasing attention from the public libraries - in short, it is becoming recognised that there is a practical as well as a dilettante side to literature.<sup>98</sup>

He went on to list many libraries with a specialist technical collection. Some of the public libraries he noted are recorded here, along with their specialism:

Bermondsey (Spa Road)	Architecture
Poplar	Engineering and Shipbuilding
Finsbury	Metalwork, Watch/Clock Making
Wigan	Mining
Govan	Shipbuilding
Woolwich	Sociology
Bradford	Textile Manufacture
Nottingham	Textile Manufacture (i.e. Lace)
Rochdale	Textile Manufacture
Stalybridge	Textile Manufacture <sup>99</sup>

Even if public libraries did not specialise they often produced separate catalogues of the technical works they possessed.<sup>100</sup>

Given that technical literature consumption was not insignificant, what effect did this theoretical learning have beyond direct application to a trade? First, technical literature was an encouragement to reading.

This was particularly true of the lighter, popular technical and scientific journals. Sturges has argued that the public library's role in improving literacy was its major achievement: reading per se, whether technical literature or fiction, contributed to economic development even in such small matters as filling in forms or reading notices and advertisements.<sup>101</sup> Second, more intelligent and adaptable workers were produced. In opening the Eastbourne Public Library and Technical Institute Sir Gilbert Parker M.P. explained that information and knowledge were not an end in themselves, "they were only the materials for reason to work with".<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the librarian and technical educationalist J.J. Ogle believed the engineering classes and the literature his library supplied in Bootle did not teach a trade as much as broader skills like "care, accuracy, thought, possibly invention".<sup>103</sup> Third, to quote Ogle again, the teaching of broad principles which constituted technical education counteracted "the cramping effect on a workman's intelligence of the present day minute sub-division of labour".<sup>104</sup> Technical literature would help negate the monotony and narrow vision which slavery to a particular process brought with it. In this respect, the architect M.B. Adams - who knew well from his own professional experience the damage to creativity which division of labour wrought - was correct in identifying the public library's aim:

... to emancipate our workers from the growing tendency encouraged by divided labour, which reduces them to the level of unthinking machines. We must teach the artisan to think for himself by showing him how to develop his mind.<sup>105</sup>

Fourth, the very intelligence, flexibility and receptiveness to ideas mentioned above were characteristics of the supervisory grades who attended public libraries in not insignificant numbers. In 1881 a promoter of the public library's technical education role stated:

Managers and foremen, and leading men engaged in structural work, are constantly reading up in order to be proficient at the particular and various work committed to their charge.<sup>106</sup>

Fifth, white-collar occupations, most noticeably clerks and teachers, used the public library in large numbers as a method of obtaining a 'rounded' education.

Thus, the fact that technical education, as stated above, was not distinguished from secondary education, had implications for the public library which, after all, consistently promoted itself as a post-elementary education continuation school. Technical education via the public library was essentially secondary education. This was recognized by employers, some of whom were public library benefactors. Employers generally saw little direct relevance to their industrial concerns, of stocks of technical literature.<sup>107</sup> The provision of employees' libraries in firms has a long history.<sup>108</sup> But these were stocked with a high proportion of fiction.<sup>109</sup> The primary aim was not to further a worker's technical skills (unlike in Germany where works libraries had a high non-fiction content);<sup>110</sup> workers in any case read for amusement.<sup>111</sup> Employers saw this as beneficial in the broad sense of producing better workers. This was the idea behind the provision of a library for East London Post Office employees - the East London Postal and Telegraphic Employees Town and Suburban Circulating Library and Literary Institute . (It was situated at the district office in the Commercial Road and circulated books to branch offices.) The aim was "to promote mental, moral, and social improvement among the different classes, especially the junior, by good literature".<sup>112</sup> It is likely that when employees supported the idea of a local public library - as was the case in towns as far apart as Northwich and Reading<sup>113</sup> - they did so for exactly the same reason. If public libraries stocked



technical literature, all the better: its value was not in its content, however, but in its improving effect. The fact that public library technical literature counted for little in terms of 'specific' technical training should not detract from any economic role which the public library set itself.

#### Commercial Information and Political Economy

If it is accepted that a "secret of business is to know something that nobody else knows",<sup>114</sup> then it is surprising that so little interest was taken by British employers before 1914 in the collation of commercial information for research purposes. In modern times speedy, accurate and appropriate information has been considered important to business success: "A central source of reliable co-ordinated information makes economic sense for commercial and industrial organizations".<sup>115</sup> This was not apparent to the vast majority of enterprises operating in Britain before the First World War, which changed radically attitudes to research. In the United States the importance of business libraries and information bureaux, both private and public, were widely recognized: research collections were assembled by some of the largest business houses including General Electric, Price Waterhouse and the American Telegraph and Telephone Company. A library was recognized as a business asset which "rightly administered can serve men who are doing things as well as those who are thinking things".<sup>116</sup> From the 1890s United States business was also served by public provision of commercial information.<sup>117</sup> By 1916 the American public commercial library was recognized as a "common feature of industrial life".<sup>118</sup> The public library as a whole was more clearly seen in the United States as an institution evincing an economic role, able to deliver "visible, tangible, material results".<sup>119</sup>

The reasons why British businesses eschewed commercial information are not clear. Lamb has suggested that international economic hegemony meant that there was no real incentive to organize research either in commercial methods or industrial processes: after all, the Industrial Revolution had occurred largely without the aid of information flows.<sup>120</sup> It would be wrong, however, to assume that there was no provision of information for commercial purposes before 1914.

As noted in Part One, the public library from its inception incorporated a commercial information role, if not always in reality then as a broad objective of the movement. The Guildhall Library, when it was re-built in 1873, included "a collection of books, directories, codes, manuals and trade papers useful to those wanting business information".<sup>121</sup> In planning this collection it had been advocated that in any public library a "room be used as a Library of Reference, free to all respectable persons desirous of making temporary use of dictionaries, maps, plans, works upon commerce, banking etc., etc.". Such a room, it was footnoted, "exists in most large towns, and is much frequented by merchants, traders and others".<sup>122</sup> Dependent upon the definition of 'large town', this was possibly an exaggeration. But large public libraries did stock commercial literature. One of the reasons for establishing a public library in Liverpool was that "there is not a place [in the town] where even a Gore's Directory, or tide-table, or an almanac can be consulted as a matter of right by anyone desirous of doing so". Adding to this statement the leader of the campaign for a public library in Liverpool, J.A. Picton, said: "Viewing the need for a library from an economic standpoint, the benefit of an institution to those engaged in commercial and industrial pursuits would be manifest."<sup>123</sup>



The public libraries of even small towns provided some basic reference works useful to commerce; something as ephemeral as a railway time-table can be deemed to have had a commercial worth. By this century a small public library like Croydon could possess a substantial commercial collection. In 1910 the Croydon Chamber of Commerce met at the public reference library to be informed of the materials available. Information could be found, it was said, on commercial geography, trade routes, the productions of various countries and the present commercial position of this country: there were maps, directories, railway rates, data on the manufacture of specific goods, news clippings on trade questions, and books. The library boasted it could answer almost any commercial question: "Not long back they were asked as to the duty rates payable on certain articles in Belgium."<sup>124</sup> The aim was to set up a commercial information desk in the library, similar to arrangements made in American libraries.<sup>125</sup>

Commercial information from public library funding was also available in a physical form in the numerous museums attached to free libraries. There were a number of motives behind museum provision. William Ewart had seen them as a means of technical (design) education, as did Thomas Greenwood later.<sup>126</sup> Moralizers saw them as useful instruments of counter-attraction. Religious propagandists supported them as places where "the works of the Creator [were] shown forth in the preserved monuments of his bounty, wisdom and skill".<sup>127</sup> They were also a source of commercial education: visible evidence of foreign tastes and products was supplied. As Greenwood explained:

Manufactured goods which suit for South America do not suit for Australia, and there has for some time been too much of the happy-go-lucky about the style and shape of certain goods for some foreign markets, the prevailing idea being that what is suitable for one market will be suitable for all. A greater mistake could not



possibly be made, and in order that employers and employees may themselves see the patterns required in other markets, no place presents so suitable and convenient a depository as the museum of a Free Library. The town which takes up this subject vigorously will be the town which against all comers will hold its own ground. Manchester should have its museum of cotton goods, Leeds and Bradford their museums of woollen, Sheffield of tools and cutlery, Nottingham of laces and muslins, Bristol of boots and shoes and other goods, and Liverpool and Glasgow of almost every commodity in which for foreign markets the patterns differ.<sup>128</sup>

Finally, there were extensive patent collections held by public libraries.<sup>129</sup> Ostensibly, these are classified as technical information. However, they also had a commercial value - the boundary between definitions of technical and commercial materials has never been precise - in revealing the commercial intentions of competitors. The housing of patents in public libraries was said to make the specifications more accessible. As J.S. Rowntree explained in campaigning for a public library in York in 1881:

An interesting feature in the history of the libraries at Leeds and at Bradford is the large amount of attention which the 'specifications of patents' receive. These specifications are presented by the Government to the various towns and cities. The City of York duly receives them ... but having no proper place in which these specifications can be kept and made easily accessible, it is sometimes found more easy ... to go over to Leeds and search for them there, than it is to refer to those which are kept in the office of our City Surveyor .... the number of persons who referred to the specifications in the City of York last year may have been 25, whilst in Leeds it was said to have been 2684 and Bradford 1500.<sup>130</sup>

The type of reader who used patents, or other forms of commercial data for that matter, is unclear. It is likely, however, that the constituency which consulted commercial data (as opposed to literature

on commercial subjects like bookkeeping) was not as wide as that which sought technical information. A leading annual commercial directory announced in 1890 that "public libraries have many special attractions to commercial men".<sup>131</sup> Commercial knowledge was considered to be of importance primarily to those in control of production. The journal Commercial Education stated in 1912:

But that our knowledge of the causes which induce a boom in trade will ever be so complete as to permit us always to enjoy unexampled prosperity is not to be expected. Everything is subject to flux, and the utmost that can be hoped for, is that fuller knowledge will enable us so to regulate production as to avoid the slump that has invariably followed a period of trade activity .... The great danger that the manufacturers of the world have now to guard against is the danger of over-production.<sup>132</sup>

Guarding against over-production was, arguably, a coded message for 'necessary' unemployment (which could always be explained by too high wages). The need to convey such a message to groups which did not to any great extent consume commercial information was a leading theme in the work of a Board of Trade committee appointed in 1898 to investigate the dissemination of commercial information.<sup>133</sup> Central government had long recognized the importance of commercial data to its operations. A commercial department within the Board of Trade emerged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. A statistics department of the Board began operations in 1828, had a library by 1834 and a librarian by 1843; in 1872 it merged with the Board's commercial department. Its major tasks were to record changes in foreign and colonial tariffs and collect trade statistics.<sup>134</sup> Some of this information was published, much of it in the Board of Trade Journal. Commercial departments were also set up by the Foreign and Colonial



Offices. Reports on trade matters from foreign consuls were edited and published by the Foreign Office and distributed to Chambers of Commerce (i.e. Consular Reports). The Colonial Office published official reports from the colonies (i.e. the Colonial Reports). The process by which commercial data was collected and disseminated was thus complicated and confusing: there was little co-ordination between the three commercial departments except for the information and news of commercial treaties/agreements which the Foreign Office gave for publication in the Board of Trade Journal.<sup>135</sup> The aim of the committee on the dissemination of commercial information was to find a means of greater co-operation between the commercial departments so as to obtain a wider distribution of data. The constituency it identified went beyond the business community to include the working classes. But the new co-ordinating body which the report recommended - a Commercial Intelligence Department under the control of the Board of Trade with a room in Whitehall open for enquiries<sup>136</sup> - was not relevant to ordinary people. The public library was seen as a possible conduit: some large public libraries already took a selection of government publications (including patents and, in some cases, Consular Reports).<sup>137</sup> Part of the committee's remit, therefore, was to see "how far it was possible for assistance to be rendered by the authorities of public libraries in disseminating commercial information".<sup>138</sup> A circular enquiring into the extent of demand and existing resources for commercial information was thus sent to fourteen public libraries (nine in England). It was found that "the authorities of such public libraries as we have addressed have generally displayed much interest in the question referred to us, and expressed a willingness to afford every distinction in their power".<sup>139</sup>

However, a reading of the replies to the committee's circular (printed in Appendix No. 7 to the Report) reveals an exaggerated



assessment of demand for commercial information. Whilst, for example, Nottingham replied that there had been "increased demand during recent months for information respecting trade with the Colonies", Bradford stated that there was "not the demand for commercial information ... which might have been expected, having regard to its [Bradford's] position as a trading centre".<sup>140</sup> It is therefore likely that government viewed commercial information as a means of propaganda: supply would induce a demand conducive to its objectives. The basic motive behind the proposed dissemination of commercial information to the working classes was that it would:

... make them more fully acquainted with the conditions of foreign trade competition and cost of production. It is suggested that the general diffusion of such information might tend to prevent disputes and stoppages of work, which sometimes result in the diversion of industry to competing countries.<sup>141</sup>

The committee had heard from several witnesses how industrial conflict might be avoided if workers were better informed in commercial matters. A representative of the South Scotland Chamber of Commerce and member of his local public library committee, T. Craig-Brown, explained that: "Workmen aim exclusively at increase of wages or decrease of hours, without considering whether in the long run their action may not lead to diminution of employment". As unions were now claiming a greater voice in management, he continued, "it seems desirable that workmen seeking to exercise this new influence should be educated to do so wisely".<sup>142</sup>

T.R. Morgan, of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce, spoke of the problem in the coal industry caused by lack of commercial knowledge:

... the workmen do not realise the amount of competition there is, and therefore they are led away with the idea that there is no coal to compete with South Wales coal ... and they become very much harder in their terms of fighting for wages.<sup>143</sup>

Similarly, J.S. Jeans of the British Iron Trade Association, referring to a current engineering dispute, explained that "if the workmen had been well posted in the conditions of Continental and American competition this wretched engineering struggle would never have taken place".<sup>144</sup> These exhortations to a fuller understanding of political economy reflected the rapid technical change affecting society: workers, it was believed, required constant re-education in economic principles.<sup>145</sup>

There is no evidence that public libraries became fully-fledged agencies of the Board of Trade's Commercial Intelligence Department;<sup>146</sup> though all free libraries were made aware of the department's existence shortly after its foundation in 1900, and no doubt referred to it from time to time.<sup>147</sup> The amount of commercial indoctrination for which the state had hoped was clearly not achieved through the public library. However, what the work of the committee on the dissemination of commercial information reveals is a belief in the potential of commercial knowledge to reduce industrial and social tensions: workers needed to understand the dangers of pricing themselves out of a job, for if wage demands were not restrained, production costs would rise, foreign producers would benefit and unemployment would increase. High-brow commercial data might not have found its way into working class reading, but more digestible materials - periodicals, and books on economics and geography etc. - were consumed: it is plausible that local public library providers, many of them industrialists, recognized as did the 1898 committee the value of commercial literature as a means of education in political economy. This was not a new aspect of public library provision: the institution's potential for fostering the powers of reason which would assist a fuller understanding of the workings of capitalism had been recognized from the outset. As William Brown had



explained in opening in 1861 the Liverpool library buildings he had donated:

Many of you will recollect the ignorance and want of thought which prevailed amongst a large body of the working classes thirty or forty years ago. When they had any dispute with their master about wages, or anything else, they thought they were revenging themselves and punishing him by breaking and destroying his machinery, forgetting that his capital and his works were the instruments with which they had to earn bread for themselves and their families. Far different is their conduct now. Education has made such progress that they are much more intelligent. They see that such suicidal conduct would be as bad as the carpenter destroying the tools by which he lives. It is now pretty well understood that the more we improve our machinery, the more we increase our customers throughout the world, and the more hands are wanted to make articles to meet the demand.<sup>148</sup>

There was a close similarity, therefore, between the social motive behind commercial education and that behind technical education, which the public library also enthusiastically promoted. Technical education has been seen as producing a 'spirit of reasonableness' and reduced radicalism;<sup>149</sup> commercial knowledge was also viewed as a force for social and industrial discipline.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, both were education per se, at once favourable to economic progress and the social stability associated with it. As a member of Oldham's public library committee stated in 1881 in urging the establishment of a free library against the backdrop of intensifying foreign competition:

Our largest rate of all is our education rate. We never grumble at its amount, because it is in education that we find our national safety and progress.<sup>151</sup>

#### Other Economic Benefits

Public library promoters were keen to publicize a range of



economic benefits beyond the more directly advantageous dissemination of technical and commercial knowledge. Moreover, these were tangible benefits characterized by clear social stability imperatives, by virtue of their furtherance of capitalist production.

A public library was a social institution which helped a locality hold on to its experienced and skilled labour. J.S. Rowntree stated that:

A large Free Library is an element that distinctly enters into the calculations of persons in fixing their place of residence. I have heard superior artisans say that the libraries of Leeds, Bradford, and Sheffield were attractions which they missed in York.<sup>152</sup>

This assertion can be supported by evidence from fiction. W. Riley's Way of the winepress (1917) is set in the 1880s and tells the story of a young man, his mother and a young woman who, having fallen on hard times, were befriended by a well-to-do cotton manufacturer in the busy town of Broadbeck. The manufacturer sent them to an isolated manufacturing village to learn the business of spinning. The young couple welcomed this removal to the countryside, but being educated they regretted that they had lost the use of the Broadbeck free library "with its store of hidden treasure, and ... the night-classes to which we had looked forward as a hopeful possibility".

Similarly, just as a library could hold on to good labour it could also attract respectable, wealthy residents and temporary users who brought business to a town. This was especially relevant to resort towns: it was said that the Leamington Spa Public Library had "established itself as an important attraction from the visitor's point of view".<sup>153</sup>

Public libraries were an early form of labour exchange. Fluidity in the labour market was encouraged by the use of the public library

newsroom for seeking out vacancies:

It is a well-known fact that thousands of men during the year find employment through reading the advertisements in the various places in the newsroom, and at nine o'clock in the morning to the minute, scores of men seeking work may be seen to go straight to the advertisement columns, leaving the news for a more favourable opportunity.<sup>154</sup>

Some libraries posted up newspapers on 'situations vacant' boards in entrance halls or outside the library. This was occasionally done before the library opened. An assistant at a free library in Marylebone (not a rate aided institution) in the 1890s has recalled:

Arriving (theoretically) at 7.30 to cut the Situations Vacant ads from the Telegraph and the Chronicle, fasten them to the boards and fix them to the little windows on either side of the door. There was always a small crowd of 'out o'works' waiting.<sup>155</sup>

Public libraries also attempted to find employment for people in the colonies. The Leeds Public Library announced:

Intending emigrants to any part of the world, particularly to the English Colonies, find the public library of great use. Applications are frequently made to the Librarian, at the central Library, who can give most impartial information as to prospects, resources, climate, wages etc., of each country.<sup>156</sup>

The librarian J.P. Briscoe included in his list of basic requirements for any large public library an emigrants' information service.<sup>157</sup> Close links were developed with the government's Emigrants' Information Office.<sup>158</sup> Emigration was not just of economic benefit to those seeking prosperity overseas; it was also proposed by the authorities as a method of relieving social pressures built up by the unemployment problem.<sup>159</sup> In An Ideal husband (1895) Oscar Wilde's Lady Markby remarks: "The fact is that Society is terribly over-populated. Really, someone should arrange a proper scheme of assisted emigration. It would do a great deal of good."



Finally, contiguous to its role as a moralizing agency free libraries claimed to provide the economic means of reducing secondary poverty caused by unwise expenditure on unnecessary items. "It is a well understood thing," wrote Greenwood, "that in promoting the prosperity of material things, public Free Libraries did more than anything else to advance the cause of temperance and thrift."<sup>160</sup> Although the public library cost the ratepayer money, it was said that savings could be made from reduced ignorance and idleness.<sup>161</sup> Janetta Manners advocated libraries in the belief that the abstinence from strong drink which they encouraged "frequently doubles men's wages, for there are many who spend more than half they earn in liquor".<sup>162</sup> Support for a public library in Camberwell came from one correspondent to a local newspaper that viewed as an economic question alone it was costly to maintain a "savage Horde among the civilised".<sup>163</sup> At the opening of new buildings for Liverpool's library in 1861 the memory of George Stephenson was raised to fortify the rhetoric of self-help as a remedy for poverty: to be successful in life, it was said, "you must be temperate, you must be frugal, you must persevere", as the great engineer had.<sup>164</sup>

The public library's cultural (and moral) message was thus an intrinsically economic one also. As the political economist Samuel Fothergill stated:

Intelligence, order, and virtue contribute most powerfully to the increase and preservation of wealth, or to that physical and social well-being which affords the conditions of the highest culture. On the other hand, idleness, dissipation, vice, and crime, while they are fearfully destructive of existing wealth, are equally hostile to its production and accumulation.<sup>165</sup>



## John Passmore Edwards

The way social and economic concerns could intersect at the point of the public library is further illustrated in the life and work of the benefactor John Passmore Edwards, who, around the turn of the century, donated numerous public libraries (as well as technical schools, medical institutions and settlement houses), mostly in London and in his native west country.<sup>166</sup> Edwards is second only to Andrew Carnegie as this country's most famous public library benefactor. He had accumulated his wealth in publishing, his primary motive being money: "I determined to establish a periodical, thinking that thereby I should be able to build up a fortune, if not to win fame."<sup>167</sup> (He had seen how his father had made his money through independent and hard enterprise: he was a carpenter by trade who diversified into brewing and market gardening.)<sup>168</sup> During his time in publishing Edwards ran a large number of publications of great variety.<sup>169</sup>

He was throughout his life a free trader: his advocacy of Corn Law abolition had earned him the antipathy of the Mayor of Penzance who at one stage threatened him with imprisonment.<sup>170</sup> He was also active in the peace movement: having opposed the Crimean War he described the South African campaign in 1900 as "criminal, cowardly and costly".<sup>171</sup> His hatred of war was based partly on Christian principles.<sup>172</sup> But like others he also saw it as the antipathy of the international harmony which free mutual trade would ensure. Prosperity brought about by economic liberalism was thus at the core of his desire for better human co-operation; science and trade were the instruments of mutual co-existence.

Edwards was influenced by utilitarianism. Part of the reason for his benefaction, he once said, was "to promote the greatest and most lasting good of the greatest number. In doing this I have selected

Institutions most likely in my judgement to minister to the physical well-being and the general advancement of the people".<sup>173</sup> He was particularly interested in the contribution which science could make to progress. This was manifest in his ownership (from 1869) of the journal the English Mechanic.<sup>174</sup> The journal's aim was to disseminate science and art instruction cheaply. The journal, in its own words, was taken by "the skilled mechanic, the manufacturer, the amateur, the searcher after knowledge, and by men who have acquired knowledge". Its readers were members of "an industrial and intellectual guild", in effect "the largest mutual aid society that ever existed".<sup>175</sup> The journal would have been the ideal helpmate to young adults taking evening classes, combining as it did practical and theoretical knowledge.<sup>176</sup> Its commitment to science was unequivocal:

Science is poking its nose into everything; it looks upon nothing as too sacred for investigation. Never mind how old a book is, or how long an institution or faith has existed in the world, never mind the number of millions who have believed in it or have been swayed by it, the scientific enquirer treats it as an everyday thing, analyses it, and if necessary turns it upside down or inside out. He tests its usefulness or its reality by the silent, but, in the long run, certain process of verification.<sup>177</sup>

Edwards saw science as the engine of progress. This belief became more important to him as anxieties loomed in the late nineteenth century over the nation's economic future. The public libraries he donated must be viewed in this context. At the opening of the Canning Town Public Library in 1893 he was reported to have urged the extension of technical education:

... for the sake of the community, for our industrial development, and for the sake of the Empire itself. He was anxious to some extent about the future commercial position and ascendancy of this country. America was driving us hard in one



direction, Germany in another, and Switzerland in another ... therefore it was essential that all the facilities possible should be placed within the reach of the working man and the artizan .... What would benefit the working man would benefit the community, and consequently the Empire.<sup>178</sup>

Edwards' outlook can thus be firmly located within the National Efficiency movement. The aim of his benefaction was:

... to build up the weak, and to afford ampler opportunities for the strong to do the best for themselves and the community ... this in my opinion must be done more energetically than hitherto, or England may be distanced in the supreme race to which nations will be summoned during the coming century.<sup>179</sup>

Yet Edwards combined these utilitarian impulses with humanitarian concerns. His biographer wrote of Edwards' "sympathy with the suffering portion of humanity".<sup>180</sup> It was said that his aim was to "serve his fellow man, raise the educational standards of the people, and lift the poor and helpless out of the mire of misery and moral degradation created by ignorance".<sup>181</sup> To this end he entered Parliament as a Gladstone supporter in 1880, but vacated his seat two years later having found political life not "such a fruitful field of usefulness" as he had expected.<sup>182</sup> He made a greater social impact through his publishing and benefactions which were sometimes combined. His ownership of the Echo, for example, sprang from philanthropic motives. He devoted the whole of the profits to benefaction, whether of drinking fountains, hospitals, convalescent homes or public libraries. He described the paper as "devoted to the public good ... not for individual gain or sectional advantage, but for the benefit of the people".<sup>183</sup>

One of Edwards' best known good works was the money he gave (£6000) for the Whitechapel Public Library in London's East End for which Canon



Samuel Barnett of Toynbee Hall had campaigned so vigorously. At the opening ceremony in 1892 Edwards revealed the motives behind his benefaction:

I do this not merely from a sense of duty, but because I think it is a distinguished privilege to assist in lightening or brightening the lives of our East End fellow citizens .... I have long felt that the East of London has stupendous uncancelled claims on the wealthy and well-to-do West End of London, and it affords me unalloyed gratification that I am allowed to wipe out a small portion of that indebtedness.<sup>184</sup>

These philanthropic sentiments<sup>185</sup> were no doubt inspired, as those of others were inspired, by a desire for greater social stability to calm the West End's fears of the East End.<sup>186</sup> As noted above, Edwards certainly possessed a desire for greater social harmony between people and peoples. He despised competition which was destructive. In 1896 at the opening of the Nunhead Public Library he was reported as saying that:

Man has been called a fighting animal; if so, there was no necessity for him to show his fighting qualities on destructive battlefields. There was no better form of rivalry than that between parishes in their endeavours to distance each other in works of public usefulness [such as public libraries].<sup>187</sup>

His philosophical motivation in this context was partly religious.<sup>188</sup> But his relationship with Samuel Barnett in providing a free library for Whitechapel perhaps has implications beyond Barnett's committed Christianity: for Barnett was also an idealist thinker who put philosophical investigations into practice. Edwards' speech (quoted above) at the opening of the Whitechapel library, couched as it was in the language of fellow citizenship and social obligation, bears a close resemblance to the ideas which idealists were articulating at the time. Elsewhere, moreover, Edwards lectured enthusiastically about 'duty',

which he distinguished from philanthropy; a "philanthropic spirit is good", he wrote, but:

... a dutiful spirit is better. Duty is a beneficent mistress. Her teachings and claims are prior to and mightier than the teachings and claims of philanthropy. Whilst a prevailing purpose of philanthropy is to mitigate human ills, a prevailing purpose of duty is to prevent them. There would be little necessity for the exercise of mercy or benevolence if right and justice ruled and regulated human affairs.<sup>189</sup>

The sense of duty to which Edwards subscribed was a central theme of idealism. If Edwards was influenced by idealism then it is apparent that cultural concerns - idealists aimed to diffuse culture as the basis of social harmony - were able to exist, through the medium of the public library, alongside utilitarian imperatives. Edwards appeared to accommodate both idealism and utilitarianism. Public libraries were worthwhile, he believed, because:

... they encourage seekers after technical knowledge, and promote industrial improvement ... [and] because they teach equality of citizenship and are essentially democratic in spirit and action.<sup>190</sup>

Further, in his autobiography, he finished by stating his own philosophy in words borrowed from great thinkers of the past. As befitted a man of science and utilitarianism he quoted John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer; but he also invoked the romanticism of Ruskin and Carlyle.<sup>191</sup> The question of Edwards' idealist leanings cannot be resolved here. However, there is enough of the idealist spirit in his utterances and writings, and those of others indeed, to invite an analysis of idealism as a possible supplement to - though not a replacement for - the utilitarian momentum of early public library development.



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129. Patents were taken by public libraries from early on. Certainly by 1873 Nottingham Public Library had a collection of patents, Nottingham Free Public Libraries and Museums Committee, Minutes (4 March 1873).
130. J.S. Rowntree, Free libraries: an address delivered in the Festival Concert Room, York ... (York, 1881), p. 12.
131. Commercial London: a manual of business information (1890), p. 197.
132. Commercial Education (10 December 1912).
133. Report of the departmental committee of the Board of Trade to inquire into and report upon the dissemination of commercial information and the collection and exhibition of patents and samples (1898), Cmd. 8962.
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135. Report ... dissemination of commercial information, op. cit., p. iii.
136. Ibid., p. x.
137. Ibid., p. viii.
138. Ibid., p. iii.
139. Ibid., p. lll.
140. Ibid., pp. 154-155.
141. Ibid., p. viii.
142. Ibid., Q. 4.
143. Ibid., Q. 162.



144. Ibid., Q. 1395. C. Reed, Why not? A plea for a free public library and museum in the City of London (1875), p. 18, argued that a public library user "examines into the real causes of those social changes by which his trade ... is affected .... He is not swept into the vortex of every sudden strike".
145. M. Berg. The Machinery question and the making of political economy 1815-1848 (Cambridge, 1980).
146. Board of Trade Commercial Intelligent Department, Minutes (1901-1917), Public Record Office BT11/3/C7065/09, make no mention of public libraries.
147. Report to the Board of Trade by the Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence with reference to their proceedings (1904), Cmd. 2044.
148. Ceremonies ... free library and museum ... Liverpool, op. cit., p. 19.
149. P.W. Musgrave, 'Constant factors in the demand for technical education', British Journal of Education Studies, 14 (May 1966).
150. W.E.A. Axon, 'Bolton and its free library', Papers of the Manchester Literary Club, 5 (1879), p. 20, said that a knowledge of the cotton industry in which they worked would make operatives more efficient.
151. Oldham Free Library and Museum Committee, Minutes (27 July 1881).
152. Rowntree, Free libraries: an address, op. cit., p. 11. The Mechanics' Institute in Crewe (provided by the local locomotive works) fulfilled a similar role. The railway employers in Swindon did not build workers' houses until it ran into shortages of skilled labour; D. Drummond, Crewe: the society and culture of a railway town 1842-1914 (unpublished Ph.D., University of London, 1986).
153. Leamington Spa Public Library, Annual report (1916), p. 6.
154. E.R.N. Mathews, Birmingham and Bristol: a few words about public libraries and museums (Bristol, 1892), pp. 5-6.
155. Letter from Mrs. E. Cockburn Kyte to E.M. Exley (received 2 August 1956), Westminster Public Libraries, Marylebone Local Studies. For a detailed discussion of late Victorian and Edwardian unemployment and government policies (including labour exchanges) devised to contain its social effects see J. Harris, Unemployment and politics: a study in English social policy 1886-1914 (Oxford, 1972).
156. Historical summary [of Leeds Public Library] to September 1877, Sparke Collection [of extracts, documents etc. relating to the Leeds Public Library], Vol. 1 (1892-1895), p. 1.



157. J.P. Briscoe, 'A Well equipped library', Library Assistant, 1 (1898-1899), p. 49.
158. The Leeds Public Library received applications from the Board of Trade's Emigrants' Union Office asking that literature on the subject be circulated to branch libraries in the area, Leeds Mercury (11 March 1898). The Emigrants' Union Office donated pamphlets to the Hammersmith Public Library, along with a special noticeboard for displaying information; Hammersmith Public Library Committee, Minutes (8 March 1898). Literature for emigrants has been seen as an early form of community information service; K. Whittaker, 'British public libraries and the emigrants' information service', Library History, 8:2 (1988).
159. For a discussion on emigration as a means of relieving casual employment and its social effects see G.S. Jones, Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society (Oxford, 1971).
160. Greenwood, Free public libraries, op. cit., pp. 126-127.
161. Manners, Some advantages, op. cit., p. 13.
162. J. Manners, Encouraging experiences of free libraries, reading and recreation rooms (1886), p. 22.
163. 'An appeal to the friends of knowledge', newsclipping, source unknown, Southwark Public Libraries, Local Studies, PC 020 Cam.
164. Ceremonies connected with the opening of the buildings for a free library and museum in Liverpool (Liverpool, 1861), p. 14; words of T.B. Horsfall.
165. S. Fothergill, The Principles of political economy as applied to the wages question (1872), pp. 5-6.
166. J.P. Edwards, Institutional buildings completed or commenced during the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria (1897).  
J.J. Macdonald, Passmore Edwards institutions: founding and opening ceremonies (1909).
167. Quoted in E.H. Burrage, J. Passmore Edwards: philanthropist (1902), pp. 26-27.
168. Ibid., p. 14.
169. These included: Temperance Tract Journal, Public Good, Poetic Companion, Biographical Magazine, Peace Advocate, Building News, English Mechanic, Echo (pioneer of the halfpenny daily for the working class). He had part shares in Hampshire Independent, Southern Echo, Salisbury Times. List assembled from Burrage, op. cit., p. 29, and J. Camplin, The Rise of the Plutocrats: wealth and power in Edwardian England (1978), p. 81.
170. Burrage, op. cit., p. 14.

171. Letter from J. Passmore Edwards to the Limehouse Library Commissioners (5 February 1900), Tower Hamlets Public Libraries, Local Studies.
172. Burrage, op. cit., p. 22.
173. Edwards, Institutional buildings, op. cit., p. 1.
174. In 1870 the name changed to the English Mechanic and World of Science, having absorbed three leading science journals. Its circulation, as explained in the issue of 23 September 1870, was thus said to be greater than all other science periodicals put together.
175. English Mechanic (24 September 1869).
176. The issue of 31 December 1869 contained items on: the production of prints, applied mechanics, steam engines and furnaces, gas manufacture, and divining rods. Letters took up a quarter of the issue. The theoretical side of the journal became more important as time passed. It became less concerned with lathes and more concerned with the principles of science.
177. English Mechanic (27 August 1869).
178. East End News (3 October 1893).
179. Edwards, Institutional buildings, op. cit., p.2. He did not, however, advocate further Imperial expansion. He called for a consolidation of the Empire by improvements in 'national efficiency' - "to build up at home healthful, educated and prosperous citizens"; J.P. Edwards, A Few footprints (1905), p. 51.
180. Burrage, op. cit., p. 7.
181. Ibid., p.36.
182. Quoted in S. Koss, The Rise and fall of the political press in Britain, Vol. 1 (1981), p. 189.
183. Ibid., p. 336.
184. Burrage, op. cit., p. 53. Also quoted as a private letter from Edwards to Canon Barnett in H. Barnett, Canon Barnett: his life, work and friends, Vol. 2 (1918), p. 5.
185. At the same ceremony Lord Roseberry said of Edwards that "whenever he goes a suspicion of benevolence dogs his steps". Quoted in Burrage, op. cit., p. 53.
186. Jones, Outcast London, op. cit., discusses the West End's fear of the East End.
187. Edwards, A Few footprints, op. cit., p. 39.

188. Edwards subscribed to the Free Christian Union and offered his services beyond a mere cash donation. Letter from Edwards to Edward Enfield, Dr. Williams Library, Free Christian Union Papers, 24/133/78.
189. Edwards, A Few footprints, op. cit., p. 39.
190. Ibid., p. 40.
191. Ibid., p. 48.



## CULTURAL CONCERNS

Such was the intensity of utilitarian forces shaping the early history of the public library that throughout the pre-1914 period its legitimacy as an agency, which inevitably purveyed so-called impracticable and recreational reading, was seriously and persistently questioned.<sup>1</sup> As a dispenser of culture the public library flew in the face of radical utilitarianism. By virtue of its intrinsically cultural nature it was susceptible to fundamental intellectual influences. This did not discount milder forms of utilitarianism which, as this chapter will argue and as the example of Passmore Edwards showed, were not alien to the encouragement of culture. The utilitarianism of William Ewart and Edward Edwards, it should be recalled, was similarly complemented by a respect for cultural achievement in art and high literature. But even in its diluted forms, utilitarianism waned in influence in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Given that the early public library movement was so strongly informed by what was at the time the most influential form of intellectual thinking - utilitarianism - it is important to the formulation of a theory of public library development that the philosophy which superseded utilitarianism be investigated also. That philosophy was idealism which, certainly by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, had become the most prominent philosophical school in British universities, though its propagation was most intensely supervised by members of Oxford's Balliol College, and by Thomas Henry Green (see below) in particular.

An investigation of idealism is also warranted in that, paradoxically, many aspects of early public library development which

were derived from utilitarianism not only continued in existence after its demise, but were amplified during the very era that idealism came to dominate. Idealism and utilitarianism were fundamentally divergent philosophies. Utilitarians had argued that reality and experience determined ideas and character; moreover, they believed that individual human beings were like the physical atoms of Newton, each atom exposed to outside forces and to be understood in isolation from the rest, thereby labelling men and women as a-social. By contrast, idealists believed ideas could be imprinted onto reality; as such they recognized the existence of as yet inexplicable forces which delivered moral goodness not through education by experience, but by means of innate powers common to all as members of a metaphysical whole. Yet, the two philosophies also displayed similarities. First, the idealist belief in the existence of innate human qualities was a concept central to John Stuart Mill's refinement of Benthamite empiricism, and to the brand of utilitarianism which emerged triumphant under Mill's guidance. Second, on a practical plane, idealists and utilitarians alike pursued reason, state action, political pluralism, equality of educational opportunity, citizenship, and, above all, social stability within capitalism. Fundamental to this discussion, moreover, is the fact that each of these objectives was a major concern of the public library.

However, differences did exist, aside from the underlying conflict over the source of human knowledge. The deepest line of fracture was between the utilitarian objective of building a practical-minded, commercial, industrial nation; and the idealist rebuff based on a spiritual criticism of a mechanized and progressive, yet alienating and brutalizing, society. Idealists rejuvenated the long-standing opposition to utilitarianism which early thinkers like Coleridge had set in motion. Idealism had a long pedigree. This partly accounts for its popularity



during its heyday between about 1880 and 1920; the very period, it should be stressed, when public libraries experienced a sudden and substantial increase in their numbers.

## Idealism<sup>2</sup>

Idealism was derived from the philosophies of ancient Greece and modern Germany. From the former was borrowed the example of a civilized and harmonious existence in the Greek polis, where humans acted morally as educated citizens of a political society.<sup>3</sup> Plato's Republic was an abiding influence on idealism. His ideal society contained three classes of citizens: artisans and labourers to produce society's material needs; soldiers to defend the state; and rulers, or 'Guardians', to organize social life. It was a society characterized by self-sacrifice and duty to others - though Plato was no friend of pure democracy. This was manifest in the 'brave' citizen soldiers who asked no reward for their courage, and in the devotion to public service on the part of the Guardians who pursued elitist intellectual study not for their own class' well-being, but for its eventual diffusion.<sup>4</sup>

Even more influential was Aristotle's Ethics (though Plato's works were more widely embraced by nineteenth century intellectuals).<sup>5</sup> The practical content of the Ethics - the constant references in it to everyday life - made it an eminently readable text. It praised the 'collective social life' of Greek civilization and emphasized the potential for social improvement without altering fundamental social structures. The Ethics became the document for good citizenship in the half century before the First World War.<sup>6</sup>

In respect of the metaphysical content of idealism, however, it was Plato who attracted more attention. Plato conceptualized an ultimate 'good' which dwelt beyond natural existence. Its nature could not be



readily understood: it was like the sun, dazzling if gazed upon directly. Only an elite few could approach a comprehension of its form.<sup>7</sup> 'Good' in this sense was 'intrinsic': that is to say, an end in itself. By contrast, Aristotle's view of 'good' was 'extrinsic': human activity was 'good' if it was instrumental to the teleological growth towards perfection. As he stated in opening the Ethics: "Every craft and every enquiry, and similarly every action and project seems to aim at some good; hence the Good has been well defined as that at which everything aims."<sup>8</sup> Aristotle did not perceive an absolute 'good', but saw 'good' as belonging to human action and thought.

These themes were later taken up by German philosophers under the influence of the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century saw the partial breakdown of old control mechanisms of custom, tradition and ritual which had sought to influence individual character from without: person as object. This was a liberation for the individual but more freedom also introduced disintegrative tendencies. The onus of greater self-control was placed on the individual; there was a duty incumbent upon individuals to develop moral consciousness: person as subject.<sup>9</sup> The value of moral autonomy in resolving the conflict between duty and inclinations was stressed by Kant. He argued that moral action was dictated by reason from within, not by law, custom and public opinion from without.<sup>10</sup>

Kant also differentiated between knowledge which was in itself eternal (noumena) and that which was derived from our sense impressions contained within space and time (phenomena). Fichte concurred with the idea that knowledge did not come through natural experience but was part of a supernatural cosmic establishment outside space and time. He taught that nature, including man, owed its being to an Absolute Ego whose motivation was ethical; the underlying purpose of

all things should be ethical. Consequently, Fichte stressed the importance of the cohesive, sharing, national community. Such a community could only be promoted, however, if education were available to all citizens without distinction. His writings influenced the education reforms instigated by Prussia following her traumatic defeat by Napoleon at Jena in 1806.<sup>11</sup>

Hegel, too, believed in the state's duty to promote education which was, in effect, "the art of making men ethical".<sup>12</sup> His theory of knowledge combined the work of Kant and Fichte with Platonic-Aristotelian thinking. Like Aristotle he conceived of a teleological growth towards perfection; his dialectic of 'thesis' versus 'anti-thesis', producing 'synthesis', was a process approximating to the truth. Education was central to this process and, like Plato's Guardians, he supported the idea of a class of elite teachers. These would be charged with the dissemination of knowledge. Hegel said that this duty had a cosmic significance. To assimilate knowledge was to 'realize' oneself: to become more 'conscious' of one's existence. But individuals were merely part of a larger consciousness; Thought or Spirit or Absolute. Thus, individual self-realization contributed to the self-realization of the Absolute. Men and women were vehicles of the Absolute in its eternal quest for full consciousness, for having begun as a featureless unity it could only reproduce itself in the growing consciousness of humans. In short:

Individual men [and women] find their own self-realization in their own thinking about themselves; and as they themselves are vehicles of Spirit, so Spirit too, realizes itself in their self-realization.<sup>13</sup>

This metaphysical conception of reality had implications for moral action. If all individuals were part of the struggle to realize an ideal essence then they were, by definition, not wholly 'atomistic' but



'social'. Individuals were contributors to a common purpose which was intrinsically good, and in working for a common good an understanding of 'good' would be furthered. Hegel thus agreed with Kant that moral action could be dictated from within by reason, but he also said that outside forces were at play because humans were social and outward looking. Of relevance here is Hegel's idea of 'civil society', which he defined as the intermediate phase between family and state. In civil society individuals, aided by law, were free to pursue their own self-interest, but within the restrictions of being interdependent with other individuals. Civil society possessed legal and economic institutions mutually beneficial to all. Hegel stressed a sense of community existing alongside concerns of self-interest. The fact that he looked to the ancient Greek polis as the model of civil life is no coincidence.

Among other places, German scholarship found favour in England: Coleridge, Carlyle and Thomas Arnold all promoted it. Matthew Arnold went to Prussia and observed German idealism in action in the state schools. As a consequence he came to regard:

... the German concept of 'Culture' as the path to the successful operation of the inevitable democracy of the future, the corrective to the 'anarchy' which Englishmen were certain was the more descriptive synonym of 'democracy'.<sup>14</sup>

The belief that the state diffusion of culture to the masses could provide a 'unifying church' was shared by a great number of leading late nineteenth century academics. The chief Hegelian proponent of culture as a socially stabilizing agent was T.H. Green, fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, between 1860 and 1878, after which time he served as professor of moral philosophy until his premature death in 1882. Green discovered Hegelian philosophy as a Balliol student in the 1850s. His tutor, Benjamin Jowett (who also taught Matthew Arnold), had introduced it to Oxford having visited Germany in the 1840s. It both supplemented



and invigorated the tradition of Greek learning at Oxford, and enriched the thinking of those who had already read German philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Green amalgamated the Greek and German intellectual heritage.<sup>16</sup> The essence of his idealist philosophy was expressed in his Prolegomena to Ethics (1883) and Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation (1895). Influenced by the Platonic-Hegelian tradition, Green believed the physical world rested on metaphysical forces ruled by an eternal consciousness (in connection with this his former religious beliefs will be discussed below). It was the human capacity for reason, he taught, which both linked individuals to, and enriched, the eternal force. The divine purpose would be furthered by raising the consciousness (extending the self-realization) of individuals. But enlarging the number of individuals whose consciousness was raised also advanced the self-realization of the eternal essence. He defined 'real goodness' as "a will to be good, which has no object but its own fulfilment".<sup>17</sup>

For Green, the common cause of self-realization meant that individuals should be well-disposed to one another. The idea of self-realization as the end of moral conduct has been seen as a synonym for self-interest. But Green emphasized that individuals could only realize themselves in relation to others: one had to look inwards first before one could look outwards.<sup>18</sup> Like the Greeks, and Hegel after them, he said that society was made up of free yet law-abiding persons, "each his own master yet each his brother's keeper".<sup>19</sup> He stressed the 'principle of human brotherhood' and is said to have coined the phrase 'political obligation'.<sup>20</sup> He employed a number of terms interchangeably - 'common interest', 'social good', 'public interest', 'common well-being' - to mean the importance of duty to others.<sup>21</sup> He himself put theory into practice by engaging in the civic life of Oxford. He became a town councillor in 1876; his home was open to townsfolk of all social

backgrounds.<sup>22</sup> In his own life, therefore, Green attempted to fulfil the objective of 'citizenship', a word to which he resorted more often than most.<sup>23</sup>

Green believed citizenship was taught by education. No other worldly subject interested him more. He advocated basic schooling to combat crime, and prevent social and political unrest. Education would remove class differences: by levelling up, not down. He wrote of "unconscious social insolence" at the top of society and "social jealousy" at its base: what was needed was "a freemasonry of common education". To diffuse culture and education teachers had to go to their pupils, not vice versa. This 'outreach' would accelerate the process of self-realization because educational advance - in terms of both standards and numbers affected - would teach citizens to be more aware of their own nature and their relation to others.<sup>24</sup>

Green's political philosophy was an extension of his ethics. Spiritual perfection he saw as no pipe-dream but as realistically attainable. The state was to be the vehicle whereby individuals and the Absolute achieved self-realization. He viewed the state from the Greek perspective as a political community, not as an overbearing machine; far from being the enemy of liberty it removed obstacles to liberty by providing and maintaining the basic conditions conducive to a fuller realization (development) of human potentialities. The state had a duty to remove, amongst other things, disease, the affliction of drink and ignorance, each being an impediment to self-realization. His support for the state came more from its embodiment of 'community' than its potential for political equality. He did not consider the right to vote as necessarily advantageous to citizenship and self-realization: he lamented Disraeli's victory in 1874 and attributed it to the economic boom and materialistic tendencies of the early 1870s which had made the



populace politically apathetic and, hence, less communal.<sup>25</sup>

The idealism which Green and others propagated was, like utilitarianism before it, no coffee-table philosophy. It produced - mostly via Balliol - a stream of educationalists, social workers, higher administrators and statesmen. It influenced political reality in revisionist New Liberalism which called for more social legislation; but it also complemented Gladstone's view of the societal role of the individual - that is to say, the individual had social duties aside from his/her concern for maximizing personal potential.<sup>26</sup> The citizenship which Green and his Balliol descendents taught became associated with a wide range of institutions, from Empire to school lunches, from democracy to national insurance.<sup>27</sup> The commitment to social duty and the necessity of engaging 'in' society were no more clearly seen than in the late nineteenth century settlement house movement which received much of its nourishment from idealism.<sup>28</sup> The need to diffuse culture for the purpose of self-realization was encapsulated in the adult education movement which idealism strengthened. The idea of University Extension education was first suggested by an Oxford Professor of Philosophy, William Sewell, in Suggestions for the extension of the university (1850).<sup>29</sup> Through the influence of idealism Oxford University began extension lectures in 1878, Green being chairman of the organizing committee.\* Greater student participation was seen in the early twentieth century in the University Tutorial Class system and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA): these enshrined the idealist objective of teachers going to the students.<sup>30</sup>

The influence of idealism on adult education was carried through into the First World War. It is significant that responsibility for the educational aspect of reconstruction was given to H.A.L. Fisher, upon whom Green had made a deep and abiding impact.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore,

\* Cambridge University commenced extension lectures in 1873.



A.L. Smith (Master of Balliol 1916-1924) became chairman of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee. It was this committee (discussed in Part Three) which was given responsibilities for investigating future public library policy. It was this committee whose recommendations were taken up by H.A.L. Fisher, Minister of Education, in formulating the Public Libraries Act of 1919.

Though widely influential in terms of social reform, initiatives and thinking, idealism did not seek to promote radical change. Idealism called for the refinement not the overthrow of capitalism. It advocated a better life for citizens without overturning the foundations of the established social and economic order. Green attributed poverty not to capitalism but to landlordism. He defended possessive individualism and the private ownership of property on the grounds that they contributed to the common good by aiding individual development and self-determination. Green's friends mistakenly saw him as a socialist. This may have been due to his advocacy of increased state activity; yet, Green saw the state as a means of ameliorating not obliterating capitalism. He urged social reform without socialism.<sup>32</sup>

Idealists like Green criticized utilitarianism not for its support of capitalism but for its pre-occupation with pleasure as the definition of 'good'. This narrow perception meant that utilitarianism could not give the necessary solid theoretical underpinning for a stable and secure society: this idealism attempted to do. It became a new justification for the market ethos.<sup>33</sup> Idealists saw disputes between capital and labour as inevitable, but believed a stronger sense of citizenship and a greater readiness for self-sacrifice would be the arbiters of differences. They saw no role for sectional class militancy in producing change. (It is significant that when class politics reached a high intensity during the First World War idealism appeared

impotent and thus lost ground.)<sup>34</sup> This was realized by some workers engaged in adult education who saw the providers of WEA and University Extension education as agents for indoctrinating capitalism.<sup>35</sup> An idealist such as the historian R.H. Tawney, who believed capitalism endangered individual liberty and prevented self-realization, was thus an exception.<sup>36</sup>

To what, then, may we attribute idealism's popularity and political moderation? Idealism grew quickly because of the social soil in which it was rooted. The late nineteenth century saw a new awareness of social problems. Mid-nineteenth century reformers and philanthropists were, arguably, more interested in the moral welfare than the material conditions of the poor: moral elevation was seen as more important than economic advance (though this was not ignored) in bringing social cohesion and stability. But the economic gains and moral improvements experienced by some working class groups in the mid-Victorian era highlighted the importance of economic factors in lessening social problems.<sup>37</sup> Thus, when social investigators began from the 1880s to publicize the exact extent of poverty<sup>38</sup> - Booth revealed that 30 per cent of London's population was living below the poverty line - the news pricked the conscience of respectable opinion. The 're-discovery of poverty' - and the associated fears of moral decline fanned by anxieties over national economic performance - was not consistent with the material advance of the mid-Victorian period. As Samuel Smith M.P. wrote in 1885: "the bulk of the nation has made wonderful progress both morally and materially in the last 40 years", yet "there remains a large deposit of human misery in our midst, wholly untouched by the progress of the nation".<sup>39</sup> The moral philosophy of idealism appeared to offer a solution to the social divisiveness afflicting the nation; it is no coincidence that its popularity soared



at the very moment that moral regeneration once again became a burning issue.

Idealism's extensive influence is also explained by its religious origins. The message it conveyed was not new. Given the "unrelentingly abstract" and metaphysical nature of idealist writing (unlike the more practical output of the utilitarians) it is doubtful if the philosophy would have been as influential if its underlying themes (of a Christian texture) had not been familiar.<sup>40</sup> Further, idealism's religious dimension partially accounts for its moderate, reformist nature; though only in part, for it is unlikely that a Balliol-propagated philosophy could have been revolutionary .

How is idealism linked to religious belief? Idealism can best be understood as a surrogate for Christian faith. It appealed to a 'transitional' generation which faced a crisis of faith in the wake of formidable scientific scholarship such as the secular theories of Darwin.<sup>41</sup> For Green, idealism became a prop to a wavering faith. But this is not to say he and other idealist atheists forgot their Christian roots: a great many Christian values were retained, though in a modified form. Christ's teachings relating to the 'brotherhood of man' were echoed in idealism, but were qualified by the argument that this and other doctrines were derived from Greek ethics: Christians were essentially the 'children' of Greece who merely provided zeal in pursuing Greek virtues.<sup>42</sup> The Evangelical belief in redemption (they did not share the Puritan belief in associating sin with poverty) was based on an understanding that citizens could become poor by circumstance, and hence remedial action to change circumstance could lessen the incidence of poverty and the low moral standards accompanying it. Idealists were in this tradition when they argued that state action, to deliver basic environmental and educational



conditions, would be advantageous to moral and material welfare. Finally, metaphysical aspects of the Christian faith were repeated. Idealists spoke of the immortality of individual souls, because their lives had informed the eternal consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Idealism employed religious language and analogies to emphasize the duties of citizenship in the context of an absolute essence existing beyond space and time.<sup>44</sup>

Idealism did not burst unheralded onto the social and philosophical scenes in the 1880s. As argued above, the heritage of modern German and ancient Greek scholarship was crucial. Wordsworth was of the opinion that if Plato's Republic were published few would read it, but added "and yet we have embodied it all".<sup>45</sup> Idealism also evolved from early Victorian religious theology. A generation before its rise to popularity Broad Church reformers in the tradition of Coleridge had advocated a spiritual offensive by active self-sacrificing citizens against the selfishness of commercial society. In the Evangelical tradition they questioned the utilitarian doctrine defining happiness as pleasure. Broad Churchmen looked towards ecumenicalism in the hope that a universal Christian effort would deliver the 'co-operative' society which Chartism had failed to bring (a liberal Anglicanism embracing other forms of Protestantism was in itself co-operative). An attempt was made to shift religious belief away from a pre-occupation with biblical truth towards a pragmatic interaction with society. This was evident in the work of the Christian Socialists who, perplexed at the defeat of Chartism, sought to relieve workers from exploitation by providing for their cultural uplift. The Working Men's College, established in 1854 by F.D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley and others, was an example of the kind of partnership between church and secular society at which Christian Socialists aimed.<sup>46</sup> The Christian Socialist ethos was almost identical to that of idealism. The idea of

the settlement house, for example, came from the former not the latter. The Christian Socialist, D.J. Vaughan, was both an uncle of Green and a formative influence. The language of Christian Socialism and idealism was remarkably similar. Kingsley anticipated the notion of eternal consciousness strengthened by individual self-development in his perception of accumulated human wisdom as the guarantor of civilized behaviour:

Every lesson which you learn in school, all knowledge which raises you above the savage or the profligate (who is but a savage dressed in civilized garments) has been made possible to you by them [the wise] .... Either the knowledge itself, or other knowledge which led to it, is an heirloom to you from men whose bodies are now mouldering in the dust but whose spirits live for ever before God, and whose works follow them, going on, generation after generation, upon the path which they had trod while they were upon earth, the path of usefulness, a light to the steps of youth and ignorance. They [the wise] are the salt of the earth, which keeps the world of man from decaying back into barbarism.<sup>47</sup>

Further, like idealism, Christian Socialism's advocacy of cultural diffusion was reformist. F.D. Maurice explained:

We believed and felt that unless the classes in this country which had any degree of knowledge more than their fellows were willing to share it with their fellows, to regard it as precious because it bound them to their fellows, England would fall first under an anarchy, and then under a despotism.<sup>48</sup>

It was this emphasis on culture as a social bond for stabilizing capitalism in a gentler mode which similarly helped underpin the early public library movement.

### The Intersection of Idealist and Public Library Philosophies

Idealism and the religious influences which gave rise to it were reflected in the development of the early public library movement. The



literature of the public library provides no evidence that idealist ideas were widely read by the institution's protagonists.<sup>49</sup> However, their utterances were remarkably similar to the vocabulary of idealism and the pious language of its Evangelical and ecumenical origins. The early public library fitted well into the framework of idealist thought, to such an extent that the latter must be considered as a theory explaining development: that is to say, idealism acted as a flywheel for cultural development via the free provision of literature in a communal, civic setting.

For this assertion to be correct it must first be established that the declared motives of promoters in the early decades of the public library's existence matched, to a degree, those of Broad Church Evangelicals. An illuminating document in this regard is the record of the speech given by George Dawson (a minister of the Church of the Saviour in Birmingham) at the opening of Birmingham's reference library in 1866, in which he reiterated much of what he told the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849.<sup>50</sup>

Dawson described a library as "one of the greatest causes, as it is one of the greatest results of man's civilization". He did not discount its utilitarian role:

... here a man gets himself ready for his calling, arms himself for his profession, finds out the facts that are to determine his trade, prepares himself for his examination.

But he stressed more the library's cultural role as a vehicle for citizenship. It was a:

... solemn chamber in which a man can take counsel with all that has been wise and great and good and glorious among the men that have gone before him, - (cheers).

This wisdom allowed the heat of discussions - ecclesiastical, political



and social - to be dissipated: "When a man has worked himself into this unwise heat a good place for him to go is a great library, and that will quiet him down admirably." In the name of conciliation he said he took pleasure in arranging in his own library the greats of old side by side according to their divergences. He put Radical beside Tory and "they lie down together as the wolf and the lamb". A library in Dawson's eyes was for 'all'. He praised the "spirit of corporate ownership": it was "a Holy Communion, a wise Socialism", because the institution was "at the service of the whole people". The library was "all things for all men: the highest to kiss the lowest". Enshrined in the library's civic character - much was made of the fact that Birmingham, unlike many other towns where philanthropy operated, provided its library solely from the rates - was the "proclamation that a great community like this is not to be looked upon as a fortuitous concourse of human atoms, or as a miserable knot of vipers struggling in a pot aiming to get his head above the other in the fierce struggle of competition". Corporate management, he said, secured "permanence of guardianship" for the library's contents. Moving on to a metaphysical plane he wished to make it understood that the library owed its existence to the existence of the town, moreover:

... that a town exists here by Grace of God, that a great town is a solemn organism through which should flow, and in which should be shaped, all the highest, loftiest and truest ends of man's intellectual and moral nature.

Elsewhere Dawson repeated his message of citizenship and duty.

In a collection of sermons published in 1878 he noted:

... a decay of public virtue in this land since I can remember. By public virtue .... I mean that public spirit which makes a man prefer, before his own prosperity and well-being that of

the town or country to which he belongs.<sup>51</sup>

He prescribed as an antidote to this decay the self-sacrifice of "doing good" which he defined not in:

... a mere ecclesiastical sense, - in the way of giving tracts, attending chapel services, and psalm-singing, - but doing good as in the sight of God whom we worship; doing good on the scale of God, that is, as far as the measure of our ability.<sup>52</sup>

From the viewpoint of effective analysis there is danger in reading idealism back into Dawson's comments. Moreover, it would be misleading not to see other influences at play. In his Birmingham speech, for example, he stated the 'multiplication of utility' argument in praising the shared ownership of the library: "I may wish to study the skeleton of a whale, but my house is not large enough to hold one." Yet, notwithstanding the pitfalls of retrospective analysis and the utilitarian influence on municipal development, Dawson's outlook can be interpreted as idealistic.

The idealism of a later religious figure and public library promoter, Canon Samuel Barnett, cannot be questioned. Barnett was the Vicar of St. Jude's, Whitechapel and became the warden of the Toynbee Hall settlement house when it opened in 1885. Barnett urged that we ask ourselves "what we can do to increase the reverence which looks up to God for strength and the charity which is empty of self, what in a word we can do to induce a belief in the existence of good".<sup>53</sup> His solution to this question was that people should show greater sensitivity to the plight of others, which he saw as, to an extent, forthcoming:

One of the signs of the time is a new consciousness of other's needs .... The desire to serve is forcing men to new, and sometimes strange activities; it exists in all and waits for expression.<sup>54</sup>

He believed 'good works' - carried out by all - would make society more cohesive. Barnett preached that the 'haves' must not despise the poor, and the 'have-nots' must not arouse hatred against the rich: "Capital must become more right-hearted, and labour more right-headed".<sup>55</sup> But he believed the onus was on the well-off to help solve problems of poverty and ignorance. This was not to be done by the distribution of 'doles', which were "fatal to the independence of the people" and only perpetuated problems;<sup>56</sup> but by an invigoration of municipal life and institutions. It was within the power of civic authorities to enforce sanitary improvements, to make every house healthy and clean, and to provide common rooms which will serve as libraries.<sup>57</sup>

Barnett supported the campaign for a municipal library in Whitechapel. He led the effort to raise £5000 for the project (to which was added a cheque for £6000 from Passmore Edwards) and to win the vote for adopting the Public Libraries Acts.<sup>58</sup> He looked upon free libraries as wholesome gifts: the best gifts were aimed at "developing the high in the low, at bringing out the manlike qualities in those who live as animals".<sup>59</sup> But improvement had to come "by growth from within and not by accretions from without".<sup>60</sup> A library was a basic requirement whereby citizens, if so disposed, assimilated culture and rejected sensual pleasures:

The workman knows about livelihood; he might also know about life if the great avenues of art, literature and history, down which come the thoughts of ages were open to him. He might be happy in reading, in thinking, or in admiring, and not be driven to find happiness in the excitement of sport or drink.<sup>61</sup>

As did other idealists he viewed the realm of citizenship as international and not confined to the family and civil society. At the stone-laying ceremony of the Whitechapel library he asked:



How can we call upon voters to decide upon tariffs if they have no knowledge of the conditions of the races of the world? How can we ask Englishmen to govern India if they have no knowledge of the natives and their condition of life. There must be knowledge if the world is to go on in its career of progress. We hope that the books to be contained in this library will be the means of distributing knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, his conception of a library was based on its appeal as an intrinsically democratic, corporate institution: "Books spoke alike to rich and poor."<sup>63</sup> Moreover, a library was a meeting place for rich and poor, for the cultured and those seeking culture, for provider and recipient. All the best "good works", Barnett said, were done "with" not "for" people: "Doing which helps must be with the people, among friends; not for the people to strangers."<sup>64</sup> Such a philosophy contradicted atomistic profit-seeking society. He was, not surprisingly, critical of machine production and its division of labour because it robbed workers of the joys of life.<sup>65</sup> He saw libraries as cultural antidotes to alienation. He praised the libraries of London's workingmen's clubs and was pleased to see that among the most patronised works were those of social critics such as Dickens, George Elliot and Charles Kingsley.<sup>66</sup> In his opinion literature sparked imagination, allowing people to escape their drab lives and thoughts of money.<sup>67</sup>

There is also evidence of idealism influencing library managers. The first chairman of the Woolwich Public Libraries Committee, C.H. Grinling, is a case in point. In 1906 Thomas Aldred wrote to his fellow librarian Walter Poweel that:

Grinling is a university man. Educated for the Church he at the last moment declined to take orders on objection to some doctrinal point, and so devoted his life to social work. He is a man of undoubted ability, but likely to end his days in a lunatic asylum. Over study or other causes, causes him at

times to go 'queer' or half 'dotty' - to use a Lancashire term.<sup>68</sup>

Arguably, Aldred's assessment of Grinling confused madness with idealist fervour. Having come down from Oxford in 1884 Grinling trained as a social worker under the Barnetts at Toynbee Hall. Aldred's letter was also mistaken in that Grinling was ordained a Deacon in 1884, later to become curate of St. James', Nottingham. In 1890 he left Nottingham to become secretary of the Woolwich Charity Organization Society. When in 1900 Woolwich became a metropolitan borough Grinling was elected to the Council where he "set a swift pace in urging for better housing, wider education, health services, open spaces - indeed, all those amenities which made for a broader life for the people".<sup>69</sup> He was given the Freedom of the borough in 1937 and remained in Woolwich until his death in 1947.

One of the amenities to which Grinling devoted his life was the public library service. He viewed the public library in wholly idealistic terms:

To the wise man his mind is a Kingdom ....  
The man is truly rich, whose mind, not  
whose house, is richly stored with precious  
things; and he only can attain to beneficent  
power over others who first learns to wisely  
rule himself. Harmony within oneself,  
harmony within nature, with the spirit of  
humanity, finally harmony with the Universal  
Mind are prizes we should seek ... valuing  
all material possessions, and books not least,  
for their serviceableness in this quest.<sup>70</sup>

He linked the metaphysical concept of the "Universal Mind" with practical affairs by speaking of the public library's relevance to the notion of community:

Libraries are workshops, and may become ten  
thousand times better workshops than they  
are to-day, when we recognise that work is  
the activity of body and mind and soul,  
which has as its conscious aim the development

of the life of the individual as a member of the social whole.<sup>71</sup>

Grinling was committed to the civic ideal which he believed Woolwich had "held aloft".<sup>72</sup> In 1928 he expressed the hope that:

... the democracy of the days to come is community, not majority, rule; that the round-table solution of all its [Woolwich's] problems is the ultimate basis of human advance.<sup>73</sup>

Further, his idealism was typically characterized by a social criticism of industrialism. He had a keen interest in natural history.<sup>74</sup> He hoped to restore a sense of kinship not just between the different races of mankind, but between mankind and the animal world: all living things were part of a "natural whole".<sup>75</sup> He aimed for:

Freedom from all that is ugly and unnecessary in our lives. Acceptance of all that is strong and beautiful.<sup>76</sup>

His moral sense was tinged by an awareness of the 'natural' existing within the 'supernatural':

It is freedom we seek and the fruits of freedom - great heartedness, mutual devotion, entry into the full inheritance of nature, man, and all that lies beyond.<sup>77</sup>

The revealed motives of Grinling, Barnett and Dawson do not constitute conclusive evidence that idealism infected public library philosophy. What is significant, however, is that many other public library promoters were saying similar things. The public library's association with citizenship - and with all that citizenship entailed in terms of political socialization and the civic ideal - provides evidence of idealist influences at work.<sup>78</sup> No word occurs more often in the public library debate around the turn of the century than that of 'citizenship'.<sup>79</sup> The Plumstead Public Library was said to teach the "dignities and graces of citizenship".<sup>80</sup> In 1908 the Mile End Public



Library offered a lecture on 'good citizenship'.<sup>81</sup> The librarian W.B. Sayers described a "successful juvenile book" for a public library as one designed "to promote the higher life of the child and to direct him to good citizenship".<sup>82</sup>

Citizenship, as far as idealists were concerned, extended beyond national frontiers. The librarian Stanley Jast once wrote that: "The school of intellectual internationalism is the reference library ... through it you contact the world."<sup>83</sup> Generally, however, the word was applied to national and local institutions<sup>84</sup> - especially political and governing institutions. Citizenship required a measured approach to political debate. In 1886 a clergyman campaigning for a public library in Lambeth was reported to have told his audience:

The safety of England lay in the way the voters were educated. Libraries would strike hard against demagogues, for men would be better able to think for themselves, and would not be left at the mercy of demagogues for their ideas.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, the librarian J.J. Ogle wrote that "ignorance is a danger to the community ... knowledge means death to iconoclastic agitators".<sup>86</sup>

Public libraries set out to provide balanced coverage of potentially controversial matters:

The less we look at things in a party spirit the nearer we shall be to attaining perfection, whether in political, religious or social matters.<sup>87</sup>

The desire to avoid controversy often led to an a-political approach.

Public library lectures reflected this neutral stance. The season of lectures in a Stepney free library in 1900 comprised:

Queen Victoria: her life and reign;  
The Tower of London;  
South Africa;  
A Journey to the North Pole;  
Ants and their ways;  
Ceylon.<sup>88</sup>

The public library encouraged political participation but within the boundaries of the existing political process. Such political participation was crucial to the success not only of national but of local structures also. The idealist Bernard Bosanquet wrote of libraries existing in a communal, parochial setting. He looked forward:

... to a society organised in convenient districts, in which men and women pursuing their different callings will live together with care for one another, and with all the essentials, the same education, the same enjoyments, the same capacities. These men and women will work together in councils and on committees ... they will have pride in their schools and libraries, in their streets and their dwellings, in their workshops and their warehouses.<sup>89</sup>

The free library was often said to be the most popular civic institution. In 1904 a Northampton newspaper declared that the town:

... prides itself, and not without reason, upon its equipment as a municipality. And among the institutions comprised in that equipment there is none that appeals more strongly to the inhabitants of the town than the Free Library; none which is more closely appreciated or more fully taken advantage of.<sup>90</sup>

As expressed by idealists, citizenship fostered by the civic ideal encapsulated the notion of social obligation to fellow citizens. Yet the respect for social duty was not the preserve of idealists.

Utilitarians had also spoken of dutiful citizenship. At the opening of Liverpool Public Library in 1860 Henry Brougham predicted:

I have no manner of doubt that it [the public library] will tend to make the members of the different communions more religious, men more orderly and better subjects, and that the whole community will be improved in its duties towards man, and in its duties towards the government, and in its duties towards Heaven, by the improvement which it will derive from this institution.<sup>91</sup>

However, although some overlapping occurred, idealist and utilitarian



interpretations of dutiful citizenship were essentially divergent. Utilitarians approached citizenship from the standpoint of individualism. The protection of individual rights by law would ensure harmonious social interaction. The law would change and control individual action. Conversely, idealists approached citizenship from the standpoint of humanity's intrinsically social nature. Men and women were socially dutiful because of an innate ethical sense. Utilitarians believed institutions such as the public library would foster powers of reason - and it was reason which guaranteed social peace. Idealists hoped the public library would encourage existing and autonomous feelings of social awareness to flourish.

This divergence can be observed in attitudes to self-help. The history of the public library movement is riddled with the rhetoric of self-help. "Cholera could have travelled no faster",<sup>92</sup> wrote Asa Briggs of self-help: certainly, the public library acted as a channel down which the self-help message could flow rapidly. Utilitarians and idealists alike would have agreed on the egalitarian aspects of self-help: that individuals should be given the opportunity to progress in life. However, the public library movement's perception of self-help changed as utilitarianism waned and idealism found favour. Early utilitarian promoters spoke in terms of the social utility of self-help; individuals relying on their own efforts would stand a better chance of maximizing their own happiness, thereby making a greater contribution to the happiness of society. Self-help in this respect was closely associated with character building and the Puritan work ethic: "I believe all true and genuine culture", said William Priest at the opening of Liverpool Public Library, "consists essentially in hard work."<sup>93</sup> By the next generation, however, public library pleas for self-help initiative were couched more in idealistic terms of



realizing self-potential. In 1911 a public library supporter in Dartford explained that: "Every mind was made for growth, for knowledge, and its nature is sinned against when it is doomed to ignorance."<sup>94</sup> By 1932 Stanley Jast was able to write of the public library's power to offer "Self-development in an atmosphere of freedom."<sup>95</sup>

This shift in attitude represents an idealist leavening of utilitarianism. Expressed motives of public library provision, such as those involving citizenship and self-help, were modified: they became less utilitarian and more idealistic in their derivation.

Utilitarians had promoted, partly via the public library, a citizenship which emphasized individuality within social relations. Through the communal nature of the public library idealists stressed the sanctity of a common life. Moreover, idealists stressed the importance of a common life, which was worth living. Idealism was part of the long-standing critique of industrialism: it looked to a society which would 'succeed' in fulfilling the spiritual potential of human beings. It stated that the industrial society underwritten by utilitarianism had in important ways - in its alienation and in its brutality, for example - 'failed' to meet human needs.

Yet, just as idealist and utilitarian characteristics cannot be easily separated out, it might also be that accusations of failure levelled at the leaders of industrial society similarly require a textured analysis. Such an analysis is invited by the history of the public library which, although of utilitarian origin and so frequently a product of industrial sponsorship, displayed in the same instant a remarkable solidarity with the social criticism of the age.

Middle Class Failure Versus Success: the Public Library's Paradoxical Role as a Solvent for Industrial Squalor

The idea of middle class 'failure', in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, has been a point of recent debate for historians.<sup>96</sup> The debate on the English middle class was initiated in the mid-1960s by Anderson and Nairn.<sup>97</sup> Their aim was to explain the absence of revolutionary ambition amongst the working class by analysing the relationship between aristocracy and bourgeoisie in the period since the political upheavals of the seventeenth century. Although they acknowledged the importance of 'history from below', they claimed it was only relevant if accompanied by an analysis of 'history from above'.<sup>98</sup> England was perceived as having, in the seventeenth century, the least pure bourgeois revolution of any major European country. It was an agrarian not an urban elite which emerged triumphant from the civil war and the Glorious Revolution, and became in the eighteenth century a virile capitalist class through agrarian revolution. The industrial bourgeoisie which emerged during the Industrial Revolution was confronted by the simultaneous appearance of a threatening proletariat. To safeguard its future the bourgeoisie gravitated towards the aristocracy which had its own reasons for welcoming such an alliance, as Nairn explains:

Afraid from the beginning of the power of the new labouring masses brought into being by and for the Industrial Revolution itself, intimidated by the spectacle of the French Revolution and all it signified, the English middle class quickly arrived at a 'compromise' with the English ancien regime. Because of its basically capitalist structure (tenant-farming carried on by wage labour for profit) and its absence of legal definition as a privileged estate, the aristocracy was such that a 'compromise' of this sort was possible.<sup>99</sup>

The result of this amalgamation was a 'fusion' of cultures, but one in

which that of the old order dominated. The middle class sought to ape aristocratic values which enjoyed a renaissance under late nineteenth century Imperialism: extending and strengthening the Empire placed a premium on the aristocratic trait of leadership and supercharged the monarchy.

These cultural arguments have been adopted by some historians in attempting to explain a perceived malfunction in the British economy over the past hundred years. The dominance of traditional over utilitarian values produced a 'gentlemanly' capitalism which eclipsed industrial production.<sup>100</sup> Enterprise was slanted in the direction of commercial and financial pursuits related to the international economy. The British educational system was "geared not to the production of industrial managers or scientists, but to the socialization of gentlemen into the cultural symbols of an elite."<sup>101</sup> The stigma attached to 'getting one's hands dirty' pushed some of the ablest into careers in the City which did not concern itself with industrial degeneration at home, but with the movements of capital in world markets; arguably, the dominant capitalist objective had, since the early nineteenth century, been to make Britain not the 'workshop of the world' but the 'Venice of the nineteenth century'.<sup>102</sup> The vast fortunes of the last century were made in commercial ventures and financial services: there were few equivalents in Britain of the industrial robber barons in the United States. Hence, it is argued, industrial business did not evolve a fully independent culture.

Rather, there was:

... a slavish imitation of the landed aristocracy and its mores in the countryside or the West End of London, and most certainly in the life-styles of their sons and grandsons.<sup>103</sup>

The cultural assumptions underpinning these economic arguments



have been challenged.<sup>104</sup> The implication of the argument that cultural fusion produced gentlemanly capitalism is that a residue formed of inward-looking uncultured Northern industrialists usually of Nonconformist persuasion. The image was caricatured by Dickens in his Hard Times (1854), a powerful socio-economic criticism of the Victorian industrial world. The local schoolmaster Mr. Gradgrind was made to epitomise all that was inhumane in Coketown. He wished to imbue his students with 'facts' to assist their material existence: he "had a particular pride in the phrase eminently practical, which was considered to have a special application to him." When Mrs. Gradgrind discovered that her children had been doing something as 'fancy' and useless as peeping at the local circus she told them to: "Go and be somethingological directly."

For many reasons the stereotyped image of uncultured elites in Northern industrial towns is misplaced. First, although Gradgrinds could be found in such towns, they also existed elsewhere: in debating the Public Libraries Bill in 1849 the protectionist Tory member for Lincoln, Colonel Charles Sibthorpe, was reported to have said that "he did not like reading at all, and he hated it when at Oxford".<sup>105</sup> Second, early industrialists were as likely to be Tory and Anglican as utilitarian and Dissenting.<sup>106</sup> Third, commerce (and agriculture) and industry were symbiotic, not insulated from each other.<sup>107</sup> Fourth, there has been little definition of the aristocratic values which industrialists fell short of or clumsily aped: aristocracy and agrarian capital have been confused. Fifth, social critics like Dickens were publicists who had an interest in exaggerating fictional characters.<sup>108</sup> Sixth, the anti-business literature, which critics like Weiner cite, has a pre-industrial heritage.<sup>109</sup>

Further, it is not certain that the social critics, who purveyors

of the 'gentlemanly' capitalism argument sometimes invoke, were consistent in their denigration of middle class businessmen. Matthew Arnold can, on the one hand, be found labelling the middle classes as Philistines. In his essay Democracy (1861) he wrote:

They want [need ] culture and dignity; they want ideas. Aristocracy has culture and dignity; democracy has readiness for new ideas, and ardour for what ideas it possesses. Of these, the middle class has the last only: ardour for the ideas it already possesses. It believes ardently in liberty [religious toleration], it believes ardently in industry; and by its zealous belief in these two ideas it has accomplished great things .... Now, all the liberty and industry in the world will not ensure these two things: a high reason and a fine culture.<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, in his essay Equality (1878), Arnold perceives a cultural refinement amongst the middle class: "Serious knowledge, high accomplishment and refined taste" were to be found in a large class of gentlemen in the professions, the services, literature and politics, and to these "a good contingent is now added from business also".<sup>111</sup> Arnold does not say he is referring to commercial or industrial business. The latter, however, did display a high degree of cultural achievement. Making money and engaging in cultural pursuits were not incompatible. As Seed writes of Manchester's wealthy unitarians, they showed it was possible "to be an ardent disciple of political economy and of Wordsworth's poetry, to ruminate in a Byronic melancholy on the ruins of Greece while one's capital accrued surplus back in Lancashire".<sup>112</sup> Moreover, cultural identity could be preserved even if exposed to traditional ways of life. As Gunn writes:

What needs to be emphasised in analysis of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie is the importance of not assuming a simple correlation between social behaviour, ideology and economic practice. It was



perfectly plausible for a Victorian industrialist to ride with the local hunt, build himself a castle in the country, and adopt a 'neo-feudal' pose of paternalist employer, without consciously compromising in any way the imperative of capitalist production or class commitment.<sup>113</sup>

It is apparent that in the middle class 'failure' debate there has been a tendency to use the word culture ambiguously. To speak of cultural 'failure' could mean either the eschewal of cultural pursuits - art, literature, music, etc. - in the ardour of material gain; or the failure to develop a separate cultural identity. The two perceptions are clearly distinct from one another, and are derived from the twin definition of 'culture'. The latter can be interpreted as a total way of life, not of an individual or type of individual, but of an entire society. Culture in this sense embraces the ideas, practices, artefacts and symbol systems of human groups; it merges in this respect with the concept of civilizations existing in particular historical epochs. The other interpretation of culture is connected with artistic and intellectual activity. Dr. Johnson defined culture as the "art of improvement and melioration".<sup>114</sup> The New Oxford English Dictionary (1893) stated that it was: "The cultivation or development (of mind, faculties, manners etc.); improvement or refinement by education and training".<sup>115</sup> This was also Arnold's interpretation:

... a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought or said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits.<sup>116</sup>

Culture in this sense - that is to say, the 'work of perfection' - was the antithesis of the utilitarian conception of education as the training of individuals to carry out particular tasks.<sup>117</sup>

The clarification of the meaning of 'culture' is important if



the rebuff to the 'gentlemanly' capitalism and middle class failure arguments is to be plausible: separating out the two meanings permits the assertion that Victorian middle class culture was in its relevant aspects authentic and successful.

It was successful in that cultural improvement was a middle class characteristic. This was not only the case, as noted above, in matters such as literary and art appreciation, which constitute the modern, popular definition of 'culture'.<sup>118</sup> Science also can be considered a cultural pursuit. T.H. Huxley argued that although 'rule of thumb' had been idolised as the source of prosperity, science made a contribution to culture in its powers of observation and criticism, which were intrinsically human. Science, he said, ennobled character and could be used to help analyse social action (i.e. culture in the anthropological sense).<sup>119</sup> Arnold - usually seen as the arch-critic of scientific materialism - concurred with Huxley in seeing science as a road to culture. He had faith in its civilizing power because it was conducive to what he called human 'expansion' (the full and free development of individual existence): "curiosity", he said, was in an intelligent being "natural and laudable".<sup>120</sup> He believed all learning, even in the humanities, had a scientific basis, if it was "systematically laid out and followed up to its original sources".<sup>121</sup> Further, it has been argued that science stood for moral edification because of the values of improvement and utility associated with it. But it went further than polite knowledge; it expressed the values of technological progress and intellectual enlightenment. Science became an expression of the cultural values of the new manufacturing elite even if the latter related more to its symbolic value than to its practical applications.<sup>122</sup>

Victorian middle class culture was authentic in that a separate identity was formed. Whereas Anderson and Nairn might have been correct

in seeing utilitarianism as too narrow and culturally deficient to underpin effective hegemony, they overlooked the influence of political economy—the articulated ideological justification of science, machinery, progress and materialism.<sup>123</sup> The power of bourgeois ideas about economic life was pervasive, particularly in the absence of alternatives. Moreover, economic ideas were often sanctioned by ideas on moral conduct. This was especially true of religion: divinity and economics ran together.<sup>124</sup> They also underestimated the political power of the middle class. In an early critique of the Anderson-Nairn thesis E.P. Thompson disputed the idea that the aristocracy continued to be the political masters: the best-remembered politicians were Lloyd George, Peel, Disraeli, Gladstone and Bright, not Lords Derby, Palmerston or Salisbury.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the political self-confidence and sovereignty of the bourgeoisie in its native urban setting was unquestionable. These factors point to a robust bourgeois culture with an authentic and distinct ideology. It was the middle classes, many believed, who provided the prosperity upon which social stability rested. As Arnold wrote:

The great middle classes of this country are conscious of no weakness, no inferiority; they do not want anyone to provide anything for them. Such as they are that believe the freedom and prosperity of England are their work, and that the future belongs to them.<sup>126</sup>

The arguments that the middle class was successful culturally (cultured) and possessed an authentic, distinct cultural outlook, gain support from the evidence of public library history. Aspects of public library development throw into sharp relief the idea of middle class failure; though not to the extent of suggesting that all middle class groups by any means championed culture.<sup>127</sup>

Despite extensive working class use, public libraries were



essentially institutions of the middle classes; provided by them, run by them, and used by them in not inconsiderable numbers. It is a paradox of the middle class failure argument that London - where businessmen were presumed to have assimilated culture - was so slow to develop its municipal libraries. In the City, however, a library was established and made public. In 1869 it was urged that a new building for the Guildhall Library would "respond to the cravings of every wise and thoughtful man that the Capital of this vast Empire may be the Capital of Intelligence".<sup>128</sup> It was said that:

Among the bankers, merchants and tradesmen of our City there are men who have felt it an honour to enrol themselves in the ranks of literature, whose fame hereafter will depend more upon their contributions to literature and science than to anything they may have done in the accumulation of wealth; such men - honoured and respected in all circles, possessing the confidence and respect of their fellow-citizens - we call upon to be up and doing in this matter.<sup>129</sup>

This enthusiasm for culture amongst the wealthy middle class did not, according to one account, spread to some industrial areas, it being stated in a history of Sheffield libraries that such matters:

... seemed to have no meaning to the men of most influence in Sheffield, whose standard of culture was low compared with other towns. They had no conception of the many-sided value of books, which had so little, in their view, to do with 'getting on'.<sup>130</sup>

Elsewhere, however, the substantial middle class supported public libraries. Wealthy and powerful groups in Bolton gave generously for the establishment of a town library in 1853.<sup>131</sup> Manchester's library was described in a letter to the Mayor as an institution "worthy of the wealth and power" of the city.<sup>132</sup> When a wealthy merchant, William Brown, donated new buildings in Liverpool in 1861 it was said that:



"Commerce is again lending her protectorate to literature and to art, as in the brief prime of Florence and of Genoa".<sup>133</sup> It was argued that the benefaction belied the image of commercial men as "hard fisted" and "grasping", who made "their desk their altar, and their money their God". Rather, it showed that "commerce does not confine its energies within its own and special range".<sup>134</sup>

Commercial and industrial enterprise alike gave financial support to public libraries. The source of this support, by virtue of the large sums involved ( though subscriptions for establishing libraries came from all classes), was the haute bourgeoisie. Those who ran libraries - committees and librarians - were from intermediate middle class groups, generally less wealthy and influential. (Throughout much of the period working classes were not represented on committees.)<sup>135</sup> Committees saw, from time to time, political squabbles.<sup>136</sup> But it was not as intense a battleground for rival ideologies as housing and education.<sup>137</sup> Many library committees, unlike other committees, had a high proportion of non-sectarian co-opted members chosen for their standing as local moral leaders or as 'men of letters'.<sup>138</sup> Businessmen also found their way on to library committees. Councillor W.H. Reeves, Chairman of the Northampton committee and the person responsible for the new library building of 1910, was described as "an energetic man of the best business type ... it is fair to say that he has enhanced that reputation, and also local opinion of his ability for public affairs, by the splendid way he has pioneered this scheme".<sup>139</sup> Despite the reservations of Edward Edwards, who argued that men of education were little represented on councils and hence gave little support to library schemes, it was generally the case that those who ran libraries had a not insignificant respect for culture.<sup>140</sup> Public libraries were the shop windows in which was displayed the liking for culture. As the

Islington Gazette stated in discussing the suburb's new library system:

The prosperity, intelligence and virility of a municipality may be gauged by the number and nature of its institutions. Point to a borough's educational and philanthropic institutions and its other agencies for uplifting the people, and it will not be difficult to judge of the characters of the men to whom the administrative work of the district is entrusted.<sup>141</sup>

The cultural purposes for which the middle classes established and ran public libraries were shared by middle class user groups. The extent of the latter should not be underestimated. The Norwich reference library was described shortly after its opening as "for the learned, and interesting to the learned only".<sup>142</sup> The 'Rochdale pioneers' objected to a public library for the town because they had already provided reading rooms for their own members and found little point in taxing themselves for an institution which they believed was for use by trading, shopkeeping, middle and upper classes.<sup>143</sup> Further, it should be stressed that middle class interest in social reform (including library provision) was not solely based on control imperatives: the middle class might benefit directly from social policy. As John Bright stated, "there was no greater folly than starting a coach by which the middle class will not travel".<sup>144</sup>

But was middle class use based on motives for establishing public libraries other than a pure desire for cultural affluence? It has been argued that the establishment of institutions such as public libraries were mere defensive reactions to stinging accusations of Philistinism. In her study of leisure in late Victorian and Edwardian Bristol, Meller wrote that the "provision of cultural facilities devoted to the formal concept of Liberal Culture ... sometimes became the spearhead of an attempt to salvage the reputation of the city".<sup>145</sup> The same motive has



been attributed to early nineteenth century initiatives in 'mucky' Leeds.<sup>146</sup> Perkin has argued in connection with middle class spending generally that it was socially emulative of aristocratic consumption patterns.<sup>147</sup> Some such spending on cultural artefacts and pursuits was possibly suspect on these grounds: an enthusiasm for books could have been a symbolic expression of social position rather than a product of intellectual interest, as was often the case in the Roman Empire where to possess a private library (each of Cicero's eighteen villas has one) was a normal badge of luxury and achievement worn by the crude and newly rich.<sup>148</sup>

The argument that middle class culture was mostly for 'show' is, however, questionable. For example, there is no financial evidence to support the idea that the wealthy bought art only as an investment.<sup>149</sup> Though a certain amount of spending and enterprise in the cultural field (private and public) was no doubt symbolic, it should not eclipse a sincere motive of educational advance for the middle classes. "What a sad want I am in of libraries, of books to gather facts from!" wrote Carlyle.<sup>150</sup> He and others were forced into establishing their own repositories of knowledge.<sup>151</sup> As late as 1887 a Sunday School promoter could state:

I have not found the best libraries in the houses of my richest friends .... How many middle class houses one enters to find that the library is represented by a few volumes, chiefly presents or school prizes, in a little bookcase.<sup>152</sup>

Clearly, middle class library supply did not meet middle class literary demand. Hence, public libraries found support and were used by the middle classes. Backed by civic finances extensive and useful collections could be formed, thereby offering a service which the fiction-orientated subscription libraries could not.



Notwithstanding the intense competition between municipalities to produce institutions symbolic of a town's supremacy in civic and commercial achievement, public libraries were genuine attempts to satisfy a yearning for cultural profit amongst middle class providers, administrators and users. For some, materialism was a mere "stepping stone to those intellectual endowments and higher characteristics which were the real guarantees of national progress".<sup>153</sup> In suggesting a public library for Blackpool the borough's Treasurer argued that: "Whilst looking after the rolling shilling they must not neglect the cultural and intellectual side of a progressive community".<sup>154</sup> The public library was frequently presented as a medium for transmitting into the present the accumulated wisdom of the past: the 'work of perfection' could not proceed without reference to recorded cultural achievement. Carlyle wrote that:

Every one able to read a good book becomes a wiser man. He becomes a similar centre of light and order, and just insight into things around him. A collection of good books contains all the nobleness and wisdom of the world before us.<sup>155</sup>

Emphasizing the rich history of culture was the aim of the library's stock generally, and the local history library in particular. Local collections did not just add to a sense of civic unity, they also safeguarded the past cultural achievement of the locality. The custodial role of the public library was epitomized by its local history department which stressed a respect for the endeavours of citizens' ancestors. Librarians at a Library Association summer school in 1897 were told:

Nothing needed more enforcing at the present time than a sense of reverence for the past, and nothing was more likely to excite reverence than the sight of an early printed book, and of the exquisite care with which the early printers did their work.<sup>156</sup>

Other aspects of service which evinced culture were music libraries, and the art galleries and museums run in conjunction with public libraries. Art galleries and museums deserve extensive separate consideration, which cannot be afforded here. But something can be said about music departments which, though not found in every medium or large library, certainly made an early appearance in some. The circulation of music began in 1859, in Liverpool.<sup>157</sup> By 1913 Bournemouth had a music library of over 3000 volumes housed in a lavishly styled separate room in the new library recently opened.<sup>158</sup> In 1892 it was estimated that about thirty public libraries stocked sheet music and scores: these included Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Dulwich, Peckham, Reading and Norwich. It was reckoned that the "middle class are doubtless, on the whole, the most frequent borrowers, but in several towns the working class are also keenly appreciative of the advantages of the music department".<sup>159</sup>

That science could aspire to cultural status was reflected in public library content and ethos. The benefactor of the Liverpool Public Library, William Brown, linked science - which, in its stock and in its museum, his new library promoted - with civilization:

How immeasurably increased has been our intercourse amongst ourselves and with the world, by our intelligent engineers and our skilled workmen! All this is the work of enlightened pioneers - men of science. Without their aid mankind would be semi-barbarians.<sup>160</sup>

Further, as discussed above, Passmore Edwards's motives in supporting public libraires showed how the institution could accommodate science as both a practical and a cultural pursuit.

Culture via the public library was also espoused for its advantageous economic benefits, as the previous chapter demonstrated.



At the opening of the Loughborough free library in 1886 a local manufacturer was reported as having called for a 'higher mental culture' to fight German competition precisely because:

... the people of Germany were so much higher cultivated. They were cultivated scientifically, artistically, literally, and generally, and if they wished to hold their own as the greatest producing nation of the world, they could only meet the competition of the Germans by raising themselves in every point at least on a level with, and he hoped to a higher level than, the Germans of the present time.<sup>161</sup>

Culture clearly had a 'value'.<sup>162</sup> Those who have disputed the argument that the nineteenth century middle class in some way 'failed' have failed to spell this out. Whilst they are correct in seeing that material and cultural pursuits were not incompatible there is no recognition that culture can generate material gain.

The symbiotic relationship between culture and materialism was clearly visible in the public library movement's reaction to industrialism's squalor - defined as a combination of environmental ugliness and the alienation of specialized work. At face value this statement is a paradox: the public library's role as an agency for cultural enlightenment did not fit either with its dispensing of practical knowledge to fuel industrialism or its civic prominence in industrial towns. This apparent contradiction was captured in the way Dickens' Mr. Gradgrind viewed his local Coketown library in Hard Times:

There was a library in Coketown, to which general access was easy. Mr. Gradgrind greatly tormented his mind about what the people read in this library ... It was a disheartening circumstance but a melancholy fact that even these readers persisted in wondering. (Wondering being the cultivation of the sentiments and affections, as opposed to mechanical, utilitarian learning.) They wondered about human nature, human passions, human



hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of common men and women! They sometimes, after fifteen hours' work, sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own. They took Defoe to their bosoms instead of Euclid, and seemed to be on the whole more comforted by Goldsmith than by Cocker. Mr. Gradgrind was forever working, in print and out of print, at this eccentric sum, and he never could make out how it yielded this unaccountable product.

Perspective was given to the ugliness of industrialism in Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present (1843), which made a notable impact on Victorian culture, finding an audience (including Ruskin and Engels) particularly among those "spiritually adrift and anti-materialistic".<sup>163</sup> As a counterpoint to preoccupations with money and progress Carlyle drew a picture of an aesthetic, ordered, hierarchical life in a twelfth century English abbey. It was a society governed by justice and an aristocracy of talent in contrast to the vulgar, democratic impulses which Carlyle thought were afflicting early Victorian society.<sup>164</sup> Carlyle's evocation was based on an idealised vision of the past and a dislike of profit-seeking, atomistic society; sentiments previously articulated by Carlyle. His aim was to draw attention to "a superior heroic society that indicted the prosaic present".<sup>165</sup> He had no apparent sympathy with the pursuit of material ends:

We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that 'cash-payment' is not the solo relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubted, that it absolves and liquidates all engagements of man .... Verily, Mammon-worship is a melancholy creed.<sup>166</sup>

He yearned for a world rid of squalid mass manufacturing:

How silent ... lie all Cotton-trades and such like; not a steeple chimney yet got on end from sea to sea! ... Side by side

sleep the coal-strata and the iron-strata for so many ages; no Steam-Demon has yet risen smoking into being.<sup>167</sup>

Later social critics drew greater attention to the effect of machine production on human existence. J.A. Hobson, critic of unfettered capitalism, wrote of the mind-numbing monotony which industrial employment brought with it: division of labour robbed workers of the power to think and reason. He explained that:

The defect of machinery, from the educative point of view, is its absolute conservatism. The law of machinery is a law of statical order, that everything conforms to a pattern, that present actions precisely resemble past and future actions. Now the law of human life is dynamic requiring order not as valuable in itself, but as the condition of progress. The law of human life is that no experience, no thought or feeling is an exact copy of any other. Therefore, if you confine a man to expending his energy in trying to conform exactly to the movements of a machine, you teach him to abrogate the very principle of life.<sup>168</sup>

The problem in the late nineteenth century was that machines were proliferating and getting quicker, even in old industries like cotton spinning. Yet, this acceleration was not matched by a commensurate increase in the work-force: that is to say, labour was being increasingly sweated.<sup>169</sup>

There is evidence that the late nineteenth century was marked by an intensification of labour in both old and new production methods. On more than one front workers found themselves under increasing pressure affecting the basic quality of life.<sup>170</sup> William Morris neatly captured these trends when he described how machines had "driven men into frantic haste and hurry" instead of relieving them of work burdens as early political economists had



predicted.<sup>171</sup>

But it was not just life at work which became increasingly sordid. Industrial development had also stained the urban environment: life was noisier and dirtier. The idealist Samuel Barnett in 1894 wrote:

Cities increase and the country becomes more and more empty. Observers shake their heads as they walk through the long, dull streets, and breathe the close air, and see the pale faces of the people .... Their hearts sink at the thought of the future, and they find themselves saying that cities will crowd in a blacker, incessanter line, that the din will be more, the trade denser, and that they will never see an ennobling sight, or drink of the feeling of quiet again!<sup>172</sup>

The Liberal M.P. Charles Masterman in 1902 wrote:

Spacious, quiet, a large horizon, flowers by the roadside, the willow by the stream: this is the world of dream. Stepney and Camberwell, the roar of traffic, the crowded streets, hot, restless, hurried life - this is the real world.<sup>173</sup>

The suggested antidotes to squalor were manifold, and included recreation via the public library. By the late nineteenth century the idea had taken hold that recreation did not have to be purely rational.<sup>174</sup> This was in keeping with Dr. Johnson's definition of 'diversion': that is to say, "something that unbends the mind by turning it off from care".<sup>175</sup> As society became richer, it was said, the opportunity for recreation increased, not just in terms of higher mental culture,<sup>176</sup> but also reading for amusement (non-fiction as well as fiction). The public library complemented the increased demand for recreation in an industrial environment. Public library books on natural history, for example, were not unpopular. This was not only the result of Darwin's work but was connected with the long-standing belief that 'God made the countryside, man the towns'. Thus, unitarians were



advised to make regular visits to the countryside or natural history museums to bring them nearer to God;<sup>177</sup> whilst a museum (in association with a library) was proposed for Exeter partly because "natural science leads to religion, natural religion leads to revealed religion ... they thus form one golden chain leading us to God".<sup>178</sup> But interest in natural history could also be autonomous and secular, as in the case of the early nineteenth century handloom weaver William Heaton who, along with fellow-workers, formed a library on insects, and collected various items of natural science interest.<sup>179</sup> Further, public library books on travel and geography - illustrating far-off lands untouched by machines - were also popular free library issues. In her advocacy of public libraries Janetta Manners related that: "Those who dwell in towns love to read of beautiful countries, and many look forward to the possibility of some day visiting fresh scenes."<sup>180</sup>

But it was not simply in their contents that public libraries countered squalor. Although the librarian Zebedee Moon might have complained that his Leyton library was subjected to "the fiendish yells and other ear splitting noises interjected by the human voice and mechanical instruments of torture",<sup>181</sup> public libraries were generally havens from the hectic activities of life. As Stanley Jevons noted: "To many a moneyless weary man the Free Library is a literary club; an unexceptional refuge from the strife and dangers of life."<sup>182</sup> The public library's appeal to loafers says much, indeed, about the serene, unmolested atmosphere therein.

The public library also combated "the dullness of the daily life of the masses".<sup>183</sup> It afforded the workman:

... a relief from the dulness and monotony of his task .... By perusing the books in the library, the working man can obtain for nothing, a relief a thousand times preferable to that which he seeks at such

a cost in other places. In establishing such an institution you open out to the working man an inexhaustible fountain of the most refine and most refining pleasure.<sup>184</sup>

It was suggested that library recreation might counter de-humanising specialization:

In our manufactures the division of labour was carried to a high pitch. This added, no doubt, enormously to the rapidity of production and the excellence of workmanship, but it also tended to cramp the mind. To counteract this books were more and more necessary.<sup>185</sup>

The public library's role as a solvent for squalor was seemingly contradictory. On the one hand the institution was a product of industrial society; a common feature of industrial towns and frequently underwritten by industrial benefactors. On the other hand it was firmly rooted in the social criticism which accompanied industrialism. An answer to this contradiction would appear to coincide with one of the traditional reasons for providing the various amenities which improved the quality of urban living. ("Who can quarrel", wrote William Morris, "with the attempts to relieve the squalor of civilized town life by the public acquirement of parks and other open spaces, planting trees, the establishment of free libraries, and the like."<sup>186</sup>) An unfettered pursuit of the 'cash nexus' was simply not possible. It was counter-productive in that it produced problems of control. Hence, an amelioration of conditions was important if capitalist production was to continue. In Northwich the public library was thus assisted by the manufacturer John Brunner in the same paternalistic spirit - he provided holiday pay, pensions, sickness benefit, continuing education and workingmen's club - that characterized the running of his concerns.<sup>187</sup> In such instances a public library was a point of intersection where scientific materialism and culture met. This has been seen as a point

of collision. At the opening of a branch library in East London in 1931 the novelist H.M. Tomlinson stated that public libraries:

... were important in this age of machinery when standards of truth and beauty were in danger of going under a mass of tarmac and electric pylons, and individuality and personality were going under the same steam roller.<sup>188</sup>

This statement contained no awareness of the compatibility of culture and materialism. Yet, the pre-1914 public library represented a marriage - with the inevitable moment of friction, admittedly - between the two.

The public library's cultural concerns assisted capitalism. From the 1870s onwards references to the public library as a centre of 'sweetness and light' abound. Thomas Greenwood wrote in 1886:

Centres of light are these libraries, if not sweetness, and the sweetness lies in the appreciative light in which they are held.<sup>189</sup>

Matthew Arnold, the author of 'sweetness and light', might have criticized industrialism but his aim, and that of most other social critics of the age, was a spiritual reform of capitalism, not its extinction. The public library ideal occupied the same standpoint, straddling a line between mindless materialism and passionate radicalism.

The history of the public library raises questions about the assessment of the pre-1914 period as an era of great 'loss' brought about by the greed of uncultured Gradgrinds. A degree of 'loss' and a presence of Gradgrinds cannot be denied. Yet the picture is not simple but textured. Industrialism and its major promoters were not stereotypes: by a study of the public library, at any rate, a respect for culture can be identified. It was possible for a town to be both wealthy and intelligent, and led by "industrialists in search of



gentility".<sup>190</sup> What needs to be emphasized is not the middle class' subordination to aristocratic values and its nervousness in the face of rising working class power; but its strength, confidence and independence, and the implications which these had for social stability.

### Social Control

The argument that public libraries were authentic and successful middle class institution begs the question of their status as instruments of social control - in that the working classes, who formed the bulk of the readership, were perhaps exposed to the hegemonic ambitions of middle class providers and their subaltern managers. But before this question can be answered a brief assessment of the social control thesis is required.

Social control is a term diffuse in meaning. One historian has denigrated it as having laid "fair claim to the title of top historical cliché of the 1970s".<sup>191</sup> Historians have undoubtedly misused the term. It remains, however, a neat sociological description of the mechanism for the regulation of social behaviour. To elaborate, it is necessary to turn to the thoughts of a modern sociologist. "For society to survive", writes Popenoe:

it must have ways to condition the actions of people to make them want to conform to social norms most of the time. This is accomplished with mechanisms or processes of social control. There are two main types of social control process: internal and external. One consists of those internal processes that cause people to be self-motivated to act in a conforming manner. The other consists of external pressures on people to conform through the use of various formal and informal social sanctions.<sup>192</sup>

Internal social control occurs when people accept as part of their

identity, and usually without reservation, the norms of a group, or society as a whole. Informal controls are the result of how people perceive the potential for negative reaction from acquaintances - that is to say, self-regulation through the fear of peer response to disapproved, deviant action. Taken together, these internal and informal aspects produce the definition of social control in its classical and enduring sense, as formulated by the pioneer sociologists at the turn of the century.<sup>193</sup> It was not until the 1930s, under the impact of the Great Depression and the rise of totalitarianism, that sociologists departed from these formulations of social control as they became fascinated and preoccupied with issues of power. It was then that social control was "transformed into a pejorative term which came to mean conformity and social repression".<sup>194</sup> It is in this sense that many historians have made use of the term. They are interested not in the policing of people by themselves but by others, which in a class society means the implementation of methods for exercising class control. Barrington Moore has pointed out that:

To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, and sometimes even taught sociology.<sup>195</sup>

'Main force' is naturally essential to the maintenance of social authority. But it cannot be the only means of control. Even fascist dictatorship coercion needs to be complemented by the organization of consent via psychological means - if only to control the personnel of the coercive organs themselves.<sup>196</sup> Hence, the increasing attention paid by historians to notions of social control and hegemony.

The historical period which has attracted most analysis by

theorists of social control coincides with the birth of the public library movement. This was the mid-Victorian era of unprecedented material progress and social peace - though agitation and protest were by no means absent<sup>197</sup> - which Briggs has referred to as "a great plateau bounded on each side by deep ravines or dangerous precipices".<sup>198</sup> Historians have pointed to the emergence during this period of an elite stratum within the ranks of the working class;<sup>199</sup> though others, it must be said, have disputed the existence of a cohesive 'labour aristocracy'.<sup>200</sup> It is argued that structural shifts in the economy precipitated a new breed of worker skilled in the processes demanded by technical change.<sup>201</sup> Recognizing these changes, the theory develops, bourgeois ideologues sought to incorporate the skilled elite of the 'engineers economy' into their own value systems by stressing the efficacy of the free market, as well as virtues of self-help, independence, respectability and thrift. The means of transmission in fashioning this 'buttress' class was the establishment by the middle classes of institutions for the working class.<sup>202</sup> Such a strategy was crucial in view of the fact that historically - and certainly during the Chartist era - the artisan classes had displayed a tendency towards radical behaviour.<sup>203</sup> One historian has referred to the post-1850 'embourgeoisement' strategy as a process of 'liberalization'.<sup>204</sup>

Other analysts have disputed the power and perception of middle class activists in engineering radical change in working class culture.<sup>205</sup> Cultural control was undeniably attempted. Power is a fact in all societies. Social interaction, including the exercise of power, occurs through the exchange of messages which are "formerly coded, symbolic, or representational events of some shared significance in a culture produced for the purpose of evoking a significance".<sup>206</sup> Those who control the communication of messages can become more powerful.<sup>207</sup>



If powerholders open the sluice gates to the reservoir of their culture then they are attempting to irrigate territory as yet untouched by the dominant ideology.<sup>208</sup> It does not necessarily follow, however, that irrigation is successful. In the nineteenth century cultural control appeared to be, on occasions, highly effective; as Joyce has argued in respect of the Lancashire mill town.<sup>209</sup> However, all control strategies are open to detailed criticism.

The social control thesis can be questioned on a number of counts. First, controllers were not a homogeneous group. Social control infers the existence of a single middle-class ideology. Yet, the middle class was a "social composite embracing men and women of widely differing conditions and experience".<sup>210</sup> It was divided into fractions of capital, and was itself subject to class division.<sup>211</sup> Middle-class reformers might have been more enthusiastic about such control efforts as social class mixing than members of their class generally: it is possible that the bulk of the middle class did not wish to recruit a distasteful working class into its ranks.<sup>212</sup> Controllers were not in any case conspiratorial. As F.M.L. Thompson has argued, employers managed workers, the police controlled crowds and ministers led their congregations - but they did not do these things with any significant degree of collusion.<sup>213</sup>

Second, values such as respectability, thrift, self-help and independence were not exclusively middle class. Each had a long tradition within working class, especially artisan, culture. For example, private education run for and by the working classes was considerable - before the Education Act (1870) and compulsory attendance obliterated it.<sup>214</sup> Also, middle class views of working class respectability were mythical; respectability was not a constant, but could be worn or discarded as easily as a collar and tie.<sup>215</sup> This

indicates a degree of autonomy inconsistent with notions of effective social control.

Third, attempted control sometimes resulted in problems which required further control efforts.<sup>216</sup> The erection of Board Schools brought considerable protest. The deliberate driving of railways through troublesome working-class areas created enlarged problems of control arising from arbitrary demolition and eviction. It may well be, therefore, "that what were intended as controlling agencies [and efforts] produced incidental effects which most people would regard as beneficial, while at the same time failing in their ostensible purpose".<sup>217</sup> Social reform as a means of social control should be mentioned in this respect. Social reform has been interpreted as a medicine for an ailing social system. The beneficence of the state is presented to the working class, in piecemeal fashion, so as to siphon off discontent, and to protect fundamental social arrangements;<sup>218</sup> or, as Stansky has put it:

The powers that be are rarely so rigid  
that they will snap rather than bend;  
they attempt to preserve the old by  
accepting the new on their own terms.<sup>219</sup>

But social reform *can* produce quite the opposite to the desired effect. This is most clearly the case with education reform which can serve to liberate.<sup>220</sup> As Lenin wrote: "Study is essential for intelligent, thoughtful and successful participation in the revolution."<sup>221</sup>

Fourth, it is misleading to present the working class as helpless and naive victims of bourgeois-directed hegemony. While some influences might have been absorbed unwittingly, others might have been accepted deliberately because they suited the interests of the recipient.<sup>222</sup> There is evidence, for example, that organized labour was "not a passive subject of elite manipulation, but tended to adopt a

positive strategy of exploiting and optimizing the progressive potential of welfare measures"; a chief benefit of which was their municipal basis and the anti-capitalist ethos this inspired.<sup>223</sup> A young boy might have joined the local church football team run by a moralizing cleric, not for religious but for sporting reasons.

Fifth, social control suggests the possibility of social equilibrium - that control efforts can restore a stable situation which has broken down. This does not fit with a Marxist analysis of on-going social conflict. Arguably, institutions designed to spread middle-class values, far from being sources of stability and equilibrium, were in effect incitements to conflict with an emergent working-class consciousness. Institutions such as mechanics' institutions and workmen's clubs did indeed become battlegrounds for power, as working-class users rejected middle-class patronage and management.<sup>224</sup> Control attempts often had to be revised: controllers were not, after all, quarantined from those they were attempting to hegemonize. Control was negotiated.<sup>225</sup> Workers were not stuck in a subordinate mode, unable to resist bourgeois influence. Rather, the working class reproduced dominant values in a modified, negotiated form which took into account the needs of the working class. The reality of class hegemony in the nineteenth century was not its existence or absence, but its limited nature. Subversion was contained, but institutions protective of working-class culture were not eradicated. This argument challenges that made above concerning the dissemination downwards of a dominant ideology from a reservoir of culture fashioned by power-holders: it is too simplistic a formulation. More persuasive is the idea of hegemony as put forward between the wars by the Italian communist Gramsci who explained:



The fact of hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised are taken into account, that there is a certain ... compromise ... that is, the ruling group makes sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind, but it is also indubitable that such sacrifices and such compromises cannot affect what is essential.<sup>226</sup>

Gramsci's notion of hegemony smacked less of an effective, conspirational manipulation by dominant socio-economic groups than of a shared cultural experience - a "whole body of practices and expectations over the whole of living"<sup>227</sup> - manufactured, in part, by the cultural influences and interests of subordinate groups.

The pre-1919 public library fits well with Gramsci's interpretation of hegemony. Public libraries were vehicles of negotiation between middle-class efforts to influence mass culture, and working-class determination to resist such change. The public library mounted cultural control efforts; but, ultimately, these did not achieve the success anticipated, and were at times even counter-productive.

The evidence of attempted control is extensive.<sup>228</sup> Libraries were bestowed a potential for dissolving radicalism. It has been argued that they were initiated as "an anodyne to the labouring masses" to prevent the rise of another radical movement like Chartism.<sup>229</sup> At the opening of the Manchester Public Library in 1851 the town's Mayor argued that free literature was a reward for those members of the working class who had not supported the disturbances of the 1840s; the middle classes could not do too much for the "well-disposed", he said.<sup>230</sup> The public library offered citizenship to those willing to eschew political extremism. Socialist literature was not welcome on the shelves. In 1889, the library committee at Portsmouth withdrew

J. Traill Taylor's The Veil lifted - an illustrated work describing the latest developments in spirit photography. The link in this context between spiritualism and radicalism should be noted. Spiritualism in the late nineteenth century was strongly plebeian, anti-Christian and politically radical; it was a 'nursery culture' for socialism.<sup>231</sup>

Public libraries sought moral regeneration; they would act as an institution of counter-attraction and could rid society of "tipsy rowdies", said a supporter in Lambeth in 1874.<sup>232</sup> Censorship of material on moral grounds was a feature of the public library from its inception.<sup>233</sup> "What is indispensable", said the Portsmouth librarian in 1886, "is that the pabulum provided should be morally wholesome."<sup>234</sup> Libraries issued and exercised strict rules of conduct. It has been argued that they were institutions highly attractive to labour aristocrats seeking decorum, respectability and moral uplift.<sup>235</sup>

Public libraries were promoted as ideal places for social class mixing beneficial to the eradication of class conflict. Supporters of a public library for Darlington reported that:

... every man, and every woman, and every youth feels that the library belongs to him or her as much as to any one else; they go to it as a place in which they have a common share, and all classes meet and mingle on a level of common privilege: there is no gradation of first and second and third class .... Free libraries form, therefore, a standing protest against the system of caste, and supply some help towards bridging over the gulf between classes, which philanthropists so much deplore.<sup>236</sup>

Such control strategies did not necessarily hegemonize working-class users of public libraries. It is very likely that workers used their local library simply for what they could get out of it - as a means of self-education and liberation. After all, autonomous working class libraries had a long tradition. In Nottingham in the 1830s and



1840s, for example, a number of operatives' libraries had been formed, some in public houses - "All these libraries appear to have been spontaneous working class products; there is no sign of initiative by members of the upper and middle classes."<sup>237</sup>

Evidence of working-class independence in public libraries can be drawn from fiction. The character of Myles, a young factory hand, in J. Fothergill's Probation (1879) is hardly an example of a socially controlled worker. Chapter 4 of the novel is set in the reading room of the Thanshope Free Library, where Myles is a frequent visitor to read such material as the Westminster Review; but also to admire a young woman who also often used the library. One evening in the library - when Myles was pleased to be reading an article which made "a particularly hard hit at the governing classes" - the son of a local Tory manufacturer, Frederick Spenceley, strutted into the library and commenced making advances to the woman Myles had for so long admired. The woman was noticeably ruffled by these advances, but Spenceley persisted nonetheless. Myles thus intervened, telling Spenceley that he would fetch the librarian and tell him that Spenceley was not a member; for which a ten shilling fine was payable. "Confounded radical place, this ... Not fit for gentlemen to live in", exclaimed Spenceley as he withdrew. In this instance it was not the worker who was downtrodden, but the "would-be dandy in his gloved, perfumed, over-dressed vulgarity" - thereby turning the tables on the social control thesis.

The idea that libraries could serve to quell disorder and bad conduct was not always realized. In fact, in some cases, libraries attracted people intent upon causing trouble. At one extreme this deviant behaviour was violent, as in the case of the drunken, unruly characters who kept busy the ex-policeman attendant at the Old Kent



Road Public Library on the eve of the First World War.<sup>238</sup> Or it could merely be a matter of youngsters 'larking about'.<sup>239</sup> In the 1870s, at the Norwich Public Library, youngsters made constant attempts to embarrass the librarian by requesting Tom Paine's Rights of Man, which was reserved for adults only - the librarian having referred to it as a "wicked book".<sup>240</sup>

Finally, the persistent fiction debate showed control via the public library was negotiated. Many public librarians - in Gramsci's formulation, 'subaltern' intellectual 'deputies' of the dominant class<sup>241</sup> - held elitist presumptions concerning the reading tastes of the working classes. The fear was that mass consumption of literature would lower standards. This anxiety was expressed by Matthew Arnold when he wrote:

All ages have had their inferior literature;  
but the great danger of our time is that this  
inferior literature tends more and more to  
get the upper place.<sup>242</sup>

However, in the field of literary taste the public library failed as a manipulator of its audience. It was forced to accommodate popular demands (see chapter 10). As the Library World explained in 1904:

The ratepayer pays for the library, and they  
will have the books that please them ....  
It is no use lining the shelves of a free  
library with the recondite works of scientists,  
educationalists and philosophers, or the  
classical treasures of the past, if people  
prefer the last bran-new flimsy tale that  
comes hot from the press.<sup>243</sup>

Public librarians were thus made to take note of the 'consumer democracy' dimension of the utilitarianism which had founded their profession; as well as pursuing a utilitarian, 'paternalistic management' or 'social engineering' line.

But to view this adjustment as a complete surrender to mass demand would be wrong: many working class readers, quite

autonomously, sought serious literature for self-improvement. When the Woolwich Trades Council and Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society jointly approached the Woolwich Local Board of Health in 1895 for help to establish a library they did so because they "wanted a library to supply them with literature that would supplant 'penny dreadfuls'."<sup>244</sup> Serious reading, such as science, did not need to be pushed down readers' throats. For example, John Urie, a Paisley handloom weaver and printer, recalls in his autobiography how in the 1820s he relished being taken by his father to lectures on science and engineering at the Encyclopedia Club.<sup>245</sup> The public library complemented the democracy of science. As the town clerk of Salford was reported as saying at the opening of the library and museum there in 1849:

Science was universal and not exclusive ...  
it would therefore be a disgrace ... if  
there was anything like exclusiveness in  
any part of their scheme.<sup>246</sup>

By virtue of its universal appeal, science, as purveyed through the public library, could not conceivably be labelled social control - and much the same can be said of the pursuit of knowledge generally in libraries. Men of culture, said Matthew Arnold, were the "true apostles of equality".<sup>247</sup> Indeed, idealist exhortations concerning the diffusion of culture and the common good were aimed at all in society, not merely at disaffected, subordinate groups. After all, the greater the numbers pursuing culture, the nearer was brought the realization of the Absolute - the ultimate fulfilment of both the human spirit and its metaphysical creator.

In both its utilitarian and idealist phases, therefore, the broadly democratic ethos of the Victorian and Edwardian public library ultimately transcended blatant control imperatives. In respect of political knowledge, for example, the public library's a-political

approach in the lending and reference departments, and its espousal of establishment politics in the newsroom, were not overtly propagandist. The vast majority of readers would have accepted, even before entering the library, that politics could only be pursued, realistically, within the narrow parameters of the existing limited liberal democracy.<sup>248</sup>

Utilitarians and idealists invited all in society to share in the prevailing political citizenship - the public library being a tool in this regard. The public library's essential aim was to stabilize the existing social system by stressing universality and social cohesion, not by imposing direct social control upon deviant, marginalised groups.



## Notes and References to Chapter 9

1. R. Altick, The English common reader (Chicago, 1957) argues that in the nineteenth century the public library could never quite shed its utilitarian heritage.
2. This discussion of idealism was formulated with reference to the following texts in particular. A.R. Cocoulios, Thomas Hill Green: a philosopher of ethics (New York, 1974). F. Copplestone, A History of philosophy (1966). P. Gordon and J. White, Philosophers as educational reformers: the influence of idealism on British educational thought and practice (1979). A. Macintyre, A Short history of ethics (1967). I.M. Greengarten, Thomas Hill Green and the development of liberal democratic thought (1981). M. Richter, The Politics of conscience: T.H. Green and his age (1983). F.M. Turner, The Greek heritage in Victorian Britain (1981).
3. See chapters on Plato and Aristotle in Turner, op. cit.
4. Macintyre, op. cit., pp. 36-39.
5. Among the surviving writings of Aristotle are two works on ethics - Eudemian Ethics named after its editor Eudemus, and Nichomachean Ethics, similarly named from Aristotle's son Nichomachean. It is the Nichomachean Ethics which concerns us here.
6. Turner, op. cit., pp. 323-326. A valuable commentary on the work is given by J. Barnes in his introduction to J.A.K. Thomson (translator), The Ethics of Aristotle: the Nichomachean Ethics (Harmondsworth, 1976).
7. Macintyre, op. cit., pp. 42-48.
8. Macintyre, op. cit., p. 57, quoting from Book 1(i) of the Ethics. Thomson, op. cit., translates this differently - i.e., "Every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit ..."
9. Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 16.
10. Ibid., p. 230.
11. Ibid., has several references to Fichte.
12. Ibid., p. 51.
13. Ibid., p. 18.
14. M. Allott and R. Super (eds.), Matthew Arnold (Oxford, 1986), p. xxii.
15. Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 7.
16. Turner, op. cit., p. 359.

17. Ibid., p. 361.
18. Copplestone, op. cit., pp. 172-173, makes the point that, according to Green, true self-satisfaction was self-realization; not in the sense of seeking personal pleasure, but in searching for one's own nature in terms of knowing oneself. Only in this way could others be understood. R. Sennett, The Fall of public man (Cambridge, 1977) has argued that to know oneself has now become an end in itself, instead of a means through which one knows the world. We are now absorbed with ourselves. The psyche has become privatised.
19. Turner, op. cit., p. 363.
20. Cacoullos, op. cit., p. 13.
21. Ibid., p. 112.
22. Richter, op. cit., pp. 370-371.
23. Ibid., p. 344.
24. For an analysis of Green's philosophy of education see Gordon and White, op. cit., pp. 68-87.
25. Richter, op. cit., pp. 366-367.
26. J. Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-1868 (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 246-247.
27. Turner, op. cit., p. 368.
28. S.D. Koven, Culture and poverty: the London settlement house movement 1870-1914 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1987).
29. Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 101.
30. Ibid., pp. 91-111.
31. Ibid., pp. 156 and 205.
32. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
33. Greengarten, op. cit., gives an account of idealism's capitalist origins in its introduction.
34. Richter, op. cit., pp. 355 and 374-376.
35. B. Jennings, 'Revolting students - The Ruskin College dispute 1908-1909', Studies in Adult Education, 9:1 (April 1977).
36. See the section entitled 'Tawney and social history' in J. Kenyon, The History men: the historical profession in England since the Renaissance (1983). Tawney was educated at Balliol, and later taught there. He joined the Fabians in 1905, the ILP in 1909, and the Labour Party in 1918 following the establishment of its



socialist constitution. Tawney "belongs with the non-Marxist ethical socialism of the Labour left"; R. Terrill, R.H. Tawney and his time: socialism as fellowship (1974), p. 277.

37. G. Himmelfarb, The Idea of poverty (1984), p. 528.
38. G.S. Jones, Outcast London: a study of the relationship between classes in Victorian society (Oxford, 1971), pp. 290-296. Whereas in the 1870s discussion of the condition of London's poor was confined to specialist journals, in the 1880s the problem received a much wider press which warned of a social volcano threatening revolution.
39. S. Smith, 'The Industrial training of destitute children', Contemporary Review, 47 (January 1885), p. 107.
40. Richter, op. cit., p. 13. Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 222, argue that idealism's religious foundations are clearly evident, from the fact that idealism's decline coincided with the secularization of life after 1918.
41. Richter, op. cit., p. 19.
42. Turner, op. cit., pp. 361-364.
43. Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 222.
44. Richter, op. cit., p. 345.
45. W.E.A. Axon, 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist', The Library, 2 (1890), p. 246.
46. See J.F.C. Harrison, A History of the Working Men's College 1854-1954 (1954).
47. C. Kingsley, The Temple of wisdom: a sermon preached to the boys of Wellington College (1866), p. 9.
48. Maurice's address to the Salford Working Men's College, 1859, quoted in R. Williams, Culture and society 1780-1950 (1957), p. 113. The 'Socialism' in Christian Socialism should not be taken to infer extreme radicalism. 'Socialism' at the time meant cooperation, and anti-socialism meant competition; Harrison, op. cit. p. 8.
49. D.F.W. Hawes, Reflections on some social, philosophical and educational influences on British library history 1880-1965 (unpublished M.A. dissertation, School of Librarianship, University College London, London University, 1978).
50. Borough of Birmingham, Opening of the free reference library 26 October 1866: inaugural address by George Dawson (Birmingham, 1866).
51. G. Dawson, Sermons on daily life and duty (1878), p. 122.
52. Ibid., p. 25.



53. S.A. Barnett, St. Jude's Whitechapel: seventeenth pastoral address and report of the parish work (1890).
54. S.A. Barnett, Sermon preached before the University of Oxford (1884).
55. S.A. Barnett, St. Jude's Whitechapel, op. cit.
56. S.A. Barnett, 'Great cities and social reform', Nineteenth Century, 14 (July-December 1883), p. 814.
57. Ibid., p. 814. He said it was "as easy to build a Library as an infirmary in every parish"; S.A. Barnett, 'Practicable socialism', Nineteenth Century, 13 (January-June 1883), p. 558.
58. H. Barnett, Canon Barnett: his life, work and friends, Vol. 2 (1918), pp. 4-5.
59. S.A. Barnett, Sermon, ... Oxford University, op. cit.
60. H. Barnett, op. cit., p. 11.
61. Ibid., p. 1.
62. Ibid., p. 5.
63. Ibid., p. 7.
64. S.A. Barnett, Sermon, ... Oxford University, op. cit.
65. Ibid.
66. S.A. Barnett's preface to T.S. Peppin, Club-land of the toiler: exemplified by the workmen's club and institute union (1895). Of 144 London clubs Peppin had knowledge of 109 possessing libraries (pp. 57-58).
67. H. Barnett, op. cit., p. 12.
68. Letter from Thomas Aldred to Walter Powell (26 February 1906), British Library Information Science Service, uncatalogued collection of letters to the librarian Walter Powell.
69. Times (2 June 1947).
70. 'Labour and public libraries', newscutting, source unknown, Woolwich Public Library Cuttings, Vol. 1, p. 17.
71. C.H. Grinling, Libraries as workshops (1903). This was reprinted from the Library Association Record, 5 (1903)
72. C.H. Grinling's preface to Twenty-five years history of the Woolwich Labour Party 1903-1928 (1928).
73. Ibid.

74. Grinling edited, along with T.A. Ingram and B.C. Polkinghorne, A Survey and record of Woolwich and West Kent (1909).
75. C.H. Grinling, Fifty years of pioneer work in Woolwich (1922), p. 25.
76. Ibid., p. 5.
77. Ibid., p. 32.
78. Only H.E. Meller, Leisure and the changing city 1870-1914 (1976), has looked at the link between citizenship and the public library - and only briefly.
79. According to Richter, op. cit., p. 344, citizenship also occurs more than any other theme in the works of T.H. Green.
80. Kentish Independent (5 August 1904).
81. List of lectures given by Mile End Public Library in 1908. Tower Hamlets Public Libraries, Local Studies.
82. W.C.B. Sayers, The Children's library (1912), p. 1.
83. L.S. Jast, Libraries and living (1932), p. 57.
84. At a meeting of the South West Ham Radical Club it was said that public libraries would "give men a firmer grasp of the duties of municipal and national life". Stratford Express (29 October 1890).
85. Newscutting, source unknown; Lambeth Public Library Cuttings, Box iv/63/1/23(1). Words of Rev. C.E. Escreet.
86. J.J. Ogle, The Extension of the free libraries acts to small places (1887), p. 3.
87. 'Reading and readers', Sunday Magazine (1893), p. 193.
88. St. George-in-the-East Public Library, First Report (covering 1895-1900).
89. From B. Bosanquet's Essays and addresses (1886), quoted in Gordon and White, op. cit., p. 119.
90. Northampton Daily Chronicle (1 October 1903).
91. P. Cowell, Liverpool public libraries: a history of fifty years (Liverpool, 1903), p. 96.
92. A. Briggs, 'Samuel Smiles and the gospel of wealth', in his Victorian people: a reassessment of persons and themes 1851-1867 (1965), p. 126.



93. Ceremonies connected with the opening of the buildings for a free library and museum presented by William Brown to the town of Liverpool (Liverpool, 1861), p. 24.
94. 'Public library for Dartford: personal expression of opinion', newscutting, source unknown (8 September 1911), Dartford Public Library Cuttings (1900-1959).
95. Jast, op. cit., p. 4.
96. The middle class is seen to have failed in Germany. Unable to assert itself against the old order, it is argued, the way was left open for conservative forces to initiate two world wars, thereby supporting the cliché that "that is the way Germans are". This line is exposed as simplistic by D. Blackbourne and G. Ely, The Peculiarities of German history: bourgeois society and politics in nineteenth century Germany (Oxford, 1984). See also J. Kocka, 'German history before Hitler: the debate about the German Sonderweg', Journal of Contemporary History, 23:1 (January 1988).
97. See essays by P. Anderson, 'Origins of the present crisis' and T. Nairn, 'The British political elite', both in New Left Review, 23 (January-February 1964). Also, see chapter 1 of T. Nairn, The Break-up of Britain: crisis and neo-nationalism (1977).
98. P. Anderson, Lineages of the absolute state (1974), p. 11.
99. Nairn, 'The British political elite', op. cit., p. 20.
100. For an early exploration of this theme see D.C. Coleman, 'Gentlemen and players', Economic History Review, 26 (1973). Coleman argues that professionalism in business (i.e. modern professional management) has attained great influence in the twentieth century. Professionalism has incorporated the nineteenth century dichotomy of 'educated amateur' and 'practical man'. In this marriage, however, the social values of the former have predominated. A less full, but even earlier explanation of 'gentlemanly' capitalism was made by D.H. Aldcroft, 'The Entrepreneur and the British economy 1870-1914', Economic History Review, 17 (1964-1965), pp. 128-129. He wrote of the move from "the furnace to the field" in explaining what he saw as the complacency which affected late Victorian and Edwardian entrepreneurs. The most enthusiastic support for this position has been M.J. Weiner, English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit 1850-1980 (Cambridge, 1981). Nairn, Break-up of Britain (1981 edn.), op. cit., p. 23, extrapolates economic decline from his cultural analysis, blaming Britain's economic backwardness on "Liberal, City Imperialism". A succinct analysis is included in A.G. Hopkins, 'British Imperialism: a review and a revision', Recent Findings in Economic and Social History, 7 (Autumn 1988). Recent commentaries are M.J. Daunton, "'Gentlemanly capitalism" and British industry 1820-1914', Past and Present, 122 (February 1989) and D. Nicholls, 'Fractions of capital: the aristocracy, the City and industry in the development of modern British capitalism', Social History, 13:1 (January 1988).



101. J. Wrigley, 'Technical education and industry in the nineteenth century', in B. Elbaum and W. Lazonick, The Decline of the British economy (Oxford, 1986), p. 162.
102. K. Burgess, 'Did the late Victorian economy fail?', in T. Gourvish and A. O'Day (eds.), Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900 (Basingstoke 1988), p. 262.
103. W.D. Rubinstein, Men of property: the very wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution (1981), p. 248. True captains of industry existed only in towns like Oldham which were relatively insulated, and where members of the commercial classes were few: in such an environment manufacturing magnates enjoyed cultural superiority; W.D. Rubinstein, 'Wealth, elites and the class structure of modern Britain', Past and Present, 76 (August 1977), p. 107.
104. A recent forceful rebuff is the collection of essays in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds.), The Culture of capital: art, power, and the nineteenth century middle class (Manchester, 1988). The Anderson-Nairn thesis has been criticized for its generalizations. Even Anderson admitted that his essay was a "crude and preliminary attempt to pose some of the development questions of British capitalism"; Anderson, Origins of the present crisis, op. cit. p. 39. What the thesis did, however, was to set in motion the debate on the nature and causes of Britain's perceived crisis; C. Leys, Politics in Britain: an introduction (1983), p. 13. E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', Socialist Register (1965), p. 312, wrote: "If it cannot be accepted as an historical statement, it is nevertheless an incitement to study, and at an uncommon pitch of conceptual intensity."
105. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 109 (1850), Col. 839.
106. Wolff and Seed, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
107. S. Gunn, 'The Failure of the Victorian middle class', in Wolff and Seed, op. citd., pp. 23-24.
108. Dickens believed that important human values were not amenable to mathematical calculation. He sincerely questioned the influence of the statistician and the economist. He was not alone in expressing these objections. Realizing this he dramatized objections to scientific materialism. He was a propagandist who was sensitive to the public's sense of right and wrong. He flattered the public's moral feelings by conveying (and enlarging) familiar topics into fiction. P. Collins, Dickens and education (1965), see conclusion in particular.
109. N. McKendrick, "'Gentlemen and Players" revisited: the gentlemanly ideal, the business ideal, and the professional ideal in English literary culture', in N. McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (eds.), Business life and public policy (Cambridge, 1986). McKendrick (p. 102) also supports the argument made in the previous footnote - that literature should not be taken at face value because of intervening factors such as the need for

readership; as well as the fact that literary evidence can reflect social and political obsessions.

110. M. Arnold, 'Democracy' (1861), in M. Allot and R.H. Super (eds.), Matthew Arnold (Oxford, 1986), pp. 311-312.
111. M. Arnold, 'Equality' (1878), in Allot and Super, op. cit., p. 437.
112. J. Seed, 'Unitarianism, political economy and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester 1830-1850', Social History, 7 (1982), p. 11. See also J. Harris and P. Thane, 'British and European bankers 1880-1914: an aristocratic bourgeoisie?' in P. Thane, G. Crossick and R. Floud (eds.), The Power of the past: essays for Eric Hobsbawm (Cambridge, 1984).
113. Gunn, op. cit., p. 29.
114. S. Johnson, A Dictionary of the English language (1827 edn.).
115. A New [Oxford] English dictionary on historical principles (Oxford, 1893).
116. M. Arnold, Culture and anarchy (1955 edn.), p. 6. Introduction to this edition by J.D. Wilson. Arnold believed that the pursuit of perfection was not advanced by 'mass' society, nor the pursuit of democracy for its own sake; R. Williams, 'A Hundred years of culture and anarchy' in his Problems in materialism and culture (1980).
117. R. Williams, Culture and society, op. cit. p. 111.
118. See J. Seed, 'Commerce and the liberal arts: the political economy of art in Manchester 1775-1860', and C. Arscott, 'Without distinction of party: the Polytechnic Exhibitions in Leeds 1839-1845', in Wolff and Seed, op. cit.
119. T.H. Huxley, 'Science and culture' (1880) in his Science and culture and other essays (1881).
120. See chapter 4 of F.G. Walcott, The Origins of 'Culture and Anarchy' (1970).
121. M. Arnold, 'Literature and science' (1882), in Allot and Super, op. cit.
122. P.M. Heimann, 'The Scientific revolutions', in P. Burke (ed.), The New Cambridge modern history, Vol. 13 (companion vol.) (1980), p. 270.
123. K. Nield, 'A Symptomatic dispute' Notes on the relationship between Marxian theory and historical practice in Britain', Social Research, 47 (1980), p. 489.



124. R. Gray, 'Bourgeois hegemony in Victorian Britain', in J. Bloomfield (ed.), Papers on class, hegemony and party (1977), p. 78.
125. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', op. cit.
126. Arnold, 'Democracy', op. cit., p. 311.
127. The library promoter George Dawson noted that the houses of "the large part of the middle class" offered endless luxuries, but few books. Borough of Birmingham, op. cit.
128. W.S. Saunders, Guildhall Library: its origin and progress (1869), p. 56.
129. Ibid., p. 17.
130. Sheffield Libraries, Art Galleries and Museums Committee, The City libraries of Sheffield 1856-1956 (Sheffield, 1956), p. 22.
131. T. Dunne, Bolton Public Libraries 1853-1978 (Bolton, 1978), p. 11.
132. Letter from T.N. Talfourd to Sir John Potter (18 May 1852), Manchester Public Library Archives, Sir John Potter Autograph Letters Collection, Vol. 2.
133. Ceremonies connected with the opening of the buildings for a free library and museum presented by William Brown to the town of Liverpool (Liverpool, 1861), p. 64.
134. Ibid., p. 66.
135. The Chelsea Public Library Committee, Minutes (24 June, 22 July, 29 July, 26 August 1887) record that its meetings were held at 5 p.m., which would have excluded working people from attending. The Fulham Public Library Committee, Minutes (1 August 1893) record a meeting held at 10 a.m.
136. T. Greenwood, Public libraries (1894), p. 352. E. Savage, The Librarian and his committee (1942), p. 12.
137. W.E. Doubleday, A Primer for librarianship (1931), pp. 113-114. G. Lovell, 'Changes in the buildings in which we work', in Library Association (Home Counties Branch), Looking both ways: the management of change (1980), p. 25, argues that low political activity on library committees made politicians interfere in professional practice as a substitute for policy debate.
138. Library Association, Establishment of public libraries (1909), p. 7, advised that: "Co-opted members should be selected for their local knowledge, their knowledge of books, and their interest in educational matters generally." Of Islington's 9 council committees in 1907 only one, the library committee, had coopted members; Islington Borough Council, Minutes (15 November 1907). In 1913 the Bournemouth Library Committee had 6 councillors and 6



- coopted members; C. Riddle, The Library movement in Bournemouth (1913), p. 8. Note that the Libraries Act (1892) required that coopted membership must be a feature of committees.
139. Northampton Daily Chronicle (9 June 1910).
  140. E. Edwards, Free town libraries (1869), p. 22.
  141. Islington Gazette (25 October 1907).
  142. Notes and Queries, 92 (3 October 1857), p. 279.
  143. J. Gerrard, Leadership and power in Victorian industrial towns 1830-1880 (Manchester, 1983), p. 57.
  144. K. Robbins, 'John Bright and the middle class in politics', in J. Gerrard et al. (eds.), The Middle class in politics (Farnborough, 1978), p. 27.
  145. Meller, op. cit., p. 7.
  146. R.J. Morris, 'Middle class culture 1700-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), A History of modern Leeds (Manchester, 1980), pp. 200-201.
  147. See chapter 3(ii) of H. Perkin, The Origins of modern English society 1780-1880 (1969) for a discussion on social emulative spending.
  148. J.W. Thompson, The Medieval library (New York, 1957), p. 5.
  149. Rubinstein, Men of property, op. cit. p. 189, points out that the very wealthy had most of their money in stocks and bonds, or in cash in banks, or in loans to individuals and firms. Their chattels - houses, heirlooms, art treasures, etc. - accounted for only about 3 per cent of total wealth.
  150. Quoted in B.L. Dyer, The Public library systems of Great Britain, America and South Africa (1903), p. 7.
  151. The lack of libraries in London, and poor standards at the British Museum's library, encouraged him to commence the campaign for the London Library; F. Harrison (ed.), Carlyle and the London Library (London, 1906). In 1834 Manchester had at least 12 libraries; Manchester Public Library Archives, MS/f/310.6/M5/37).
  152. L. Watson, What shall I read? Helps to the study of English literature (1887), pp. 17-18. Produced by the Sunday School Union.
  153. Cowell, op. cit., p. 159.
  154. J. Burkitt, Blackpool libraries 1880-1980 (Blackpool, 1980), p. 1.
  155. Harrison, Carlyle and the London Library, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
  156. 'The Training of librarians', newscutting, source unknown, British Library Information Science Service, Press cuttings on

- libraries 1897-1898, compiled by B. Matthews, p. 13.
157. Cowell, op. cit., p. 52.
158. County Borough of Bournemouth, Minutes (12 May 1911). The Public Library Annual Report was included in these minutes.
159. Magazine of Music (March 1912).
160. Ceremonies ... William Brown to the town of Liverpool, op. cit., p. 31.
161. T. Greenwood, Free public libraries (1886), p. 130.
162. Value is used in this instance in the sense of utility, not as an idealistic conception of culture's intrinsic value which was recently the theme of a conference on Cultural value, organized by the Centres for Languages and Literature and Human Sciences, Birkbeck College, University of London (16 July 1988). Audio tape held by Birkbeck English Department.
163. F. Kaplan, Thomas Carlyle: a biography (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 329, 339 and 439-443. The entry for Carlyle in the Dictionary of National Biography says that this book made more of a stir than most of his writings.
164. G.B. Tennyson, A Carlyle reader: selections from the writings of Thomas Carlyle (Cambridge, 1984), p. 407.
165. R.J. Smith, The Gothic bequest: medieval institutions in British thought 1688-1863 (1987), p. 196.
166. T. Carlyle, Past and present (1843), p. 198.
167. Ibid., p. 88.
168. J.A. Hobson, The Evaluation of modern capitalism: a study of machine production (1906), p. 348.
169. Ibid., pp. 337-338.
170. See M.J. Daunton, House and home in the Victorian city: working class housing 1850-1914 (1983), pp. 264-265, which argues that intensification of work led to increased domesticity. See also E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Custom, wages and work-load in nineteenth century industry', in his Labouring men (1964).
171. W. Morris, 'Art socialism', in his Architecture, industry and wealth (1902), p. 107.
172. S.A. Barnett, The Ideal city (1894), p. 3.
173. C.F.G. Masterman, From the abyss (1902), p. 80, quoted in D.E.B. Weiner, The Institution of popular education: architectural form and social policy in the London Boards Schools 1870-1904 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1984).



174. Meller, op. cit., p. 5.
175. R.W. Malcolmson, Popular recreations in English society 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1973), p. 4.
176. This was noted by Greenwood, Free public libraries, op. cit., pp. 129-130.
177. G. Davison, 'The City as a natural system: theories of urban society in early nineteenth century Britain', in D. Fraser (ed.), The Pursuit of urban history (1983), p. 353.
178. G.T. Donisthrope, An Account of the origin and progress of the Devon and Exeter Memorial Museum (Exeter, 1868), p. 10.
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245. J. Urie, Reminiscences of eighty years (Paisley, 1908).
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248. An article signed 'Bibliophilist' in the Bermondsey Liberal Monthly (March 1912), p. 5, praised the local libraries because "they show an impartiality which is to be commended, and enables all of us to judge views and form opinions". The public library allowed consideration of pros and cons, but only those which did not threaten the essence of the existing political system.



## Chapter Ten

### LIBRARIANS

Chapter 8 above showed that the pre-1914 public library had an 'economic' concern. Yet, the public librarianship profession has throughout its history been berated (frequently from the inside) for not fulfilling a more 'educational', 'material', 'useful', 'utilitarian' role - the words employed in the literature might change but the meaning does not. In 1942, for example, Lionel McColvin in his prescription for a reconstructed post-war service lamented that "reference library work is the outstanding failure of British librarianship".<sup>1</sup> Even today accusations persist that the public library fails to meet 'useful' information needs - lack of marketing techniques in attracting business clients being a prime example.<sup>2</sup>

Although this thesis has argued that the economic role of the public library has been underestimated it has to be admitted that the record in respect of pertinent information services to industry, commerce and the trades has fallen short of the expectations which some library promoters set. This has been largely due to past confusion over motives of provision. Historically, public library objectives, in terms of its social role, have been both varied and vague. As a result groups with the least generalized needs (such as business) have been subordinated to the necessity of satisfying a general readership, no doubt partly to boost popularity. As the chief librarian of Harlesden wrote in 1904:

In all public libraries I presume a fair amount is always spent on technical works, but as public libraries *must* cater for all sections of readers the amount spent on one particular class of books must necessarily be limited.<sup>3</sup>

## Status

In the absence of any great urgency for specialization public librarianship in its early years took on a 'literary' pose. As the librarian E.A. Savage said in recalling his own pre-First World War career experience: "Public librarians thought more of Shakespeare and musical-glass culture than of the crafts".<sup>4</sup> Like librarians in general, they were often tainted with the image of being mere custodians of books, out of which arose inevitable accusations of stuffiness, exclusivity and reclusivity. To quote the colourful Savage again:

The mid-Victorians, in their later days that my impatient youth knew, never dreamt of librarianship as it is, let alone as it will be. They hadn't the imagination. Their idea was books in a college, a club, a big country house; books kept apart for the wealthy ... books shut away in glossy glass cases more effectively than on chained open shelves. They took timid mousehole peeps at librarianship through the dust and the musty snuff from calf bindings.<sup>5</sup>

Melvil Dewey likened the English librarian to a "superior servant ... appointed to look after the silver", keeping the books in immaculate condition, but discouraging rather than encouraging frequent disturbance of them.<sup>6</sup>

This passive, detached, 'fortress' mentality did much to damage the corporate image of the public library and determine the low status which the profession endured throughout the period under consideration, if not beyond. Low status was reflected in poor remuneration, made even poorer in light of the long hours which had to be worked, particularly in the first 30 years of the profession's existence. When Dartford Public Library advertised the vacant chief librarian's post in 1915 as many as 54 applications were received for the paltry £120 annual salary.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, a great many people believed that they could carry out what they considered to be the undemanding duties of a



librarian, for which a commensurately low salary (relative to other profession) was paid. Despite the literary bent of the profession not all librarians could be regarded as quality bookmen (the word 'bookwoman' hardly applies as the profession was overwhelmingly male). In some instances librarians were no more than caretakers with little bibliographic knowledge. When the vacant librarian's post at Erith was advertised in 1905 the four applicants were a senior clerk, a sub-librarian, a library assistant and a school caretaker.<sup>8</sup> The duties of the librarian at Oldham's North Moor branch involved looking after the building and grounds, whilst cleaning the premises was the responsibility of his wife.<sup>9</sup>

Although public librarians developed from the outset a sense of professional 'expertise', a process of professional 'training' barely existed; the idea prevailed that the best path to professional achievement was not one of theoretical education but the practical experience of 'learning by doing'.<sup>10</sup> Librarians did follow the example set by other professions in changing from apprenticeship to student-apprenticeship.<sup>11</sup> But this affected neither the profession's popularity or status. The Library Association held its first exams in 1885 for which only three candidates entered. In some following years there were no exam entrants. Although an improved and revised syllabus was introduced in 1904, along with Library Association correspondence courses, the numbers obtaining professional qualifications before the First World War remained extremely low. Library studies, perhaps because of their highly practical content - in this respect they did not correspond to the traditional nature of technical education in Britian - were unattractive to potential librarians who could achieve their goal just as easily by time-serving. For employers also, professional qualifications commanded a low premium. As late as 1931 a

survey of 177 public library authorities revealed that only 67 of these made promotion conditional on the possession of certificates obtained at library school or through the Library Association.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the first generation of public librarians had no prior experience of work requirements beyond their own use of libraries: silverplaters, booksellers and school teachers were all drafted into service.<sup>13</sup> Even in the 1880s, when second generation librarians might have been expected to originate from within the service, appointments were being made from other professions, as at Northampton and Portsmouth where ex-Army men were enrolled.<sup>14</sup> When H.E. Curran, deputy librarian at Liverpool, applied for the chief's post at the same library; he told Ernest Axon that he "feared a rank outsider's appointment - journalist, barrister, university swell, or poor relation".<sup>15</sup> An analysis of Munford's recent Who was who in British librarianship 1800-1985 shows that public librarians who did not enter the service straight from school did so from a wide variety of occupations. The following entries contained information on previous employment (it should be noted that data is not confined to English librarians and that occupations are not necessarily those immediately prior to a library career):

<u>Librarian (Public)</u>	<u>Previous occupation/s</u>
Allan, J.	teacher, private tutor
Blaxland, A.D.	chemist's apprentice, unsuccessful farmer
Broadwick, E.B.	mill worker
Brown, E.	watch engraver's apprentice
Brown, J.D.	bookseller's assistant
Buckland, F.	clerk (tramways)
Dalton, J.S.	schoolmaster



<u>Librarian (Public)</u>	<u>Previous occupation/s</u>
Dewe, J.	bookseller
Dibbs, W.C.	marine engineer
Fenley, R.	bookseller's assistant, watchmaker
Finnigan, M.	policeman
Foskett, E.	journalist
George, T.J.	farmer
Hall, W.R.	journalist
Houghton, J.T.	railway signalman
Jackson, T.	schoolmaster
Kemp, A.	journalist
Lean, T.J.	journalist
McEwan, W.B.	bookseller's apprentice
Miller, R.C.	headmaster
Morrison, H.	schoolmaster
Nicholls, J.F.	paperstainer, schoolmaster
Overbury, K.E.	clerk (local government)
Parsonson, W.	silverplater's apprentice
Pierce, K.E.	teacher
Pink, J.	bookseller
Pink, W.D.	bookseller
Shearer, W.R.	postman, photographer
Waite, J.K.	schoolmaster
Williams, O.	teacher
Wright, W.H.K.	clerk (bank and railways)

Whether some of these librarians or others entered the profession as, variously, the 'refuse' of other callings, the 'failures' and 'refugees' of other occupations, either preferred or previously followed, is uncertain. Samuel Barnett wrote: "The preachers whose words halt,

the teachers who cannot keep order, but whose mission is to preach and teach, could find their vocation as librarians."<sup>16</sup> If what Barnett postulated often occurred then the 'fortress' mentality of public librarianship becomes more understandable in that lack of confidence or thwarted ambition may trigger 'defensive' attitudes.

Self-confidence was not a strength which the profession displayed in any great amount. The move towards a professional training process had been intended to boost the self-image and social standing of librarians, but was not a success. Whereas in the United States a full-time college of librarianship was founded as early as 1887 (by Melvil Dewey at Columbia), British librarians had to wait until 1919 for such an institution (founded at University College London). Training remained largely tied to the workplace. Yet the pool of practical experience from which librarians were expected to rise was not of a high standard. Before the First World War it was the "elementary schoolboy, and not always the brightest, [who] often became the library assistant, and from the material available librarians had to be made".<sup>17</sup> Boy assistants were frequently castigated by the public for their poor service. A reader at Darlington urged that "the boy with the piping voice and shrewd face, who acts as assistant, be taught a little more civility than he seems to possess when ordinary folks go for books".<sup>18</sup> When, in 1905, Islington became the first authority to employ only female assistants it did so partly because the "experience in the big towns of the north was that boys were a failure".<sup>19</sup> Arguably, the prevalence of 'closed access' libraries in the period under consideration did nothing to improve the skills of assistants. Hence, pay remained low, a state of affairs compounded by the statutory rate restriction which gave little room for manoeuvre in the wages bill. Thus, an unfavourable two-way process evolved in that



low pay attracted a sub-standard workforce which, in turn, was unable to command any higher reward than its skill level dictated. Wages for assistants were indeed low: five shillings per week starting pay at Eastbourne (1896) and twenty-five shillings per week at Darlington (1890s) for a junior assistant at the top of his grade, even after 11 years of service.<sup>20</sup>

The low standards and rewards which operated at the base of such professional structure as existed had a detrimental effect on the pay and conditions of professional librarians; this due to the fact that most were expected to become professionals by rising through the poorly paid ranks. It was not only that years of enduring low pay taught librarians to expect little reward for their work - even someone at the top of the profession like James Duff Brown could command only £300 per annum in 1904<sup>21</sup> - but that professional was separated from non-professional largely by mundane time-serving and not by a barrier of prestigious qualifications.

The status of library work was not enhanced by the emergence of women onto staffs (though, as now, not at the top). Whereas in the nineteenth century library work was virtually a male preserve (unlike in the United States), by the 1920s, largely due to the war, around 50 per cent of assistants were female.<sup>22</sup> Male librarians began employing women ostensibly in preference to inefficient boy assistants. The idea was common that women were suited to library work because of both their domestic and innate qualities. One male Croydon reader, protesting at the poor work of boy assistants, called for the employment of women who would at least keep the shelves dust free.<sup>23</sup> Women were also seen to "surpass men in the moral virtue of patience", which naturally made them ideal material for library work.<sup>24</sup> James Duff Brown argued that he employed only female assistants, for efficiency. In reality, the

prospect of cheap labour - "Chinese labour", as one Islington councillor described the policy<sup>25</sup> - was an attractive one for a rate-capped service. Even when women got a chance at the top cheap labour appeared to be a factor determining their success. Sidney Webb, a member of London University's Library Committee which sought in 1904 a librarian for the institution, felt strongly that a woman be appointed because:

You will get a far better woman for £150 than a man. For this sum you could get a good, university educated, practically competent woman who would regard the job as a valuable prize and who would be more easily "absorbed" or dispensed with in a year's time if need be. A man at that price would be either a callow youth who would leave us at the first chance; or a half-educated clerk; or a "failure" without energy or grit.<sup>26</sup>

Women thus compounded the low status of library work not because of their effect on standards of service, which was positive but because of the economic exploitation imposed on them by a male library establishment.

Confronted with the prospect of continuing low status public librarians took steps to improve their position. By the early years of this century they were showing considerable interest in employment prospects, situations vacant, promotion and salaries; and corresponded with each other at length on these matters.<sup>27</sup> Poor remuneration and conditions must have been a constant spur to the professionalization process. But pay was not the only concern. Librarians sought to assert themselves in a wider social setting. Their immediate obstacle in this respect was the library committee. In the library's hierarchical management structure their power and influence were limited, being generally subordinate to those of the committee. The latter, for example, often supervised the acquisition of reading material, as at Eastbourne (1896) where a separate 'Book Selection



Committee' was established.<sup>28</sup> The career of Edward Edwards at Manchester Free Library in the 1850s offers one of the best illustrations of friction between a librarian and his committee. Edwards' independence and disregard for supervision must have been sorely compromised by the following apology made to his committee for falling behind in his financial accounting of book purchases:

It shall be my earnest dream not, under any circumstances, to allow my zeal to outstrip my discretion. I shall always feel that to secure the confidence and good opinion of this Committee is the best reward I can obtain for my utmost exertions in their service; and that by exercising a liberal forbearance in respect of any oversight which I so deeply regret, the Committee will have even a stronger claim than ever to an exact and unremitting performance of duty on my part.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, even in the case of Edwards, the co-pioneer of public libraries, the word librarian spelt 'servant' and not 'partner'.

The fact that a master-servant relationship characterized public library administration throughout the period in question must have proved doubly frustrating for librarians since in the library setting itself their authority was unquestioned; notwithstanding occasional 'informal' inspections by committee members wearing their reader's hat. Faced with small staffs of inadequate ability and motivation, librarians were unable to delegate responsibility as they might have wished.<sup>30</sup> W.C.B. Sayers described the prevailing attitude as: "I am Chief Librarian and all the suggestions needed I will make myself"<sup>31</sup> - though Sayers himself, it must be said, was one of the few who encouraged suggestions from his staff. Consequently, expertise was concentrated at the top of the staff hierarchy, mostly in librarians themselves; and this, librarians believed, committees failed to acknowledge.

Librarians also believed their true worth went unrecognised in the communities they served. Criticism that the public library fulfilled merely a passive recreational-welfare role at the ratepayer's expense was repeated time and again during the period under consideration. In fact, to this day the institution is accused of failing to meet the needs of its readers due to its complacent and inward-looking nature.<sup>32</sup> Yet the notion of 'service' to the community has historically characterized professional practice, including librarianship. The formulation by professions of a differentiated body of knowledge has always had, to be sure, a monopolistic and therefore material value. In the nineteenth century, indeed, the professions contributed significantly to a belief in the efficacy of the 'market', giving the entrepreneurial ideal a non-industrial expression.<sup>33</sup> However, the ideology of service and reciprocal trust by the community did not recede in the face of strengthening competitive forces.<sup>34</sup> Even if professional groups saw themselves as elites aiming at class and economic improvement they were not, by virtue of their expertise, disengaged from society. Librarians corresponded with this assessment of the professional motive. The formation of a professional body for librarians in 1877, the Library Association, represented a commitment to social engagement. Pay and conditions were certainly part of its remit; in fact, many library committees prevented their librarians from attending the International Librarians Conference, which gave rise to the Library Association, for fear of trade unionism.<sup>35</sup> But a key objective of the Association was also to raise standards of service.<sup>36</sup> Thus, when in 1892 the Association held its first annual conference abroad, in Paris, it did so not merely for the purpose of prestige - though the venue no doubt held a certain attraction in this respect - but to study standards in French national and municipal



libraries.<sup>37</sup>

The Library Association did not develop without its share of damaging internal strife.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the activities of such a professional body were neither the only nor the most effective means of advancing professional status and standards of service. Far better results, some public librarians proposed, would be derived from making the library more educational, more materially useful, more 'economic' and business orientated. This, it was said, was the way to improve corporate respectability and raise the public library's social prestige. But to achieve these goals the public library would need to 'extend' itself - to a degree it had not done before - into society. It could no longer rely on the passive role it had mostly assigned itself since its inception. This is not to deny, as shall be argued below, that the conservation of materials and making them available for use did not constitute a form of service; it is rather that reaching out to society to assist the exploitation of what is conserved constituted a higher form of service. As T.H. Green argued, the teacher must go to his pupils.

#### American Influences

If public librarians were to escape taints of redundancy and superficiality there was little in the experience of the public library in this country upon which to construct a more outgoing, useful service. The concept of service was present, as seen in the desire to regenerate society's morals, but the practical mechanics of improving service were until the very end of the century largely unexplored. Fortunately, inspiration came from abroad: from across the Atlantic, from the 1870s onwards, came a stream of fresh ideas on the 'techniques' (and indeed objectives) of professional librarianship, into which public librarians

were to tap. The fertilization of the British library profession from the ideas of the profession in the United States was one of the constant themes in pre-1914 library literature.<sup>39</sup> Nowhere was the superiority of American public librarianship more emphatic than in the field of library-user interaction: "Service was an idea that weighed heavily on the minds of American librarians"<sup>40</sup> The public librarians amongst those active in the establishment of the American Library Association in 1876 - the so-called 'Men of '76' - did much to erode the image of the librarian as the mere custodian of literature. Contributions by Melvil Dewey and Samuel Green to the first volume of the Library Journal (1876-1877) were typical of the service-orientated spirit of American librarianship, and testify to the consequently high regard in which it was found. Dewey had this to say about his profession:

The time has at last come when a librarian may ... speak of his occupation as a profession .... The best librarians are no longer men of merely negative virtue. They are positive, aggressive characters, standing in the front rank of the educators of their communities, side by side with the preachers and the teachers.<sup>41</sup>

Dewey advised that the public librarian tailor his work to the "wants of his special community". Public librarianship was now a "high calling", and so he would not be astonished to find "the ablest business talents engaged in the management of a public library".<sup>42</sup> His insistence on business acumen in library administration complemented his desire to mechanize and standardize the library.<sup>43</sup>

Samuel Green, a vehement advocate of good relations between librarian and public, urged the librarian in popular libraries to "put himself out" in the cause of building a popular intercourse between staff and user. Enthusiasm, persistency in assistance, a courteous disposition and outward-looking techniques (all of which he had tried



to instill into his own library's staff) had all come to be "highly appreciated in the community"; not only in the realm of cultural elevation but also "in regard to the scientific principles which underlie the processes of their daily occupations". Green's reasoning was logical. Quite simply, the more assistance librarians gave the more libraries would be supported. This would earn respect for the library. For even though treating readers "as equals" might leave them open to a "neglect of deference", the librarian's "superiority of culture" would always shine in the face of disrespect, "impudence and conceit".<sup>44</sup>

The service tradition in American public librarianship strengthened over time, coalescing with strands of the Progressive creed which taught that the intellectual-professional community were duty-bound to serve society, and in particular those with least educational opportunity.<sup>45</sup> Of importance also was the burgeoning complexity of American industrial society. The decades on either side of 1900 saw a rapid growth in the economy.<sup>46</sup> This was based on increased concentration, diversification, innovation and mechanization which, combined, provided new problems of organization for management. Complex problems called for complex solutions and thus the management of external marketing and internal organization became more 'scientific'.<sup>47</sup> In keeping with the new scientific approach the idea emerged that business decisions could no longer be based merely on "the way the old man used to run the shop". Personal experience no longer offered a safe basis for progress and intensified competition demanded that executives be "familiar with the best knowledge and thought of the day in order to keep up with the profession". Hence, the turn of the century saw the beginning of a rapidly rising output of business literature, indicative of "the tremendous demand that has

recently sprung up for the wider and better knowledge of business that spells 'efficiency'". This demand came not just from management but also from workers keen to improve their skills and intelligence in a competitive world.<sup>48</sup>

American public libraries sought to meet the demand for economic and industrial information by establishing business libraries. An 'Industrial Library' was established in Providence in 1900, followed in the next few years by 'useful arts' departments at Cincinnati, Detroit and Cleveland.<sup>49</sup> It was in the context of these attempts to capitalize on the increased demand for business and trade literature that the service tradition of the American public library began to pay dividends. A close psychological link can be identified between notions of library 'outreach', on the one hand, and the complex needs, on the other, of an optimistic business world and aspiring groups within it. Successful outreach required efficiency and this was highly compatible with the business ethic. In the late nineteenth century American public librarianship began to fashion itself more on business. It set out to offer an 'aggressive' service to complement 'hard-nosed' business needs; just as business was intrinsically 'useful' so also could the public library be. In essence, increased production in the wider world taught librarians themselves to be more 'productive'. American librarians believed this path could improve significantly their professional status: not only would the ablest business talents be attracted to librarianship, but the librarian would enjoy greater engagement and, hence, appreciation in society.

This analysis of the United States' library scene has been important because some British librarians were profoundly influenced by developments across the Atlantic. Public library service to business was just one of a host of ideas which took root here having first been



experimented with in the United States; the professional association and Dewey classification are two further examples . Advances in American librarianship were reported extensively in the library press here. This was the main means of informing librarians of new techniques and purpose; visits to the United States were for the privileged few . However, the library press could not by itself produce change; librarians would only react to wider social change. In fact, conditions similar to those which wrought change in the United States also existed here. First, despite anxiety over economic performance the pace of business, work and indeed life was quickening; science and innovation were making a social impact. Second, librarians in this country also had a 'service' tradition upon which to build; they were, after all, involved in the diffusion of education and culture, albeit in a relatively passive way.

#### Materialist Concerns, Scientific Techniques and Service Efficiency

Some public librarians sensed changes in the nation's economic life, including the threat to national economic security, and began promoting their institution's value in aiding 'useful' pursuits. As the public library became more education oriented, towards the turn of the century, the importance of serious, 'productive' reading was stressed more and more by librarians.<sup>50</sup> James Duff Brown testified in 1904 to:

... the value of books in the *practical affairs* of life, and the adoption [by the public library] of a thorough method of bringing this recognition home to the general public by means of a propaganda suited to each district.<sup>51</sup>

He accordingly advocated that public libraries provide high-class scientific and technical magazines as a means of attracting serious readers.<sup>52</sup>

A growing number of public librarians began to discuss services to business; their thoughts were not to be fully realised until the First World War . As municipal employees, librarians could not wholly engage with the entrepreneurial ideal unlike professions with a direct market relationship; but they could relate to it in a limited way by providing industry and commerce with information and knowledge pertinent to their competitive needs. Moreover, the fact that librarians had to 'sell' the idea of 'pertinent' knowledge to business (because the latter was not widely convinced of its efficacy) was in its way an entrepreneurial pursuit.<sup>53</sup>

Stanley Jast was a librarian who devoted a considerable period of his career to the furtherance of services to business. In 1903 he read a paper on technical libraries to the Library Association Annual Conference. This "unusual and far-sighted" piece duly appeared as a publication in its own right, as well as in the Library Association Record.<sup>54</sup> The following year he was able to view at first hand American public library services to business as the U.K. Library Association's official representative to the annual conference of the American Library Association. Whilst in the United States he visited public libraries in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Cleveland, Buffalo, Albany, Boston, Newark and Providence.<sup>55</sup> This was a formative experience for Jast who later as deputy (1915-20) and chief (1920-31) at Manchester was responsible for establishing high standard technical and commercial library services for the city.

Business provision was for Jast but one aspect of improving the 'service' ethic. He believed that in all its departments the public library should become more helpful and scientific in its methods of operating an 'open' policy. 'Openness' was something which pro-business librarians like Jast both preached and practised. In an article read



to the 1898 Library Association Conference, entitled 'Some hindrances to progress in public library work', he stages a vehement assault on the "officialism" of past provision. He denigrated the "red-tapeism" of grasping fines; of complicated and intruding fines for reference book loans; of the issue of borrowers' tickets being dependent on the signature of two ratepayers; of the borrowing of one volume at a time, even if the work was multi-volumed.<sup>56</sup> In his years as chief at Croydon (1898-1915) he attempted to combat these and other restrictive practices. His list of innovations is impressive:

1. Telephone link between central library and branches (1898)
2. Issue of extra non-fiction ticket (1899)
3. Library talks (1899)
4. Open access in central reference (lending already open access) (1899)
5. Library magazine - Reader's Index - for the public (1899)
6. Technical book exhibition (1901)
7. Photograph collection for loan (1903)
8. Special exhaustive index of authors, themes, titles to current year's periodicals
9. Classified reading lists on various topics
10. Subject catalogue
11. Information service via 'quick enquiry' card index.<sup>57</sup>

Jast did not have the resources to develop fully an information service to business. Croydon was at the turn of the century a thriving small-scale industrial and commercial centre of 12,000-people, largely self-supporting and separate from London except for its commuter population.<sup>58</sup> This made it ripe for the establishment of a technical and commercial library service. Though Jast was not able to instigate this, his library magazine (Reader's Index) at least contained numerous

local trade advertisement, thereby forging one useful link with business.

If the Croydon public library could not fully serve business it could nonetheless interact more effectively with the public. Jast instilled into his staff the need to be more assertive and helpful, especially in the area of reference work. The assistant was placed "among the readers ... to help students in any way he can".<sup>59</sup> Staff were taught to be more sensitive to the public's needs:

The reference library assistant is brought in close touch with people of different temperaments. Some are shy and awkward, others dogmatic and demanding, and others easily served. In each case he is compelled to use different methods of obtaining an idea of the reader's wants; and must always use tact. Particularly is this the case with the shy reader, who is often afraid to ask help and wanders among the books without being able to find what he is seeking.<sup>60</sup>

Jast believed a way to help all readers was by applying science to the problem of knowledge dissemination. His introduction to Dewey Decimal Classification had made a big impact on his library thinking.<sup>61</sup> He was an enthusiastic propagandist for the 'scientific' classified catalogue which challenged the supremacy of the dictionary catalogue. Sound classification, he believed, was the key to a fuller exploitation of the liberating open access revolution; and he believed he was engaged in a momentous struggle:

... when the history of the library movement is written the facts that will stand out are the battle of the dictionary versus classified catalogue; the application of exact classification to shelf arrangement; and the battle for open access.<sup>62</sup>

One local newspaper described Jast's championing of such innovations as "more important than the invention of the aeroplane". Moreover, it was surprising that they came "not from the office, or the shop, or the



factory, but from the learned, and, as some thought, dreamy atmosphere of the library."<sup>63</sup>

Just believed science could improve service. He was not wrong in his analysis. In other areas of customer service, the notion of 'service' was changing but not to an extent seen in the public library. The department store was by the 1900s paying closer attention to shoppers. David Lewis's, which looked much to working class customers, adopted from 1880, when it opened its Manchester outlet (the others being Liverpool, 1856 and Birmingham, 1885), a deliberate policy of encouraging customers to come into the store and browse without any obvious pressure on them to buy. By the early years of this century many stores had installed accommodating facilities such as lifts, escalators, rest-rooms and restaurants.<sup>64</sup> In 1909 the American Gordon Selfridge opened his Oxford Street store. This he tried to make an informal, 'family' establishment with the inclusion of roof garden; bargain basement; ice-cream soda fountains for children; large and brightly lit shop windows; perfumery counters placed just inside the main entrance to seduce passers-by with enticing scents; and adverts reading 'Spend the Day at Selfridges'.<sup>65</sup> But not until after the Second World War did retailing adopt what the public library had begun fifty years earlier; that is to say, self-service (or open access in library terminology).<sup>66</sup>

Public librarians rightly saw themselves as pioneers in customer service. To be so they had had to become scientists also. By the 1900s librarianship had taken on a technical pose. In 1909 the Library Association declared: "Librarianship has a technical side for which special training is necessary, and without this training no one is qualified to take up the position".<sup>67</sup> This was a far cry from the early days of the Association when it was ruled by 'gentlemen's

gentlemen'.<sup>68</sup> By the turn of the century it was the municipal librarians who dominated: they were in the forefront of library innovation. Public librarians made contributions in advance of those running academic libraries: "Any stuffy duffer who seemed no good for anything on earth", said Savage, "was jobbed into a 'learned' library."<sup>69</sup> It should be acknowledged, however, that some non-public librarians did make significant contributions, most notably in the field of bibliography. For example, E.W.B. Nicholson, a private and academic librarian who helped found the Library Association was no die-hard when it came to supporting Sunday opening and open access.<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, it was public librarians like Ernest Savage who were pioneering the new 'scientific' approach; it is no coincidence that he was trained by Jast at Croydon. In a Library World article in 1909 dealing with the representation of science in municipal libraries he applauded the idea of extensive science collections. Science - in which he included literature which aided "the side of our work which helps people earn a living" - was more important than reading for pleasure, which was of "little permanent good". He wished to promote literature of "practical" value:

Although it is pleasant for us to provide solace for a tired working man, and to provide a companion for the villa lady who can only afford a maid, yet my crass utilitarianism forces me to believe that it is better for our libraries to be educational institutions than philanthropic circulating libraries. I plead for less clap-trap and more science .... I want to see the public library recognised as an institution with a definite educational value, a definite business value; and less as part of the modern scheme of beer and skittles.<sup>71</sup>

The problem for public libraries, he continued, was that science was a sprawling area of human knowledge made worse by its relatively short shelf-life and the expensive nature of publications. For local public libraries, with little available cash, a wide coverage of the literature



was not possible. Hence, groups had to be targeted, the extent and nature of demand assessed and provision made accordingly; this process was particularly relevant to the needs of local technical school students. The process, in other words, was a 'scientific' assessment aimed at furthering the consumption of 'useful' literature. In advocating both the literature and the process, Savage revealed he had been labelled nothing more than a 'crass and ignoble utilitarian'. He admitted only to being the last word of this description. And such was indeed the case. To promote serious science literature was utilitarian. Moreover, to devise scientifically how the correct science literature would reach those who needed it was being even more so.<sup>72</sup>

Further, as Jast had argued, the scientific instrument of classification could help open up the library's treasures to readers. But close classification was also useful to librarians seeking improved prestige; it became the symbol of the new drive towards enhanced professional status. In the 'closed' library, it has been argued, the catalogue was the main key to the stock. The public was thus given the chance to appreciate, in consulting the catalogue, the skilled and lengthy labour of the librarian who had produced it and who, many must have presumed, knew something of the content of the books listed. With the gradual emergence of the open access library the catalogue, though it did not of course disappear, became less important as readers were now allowed to browse. However, this did not diminish any public appreciation of the librarian which did exist, because a new method of 'revealing' the library - and a scientific one - emerged in its place to impress the public. Classification became the basis of the new link between librarian and reader because it attempted (reality has, of course, never matched theory) to arrange items on the shelves as readers would expect to see them.<sup>73</sup>

Public librarians were assisted in their migration towards science by the latter's rejuvenation in the nation's intellectual life. The intellectual community in the Victorian age - though the word 'intellectual' did not exist in the way we know it until the late nineteenth century - consisted of 'men of science', 'scholars' and 'men of letters' - women presumably were not considered capable of intellectual effort . During the Victorian age 'men of science' by and large took a back-seat in intellectual activity. Literature, not science, was the hallmark of the intellectual elite. By the early twentieth century, however, science had staged a remarkable recovery: leading scientists having attained a higher social profile and international reputations even. Despite the fact that economic, social and political elites remained bound to many attitudes discouraging science, there was no denying the advances it had made in terms of knowledge, professional status, relevance to ordinary life and the confronting of things established; the way Darwinism confronted theology, for instance . But the effect of scientific discovery went much deeper. Science possessed by the late nineteenth century a 'silent and permeative genius' which deeply affected the nature of other disciplines, and helped convert many other fields of intellectual activity into professional disciplines including, to a degree, librarianship.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, science itself underwent a division of labour in the nineteenth century. The 'natural philosophy' and 'natural history' of the eighteenth century were transformed into 'physics' and 'chemistry', 'biology' and 'geology', each with its own distinct boundaries, techniques of investigation, and specialised practitioners.<sup>75</sup> There was a proliferation of new sciences and sub-sciences. Two examples of highly specialised disciplines were



seismology (the study of earthquakes) named in 1858, and 'embryology (the study of rudimentary life forms) named the following year.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the acquisition of a special name for a science usually indicated it had achieved a distinct professional importance.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the evolution of the term 'library science' did not just indicate where librarians thought part of their future intellectual standing should rest but revealed considerable status aspirations also.

Yet, being 'at one' with science was no guarantee of improved professional prestige. It should be recalled that after about 1880 engineers fell from being the heroes of the industrial age to a position of diminished self-confidence; this was especially true of the 'electricals'. This had little to do with the qualities of engineers themselves, but with the economic climate in which they operated; their associated industries had begun to falter under mounting foreign competition and the engineering profession's reputation suffered accordingly.<sup>78</sup>

By contrast, the sphere in which librarians operated - broadly education - was from the late nineteenth century onwards one of expansion and optimism. Improved educational provision was required for advances in economic efficiency, as well as for a regeneration of society's culture and morals in response to the 'rediscovery of poverty' in the 1880s and the 'national efficiency' drive of the Edwardian period. In fact, it is necessary to stress - as the remainder of this chapter intends to do - that public librarians did not, around the turn of the century, metamorphose into fully-fledged disinterested scientists, jettisoning their traditional role as moral agents of society. True, some at least had sought to define themselves in relation to the new scientific industrialism; nonetheless, they retained their belief in the need to disseminate culture.

If anything, science had helped strengthen this traditional role: it had shown that librarians were not obscurantists but could engage in inquiry and reform. This lesson could now be carried into the broader educational field, into 'liberal' adult education and the education of children. The notion of 'service', which science had done much to develop, could now be further invigorated by a non-utilitarian commitment.

### The Diffusion of Culture and the Service Ideal

Throughout history librarians have been seen as persons of culture. The great library at Alexandria had along with the city's museum formed a literary research institution where the librarian was "the most important personage of the intellectual entourage".<sup>79</sup> The first librarians at Alexandria were true scholar-poets, not mere custodians of literature.<sup>80</sup> This intellectual image continued into modern times and was humourously described by Sayers in 1912:

... unkempt, shabby, preoccupied and absent-minded, climbing up ladders in a dim-lit dwelling-place of books, taking from the shelves volumes on which reposes the dust of generations, sitting upon the rungs of the ladder to read them, and ejaculating at intervals his invariable 'Prodigious' at the revelations of those worm-eaten folios - this is the cloistered, other worldly librarian of the imagination; a recluse, a scholar, and impractical, harmless and passive human automaton.<sup>81</sup>

Many nineteenth century librarians (including municipal) were accomplished scholars and 'literateurs'. When Fulham's librarian, F.T. Barret, died in 1905 he left a library of three hundred volumes.<sup>82</sup> When the country's first school for librarians opened in 1919 eighty-nine of the ninety-nine students enrolled made 'Literary History and Book Selection' the biggest class intake.<sup>83</sup>



This scholarly dimension did not mean that librarians had no conception of public service. Public librarians can be considered as part of the intellectual community which came under the heading of 'men of letters', alongside poets, novelists, journalists, biographers, historians, social critics, philosophers, political economists, etc. The one factor common to these groups was that each commanded some kind of 'market relationship' with the general reading public.<sup>84</sup> Public librarians did so in that they attempted to meet readers' needs, though without the incentive of profit. As such they were interactive with society. They were not, however, servile to the public. A concern common to many professions was to raise the moral tone of society.<sup>85</sup> This was certainly the case with librarians who, in part, perceived themselves as guides to a higher form of social life.

Librarianship was often seen as being akin to the 'gentlemanly' callings of medicine, the law and the church. Allegorically, librarians were sometimes allotted the pastoral-clerical role of shepherds of a flock.<sup>86</sup> As late as 1932 Stanley Jast was reminding librarians of Andrew Carnegie's words at the 1907 Library Association Conference, when he told the assembly: "Consecrate yourself to your profession for it is noble." It was a sentiment and a calling with which Jast fully concurred: "To the priest the spiritual, to the doctor the physical, and to the librarian the intellectual ministry of man. It is a splendid part for us to play."<sup>87</sup> The role of attentive public servant had been described by Thomas Carlyle in 1840:

My notion of the Librarian's function does not imply that he shall be king over us; may that he shall ever quit the address and manner of a 'servant' to a Library; but he will be as a 'wise' servant, watchful, diligent, discerning what is what, incessantly endeavouring, rough-hewing all things for us, and, under the guise of a wise servant, 'ruling' actually while he serves. Like a Nobleman's Steward: that is

in some sort the definition of him.<sup>88</sup>

The service in which Carlyle's 'Stewards' worked was one of culture, their duty being to extend and enlarge it by diffusing literary knowledge. As the librarian of Edinburgh University wrote in 1923 after forty-six years library work:

Librarians are men who are not in the forefront in public. But they are certainly the stimulus to the soil of literature, and the dispensers of literary knowledge. Without them ignorance would bring forth a scentless flower instead of a garden of perfume. Librarians put the necessary tools into the hands of clergymen, statesmen and workers of all ranks. And their worth is not recognised as it should be.<sup>89</sup>

However, to be true servants of culture and improve their public reputation librarians needed not just to dispense but encourage reading. Public librarians interviewed by local newspapers and writing in their annual reports constantly impressed upon the public the value of quality literature. Yet it was recognised that the process of making 'quality' readers was necessarily piecemeal, commencing for the majority at a low level. As Winchester's librarian explained in 1886:

The great thing is to induce the people to read; and though it is perfectly true that the tastes of the majority may not coincide with our own, it is far preferable that they should read anything rather than they should read nothing.<sup>90</sup>

To coax readers - and indeed to maintain the library's popularity - librarians were thus forced to make concessions to mass literary consumption. This seriously undermines any view of librarians as successful social controllers.

Interest had to be generated even in the lightest reading material of an acceptable moral content. Sayers in 1912 explained that librarians had a "mission not only to provide reading but also to create readers". They had to transform themselves "from a passive into an active force in the community".<sup>91</sup> Similarly in 1909 the



Library Association advised that public library committee's principal efforts:

... should be directed towards inculcating and stimulating the habit of reading both for recreation and mental improvement. The mere acquisition of books and their display in a public building will not of itself be sufficient to this effect.<sup>92</sup>

From the late nineteenth century the idea that librarians required a higher profile was gaining popularity. Thomas Aldred, Southwark's librarian, explained in 1904 how he 'encouraged' reading:

By the very best method, viz., personal recommendations to borrowers; and not shutting myself in an office working out details of utopian schemes.<sup>93</sup>

Librarians were increasingly leaving their offices and guiding readers in their choices. Of the librarian at Portsmouth in 1886 it was said that "the recommendations of a judicious adviser such as Mr. Jewers [the librarian] are of great value". Moreover, this allowed the librarian to take greater care of the readers' moral well-being; for although the ultimate choice was said to be "affected by personal preferences", what was "indispensable" was that "the pabulum provided should be morally wholesome".<sup>94</sup> Librarians believed that a substantial part of their clientele, made none the wiser by the catalogue, were baffled by the extent of choice, even in an open access setting.<sup>95</sup> In such cases, it was said, "a well informed and affable librarian may be of the greatest service".<sup>96</sup>

Presented here is the image of an 'engaged' librarian, actively aiding the reader in choosing worthwhile and morally sound literature. Librarians might not have taken on a 'confessor' role as in the case of the shop assistant to the higher class customer.<sup>97</sup> But they did begin to pay closer attention to their clienteles in the hope of boosting reading and conveying culture. As noted above, science was an aid in

this direction; so also were 'non-utopian' schemes of open access, library talks, lectures, reading circles and exhibitions.

Supporters of open access pointed to its long tradition. Medieval libraries, though books were chained, were 'open' in the sense that staff were not required to fetch books. In modern times, in collegiate, proprietary, subscription and commercial libraries, the open library was almost universal. Many public library reference departments also had small sections of stock on open shelves (beginning at Cambridge, 1870).<sup>98</sup> In 1894, at Clerkenwell, James Duff Brown introduced open access to lending services. This was a revolutionary idea enthusiastically supported by some: "Mr Brown is become a Mahomet, and dingy Clerkenwell Library a sort of a librarian's Mecca, whence he spreads literally the true faith".<sup>99</sup> Brown had first suggested open access in 1891, and was confirmed in its efficacy as an aid to education after his visit to the United States two years later.<sup>100</sup>

The main motivation behind the open access drive was the desire to spread culture by making the public library more educational. It was argued that allowing readers to browse would encourage serious reading.<sup>101</sup> The indicator system, it was said, "disgusted and disheartened many readers and would-be private students as open access could never do". As a schoolboy and butcher's boy before the First World War, Albert Williams has described how using the closed access library at Bolton in his spare time was a complicated and 'crude' business.<sup>102</sup> Readers warmly welcomed open access in the minority of places that it appeared before 1914.<sup>103</sup> Librarians hoped that this would not only encourage reading per se, but also develop a taste for 'useful' literature. Open access was thus promoted as an effort "to get in touch with the educational work of the nation".<sup>104</sup> It was an



'active educational force' which enhanced the reputation of the library as the 'People's University'.<sup>105</sup>

To render the library more educational free access not just to books, but to better books was essential. As the librarian John Ballinger claimed:

... if our modern selection of books are to be of any actual educational help, they must contain choice and beautiful books, samples of fine painting, high class illustrations, and beautiful bindings, in order to present a more worthy standard of craftsmanship for teaching people improved ideas and workmanlike methods.<sup>106</sup>

To make a selection of quality stock worthwhile required improved supervision, in respect of both its definitions.

In 1907 the architect A.L. Champneys made the following comments on library supervision:

There is, it may be thought, something rather aggressive in the term and its acceptance, and it is a pity that there is no more agreeable word. Though supervision is undoubtedly a safeguard against malefactors and, as such, a benefit to the majority, the true spirit of it should be rather one of helpfulness, and the staff should be considered allies to the readers and not spies.<sup>107</sup>

Herein lies the twin definition of supervision in respect of library work. On the one hand it has been considered a function of library management: an attempt to enhance the smooth running of the library by maximising public accessibility. This would be achieved by concentrating staff in accessible positions. Readers would have ease of access to staff for answering enquiries: "short lines for every process are essential", wrote one American librarian.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the financial savings which would arise from this would be in the interests of both library establishment and users. On the other hand, supervision has meant the overseeing of a potentially disruptive public; in effect, an expression of a desire not to 'help' but to 'spy'.

The fact that librarians thought they needed to spy on readers reveals a degree of distrust of the public on their part. Fears of public malevolence increased with the arrival of the open access idea. Librarians now had to watch not only for mutilation of materials, but for their theft and misplacement also. Yet, the amount of theft from open access libraries was, and always had been, minimal. George Dawson had told the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849 that loss of books from Mechanics' Institutes libraries was negligible.<sup>109</sup> One of the earliest public libraries to offer freer access was Salford where there was no need to register for a book when obtaining it for reference purposes:

The check on the readers is entirely of a moral kind - a person so disposed could, without much difficulty, carry off the volume he had been reading; but 'not one case of this kind has yet occurred', and the conduct of all the readers has been most orderly and becoming. The readers know and feel that they are trusted, and this naturally makes them anxious to show that the trust has been well reposed.<sup>110</sup>

In the first four years of open access at Clerkenwell's lending library only twelve volumes costing £1.10s.0d were stolen.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the pre-1914 period open access remained a vexed question. Opposition to it was partly financial, in both a corporate and personal sense. For poorly funded library authorities adapting premises and classifying stock was expensive. A popular view was that open access was the dream of lazy librarians whose work-load would be cut at the ratepayer's expense. Some leading opponents of the system had a significant financial stake in retaining closed access libraries. Alfred Cotgreave, West Ham's librarian, became particularly vocal in his opposition: his patented indicator for closed access libraries was, after all, one of the most popular devices of its kind in use.



These financial concerns bolstered the opposition to open access based on distrust. This was not insignificant. One librarian described the idea as a "plea for anarchy".<sup>112</sup> Even open access enthusiasts devised means of 'safeguarding' their new system; by placing counters and shelving in appropriate positions for overseeing the public, and by placing wicket gates at entrances and exits. Councils and parishes were not slow to prosecute thieves; whilst posters liberally displayed in libraries warned of the penalties of mutilation and theft. But this continuing 'fortress' mentality should not detract from an emergent willingness to assist and liberate use. A growing awareness of supervision in its positive mode should be recognised. Open access revealed a new trust in popular use. Moreover, enshrined in it was the concept of 'service'. In a free access setting readers would, to an extent, have to help themselves, but they would also have the assistance of staff now released from behind the impenetrable barrier of indicator and issue window: "A large amount of aid given to readers must take the form of personal assistance", remarked Portsmouth's librarian.<sup>113</sup> It should be noted, however, that supporters of indicators believed their system also rendered service to the public, allowing as it did an instant answer to a book's availability.

Enhanced service via open access was extended to all, not just a privileged few. Distrust of users had never been determined by social class - that is to say, middle class librarians spying on working class readers with a propensity to steal and mutilate. Such 'depredations' had not been the preserve of "the much-reviled lower orders".<sup>114</sup> At Leeds it was considered "not by any means clear that the better educated classes are not responsible for the filthy remarks so often to be found on the margins of books";<sup>115</sup> whilst the Select Committee of

1849 had been told of the likelihood of theft and the need of a 'literary police' at as reputable a library as the Royal Dublin Society.<sup>116</sup> Just as malevolence and the need to oversee were classless, so also, said open access enthusiasts, should be service to well-affected, education-minded readers who came from all social groups.

The new impetus to render a widely embracing service manifested itself in a whole range of extension activities. 'Extra-library activity' had existed in one form or another - most notably classes and lectures - since the early days of the public library.<sup>117</sup> For librarians extension work was nonetheless a minor concern relative to the 'backroom' techniques of librarianship. In the late nineteenth century, however, the idea of 'extension' beyond mere fixed-site book provision gained popularity. Short library talks to the public (especially children) on the mechanics of library use - describing rules, issue and classification systems, the catalogue, etc. - became very popular. The library lecture underwent a renaissance. At Mile End, in 1893, six Gilchrist lectures organised by the public library attracted 27,000 people.<sup>118</sup>

#### Briscoe and Axon

A novel means of engaging with the public was the reading circle. One of the chief proponents of this form of extension activity was J. Potter Briscoe (Nottingham's librarian) who saw it as a corollary to the 'bustling age' in which he lived:

The hurry-scurry of city, town and society life seemed to need literature of a light and a scrappy kind; something which would not require much, if any, mental effort. Novels have therefore teemed from the press in greater number than has ever been published before in the history of literature; and snippet weeklies



have been issued by publishers under scores of titles, and in ton loads .... The average reader is omnivorous and needs direction if he is to derive the greatest possible advantage from his reading.<sup>119</sup>

To meet readers' needs for direction, Briscoe continued, "much thought has been given by the cultured, and others lower in the intellectual scale, who desire to do good to their fellows in their day and generation".<sup>120</sup> In practice this often meant co-operating with the National Home Reading Union (founded 1889) which provided a magazine, book lists and group leaders (often librarians) to encourage the association of those seeking to advance their reading.

Briscoe also believed in giving short lectures on books and writers to attract readers and stimulate good reading.<sup>121</sup> He further asserted the need to reach out to minority user groups. The lack of library books for the blind was decried.<sup>122</sup> He urged and pioneered increased library use by the young.<sup>123</sup> He praised the work done by public libraries as agencies of the government's Emigrants' Information Office: this involved giving sound advice to those, perhaps with little means, seeking a fresh start in the colonies; as well as protecting them against fraud, exploitation and hardship.<sup>124</sup>

These stances demonstrate a significant social commitment which Briscoe also displayed outside the library field. In Nottingham he was active in the temperance movement, as well as other church, charitable and social institutions: "He appears to have had a finger in every conceivable pie of the town and a great love for being a committee member of one organization or another."<sup>125</sup> His engagement with society was clearly evident in his library philosophy. The public library, he believed, was a "local well-spring of learning".<sup>126</sup> By using public libraries individuals would "be enabled to progress in matters which affected their callings and positions in life, and thus make them

worthy citizens, good workmen, and acceptable members of society".<sup>127</sup>

It was the public library's duty to serve all, irrespective of class distinction.<sup>128</sup> In promoting reading of high character, he asserted, the "librarian of the twentieth century must not spare himself for the common good".<sup>129</sup> His view of librarians was that:

As a body and as individuals, we are not selfish. We have some of the missionary spirit in us.<sup>130</sup>

This missionary impulse fitted well with Briscoe's wish to extend the library into society (it is probably no coincidence that his son, who followed him into librarianship, became a leading advocate of library publicity).<sup>131</sup> In 1886, Thomas Greenwood wrote that: "The student and the book-worm do not necessarily make the best librarian for a Free Library, often, in fact, the very opposite."<sup>132</sup> Greenwood might have been correct in stating this as a general rule. To Briscoe, however, it did not apply; a 'bookman born', he was also anxious actively to serve his community in its literary and cultural needs.<sup>133</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that Briscoe was directly influenced by educational idealism, even though his personal social philosophy and professional practice bear a striking resemblance to it. However, in the case of the librarian W.E.A. Axon, a contemporary of Briscoe, the suggestion of a link is much stronger. Axon became chief at Manchester and an active member of the Manchester Literary Club. He would have been aware of the interest of his fellow club members in the German philosophy which informed idealism.<sup>134</sup> He himself was aware of its impact: "We have witnessed the vigorous development of German literature, essentially informed by the spirit of the new age."<sup>135</sup> Axon was a man of erudite culture and learning. He was a product of educational self-help. As he wrote to Edward Edwards in 1867:



What little knowledge I possess has been almost wholly acquired by the use of our Free Library [Manchester], which placed within my reach those aids to study and research which but for these institutions would be quite inaccessible to poor students like myself.<sup>136</sup>

Axon believed the library could enable others to elevate themselves similarly:

He who goes into a large library has the opportunity of communing with the greatest minds that have existed. If he imbibes some of their spirit, he must inevitably be a better man and a better citizen. Literature will liberalize his mind, give him broader views of life, a wider charity, a greater earnestness, and a deeper faith.<sup>137</sup>

He encapsulated his belief in the efficacy of culture in quoting Shakespeare:

Ignorance is the curse of God;  
Knowledge the wing whereby we fly to heaven.<sup>138</sup>

For Axon, the library was "an instrument of culture, of research, of moralization";<sup>139</sup> it was a "universal provider" not only of information but of "ethical inspiration and enthusiasm".<sup>140</sup>

He freely quoted and praised the social critics of the age. He concurred with Carlyle that the "true university of these days is a collection of books", and with Arnold that culture was in essence "a study of perfection".<sup>141</sup> He studied and admired the works of Ruskin who, according to Axon, taught:

... that Art should be true to Nature, and that Man should be true to God. When Art loses its faith in Nature, it ceases to possess utility. When Man ceases to work Righteousness, there follow disorders and social perils of every kind. Ruskin beholds in our modern society an aristocracy which has abdicated its functions, a middle class largely given up to greed, a working class struggling in the dark, but dimly conscious of injustice. He sees the fair fields replaced by 'jerry-built' houses, the lechery, the drunkenness, the brutality that disgrace our towns, and degrade men and women below the level of the beasts, and put them on a par with the fiends of the pit .... He has taught us also

that it is an ill return for God's gift of  
delight in beauty and order to leave our  
bretheren festering in misery and despair.<sup>142</sup>

Axon praised the fortitude of the Platonist Thomas Taylor who as a  
'Pagan' philosopher stood firm against the denunciations of a Christian  
society:

it must be acknowledged that a man who devotes  
himself to poverty and to study in an age and  
country famous for the pursuit of wealth; who  
has the courage to adopt and the sincerity to  
avow opinions that are contrary to every  
prejudice of the time; who runs the risk of  
persecution and imprisonment; a man who  
'scorns delights and lives laborious days', is  
entitled to our admiration and respect.<sup>143</sup>

Axon thus perceived the pursuit of learning as a work of  
Righteousness (see Ruskin quote above), a sentiment which Samuel  
Barnett later echoed.<sup>144</sup> A librarian, he believed, had a duty to his  
fellow citizens both to conserve and diffuse literature. He was an  
advocate of library lectures "on the best book in a particular class or  
on a particular subject".<sup>145</sup> Regarding the collection and conservation  
of materials he was motivated by the vision of the sustained growth of  
culture: from such passive work "future knowledge may be wrought".<sup>146</sup>  
The provision of literature was a social activity; and like Briscoe  
his impulse to engage with society in the literary field was matched by  
social service in other areas. His obituary noted that he was not  
just a bibliophile but "a humanitarian in its most ample sense".<sup>147</sup>  
As a member of numerous social organizations and public bodies  
(including the Salford School Board, and Moss Side Urban District  
Council) he "took an active part in promoting all movements which in  
his belief would tend to the material and social amelioration of the  
people, and was accordingly a life-long advocate of education,  
temperance, peace, and food reform".<sup>148</sup>



## Social Criticism and Idealist Influences

Public librarians like Briscoe and Axon contradicted the received notions of passivity introspection and conservatism which have characterized the profession. Evidence from contemporary fiction further denies these charges. Published in 1908 Miss Lucy: a character study, by C. Coleridge, contains an unusual depiction of an Edwardian public librarian. It is the story of a woman whose life is overshadowed by her loss of class status following the death of her rich guardian ( her parents died when she was young) who leaves her penniless. Out of necessity she is forced to marry below her. Later in life she is dismayed when her daughter becomes engaged to the town's librarian. Even though his family lived in "a fine villa in Acton" and were above a game-keeper's family, Lucy cared little for the relationship: "He was like the cock that thought the sun got up to hear him crow." She was unimpressed by the fact that he had passed the higher Cambridge examinations and was getting good marks for papers on Browning at University Extension classes. But for Kendal Ashford, the librarian, exams were an 'excitement', and had qualified him for each step in life, including his post at the library: "I went on getting all the education I could, and have got some credentials - I am still working for more - I want a London degree. There are many secretaryships, and excellent librarianships to be got." Ashford had chosen a life of study and self-education in preference to a lucrative career in his step-father's sherry firm; "I hated disseminating alcohol, and I'd lived on a crust a day to study." But he also preferred librarianship to selling sherry because it was "something to be able to pull one's fellow creatures up a bit, and you don't do that in the wine trade." Ashford was not a conventional character. He questioned his fiancée's father's integrity in hunting poachers who he

described as "poor starving fellows". He apparently had little concern for class distinctions. He cared not that he was marrying below him: "I don't intend any class prejudice to stand in the way. It's beyond all that." In this regard he was an independent spirit: "I'd emigrate, or break stones, or work in a factory to be my own master. The assumptions of class are intolerable", he told his prospective parents-in-law.

This fictional representation, together with the previously described motivations of men of culture like Briscoe and Axon, of technicians like Jast and Brown, and even earlier, of a man of inquiry like Edward Edwards, show that the image of the cloistered, socially disinterested librarian is a cliché. Librarians, especially those in municipal posts, tended to be integrated with the social criticism which characterized the industrial age. Though they had faith in the 'age of progress', this was curbed to an extent by hesitancy over the social disruption and conflict which industrialism wrought. They thus looked to sanitize morally and to unite industrial society. They saw their institutions as schools of ethics. But what was the origin of this perception? Certainly religious influences (which in the United States contributed much to the New England derived genteel, gentry professionalism) require an investigation which cannot be afforded here.

As far as secular explanations are concerned, it has been noted previously that the popularity of idealism corresponded with the explosion in public libraries from around 1880. There is an intriguing similarity between the philosophy of leading public librarians and educational idealism. Librarians often spoke of the ultimate 'common good' at which their work was aimed. They stressed the equality of opportunity which libraries provided and their role as



generators of democratic ideals. They believed education through the library taught duty, good citizenship and social obligation. These virtues librarians themselves sought to practise by reaching out to readers, identifying their needs (within the confines of what was wholesome) and guiding the way to cultural elevation. Samuel Barnett believed this to be the librarian's true vocation; that is to say, to ascertain:

... the reader's mental equipment without appearing curious or arousing vexation. A recognition that such work was part of a librarian's duty would ... attract to the profession men and women desirous of rendering public service, or inspired by philanthropic ambitions. How better could men serve their generation than by acting as guides to enquiring minds?<sup>149</sup>

Barnett urged that librarians "be missionaries rather than collectors of books and makers of catalogues".<sup>150</sup>

#### Summary: Refining the Conservative Image

There is no evidence that public librarians studied T.H. Green or any other idealist writer, but this is not to say that public library ideals could not have been derived from some of the sources which produced idealism. Librarians did not attempt to immerse themselves in society, as was the case with settlement workers. But nor were they as apparently detached and coercive as teachers in moralising society. Theirs was rather a 'liberal' outlook which in the early period was formed from the utilitarian ideas about anti-exclusiveness and equality of opportunity which Edwards had championed; and which by the end of the century broadly corresponded with the New Liberalism. Librarians were often liberals, perhaps with a capital 'L' also. As Thomas Aldred commented to Walter Powell in warning him not to seek a library position in London:

Work in London is not near so pleasant as in provincial towns, especially in liberal boroughs. Administrations here (in London) take their duties very seriously and liberals, in particular, worry officials. You are better off in Birmingham if you attach any value to peace of mind.<sup>151</sup>

Because the public library was ostensibly a-political, librarians too have been labelled with a political quietism which was intrinsically conservative. However, the image of the conservative-minded librarian of the pre-1914 era requires refinement. The provision of separate women's rooms and tables is a case in point. On the one hand these facilities might be taken as demonstrating that librarians sympathized with traditionalist attitudes to women. On the other hand, they can be seen positively, as a privileged treatment for women who would otherwise not feel able to use the library.<sup>152</sup>

Librarians were burdened by a conservative image partly because their first duty was to conserve literature. To diffuse culture one must first be its custodian. For librarians to assert their public-spiritedness was thus problematic. Sayers once observed that

... while intellectually the librarian is one of the most cultured of municipal workers, because he does not produce tangible material returns, and because he is grossly underpaid, he is too often regarded as the social inferior of other municipal workers.<sup>153</sup>

Since the inception of their movement public librarians had preached some kind of 'productive' message. To employers they had pledged intelligent, purposeful workers; to the latter the library was presented as an enticing source of material gain. Late nineteenth century economic anxieties boosted interest in this aspect of library work; a momentum which was to be suddenly accelerated during the First World War when an economic role became the focus of public library purpose. Librarians thus straddled the line of tension between



scientific industrialism and cultural elevation. They supported each and did not view them as incompatible: culture, they said, had economic benefits. This symbiosis was reflected in the profession's move towards science, which visionaries like Brown and Jast spear-headed. Their scientific aspirations fitted with the drive for economic regeneration; but they were also a means of furthering the traditional function of cultural conveyance in that science made access to 'liberal' knowledge and education easier.

Public librarians were intellectually intrigued by science and its library application. They sincerely believed they were making an important contribution to progress. But they also saw it as a means of improving status and corporate respectability. The St. Helen's chief, Alfred Lancaster, argued in 1900 that due to technical book provision "public libraries have reached a much higher position and are justly recognised as educational institutions".<sup>154</sup> Equally, prestige was boosted - or so it was believed - by the advance in 'liberal' education and reading which science assisted. In all its aspects public librarians came to see their institution as thoroughly educational - an essential element in the national system of education. Such a position could only but improve status: it should be remembered that when public librarians acted as secretaries to science and art classes run by public libraries - this was not frequent but did occur - they could virtually double their salaries.<sup>155</sup>

By classes and other extension activities the "needful public sentiment" would be created.<sup>156</sup> Public appreciation was important to the material and status aspirations of librarians. By appearing as agents of educational endeavour they would be exhibiting the gentlemanly virtues of gentility and learning. In this respect public librarians might be seen to have been indulging in the formation of a

general or lower middle class consciousness. On the other hand, it can be argued that they were too aware of society's need for stability and fewer class divisions to be excessively anxious about the claims of their own social class. The motivation was rather to serve society and rescue it from the ravages of industrialism.

In the final analysis, therefore, public librarians were neither conservative nor revolutionary. They were moderate reformers aiming to reduce the social disorder and class conflict, which they found distasteful, by conveying culture; not just to the lower orders but to all social groups. As men of culture they were not antagonistic to science but saw it as an aid to society's elevation. Science was manifest in the classification of stock and the provision of scientific, technical and business literature. Just as science brought order to the library so also could it be applied to industrial society in the hope of improving the economic foundation of stability. Public librarians did not question the fundamental economic morality of the age. As Jast wrote in describing the constituency of the public technical library:

It includes all who are engaged in business or profession, in buying and selling, skilled and unskilled labour of every sort, the great army of workers who have made England the England she is, and upon whose well directed education depends the England that she will be.<sup>157</sup>

These are unequivocally the sentiments of someone in broad sympathy with the fundamental social arrangements of industrial capitalism. What librarians did question was the way the system had developed; creating social injustice, greed, ignorance and cultural deficiency. For the system to function smoothly these unattractive by-products needed to be ameliorated. It is in this context that the social criticism and cultural concerns of some leading public librarians can



be seen; 'liberal' education was not the antithesis of utilitarianism  
but its helpmate.

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## Chapter Eleven

### ARCHITECTURE

The previous chapter showed how the development of a profession intersected not just with motives of provision to its clientele but with wider social issues also. It is not surprising that librarians displayed a 'social' dimension: for they were a highly visible element in what was an intrinsically social institution. They, no more than their institution, could be divorced from the broader workings of society. The visibility of librarians and their assistants, however, was less than that of the institution's architecture to which a 'social' function can similarly be attached. At times it even appeared that buildings were more important than the books they contained. The Act of 1850 had permitted councils to spend money (raised through loans or rates) on buildings but not on books: in fact, the word 'book' occurs only once in the whole Act.<sup>1</sup> For the user too it was often the building which mattered most. This was particularly true of the Carnegie libraries, as one reader, mimicking the benefactor's Scottish heritage, explained in 1905:

D'ye know what a libry is? I suppose ye think it's a place where a man can go, haul down wan iv his fav'rite authors fr'm the shelf an' take a nap in it. That's not a Carnaygie libry. A Carnaygie libry is a large brick and white stone impenetribile builidin with th' name iv th' maker blown on th' dur.<sup>2</sup>

#### Historiography, Style and Show

Despite the considerable physical presence of the public library sensed by contemporaries relatively little research has been attempted in the area of the institution's architecture; the more uniform (and



some might say, uninteresting) buildings of the modern era have perhaps blunted the zeal for investigation. There have been entertaining yet occasional and brief assessments such as those by Keeling, Desmond and Ball.<sup>3</sup> More exhaustive research has been undertaken by Smith and Dewe from the perspective of benefaction and library architect respectively.<sup>4</sup> These studies have naturally taken some account of social use. However, no extensive, systematic research has been conducted into the social causation (from the viewpoint of motives of provision) of the public library built form, as has been the case in respect of work by architectural historians on other building types.<sup>5</sup>

Not that architectural history has always admitted data from outside its immediate domain of art. A parallel can be observed in the shortcomings of research in architectural and library history. Just as library analysis has lacked a broader historical perspective, so also in architectural history the tendency has been to view 'built form' without reference to the society which conceived it, notwithstanding the employment of the shallow device of 'social background'. However, as with library history there has emerged in architectural history in recent decades a fresh approach: one which integrates the study of the built environment with that of non-design inputs. Arising from the general thesis that built forms "exist in a web of non-material culture, made up of ideas, values, norms, beliefs and other phenomenon which do not have physical properties",<sup>6</sup> a number of new questions have been asked, principal among them: "What can we understand about a society by examining its buildings and physical environment?"<sup>7</sup> The answer to this question is that in any society buildings absorb (through the processes of design and construction) and subsequently reflect (in their final form) social, economic, political, religious and cultural functions. In short, the bond between built form and social form is

indissoluble.

Art and design historians have largely ignored other history. Equally, historians and sociologists have underplayed art and design; yet, these are not separate or distinct from society but part of a single process.<sup>8</sup> Exponents of this concept are not new.<sup>9</sup> It is only recently, however, that a new breed of writers - Girouard being a leader in the field (though some would argue, in a superficial way) - has gained recognition.<sup>10</sup>

New approaches adopted in architectural history can be exploited by library historians to help crystallize (or indeed reject) motives of provision. In accounting for the built form of the pre-First World War public library motives connected with civic power, the pursuit of culture, social cohesion, self-help, social control, national economic performance and technical education can all be placed on the design agenda: for both the design process and final architectural treatment can tell us much about support for the public library ideal, thereby confirming or adding to evidence gathered elsewhere.

The architectural evidence is extensive and varied. Style was eclectic. Of the hundreds of libraries built before the First World War some resembled Greek or Roman temples, others Renaissance palaces, Tudor mansions, Gothic churches or Scottish baronial homes; historical references were plundered from all eras of design.<sup>11</sup> The pre-occupation with style and excessive aesthetic treatment has since been derided. As early as 1935, when a considerable amount of visual evidence still stood, the librarian B.M. Headicar concluded that:

A casual survey of existing public library buildings in this country promptly leads to the conclusion that it would be not altogether a bad thing if many of them could be swallowed up in a single night and provide an opportunity to put in their places structures which would be suitable for their purpose.<sup>12</sup>



In 1942 Lionel McColvin reported that "as a class libraries are the worst set of buildings to be found in the country".<sup>13</sup> Later, in a much cited piece, the librarian R.G.C. Desmond exclaimed: "It is impossible to be enthusiastic about public library buildings in this country and difficult even to be charitable. They stand as shabby symbols of monumental dignity."<sup>14</sup> Because they had been subjected to a diversity of styles, Desmond continued, public libraries had been too easily mistaken for churches and chapels, banks, board schools, prisons or public wash-houses. Further, they had been badly planned (not fit for their purpose) and "can appeal only to persevering admirers of the Betjemanesque".<sup>15</sup>

Betjeman himself rejected the derogatory broadsides on Victorian architecture, which marked the period c. 1920-60, and helped initiate a new appreciation of Victoriana. "Some of our finest architecture", he argued, "was built by the Victorians, and we must rid ourselves of prejudices about date and style in order to sift the good Victorian architecture from the bad."<sup>16</sup> The architecture of the pre-1914 public library should be seen in this light. True, application of style was haphazard, and this perhaps undermined the corporate image of the institution. Yet diversity was the single most dominant characteristic of Victorian architecture.<sup>17</sup> It was not confined to public libraries. Moreover, there was a practical reason for variety in that there existed for public libraries no central body determining style and planning unlike in the case, say, of board schools or inter-war underground stations designed by London Transport.

Contemporaries were aware that much was yet to be achieved in public library design. From the 1890s onwards librarians and architects were highly vocal on the subject.<sup>18</sup> "Where lies the blame?" asked the American Charles Soule in 1912 in criticizing the past record

of public library design both here and across the Atlantic.<sup>19</sup> Soule proposed that in any design project the motto adopted should be "Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustus", that is to say, "Stability, Usefulness, Loveliness". It was his opinion, however, that in the past too much "Loveliness" had been administered at the expense of "Usefulness", and that the solution to this imbalance was that "the library should incontestably be assigned to the utilitarian extreme".<sup>20</sup> "The end of building is convenience," he wrote, whereas "the end of architecture as an art is beauty, grandeur, unity and power".<sup>21</sup>

Both the distinction between utilitarian and aesthetic concern and the subordination of the former to the latter carried some validity. But to exaggerate either inattention to utility or the incompatibility of the two aspects would be a concession to retrospective analysis. All library architecture, Victorian and Edwardian included, becomes outdated; even modern designs, despite the technology available, are questioned on grounds of function.<sup>22</sup> Modern planners might think their designs are more functional than those of their predecessors, but in reality utility is always to be measured against the objectives of a service and the nature of demands on it.

To this extent Victorian and Edwardian library planners did not wholly fail to address function. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a great deal was being said on the matter, much of it from a national economic perspective. Planners were aware, as today, that function was crucial. Moreover, if the definition of function is broadened to include an accommodation of fundamental social purposes, such as the celebration of the civic ideal or the exaltation of culture, then, surely, the aesthetic tendencies of public libraries can be said to have been functional.<sup>23</sup> In this context, observations such as that made by Alec Ellis concerning Carnegie building grants - "dissipated in



in many instances in the erection of palatial buildings"<sup>24</sup> - are not only retrospective but also lack an understanding of the symbolic purpose for which they were created.

In 1943 a finalist of the Royal Institute of British Architects' professional exams chose to approach the problem of library architecture from a perspective of function, urging, in deference to the 'user', that "if we realise that in a library building there is only the very human relationship between the reader and his book, we shall remember that the library building is not really public or civic, but personal and intimate, and need not be overpowering in its dignity".<sup>25</sup> Modern approaches such as this ignore the 'useful' role which architecture can play in giving meaning to human existence through the transmission of social messages. Public libraries of the pre-First World War era were symbolic. This is not surprising since architecture is one of the symbol systems - examples of others being language, gesture, expressive behaviour, pictures - which constitute the common experience of culture.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, architecture is a highly articulate, advanced symbol system capable of communicating complex meaning.

At its simplest a symbol is a phenomenon "which has a meaning additional to that which is communicated by its superficial configuration or stimulus profile".<sup>27</sup> "The Lord Mayor's coach was not for the Lord Mayor's benefit", wrote William Paley, "but for society's: to excite the ambition of the 'prentice boy'."<sup>28</sup> John Ruskin argued architecture to be the most political of all the arts in that it imposes upon all who care to gaze a vision which is the philosophical expression of another individual (or group), irrespective of that philosophical expression being shared by those who view it.<sup>29</sup> Or, as

Roger Scruton has pointed out:

Architecture is public. It imposes itself whatever our self-image .... Every man, whatever his tastes and aptitudes, is forced to confront the buildings which surround him, and to absorb from them whatever they contain of political significance.<sup>30</sup>

Architecture has a potential to impress itself (politically, ideologically, socially) on the unsuspecting observer. Victorian and Edwardian public library providers realised this and built to 'impress' accordingly. This was the basis of the symbolism contained in their elevations and interior decor.

The symbolic essence of public libraries was not primarily located in the use of allegory. Narrative, to be sure, was employed. Of the Darlington public library it was reported:

... it may fairly be claimed for its accessories (if we may employ such a term to describe stained-glass allegories, beautiful mouldings, busts etc.) that they will have an educative influence upon its frequenters all the more powerful because of their silent impressiveness.<sup>31</sup>

At Oldham it was proposed that the library be decorated with medallions of twelve literary, artistic and scientific 'greats' - Dante, Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Turner, Mozart, Handel, Rubens, Stephenson, Watt, Crompton, Michael Angelo - presumably offering an invitation to follow in their footsteps. In such cases (which were common) form preceded function in an attempt to explain, in easily comprehended pictorial language, the purpose of the institution.

A similar simplicity was perhaps at times evident in the employment of certain styles. Classicism was evocative of learning and pretensions to scholarship (partly because of the idea that classical architecture required more skill and knowledge to produce) and was used by architects accordingly;<sup>32</sup> the numerous museums of



antiquity which sprang up in the nineteenth century lent themselves well to the newly discovered details of Greek architecture.<sup>33</sup>

Classicism was an enduring style for all building types, despite the rise of the modern movement, and a great many public libraries were fashioned thus. Gothic - which in its influential period achieved a high fashion status - was closely linked to civic prestige. It also had connotations of religiously derived moral earnestness and piety, i.e. values appropriate to the age. Gothic was applied to public libraries but, interestingly, to few of those donated by Carnegie.<sup>34</sup> Arts and Crafts designs, which aimed to attract the attention of the 'ordinary' passer-by, were perhaps indicative of a desire for greater social cohesion as perceived by the style's 'socialistic' inventors; the 'democratic' essence of the public library would certainly have been a plausible reason for employing designs derived from such sources.

No doubt, some buildings were erected with an "iconographic implication" in mind.<sup>35</sup> However, it is likely that most architects were unconscious of such implications in adopting historical styles.<sup>36</sup> The Classical, for example, was as much a part of the British heritage via the Roman influence as the Gothic; it is not surprising that architects plundered their history for the style they required, and no doubt did so in an 'unaffected' way. It is therefore probable that public library designs owed more to the existence of the extensive portfolio available than to any 'associational' value in the style chosen.

Narrative, in terms of both allegory and style, was a relatively minor concern of architect, library committee and librarian. Far more important were lay notions of substance, solidity, taste, repose, worthiness, dignity, enduring impression, size, splendour,

monumentality, prominence and simple beauty. It was these basic ingredients - the most frequently invoked in the description of public library buildings by committees, civic elites and local newspapers - which conveyed readily the institution's social purposes. (See Fig. 2) This discussion also refers to lay notions in an attempt to assess architecture through the eyes of pre-1914 lay providers.) The central issue was the projection via aesthetic appeal (of whatever style or allegorical embellishment at hand) of an image designed to make a secular impact on those either ignorant or in need of a reminder of the public libraries' origins and worth. As such, the doubts raised in 1839 by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge as to the desirability of separate public library buildings - "It is men, not a building," it asserted, "that constitute a society, and that it is by lectures and books, and not a public room, that the purpose of their association are to be obtained"<sup>37</sup> - were not shared by later generations of civic leaders (and to a certain extent their librarian and architect appointees) who displayed considerable concern for aesthetic treatment.

The evidence of aestheticism - defined here as the perception, even if mistaken, of an object as artistically tasteful or pleasingly eye-catching or both - is voluminous. Local newspapers, annual reports, the library and architectural press and opening ceremony souvenirs are littered with examples of ostentation. Of the Birmingham Public Library it was said: "wherever we turn, we find in the wealth of carving and the flush of colour evidences of originality and individuality, which indicate at once inexhaustible fancy and endless labour".<sup>38</sup> Occasionally an unflattering description is to found. The library at Poplar, opened in 1894, was said to have been "entirely



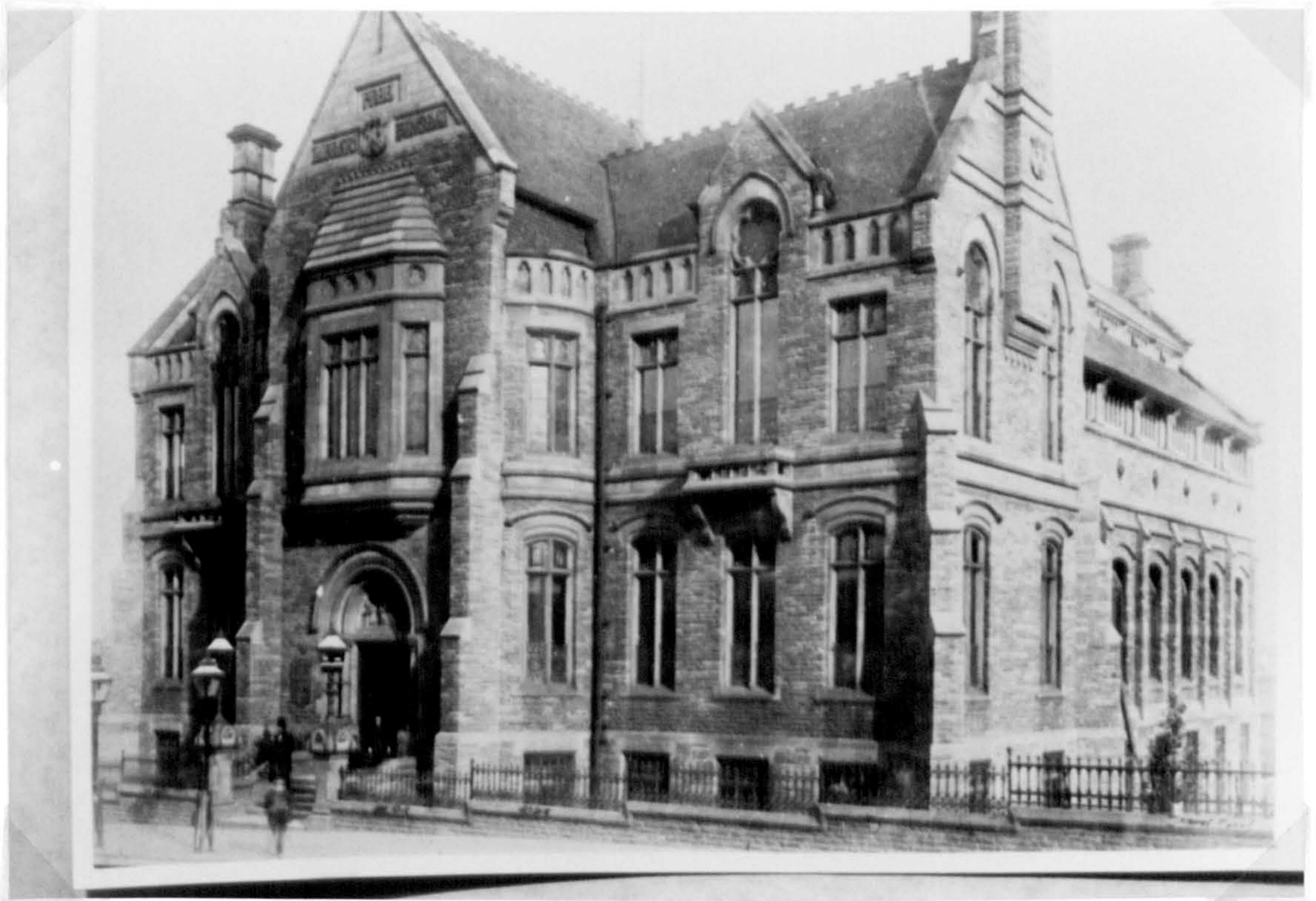


Fig. 2. Oldham Public Library, opened 1881. Library planners referred less to the style of such buildings than to their substance, splendour, monumentality and civic appeal.

Source: Oldham Public Library, Local Studies.



without pretension or ornamental features".<sup>39</sup> The new Renaissance style library at Northampton (1910) was said to be "without elaboration, and with an artistic restraint for over-ornament".<sup>40</sup> Naturally, the rate limit enforced restrictions. Excessiveness was also curbed by strictures attached to Carnegie grants (though this was more a feature of later benefaction). The initial plans for the library at Luton, for example, were rejected by Carnegie's staff for not getting "the most accommodation which can be had for the money consistent with good taste".<sup>41</sup> Not all library committees were flamboyant in their building plans. Fulham's committee recorded that: "It was their wish that a great deal of money should not be spent on adornment and embellishment."<sup>42</sup>

However, these examples were the exception rather than the rule. Within the financial means available library authorities generally aimed to make an aesthetic impact, even if the outlay affected literary provision. Thus, a journalist at the opening of Hammersmith Central Library wrote that his task was one of reporting "miserable hypocrisy: for the average borough councillor loveth bricks and mortar pregnant with rich possibilities, to the complete exclusion of the classics".<sup>43</sup> James Duff Brown attacked committees for harbouring:

... such extrapordinary ideas as to the purchasing power of the ratepayers' money or to the dollars so lavishly bestowed by Mr. Carnegie .... for an inclusive sum of £5000 they imagine they are going to obtain a building as roomy as the Agricultural Hall or as ornamental and dignified as the British Museum.<sup>44</sup>

A great many libraries were made palatial. The new central library at Portsmouth (1908) was described as a "palatial building ... certainly in extent and beauty the library can compare favourably with any in the Kingdom". One person described it as "fit for a King", adding that "one cannot but be struck by the sumptousness of the building".<sup>45</sup>



Public libraries did not alone fall foul of aesthetic excess. In 1896 the Arts and Crafts propagandist Walter Crane denounced public buildings generally as "inorganic", where "decoration is considered merely as so much super-added or surface ornament, and often not so much to emphasise as to conceal structure, or to finish or to mark it".<sup>46</sup> During the period in question 'official' architecture generally was prone to elaboration and monumentality, the town hall offering the most obvious example.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, the library building type had historically been the subject of such treatment. The libraries of the ancient world were usually connected with colonnades, an intrinsically "dignified construction" (though these also provided a functional reading environment in warm climates).<sup>48</sup> The sizeable ancient Library at Alexandria was located in the city's monumental area contiguous to the Royal Palace.<sup>49</sup> Yet, most ancient and medieval libraries were situated in buildings used primarily for other functions.<sup>50</sup> One of the earliest examples of external monumentality, produced in part by isolation, was the Radcliffe Camera at Oxford (opened 1749).<sup>51</sup> Traditionally, therefore, external monumentality and elaboration was a 'shared' affair. Internally, however, aesthetic excess as a purely 'library' phenomenon was more possible: and this is particularly true of elaboration which has an 'internal' history dating back to ancient times. Internal monumentality, on the other hand, is a relatively recent development. The library model of the large hall, adorned with extensive shelving, a familiar arrangement of the modern era, was a sixteenth century development; the Escorial Library of the Palace Monastery of the Spanish Kings near Madrid being one of the earliest examples of this library conception.<sup>52</sup>

The erection of vast expanses of wall shelving in public libraries

(especially Victorian), as at Birmingham in 1882, offers one of the best examples of superfluous ornament. This was historicism - the free use of a vocabulary of ornament drawn from the past - at its starkest. Since the inception of the 'hall' library concept in the sixteenth century books had provided a ready means of ornamental display. From the Renaissance onwards books were placed on the shelves with their spine turned towards the spectator instead of being laid flat with their edges outwards. The rich decoration of the books, often enhanced by their arrangement in size and even colour, added to the decorative pretensions of the library.<sup>53</sup> In the Baroque monastic library, for example, the design intention had been to create a fused unit incorporating floors, ceilings, paintings, sculpture, furniture, fittings and, not least, the books which "surpass their function and become the gilt tapestry that envelopes the total experience".<sup>54</sup> At the British Museum Reading Room (1850s) Panizzi eschewed statues and ornamental incrustations; the books were to be the ornamentation.<sup>55</sup>

A similar experience was intended in many public libraries, whether conveyed through the vast arrays of volumes or the supposed beauty of the shelving which supported them (though it should be remembered that good woods were often chosen for economy reasons in that they were durable).<sup>56</sup> Yet, the sensible idea of keeping most of the books away from the reading room in separate stacks was first advocated in the early nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> The first design for a library on such utilitarian lines was said to be that of Leopoldo della Santa who in 1816 in Florence published a pamphlet entitled "Della costruzione e del regolamento di una pubblica universale Biblioteca, con la pianta dimostrativa". This included a plan (never carried into effect) advocating the use of separate book stores and reading room



to save space.<sup>58</sup> Library shelving became more expansive because of the increase in the size of stocks. Hence galleries were added as a functional, though at the same time ornamental devices. As wall space became short alcoves were introduced to provide more shelving. Yet, readers themselves were not allowed to take books down from the shelves or use alcoves. The use of wall shelving, alcoves and galleries was therefore highly ornamental, owing little to function.

This illogical, expensive and extravagant means of storage became self-evidently redundant once the issue had been raised in the early 1880s by William Archer, who as librarian at the National Library of Ireland in Dublin oversaw there the space-saving experiment of closed stocks and separate rooms, as opposed to the alternative of the vast hall housing decorative wall shelving.<sup>59</sup> Archer himself was probably influenced by the American librarian W.F. Poole.<sup>60</sup> A survey of the library press of the early 1880s has revealed a substantial debate on the 'wall shelving vs. stack' issue, highlighting the non-utilitarian nature of the former. From this time onwards, as Kelly has argued, there really was no excuse for building in the traditional style.<sup>61</sup> But change was slow, for library providers continued to find vast acres of wall shelving served by galleries and supplemented by alcoves as an aesthetically pleasing style.

This particular means of ornamentation is just one example of the considerable appeal made to the aesthetic faculty. Such an appeal was not new to library architecture. However, in the nineteenth century it became more widespread due to the expansion of local government and the increased wealth of those who ran it. Hobsbawm has argued that the "gigantic, awful and very expensive municipal buildings" of the second half of the nineteenth century were the result of both the vast surplus capital and savings accumulated in the first phase of industrialism,

and the competition between municipalities for the best civic image.<sup>62</sup>  
This appears to be a plausible fundamental explanation of the over-romanticizing of public library architecture.

### Civic Society and its Leaders

Civic pride and public library architecture went hand in hand.

The librarian of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) wrote in 1939:

If ever there was an architectural problem that should inherently be free from cliché, pompousness and all vile accoutrements of civic esteem it is the problem of designing a public library; and yet, if this is true, there is hardly a public library in England that can be produced to give whole-hearted support to the argument.<sup>63</sup>

It is a paradox of public library architecture that the successful businessmen who populated many councils and library committees, and who had made their money by extolling the virtues of frugality and thrift, often opted for extravagance in library building. Many councils borrowed heavily to satisfy their desire for memorable edifices. The proportion of income devoted to the annual repayment of loans sometimes exceeded 35 per cent, thereby exerting pressure on salaries and book funds.<sup>64</sup> Monumentality and elaboration resulted, in part, from the fact that civic leaders wished buildings to be representative of their hierarchical position in the community.

The use of architecture by civic leaders to celebrate the towns which they dominated was seen in relation to other building types. Town halls (in which public libraries were sometimes situated), most notably after the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, displayed in their architecture a commitment to town life and its improvement. For example, Manchester's classical town hall of 1825, built by the old



Tory oligarchy at a cost of £40,000, was later dwarfed by size and splendour of the fashionable new Gothic building of 1877, erected by Manchester's buoyant bourgeoisie at a cost of £1 million. This new town hall reflected, it has been argued, the confidence, power, wealth and deeply felt political sovereignty of the city's bourgeoisie.<sup>65</sup>

A similar representation of the 'substantial' middle class can be seen in the history of the public library at Birmingham. The city's first public library was built in the early 1860s under the aegis of the economists who dominated the council from the mid-1850s to the early 1870s. The mayoralty of Joseph Chamberlain, 1873-76, radically altered attitudes to local government spending.<sup>66</sup> One result of this was the striking monumentality of the new library of 1882 - one of the best examples we have of public library size and splendour - in marked contrast to the frugality of its predecessor.

On account of their official standing public libraries were subjected to a ubiquitous use of heraldry, and in their overall treatment were "usually thought worthy of a certain dignity and substantiality".<sup>67</sup> Often, their middle class providers determined that libraries should be 'showy' also: "the average borough councillor loveth bricks and mortar pregnant with rich possibilities", reported one newspaper in describing the opening of Hammersmith Central Library.<sup>68</sup> 'Show' was a means of competing against rival municipalities: library committees commonly visited other towns to view their libraries when considering their own architectural plans.<sup>69</sup> 'Show' was also in keeping with ideas on 'what a library should be', drawn from the middle class domestic experience. Progressively in the nineteenth century the libraries of large houses became more and more general living rooms where books were displayed rather than used: the library became a mere drawing room lined with bookcases, and "anyone

wanting to study would have had to retire elsewhere".<sup>70</sup>

The notion of libraries as things of display and ostentation was not therefore alien to the urban elites who provided public libraries. Moreover, the form which display took - that is to say, an often 'heavy' approach to internal decoration seen typically in showpiece reference departments - perhaps reflected the male domination of the architectural production and selection processes. Historically, the domestic library had been an essentially male room, often situated next door to other male rooms like billiards and smoking. Further, a masculine touch also characterized the dining rooms which sometimes doubled as libraries. It is possible, therefore, that male architects and committee members drew on their own and others' domestic situations in producing public library interiors.

Public library designs endorsed rather than flattered middle class self-confidence. They were not insincere monuments to the power of urban elites but genuine barometers of their confident self-image. Accordingly, style should not be seen as an important issue. The choice of Gothic for the Bradford Wool Exchange of the 1860s has been viewed by one writer as backward looking and, by virtue of its medieval origins, illustrative of a middle class sympathy with the traditions of landed society.<sup>71</sup> There is no evidence that when towns chose Gothic for their public libraries, or indeed classical styles which also had aristocratic overtones, they were expressing a social emulation of aristocratic values. It was not style - which in any case changed rapidly and was often chosen for its fashion value - but substantiality which mattered. When Betjeman wrote that the St. Pancras Hotel reminded him of "a pompous alderman with an enormous watch-chain, flaring tie and pearl tie-pin masking a bosom in which beats a worthy heart", he was not thinking so much of its Gothic



treatment as its imposing image. There is no reason to suppose that civic leaders thought any differently about the pre-1914 public library.<sup>72</sup>

Library designs were essentially the work of civic leaders, not their architects or librarians. The latter had little influence with their committees. When Fulham was planning its new central library in the 1890s the building sub-committee (of eight) excluded the librarian.<sup>73</sup> Architects did not conform to the image of unfettered artists. Rather they were 'tradesmen' architects.<sup>74</sup> Generally, they produced what committees wanted, or what they thought committees wanted. Designers proceeded on the basis of what had gone before and the instructions given them by the committees who, as noted above, travelled much to view and note existing buildings. In the Edwardian period such pictorial reference works as A. Cotgreave's Views and Memoranda of Public Libraries (1901) and J.J. Macdonald's Passmore Edwards Institutions (1900) must have had a significant influence on recycling established notions of how a public library should look.

Architectural competitions reinforced the control of committees. Independent assessors were often appointed (more so later in the period) but their decisions were not necessarily accepted by committees who might opt instead for a tame architect, perhaps a local man.<sup>75</sup> Competitions dampened flair. They provided a wide choice for committees but encouraged a tendency to conform, whereas patronage arguably allowed for greater artistic freedom. As librarians noted: "Competitive plans are usually insisted on; by such means the committee gains a variety of ideas and gets what it wants."<sup>76</sup> Committees seldom looked for radical innovation in architecture. This resulted in friction between committees on the one hand, and librarians and architects on the other.<sup>77</sup>

Good or bad, municipal libraries were nonetheless physical evidence of political sovereignty and local patriotism - this latter term was much used in the public library debate.<sup>78</sup> They reflected - despite the tendency to copy designs - the confidence and security of civic leaders and the urban middle class who revelled in the prestigious appearance of the public library built form.

### Benefactors

Few public libraries owed their origin or maintenance to civic society alone. Benefaction was widespread. Public library architecture made statements about the relationship between giver and recipient. Buildings reflected the social status of benefactors and demonstrated to townspeople the apparently selfless munificence of the gift. At York in 1881 J.S. Rowntree encouraged benefaction from any wealthy manufacturer or merchant so disposed, not just because a gift of a public library building would be an "incalculable boon" for the city, but also because it "might confer honour upon themselves".<sup>79</sup> In Darlington, where the Quaker Edward Pease bequeathed money for a public library, the entrance hall was ornamented with a white marble bust of the late donor on a black marble pedestal.<sup>80</sup> Of the building as a whole it was said that, "as it was erected as a memorial, no expense was spared by the donors to make it in every way worthy of the memory of its founder".<sup>81</sup> Some benefactors took great interest in the progress of the buildings for which they had pledged money. William Gilstrap, benefactor of the public library at Newark, sought the advice of J. Potter Briscoe in matters of detail, spent much time riding around the town searching for a suitable site and supervised the architectural drawings.<sup>82</sup>

An idea of the public acclaim which the benefaction of a public



library could bring can be gathered from A. Kenealy's The Things we have prayed for (1915). Passages from the novel describe the public library at Croxford, donated some years earlier by a local businessman, Cooling Senior. This was said to be "a handsome and substantial building ":

Cooling Senior had built and presented it to the town .... A man of large ideas, the gift was a considerable and costly one. He had spared no expense in construction or equipment. There were excellent reference and reading rooms; reading and writing rooms; class-rooms; a good if small museum; a picture gallery and lecture hall. What it had cost him by the time all was completed nobody knew; though many speculated. It pleased his fellow-townsmen to put the sum in large, round, ever-increasing figures. All were justly proud of it. No other town of its size had a Library to compare it with, in point of architecture or equipment.

When one evening the library played venue to the annual 'conversatione' speakers constantly praised the institution and its benefaction: "for the hundredth time" Senior Cooling was spoken of as "the benefactor of the town in his munificent gift of our magnificent Library". Clearly, magnificent buildings highlighted munificence.

### Self-help

Benefactors consistently espoused the notion of the public library as an educator in self-help. Buildings were a celebration of this social philosophy which proclaimed the moral supremacy and material efficacy of the free market. They bore physical testimony to the ability, supposedly inherent in all, to rise above one's station and achieve a measure of moral and material improvement beyond that bestowed at birth. References to past achievers, in keeping with the 'great man' approach to history, were freely deployed. Allegorical sculptures to the 'greats' stressed the importance of culture (see

below), but also reminded onlookers that anyone could rise to cultural heights. At Fulham's Westfield Library:

Fancy scrolls along the walls are enriched with the names of all sorts and conditions of men, who, in various ages, have advanced civilization in all its branches.<sup>83</sup>

Whether or not such allegory made an impact is unknown. Obviously, providers saw it as worthwhile. Although it was not as important as style, allegory could make the best use of a narrow street where a building's overall presentation mattered less. The allegory of achievement was also used internally. At Lincoln (1914) the aim was to make the marbled palatial entrance hall "a pantheon of Lincolnshire worthies".<sup>84</sup> However, allegory was arguably less decipherable than carved inscriptions. Often adorning doorways these were clarion calls to self-motivation. Erith Public Library (1906) carried over its entrance the motto 'Labour Overcomes All Things'.<sup>85</sup>

Nowhere was the symbolism of success and self-help more evident than in the built form of the Carnegie Library. Busts, paintings, ornamental carvings and the inscribed name of the man were a constant reminder of the social morality which guided his life and with which he was synonymous. Tenets such as: 'Work is no punishment, it is a blessing' or 'No young man ever lived who has not had his chance', would have been familiar to many Carnegie library users, perhaps endeavouring to emulate through educational improvement the benefactor's 'rags to riches' tale.<sup>86</sup> Yet, the sheer physical presence of the building itself was all that was really required to convey the self-help message. The importance of the building as a Carnegie benefaction was enhanced by the fact that he never gave money for books or subsequent maintenance: these were the responsibility of local citizens who in true self-help fashion would be taxing



themselves to ensure the upkeep of an unexpected boon. A Carnegie building thus echoed the Christian message of using a gift to the full, stating that even a few talents could be transformed into unthinkable success. As LCC councillor Gordon stated in praising the new Carnegie library at Mile End, opened in 1906:

Mr. Carnegie was one who knew his fellow men and tried to do what he could for them. The life story of that gentleman might well serve as a life lesson to all of them. From very humble surroundings, Mr. Carnegie had achieved wealth and amassed riches beyond the dreams of avarice.<sup>87</sup>

Such lessons were embodied in the bricks and mortar of Carnegie institutions. The name Carnegie was inseparable from his message. His name was also inseparable from the building itself, as the programme for the unveiling of a Carnegie portrait at one of his benefactions illustrates (see Fig. 3).

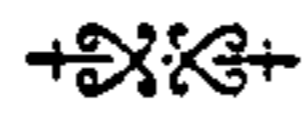
In keeping with the need to attract would-be self-improvers Carnegie libraries were treated with aesthetically pleasing, historical styles. They conformed to no specific architectural model, though free Renaissance and Edwardian Baroque were noticeably popular.<sup>88</sup> Rather, their similarity was in their substantiality and prominence, which often contradicted function. They stood as the epitome of ideal over practicality. A degree of function, of a social form, nonetheless, operated: the social message they conveyed was the ethos of the Carnegie philosophy stated in bricks and mortar.

### Citizenship

Buildings which furthered the rhetoric of individualism sought, paradoxically, to foster social cohesion via a collectivist message. The concepts of the public library as a fountain of citizenship and a vehicle for social cohesion found expression in its architecture. The



METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF FULHAM  
PUBLIC LIBRARIES.



*Unveiling of the Portrait*  
*of Dr. Carnegie*

BY

THE MAYORESS (Mrs. H. G. NORRIS),

ASSISTED BY

Alderman W. HAYES FISHER, M.P., L.C.C.,

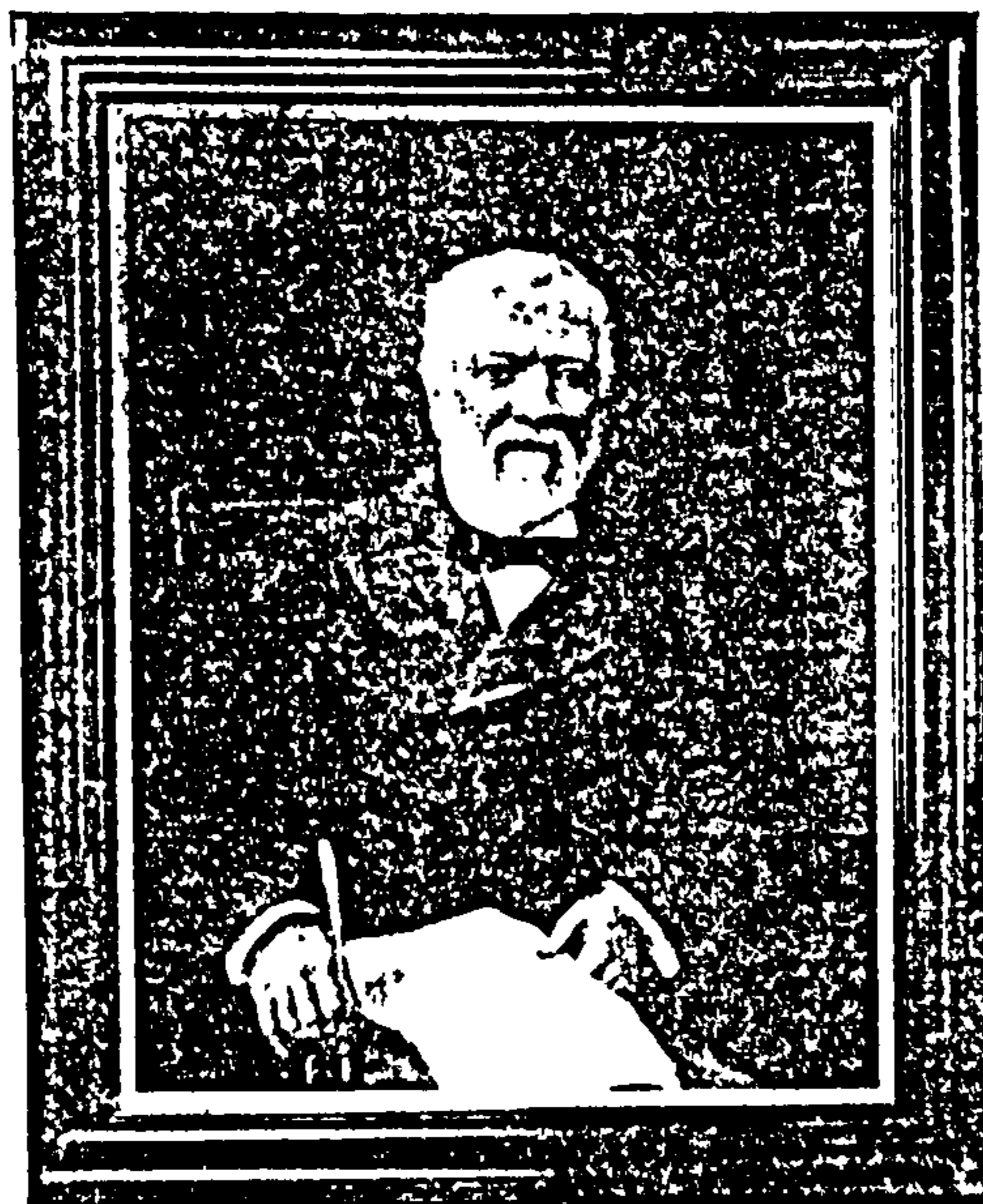
*25th January, 1911.*

AT 6 P.M.,

*At the Central Library.*



Chairman, Mr. Alderman LITTLEBOY.



DR. ANDREW CARNEGIE.

Fig. 3. Title page of a programme for the unveiling of a portrait of Andrew Carnegie, 1911.

Source: Fulham and Hammersmith Public Libraries, Local Studies.



Arts and Crafts advocate Walter Crane asserted in 1896 that modern decoration of public buildings could be enhanced by "the new development of municipal life and spirit in our towns" which fostered "a sense of citizenship and local pride". The public building, correctly decorated "would bestow a 'centralising' and 'organic' life and purpose to the vast jungles of bricks we call cities." Once the organization of ordinary needs and utilities had been secured, said Crane, the "collective" citizen "should seek some higher and more comprehensive means for the expression of the aims and ideals of the community which should satisfy its needs, while stimulating the imagination and uniting the sentiments".<sup>89</sup>

As a 'socialist' designer Crane's optimism in the ability of a well-designed public library to unite 'sentiments' and furnish a 'centralising life and purpose' is not surprising. Yet such optimism was broadly felt. A prime concern for most library authorities was to site the library centrally so as to emphasize the availability of the institution to 'all' citizens. Librarians believed buildings should be "near to the heart of the town's affairs, not poked away in some remote position serviceable only to the immediate residents".<sup>90</sup> Even non-librarians believed "libraries should occupy prominent positions so as to attract people to them, not to be shut up in the background of some old building, or in a small street".<sup>91</sup> Prominence would attract the 'goodwill' of the public, as Savage was later to put it.<sup>92</sup> The requirement of central siting needed, of course, to be balanced against the desire for quiet surroundings conducive to rational recreation. The fact that planners often urged a quiet site was a reaction against the noise of many nineteenth century urban environments. The yearning for quiet was one reason why reading rooms were often situated at the back of buildings, and why Sunday opening was propounded.<sup>93</sup> The noise

issue was important but generally less of a priority than centrality in planning. Peripheral siting contradicted the fundamental democratic social objectives of the public library. When Manchester Public Library moved to new premises in Kings Street in 1877 it did so because "the Free Libraries are intended for all classes of the community ... and as the Reference Library is used largely by literary and scientific men and students, as well as by working men it appears indispensable that such Reference Library be in a central position".<sup>94</sup> The frequent use of the word 'central' to describe a town's main library emphasized the importance attached to centrality. Naturally, not all libraries could or were intended to be centrally sited. Tight budgets meant that central sites sometimes had to be passed over in favour of less well situated but cheaper adapted premises. In the early years a high proportion of libraries were not purpose-built. Between 1850 and 1870 seventeen out of fifty-five buildings used as public libraries were adapted premises.<sup>95</sup> Towns also established branches outside urban centres. By 1914 533 library authorities in the U.K. were providing 345 branches.<sup>96</sup> However, the overriding public library phenomenon, in physical terms, was the main town library. This was usually the flagship of a town's library network (in towns of more than one library) and was given considerable architectural treatment accordingly; though many branches also displayed elaboration and monumentality .

Flagship libraries needed not just to be central and imposing but preferably built in isolation.<sup>97</sup> An isolated building was more striking. For this reason some providers argued that the library should not share a building which also housed other institutions. When early this century Northampton was considering a position for its Carnegie library a local newspaper objected to the library's planned inclusion in a multi-purpose building, proclaiming "how much more



complimentary to Carnegie to have a separate site".<sup>98</sup> But many libraries did share buildings with other civic institutions and offices, or were adjacent to them. When this occurred the library's civic nature was underlined.

But libraries did not have to be contiguous to other official premises to evoke a civic message. The library belonged to civic society and all its social groups; it was a classless institution. As such the idea was less to make the building appear civic (though this was not unimportant) than to make it as widely attractive as possible. A.L. Champneys argued that if the message can be conveyed that the building is "for the public" then "the success of the institution is more than half assured".<sup>99</sup> Because it was a communal utility it needed to be aesthetically attractive to all. Size and splendour were the lowest common denominators in this respect: public libraries needed to be 'landmarks' if they were to help encourage citizenship. As the library architect H.T. Hare argued:

Every building should be a worthy landmark to the district where it is built, and should impress itself on the passer-by as a dignified expression of the public spirit which has promoted its erection.<sup>100</sup>

A public library which impressed and hence attracted wide social use hopefully bridged the gulf between classes. Monumentality and artistry were seen as lasting investments in civic responsibility, the dividend payable in the currency of social stability.

Internally, the quest for citizenship manifested itself most obviously in newsroom design. Finances permitting, these were made spacious not just because of their popularity but also because of the practice of allotting each newspaper or periodical its own stand, reading slope or table space. This generous layout reflected the newsroom's niche in the politics of a 'liberal' pluralistic

society. The 'liberal' notion of politics was similar to political economy in that it was believed a point of equilibrium was arrived at by giving free reign to all the forces acting on the production and distribution of a particular commodity or service, or in the case of social and political affairs, a particular issue. Via the 'furnace of debate' newsrooms would help establish the truth. In design terms this role was manifest in the vast array of fittings, each with its own journal, each offering ideas for the consideration of 'reasoning' users. Later, as the press became more concentrated, designers turned away from sprawling lay-outs and became more interested, most notably during the First World War, in utilitarian means of storing journals ready for speedy retrieval. There was, however, no overnight conversion to utilitarian methods; to this day, in fact, Darlington's newsroom retains its multiplicity of reading slopes from the last century.

### Culture

Public library landmarks were invitations to engage in civic life and espouse citizenship through educational endeavour. Education, including 'good' fiction reading, was the means to culture, which was itself captured in the institution's architecture.

Since antiquity library architecture has evoked an enthusiasm for culture. Libraries in the ancient world often resembled temples (or were given prominent places within them) because their contents - laws, rituals, songs, prayers, creation stories, biographies of the Gods - were sacred.<sup>101</sup> The 'temple' mentality of preserving sacred, indispensable materials which formed the basis of a culture is identifiable in Victorian and Edwardian public library architecture. Public libraries (the large ones especially) were said to be repositories of man's accumulated knowledge. Their architecture



stressed the antiquity and tradition of learning. Thus, classical designs were not unpopular. These had never been absent from the British design tradition but enjoyed unprecedented popularity after the results of detailed research into ancient Greek architecture was brought here in the 1750s. The architectural work of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett (the first volume of the Antiquities of Athens was published in 1762) was a "landmark in the history of taste": it generated a mania for Greek design.<sup>102</sup> "We are all Greeks now", said Shelley.<sup>103</sup> Victorians looked to the cultural achievements of ancient Greece and proceeded to congratulate their own social progress by copying Greek architecture.

The public library built (in conjunction with a museum) in Preston in the 1880s was a prime example of the desire to ape Greek cultural performance. In choosing the Ionic style the architect was reported to have said that:

... as the Hellenic race reached the highest standard in the plastic arts, literature and geometrical science, the suitability of the style for the purpose of a building which is to be a repository of knowledge, of examples of the arts, and the specimens illustrative of the sciences, will be admired by all.<sup>104</sup>

Not only Greek culture was celebrated. Canon Barnett anticipated in his Ideal City (1894) that in the perfect urban environment:

Halls, galleries, libraries, baths, hospitals, colleges, asylums, prisons (many of them brilliant with mosaic) will catch and raise the thoughts of men, as in the old days the thoughts of their citizens were caught by the public buildings of Florence and Venice.<sup>105</sup>

Memorial architecture of this nature signified a devotion to culture in an age when reference to the past and to non-utilitarian pursuits provided a respite from the onward rush of industrialism. Public libraries, like temples and impressive public buildings of

bygone ages, were in many respects apart from the real world. As places for the reflective perusal of cultural achievement they were havens set aside from the hurry of daily life. This role was reflected in design evocative of the intellectual excellence of past successful civilizations.

Yet, as argued above, allegory should not be exaggerated. For lay providers and users the concern for culture was conveyed more by grandeur and beauty than style. Of the educational complex (which included a public library) proposed for Nottingham in 1876 it was said:

If this be but the dawn of high popular culture, if the science of the present day, mighty as it is, be yet an undeveloped human power, and if the arts of eighteen hundred years ago are yet to hold their true refining influence, and shed a brighter lustre on futurity, then it is essential our Training Institutions should be designed on principles wide and unparsimonious, should have unstinted facilities for growth and permeation, and be endowed with generosity and freedom.<sup>106</sup>

The onus on size, however, did not eclipse appeals to the aesthetic faculty. In discussing the planning of small libraries the Building News argued that: "The mental impressions made on the reader by the stones may be more elevating than that he receives from his reading."<sup>107</sup> This echoed Ruskin's belief in the educative power of architecture which, if artistically produced, contributed to "mental health, power and pleasure".<sup>108</sup> Pleasing architecture was a ready means of diffusing culture and improving taste.<sup>109</sup> Municipal patrons commissioned what they hoped would be works of art, as educational in their design as their content.<sup>110</sup> As such, criticism of burgesses deemed to have practised architectural barbarism is unfounded.<sup>111</sup> The middle class did not 'fail' culturally in the field of art. Despite the 'Gradgrind' image there is evidence to suppose that the middle class genuinely espoused art and architecture. The work of Mark



Girouard is of relevance here in that he accounts for young upper middle class attachment to the fashionable Queen Anne style of the 1870s in their feeling more socially secure than their parents who had been confronted with Chartism. In the socially relaxed climate of the 1870s they were able to evolve a sympathy for "sweetness and light".<sup>112</sup> This interpretation can be applied to public library architecture (of whatever style) which displayed an enthusiasm for culture amongst middle class providers: buildings were often praised as 'tasteful' and 'dignified'. The East Ham Public Library carried above its portico the motif: 'Let there be light'.<sup>113</sup>

Greenwood urged: "Let your Free Library be a public building doing credit to the intelligence of your town."<sup>114</sup> The architect M.B. Adams advised they be "fitting caskets for enshrining jewels of knowledge".<sup>115</sup> Public library architecture was pre-eminently a method of transmitting culture. This was the case in the anthropological sense of reproducing a society's culture;<sup>116</sup> but more so in the aesthetic sense of diffusing culture to a brutalized populace. "To build ugly buildings," asserted the Woolwich Pioneer in commenting on a new library for the town, "is a practice equivalent to building insanitary ones. The latter injure the body ... the former injure the mind in subtle and unnoticeable ways."<sup>117</sup> The aim was to enrich the mind with the intellectual achievements of the past, as the librarian of Edinburgh University described the town's public library:

As you enter the lofty hall with its myriad of pillars, see the busts representing in marble the lineaments of the intellectually great whose thoughts uttered by the voice, or given forth in the printed page gave vitality to the young life; look on shelves closely packed with books which carry the mind back to the most beautiful dawn that mortals could behold - the dawn of a printed literature, and we are lifted out of our ordinary thoughts. There is something impressive, 'reverential' in the building itself, as if it

were filled with the spirits of the mighty dead  
who have made us heirs of the spiritual life of  
past ages.<sup>118</sup>

It is no coincidence, therefore, that many internal public library designs were based on academic models: libraries at Haggerston, Shoreditch (1897) and Eltham (1906) were said to incorporate features of the Old Ashmolean at Oxford.<sup>119</sup> The public library was, after all, popularly presented as the 'poor man's university'. In this context design possibly enhanced cultural osmosis.

### Social Control

The fact that designs mirrored the quest for culture might easily be construed as an attempt to transmit middle class values to a resistant working class. Built forms maintain social forms.<sup>120</sup> Buildings can indoctrinate and hence help maintain power; ideals can be 'constructed'. Winston Churchill once said that "the sociologist wants to know how men shape buildings and buildings shape men".<sup>121</sup> For social control theorists the operative word here would be 'shape': it encapsulates the idea that buildings not simply incorporate society's ideas and beliefs but can be used by dominant social groups to maintain their position. This theory has commonly been voiced with regard to the public library. The social composition of committees in respect to both elected and co-opted members was radically different from that of the bulk of readers. It was committees which controlled the capital to construct buildings and which chose designs. Hence, it might be argued, architecture embodied the value systems of middle class library governors. Social control was thus exercised, even if not explicitly stated. Working class readers were consequently intimidated and alienated.

This is a crude analysis. True, library design can be used as "a



vehicle for social engineering aspirations".<sup>122</sup> But with regard to the pre-1914 public library built form this should not be mistaken for middle class directed social control. Even if impressive architecture did humble some working class readers - and there is not a shred of evidence to suggest they were not immediately at one with elaborate and monumental surroundings - its intention was to inspire.

Some providers believed grandeur would drive away lower class users. When Nottingham was considering a new building in 1867 one councillor warned:

If they erected a fine, grand building ... the working classes would be kept away. They would never attend in their working cloths ... but would prefer a plain, substantial building erected without pretence.<sup>123</sup>

Similar sentiments were voiced concerning technical education institutions:

It is thought by some persons that good rooms and pleasant looking institutions are apt to drive away the regular mechanic; and possibly, if they are made too luxurious, this may be the case.<sup>124</sup>

The idea therefore was to strike a balance between sparse utility and over-elaboration. In 1892 Bristol's librarian urged that a new library be "one fit for a prince, and not too good for a workingman."<sup>125</sup>

The minimum condition was that a free library should attract. Champneys believed an attractive exterior and agreeable interior were great inducements to use of the library.<sup>126</sup> The architecture of Norwood Public Library was said to be "distinctly inviting".<sup>127</sup> An attempt was made to emulate the public house's potential for attracting a clientele: "if gin palaces and the like are brilliant and handsome", said Birmingham's librarian J.D. Mullins, "why should the opposition be enamoured of the dingy and the mean".<sup>128</sup> Consequently, few public libraries were designed like workhouses - money permitting. This is

not surprising. As institutions designed to attract, libraries were diametrically opposed to the deterrent principle of the 'Bastilles', even though both institutions aimed at a rationalization of labour under capitalism.

Attractive, comfortable surroundings were also a reward for library use. At the stone laying ceremony for Leamington Spa's library the mayor explained that readers who through the library had improved themselves educationally and materially deserved a "palatial" setting.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, those interested in the 'aesthetic' would expect an artistic environment. The doyenne of reading rooms, Janetta (Lady John) Manners, wrote that "judging from the delight working people take in illustrated papers, I believe they would enjoy their reading and recreation rooms all the more if it were found possible to beautify the walls".<sup>130</sup> This was done at Hammersmith reference library where books were kept in stockrooms to leave the walls free for hanging pictures: "to leave it free for pictures would add much to the quiet and comfort of the room".<sup>131</sup> In this instance the deterring closed access system was turned to good use as a means of attracting readers.

Architecture to impress was not a classical social control mechanism; though it was an attempt to influence society. But what of the considerable supervision built into public library architecture? Was this not an indication that working class readers could not be trusted and needed to be educated into 'correct' methods of library use?

A.L. Champneys believed deference was paid to the "shrine of supervision".<sup>132</sup> Certainly a great many changes were made to facilitate it. Glass screens were used to divide departments. Alcoves gradually became unpopular and were eschewed. News-stands were swept away from the centre of rooms and replaced by wall-mounted reading



slopes. Further, the supervisory potential of the library counter was fully exploited. The library counter was/is not just a physical but a psychological barrier also.<sup>133</sup> It reinforces the power of a library's staff; its correct positioning to enhance supervision further increases that power. The perfect model of supervisory power in this respect was provided by the circular reading room of the British Museum. Its staffed inner circle was just sufficiently raised to give a clear view of readers' desks radiating out from the centre.<sup>134</sup>

For those seeking to improve supervision there was no better model from which to draw inspiration than Bentham's panopticon. The design of the panopticon prison was determined by Bentham's belief in the efficacy of social engineering; in particular that an individual's character could be changed for the better by external 'checks and spurs'. Bentham believed prison should not simply protect society from the criminal or dispense retribution, but also regenerate morally the offender to heighten his/her utility. Prison education should aim to promote industry and responsibility, thereby facilitating a return to citizenship once a sentence had been served. The panopticon would be a kind of technical education institute to which employers would come to choose workers.

The most striking feature of the panopticon was its design. The building was to be circular with the governor and his staff at the centre of the complex, and the prisoners' cells at the circumference, all cells subject to constant observation. The essence of the scheme, however, was that observation was to be a one-way process. Superintendents could see prisoners, but prisoners could not see superintendents.

It has been proposed that the panopticon plan displayed omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.<sup>135</sup> It was omniscientific

in that character was to be changed empirically through functional architecture; omnipresent in that at no time could inmates determine that they were being unobserved; and omnipotent in that superintendents had absolute power over the incarcerated.

Parallels can be drawn between the nature of the panopticon and the public library. The latter aimed to improve character and manufacture better citizens. A news-stand designed by the architect J.M. Brydon, for example, aimed to "ensure that people stand upright to read the paper and not lounge over it".<sup>136</sup> Regarding supervision, this was precisely calculated to prevent malefaction. Readers did not know when they were likely to be observed. It was not the library staff's job to observe continually; they had other duties to attend to. Readers would be aware, however, that at any time a librarian's gaze could fall on them. This was especially true in the case of elongated counters in open access libraries where stacks were arranged at right angles to the service point: as the architect M.B. Adams explained, the public "never knew exactly who was looking at them or when they were being supervised".<sup>137</sup> Arrangements for supervision thus increased the power of library staffs. Of the new library at Poplar it was said that as a result of the counter's location staff would be able to "overlook and control the whole of the public portions of the building. The number of assistants will thus be the fewest possible. With a different arrangement it would have been necessary to employ others for watching the evilly-disposed persons who, when unobserved, mutilate books and newspapers, and annoy others".<sup>138</sup>

There is no evidence that library planners studied the panopticon plan. Bentham believed his plan could be applied to other building types such as factories, hospitals, workhouses and schools (his Chrestomathic school of 1816 was also designed 'in the round' to



give central surveillance). What can be said, therefore, is that panopticon design principles fitted the requirements of other building types in the social field, public libraries included. However, library supervision should not be exaggerated. In practice, the public largely supervised themselves.<sup>139</sup> This echoed William Ewart's belief that public use of a library, as opposed to exclusive admittance, created "a kind of public police by their presence, which affords a kind of safeguard for the collection".<sup>140</sup> In other words, authentic, 'informal' social control would operate.

Further, just as the panopticon was designed to oversee all prisoners, so with public library supervision, no distinction was made between readers, certainly not on grounds of class. There is no evidence that working class readers were more intimidated than higher class readers by supervision or, indeed, the library's general ambiance. There is little evidence that any class of reader experienced intimidation; though this does not necessarily mean none occurred. There might have been a general dislike of closed access but that was not tantamount to coercion. It is true that early twentieth century library promoters looked back to a previous era characterized by a 'Please Do Not Touch' spirit. But this was, arguably, a retrospective and hence exaggerated analysis, coloured by closed access and the modern commitment to make public libraries "homes of the liberal studies and centres for the development of the true humanities of life".<sup>141</sup> Recalling his early career, Sayers explained that producing an informal atmosphere by providing paintings, busts and ferns, in what was essentially a formal setting, created a reverence for books. As the public library became more educationally orientated this was a sensible ploy. It did not mean that in earlier years there was little reverence for books, in terms of malefaction, for which greater control

was required. Moreover, regarding the era as a whole it is difficult to accept the picture of conflict between library establishment and user as painted by some, including Altick, who has written:

... in many places, the brusqueness of the assistants, the stern maintenance of discipline and decorum, and the inadequate and uncomfortable accommodations actually drove readers away.<sup>142</sup>

### Function

The pre-1914 period has been labelled as one characterized by inattention to function in public libraries. Writing in 1942 Savage stated that "the worst period of library architecture was between 1895 and 1914. In later years building has been ... better adapted to its purpose".<sup>143</sup> The move towards function has generally been located in the inter-war years. Ellsworth has argued that just as there occurred:

... a shift in interest from the purely bibliophilic aspects of librarianship to the use and users of libraries, so the new spirit in library architecture shifted from a purely aesthetic approach to planning to one based primarily on the use and users of buildings.<sup>144</sup>

The idea that the First World War divided eras of non-function and function is too rigid an assessment. First, the post-1918 era has witnessed an enduring enthusiasm for an affected aesthetic. Classical designs, for example, were chosen for central libraries at Manchester, Marylebone and Kensington as late as 1934, 1940 and 1960 respectively. Function has clearly not always been the priority. Second, there is extensive evidence of a concern for function much before 1914.

Function in library architecture is not a modern phenomenon. For example, the practice of chaining books (which generally lasted up to the end of the seventeenth century) was, in an age of virtually irreplaceable manuscript and printed materials, highly functional; as



were the bookcases, seats and desks to which the volumes were attached and the location of these adjacent to windows. In practice, therefore, the notion of 'showing' a 'noble reading-room' was subordinate to the utilitarian need of effectively storing the books in determining the library's design.<sup>145</sup> Further, some of the fittings of medieval monastic libraries, such as book-wheels and rotating desks affording selection from a stationary position, were also highly functional.<sup>146</sup>

In the case of nineteenth century public libraries function, and the discussion of it, were also visible. To make their libraries more usable librarians were expected to study the requirements of architectural internal planning for their professional exams.<sup>147</sup> Committees also displayed an interest in utility. In 1908 the Manchester committee sent a deputation comprising its chairman, deputy chairman and chief librarian to study libraries in the United States and Canada. After a six week stay a report was prepared in which considerable attention was paid to library architecture advances in the United States.<sup>148</sup> The report advised that: "Architectural effect be subordinate to utility and convenience."<sup>149</sup>

However, utility could be included alongside architectural effect. At Darlington it was reported that the architect had produced "a building not only highly artistic, but most admirably adapted for its purposes in every particular".<sup>150</sup> Many aesthetically agreeable historically-styled buildings would have contained modern appliances to facilitate library work as supplied by prolific inventors like Cotgreave. Moreover, aestheticism and function were not incompatible: the erection of domes over libraries (as at the British Museum) might at first glance be interpreted as an ornamental affectation, but were in reality important sources of light. Domes fulfilled the double purpose of 'landmark' art (which in its way was functional in attracting

readers) and function.

The awareness of functional needs and the determination to do something about it were enshrined in the Carnegie Corporation's Notes on the erection of library buildings (1911). This was a leaflet written by Carnegie's secretary James Bertram, not published for sale but for distribution to authorities using Carnegie money for construction. Its message was a rebuke to the aesthetic tendencies seen to have characterized the Carnegie era. It urged a cut-back in the use of expensive ornament, such as in the use of columns, portals, stairways and domes. Further, in an age of expansion, development and specialization - for example, growing book stocks, open access, larger catalogues, services to children, and the appearance of departments for local history, music and technical literature - it thought it sensible to sweep away the idea of immovable internal barriers.<sup>151</sup> There is disagreement over the influence of the Carnegie 'Notes'. Kelly has argued that the document subsequently benefitted small library design.<sup>152</sup> Smith regards its contribution to efficient design as negligible.<sup>153</sup> However, its degree of influence is not the issue here: more important is the fact that the document encapsulated a dissatisfaction with past design and reflected the existence of a debate on function.

Not that functionalists made deep inroads into the superiority of aesthetic concern. The pre-1914 era was one of categorization and clutter in library architecture. The Victorian obsession with categorization was reflected in the proliferation of library departments. J. Potter Briscoe stated in 1898 that any large public library required eight separate rooms:

adult lending

children's lending



'magazine room

patents library

ladies room (though he himself opposed this)

news room

emigrants information office.<sup>154</sup>

The architect A.L. Champneys said that as a general rule there should be "a division of space into departments according to the various purposes for which the building is to be used".<sup>155</sup> The result was generally one of 'clutter', often made worse by the awkwardness of sites in town centres.<sup>156</sup> This was not out of keeping with traditions of design in other building types, including domestic buildings. Compartmentalization and confusion in internal planning were very much English phenomena in that, historically, the pursuit of privacy was more important than elsewhere, certainly in comparison to the United States and France.<sup>157</sup> Late Victorian internal decoration was characterized by 'clutter'. The end of the nineteenth century, however, brought a "great clean up".<sup>158</sup> The general 'lightening of the load' in decoration was also visible in the internal planning of some public libraries. Thus, although planning in relation to function was largely eschewed by designers during the pre-1914 era, by the 1900s a growing awareness of it can be identified. (See Figs. 4, 5 and 6) First, the teachings of the Modern Movement placed greater emphasis than before on functional requirements. Second, concern over national economic efficiency was reflected in a desire to maximise efficiency in education administration through good design.

### Modern Movement

The roots of the modern movement were in the Gothic Revival of the mid-nineteenth century. Pugin's Contrasts (1836) and True



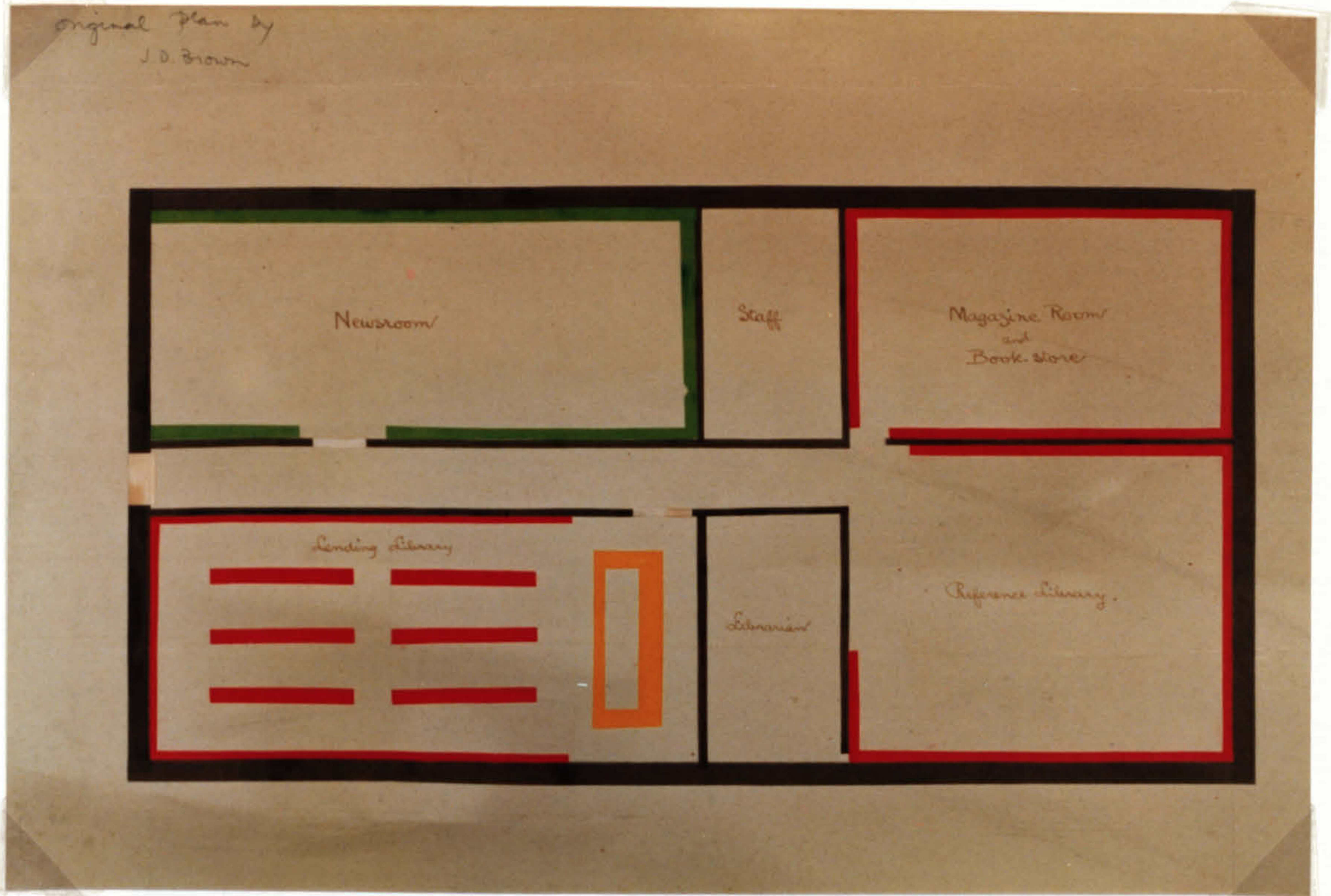


Fig. 4.

Library plans by  
James Duff Brown.

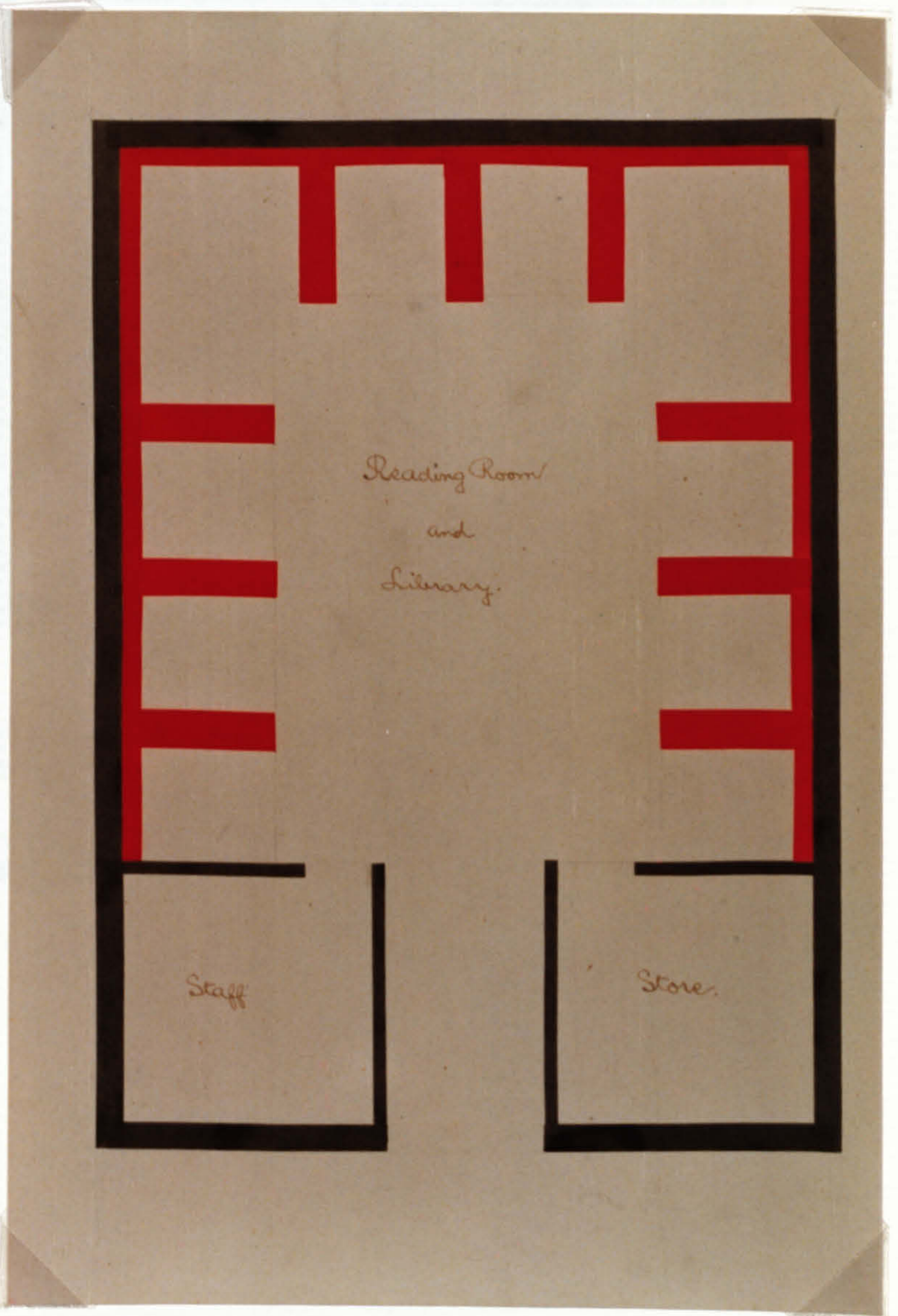


Fig. 5.



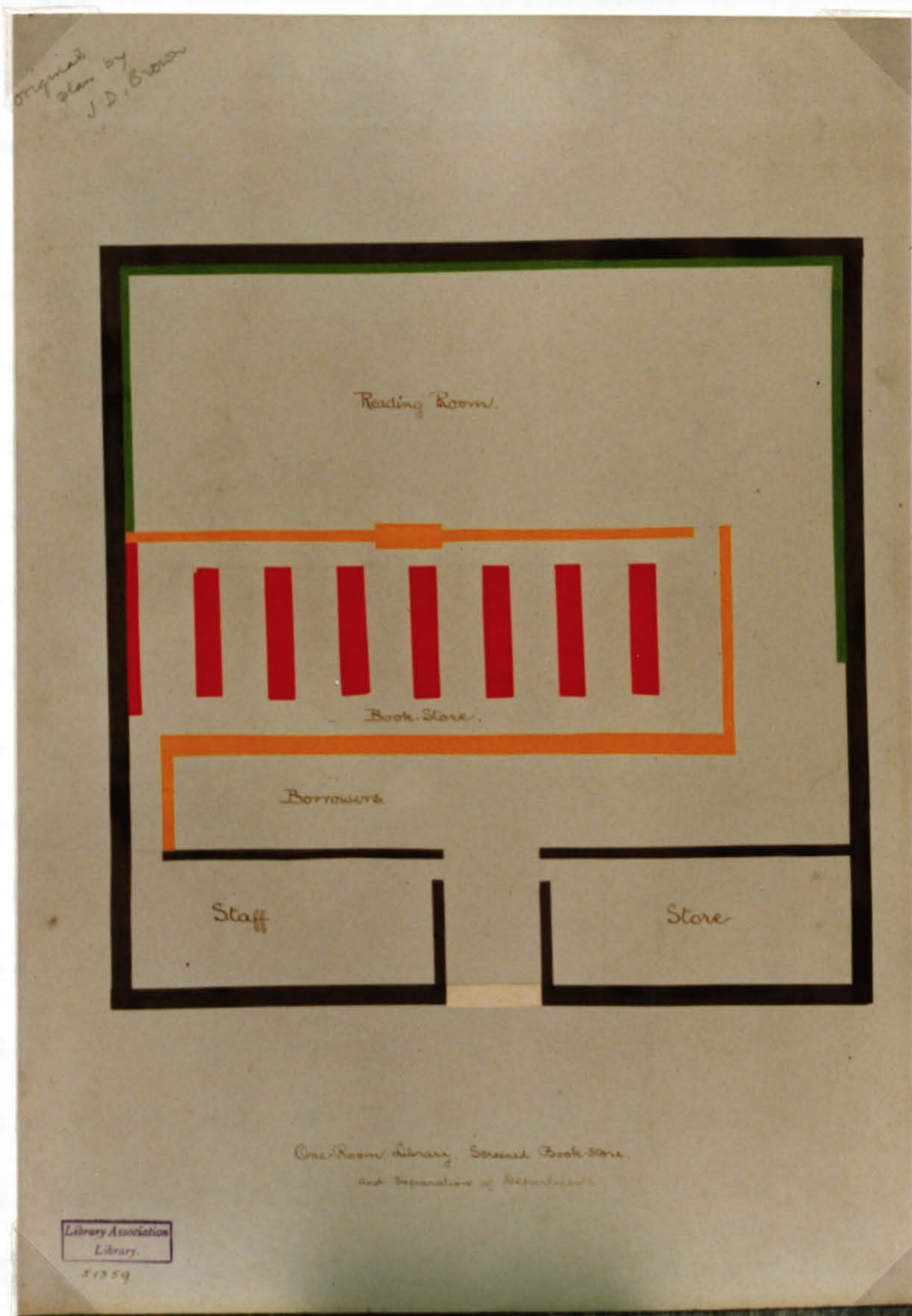


Fig. 6. Library plans by  
James Duff Brown.

Source: School of Librarianship, Wales  
(Aberystwyth).



principles of pointed Christian architecture (1841) advocated a return to medieval styles not only because they were seen to be suited to the industrial age but also because of a yearning to restore pre-industrial religious zeal and social structure.<sup>159</sup> The Gothic Revival was born of capitalism's first great crisis. Medieval architecture, it was believed, could help restore the stability which the fourteenth century was mythically perceived to have enjoyed. The momentum of the Gothic was carried forward into the mid-Victorian period by Ruskin whose chapter 'On the nature of Gothic' in The Stones of Venice (1851-1853) became one of the most influential pieces of architectural writing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ruskin's departure point was not religion but a belief in the human integrity of medieval buildings produced by honest, skilled and 'interested' hand labour - that is to say, 'joyful architecture' in which artisans retained a profound knowledge of the art content of their work.

These architectural ideas developed alongside the social criticism outlined previously. The squalor of industrialism and the class conflict it produced led some social commentators, including designers, to seek inspiration in a pre-industrial golden age. William Morris embodied the double identity of social and design critic. He castigated machine production and its division of labour (though machines did have a place in his view of society as doing work which was revolting and destructive of self-respect) which robbed workers of pleasure in work and the people of a love of art: society's stability was thus endangered. Morris advocated the study of the art of past ages to rid modern society of its divisions and sordidness. He saw education as a great ally: not only could it illuminate bygone art and culture, but also make people realize the lack of dignity in their lives:



Everyone who is pushing forward education helps us; for education ... when it reaches those who have grievances which they ought not to bear spreads deep discontent among them, and teaches them what to do to make their discontent fruitful. Everyone who tries to keep alive traditions of art by gathering together relics of the art of bygone times, still more if he is so lucky as to be able to lead people by his own works to look through Manchester smoke and squalor to fair scenes of unspoiled nature or deeds of past history, is helping us. Everyone who tries to bridge the gap between the classes, by helping the opening of museums and galleries and gardens and other pleasures which can be shared by all is helping us.<sup>160</sup>

If questioned, Morris would no doubt have approved of public libraries. The architectural treatment of such civic institutions was in itself an important educator:

I want all the works of man's hand to be beautiful, rising in fair and honourable gradation from the simplest household goods to the stately public buildings, adorned with the handiwork of the greatest masters of expression.<sup>161</sup>

The Arts and Crafts school in which Morris participated taught a wide range of design elements inherited from the Gothic. These included not just an honest selection of materials and style to fit purpose and location, and the integrity of creative labour; other important facets were simplicity, practicality, function and inspiration from the world of nature. But these objectives went beyond a narrow Arts and Crafts fraternity to influence architecture generally. The architect Richard Norman Shaw, for example, although he grew disillusioned with the Gothic, nonetheless championed vernacular design. The Queen Anne style, for which he is best known, corresponded to Puginian and Ruskinian criteria in that it was capable of construction by craftsmen with indigenous skills.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, Shaw developed Queen Anne into an essentially picturesque style which in terms of internal planning stressed the flexibility of room

arrangement in contrast to, say, classical architecture which allocated rooms geometrically according to a building's elevation. Picturesque internal planning was, like nature, organic: as in the natural world, where forms grew and changed, so buildings could be extended and adapted to fit their purpose.

It is no coincidence that M.B. Adams, the second most prolific public library architect of the pre-1914 age, was a student of Shaw's. Adams believed much contemporary design was pretentious:

Most of the common architecture of our cities is simply ... both vulgar and expensive, seeking to impress by vainglorious noise, heralding its costliness from groundline to ridge as if obtrusive opulence might be accounted a virtue.<sup>163</sup>

Such 'monied imbecility' was to the detriment of function. He stressed that "no building could be a success which was not well planned".<sup>164</sup>

"The aim and object of an architect," he wrote, "is to build beautifully - this is, of course, including conveniently - for a building that is beautiful but inconvenient and unsuited for its purpose can be of no permanent interest or value."<sup>165</sup>

Adams was not the only late Victorian/Edwardian public library architect to be interested in function. H.T. Hare, the most prolific designer of pre-1914 public libraries, showed "unremitting inventiveness and functional planning" in his designs.<sup>166</sup> Both Adams and Hare were ahead of their profession in developing practical architecture.<sup>167</sup> Adams' lineage can be traced back via Shaw to the Gothic-inspired modern movement. H.T. Hare's background was the Beaux Arts school, noted for its monumental, eclectic and historical architecture. This is not to say, however, that Hare or his contemporary public library designers were not influenced by the same ideas on function which informed and characterized modernism, and which



grew out of medievalising romanticism.

### Economic Decline

The social instability to which architectural modernism was in part a response contained an economic dimension. If modernism was to help to stabilize social relations it had to address the problem of national economic malfunction. Functional design and economic efficiency are, after all, inseparable. Much of the landscape of the Industrial Revolution - mills, docks, viaducts, warehouses, etc. - were subject to a functional design imperative.<sup>168</sup>

It should be recalled that public libraries were first proposed in the 1830s and 1840s partly as a means of furthering design education amongst workers shorn of artistic skills by mechanization and division of labour. Ironically, the public library itself fell victim to sub-standard design; though, as previously explained, this should not be exaggerated. In the late nineteenth century voices were raised in support of a more efficient, functional architectural treatment. The fact that this period witnessed a strengthening recognition of the public library as a force for economic good was no coincidence. Anxiety over the economy's performance resulted in a call for increased efficiency in a whole range of economic inputs, labour and education included. Improvements in the organization of education would produce improved workers. But for education to improve educational institutions needed to be designed more effectively. As far as the public library was concerned one designer, at least, became aware of the connection between economic performance and more efficient architecture.

M.B. Adams' modernist pedigree coalesced with his desire to produce public library buildings conducive to economic regeneration.

In an article of 1905 he stated the necessity of having good libraries to secure economic efficiency in educational administration:

Personally I have no desire to assume the pose of a preacher; but I do wish to assert in the plainest possible language the practical necessity of ensuring to the public library its proper place in the solution of education administration.<sup>169</sup>

Efficiency in education was essential, Adams continued, because of increasing anxiety over Britain's position in the world economy:

The need is obviously urgent, and the necessity is undoubtedly ripe, for the simple and good reason that it is impossible to disguise the inevitable .... Foreign competition, written large, leaves us no choice ... it can surely enough only be recognised that circumstances beyond our control have settled for us, once and for ever, the unrelenting demand for individual equipment and educational efficiency if we are to hold our own in the cosmopolitan possibilities of the immediate future.<sup>170</sup>

However, he questioned whether most public libraries were "exactly equal to the demands which are already asserting themselves in regard to the ever-extending enterprise of education which in the near future is calculated to assume still larger proportions".<sup>171</sup> Adams thus believed it crucial to pay special attention to the physical planning of public libraries to secure educational provision commensurate with competing in a dynamic world economy. Thus, because he disapproved of "snippity news sheets" and praised the "technical weeklies" and "trade journals", he accordingly advocated more space be set aside in designs for the reference department at the expense of the news/reading room.<sup>172</sup>

Adams was deeply aware of the importance of architecture to national and even imperial prestige:

The architect's chief endeavour, notwithstanding the surmounting weight of our commercialism, should be devoted to the production of thoughtful and artistic buildings worthy of our national



greatness and in harmony with the aspirations and activity which distinguish the political, ecclesiastical, and philanthropic enterprise of the Empire.<sup>173</sup>

He believed that to ensure national and imperial greatness there should be a greater reliance on self-help. This philosophy could be shared by all. He thus applauded:

... technical education projects intended for the bettering and amelioration of the professional and working classes. It is impossible for any class to remain indifferent in this matter, and no one who has to earn his own living, to put it on the bed-rock of existence, can afford to be left behind.<sup>174</sup>

In this context Adams' link with the benefactor John Passmore Edwards should be noted. Edwards was committed to improving technical education. One aspect of this was his ownership of the technical journal Building News, on which Adams had served since the early 1870s. This was an immediate reason why Adams was chosen to design five Passmore Edwards libraries.<sup>175</sup> Another reason, a more notable one, was the belief he shared with Adams in the efficacy of education to offset foreign competition:

He feared there were other nations who valued education more than ... in England and he would rather see a competition between nations in mind than in trade.<sup>176</sup>

Just as Adams and Edwards shared an awareness of poor educational provision it is likely they also concurred on the importance of efficient architecture in educational institutions.

The standpoint of Adams and Edwards reflected the growing educational and economic role of the public library. This was most clearly illustrated in the growing number of public libraries sharing premises with technical schools following the Technical Instruction Act of 1889. The linking of libraries with other educational facilities was not new. When in 1875 an educational complex was being planned in

Nottingham it was urged that the library, museum, science school and university extension premises be housed under one roof because "much greater efficiency and economy would be promoted by the association of these institutions in one building than by their being separately located."<sup>177</sup> But the premium on such arrangements was increased by the economic anxieties of the late Victorian period. The architectural amalgamation of agencies became highly logical. A single edifice was advocated in 1902 for Leamington Spa's library, art school and technical institute because students "could without leaving the building refer to books, prints, and art subjects which would be of immense value to them".<sup>178</sup> The public library had always evinced some kind of economic role which was, in turn, reflected in the institution's design. The allegorical ornamentation - figures, statues, medallions, panels - which had decorated public libraries had frequently included references to science and industry, alongside art and literature. In the late nineteenth century, however, architecture for economic growth needed to go beyond mere allegory to a studied production of efficient buildings which would manufacture efficient workers.

### Functional Aestheticism

This architectural assessment has lent weight to the idea of the public library as an agency encouraging social stability. Aesthetic, landmark designs reflected the strength, local sovereignty and cultural confidence of civic society's middle class leaders and wealthy benefactors. They also served to diffuse a belief in citizenship, culture and self-help, the premium on designs for these purposes being raised as social tensions increased from the 1880s onwards. Anxieties over economic decline which accompanied social tension determined that



functional design should supplement aesthetically derived social cohesion and tranquility.

The intention was to deliver social stability via cultural and utilitarian design considerations. These were separate concepts and sometimes caused friction in determining design: the idea became popular that aesthetic treatment detracted from function. Yet design for culture and utility were not always incompatible. This was most clearly the case with children's library designs. Separate children's libraries and departments emerged from the 1880s. These often received more aesthetic attention than other departments. When Sayers established a children's department at Wallasey immediately prior to 1914 he created "a homely room, with a large bay window giving on to the lawn, around the interior of which I ran a continuous window seat".<sup>179</sup> The aim here, and elsewhere, was to create a homely ambience. The children's library was to be a 'shelter' or 'half-way house': in short, 'a home away from home'. The intention was to attract children through creating pleasant surroundings. This had a cultural dimension in that children would be taken off the streets which morally corrupted them. Street-life was also a factor in physical deterioration which, in turn, affected economic efficiency: to rescue children from the street would be an investment in human capital. Further, it is possible that the separate provision of entrances and/or tables for girls and boys emphasized these cultural and economic motives by reinforcing established attitudes to the roles of the sexes. To be precise, there would be a strengthening of the notion of women, firstly as the moral guardians of the family, and secondly, as homemakers for the requirements of male industrial and imperial armies.<sup>180</sup>

Children's libraries thus aimed at a social stabilization to be

delivered by mutually beneficial cultural and utilitarian concerns.  
It was a design imperative which reflected the symbiotic relationship  
between the pursuit of culture and utility: a relationship, indeed,  
which characterized pre-1914 public library objectives.



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PART THREE

FIRST WORLD WAR INFLUENCES



## Chapter Twelve

### RECONSTRUCTION AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The public library during the First World War not only continued to contribute to social stability but saw its role in this regard sharpened in response to the escalating social problems which it and others outside the library establishment hoped it could help solve. The period threw up serious - though not entirely new - problems of social order. These problems were primarily the concern of the state. But the library establishment also was sensitive to the instability of the time, sensed the prospect of change (perhaps of a radical nature) and evolved policies accordingly. Business too expressed anxiety over possible detrimental effects on production caused by social flux. Many ideas on how the public library could help to ensure social stability were shared during the war and its immediate aftermath by library establishment, government and business (each group to be given separate consideration below). These ideas focussed on the fundamental relationship, outlined earlier in the thesis, between reduced social tension, on the one hand, and cultural control and economic confidence on the other.

The social role of the public library between 1914 and 1919 was defined by two central aims. First, to construct a durable, stabilising civic consciousness through the promotion of education, and in particular non-vocational adult education. Idealist influences were crucial in this regard. However, at the moment when idealist education for citizenship was receiving unprecedented attention it began to be undermined by its Hegelian heritage. Idealism had stressed the virtue of state action in assisting the moral action of individuals. In the

short run state control was deemed necessary: it was the natural corollary to total war. In the long run, however, despite being welcomed as a beneficial change, the growing power of the state was tarnished by its association with the centralized Prussian system which was believed to have provoked the war.<sup>1</sup> A contributor to the Library Association Record in 1915 wrote of "unmoral economic ideas made in [pre-war] Germany", and castigated:

... persons who placed their faith in German economics, and in the schools of educational and economic thought that have done so much to imperil the very existence of human society.<sup>2</sup>

The second aim of the public library was to help reconstruct the national economy, partly through improving technical education, but more importantly, by disseminating technical and commercial information. Of this second objective much more was said than previously: in the First World War the economic role of the public library achieved a profile, if not surpassing, than broadly matching its cultural control dimension. During the war the 'social stability' roots of these two central aims - stretching back as they did to the genesis of the public library movement - reached their sturdiest. The history of the First World War public library is thus a micro-study of secular macro-roles aimed at preserving social order and protecting *the* social order. As such, the public library can be located in the wartime debate on Reconstruction, of which a brief discussion is accordingly required.

War, especially 'total war', has been a potent catalyst for change; though its power to retard social development, as in the case of postponing British housing legislation in 1914, should also be noted.<sup>3</sup> The 'total' conflict of 1914-18 brought about a new commitment on the part of the state to the management of the nation's social and economic condition. This amounted to the most extensive state direction of



society that Britain had known.<sup>4</sup> As the war progressed, the spirit of reform - though by no means in all areas of social policy - strengthened. Lloyd George recalled that: "The Great War was not an end in itself. We waged it in hopes of winning through to peace and a new and better age."<sup>5</sup> Seebohm Rowntree spelt out what Lloyd George's "new and better age" entailed:

The war has torn the scales from our eyes, and forced us to see things as they really are, and by the light of this clearer vision we have come to regard many conditions as intolerable which before had only seemed inevitable .... We have completely revised our notions as to what is possible or impossible. We have seen accomplished within a few brief months or years reforms to which we should have assigned, not decades, but generations. I do not believe for a moment that in the future we shall allow millions of our fellow-countrymen, through no fault of their own, to pass through life ill-housed, ill-clothed, ill-fed and ill-educated.<sup>6</sup>

That a committed reformer such as Rowntree should display an excess of enthusiasm for social reform is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, the existence of a desire for change attracting many social groups and political factions is inescapable when examining British society in the years 1916-21. However, motives behind the promotion of reform varied, and can be categorized in three ways. First, there was a sincere radical and liberal-reformist concern over the inadequacy of existing social provision. Second, all mainstream political groupings recognized the need to espouse social reform for fear of the electoral consequences of not doing so - this motive being essentially the result of pressures during the war and electoral reform in 1918. Third, faced with the prospect of serious unrest the state aimed at a 'containment of labour' through a policy of stabilization to meet the structural needs of British capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Of all these motives the last was perhaps the most crucial - that is to say, the need to construct an assured social

stability out of the potentially destructive and socially divisive effects of war. As Lloyd George pleaded: "We want neither reaction nor revolution, but a sane, well-advised steadiness of bold reconstruction."<sup>8</sup>

Serious disaffection confronted the state in the period 1916 to 1921. Its cause was seen at the time as multifarious - rising prices (especially food and rents); poor housing; restrictions on trade union practices and labour mobility; narrowing of differentials between the skilled and unskilled; strict licensing laws; industrial fatigue; resentment against supervisory grades required to manage increased semi-skilled labour; the growth of militancy amongst the semi-skilled pertaining to monotonous work processes; inequality of sacrifice in the war; lack of faith in government to keep pledges and in the parliamentary process; uncertainty as to the industrial future; and anger at the handling of the military effort summed up in the belief that "lions" were being led by "donkeys".<sup>9</sup>

Some historians have underlined these contemporary establishment views as offering a plausible historical explanation of disaffection.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, one line of historiography has recognized the existence of a "semi-revolutionary situation" precipitated by the war.<sup>11</sup> As Alan Hutt wrote in the 1930s:

During the first few months of 1919 British capitalism was skating on thin ice. The revolutionary outburst that was threatening in 1914 now seemed likely to materialise in a far more acute form and in circumstances vastly more menacing to the existing social order.<sup>12</sup>

Retrospectively it can be judged that the chance of revolution along Bolshevik lines was negligible. Both the causes and revolutionary implications of disaffection have recently been questioned. It is argued, for example, that the downgrading of skilled workers by dilution



and narrowing wage differentials has been exaggerated.<sup>13</sup> Such evidence undermines the conventional picture of a revolutionary crisis brought about by attacks upon labour through a conspiracy between government and industry. There is a growing body of evidence that business had little influence on the state's prosecution of the war.<sup>14</sup> Further, the working class generally, and its leaders in particular, remained attached to pragmatic and conservative traditions. It is true that, on the one hand, many trade unions found themselves for the first time negotiating with the state over wages and conditions, which meant that the habitual separation of economic and political issues was broken: hence the increasing realization during the war of the need to win working class representation in Parliament.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, it is likely that most workers undertook industrial action - often successfully as in the case of forcing the abandonment of the 'leaving certificate' system - for economic rather than political ends, in an attempt to make the most of advantageous collective bargaining opportunities delivered by full employment.<sup>16</sup>

At the time, however, some elements in the ruling classes tended to mistake economically derived working class volatility for revolutionary intent. There was a real fear that instead of labour seeking power constitutionally, direct action would attempt to by-pass parliamentary government.<sup>17</sup> The political objectives of labour were projected and enlarged into a socially cataclysmic scenario. Ministers were fed alarming information on the very real possibility of European-styled revolutions occurring here.<sup>18</sup> As a result, a fear of revolution at home was expressed in the months following the Armistice of November 1918 by several leading members of the Government.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, such fears of revolution require refinement. Public

utterances on the prospect of revolutionary insurgency should not be taken at face value. Lloyd George, for example, skilfully used the bogey of Bolshevism to rally Conservative support for the social programmes in which he genuinely believed.<sup>20</sup> The image of impending social collapse was thus used to justify piecemeal social reform and lessen the chances of serious social unrest. This tactic manifested itself most clearly in the work of Reconstruction, comprising an extension of social policy and measures for economic recovery. Government noted that two of the main reasons for disaffection were the psychological feelings of "inequality of sacrifice" and a "woeful uncertainty as to the industrial future".<sup>21</sup> Hence, policies were developed and promises made concerning improved living standards and quality of life. Notwithstanding practical needs to plan for post-war renewal, Reconstruction was initiated in the middle of the war as a means of boosting morale in helping to prosecute the war more effectively. Quite simply, workers and soldiers would be more efficient if presented convincingly with the prospect of a better post-war world.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the war Reconstruction had also become an insurance policy against social unrest. A vast housing programme, for example, aimed at delivering "homes fit for heroes" who sought repayment for sacrifices made. Duly rewarded with improved living conditions a potentially disruptive working class would, it was hoped, assume the responsibilities of citizenship so crucial to the maintenance of social stability.<sup>23</sup> Other defensive reforms were made in areas such as rent control, unemployment relief and, of particular relevance to this discussion, in education.

Education and housing were the most prominent attempts to promote social stability by means of social reform: "Educational reform was obviously one of the most important conditions of the post-War



reconstruction for which plans were being laid", wrote Lloyd George.<sup>24</sup> The Education Act (1918) - one of the few pieces of social reform which the government found itself able to institute during the war - demonstrated a determination to make use of a better educated population to solve the problems the war had revealed. The importance which government attached to the education of those beyond school age, moreover, was demonstrated by the Ministry of Reconstruction's inauguration of an Adult Education Committee, which produced four revealing reports in 1918 and 1919, including one on libraries and museums.<sup>25</sup> Non-vocational adult education will be discussed in detail below. Of immediate relevance here, however, is that it was promoted in the First World War with considerable enthusiasm, partly for conservative reasons. The chairman of the Adult Education Committee, the idealist A.L. Smith, wrote in 1917, for example, that continuation classes for 14-18 year olds were essential:

... to carry on the moral and disciplinary influence of the elementary schools ....  
If industrial harmony is to take the place of social unrest ... education on the moral and social side must be taken up in a way that had hardly been experimented upon as yet .... Unless we educated our democracy there would be the greatest social and political trouble as the outcome of the war.<sup>26</sup>

Education was viewed by politicians such as the idealist H.A.L. Fisher (Minister of Education) as crucial to a reinforcement of the civic consciousness which helped safeguard existing social arrangements. It would make individuals more 'reasoned' and therefore more 'reasonable' in their attitudes to the state and to employers, thereby enabling otherwise alienated individuals to become true citizens of a participatory, pluralistic, capitalist society. Emphasis was placed on greater equality of opportunity and on increased knowledge as

the pre-requisites of liberal democracy: education, said Fisher, "is of great democratic interest, for a wise democracy is impossible without it".<sup>27</sup> The inherent social power of education was presented as a reason for its promotion. The German experience was highlighted. The German education system had appeared to have galvanized military and economic preparations for war - "a signal example of the power which organization and systemised education are able to confer".<sup>28</sup> But whereas German education was perceived to have been prostituted for evil ends, British education would be strengthened to ensure socially 'good' benefits and virtues. Education was believed to affect, for better or worse, whether a child be "prudent or profligate, cultured or ignorant, brutal or refined, social or anti-social, a citizen or an anarchist".<sup>29</sup>

Such was the potential for cultural control attributed to education; though it would be wrong to construe education merely as a control mechanism in that recipients could also be beneficiaries. With regard to economic performance also, education was deemed beneficial. The nature of the relationship between education and economic advance has, as discussed in Part Two, always been problematic; but in the First World War it was believed to be fairly straightforward. Fisher remarked in a Commons debate on the Education Bill:

I venture to assert that no country in the long run suffers economic injury from an improvement in the general education of its people .... Granted that the educational proposals which are now before the house have the effect of strengthening physique, shaping character, and enlarging the intelligence of the community, then it follows by an inexorable chain of practical logic that the economic output will be increased with resultant benefits to all engaged in the economic life of the country, whether as producers, distributors, employers or employed.<sup>30</sup>

Increased expenditure on education was considered appropriate because of



perceived improvements in wartime economic efficiency. Industrial productivity would in turn be boosted by educational investment facilitated by increased profits.<sup>31</sup>

This theory of an upward spiral of favourable cumulative causation was attractive to economic planners due to the pervasive fear of depression. Although high levels of demand continued into the post-war period, politicians (and business indeed) mostly expected the worst, and "in expecting the worst they brought about the worst".<sup>32</sup> Despite displaying a rousing public commitment to Reconstruction government never felt at ease with the high taxation and even higher borrowing (the First, unlike the Second, World war was financed more from savings than taxation) it required. Politicians of the Right, urged on by business, were particularly vocal in urging a return to financial normalcy. Lower public expenditure would not only release more capital for private enterprise; it was also seen as the traditional road to economic stability. Keynesian ideas on the advantages of the 'multiplier effect' had not yet been articulated.<sup>33</sup>

The attitude of the well-off to the high public expenditure which social reform demanded was not favourable. The Ministry of Reconstruction did not grasp fully the extent of the transfer of resources from rich to poor which social reform demanded. It was not therefore in a position to anticipate the strength of opposition to reform. Yet, some reforms attracted less criticism than others. At a time of economic pessimism, finance for education was perhaps the form of public spending viewed with least suspicion: this by virtue of its apparently 'productive' and, consequently, self-funding nature. This explains, from an economic perspective, why education attained such a high priority in Reconstruction.

That economic stability was seen to influence social stability

there is no doubt. The Industrial Conference of 1919, for example, recommended that one means of avoiding conflict was through stable employment, possibly stimulated by timely government contracts.<sup>34</sup> The war, and the resulting dependence of government upon key workers, had created an unusual conjuncture. Labour found itself on the offensive. It was only when depression set in during the autumn of 1920 that the challenge of the Left began to be weakened by unemployment and a downward pressure on wages; at which point the state saw that the premium on the insurance policy against serious social unrest could be slashed. The social reform programme was duly reduced by the 1922 'Geddes Axe' which "chopped away a substantial section of public expenditure".<sup>35</sup> As such, the ruling classes might have been expected to have welcomed a deterioration in the economy. After all, the boom induced by war had been accompanied by extensive industrial unrest. The fear was, however, that the deterioration might worsen to the extent of providing a rich soil in which revolutionary ideas could quickly grow. Hence, economic Reconstruction, including the priority accorded to education, commanded considerable respect. Even amongst those who believed that a sounder economic platform could only be constructed through retrenchment, support could be found for economic regeneration via education; though such support was more easily affordable in that education's potential for cultural control was also widely recognized.

How, broadly, does First World War public library development interact with the events and circumstances outlined above? The public library was 'advanced' by the war in three ways. First, in keeping with the reform climate, the war did appear to precipitate the legislation which the library establishment had sought for so long. The Public Libraries Act (1919) not only allowed county councils to become library authorities but also abolished the 1d rate limitation in existence since



1855. It is possible that abolition would have been achieved irrespective of the war. True, standards of provision in 1914 were not seen by the library establishment as seriously deficient.<sup>36</sup> However, pre-war inflation had begun to have some disadvantageous effects on services.<sup>37</sup> Subsequent wartime inflation brought services to a point of crisis, thus opening the way for legislation. The extremity of the crisis meant that government for the first time began to take more than a passing interest in the public library. Previously, parliamentary action had been confined to individual initiative. In 1919, however, it was a government department (Education) which promoted the new bill - an indication perhaps of the acceptance during the war of increased state intervention.

Second, just as Reconstruction encompassed a psychological, spiritual dimension denoting a sense of rapid social change, public libraries also were considered to be on the threshold of something new. This 'watershed' mentality manifested itself most clearly in the excitement surrounding the new public commercial and technical, or 'business', library provision. Such developments were thought to be in step with the strategy for Lloyd George's "new and better age" noted above.

Third, public libraries benefited from the fresh interest in education promoted by Reconstruction. This is not surprising in view of the fact that, as the Workers Education Association (WEA) commented in 1919, "Adequate provision and equipment of libraries and museums are indispensable conditions of any efficient system of education".<sup>38</sup> News that readers were switching to more serious reading - though the extent of this was exaggerated - was welcomed. Serious issues raised by the war, and the desire of people to read about them, gave greater recognition to the public library as an educational agency. Thus, in

Leeds shortly after the war it was enthusiastically reported that issues of fiction had fallen to 52 per cent in contrast to the 70 or 80 per cent of previous years:

There is no desire to discourage fiction. It is realised that a vast amount of the best kind of recreation is derived from the reading of novels. But it is felt that a public library should be primarily an educator, a widener of the mind, a source of information to the enquirer, a handmaid to progress.<sup>39</sup>

This invigorated education role included a greater awareness of the public library's economic and civic education potential. The notion of education's 'productive' characteristic influenced conceptions of the public library's function. The not unfamiliar idea that public library education had a materialist dynamic, in that it aided individuals (such as technical students) in their personal economic ambitions and contributed to national economic regeneration, grew significantly. When, for example, the Minister for Reconstruction, Christopher Addison, addressed the Library Association at its annual meeting in 1917 he expressed the hope that public libraries would become "infinitely more useful than they have been in time past" if, amongst other things, they forged "a proper working relationship between our higher educational system and the businessmen and industries of the country".<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, public libraries were seen as 'useful' in relation to the perceived increased demand for adult education. The public library was presented in idealistic terms as the natural haven for the civic-minded individual thirsting for knowledge about a rapidly changing world. The fact that the war more clearly focused the institution's image as 'useful' - both politically for the 'citizen' and economically for the 'producer' - enabled the librarian G.A. Stephen to speak in 1922 of the public library as "the fountain of mental health for the whole community", providing "pure education, which is the foundation of citizenship" as well as



"material for technical and vocational instruction and generally ... information useful to those engaged in commerce and industry, whether as employers or manual or non-manual workers".<sup>41</sup>

But developments induced by war were not all positive, whether judged retrospectively or by contemporaries. The library establishment made loud warnings about the crumbling fabric - buildings and services - of public libraries. A depressing picture was painted of the abandonment or curtailment of book acquisition (partly due to the high cost of paper), of premises and departments not maintained, or closed, or handed over to war work, the postponement of building programmes, of reductions in opening hours despite a slight upturn in demand in 1917-18, of the withdrawal of staff on active service, and, as mentioned above, of pressure on income due to inflation.<sup>42</sup> The deterioration between 1916 and 1919 was so rapid that, without further help from the rates, the institution's continued existence was seriously questioned.<sup>43</sup>

More important than tangible deterioration, however, was the ideological blow which the war dealt to the public library's 'liberalizing' tendency; this by virtue of the war's reinforcement of the institution's conservative characteristics. Like Reconstruction, the public library was seen by some as a bulwark (albeit not a major one) against social disaffection. The aim was not to 'buy off' discontent: for neither a disaffected working class at home, nor soldiers in the trenches or awaiting demobilization, clamoured for better library provision in preference to improved housing, higher pay, the dole or rent control. The public library has never fitted in with the Marxist explanation of social reform — in that the ruling class must pay a 'social' ransom for avoiding proletarian wrath.<sup>44</sup> Quite simply, the working class has not taken enough interest in the institution to constitute a ransom demand. Rather, a propagandist role

was envisaged; it was the library's 'educative' power which attracted those seeking stability at a time of increasing working class demands to the idea of improved provision. Further, education (and information) of a 'material' nature, disseminated through the public library could help eradicate, it was said, the chances of national economic dislocation upon which social confrontation fed. This strengthening of its social stability objective - via education for both social conservatism and material progress - places the public library in line with the forces of reaction which emerged during the war; though the liberating role of the institution did not, of course, disappear. The public library's efficacy and durability as a social stabilizer were to be demonstrated during the 1930s when library services were widely viewed as helping to lower social tensions caused by unemployment. As J.M. Mitchell (Secretary of the CUKT) asserted at the opening of an extension for Nottingham Central Library in 1932:

Never was the value of a library greater than at a time when unemployment was rife .... You have this day provided not a luxury, but an asset of the highest practical value and a safety valve of the greatest civic and social importance.<sup>45</sup>

The arguments laid out above surrounding motives for First World War public library promotion are general and subject to qualification. There are nuances in the assertions. A more accurate picture can hopefully be obtained by examining exactly who advocated what, and for which reasons. Attitudes to the public library in the 1914-19 period need to be assessed from the perspective of government, library establishment and business. The changing demand, upon which motives were based, also requires investigation.



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17. Beloff, op. cit., p. 73.
18. See a selection of the reports of the Home Office, Directorate of Intelligence, which were sent to cabinet at regular intervals; see chapter 13, note 36.

19. Wrigley, op. cit., p. 1.
20. G.C. Peden, British economic and social policy (Oxford, 1985), pp. 49-50.
21. Commission of enquiry into industrial unrest, Summary, op. cit., p. 7.
22. It has been argued that there is an inherent connection between levels of social welfare and the proportion of a society's citizens called upon to help fight the war - whether as soldiers or as civilian war workers; S. Andrzejewski, Military organization and society (1954). Andrzejewski's 'military participation ratio' theory is explained by A.S. Milward, The Economic effects of the two World Wars (1970).
23. M. Swenarton, Homes fit for heroes (1981).
24. Lloyd George, War memoirs, op. cit., p. 1989.
25. The Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee produced the following:
  - i) First interim report on industrial and social conditions in relation to adult education, Cmd. 9107 (1918);
  - ii) Second interim report on education in the army, Cmd. 9229 (1918);
  - iii) Third interim report on libraries and museums, Cmd. 9237 (1919);
  - iv) Final report, Cmd. 321 (1919).

The Adult Education Committee was one of several sub-committees formed by the Ministry of Reconstruction in March 1917. Other sub-committees covered; Agricultural policy; Demobilization of the army; Coal conservation; Policy in regard to aliens after the war; Relations between employers and employed; Women's employment; Civil war workers demobilization; Acquisition of land; Machinery of government; Local government. Additional committees were established as the war progressed. For a description of the Ministry's brief, see Ministry of Reconstruction, Report on the work of the Ministry for the period ending 31 Dec. 1918, Cmd. 9231, (1919).
26. Quoted in B. Simon, Education and the labour movement 1870-1920 (1965), pp. 333-334.
27. H.A.L. Fisher, Educational reform; speeches (Oxford, 1918), p. ix.
28. H.A.L. Fisher, Educational reform (1917), p. 3.
29. Fisher, Educational reform, op. cit. p. ix.
30. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 104, Col. 394 (1918).
31. Reconstruction Committee, Memo on the Education Bill ... to Lloyd George (June 1917), Public Records Office, CAB 24/19, GT 1304.
32. Marwick, op. cit. p. 142.



33. For a succinct discussion of First World War financial management see G.C. Peden, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-57. Although there was opposition to the continuation of high public spending - an opposition which eventually won a policy of retrenchment - the legacy of the war was the maintenance of public spending over the next generation at a level far higher than experienced in the pre-war era. Before the war government expenditure averaged 4 per cent of GNP; in the inter-war period it never fell below 8 per cent.
34. Report of the provisional joint committee presented to the meeting of the Industrial Conference, Central Hall, Westminster, 19 April 1919, Cmd. 501 (1920). Also, inherent in the argument that retrenchment was the basis of growth was the belief that better social conditions - to 'buy off' discontent - would flow from it; see R. Price, Labour in British society (Beckenham, 1986), p. 165.
35. Marwick, *op. cit.*, p. 145. The social reform programme was not entirely abandoned. Housebuilding, for example, was to continue under Acts of 1923 and 1924; whilst unemployment relief was also continued.
36. A. Ellis, Public libraries at the time of the Adams Report (Stevenage, 1979), p. 72.
37. A. Ellis, The Development of public libraries in England (unpublished Ph.D., CNA, 1974), p. 36.
38. Workers Educational Association, Adult education (1919), p. 11.
39. Yorkshire Evening Post (29 May 1922).
40. Address by Christopher Addison, Minister of Reconstruction, to the Library Association's annual conference, Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 434.
41. Publisher's Circular (17 June 1922).
42. Ellis, The Development of public libraries, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
43. Ellis, Public libraries ... Adams Report, *op. cit.*, preface.
44. R. Miliband, Capitalist democracy in Britain (Oxford, 1982), p. 2.
45. Nottingham Journal (26 October 1932).

## Chapter Thirteen

### GOVERNMENT

For wartime central government the fate of public libraries was not a burning issue. Library historians have sometimes taken the initiative of Christopher Addison (Minister of Reconstruction) in addressing the Library Association in 1917 as evidence of a new commitment on the part of government to support the institution. A close reading of Addison's address, however, reveals an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand the value of the public library, particularly in the economic sphere, is recognized. On the other, this value is seen as limited in that he urges the private collection of higher technical and commercial information. Addison also doubted the existence of an extensive demand for increased funding:

We know ... that the powers of public authorities are limited by statute in various directions, although it is evident, looking through your records, that there are a large number who do not even exercise them.<sup>1</sup>

Further, though it is true that legislative action was eventually taken - that is to say, the Act of 1919 which abolished the 1d rate limitation and allowed county councils to adopt library legislation - the decision to include the crucial clause relating to the rate restriction abolition was taken late in the day, and very much as a result of persistent lobbying by the library establishment, from in particular the librarian John Ballinger.<sup>2</sup> As late as March 1919 the government, in answer to a question in the Commons, perceived no widespread demand among local authorities for altering the rate limit. Only in June 1919, by which time responsibility for public libraries had passed from the local Government Board to the Board of Education,



was there any indication that government was aware of the rating problem.<sup>3</sup>

The public library cause was taken up in 1919 by President of the Board of Education, H.A.L. Fisher, who later claimed that he "in a humble way, had been instrumental in improving the position of public libraries".<sup>4</sup> Both the 1919 Act and the Education Department's sponsoring of it were widely viewed as a natural corollary of the 1918 Education Act, and the plans for 'continuing' education in particular. This was certainly the view of the Leamington Spa Public Library Committee which praised the Board of Education's involvement:

This recognition by a great Department of State of the place of public libraries in our national life is a cause for satisfaction to those who have so long felt that the library movement in this country was 'nobody's child'.<sup>5</sup>

However praiseworthy the involvement of Fisher and his department was considered at the time, government support for public libraries was not unqualified. When discussing the issue at high level Fisher said that one of the reasons he supported the Bill was that "no charge upon the exchequer was involved".<sup>6</sup> The 1919 Act was clearly based on the prospect that no government expenditure was entailed, and at no time was any form of central funding seriously considered. Public libraries were to remain essentially 'voluntary' bodies - that is to say, users deciding to tax themselves for a service. The idea lingered (contrary to what early promoters like Ewart and Edwards thought) that public libraries were established under 'class legislation', that they were provided primarily for the working class. As such, compulsion should be avoided and expenditure limited because the service was not in the first instance for 'all' the community.<sup>7</sup> The continuing strength of these sentiments were revealed in the debate at the 1919 Bill's committee stage when objections centred on the rates

issue.<sup>8</sup>

Relative to other areas of social policy, therefore, public libraries attracted little government interest. Yet such indifference is at first sight belied by the preparation during the war of a report on libraries by the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee, the first government appointed committee since 1850 with terms of reference specifically relating to public libraries. The importance of the proposed report was not lost on Stanley Jast:

For the first time, I fancy, we have been included in a far-reaching scheme of education reconstruction, bearing the imprimatur of a responsible body of educational reformers.<sup>9</sup>

The report's recommendations, published in 1919, were indeed not inconsequential. It advised the power of county councils to 'adopt'; the abolition of the 1d rate limit; greater prominence to be given to government publications in libraries: local education authorities to control public libraries; and the transfer of responsibility for libraries from the local Government Board to the Board of Education.<sup>10</sup> These proposals underlined the report's description of the public library as 'a valuable national asset'.<sup>11</sup>

But for many the report did not go far enough. The idea of central government financial assistance, for example, had been put to the committee during its deliberations but rejected.<sup>12</sup> Those disappointed with the report's limitations would have been doubly so by the legislative proposals arising out of it. The initial library bill of 1919 (requested by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust) envisaged merely an extension of provision to rural areas, where county councils - the only real bodies with the resources to provide costly services to dispersed communities - had heretofore not been



permitted to charge a library rate.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, government's prime consideration was for library provision in rural areas, which the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (CUKT) wartime experiment in Staffordshire had proved viable.<sup>14</sup>

This concern was associated with the policy of revitalizing rural communities. Agriculture had long been in decline. Whereas in 1870 Britain imported about one-fifth of total food requirements, by 1913 this fraction had risen to about a half. The inadvisability of such external dependence was highlighted by the German wartime submarine campaign which confirmed anxieties over agriculture expressed before 1914. Pressure to restore agriculture also came from those who saw the extension of urban life as a social threat. It was widely felt that towns created physical and moral degeneration; re-establishing rural life was an attractive alternative.<sup>15</sup> Government therefore urged a post-war re-settlement of the land in the belief - as a committee reported in 1916 - that:

The stability and physical strength of our nation depends largely on those classes who have either been born and brought up in the country or have had the advantages of the country life.<sup>16</sup>

The former, which meant attracting workers and ex-servicemen back to the land, could be achieved by improving rural housing, increasing the number of smallholdings and ensuring "a general provision for increased amenities of village life".<sup>17</sup> The public library was patently one such amenity in this respect. In fact, as far back as January 1916 a government report on re-settlement had recognized the public library's attractiveness as an educative and recreative agency in any re-settlement programme.<sup>18</sup>

What of the problem of increasing production? In criticizing the report, noted above, the librarian G.T. Shaw had stressed the

'practical' potential of public libraries for agriculture, arguing that it could dispense technical literature on the latest methods in agriculture and husbandry, as well as Board of Trade commercial information relative to markets.<sup>19</sup> But government considered financial assistance only at the highest level. — research grants to local councils, universities, and to agricultural colleges and research institutes.<sup>20</sup> The Ministry of Reconstruction did consider the idea of Rural Information Offices "to centralise at suitable places in each locality the provision of any information available from official sources that might be of interest or value to the local agricultural community".<sup>21</sup> However, it is not clear whether the public library was viewed as the natural home for these offices although, as shall be described below, commercial and technical libraries were seen (mostly by librarians) as relevant to agriculture.

Despite the lack of evidence that government perceived the public library as possessing a rural economic role, it nonetheless included libraries as a factor in re-stabilising declining rural communities. Rural economic regeneration - albeit not necessarily with the help of the public library - would generate a "corporate life", which would also be encouraged by the furtherance of adult education; in which the public library played a full part . It was a policy which derived its existence from the class antagonisms of the day, which affected even the countryside. In its report on the way adult education was affected by industrial and social conditions the Adult Education Committee drew a picture of demoralised rural labour exposed to poor pay and housing, isolation (the only consistent form of social intercourse being the pub), and seasonal unemployment. This social existence resulted in 'alienation' — class deference, feelings of inferiority and exclusion from any 'higher' village social life. However, adult



education through such agencies as the public library, so it was perceived, could encourage cohesive social development and social stability.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that government had to be coaxed to extend its legislation in 1919 to include town libraries does not imply it did not recognize the urban library as a promoter of social stability. The problem of rural degeneration was considered acute, and had attracted attention before 1914. It is not surprising that the rural dimension took priority in 1919, not least because a revitalized and stable rural society might channel away tensions from the urban scene. Further, existing urban library provision might have been seen as adequate in terms of the social stability function it had to fulfil. This argument is especially relevant to adult education, to which government attached considerable importance as a social pacifier. Public libraries were a mainstay of adult education.<sup>23</sup> Berwick Sayers wrote that the public library was "the most active influence in general adult education".<sup>24</sup> Further, one of the reasons why government had proposed local education authority control of public libraries was that adult education and libraries were seen as natural partners. If, therefore, it can be shown that adult education was to be given a social stability role, then a similar function can be ascribed to the public library.

Government had certainly realized during the war the part which libraries could play in complementing its objectives. They contributed to the war effort in a number of ways. They were liable to be requisitioned as offices of food control or recruitment with the librarian acting as director.<sup>25</sup> Departments or whole buildings were commandeered as hospitals.<sup>26</sup> The Ministry of Food, via the Library

Association, urged a provision of books on food economy.<sup>27</sup> Posters were displayed and leaflets made available. Book marks advocated war loans.<sup>28</sup> Overtly propagandist material was also purveyed at the government's behest. At Bolton public library government pamphlets entitled "The Great War and how it began" (300 copies) and "If the Kaiser governed England" (4,000 copies) were distributed.<sup>29</sup>

But the future propagandist role which government planned for the public library was more sophisticated: for adult education through the public library was to be employed as a subtle instrument of attempted control. This was never exactly spelled out. But a great deal was said about adult education in this respect and, as the public library was so closely linked to it (after all, the Adult Education Committee had public libraries within its remit), then an analysis of why adult education was so enthusiastically promoted during the war is important.

Viewing the four reports produced by the Adult Education Committee (see previous chapter on Reconstruction) it is evident that government identified two main impulses behind adult education. First, that it provided a means of self-expression and individual fulfilment. This was said, and with some truth, to account for a growing autonomous demand and popularity. Second, it "aimed at the attainment of new standards of citizenship and a better social order".<sup>30</sup> It was this second motive - of 'social engineering' - which government recognized as beneficial in its advocacy not just of adult education, but education generally. H.A.L. Fisher captured the mood of the day when he spoke in support of his Education Bill:

We have been asking them to fight and work for their country; we have been asking them, not only to appreciate the forces of great political arguments and the significance of grave political emergencies, but to translate their appreciation of those



arguments and emergencies into acts of renunciation and sacrifice .... I ask them whether the education which is given to the great mass of our citizens is adequate to the new, serious, and enduring liabilities which the development of this great world-war creates for our Empire, or to the new civic burdens which we are imposing upon millions of new voters? I say it is not adequate.<sup>31</sup>

One interpretation of the above is that education would serve as the enemy of socially disruptive tendencies arising out of the 'liabilities' of war; it would imbue the masses with reason and 'reasonableness', thus awakening a sense of citizenship and social responsibility conducive to the existing social order.

This particular function of education was put into practice during the war in the army's adult education programme. Towards the end of the war and during the demobilization that followed there was undoubtedly some spontaneous demand for education.<sup>32</sup> But autonomy of demand should not be overstated, and should not overshadow the authorities' belief that adult education was a powerful weapon against unrest and rebellion.<sup>33</sup> Col. Lord Gorell organiser of education in the British army, wrote that it would give men "a wider realisation of their duties as citizens of the British Empire".<sup>34</sup> The Adult Education Committee agreed: asserting that it would "enable men to resume their social responsibilities and to pass judgement upon the proposals which in the last resort must be accepted or rejected by the electorate".<sup>35</sup>

Yet motives went deeper than a mere desire to 'educate our masters'. Government strongly believed that the level of social unrest was heightened by unfettered Marxist rhetoric: a demagogic insurgency of 'false' politics and, in particular, economics. This notion was expressed on numerous occasions by the Home Office's Directorate of Intelligence which reported to the Cabinet virtually weekly during the post-war crisis. It reported in July 1919, for example, that "the

crying need for the moment appears to be education in elementary economics, for the judgement of the British working man may always be trusted when he knows the facts".<sup>36</sup>

The kind of adult education which the government feared was that which emerged spontaneously amongst labour organizations. The

Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest reported that many trade unions had become through their educational work "centres of social and political activity more potent than perhaps any other of the social movements in the community".<sup>37</sup> Of the education purveyed by the radical Central Labour College the Commission noted that "it tends, though intensive, to be partial .... [The worker] studies along restricted lines .... Economics is often degraded into a gross materialistic conception of cause and effect, and the essential spirituality of education is neglected or forgotten."<sup>38</sup>

Government duly set out to nullify harmful, revolutionary teaching, realising that

The pity is that so little is done to counteract their [referring to 'hysterical' speakers like John McLean and Sylvia Pankhurst] revolutionary propaganda, which is circulated with so much industry.<sup>39</sup>

The aim was to oust the 'direct action' propagandists from labour organizations and bolster the traditional, 'reformist' leadership. It was noted that workers were better educated - or at least demanded more education - than ever before. It was assumed that they would assimilate 'correct' arguments if only the message could be shouted loudly enough. This was especially true with regard to the more intelligent and skilled workers who on the one hand might provide leadership in a revolutionary direction, but who on the other could aid stability if won over to the 'establishment' cause.<sup>40</sup> In government circles the idea emerged that more power had to be given to those at the hub of the



labour organization wheel than to those at the rim.<sup>41</sup>

Adult education was important to the scheme for containing social disaffection: it could act as a "valuable corrective to all methods of study of a purely partisan character undertaken for propagandist objects".<sup>42</sup> This was very much the objective of the Adult Education Committee which was almost entirely populated by adult education specialists who, moreover, displayed a close affinity to the reformist, social conscience, liberal, 'Balliol' tradition in adult education, outlined in Part 2.<sup>43</sup> The Committee represented a continuation of the ideological mainstream of adult education which had close links with the labour movement and which "occupied a position in the political spectrum which ranged between the social-democratic reformist centre and the non-Marxist ethical socialism of the labour left".<sup>44</sup> That is to say, the Committee espoused adult education as a means of liberation via reform, not revolution.

Accordingly, the Committee's final report - in the production of which reformists like Tawney had a leading role - was very much an advocacy of general/liberal studies as opposed to industrial/technical training. The form of education considered appropriate to the social crisis of the day was through the teaching of 'social' subjects - for example, civics, economics, politics, history, economics, etc. These enhanced 'good citizenship'. They were subjects which armed individuals with the power to 'understand' and 'accept' the problems of a rapidly changing post-war world.

Nowhere was this strategy required more than in the workplace. The government's Adult Education Committee believed the existence of a recent trend towards industrial concentration, mechanization, division of labour, semi-skilled work and monotonous processes had rendered the

worker "a mere cog in the machine". This, allied to the treatment of labour as a commodity to be bought and sold, had created "a revolt in the minds of a large section of the community".<sup>45</sup> Lip-service was thus paid to ideas of greater industrial participation. More realistically, adult education was proposed as a preventative remedy for unrest: as a means of developing the intelligence and character, and hence widening the perspective, of the citizen. In the long term, as a result, material wealth would also be enhanced, thereby aiding social stability further.

Liberal, reformist adult education was epitomised by the Workers Educational Association (WEA). It stood for the belief that social differences could be resolved by impartial study and discussion.<sup>46</sup> An analysis of wartime WEA pamphlets has revealed the organization's reformist stance in terms of adult education's social role. It rejected the notion of class struggle and called for a "fellowship of men and women drawn from every class".<sup>47</sup> It asserted that "since the character of British democracy depends on the collective wisdom of its adult members, no system of education can be complete that does not promote serious thought and discussion on the fundamental interests and problems of life and society".<sup>48</sup> The end of education was seen as primarily spiritual and communal, not self-interested and divisive; a plea was made to "deliver us from the incubus of materialism by which true life is surely being crushed out of the nation".<sup>49</sup> Education was not an economic tool to enhance commercialism and serve industrial efficiency; rather it should enable people to "see life steadily and see it whole".<sup>50</sup>

The WEA contributed much to the work of the Adult Education Committee whose final report mirrored the organization's work.<sup>51</sup> The type of education promoted by the WEA, despite the latter's



progressive objectives, fitted neatly with the government's prescription for social stability; even though at one stage in 1917 the cabinet discussed the danger of the WEA spreading revolutionary ideas to the workers, and the WEA's secretary was required to assure the King of the organization's loyalty.<sup>52</sup> Hence, government social policy was also complemented by the 1919 final report.<sup>53</sup> This is not surprising considering the type of written material which the Adult Education Committee consulted. For example, the Committee was in touch with the work of the Commission of enquiry into Industrial Unrest.<sup>54</sup> A pamphlet entitled The Education of the citizen was viewed.<sup>55</sup> A paper by a textile employer presented to the Committee and entitled Notes on industry and education identified "monotonous and degrading work" as the main cause of unrest and discontent.<sup>56</sup> The Committee also viewed a pamphlet on the importance of reading which argued that adult education had been a potent weapon in preventing revolution.<sup>57</sup> The same pamphlet was no less enthusiastic about the public library.<sup>58</sup>

The function of the public library coalesced with the adult education ideologies and objectives outlined above. A not insignificant part of the library's clientele was the type of skilled, intelligent worker who had the potential to assimilate knowledge for either 'establishment' or 'revolutionary' political activity. The aim was to refute dangerous and radical demagogy, and promote participation in 'establishment' politics. Hence, the Adult Education Committee advised that greater prominence be given to official publications in view of the "growing interest in political studies, and the extension of the franchise".<sup>59</sup> Further, commercial libraries were opened (these will be described in greater detail below), partly with the intention of reinforcing traditional attitudes to the efficacy of the commercial

system. In Chapter 8 it was noted that the wider dissemination of commercial information, partly through public libraries, was advocated by the Board of Trade in 1898 in the hope of 'educating' trade unions and workers out of their tendency towards disruptive industrial relations. A similar strategy was advised in 1919, with the public commercial library serving as a weapon for indoctrination.

The commercial library idea was praised by Christopher Addison in 1917 in his speech to the Library Association. He saw them as instruments of economic growth, though he could not pledge government money for their development. What is more important, they were seen by others as effective agencies for countering 'false' politics and economics. At the opening of Manchester's commercial library, for example, Admiral Sturdee was reported as follows:

The British people did not know enough about economics which, after all, were fairly simple. He thought if the people were told in a simple form the principles of finance they would back the country up in every possible way.<sup>60</sup>

A similar line was taken by Arthur Steel-Maitland (Parliamentary Secretary at the Department of Overseas Trade) at the opening of Wolverhampton's commercial library, when he called for a greater understanding of trade and commercial matters, both national and international:

Here we had friction of one kind and another in the industrial world - friction which, during the enthusiasm for war, we did not think would occur. This occurred ... through the two parties in industry not understanding the other man's point of view. In the next place there was no real understanding of the real economic conditions which ruled the situation. Owing to the war we had practically to give up our foreign trade, and now we had not only to recover it but to get more of it.<sup>61</sup>

The message here is clear: if only people were better educated commercially they would understand the unavoidable problems of capitalism and create less 'friction' as a result.



This function of the commercial library is an example of the cultural control role which government hoped the public library might fulfil. There is less evidence that it saw the institution as capable of a significant contribution to social stability via its role, purely and simply, as an economic regenerator. An economic role was not marked out because the problems of the day required radical and extensive solutions. The public library's contribution in this respect was marginal, or so government believed.

War had revealed underlying weaknesses in Britain's commercial position, particularly regarding the more modern branches of production such as electrical, chemical and chemico-metallurgical industries. At the start of the war Germany was found to have a virtual monopoly in products like tungsten, synthetic dyes and drugs, magnetos, and optical and chemical glass.<sup>62</sup> Such products required a high research input, and war naturally stimulated the need for increased activity in this respect. Yet government-sponsored research institutions were few.<sup>63</sup> The literature required to support research was also poorly organized. On the eve of the war scientific and technical literature (of a high level) was located in the Imperial Institute, National Physical Laboratory, Patent Office, Science Museum and in learned societies and institutions. Commercial information was available from the Board of Trade's Commercial Intelligence branch, the Foreign Office Consular Service and local Chambers of Commerce. Although public libraries also provided technical and commercial literature, their usefulness in this respect was limited.

Thus, there was no conceivable reason why during the war government should have suddenly decided - as many librarians hoped - that the public library was the natural repository for high-level technical and commercial literature and information. After all,

research was assuming a high profile. As H.A.L. Fisher wrote:

Research is becoming a great and potent feature  
in the organization of the state .... We are in  
the process of building up what will in time  
become one of the First Departments of Government.<sup>64</sup>

The department Fisher was referring to was the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), which was created during the war with £1 million in grants at its disposal. It was intended that the DSIR should sponsor voluntarily established research associations organized on an industry-by-industry basis. The idea was for co-operative research in place of inadequate in-house research facilities. Each association, moreover, would organize its own repository.<sup>65</sup>

The DSIR's aim was to promote research specifically for its application to industry. Sector research associations were deemed appropriate because of the "comparative infertility of research when dissociated from large scale production".<sup>66</sup> As such, research facilities, including libraries, were to be arranged by the research associations themselves. The associations were permitted to "establish, form and maintain museums, collections, libraries and collections of literature, statistics and information relating to the said trade or industry, or to matters of interest to the members thereof".<sup>67</sup> By the end of the war few associations - and hence libraries - had been established, but the numbers increased rapidly thereafter.<sup>68</sup>

Government support for high level research fits with the status of technical education outlined in chapter 8. Britain's deficiency in higher technical education and research was gaining greater recognition than the need for improved low-level technical instruction. Attitudes to the latter remained suspicious, as one commercial journal asserted:



Gallipoli is written all over the history of the educational movement in this country, and especially commercial and technical education. Half-heartedness and indecision, the absence of a determination to do the thing properly because of a scepticism as to its being really worthwhile.<sup>69</sup>

Despite enthusiasm for 'continuing' education at the end of the war government appeared uninterested in radically promoting general technical education. Far more importance was attached to general education than to 'bread and butter' studies. Hence the enthusiasm for liberal adult education. Even when the need for technical education was invoked it could not divorce itself from non-vocational studies. The Adult Education Committee's final report advocated that technical education should include:

... studies which will enable the student to relate his own occupation to the industry of which it is a part, to appreciate the place of that industry in the economic life of the nation and the world, and to interpret the economic life of the community in terms of social values, i.e. of economic history, economics and sociology.<sup>70</sup>

It was as if technical education should always be tagged on to the end of the general curriculum; it should not be separate from and thus challenge the latter.

Given the above attitudes to technical education it is perhaps wasteful to seek for any dynamic economic or technical education role for the public library; whilst the importance of dovetailing research (and its library concomitants) with the realities of production in research associations excluded the public library from any comprehensive role as a high level technical and commercial resource.<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that government perceived no specific economic role whatsoever for the public library; it might merely have been silent on the issue, reserving its support for prestigious, high level research initiatives.

## Notes and References to Chapter 13

1. Address by Christopher Addison, Minister of Reconstruction, to the annual meeting of the Library Association, Library Association Record, 19 (L917), p. 431.
2. John Ballinger, librarian of the National Library of Wales, made special representations in November 1919 to Herbert Lewis, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education and close friend of Lloyd George, whose sanction for the bill was required. Ballinger asked that the abolition clause be included; J.G. Olle, Earnest Savage: librarian extraordinary (1977), p. 92. At the bill's second reading Lewis spoke of having received "most urgent representations, by deputations and otherwise, from all parts of the country, from Library Authorities". Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 122, Col. 369 (1919). The 1919 Act had been agitated for by London librarians led by George Roebuck; E.A. Savage, 'George Roebuck and the rate limit', Library World, 55 (1954), pp. 167-171. A deputation of London librarians saw H.A.L. Fisher as early as April 1919 to ask for rate limit abolition. Written pleas were sent to the Prime Minister and the Local Government Minister; J. Minto, A History of the public library movement (1932), p. 136. The events of 1919 are also described by W.A. Munford, A History of the Library Association 1877-1977 (1977), p. 141.
3. A. Ellis, Public libraries and the First World War (1975), p. 14.
4. Yorkshire Post (9 October 1920).
5. Leamington Spa Public Library, Annual Report (covering 1918-1920), p. 5.
6. Cabinet Home Affairs Committee, Minutes (25 November 1919), Public Records Office, CAB 26/2.
7. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Libraries Sub-Committee, Memo from Mr. Ball (Local Government Board) (28 September 1916), Public Records Office, RECO 1/677.
8. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 122, in particular cols. 1771-1772, 1775 and 1778-1779 (1919). One member said (col. 1782): "Go where you will in this country you hear bitter complaints of the continually increasing rates. They are a tremendous burden, especially upon the middle class, the people with fixed incomes and diminishing incomes."
9. Jast's address to the Library Association annual meeting 1917, quoted in L.S. Jast, Libraries and living (1932), p. 3.
10. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report on libraries and museums, Cmd. 9237 (1919).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 3.



12. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Libraries Sub-Committee, Minutes (18 September 1918), Public Records Office, RECO 1/677. The view was expressed "that the abolition of the rate limit would be sufficient for library needs without resort to state aid".
13. E.J. Carnell, County libraries (1938), p. 31.
14. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 8.
15. Chapter 6 of G.S. Jones, Outcast London (Oxford, 1971), shows that the desire to rejuvenate rural life for urban stability had a long tradition, and was thus not invented during the First World War.
16. Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Final report on the settlement or employment on the land ... of discharged soldiers and sailors, Cmd. 8182 (1916), p. 6.
17. Ministry of Reconstruction, Report on the work of the ministry for the period ending 31 December 1918, Cmd. 9213 (1919), p. 25. Also, Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, First interim report on industrial and social conditions in relation to adult education, Cmd. 9107 (1918), p. 26. explained that good village libraries would aid social and educational development; men returning from the war would have tasted a wider world and would consequently demand more education.
18. Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Final report, op. cit., p. 20. This report was noted in G.T. Shaw, 'The Place of the public library in the government scheme of state settlements', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 93.
19. Shaw, op. cit., p. 94. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust had similar hopes for rural libraries - that such libraries would be able to "furnish more suitable means of distributing books on agriculture, horticulture, arboriculture and the like"; Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, Libraries Sub-Committee, Minutes (20 March 1919).
20. President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Memo on financial requirements for agricultural education (10 December 1918), Public Records Office, CAB 24/71, GT 6453. This document asserted that: "Agricultural Education and Research have hitherto notoriously been starved in this country".
21. Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of 31 December 1918, op. cit., p. 25.
22. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, First interim report, op. cit., pp. 24-26. It must be remembered, however, that county library development was to be a slow process.
23. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 8.

24. Letter from W.C.B. Sayers to Arthur Greenwood (Committee Secretary), Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Libraries Sub-Committee, Minutes (7 September 1918), Public Records Office, RECO 1/677.
25. Darlington Public Library's reference and ladies departments were taken over to house a Food Control Office; and the librarian became Food Controller for the area. J.V. Redhead, Darlington public library (Darlington, 1985), p. 29.
26. For over three years from 1916 Islington North branch served as an annexe to the nearby Great Northern Central Hospital. E.A. Willats, A History of Islington public libraries, Islington Local Studies.
27. The Ministry of Food contacted the Library Association to suggest that it used its influence in this direction. Library Association Council, Minutes (14 December 1917).
28. A. Ellis, The Development of public libraries in England during the First World War (unpublished Ph.D., CNA, 1974), p. 36.
29. Ibid., p. 127.
30. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Final Report, Cmd. 321, (1919), p. 168.
31. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 104, Col. 399 (1918).
32. G. Jones, Political and social factors in the advocacy of 'free' libraries in the United Kingdom 1801-1922 (unpublished Ph.D., University of Strathclyde, 1971), p. 665.
33. General Richardson, chief of the New Zealand expeditionary force in the United Kingdom, called for compulsory classes for troops in economics and civics, because it would make men "better qualified to sift the grain from the chaff when listening to revolutionary speakers". R. Boshier, 'John Condliffe confronts Captain Kirk: a New Zealand perspective on mandatory adult education during World War One', Studies in Adult Education, 14 (September 1982), p. 18.
34. R.G. Barnes (Col. Lord Gorrel), Education and the army (Oxford, 1921), p. 46.
35. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Second interim report on education in the army, Cmd. 9229 (1918), p. 5.
36. Home Office, Directorate of Intelligence, Report on revolutionary organizations in the U.K. (24 July 1919), Public Records Office, CAB 24/84, GT 7790. This belief was echoed in many more of the Directorate's Reports, for example: The Progress of Bolshevism in Europe (28 January 1919), CAB 24/75, GT 6857; Fortnightly report on revolutionary organizations in the U.K. and morale abroad (16 March 1919), CAB 24/76, GT 6976; Report on revolutionary organizations in the U.K. (20 November 1919), CAB 24/93, CP 168; A Survey of revolutionary feeling in the year 1919: special report number 13 (1920), CAB 24/96, CP 462; Report on



- revolutionary organizations in the U.K. (20 January 1920), CAB 24/96, CP 491; *ibid.* (13 January 1920), CAB 24/118, CP 2455.
37. Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest (Division 7), Report of the Commissioners for Wales, including Monmouthshire, Cmd. 8668 (1917), p. 17.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
  39. Home Office, Directorate of Intelligence, *The Progress of Bolshevism in Europe*, *op. cit.*
  40. See chapter 2 of J.E. Cronin, Labour and society in Britain 1918-1979 (1984).
  41. Bonar Law said in February 1919 that "trade union organization was the only thing between us and anarchy". C. Rosenberg, Britain on the brink of revolution: 1919 (1987), p. 68.
  42. Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
  43. F.J. Taylor, 'The Making of the 1919 Report', Studies in Adult Education, 8:2 (1976). The chairman of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction was A.L. Smith who was Master of Balliol, 1916-1924.
  44. R. Fieldhouse, 'Conformity and contradiction in English responsible body education 1925-1950', Studies in the Education of Adults, 17:2 (1985), p. 121.
  45. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, First interim report, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14 and 19-20.
  46. T. Kelly, A History of adult education in Great Britain from the middle ages to the twentieth century (Liverpool, 1970), p. 258.
  47. W. Temple, Tradition, policy and economy in English education (1915), p. 9.
  48. Workers Educational Association (1916), p. 11.
  49. J.C. Powell, Education: scope and meaning (1919), p. 11.
  50. J.M. Mactarish, What labour wants from education (1916), p. 8. Other WEA pamphlets of the time espoused similar ideas, for example: J.M. Mactavish, Education in relation to labour and industry (1919); W. Temple, Presidential address to the annual convention of the WEA (1919).
  51. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
  52. M. Cole (ed.), Beatrice Webb Diaries, Vol. 6 (1912-1924), p. 97.
  53. T. Kelly, 'Two reports: 1919 and 1973', Studies in Adult Education, 5:2 (1973). Kelly sees the 1919 report as anti-demagogic and pro-citizenship.

54. A memo on the work of the Commission appears amongst the records of the Adult Education Committee; Public Records Office, RECO 1/900, item AE40.
55. Reprinted from The Round Table (June 1917), Public Records Office, RECO 1/900, item AE41.
56. The author was J. Morton, Public Records Office, RECO 1/900, item AE44.
57. G. Radford, The Faculty of reading (1910), p. 17, Public Records Office, RECO 1/901, item AE48.
58. Ibid., p. 47.
59. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 15.
60. Manchester Evening Chronicle (23 October 1919).
61. Wolverhampton Express and Star (28 June 1919).
62. Final report of the committee on commercial and industrial policy after the war, Cmd. 9035 (1918), p. 21.
63. P. Alter, 'Science and the Anglo-German antagonism', in T.R. Gourvish and A. O'Day, Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900 (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 276-277.
64. Memo on the proposed extension of the function of the Committee of the Privy Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (30 October 1918), Public Records Office, CAB 24/68, GT 6179.
65. The DSIR arose out of a 1913 cabinet committee which discussed a Board of Education proposal for a national system of education. In 1914 the Board advised that at the top of this system a state sponsored scheme of research should operate; Beatrice Webb interviewing Frank Heath, Secretary of the DSIR (18 January 1918), Reconstruction Papers, Vol. 4 (1916-1918), items B272-B276, London School of Economics, Passfield Collection 13. The DSIR's funding was only the second instance of government aid for scientific research, the first being the £1000 given to the Royal Society in 1850; M.R. Marshall, The History of industrial libraries in Britain to 1960 (Fellowship of the Library Association thesis, 1969), p. 147.
66. Letter to Beatrice Webb from an Admiralty official (October 1917), Reconstruction Papers, op. cit., item 258-259.
67. Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Draft memo of association (March 1917), Public Records Office, DSIR 16.2.
68. For example, in October 1918 negotiations were under way for establishing research associations in: machine tools; Scottish marine engineering; shipbuilding; the metallurgical industry; the rubber industry; the motor and allied trades; and the boot



and shoe industry; Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Minutes, 30 October 1918, Public Records Office, DSIR 1.2. The first research association was established in 1916, but just 24 were established, 1918-1923, only one of which could support itself without a government grant; D.C. Mowery, 'Industrial research 1900-1950', in B. Elbaum and W. Lazonick (eds.), The Decline of the British economy (Oxford, 1986), p. 206. Support for associations varied from one industry to the next. In scientific instruments membership was nearly 100 per cent. But in cotton and footwear manufacturing membership was 60 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively. This showed support for scientific research was still patchy - a fact reiterated by the Balfour Committee (on trade and industry) in 1927; S.F. Cotgrove, Technical education and social change (1958).

69. Commercial Education (March 1916).
70. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Final report, op. cit., pp. 174-175.
71. The public library was disregarded as a main repository, not just for technical but for commercial material also. The idea that they be official branches of the Commercial Intelligence Department was rejected, though they were to receive, freely, the Department's publications. Library Association Executive Committee, Minutes (4 January 1918).

## Chapter Fourteen

### LIBRARY ESTABLISHMENT

One group which did see a vibrant economic role for the public library was librarians. They believed they had little support from government. "Either Government was indifferent to them [public libraries] or it was hostile," said Stanley Jast.<sup>1</sup> The previous chapter shows Jast's comment to be an exaggeration. Nonetheless, many librarians considered that they were fighting alone. This makes the library establishment's efforts to hew an economic and scientific position all the more remarkable.

In Part 2 it was shown that some librarians had long believed that economic progress could be accelerated by the diffusion of knowledge via the public library. This belief was entrenched by the war which created the need for advances in industry and science. As scientists and technicians began to recognize the value of libraries and bibliography to research, librarians responded. In 1915, for instance, Ernest Savage initiated a programme of commercial and technical book acquisition at Coventry, and by 1917 was able to tell his committee that a number of industrial bibliographies (for example, one on aeronautics) of interest to local firms had been produced and distributed, whilst "no journal of importance in motoring engineering and works' chemistry" was not supplied.<sup>2</sup> A battle for post-war international commercial expansion was also recognized. The librarian W.E. Doubleday thus wrote:

Currently with this commercial expansion, one may look for progress in home manufactures; new ideas, new inventions will be brought forward and it will require an alert and mentally well-fed people to take advantage of these fleeting opportunities. What better than a public library can facilitate this work, and feed commercial and general institutes?<sup>3</sup>



Librarians endeavoured to satisfy wartime demands of science, industry and commerce by establishing separate technical and commercial sections/libraries within their institutions. The Library Association Record described the importance of such ventures:

Arsenals of scientific and technical information will become, nay have become, as necessary as arsenals of war-like materials, and if steps are not taken promptly we shall be as little prepared for peace as we were for war.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, technical and commercial library provision was the most significant wartime public library achievement. The extent of activity is obvious from the list in Table 1 of initiatives during the period 1915-20. The list is split into three categories corresponding to descriptions made at the time, though in reality the distinction between a commercial and a technical item might be marginal or non-existent. The list does not include collections, such as that at Wigan on mining technology, formed before 1914.

It appears, therefore, that the advice of the Library Association was being taken; that "public libraries must probably devote a larger proportion of their resources to work more directly useful to industry and commerce".<sup>5</sup> Librarians developed ambitious plans in this regard; though it is interesting to note that questions on science and technical literature do not appear on Library Association exam papers until after a new syllabus of 1950. A plea was made for government assistance in establishing a large central repository of technical literature into which public libraries could tap.<sup>6</sup> It was also envisaged that public commercial libraries in the major industrial centres would act as agencies of the Board of Trades' Commercial Intelligence Department. Bradford initiated its commercial library partly on the basis that this would be the case.<sup>7</sup> Stanley Jast waxed

TABLE 1. Technical and commercial collections and separate libraries  
established by public library authorities 1915-20

Combined Commercial and Technical

Sheffield 1916 (initially a collection; separate library 1920)

Lincoln 1917

Leeds 1918

Leicester 1919

Middlesborough 1919

Bath 1920

Commercial

Coventry 1915 (initially a collection; technical library status 1917)

Northampton 1916

Richmond-on-Thames 1916

Glasgow 1916

Liverpool 1917

Bradford 1918

Derby 1918

Wolverhampton 1919

Birmingham 1919

Manchester 1919

Dundee 1919

Bristol 1920

Newcastle 1920

Technical

Birmingham 1915 (separate patents collection)

Darlington 1918

Nottingham 1920



lyrically on the prospect of a system comprising government, large town and branch commercial libraries:

... the relation of the Board of Trade library to the provincial libraries would be that of the brain to the great nervous plexuses, and the smaller collections would be the knots or ganglia, the whole forming the Commercial Intelligence Department of the British nation.<sup>8</sup>

For such a system to work, said Jast, public commercial (and technical) libraries required government grants.<sup>9</sup> But neither the system nor grants were forthcoming. Librarians had to be satisfied instead with making a contribution to technical and commercial knowledge dissemination from the library system's own resources.

The fact that the library establishment committed itself to such a contribution at a time of severe financial strain illustrates the importance which it attached to fostering an economic role for the public library. Librarians were certainly caught up in the euphoria of reconstruction: they were genuinely impressed by the economic problems of the day and optimistically devised ways in which libraries could help solve them.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they believed an economically active public library could make a social contribution. It could help give a much-needed psychological boost to a national self-confidence buffeted by pre-war European - particularly German - material and military progress. Time and again librarians asserted that their technical and commercial libraries had evolved primarily from patriotic motives. As the Patent Office librarian, E. Wyndham Hulme, stated: "I claim for our programme of technical libraries that it forms part and parcel of a series of measures which are essential to the security of the state in time of war, and to its prosperity as an industrial nation in those of peace."<sup>11</sup> The deputy chairman of Manchester's committee displayed equal national pride in his support of technical education:

The day has gone by when this country can afford to rely upon its traditional reputation for supremacy in the markets of the world .... The full resources of science must be utilized, the inventive genius of our practical craftsmen encouraged and fostered, and the mechanical improvements adopted without delay.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the public library could act as a 'social healer' by working for economic progress advantageous to all. Communal material gain, it was felt, would lessen the social tensions which economic uncertainty had fostered. In the words of one supporter of commercial libraries:

We are in a stage of affairs, both national and commercial, as well as political and industrial, which may be called practically a revolution, a revolution of all our preconceived notions. The great thing we have to face is not the development of individual character as displayed in connection with our commercial enterprises, but the problem of relations between employer and employed .... The fact is you cannot benefit any section of a community [i.e. through commercial library provision] without benefiting the whole of it .... We must get rid of industrial disputes.<sup>13</sup>

Though librarians believed economic regeneration could aid social stability they were more convinced of the public libraries' broader cultural function in this respect. Despite being assigned a material, tangible role by librarians, the public library's 'spiritual' nature was not diminished. In fact, war served to promote it, as the librarian F.G. Kenyon wrote:

The cause for which we are fighting is the cause of civilization, of the liberty and moral well-being of the people of Europe; and our confidence in our ultimate victory arises out of our belief that spiritual things must eventually triumph over material. Every influence that reinforces our spiritual nature makes us stronger for the struggle in which we are engaged, and the Public Library, whether as the source of knowledge or as a reservoir of mental refreshment and stimulus, is a spiritual influence of the first order.<sup>14</sup>



The gravity of war itself was believed to have a beneficial effect on the nature of public library reading. Books on the causes, course and consequences of the conflict flooded into libraries, with the result that there was "no department of activity or thought that has not been stirred by the upheaval".<sup>15</sup> It was hoped that the war would enrich the library's literature and have "a purifying effect on fiction".<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately the war did produce a minor 'purifying' effect, but any claimed achievement in this regard should be set against the retrogressive propagandist role which the library assumed. Leamington Spa's committee, for example, congratulated itself for providing "suitable works exposing and denouncing German aims and methods, and stimulating British ideals and patriotism".<sup>17</sup> German intellectual development, praised before the war, was now attacked as lacking "the essential elements of freedom and morality".<sup>18</sup> Articles appeared in local newspapers proudly advertising the acquisition of new titles like 'The Germans in Africa', which was said to trace the efforts of Germany to secure an African Empire through intrigue and trickery.<sup>19</sup> Newspapers critical of the war's prosecution were occasionally withdrawn.<sup>20</sup> In addition, literary propaganda and censorship was backed by lectures often of a vehement anti-German nature.<sup>21</sup>

But it was not simply by a crude castigation of the enemy that the war effort was intensified. In keeping with the optimism of reconstruction the public library aimed to boost morale. As food for the mind its literature was presented as a "source of strength" and a "spring of energy".<sup>22</sup> F.G. Kenyon summarised this optimistic spirit:

We shall fight better and endure hardships better  
if our minds are trained and our spirits refreshed;  
and both for knowledge and for imaginative  
literature we must come to the library. Therefore,  
in cherishing our libraries we are increasing the

fighting strength of our nation and making it worthy of victory in this, its hour of trial.<sup>23</sup>

Librarians shared the view that the war was a fight for democracy and liberty against autocracy and authoritarianism. As an avowedly democratic institution the public library symbolized this cause, and its traditional function of offering a free and open assessment of differing political creeds was invoked. Stanley Jast argued that in Germany public libraries indoctrinated, but here they served to "intellectually sanitize" the people:

If the public library serves out what some regard as intellectual poison with one hand, it serves its antidote with the other, and when all sides obtain a hearing the natural predilections and cleavages in the minds of the hearers prevents any overmastering ascendancy of any one exponent or school.<sup>24</sup>

However, the war was being fought not just for democracy but for greater democracy. It was accepted that the war would throw up new social problems. Thus, in soliciting support for the public library, Winchester's librarian spoke of the duty:

... to prepare for the task of reconstruction that would be necessary after the war by reading about such important social questions as unemployment and wages, woman suffrage, the relations between capital and labour, technical education, and many other similar subjects; whilst a general study of history would be an excellent topic now.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, the public library could help mould an educated and wise electorate which, in Jast's words, "must be called upon to pronounce on so many subjects of difficulty, and whose decisions must affect not only this nation but the world."<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, to see the Adult Education Committee's report on libraries calling for the free distribution of government publications to public libraries to complement a widening franchise.<sup>27</sup> It was hoped the



library's efforts in the area of expanding democracy would promote a feeling of participation - an "enlightened sense of a real stake in the country" - as opposed to alienation.<sup>28</sup>

But the public library's contribution to stability went beyond an "education for democracy" syndrome. A more positive policy was identified: one which directly confronted socially disruptive influences. As a speaker to the Library Association explained:

There never was a time ... when the thoughts of their people needed more to be directed in the right course. In regard to their social, industrial, and political matters he did not know that they had the books in their own hands, but he believed there was a great amount of influence which they could use if their libraries were furnished with such literature, and the thoughts of their people could be directed in the right course.<sup>29</sup>

Purveying the 'right' reading would devalue the arguments of groups seeking radical change and secure British democracy in its traditional, conservative pattern. This the public library tried to do through, amongst other means, its alliance with the National Home Reading Union:

The courses of reading pursued at the suggestion, and with the help of the Union, which offer a large choice to readers of all ages, tastes, and acquirements, have been found, in time of war, a steadying, refreshing, and heightening influence. Systematic reading has proved itself a powerful antidote to the spirit of unrest, and an aid towards carrying on national service cheerfully, steadily and effectively .... It claims to be helping in no small measure to maintain in the present, and secure for the future, a standard of high thought, intelligent interest, and true patriotism.<sup>30</sup>

Arising out of the public library's enhanced economic and cultural roles a greater emphasis on serious reading became evident. This induced the library establishment to believe it was now at the forefront of education, particularly for adults. It was proclaimed that: "The precise educational value of public libraries has immensely

developed of recent years, and their scope should be greater than ever in this direction in the reconstruction after the war."<sup>31</sup> Shortly after the war the Mitchell report on public libraries stressed the 'external' and adult education roles which the institution, it believed, should fulfil.<sup>32</sup> It was indeed being felt that "a public library should be primarily an educator, a widener of the mind, a source of information, and a handmaid to progress".<sup>33</sup>

Librarians certainly felt that war had helped boost the image of the library. Whether they were justified in this belief is not at issue. What is important is that they recognized an opportunity during the war to advance their professional status. At the start of the war the public notion persisted that the librarian was a mere handler of books. Even in 1917 it was said:

The term 'librarian' is lightly used, and often is applied to an official who is placed in charge of a collection of books, with very meagre knowledge of their contents and still less knowledge of the profession to which he purports to belong.<sup>34</sup>

It was the premium on knowledge for scientific and industrial development which gave wartime librarianship its chance for advance.

"It is hard to exaggerate", wrote F.G. Kenyon:

the extent to which the welfare of the nation depends on the prosperity and development of our Public Libraries. The great need of the country is knowledge and respect for knowledge. Knowledge, in any scientific sense of the term, is impossible without books.<sup>35</sup>

Librarians, as indicated above, set out to increase the supply of 'practical' literature. In opening technical and commercial libraries they hoped to forge stronger links with business. This would result in greater prominence and prestige, as explained by Jast after his retirement:



... the fact that he [the businessman] can find the information quickly makes him a friend of the library, and adds to the strength of that public opinion on which the success of the library in other and more vital directions depends.<sup>36</sup>

Business libraries were also expensive. It has been suggested that they were established as a lever to win an abolition of the 1d rate restriction, thereby releasing funds for increased salaries.<sup>37</sup> It is also evident that services to business, as well as to other 'serious' readers, would require better trained and, hence, higher status staff.<sup>38</sup> This was certainly realized in relation to central government's information services:

Intelligence departments must not be mere libraries and collections of statistics [which practical civil servants were good at accumulating]. What is wanted is the man who is a live wire, who concentrates upon the things that matter, and has a true expertise.<sup>39</sup>

At a time of downward pressure on salaries and severe cuts in services the hope of a future promotion to the status of 'expert', with all the material rewards which accompanied it, must have given a significant boost to the profession's morale. However, given the lamentable standards of professional librarianship it is difficult, retrospectively, to speak seriously about the notion of 'expert' status, despite the plans laid for a full-time library school at University College, which began 1919.<sup>40</sup>

It has recently been argued that wartime librarians displayed no such positive attitudes.<sup>41</sup> This is not the place to engage in a lengthy denial of accusations of apathy: suffice it to say that the catalogue of efforts by the wartime profession is extensive.<sup>42</sup> It would be naive to deny that this high level of professional activity was aimed, in some degree, at improving the status and rewards of librarianship. However, it must be stressed that attempts to establish

a more dynamic role for public libraries - in adult education, business provision etc. - were also manifestations of the way library professionals intersected with established ideologies and diverged from efforts to force radical change in society.



## Notes and References to Chapter 14

1. Yorkshire Post (29 May 1919). Jast speaking at the annual meeting of the LA North Central Branch.
2. J. Olle, Ernest A. Savage: librarian extraordinaire (1977).
3. W.E. Doubleday, 'Symposium on public libraries after the war', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 115.
4. Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 110.
5. Library Association, Interim report of the council on the provision of technical and commercial libraries (Aberdeen, 1917), p. 3.
6. Ibid., p. 4. The plan for a central technical library was to be developed along the lines of the Central Library for Students, set up in 1916 as a wing of the WEA; S.P. Filon, The National Central Library (1977), p. 1. The function of this library was to act as "a national reserve for the most expensive works on serious subjects which are required by a comparatively small number of readers"; H. Guppy, Seventy-five years: presidential address (to the Library Association) (1926).
7. The committee noted that Board of Trade officials had "promised their active support in carrying out the scheme"; Bradford Libraries, Art Gallery and Museums Committee, Minutes (21 May 1917).
8. L.S. Jast, The organization of British trade (Manchester, 1917), p. 8.
9. Ibid., p. 8.
10. Dan Rider, a book supplier to public libraries and former librarian, recalled in his memoirs the sudden impact which war made. He wrote that "all the security upon which our individual worlds were built was undermined, and the calculations upon which business promises had been made were set at nought by the sudden change from peace to war"; D. Rider, Ten years' adventure (1927), p. 1.
11. E.W. Hulme, 'Technical libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 487.
12. T.C. Abbot, 'Commercial libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 475.
13. Ibid. Words of Alderman H. Plummer in discussion following Abbott's paper.
14. Letter of F.G. Kenyon (Principal Librarian at the British Museum) to G.A. Stephen (Norwich librarian), (11 March 1917); Norwich Public Library, public library history ephemera collection.

15. Times Literary Supplement (29 July 1915), reporting on the Library Association Conference, which included an exhibition of books, pamphlets, maps and prints connected with the war. Such exhibitions were also mounted by public libraries - in Croydon, for example; The Readers' Index: the bi-monthly magazine of the Croydon Public Libraries (Vol. for 1915), p. 1.
16. 'After the war', newscutting, source unknown (c. 1916), Leamington Spa Public Library Cuttings, Vol. 1.
17. Leamington Courier (24 September 1915).
18. Pall Mall Gazette (4 October 1917). Report of the presidential address by J.Y.W. MacAlister to the LA Conference.
19. Borough of Woolwich Pioneer (23 July 1915). The author was P. Evans Lewin.
20. This occurred at Bermondsey; Southwark Public Library cuttings, ref. PC021/BER (20 July 1915). Attacks on Lord Kitchener in the Times and the Daily Mail led the Bradford committee to consider withdrawing the papers; Bradford Public Library Committee, Notes 1913-1946 (31 May 1915), p. 6.
21. One example being an Oldham Public Library lecture, 'The Great War', which argued that the war was being fought in honour of the British Empire, which was synonymous with civilization, and opposed the enslavement of smaller nations by German militarism; Oldham Chronicle (19 October 1914).
22. Bournemouth Guardian (20 May 1916).
23. Letter from Kenyon to Stephen, op. cit.
24. Croydon Guardian (3 April 1915).
25. Hampshire Chronicle (11 December 1915).
26. R.D. MacLeod, 'A Wartime celebration: Mr. Jast at Norwich', Library World, 19 (April 1917), p. 258.
27. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report: libraries and museums, Cmd. 9237 (1919), p. 15.
28. A.H. Jenn, 'Public libraries after the war: the need for immediate preparation', Library World, 19 (March 1917), p. 228.
29. Harrogate Advertiser (15 May 1920). Words of the mayor of Harrogate.
30. Letter dated 2 September 1917 from the National Home Reading Union to the Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 424.
31. 'Current view: cinema and libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 41.



32. J.M. Mitchell, The Public library system of Great Britain and Ireland 1921-3 (1924), p. 47.
33. Yorkshire Evening Post (29 May 1922), in praising a reduction in fiction issues.
34. Leamington Courier (9 March 1917).
35. Letter from Kenyon to Stephen, op. cit.
36. Quoted in W.G. Fry and W.A. Munford, Louis Stanley Jast: a biographical sketch (1966), p. 43.
37. A. Ellis, Public libraries and the First World War (1975), p. 15.
38. 'Revised report on training in librarianship, Library Association Council, Minutes (21 March 1919). H.V. Hopwood, 'The Educational standards of librarianship in relation to technology', Library Association Special Committee on Technical and Commercial Libraries, Minutes (26 April 1917).
39. Letter from H. Higgs to Beatrice Webb, Reconstruction Papers, Vol. 4 (1916-1918), item B279; London School of Economics, Passfield Collection 13.
40. 'Director's report on the School of Librarianship, 1919-1920', University College, London, Annual report (1920-1921). Only 38 full-time students (compared with 61 part-time) enrolled in the school when it commenced lectures in October 1919.
41. D.F. Ring, 'Some speculations on why the British library profession didn't go to war', Journal of Library History, 22:3 (1987). Also, see Sturges' reply in the same issue.
42. The achievements and efforts of wartime librarians were numerous and strenuous. A few are listed here. a) Separate commercial and technical libraries were a radical departure. Librarians went into the business and science communities to enlist support. b) The penny rate restriction was abolished, county libraries were established. c) The Library Association was highly active in establishing committees investigating post-war policy: for example, in areas such as training, business provision and outreach. Plans were ambitious. The Association hoped its public library strategy would "embrace and extend all the present spheres of its activities, educational and recreative, and in addition, making it [the public library] the centre of commercial and technical activities; of scientific and industrial research, public information, public records, local antiquarian and other like interests of the district in which it is placed"; H. Johnes, 'Draft statement on library policy', Library Association Library Policy Sub-Committee, Minutes (14 September 1917). d) Links with government were forged: the Minister of Reconstruction addressed the Library Association; considerable pressure was exerted on government to win legislation in 1919. e) There was considerable debate - at the Library Association's 1917 conference, for example - as to future development. f) Librarians were included in the work of the Adult

Education Committee: Public Records Office, RECO1/901, item AE49. They also pushed for a separate report on libraries; see letter from W.C.B. Sayers to Arthur Greenwood (7 September 1918); Public Records Office, RECO 1/677. Greenwood serviced the Adult Education Committee's Libraries Sub-Committee. g) The Library Association fought strongly against education authority control of libraries, as proposed by the WEA and in the Adult Education Committee's Third interim report on public libraries, op. cit. h) A vehement campaign was mounted against the Third interim report, op. cit., because of its advocacy of DSIR research association libraries, and its lack of recognition of public libraries as repositories for high grade technical/commercial information and literature.



## Chapter Fifteen

### BUSINESS

Wartime business gave considerable priority to the economic role of the public library over other aspects of provision, even though ideas linking improved efficiency with information and knowledge dispensed through the library were not widely acknowledged by industry and commerce. In the United States business was more likely to view library-generated information and knowledge as "a wonderful medium for the promotion of increased efficiency" and "the great essential to discovery", on a par with the laboratory.<sup>1</sup> In this country, although some businessmen and a few librarians were aware of advances made across the Atlantic, pre-First World War enterprises largely eschewed the assembly of information and research collections. These were to be found in only a few large firms.<sup>2</sup> In small firms the absence was virtually complete.<sup>3</sup> Collections were uncommon for reasons of either cost, or ignorance of potential benefits, or both. In 1920 the Manchester Guardian stated: "Not every firm can afford a large office library; very few firms can afford to keep a clippings cabinet of matters only indirectly related to their own business."<sup>4</sup> The librarian G.A. Stephen made a similar reference to expenditure when he wrote that "only the large companies with extensive works, and employing many hands, can afford an adequate works library under the control of a trained librarian."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the factor of cost, particularly in regard to what were expensive literary items, was a main reason why firms did not create their own specialist reference libraries or information bureaux. Lack of recognition of potential benefit, an important factor before, became

much less so after 1914 when greater emphasis was placed on research into industrial processes and marketing.

Yet business' enthusiasm for research in the war has been questioned.<sup>6</sup> The 1914-18 period has been seen as one of disadvantage for the long-term performance of the British economy, exacerbating as it did longer-term problems such as overcommitment to technically backward staple industries exporting to low income countries - the overcommitment being at the expense of investment in production for newer, higher-yield, science-based goods. This unfavourable assessment has tended to obscure the fact that a wartime profit bonanza was experienced across a wide range of industries (including the staples), by firms large and small. Many overseas markets were lost, but were compensated for by buoyant war needs. Notwithstanding the not insignificant fear of increased post-war foreign competition (particularly German), British businessmen prepared for peace "in a decidedly bullish mood".<sup>7</sup> It is argued that the period should be seen, commercially at any rate, less as one of shock and despair than one marked by an optimistic assessment of future demand leading to heavy investment, which the banks helped fund with equal confidence.

In financial terms, therefore, the war provided an ideal opportunity for firms (particularly in the staple industries) to innovate. This did not happen: for although investment was high it was directed towards increasing production along existing lines via amalgamation (concentration) and acquisition (simple expansion of capacity).

The need to 'modernize' was not entertained for a number of reasons. Big profits were, after all, being made on the basis of existing techniques and processes. Also, leading competitors such as Germany and the USA were not viewed as more technically efficient: they



simply enjoyed special advantages, chiefly protection, but also extensive public and private financial backing. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising little attention was given to technical and, even less, commercial research. Regarding the latter, having opted for concentration and monopolistic organization, a premium was placed on the development of marketing techniques; this because in highly competitive conditions these techniques are developed more naturally. Marketing is distinct from traditional selling in that it is concerned with "deciding market objectives, and then integrating research, production, advertising, selling and distribution into a policy and programme designed to secure these objectives".<sup>8</sup> It is argued that firms displayed inertia in understanding the need for such sophisticated techniques. In short, therefore, the war can be seen to have produced little change in business attitudes.<sup>9</sup> It follows that if there was little change in attitudes to technical and commercial research then the libraries and information bureaux required to facilitate it were eschewed also.

However, an investigation of business library provision appears to contradict, to an extent, the image of business as a research desert. Regarding marketing, for example - that is to say, one of the fields singled out as being inadequately explored - the technical librarian at the Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Co. explained shortly after the war that "in the past potential markets have only been supplied in a vague and general way", but now it was the custom to assess demand and fashion selling and plant organization accordingly.<sup>10</sup> In assisting this sophisticated strategy the Metropolitan-Vickers library was playing a full part.

Too little weight given to the fear of foreign competition is one

possible explanation why innovation and research has been underestimated. In the war industry and commerce began to anticipate the cold international economic climate which was to come. This led some to hold a pessimistic view of future economic events. As one industrial commentator asserted in 1915: "With regard to industry as a whole, it is apprehended by some people that the resumption of the normal will only be affected after a terrible depression and much unemployment".<sup>11</sup> In bleak scenarios like this the fear of aggressive, state-assisted German trade warfare was to the fore. At a meeting of the Leamington Philosophical Society at the town's library in 1916 one speaker reminded the audience:

England would not cease to be the centre of international exchange, and would always have a financial standing above Germany's. The latter country would not cease to be a great trading nation, nor was it desirable to cripple her activities too much.<sup>12</sup>

Faced by the prospect of stiff post-war international competition, sections of the business community began to realize that they could no longer conduct their affairs 'flying by the seat of their pants'; but had instead to invest in, and give support, to effective commercial and technical intelligence gathering, and the dissemination thereof. This growing awareness lent weight to the idea of rate-supported commercial and technical libraries. In 1920 the Manchester Guardian reported that public commercial libraries, for example, had arisen:

... in response to the demand now prevalent in the commercial world, that the business of the future can be more carefully conducted than formerly. Gone are the old rule-of-thumb systems with their risky characteristics.<sup>13</sup>

Commercial and technical libraries were seen as aiding "all who wish to build up, strengthen and excel in our efforts for future supremacy".<sup>14</sup> The fact that Germany was seen as a main obstacle to



supremacy is demonstrated by the fact that when Rowntree and Co. of York were planning their technical library during the war it was advised that the new technical librarian speak German in order to read the quality technical and commercial literature of the country.<sup>15</sup> But Germany was not the only factor. Particular stress was laid upon the need to win back lost trade by boosting exports to those who had obtained new suppliers, perhaps indigenous, as a result of European trade dislocation. Although it was recognized that a large firm engaged in regular exporting might afford its own intelligence department or library, this would not be the case regarding firms engaged in exporting in a small way.<sup>16</sup> Thus, public provision of technical and commercial literature was seen as beneficial to middle- and small-sized enterprises. Moreover, this provision - which had always existed to a greater or lesser extent - had to be organised in departments separate from the general reference library, partly because of the poor reputation of business people for retrieving items dispersed through the collection.<sup>17</sup>

The exact extent to which business sought the establishment of public commercial and technical libraries is not known. Ellis has argued that interest was not negligible.<sup>18</sup> In Leeds business interest could be described as enthusiastic. The Leeds Chamber of Commerce praised the town's new commercial and technical library as a great municipal development - "one of the most complete collections of this kind in the country".<sup>19</sup> Given the structure of business in Leeds this is perhaps not surprising. A significant proportion of the workforce was in manufacturing - in 1911 some 43 per cent in the four industries of textiles, clothing, engineering and footwear alone.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the town was well equipped with amenities for the trading (wholesale

and retail) and marketing of local products.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, technical and commercial literature would have been of some value. Certainly there was an appreciation of technical knowledge in Leeds, businessmen having supported the establishment of the Yorkshire College in the 1880s (which became an independent university in 1904) with the threat of mounting foreign competition in mind.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, reasons for supporting the library could have been based less on practical value than municipal rivalry. Leeds had seen commercial and technical libraries set up as praiseworthy civic institutions elsewhere and so support for its own institution might be put down to the "continuing alertness of the business community and the council to what was happening elsewhere, and their willingness to take action when serious competition appeared."<sup>23</sup>

All that can be said for the present, therefore, is that business lent some credence to the idea of public business libraries, an argument which can be more fully supported by a separate analysis of business attitudes firstly to commercial, and secondly to technical libraries.

As previously indicated, business had for some time had access to commercial information via the Department of Trade's (later Overseas Trade) Commercial Intelligence Department and the Foreign Office's Consular Report service.<sup>24</sup> That such information - especially that relating to foreign trade - was found invaluable is evinced, in part, by the acute irritation which traders felt towards the government's tardiness in lifting censorship restrictions on foreign and telegraphic communications after the war. The President of the Board of Trade stated in 1919:

By representations which have reached me from several quarters, more particularly from some leading Chambers of Commerce, I am confirmed



in my conviction that one of the serious hindrances to the recovery of trade ... is to be found in the delay and inconvenience caused by the censorship restrictions.<sup>25</sup>

Free flow of information - and one can include detailed commercial information alongside that communicated by post and telegram - was therefore deemed crucial by business (and indeed government) for hastening economic reconstruction.

Commerce helped set up public commercial libraries and supported them once established. At Croydon the Commercial Information Department was said to have been formed with the active support of the local Chamber of Commerce.<sup>26</sup> The Chamber of Commerce in Coventry gave financial assistance to their local public commercial library.<sup>27</sup> At Liverpool, when businessmen met representatives of the public library authority to plan a commercial library for the city, they expressed surprise at "the wealth of current mercantile facts and statistics" already in the public library, and looked forward to it being made more accessible in a separate department.<sup>28</sup> When a commercial library was proposed at Bradford representatives of commercial organizations in the city estimated it "would prove of first assistance to the whole business and commercial community";<sup>29</sup> whilst in Table 2 the list of organizations invited to the opening of the Bradford Commercial Library in 1918 demonstrates that business/commercial interest had not waned in the meantime. Once opened the Bradford Commercial Library proved extremely popular, businessmen no doubt being wooed by such stories as information on trade in South America dispensed to one firm resulting in £4,000 worth of business.<sup>30</sup>

TABLE 2. List of organizations (representatives and officials thereof) invited to the opening of Bradford Commercial Library - 13 May 1918

The Council  
Chamber of Commerce  
Chamber of Trades  
Trade and Labour  
Technical College  
Textile Society  
Dyers and Colourists Society  
Engineering Society  
Wool Combers Federation  
Dyers Federation  
Manufacturers Federation  
Spinners Federation  
Yorkshire Managers and Overlookers Association  
Weaving Overlookers Association  
Accountants Society

Source: Bradford Public Library Authority.<sup>31</sup>

Generally, businesses used commercial libraries to answer basic questions on trade such as:

Who makes it?

Where can I get it?

What are the industries in any town or district?<sup>32</sup>

In other words, information was sought in keeping with age-old adages concerning traders selling in the most favourable markets and not being



prepared "to buy a nag till he has examined it at all points".<sup>33</sup>

From the evidence given above it is possible to agree with Alec Ellis that the business community's enthusiasm for commercial libraries was at least moderate.<sup>34</sup>

Regarding public technical library provision, the evidence of businessmen's interest - such as local industry's funding of the technical collection at Darlington - appears less frequently.<sup>35</sup> However, much interest is visible in the literature of the professional and scientific societies, and in the trade press. Fears were expressed that workers did not have sufficient access to technical literature. The Practical Engineer lamented in 1918 that "very few of our free libraries cater as they might do for the technical reader, and they are not usually adjacent to large works." Hence, it was said, "workers were losing their grip of fundamental principles, and their value as producers is lessened".<sup>36</sup> The Electrical Review urged better provision by private means: "business firms and manufacturers should provide well-stocked technical libraries for the use of their employees", it argued in 1918; though at the same time it welcomed the establishment of public technical libraries like that of Leeds where "a careful selection has been made of literature likely to prove useful to the electrical and allied trades".<sup>37</sup> In Nottingham in 1918 local scientific and technical societies deposited their collections with the public library (a separate technical section opened in 1920) for loan to members and for public reference.<sup>38</sup>

The movement for the establishment of a technical library in Manchester demonstrates that in one large industrial centre at least there existed significant enthusiasm for the public provision of technical literature in separately planned accommodation. As noted in

chapter 8 a technical library had first been proposed there in 1907 when local businessmen and industrialists had formed a deputation to interview the Free Libraries Committee. The issue was formally resurrected in March 1918 when a meeting at the Engineers' Club called for a separate technical library, a call subsequently supported by nine other scientific societies in the city. The meeting affirmed "the necessity, in view of the future of the industries of Manchester and District, of an adequately equipped Technical Dept. of the Municipal Libraries".<sup>39</sup> A deputation subsequently visited the Libraries Committee and presented it with a detailed memorial. After pointing to the efficacy of local public technical libraries in America, it went on to stress the long tradition in Manchester of "technical education to train students to the highest form of research", and hence the need for study collections in this respect.<sup>40</sup> Manchester central library was by no means bereft of technical literature. For example, of 370 periodicals in the reference library, 98 dealt with technical and commercial subjects.<sup>41</sup> However, many of these were British publications and so were already taken by firms. What was needed were foreign journals which were not generally available in the country. Foreign patents were also required. These could only be viewed in London, with the exception of USA patents which Manchester did take.<sup>42</sup> It was believed that funding by local firms would not provide sufficient support, nor would it be appropriate for Manchester's ratepayers alone to foot the bill. Hence, a provincially based library was advised; one which drew funds from surrounding districts. Assistance from central government, moreover, was called for.<sup>43</sup> The knowledge of German state aid for technical libraries was not lost on the scientific societies. As Stanley Jast had reminded the Society of



Chemical Industry: "The German Government, by the almost lavish equipment of libraries of technological works, had immensely facilitated the studies of their own scientists and students".<sup>44</sup> In fact, no sooner had the technical library opened in 1919 than representatives of the engineering, chemical and other industries in Manchester, along with the library committee, met the Minister of Education, H.A.L. Fisher, to urge that some of the £1 million Parliament had voted for scientific and industrial research should go to their local technical library. But in keeping with government policy — that money for research be channelled into the industrial research associations and their own libraries — the plea for central funding was rejected.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear, then, from the emphasis placed on foreign literature and the awareness of government assistance in library provision abroad, that anxiety over international trade competition was a leading motive for the advocacy of a local technical library by Manchester's scientific societies.

In Sheffield, also, the international trade dimension was to the fore. It was seen by some as particularly important to make headway — as for instance Germany had done — in the newer industries like electrical engineering and metallurgy. The Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, in a newspaper interview of 1918, recognized that Sheffield, unlike say Manchester, was dominated by one great class of industry . . . (iron, steel and metallurgy) and to survive had to invest in metallurgical research, as opposed to pure engineering which had a longer history. In support of a public technical library he said that: "New ideas were beginning to flow, and hence the literature of the great societies connected with these trades had to be made available." The public library, he added, "would need to be more closely associated

with the national life and industries than ever before".<sup>46</sup>

Amongst professionals and technicians, therefore, there was no absence of support for public technical library provision. This is not surprising in that, as E.A. Savage wrote: "The needs of the war have brought home to technical men the desirability of obtaining information rapidly."<sup>47</sup> However, support for public initiative competed with enthusiasm for private business libraries. There was also considerable enthusiasm for the establishment of a central technical information/indexing service.<sup>48</sup> The idea of a Technical Information Office with material indexed for speedy bibliographic retrieval commanded fairly wide support, partly because it was a formula tried and tested elsewhere. As the Assistant Secretary of the Institute of Civil Engineers reported in 1917:

In other countries, the importance of this service is fully recognised. [For example,] Belgium before the War, had organised, under the auspices of the International Institute of Bibliography, an index-library covering the whole field of scientific knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Such an index to the location and content of material was considered an essential corollary to the great reservoir of technical knowledge in technical societies, universities, government departments, the Patent Office, etc.

In the final analysis, therefore, it is clear that business gave some support to the idea of public business libraries, though its extent should not be exaggerated. The limited nature of the support is demonstrated by the move in 1918 to obtain more representatives of science and industry on the Library Association's Technical and Commercial Libraries Committee in the hope of reversing the "inadequate appreciation of the work public libraries (state and municipal) now do".<sup>50</sup> But any attempt to enliven business interest



first had to overcome the traditional obstacle to improved public library provision in the form of distaste for public expenditure. When, for example, a resolution was proposed at the 1915 annual meeting of the Society of Chemical Industry "that technical libraries should be established at the public expense in all great centres of industry" some delegates objected to public money being spent in an area where industry could provide for itself.<sup>51</sup>

On the basis of evidence surveyed there appears to have been more business support for public commercial rather than technical library provision. This had less to do with any wild enthusiasm for commercial literature than with long-standing prejudices against technical education and information. In relation to commercial data, technical literature was costly to both buy and track down. The value to efficiency of technical knowledge was also questioned. Finally, public provision of technical knowledge might threaten the secrets which gave a firm an advantage over its rivals. Technical information was much more 'specific' to individual enterprises than was commercial data. The attraction of private intelligence gathering thus remained strong, even though librarians expressed the hope that more research findings would in the future be published.<sup>52</sup>

If the amount of business support for public business libraries is difficult to assess, the motives for what support existed is much more so, though the broad reason of anxiety over foreign trade has been noted.

Thus far, the aim has been to gauge enthusiasm in quantitative terms. For a fuller understanding of business support a qualitative approach is required, which can attempt to identify motivation in detail. The approach taken here is to study the business library established by Rowntree's of York during the war. The study shows how one firm, at

least, did acknowledge the value of research both for its own good and for wider social reasons. Although the Rowntree library was private, motives behind it can shed light on attitudes to public provision. As an adviser to the company wrote when plans for a library were being laid: "the object of these special libraries is much the same whether introduced by public authorities or private firms".<sup>53</sup> In this respect the approach which follows can be put forward as a valid attempt to expose heretofore hidden business attitudes.

#### The Technical Library of Rowntree and Co., York

Since the 1880s Rowntree and Co. had supplied a library for its employees.<sup>54</sup> By 1905 the 'social library', as it became known, had 1400 volumes and 600 regular borrowers.<sup>55</sup> Prominent classification headings were Food and Health; Gardening; History, Geography and Travel; Biology; Natural History; Poetry; Scripture; Temperance Literature; and Arts and Sciences.<sup>56</sup> The vast majority of the works, however, were fiction. In 1923 fiction accounted for 70 per cent of total issues, the remainder being 26 per cent juvenile and just 4 per cent non-fiction.<sup>57</sup> The library was not one in which to find "expensive books at half-a-guinea on technical subjects or on matters that would only interest a few people".<sup>58</sup>

This is not to say that there had been an absence of technical literature; rather the company preferred that it was scattered across the various departments for their own reference purposes. During the war the idea arose of centralizing this dispersed stock, though departments were reluctant to relinquish their own holdings of periodicals and books.<sup>59</sup> Such centralized collections were seen to have worked well in this country; for example at Lever Brothers and at Nobel's Chemical Research Laboratories in Scotland.<sup>60</sup> The Rowntree



directors were also aware of the American experience and thus commissioned a detailed report on private business libraries there, from an agent working in the country. The report praised the work of American private business libraries, and this no doubt influenced the Rowntree board in their decision to go ahead with their own technical library.<sup>61</sup>

The technical library began work c. 1916-17 "with the object of collecting, indexing, and bringing to the notice of the managerial and technical staffs information of utilitarian value".<sup>62</sup> 'Technical library' was a misnomer in that it aimed to collect commercial information and literature also.<sup>63</sup> Yet, a considerable proportion of the library's expenditure was on chemistry literature.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, evidence of enquiries received by the library - though sparse - indicates a greater concern with technical than with commercial matters; although it could be that commercial enquiries were more easily solved without recourse to the library's staff. (See Table 3)

TABLE 3. A selection of the 900 enquiries received by Technical Library Staff in the course of 1920

Exact Barometric Pressure midway between London and Bristol on the afternoon of January 28th 1920.

Chemical Analyses (including hardness and softness of the various waters supplied by the Water Companies throughout the United Kingdom).

Are Barrel Organs manufactured with interchangeable cylinders?

Population statistics of various towns, provinces, and countries throughout the world.

cont'd

Acreage of Beet Sugar for the guidance of intending growers.

Velocity of gases.

Data on the consumption of alcoholic liquors for Mr B.S. Rowntree's use in connection with his recent lecture on State Purchase at the Festival Concert Rooms.

Dust Precipitation.

Humidity of air.

Names of manufacturers of tanks for use in the manufacture of citrate of lime, to enable the Engineering Dept., to purchase same for use on the Companies Estates in the West Indies.

Liquid soap, and liquid soap containers for use in Lavatories.

Enquiry for a Dutch translator. Professor Belger of the Settlement was recommended, and he executed the translation satisfactorily.

Statistics of Germany's pre-war trade.

Descriptions of automatic gravity scales.

Particulars of group insurance schemes.

Oil seed producing areas.

Particulars of walnut trade.

Insulation of brine pipes.

Compilation of bibliography on the Human Factor, as a preparation for proposed lecture.

Registration of Newspapers.

Source: Library report, 30 December 1920.<sup>65</sup>



The library tended to dispense information rather than books, and was in many ways a research department in its own right. The 200 or so periodicals subscribed to were 'exhaustively' indexed by two full-time scrutineers, thus providing "live material, germane to our business".<sup>66</sup> In addition, bulletins of information of recent interest were prepared and circulated. These comprised "announcements of books, portions of books, magazine articles, pamphlets, press-cuttings, government reports and orders, and patent specifications". By August 1918 5727 bulletins had been issued.<sup>67</sup> These bulletins were said to save much unnecessary reading and "apprise our people of much information which, otherwise, they would not see".<sup>68</sup>

What were the motives behind the decision to establish and maintain a technical library? At its most basic the library's value was reckoned in purely cash terms. Though some doubts were raised concerning the library's running costs - £1186 in 1919 - tangible results were believed to have been obtained. One director estimated less than two years after its formation "that the cost of the library has already been saved two or three times over by improvements in the works affected as a result".<sup>69</sup> Further, the technical librarian, H.V. Garrett - admittedly a biased source in this regard - observed that:

... the British manufacturer will have nothing to do with anything that is not of immediate tangible value. But in the complexities of the present day industrial machine, there are many functions the value of which cannot be proved in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. The value of up-to-date information, if made accessible, properly interpreted and turned to account, is very real, despite it being of an abstract nature.<sup>70</sup>

Anxiety was expressed over the likelihood of sterner post-war competition. The Cocoa Works Magazine predicted that: "Competition

will be keener, and the commercial struggle of the future will be won by those who succeeded in maximising production with the minimum effort."<sup>71</sup>

Other, less general motives can best be identified from the perspective of separate user groups. Primarily, the technical library was aimed at management. Whilst meetings between departmental managers were valued - "these have already been proved to be beneficial in largely breaking down exclusive departmentalism and indexing the outlook of many of those who attend" - they were also viewed as time consuming and not a complete substitute for extracting new ideas from periodicals. Joseph Rowntree saw the development of fresh ideas as extremely important and:

alluded to the need for alertness on the part of Rowntree and Co., otherwise we might find that the combined boards of Cadbury and Fry amalgamated are ahead of us. It was felt [by Rowntree] that the question of adding to the intelligence of the governing authorities is one of very great importance for the future of this industry.<sup>72</sup>

The idea was that information should not take the place of experience but complement it: for information was "the summary of experience".<sup>73</sup>

Good management - though the relationship was not always appreciated by everyone - meant good business. As the technical librarian wrote:

The secret of high wages and high profits is *Management* and management is carried on mainly by men who are called non-producers.<sup>74</sup>

Given access to better information sources management could become 'productive'. The trouble was that managers were not considered to be particularly efficient at retrieving data: "A good department head is not always necessarily clearer at obtaining information".<sup>75</sup> Hence, a library was required; one, moreover, with an investigative role able to help managers with research, or perhaps doing the research



for them.

One of the dangers of ignoring literature describing new processes and organizational techniques was that management might take decisions which were documented as having failed elsewhere. Americans appeared to be more aware of this obvious fact and valued the library accordingly:

It is a matter of far less expense for the expert to spend a few days in the library searching for records on a given subject, than to go ahead blindly buying expensive apparatus and consuming expensive materials making investigations, only to find the experiment already done.<sup>76</sup>

But Rowntree and Co. also saw the logic, as a director pointed out in a discussion on the technical library: "Broadly speaking the decision is not to capitalise experimental machines unless their value has been proved."<sup>77</sup>

Clearly, it was important for management not to take such decisions by itself but take advice from the company's higher technical staff. An expanded and centralised technical collection was of direct relevance, then, to the firm's technicians in improving the guidance they gave to management. It would also support their own development research concerns. The war had strengthened interest in scientific discovery: "The knowledge of science ... [is] likely to be applied more extensively than in the past to productive processes."<sup>78</sup> Rowntree and Co. possessed a busy Chemistry Department which made heavy use of the technical library situated nearby.<sup>79</sup>

Supervisory grades were an important beneficiary of the library. In a firm the size of Rowntree and Co. the development of personnel management techniques and the need for a good supervisory staff were at a premium. The workforce had expanded sharply from 892 in 1894 to 1613 in 1899 to 6345 by 1914.<sup>80</sup> Naturally, this expansion brought

with its considerable problems of supervision. In fact, the technical library became partly responsible for the training of supervisors as it demonstrated in 1920 when its annual report gladly quoted an American source on personnel management:

A foreman needs to first of all know his trade thoroughly and also the basic principles of organization. But above all, the factor which makes so much difference to the aims of a concern is the attitude of the worker, and the fostering of the correct attitude requires in the foreman a knowledge of the movements of the human mind: a factor which will enable him to clear the mental fog in the mind of the workers, more than is the case at present.<sup>81</sup>

It was such sources that supervisory grades needed encouragement to study. The technical librarian was "not unmindful of the fact that some of our overlookers are ardently wishing to avail themselves of any opportunities, the adoption of which would lead to the increasing of their efficiency." A study scheme for overlookers was thus introduced. In addition, the reading of some literary classics was advised to offset the abstract nature of ideas in the study scheme; this because many of them were "works which soften the transition from the schools to the world", and "show how imagination and philosophy can be woven into practical wisdom."<sup>82</sup>

Library facilities, including the technical library, were deemed "absolutely integral to the firm's educational scheme", which will be discussed below.<sup>83</sup> Initially, however, use of the technical library was exclusive, unlike the social library which was open to all. Although it was recognized that some American concerns had used their technical libraries from the outset as a general means of educating their workforce, no such role was envisaged in the earliest days of the Rowntree library.<sup>84</sup> In fact, by August 1918 only 76 different readers had been received by the library.<sup>85</sup> This would indicate use by managers, higher technicians and supervisors only. However, the idea



of widening the library's clientele surfaced soon after its work began. The directors advocated that the library evolve a more public section.<sup>86</sup> Plans were also made for an amalgamation of the social and technical libraries, and the relocation of the new library near to the factory's main entrance for 'social' use in the dinner hour and evening, so as to "develop the reading habit among our people".<sup>87</sup> Such an amalgamation had been suggested as early as 1916.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the company did not proceed with amalgamation, though in September 1923 the technical librarian did assume responsibility for the social library also.<sup>89</sup> Even though amalgamation did not occur, the fact that clerks were soon to be borrowing from the technical library 'literature pertinent to their work' indicates that membership did widen.<sup>90</sup>

Widening use to the general workforce brought the technical library into line with the traditional Rowntree policy of workers' welfare provision which, by 1914 included free medical and dental facilities, an occupational pension scheme, and a purpose-built cottage housing estate (the 123 acre model village of New Earswick).<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, an in-house magazine - the Cocoa Works Magazine - was instituted in 1902 to promote friendly management-worker contact.<sup>92</sup> All these efforts contributed to a record of good industrial relations before 1914.<sup>93</sup>

Education was central to the company's welfare programme. In fact, 17 of the 24 welfare workers in the Social Department in 1913 were engaged in providing educational classes. Attendance at elementary classes was compulsory for all entering the factory up to the age of 17. In 1913 new education accommodation was opened in which boys spent six hours per week on elementary studies in Maths, English, Woodwork and Practical Science; whilst girls devoted three hours per

week to Needlework, Cookery and Housewifery. Also, a new gymnasium was provided for both boys and girls.

Post-elementary education was also provided. There was much emphasis on commercial studies, especially bookkeeping, and between 1908 and 1912 37 clerks passed Society of Arts or London Chamber of Commerce exams. There were day-time tutorial classes for engineering apprentices to back-up evening classes in Maths, Mechanics and Mechanical drawing at the York Railway Institute or City School of Art, the fees for which were paid by the firm for regular attenders.<sup>94</sup>

The technical librarian gave full support to these educational endeavours saying that "the education of employees is the most powerful single influence which can be brought to bear in the greater development of industries".<sup>95</sup> Wider technical library use was advocated for one of the same basic reasons as reading circles, lectures and educational classes:

In the struggle for existence - and the present situation foreshadows a very severe struggle - the best-equipped men, the best-equipped firms, and the best-equipped communities, will have the best chance.<sup>96</sup>

Elementary science and maths were imparted to Rowntree youngsters not merely for their direct relevance to narrow trade skills but because they fostered accuracy and powers of reasoned observation.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, it was believed that "a good reader makes a good employee."<sup>98</sup>

Another means of producing better-equipped workers was via the incentive of promotion. Prospects for promotion at Rowntree and Co. were emphasized as being bright. In 1920 the Cocoa Works Magazine urged that if "you are not satisfied to go along in the same old groove all your life, if you're anxious for promotion and would like to know how to equip yourselves to be worth it, if you'd like to use your leisure time for better purpose", then the thing to do was enroll in



education classes at the factory.<sup>99</sup>

The technical library saw itself as featuring in the quest for promotion. As the librarian wrote:

... the man who does not make good in the library is not progressing in his work, but the man who reads the books and puts into practice the ideas gained from them is the man who wins promotion.<sup>100</sup>

The technical library was useful to individuals once promotion had been achieved: "A noteworthy development in [the technical] library service is the number of requests from people in the offices and factory for literature treating of functions to which they had been promoted."<sup>101</sup>

A more important aspect of technical library use for promotion purposes was, arguably, the chance it gave individuals to read about specialisms and processes outside their own departments which, due to their own specialization, they had been unable to experience. The technical librarian wrote:

Many of us have 'grown up' in our departments; our environment is such that we are possibly somewhat narrowminded; our daily duties have in accordance with the Law of Repetition, become fixed habits, i.e. they have turned us into mere routinists.<sup>102</sup>

One result of routine was seen to be the danger of "developing a state of self-complacency" which meant that a "tendency to hold to old ways must inevitably be very strong".<sup>103</sup> 'Mental inertia', which shut off the mind to new ideas, was obviously detrimental to company efficiency, and was seen to be a disease, afflicting not only the workforce but management also.<sup>104</sup> The reading of technical literature was the antidote; it would broaden a worker's knowledge of processes elsewhere in the plant and open the way to promotion. For the company the advantage was less a matter of improved technical skill

than the production of 'rounded', adaptable, intelligent and motivated workers. As the company advised workers seeking promotion:

What is wanted is not a detailed study of some particular branch of industry, but rather mental alertness which will enable them to extract the utmost from the daily experience of the workshop.<sup>105</sup>

The question of specialization (and the accompanying danger of alienation due to monotony) was an important one for industrial peace at Rowntree and Co. The Rowntree dynasty was well versed in the social damage wrought by poor industrial relations. A.S. Rowntree wrote during the war that:

The gulf between employer and employee widens. It is now imperative that master and man should learn to understand each other and side by side should seek for a common good.<sup>106</sup>

The Rowntree management was aware of the growing polarization between capital and labour and the alienation of employees in large industrial organizations.<sup>107</sup> This was a main reason why a workforce welfare strategy was instigated at Rowntree and Co.: "to humanize the industrial conditions of life".<sup>108</sup> Management recognized that specialization de-humanized, and forced workers to seek compensation in demands for a higher economic status. This cause of industrial strife was seen by management as more salient than other explanations such as inflation, rising expectations and excess profits.<sup>109</sup> The answer was not higher pay but "to push industry further and further into the background of our scheme of life and to emphasise the need of a greater development of our non-industrial faculties".<sup>110</sup> A technical library could make a contribution in this regard. The technical librarian at Metropolitan-Vickers, for example, believed that establishing a "mental equilibrium" helped combat "acute specialization" and "false perspective", and this was one of his library's main objectives.<sup>111</sup>

In a Cocoa Works Magazine interview of March 1921 A.S. Rowntree



reiterated his faith in the stabilizing role of education. "The unrest of today," he argued, "is the penalty we are paying for not having adopted the principle of social preventative medicine in the past."<sup>112</sup> In fact, an effort had already been made to provide workers with a greater understanding of industrial and social affairs when a number of books on "burning social and economic problems of the day" were added to the social library in 1920.<sup>113</sup> An improved knowledge of economics in particular was seen as the "key to social and industrial problems".<sup>114</sup> Clearly, the technical library also, by virtue of the economic implications of technical and commercial knowledge, had a role to play in fostering an understanding of society's problems from an economic perspective.

Three conclusions can be drawn from this study of the Rowntree technical library in attempting to shed light on motives behind business support of public commercial and technical libraries. First, the further down the employment hierarchy one goes the less directly relevant to production was library content. Managers and higher technicians made use of the library for specific research purposes, of both a technical and personnel management nature. As the next chapter demonstrates, this was a demand which public institutions saw they could fulfil.

Second, the technical library was also meant for mass use to 'educate' workers in the word's widest sense. Technical education via the library was a part of, and not separate from, general education. Its main aim was to fight the monotony and narrowmindedness which modern mechanized production processes created, in an attempt to lessen disaffection. Broader minded and, at the same time, economically knowledgeable workers would be more inclined to sympathize with the

problems of others, including those of management. They would thus be less likely to follow the selfish path of industrial action. It is interesting to note in this respect the concern of the Ministry of Reconstruction Adult Education Committee, indicated above, with the issue of work monotony. Yet the direct economic value of technical and commercial information was recognised by Rowntree's management. In this respect it echoed government and library establishment wartime attitudes.

Finally, what the Rowntree study broadly shows is that ostensibly altruistic policies - in this case company sponsored education - can in fact be aimed to benefit the benefactor first and the recipient second. Traditionally, the public library had conformed to this notion in that motives of provision were based primarily on the objectives of providers, that is to say, benefactors and library establishment. It is almost certainly the case that the First World War public business library was conceived according to the same principle.



## Notes and References to Chapter 15

1. O.P.R. Ogilvie, 'Libraries in science and industry', Special Libraries, 16 (June 1925), pp. 10-11. The number of business libraries in the U.S.A. should not, however, be exaggerated. In 1916 it was estimated that in manufacturing they numbered only about one hundred. The best developed libraries were not in manufacturing but belonged to banking, insurance and telephone companies. Libraries in manufacturing developed late and owed their existence "almost entirely to the scientific management movement"; letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell (12 May 1916), included in J.B. Morrell [Internal report on] Business libraries (26 July 1916), Rowntree-Mackintosh Archives, hereafter referred to as RMA.
2. E.W. Hulme, 'Technical libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 494. Examples of business libraries in large firms are those of the Metropolitan-Vickers Co. and the Dunlop Rubber Co. The former held 2000 volumes and 150 current periodicals. In addition there were pamphlets, trade catalogues, news cuttings and patent specifications. The library was called the 'Intelligence Bureau' and was run by the Research Department (i.e., independent of the engineering and commercial departments). There was close contact with local and national libraries, manufacturing associations, research associations, government departments and consultant, technical and scientific institutions; J.G. Pearce, 'Intelligence work in a modern industrial organization', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), pp. 367-368. Dunlop's library was smaller, containing 500 volumes, with another 500 dispersed around departments. These were in the catalogue and could be recalled; E.A. Clarke, 'Dunlop Rubber Company: the work of the library section of the service department', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), p. 374.
3. D.J. Urquhart, The Technical college as a service to industry (Dublin, 1956), p. 2.
4. Manchester Guardian (18 November 1920).
5. Publishers' Circular (17 June 1922).
6. B.W.E. Alford, 'Lost opportunities: British business and businessmen during the First World War', in N. McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite, Business life and public policy (Cambridge, 1986).
7. Ibid., p. 209.
8. Ibid., p. 221.
9. D.C. Coleman, 'Gentlemen and players', Economic History Review, 26 (1973), argues that British businessmen learned few lessons from the two World Wars. They remained, for the most part, 'sleepers' not 'thrusters' - this due to the continuing predominance of gentlemanly behaviour and the abiding preference for social advance over business achievement. However, as chapter 9 of this thesis argues, this line of argument has been strongly countered.

10. J.G. Pearce, 'Intelligence work in a modern industrial organization', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), p. 367.
11. S.J. Chapman, The War and the cotton trade (Oxford, 1915), p. 22.
12. 'After the war', newscutting, source unknown (c. 1916), Leamington Spa Public Library Cuttings, Vol. 1.
13. Manchester Guardian (18 November 1920).
14. Leeds Mercury (4 November 1916), letter to the editor.
15. Letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell, op. cit.
16. View of the Mayor of Leeds in an address to the North Central Library Association, Yorkshire Post (13 January 1917).
17. Library Association, Interim report of the council on the provision of commercial and technical libraries (Aberdeen, 1917), p. 4.
18. A. Ellis, The Development of public libraries in England during the First World War (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, CNA, 1974), p. 168.
19. Leeds Chamber of Commerce, Commercial yearbook (Leeds, 1920), p. 47.
20. E.J. Connell and M. Ward, 'Industrial development 1780-1914', in D. Fraser (ed.), A History of modern Leeds (Manchester 1980), p. 173.
21. K. Grady, 'Commercial, marketing and retailing amenities 1700-1914', in Fraser, op. cit.
22. R.J. Morris, 'Middle class culture 1700-1914', in Fraser, op. cit., p. 219.
23. Grady, op. cit.
24. The Commercial Intelligence Department was indeed busy. The number of enquiries - about one-third personal and two-thirds written - increased from 16,668 in 1913 to 39,018 in 1916. Report to the Board of Trade by the Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence, Cmd. 8815 (1917).
25. Memo of the President of the Board of Trade, A.H. Stanley, on the abolition of censorship (18 January 1919), Public Records Office, CAB 24/73, G16678.
26. Electrical Review (11 August 1922).
27. Ellis, The Development of public libraries, op. cit., p. 167.
28. Library Association Record, 19 (1921), p. 34.
29. Bradford Public Libraries Committee, Minutes (28 June 1917).
30. Yorkshire Observer (19 November 1918).



31. Opening of the Bradford Commercial Library ... 1st May 1918.  
Manuscript list of invitations prepared by Bradford Public Libraries, Bradford City Archives.
32. S.A. Pitt, The Commercial library: what it offers in the way of service to businessmen (Glasgow, 1917), p. 4.
33. F. Crunden, 'The Public library as a factor in industrial progress', The Library, 7 (1906), p. 388.
34. A. Ellis, Public libraries and the First World War (1975), p. 40.
35. In December 1918 Darlington Public Libraries began planning a technical collection. The scheme was laid before local employers, and ten firms subscribed £167. Eventually 403 volumes were purchased for £250. After a year of operation the technical collection was described as having been "appreciated by workmen and executives alike". J.V. Redhead, Darlington public libraries: a centenary history 1885-1985 (Darlington, 1985), p. 34.
36. Practical Engineer (6 May 1918).
37. Electrical Review (19 July 1918).
38. Ellis, The Development of public libraries, op. cit., p. 167.
39. 'Technical Libraries: support by influential societies', Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 105. The resolution was supported subsequently by the following: The Society of Chemical Industry, The Textile Institute, The Chemical Club, The Manchester Geological and Mining Society, The Junior Institution of Electrical Engineers, The Manchester Association of Electrical Engineers, the Institution of Electrical Engineers, The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, and The Manchester Institution of Gas Engineers.
40. 'Technical libraries ...', op. cit., p. 106.
41. Ibid., p. 107 (footnote).
42. Ibid., pp. 107-108.
43. Ibid., pp. 108-109.
44. Society of Chemical Industry Journal, 37:1 (1918), p. 31.
45. Manchester City News (5 July 1919).
46. Sheffield Independent (18 January 1918).
47. E.A. Savage, 'Memorandum on the future work of the technical and commercial libraries committee', Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 219.
48. Ibid., pp. 219-222.

49. W.E. Simnett, 'Draft scheme for the formation of a technical information office' (1917), Reconstruction Papers, Vol. 4 (1916-1918), item B239-B243, London School of Economics, Passfield Collection 13. Towards the end of the war government did establish a Technical Information Service run by the War Office "to answer inquiries from Government Departments or Engineers desiring information on engineering questions generally, so far as this is obtainable from technical literature, engineering societies' records or similar sources". This enterprise grew out of the War Office's 'Daily supplement to the daily review of the foreign press', which contained extracts of articles on scientific and technical matters. At one stage it was hoped that the exercise could be continued and fitted to peacetime conditions; E.A. Savage, 'Technical and commercial libraries', Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 226.
50. Savage, Memorandum, op. cit., p. 222.
51. Society of Chemical Industry Journal, 34 (1915), p. 764.
52. Clarke, op.cit., p. 378. Clarke was the librarian at Dunlop. He believed the tendency to preserve trade secrets was breaking down.
53. Letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell, op. cit.
54. Tanners Moat in Joseph Rowntree's day, unpublished typescript, RMA.
55. Rowntree and Co., Industrial betterment at the Cocoa Works, York (York, 1915), p. 40.
56. See the York Cocoa Works Library Catalogue for the years 1890, 1899 and 1904.
57. General Library (12 November 1923), memo from H.V. Garrett to W. Wallace, RMA.
58. Cocoa Works Magazine (October 1905).
59. M.R. Marshall, The History of industrial libraries in Britain to 1960 (unpublished Fellowship of the Library Association thesis, 1969), p. 182.
60. Morrell, op. cit., p. 4.
61. B. Lasker, Report on American business libraries, included in Morrell, op, cit. That the board of directors should have commissioned a report from the U.S.A. is no surprise in that the business information bureau was "an essentially American idea"; Sheffield Telegraph (24 April 1918).
62. H.V. Garrett, 'Messrs. Rowntree (York) technical library', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), p. 369.
63. Ibid., p. 369.



64. For example, in the first quarter of 1921 the chemistry laboratory received £50 out of a total expenditure on books of £101. Analysis of expenditure on books purchased by the Rowntree Cocoa Works technical library in the first quarter of 1921, RMA.
65. Suggested material for the 1920 [technical library] report (30 December 1920), RMA.
66. Garrett, op. cit., p. 369.
67. Rowntree Technical Library, Report for twelve months to 31 August 1918, RMA.
68. Rowntree Technical Library, Report for twelve months to 31 December 1924, RMA.
69. Rowntree Directors' Committee, Minutes (16 December 1918), RMA.
70. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 1924, op. cit.
71. 'Personal efficiency', Cocoa Works Magazine (June 1919).
72. Rowntree Directors Committee, Minutes (23 December 1918), RMA. In 1913 there were 13 departmental managers; Number of Rowntree and Co. employees on 1st January 1914 with the corresponding figures over four periods of five years each, RMA.
73. Rowntree Technical Library, Report for twelve months to 31 December 1928, RMA.
74. Rowntree Technical Library, First half-yearly report (10 September 1917), appendix III.
75. Letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell, op. cit. This appeared to confirm what librarians had been saying for some time concerning the ability of business people to use reference collections, particularly in closed access libraries.
76. Ogilvie, op. cit., p. 9. Words of the President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
77. Rowntree Directors' Committee, Minutes (23 December 1918), RMA.
78. 'Personal efficiency', op. cit.
79. Rowntree Technical Library, Report for twelve months to 31 August 1918, RMA.
80. Number of Rowntree and Co. Employees, op. cit.
81. Rowntree Technical Library, Report for twelve months to 1 March 1920, RMA. The quote is from the official organ of the U.S. National Association of Employment Managers, 'National Efficiency' (December 1919).
82. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 1 March 1920, op. cit.

83. General library, op. cit.
84. Rowntree Technical Library Committee Conference (1 February 1917), RMA.
85. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 31 August 1918, op. cit.
86. Rowntree Directors Committee, Minutes (23 December 1918), RMA.
87. Ibid.
88. Letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell, op. cit.
89. General Library, op. cit.
90. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 31 December 1924, op. cit.
91. I.C. Bradley, Joseph Rowntree 1836-1925 (1987), p. 8. This pamphlet was produced for Rowntree-Mackintosh, being an extract from the author's Enlightened entrepreneurs (1987).
92. Tanners Moat, op. cit.
93. Ibid.
94. Rowntree and Co., Some notes on education and other work (York, 1913).
95. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 1 March 1920, op. cit.
96. Cocoa Works Magazine (August 1920).
97. Rowntree and Co., Some notes ..., op. cit.
98. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 31 December 1924, op. cit.
99. Cocoa Works Magazine (August 1920).
100. Rowntree Technical Library, First half-yearly report, op. cit., appendix III.
101. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 31 December 1928, op. cit.
102. Rowntree Technical Library, First half-yearly report, op. cit.
103. Ibid.
104. The technical librarian related that this was the opinion of Alfred Mond, with whom he agreed. Rowntree Technical Library, Report ... 31 December 1924, op. cit.
105. 'Personal efficiency', op. cit.
106. A.S. Rowntree in the introduction to F.J. Gilman, The Workers and education: a record of some present day experiments (1916), p. 5.



107. Bradley, op. cit., p. 7.
108. Rowntree and Co., Some notes, op. cit., pp. 14-15.
109. Cocoa Works Magazine (September 1920).
110. Ibid.
111. Pearce, op. cit., p. 365.
112. Cocoa Works Magazine (March 1921).
113. Cocoa Works Magazine (June 1920).
114. Cocoa Works Magazine (December 1920).

## Chapter Sixteen

### DEMAND AND DESIGN

Whatever the specific reasons for public library support from government, library establishment and business during the war, the 'educative' role of the institution had by 1919, to be sure, attained a profile higher than at any time since its inception. Contemporary statistics on the books public library patrons were actually reading might, it is true, tempt one to question such a statement. At Eltham, for example, 23,000 of the 27,000 loan issues in the first quarter of 1919 were fiction.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, over and above the link, noted previously, between general reading and increased productivity in an industrialising economy, the continued predominance of fiction should not be allowed to obscure the boost which the war gave to the educational side of the public library. This enlarged educational function was generated from the same sources from which it was hoped greater social stability would flow - that is to say, an emphasis on civic consciousness and the belief in the public library's ability to 'deliver' economically; both of which would rely on changed attitudes to 'serious' reading.

Evidence to illustrate the shift towards educational considerations in provision can be drawn not only from the expressed - and indeed hidden - motives of government, library establishment and business but also from the wartime theory and practice of library architecture, which was in itself a response to anticipated and actual demand. Due to financial restrictions there were few new buildings during the war.<sup>2</sup> But much was said about how design should proceed in the future; and some internal design alterations were executed. The architectural debate, as well as the rearrangements actually carried



out, furthered the ideological objective of more assured social stability which the public library espoused during the period. The institution was not alone in this regard. In 'cottage estate' housing, for example, government looked to design to carry out the ideological function that lay at the heart of the 'homes fit for heroes' campaign.<sup>3</sup>

Public libraries did not have the same social impact as housing. Nevertheless, they did see themselves as possessing an ideological role. In the nineteenth century, as described above, ideological requirements tended to eclipse, almost entirely, the production of functional public library architecture. During the First World War, however, ideological requirements were more closely moulded to function in that the 'serious' reading demanded by socially-stabilizing civic consciousness, and the assimilation of practical knowledge, required a more functional approach to design. This matching of ideology and design did not suddenly materialize during the war. Rather, it can be traced back to the evolving educational role of the public library during the late nineteenth century. In this respect it is slightly misleading to see the Second World War as the 'watershed' of functional public library architecture: for since the late nineteenth century, and especially during the Great War, ideas had been evolving concerning due respect for the convenience and considerations of readers.

It was the extremely high expectations of the Reconstruction era, particularly with regard to education, which distinguishes the period as an important one for the evolution of library architecture. A fairly radical reassessment of design was called for. Hence, the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee reported:

It is important that steps should be taken to increase in every possible way the usefulness of public libraries to serious readers. Whilst the newer buildings used for public library

purposes are for the most part carefully planned, well-lighted, and attractively furnished, there are still many public libraries which are overcrowded and inadequately equipped - a state of affairs which, we realise, in many cases, is due to the financial limitation of the penny rate. With the development of public libraries which we anticipate in the near future we hope that they will conform to much higher standards of furnishing, equipment, and arrangement.<sup>4</sup>

This statement overestimates any movement which did occur in the direction of functionalism in the inter-war period: for although the First World War should not be discounted as having made no significant contribution to modernism in library architecture its importance was not greater than that of the 1939-45 period.<sup>5</sup> Particularly in the 1930s, public library design and planning did show some sign of absorbing wider theories of utility in non-domestic built forms. Generally, however, designers retained an attachment to old ideas concerning supervision and civic grandeur. For example, Frank Gardner has recalled how in his early 1930s librarianship career at Sheffield Reference Library (in the adapted premises of the old Constitutional Club) furniture was arranged so that "you sat at a large desk surveying the whole of the reference library, and you were lord of all you were surveying".<sup>6</sup> Further, regarding external design, it is noticeable how many inter-war central libraries were constructed in historical styles more in keeping with the nineteenth century. Manchester Central Library, as noted previously, was designed in the early 1930s in an unmodified classical mode.

On the one hand, any trend towards efficiency brought about by the wartime need for improved organization of production appears to have had no sweeping effect on the nature of designs demanded. The Leeds Public Library Annual Report for 1915, for example, expressed the hope "that when peace is restored an effort will be made to commemorate



the occasion by the erection of a Central Library worthy of the city".<sup>7</sup> Clearly, civic pride was to the fore in this instance. Whilst at Dartford, where a Carnegie Library was opened in 1916, there were considerable objections to the siting of the library in the local park "rightaway from the public street and practically out of sight". Objectors called instead for a civic landmark and monument. "Who outside Bedlam", wrote a Dartford resident in 1913 when the design was first suggested, "would think of spending between £7000 and £8000 on a public building that is not to be a prominent architectural feature of the town, so that it may be seen and used by the townspeople? Would Mr. Carnegie give a copper to build this library if he only knew the facts and saw for himself where it is intended to put it?"<sup>8</sup> The enthusiasm for imposing 'landmark' architecture on public libraries was, arguably, little diluted by the war, and this was generally, though by no means always, at the expense of a degree of utility.

On the other hand, a hint of a future functional approach can be detected. Certainly, designers often thought their creations made some concession to utility. Of the Dartford Public Library mentioned above, for example, it was said in 1915:

Inside the accommodation is well designed and ordered and altogether the library is a model building of its kind. It has been designed for utility, and the clever manner in which the space has been utilised has made the most of the ground available.<sup>9</sup>

Also, in an effort to reduce overspending and elaboration in buildings the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust tightened its control over grants.<sup>10</sup> Although the decision had in this respect been taken before the war, wartime stringencies eased its application.

Further, the war brought with it a renewed commitment to open access provision, in itself the single most utilitarian aspect of

design which the public library could adopt. Criticism of closed access gained momentum. A visitor to Leamington Spa in 1917 "was horrified to see the books and librarians in a cage and wondered whether it was they or the public who needed protection".<sup>11</sup> The system was seen as educationally inefficient, an image confirmed by such stories as a boy studying the Roman Empire, ordering his book via catalogue and indicator, and subsequently finding he had ordered the wrong volume. This, because of the library rules, he could not exchange until the following day.<sup>12</sup> Once open access was adopted, however, then users reacted favourably: "Borrowers go away much better satisfied than they used to do in the old days."<sup>13</sup> Open access was an element of the wider belief that

... books must be brought to the inquirer and not the inquirer sent to the books; the proposition is really so reasonable that it is extraordinary that it has taken a world war and its inevitable schemes of reconstruction to emphasise its desirability.<sup>14</sup>

The open access imperative was fully recognised by the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee:

We also hope that the open access system which has already been introduced in some places will be universally extended. We are aware of the difficulty of converting many libraries to this system, and of the possible drawback of a loss of books or their misplacement by readers. On the other hand we are so fully convinced of the value of allowing readers to see and handle books before taking them away, that we think the advantages more than outweigh the disadvantages.<sup>15</sup>

The main impulse behind open access was the desire to meet the needs of users, as opposed to those of providers. It aimed at improving the quality and incidence of use by making life easier for the patron. The revitalized interest in open access as a result of the war was above all due to a perceived new demand from the serious reader. For the latter, the system made a considerable difference to the



efficacy of detailed study.

But who was the 'serious' reader? Two broad categories can be identified, one political the other economic. First, there were those who had matured politically as a result of the war. The conflict itself had sparked an interest in reading about its causes and its belligerents; librarians noted increased issues of books on economics, politics, geography, sociology, etc.<sup>16</sup> Further, the social disaffection which war brought placed an onus on serious reading. Supporters of the public library believed it could help teach individuals their civic duties; which was shorthand for persuading citizens to eschew any ideas which might lead to a Bolshevik or German revolution here. Associated with this was the idea that the war had been fought against authoritarianism and for democracy - a democracy in which all citizens, except women under 30 and men under 21, could and should participate. The evolution of the democratic, participatory ideal, incorporating greater political power passing to the people, was an image - for it was not a reality - with which the public library found complete compatibility. The public library, after all, saw itself as the embodiment of democratic principles. As the librarian W.A. Briscoe proclaimed:

We are anxious to improve our libraries, to assist education in every way possible, to assist the workers, to help the children - to do the greatest service to the greatest possible number. One of our aims is to be regarded as the greatest democratic institution in the world. Libraries cater for everybody.<sup>17</sup>

The public library both benefited from and contributed to the wartime democratic impulse. This meant an increased importance given to 'study' via the public library. Thus by 1919 the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee was calling for a 'new deal'

for student readers who should be allowed to borrow more non-fiction than the general reader; which usually was just one volume .<sup>18</sup>

The new emphasis on the importance of study also had architectural implications. The same committee recommended the provision of 'educational' accommodation in all libraries in the form of a separate study room away from the main reading room, in addition to a room for classes, lectures, discussions, etc. This was advocated because it was believed "the proportion of serious students and trained readers will undoubtedly grow very considerably and the fulfilment of their needs will be an important part of the work of the public library".<sup>19</sup>

The increased demand for serious reading, whether real or imagined, was not entirely due to interest in social and world affairs. It was part of the rejuvenated interest in education generally during the war which, in turn, resulted from the need for improved economic organization. This economic dimension, certainly with regard to the public library, has to be emphasized. Jones in his exhaustive thesis has argued that the evolution of the public library into a more democratic service - by which he means, it moved away from an earlier, narrower conception dominated by the idea of moral education specifically for the working classes - was due to society's political evolution towards greater democracy. Whilst he does not exclude the dynamism of industry and commerce as a key factor in this respect he does not award it primary importance.<sup>20</sup> There is a case, however, for placing economic forces at least on equal terms with political change in explaining the development of a wider ranging public library service.

Today's public library is seen as a place where "the modern citizen can secure reliable and disinterested advice on practical matters and where he is helped to get his bearings in the complexities



of modern community life."<sup>21</sup> One of the aims of this thesis has been to argue, by pointing to the library's economic role, that such practical objectives have a long tradition in provision, and were certainly visible before the First World War. The latter, however, catapulted the institution's 'practical' function into a new dimension. There was a feeling of excitement, especially from 1916 onwards, that something very new was happening. As a business librarian said about his own intelligence bureau: "It is allied to, but an extension of, library work in a sphere, the purely economic, in which library work has never been tested."<sup>22</sup> This statement, though myopic in viewing the library as having no history of 'economic' work, nonetheless captures the essence of a revitalized and adventurous interest which the public library shared.

The economically motivated serious reader was the fuel which was to sustain the public library's new-found economic momentum. The First World War education dynamic, of which public libraries were a part, was not confined to 'liberal' studies. The stress placed on industrial research during the war underlined the importance of education for vocational and 'productive' purposes. It was an opportunity of which the public library fraternity could take advantage: "The educative function of well equipped libraries, in the ever widening sphere of industry and production will play as important a part as those who manage public libraries will allow them."<sup>23</sup> But in order to capitalize on increased interest in materialist oriented education the public library needed to pay closer attention to modern ideas of business organization (for instance, publicity and good service), many of which had originated across the Atlantic. Quite simply, the information demands of industry and commerce - of businessmen, their assistants and serious vocational readers - had to be catered for in a more efficient

and enthusiastic, almost more American, way.

The emergence of commercial and technical libraries, the most salient aspect of the new economic provision, showed that some British public libraries were indeed taking note of the American example. Moreover, the desire to build a closer relationship with business found expression in the internal design and arrangements of these new departments. Thus, the Yorkshire Evening Post declared in 1924:

There appears to be something of the American 'push' about the Leeds Commercial [and Technical] Library .... Slap bang up-to-date to the smallest detail it is surely one of the most useful institutions (both economically and commercially) in Leeds.<sup>24</sup>

How exactly the public commercial and technical library met (or was meant to meet) in its physical form the needs of business and vocational readers will be discussed in detail below. But first an assessment is required of the anticipated and actual demand which generated design and arrangement ideas.

Ostensibly the public business library was meant for all. In a way they were to continue the tradition of the public library's most 'popular' department, the newsroom, which had long provided information on commerce and industry in a variety of journals.<sup>25</sup> The gathering together of commercial and technical literature in one place would appear to have been a response to some level, at least, of public demand. The Leeds librarian noted in 1916 that a "noticeable feature" of recent use was that:

... in the Reference Library there is a steadily growing demand for books relating to trade and commerce, and particularly to dyeing, a branch of industry which is very much to the front just now. [Mainly because so much had previously been of German origin.] ... I firmly believe that in this connection there is a great future before the libraries. The British public are beginning to realise more and more that they can



learn something about trade from the printed page, and that they must be prepared theoretically as well as practically to maintain our commercial supremacy. The libraries can help in this direction and I am looking forward to them being tremendously busy and tremendously useful.<sup>26</sup>

An image was created of all types of reader making use of the business library:

The questions come from all kinds and classes of people, from working men seeking information about peculiar tools of their craft to business men anxious for the address of a consul in some foreign country, and from the debtor wondering as to the legality of a promissory note, to the mechanic who wanted information about an old-time practice revived during the war, the spinning of metals.<sup>27</sup>

Enquiries came from demobilised soldiers, many of whom had been incapacitated by the war and who were in search of information about suitable employment, as well as from people interested in emigration procedures and suitability of foreign climates.<sup>28</sup> There was also the sailor who wished to know the best road from Leeds to London as he had "not a cent, and was walking there to join his ship".<sup>29</sup>

Such a clientele enabled promoters to present the business library as a place of resort for the skilled, upwardly mobile working man:

To the men of limited means, unable to afford the purchase of works with which to satisfy their ambition for advancement, or to develop ideas connected with their work an organised medium of this character is of inestimable value.<sup>30</sup>

The demand from ambitious artisans at Leeds was so marked that one trade organization requested Saturday evening opening "as this is the only evening of the week when many of the seekers after knowledge and information are able to come into the city for the purpose".<sup>31</sup>

Ambition was also seen as a virtue which more and more women workers would adopt. The war was thought to have opened up new vocational opportunities for women. Except for white-collar work, this

this was not a reality. Although women's employment did increase it was mostly in specific industries such as armaments and transport. At the end of the war it was predicted that the ground which women were thought to have gained in terms of employment options would not only be consolidated but advanced.<sup>32</sup> Such was not to be the case in the inter-war period as the percentage of women employed outside the home slipped back to roughly its pre-war level. However, in the 'heady' days of Reconstruction women were seen as having a bright future in terms of commercial and industrial employment. But in order to compete with men returning from the war women were urged to equip themselves with appropriate knowledge. The business library was seen as an important tool in this respect as the following report, encouraging women's use, reveals:

Women have to go out into the great world of human affairs .... What preparations are they making to fit themselves for positions which have been held by men since business was business? Education is going to play an important part in the re-building of the nation after the scourge of war, and in the coming days women will have to possess the same qualifications as the men folk if they wish to secure responsible positions and establish themselves in the world of business affairs.<sup>33</sup>

Youth was presented as a main beneficiary of the new service. The Commercial, Technical and Scientific Department at Leicester was portrayed as a venue where youth "may fit itself for the battle of life, and prepare the way for the rise in the industrial and scientific world which is the ambition of every normal minded citizen."<sup>34</sup>

Promoters believed young people were making good use of such new facilities. In speaking of recent purchases of technical and commercial works the Chairman of the Brighthouse Libraries Committee said "there was a very good reason for believing that they were very



much appreciated by young people of the borough".<sup>35</sup>

It is possible, however, that promoters were carried away by the intense interest in youth education which surrounded the Education Act of 1918, and in particular its provisions for part-time day 'continuation' education for young people. The idea was a fine one on paper, that is to say, that:

... the education given might have an educational bias, and include the underlying principles of various technical subjects for those coming from the factory and the workshop, and some of the higher branches of commercial education - economics, banking and commercial law - for those whose work lies in banks and offices.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the library establishment believed it could make a significant contribution to this new education initiative - "it was the lads of from fourteen to sixteen that they needed to get at", said an enthusiastic supporter of the business library at Leicester.<sup>37</sup>

However, just as the idea of continuing education remained largely unfulfilled, so is it likely that expectations of youth use of business libraries did also.

The promoted image of the public business library, therefore, was one of common appeal, usefulness and use. The Leeds' department was described as rich in material for "the artisan, craftsman, student, and useful to both commercial and industrial concerns".<sup>38</sup> The publicity notice (Fig. 7) indicates a similar 'democratic', poly-functional approach.

The advantage taken of the new service was not insignificant in terms of numbers of users. Wherever departments were set up increasing use was noted. "Where such libraries had been established they had been a great success", the Chairman of the Leeds Committee observed.<sup>39</sup> In the first 2½ weeks of operation the Leeds' business library attracted 1699 readers who consulted 2112 items.<sup>40</sup>



# Leeds Public Libraries,

## COMMERCIAL & TECHNICAL LIBRARY.

Hours Open - 10 a.m. - 9.30 p.m.  
Telephone No. 22507.

Municipal Buildings,  
Centenary Street.

FOR THE BUSINESS MAN, STUDENT & ARTISAN.

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BUSINESS ORGANISATION.  
CARPENTRY & JOINERY.  
CHEMISTRY.  
COAL MINING PRACTICE.  
COSTS & COSTING.  
DYES & DYEING.  
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PAINTING & DECORATING.  
PAPER MANUFACTURE.  
PHOTOGRAPHY.  
RAILWAY ENGINEERING.  
SALESMANSHIP.  
TEXTILE MANUFACTURE.  
UPHOLSTERY.  
VOCATIONAL TRAINING.  
WATER ENGINEERING.  
WIRELESS.  
WINE AND WOOLLEN.

**Left Text Box:**  
The world is large and many minds have solved business problems which have been recorded in print for the use of those to whom they are of value.

**Right Text Box:**  
The Library acquires and organises for the business man's use printed matter which contains the best of these records and which will help him to overcome his own problems.

A Novel Type of Poster.

Fig. 7. Handbill advertising the Leeds Commercial and Technical Library (c. 1920).

Source: Leeds Public Library (Local History Department), commercial and technical library cuttings and ephemera file.



However, it is doubtful whether commercial or technical information and literature had as wide an appeal as promoters wished or believed. The business community was the more likely beneficiary of the new service. Although public libraries would proudly announce their ability to cope with enquiries from all sections of the general public - even enquiries of as obscure a nature as depicted in Fig. 8

— the vast majority were received from the business sector, on routine as well as detailed commercial and industrial matters. The following is a list of typical enquiries received by the Leeds commercial and technical library. Information was sought as to :

- a) the name of a shipping agent at a certain point on the Gold Coast.
- b) the weights and measures of Brazil.
- c) inland and foreign exchange.
- d) routine methods of exporting to the USA.
- e) textile machinery manufacturers in the USA.
- f) use of chemical fertilizers.
- g) processes for extracting oil from seed.<sup>41</sup>

That business libraries geared themselves essentially for business use is evinced by the way in which public libraries began to promote its service in this field in a more business-like fashion. Quite simply, to attract business patrons, public libraries had to adopt the methods by which industry and commerce sold themselves. Public libraries aspired to be 'at one' with the business community both in terms of services provided and the means by which those services were made known to would-be users. The approach urged by many librarians at the time is captured by the following letter from a local trader to the Cardiff Committee. The Chairman was told that if he was to:



## A POSER.



[At the Enquiry Bureau of the new Commercial Library in Birmingham over 300 enquiries are made daily.]

UN-COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER: "SCUSE ME GUVNOR, I'M A STRANGER 'ERE. D'YER KNOW WHERE THEY'VE GOT ANY?"

Fig. 8. "A Poser".

Source: Birmingham Daily Mail (14 May 1919).



... treat the library like many of us treat our business and advertise the service it is able to render he would find that greater advantage would be taken of the institution. Many people doubt whether the library is of substantial value having regard to its heavy cost, but that is because so few people comparatively use it. Why not go in for a campaign even on a small scale through the popular press and let the public, and particularly the trading community, know what assistance the library can afford business men in dealing with the problems which arise from day to day.<sup>42</sup>

The library establishment appeared to be beginning to take note of such exhortations, particularly in respect of the American experience which had progressed nearer to the notion that - as one American librarian put it - the "object of the library is to disseminate and not accumulate books".<sup>43</sup>

The British librarian J.P. Briscoe was one of a growing number who recognized the need for the public library to sell itself harder:

People as yet did not appreciate the value of public libraries, and by every means possible it should be brought before the public that public libraries were helpful in every department of life. [Including the 'economic', of course.] The need for this was never greater, and a national campaign on the subject should be initiated.<sup>44</sup>

He also advised that the public library ape tactics used in business:

Just as a certain commodity used to have as a catchphrase 'No home is complete without it', so with our 'wares'. And just as various commodity-proprietors advertise their goods, let us advertise our libraries - in the local newspapers, and in every way possible .... Familiarity does not breed contempt in such cases, it breeds popularity; and publicity breeds success.<sup>45</sup>

The need for a more effective marketing of its product was impressed upon the public library by the requirements of disseminating

information to a society convulsed by total war. However, the need to appeal to business - whether due to a sincere belief in Reconstruction and its social effects or a desire to enhance professional self-image - was an additional incentive to create publicity techniques. New techniques were indeed introduced to promote services to business. The following means were advocated at Leeds in 1917 to encourage use of the business library:

1. A monthly list of new literature.
2. Leaflets distributed to technical schools, workplaces and trade unions.
3. Use of noticeboards at workplaces.
4. Personal visits to workplaces.
5. Efficient telephone and letter answering services.
6. Bibliographies devised for distribution, specializing in certain trades and industrial processes.
7. Articles in local press.<sup>46</sup>

Leeds in fact took a lead in devising new advertising methods, and was soon drawing public attention to its new commercial and technical department by distributing handbills and buying advertising space on the sides of the town's buses. Bradford was another public library authority which declared its faith in handbills, posters, etc. for the purpose of promoting its commercial library.<sup>47</sup>

The preceding discussion on 'economic' demand via the public business library has thus far not distinguished between commercial and technical literature. It is true that a particular item could be of both commercial and technical value. A book on the growing of coffee in South America, for example, has both technical (i.e. horticultural) and commercial (i.e. supply source) information. Moreover, libraries



reflected this overlapping in that what might be called a technical department actually contained considerable material of a commercial nature - this was the case with the Rowntree and Co. technical library, for example. However, a clear distinction can and should be made between commercial and technical literature for our purpose in assessing demand.<sup>48</sup>

In 1921 the Huddersfield Examiner commented that:

Technical libraries or collections, dealing with the manufacture or producer's side of industry, have long been a recognised part of public library work, but the commercial side, dealing with the placing or marketing of the product of the machine is a new idea.<sup>49</sup>

This view was wrong in its understanding that commercial literature had no history in public libraries. But the distinction it makes between roles is valid. Commercial libraries were seen as agencies aiding the selling of goods and services: whilst technical libraries assisted those involved in production — inventors, researchers, designers or simply "the man behind the loom".<sup>50</sup>

Ostensibly, commercial libraries were for use by a wide spectrum of social and occupational groups; though not perhaps as wide as that intended for technical libraries, as shall be described below. This was something encouraged by the fact that, as with technical literature, no fee was charged for enquiries, even those of the elaborate or foreign kind often associated with commercial problems.<sup>51</sup> The Deputy Chairman of Manchester Public Libraries pointed out that the planned commercial library "will be available to everyone - from the director of the great establishments to the fresh recruit who makes an entrance into business life".<sup>52</sup> Use by business groups was also anticipated. Regarding their new commercial collection Wolverhampton libraries hoped "the new venture will be taken advantage of not only by

manufacturers, but also by farmers and agriculturalists". Youth was seen as a keen user group - at Manchester there was "generally a contingent of young folk amassing a knowledge of the world's work at the dawn of their careers".<sup>53</sup>

Despite the reality of use by a wide selection of groups the general public was largely absent from commercial libraries. By the 1930s it was being said that "ordinary casual readers never used the commercial library which was the haunt of businessmen and journalists who had no time to waste".<sup>54</sup> Commercial libraries were essentially the resort of businessmen and their assistants. They were not schools of commerce but places "where people who are skilled in commerce may go to obtain information of a wide kind which they may want in connection with their business".<sup>55</sup> Business use should, however, not be over-estimated. Not all businesses by any means made use of the service provided. The librarian E.A. Savage, who had established a commercial library in Coventry during the First World War, wrote from his experiences that:

It might be expected that commercial leaders would study the books about their affairs with almost as much care and attention as they study their private ledgers. Only a few do .... The merchant who neglects works about his business gets on quite as well as his more studious rivals. One of his kind told me that basic knowledge about commodities was in the air of the business dealing in them: it was inescapable.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, commercial people did make use of the new institutions; if not for books and magazines then certainly for pure information pertaining to business.<sup>57</sup>

Technical libraries were established with a much more democratic readership in mind. It was said of Manchester that the city "is moving in the matter of establishing a technical library so that the



students and workers of that city may be able to avail themselves of the latest and best works on their several arts and handicrafts".<sup>58</sup> Such statements appeared to emphasize the importance of skill seeking workers educating themselves in the technology of their trade — in theoretical and not simply practical matters.<sup>59</sup> Although there were those who believed, as the librarian Charles Riddle noted, that in trade "the only equipment needed was that gained in actual business life", an awareness was growing that "text books and technical works were necessary in all trades".<sup>60</sup> Technical literature issued through the public library would mean that no longer was technical education in terms of technology training to be preserve of the higher status worker or professional:

Masters and mistresses, if themselves unwilling to borrow the books [i.e. technical works] should draw the attention of their assistants to the opportunities offered to study the theoretical side of their work, and thus take full advantage of the facilities offered to equip themselves in the battle of business life.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, technology education via the public library would be diffused throughout society. In praise of the new technical library at Linthorpe it was reported in 1919 that:

While at first sight this may appear to be a subject only of interest to those engaged in engineering or commerce, yet the efficiency of our craftsmen and industrial workers generally has such a direct bearing on the prosperity of the town in which they live, that the subject cannot be ignored or confined only to those who may be classed as workers.<sup>62</sup>

Further, technology education could be transferred beyond the realms of work into leisure time, something which in itself would aid industrial productivity by enhancing craftsmanship for work. Ernest Savage hoped that with better technical book provision, and the arrival of shorter hours of work, "we might expect to transform hobbies into

crafts of the past, crafts artistic and profitable to the craftsman".<sup>63</sup>

The researcher was seen as a natural user of the technical library. For the researcher the emphasis was more on technical information, as opposed to general technical literature for study.

Stanley Jast wrote that:

We are aiming not so much to do the work which might be done in the technical schools, but to provide that library which is collateral with the laboratory. We are aiming to provide technical information for those who want it.<sup>64</sup>

As already indicated, such a high-flying role was not allotted to the public library in any way commensurate with the hopes of the library establishment. High level technical information remained locked away in professional associations, educational institutions and government sponsored research associations. General technical literature, on the other hand, was available and, as contributors to the Commons debate on the 1919 Public Libraries Bill testified, was in great demand. One member pointed out that public libraries were not "being used merely for the reading of novels because I know that scientific ... works are in great demand".<sup>65</sup> Another related that the public library in his constituency was:

... occupied every night by young men who are studying technical books. They are young men training themselves after the war for the work they are hoping to take up. That library, I believe, is typical of the public libraries in many of our growing industrial towns, where demand for really useful technical works for adults is very great.<sup>66</sup>

Evidence of significant demand also came from sources closer to activity on the ground. The Yorkshire Evening Post noted in 1920 that:

A noteworthy change seems to be coming over the use of Free Libraries, at all events in the North of England. There is an increasing demand



for scientific and technical books by young men and women.<sup>67</sup>

Such statements point to a notable increase in the use of technical libraries and collections. However, ranged against this argument is evidence that youngsters with potential for skilled work had little enthusiasm for technical education. Attendance at courses was physically draining, not to mention evocative of the school environment so recently left behind; and fees might not be met by the employer. Further, the apprenticeship system was by no means as rare as has been believed in the past. It had remained attractive to employees partly because time served workers had as good a chance of earning both promotion and the wages of a technically educated worker.<sup>68</sup> (See Chapter 8.)

If there is good reason to question the popularity of technical education after the First World War, then the associated demand for technical literature in public libraries must be also. Ernest Savage, reminiscing in 1950 his long librarianship career, wrote that: "Not many artisan mechanics turn to craft books. Unless they take up a hobby for relief or to earn more money they don't want books for their bread-and-butter jobs."<sup>69</sup> And he had this to say about the younger worker in particular:

The young factory hand who looks beyond mass production (and he's rare) to out-vault Sam Smile's self-helpers, is doggedly 'frozen out' of reading about his work. He must keep books out of sight; never air in the shop any knowledge marking him as one 'to get above himself'. Foremen and other petty officers in industry (with some exceptions) are wont to be dourly repressive of go-ahead youngsters. Ordinary workers barnacled with social and technical conservatism are quick to trip up anyone who tries to jump over them.<sup>70</sup>

Despite such assessments of the lack of attractiveness of technical education, historically, amongst workers it is nonetheless

clear that in the latter part of the war and its immediate aftermath an increased interest was registered in technical literature in public libraries, particularly in the new technical departments.

To conclude this analysis of 'economic' demand it can be said that from their inception during the First World War commercial and technical libraries brought an increase in the use of literature previously dispersed throughout the library stock. They were characterised by a desire for a more efficient dissemination of material to users, and this no doubt encouraged use; though the splitting of technical and commercial, it should be noted, was by the nature of its classification not easy, confusion leading to inefficiency often resulting. However, use should not be over-estimated. The commercial library remained an esoteric department, largely for business use; whilst the picture of 'democratic' use of technical libraries by students and skilled workers, though of some authenticity, was more a creation of the hopes of providers.

How did the design and arrangement of public libraries, in particular business departments, intersect with the nature of 'economic' demand? The war appeared to instill a willingness on the part of the library establishment to obtain greater architectural efficiency. Such efficiency was at a premium when arrangements were made for technical and commercial services to business. The first step, naturally, was to isolate material in a separate room or building.<sup>71</sup> In the period under consideration business libraries were not purpose-built, either in isolation or as part of new designs. Either accommodation was found in existing premises such as at Leicester where the Commercial, Scientific and Technical Library was set up in the former women's room.<sup>72</sup> Or premises were taken over



outside.

If accommodation was sought outside existing buildings it was usually less for reasons of lack of space than to be close to the business hub of the city. To be fitted to business purposes premises had to be accessible and located with regard to "the greatest possible number of users".<sup>73</sup> When Bradford was planning its business library in 1917 it was considered "absolutely essential that the premises should be situated in the commercial centre of the city".<sup>74</sup> The Board of Trade's Commercial Intelligence Branch had confronted the same problem in 1903 when it was admitted that due to the positioning of the office in Whitehall "there was some difficulty at first in making the work of the branch known to the business community".<sup>75</sup> Hence, the office was moved to Basinghall Street in the City which it was hoped would "still further increase its usefulness to the commercial community by making it more readily accessible to businessmen".<sup>76</sup> In Manchester the Royal Exchange was said to be the ideal spot for the new commercial library there:

*The Commercial Library, above every other kind of library, must be in the right place. The ordinary student and reader may be expected to go a reasonable distance to his library, but so far as the business man is concerned, the library must endeavour to go to him. Wherever is the centre of the business life of the city, there should the Commercial library be. When, as in Manchester, that centre is to be found in a particular building, such as the Royal Exchange, then the ideal spot for the commercial library is in the Exchange itself, and we are fortunate in having arranged for our future Commercial library in that city to be housed in the new Exchange building.*<sup>77</sup>

At Glasgow it was said that:

The Commercial library has been placed on the first floor of the Stirling Library's building, 21, the Miller St, where, by reason of its excellent position, it will be readily

accessible to the business community.  
Reference to a plan of the city  
. . . . shows that the library occupies the  
centre of a circle having a diameter of  
about 1200 yards in which are situated not  
only a very large proportion of the great  
business houses but also the three  
principal railway stations, the Royal  
Exchange, the Stock Exchange, the Corn  
Exchange, the Chamber of Commerce, the  
General Post Office, the Trades' House, the  
Merchants' House, the County Buildings,  
offices of the Corporation, the Clyde Trust,  
the leading newspapers and the consular  
representatives of foreign powers.<sup>78</sup>

It was not only siting which shows that technical and commercial  
libraries were provided essentially for business use. The internal  
arrangements, lay-outs and facilities, as well as the general  
ambience, were also business orientated. Departments were provided in  
a form which accorded to the dictum that "time is money".  
Information had to be disseminated accurately and speedily. No  
thought could therefore be given to archaic closed access service.  
Leeds promoted its business library by explaining that it

. . . is arranged entirely on the 'open-access'  
lines, and there are no barriers between books  
and readers. The classification is simple and  
all necessary guides and indexes are provided.  
On entering the Library a reader can take down  
from the shelves whatever books he desired, and  
the arrangement is such that all works on any  
subject are to be found together.<sup>79</sup>

The design and arrangement of furniture and fittings was of the  
upmost importance. Of the Manchester Commercial Library it was said:

Libraries are popularly associated with musty  
volumes, antiquated fittings, and scholars of  
various degree lost in some purely academic  
quest. It is a new thing to see a library,  
furnished in the most modern style, containing  
no books that do not bear directly upon modern  
commerce, and whose readers devote minutes  
instead of hours to their tasks. Few scholars  
have seen such a library, and few scholars have  
been able to put their library to such  
productive use.<sup>80</sup>



A further praiseworthy picture of speed and efficiency at Manchester appeared in the Times:

A special feature of the library will be its large scale maps and atlases. The maps will be kept rolled up in cylindrical holders and stacked upright in a sort of umbrella stand. They will be taken out as required and unfolded on tables. There will be other novel fittings. The shelves (which will be of steel) for magazines and business periodicals will be in rows alternately flat and tilted, like a book rest, with the object of displaying the latest issues on the tilted shelves and stacking the earlier copies on the flat shelves.<sup>81</sup>

Tables had to be arranged in proximity to shelving, and be large enough to accommodate perhaps a number of large directories, indexes, etc.:

A table or tables, to be placed as near the books as possible, in order that the reader may have the opportunity to thoroughly examine the books, so as to be satisfied he gets what he requires.<sup>82</sup>

Tables for single readers were advised, as long tables with readers in contact with one another did not allow satisfactory consulting space.<sup>83</sup> This appeared as a common-sense arrangement to business. An adviser to Rowntree and Co. on the setting-up of its business library urged "plenty of elbow-room, ample tables, and all the shelf accommodation that is needed and more"; and added it could be a mistake to "cram away the library in some small and inaccessible part of your office building".<sup>84</sup> The technical librarian subsequently planned his department with almost scientific precision, as the plan in Fig. 9 illustrates. It is not inconceivable that public librarians approached the arrangement of their business libraries in a similar fashion. It is certainly the case that some public libraries took close interest in the efficacy of arrangements made by others. For example, Bradford's desire to plan its new commercial library



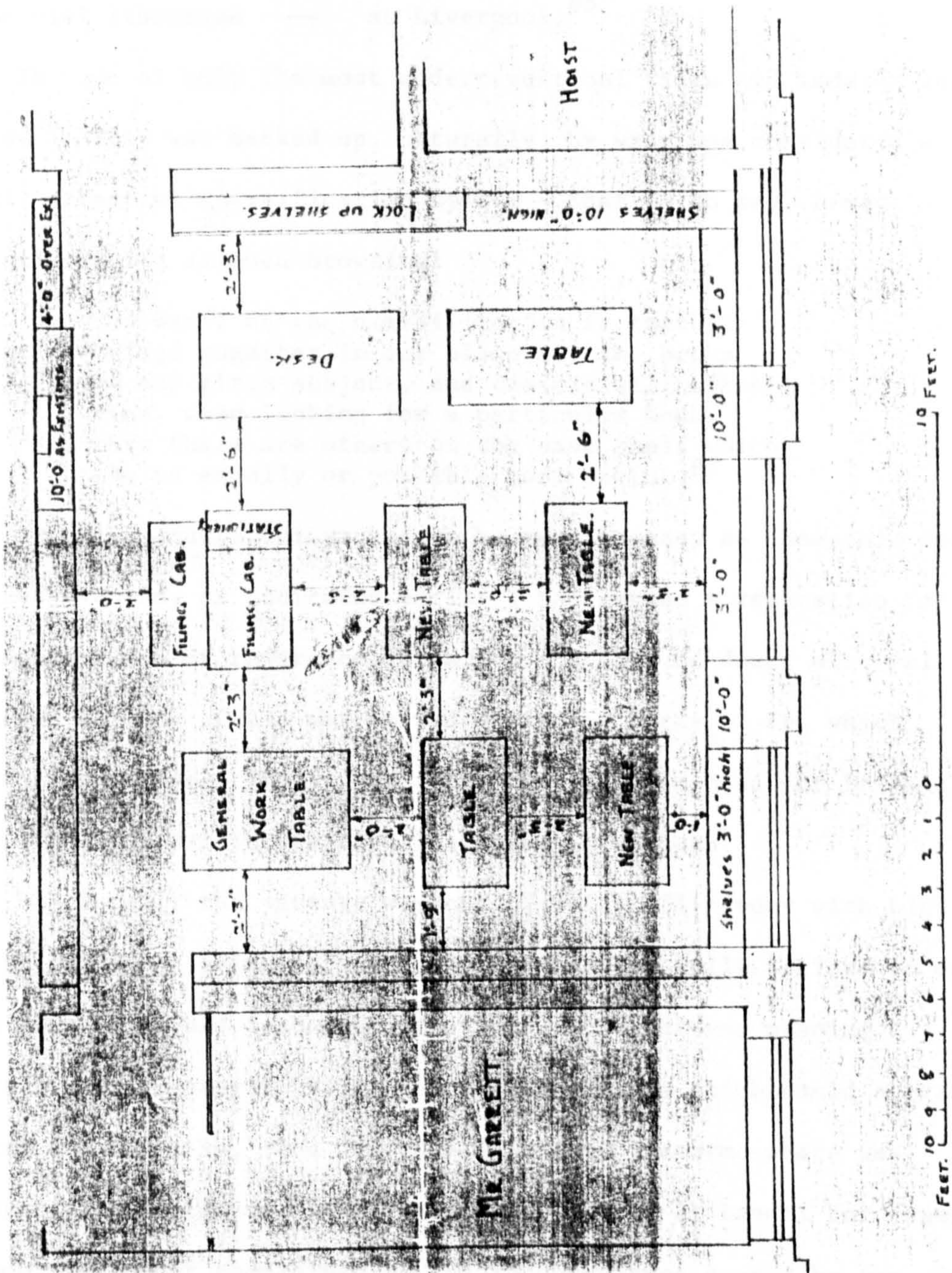


Fig. 9. Technical library, Rowntree and Co.: arrangement of new shelves, tables and existing furniture (1919).

Source: Rowntree-Mackintosh Archives.



efficiently induced the Committee to visit one of the country's first commercial libraries — at Liverpool.<sup>85</sup>

The use of only the most modern vertical files and indexes was urged.<sup>86</sup> This was backed up, naturally, by what was considered a highly effective classification system - that is to say, Dewey Decimal - which allowed browsing:

The merit of the classification is that it brings together in one place all the books on any given subject, and readers will often find, when looking for a particular book, that there are others on the same shelf which may be equally or possibly more useful.<sup>87</sup>

By all accounts things had to be made as easy as possible for businessmen who, as indicated earlier, had earned a reputation for incompetent use of reference libraries.<sup>88</sup> They no doubt also felt welcomed by maps of the world, and different parts of it, which adorned the walls. These impressed upon them the need for Britain to recapture its lost international economic standing.

All in all, the picture was one of slick efficiency with high design standards being backed up by staff "especially trained to deal with commercial and technical enquiries".<sup>89</sup> What was missing, however, was a general ambiance of functionalism which could attract, if not exactly mass, then 'democratic' use. The atmosphere was esoteric and exclusive, rather than 'popular'. At Leeds, for example, a local newspaper complained of the inconvenience caused by the siting of the business library at the end of a corridor in the art gallery, yet in the same breath declared that "compensation is found in the air of exclusiveness in the library itself, which is conducive to study".<sup>90</sup> The very fact that the department at Leeds was sited in a part of the art gallery which contained ornate busts and artefacts appeared to add to the exclusivity of the services offered, though

this was not to the liking of one user:

The statues and other exhibits at the entrance may suggest strength and massiveness, but there is neither harmony nor beauty because utility and propriety of space are both ignored. Why not remove all those and utilise the space for the increasing number of those who hasten, for example, to find what length of wire can be made from two 'ducts' of gold, the address of Mr. Tutankamen in Birmingham, or the latest recipe for making jam.<sup>91</sup>

Notwithstanding such demands for a truly functional provision and arrangement of facilities others remained wedded to the idea of all library services (including technical and commercial) occupying accommodation which exhibited status, first and foremost. Thus, again in Leeds, there was a call shortly after the war for the building of a "Temple of Fame" which would be a shrine to all who had fallen in the war, and would accommodate the city's artistic and literary agencies also, including the municipal business library. Such a temple was said to be "worthy of the city".<sup>92</sup> Aesthetics and civic pride were also to the fore in Birmingham where the commercial library's premises drew the statement that: "Architecturally the room is handsome, all the fittings, including the book presses, being of solid oak."<sup>93</sup> This ambience made this "spacious and handsome chamber as imposing as the chief libraries of an average provincial town".<sup>94</sup>

Thus, once again the public library found itself in a dilemma, this time architecturally, over which function it was meant to fulfil. As with the nineteenth century avowed intention of appealing to all classes, yet attracting and welcoming - for the most part - only the respectable, so also with architectural form of the 1914-19 era library providers found themselves espousing functional form to meet the demands of serious 'economic' readers, yet in the same instance paying homage to the aesthetic appeal of civic design. The idea



appeared to be ignored that:

... there can be no 'gallery display' in the business library. The value of the department will be judged solely by the results obtained.<sup>95</sup>

The mixing of aesthetics with business architecture showed that the attraction of civic grandeur persisted. Yet this was something which perhaps said less about knowledge (or lack of it) of function and efficiency than about the public libraries' deeply felt relationship with serious, responsible, civic-minded readers in an era of social unrest. First World War thinking on public library architecture was concerned with delivering good citizenship; in which was included the socially stabilizing twin quest for economic recovery and cultural elevation.

## Notes and References to Chapter 16

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2. A. Ellis, Public libraries and the First World War (1975), p. 20.
3. M. Swenarton, Homes fit for heroes (1981), p. 3.
4. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report on libraries and museums, Cmd. 9237 (1919), p. 4.
5. It has been argued that the tendency to erect prestigious buildings, in which function was subordinate to appearance, was dealt its biggest blow by the Second World War. Research requirements 1939-1945, arguably greater than 1914-1918, revealed the inadequacy of library facilities, including design. Hence, a more careful regard for readers was engendered. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 10 1974, 15th edn. , p. 865.
6. Frank Gardner interviewed by D.E. Gerard; sound recording (cassette), produced by the College of Librarianship, Wales at Aberystwyth (Cardiff, 1975).
7. Report cited in Yorkshire Post (23 September 1915).
8. West Kent Advertiser (14 February 1913). Letter to the editor from 'J.R.D.'.
9. Dartford Chronicle (24 December 1915).
10. Ellis, Public libraries, op. cit., p. 18. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, Annual Report (1915), pp. 23-24.
11. Leamington Courier (20 April 1917). Letter to the editor.
12. Leamington Courier (16 April 1915). Letter to the editor.
13. Leamington Courier (6 June 1919). Words of Rugby's public librarian concerning the change to open access there.
14. Walter Powell in a discussion on technical libraries, Library Association Record, 19 (1917), pp. 489-490.
15. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 5.
16. Yorkshire Post (17 November 1914).
17. W.A. Briscoe, 'Our war aims', Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 117. An example of the public library as an institution for 'all' was the weekly readings given to the blind by Luton Public Library; Library Association Record, 19 (1917), pp. 77-78. Statutory obligation to provide for 'all' did not arrive until the Public Libraries Act (1964).



18. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 5.
19. Ibid., pp. 4-6.
20. G. Jones, Political and social factors in the advocacy of 'free' libraries in the United Kingdom 1801-1922 (unpublished Ph.D., University of Strathclyde, 19719).
21. Encyclopaedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 861.
22. J.G. Pearce, 'Intelligence work in a modern industrial organization', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), p. 369.
23. Coventry Herald (10 May 1919).
24. Yorkshire Evening Post (7 November 1924).
25. Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, Third interim report, op. cit., p. 4.
26. Yorkshire Post (15 May 1916).
27. Yorkshire Evening News (22 November 1919).
28. Yorkshire Post (10 April 1919).
29. Yorkshire Evening News (22 November 1919).
30. Leeds Weekly Citizen (22 January 1926).
31. Yorkshire Evening Post (17 October 1918).
32. Beatrice Webb noted a piece of evidence collected by the Reconstruction Committee: "As a very large number of men will not return to industries - through death or disablement or through diversion to some other career - the employment of women in what was regarded as men's work before the war will continue in many cases after the war. Apart from this the war will have given an enormous impetus to the industrial employment of women. It will be a question possibly whether some of the emergency arrangements which have been made to facilitate the employment of women should be allowed to continue, either temporarily or permanently, and questions will also arise as to the conditions on which they should continue to be employed. A demand will very likely be made for a re-examination of the whole question of the conditions of industrial employment for women." 'Reconstruction Committee correspondence with departments concerning problems which will arise at the end of the war' (August 1916), Reconstruction Papers, Vol. 1 (1916-1918); London School of Economics, Passfield Collection 13.
33. Leeds Mercury (6 February 1919).
34. Leicester Mail (16 June 1920).

35. 'Public libraries: usefulness to individuals and the nation', from the Brighouse Echo (c. June 1918), included in Library Association Branch Meetings, Minutes (1916-1926), p. 42, Library Association Archives.
36. London County Council, Education Committee, Draft interim scheme under section 10 of the 1918 Education Act, Greater London Records Office, papers accompanying reports, LCC/MIN/2975.
37. Leicester Daily Post (1 November 1919).
38. Yorkshire Evening Post (1 October 1924).
39. Yorkshire Post (29 May 1919).
40. Leeds Public Library and Arts Committee, Minutes (25 July 1918). It was a similar story elsewhere. In the ten months after the opening of the Glasgow commercial library an average of 3000 enquiries (person, written and telephone) per week were received; S.A. Pitt, 'Commercial libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917). However, it is important to put the extent of use into perspective. One could not describe business libraries as wildly popular. Moreover, doubts were expressed, as at Bradford, that departments were not operating at full capacity. The Bradford Daily Telegraph (10 June 1920) asked: "How many Bradfordians are aware of the existence of the Commercial Library ... or, if aware of it, ever make use of the mine of information? One does not expect to see queues outside a commercial library, it is true. There is no danger of competing with the cinema as a popular entertainment, but the present average of 1500 enquiries per week taxes the library to about only half its capacity."
41. Yorkshire Post (10 April 1919).
42. Western Mail (3 November 1920).
43. Ilkley Free Press and Gazette (10 June 1921).
45. W.A. Potter, 'Our war aims', Library Association Record, 20 (1918), p. 116.
46. T.W. Hand, Memo on securing publicity for scientific and technical libraries, Library Association Special Committee on Technical and Commercial Libraries, Minutes (26 April 1917); Library Association Archives.
47. Bradford Public Libraries Committee, Minutes (9 January 1918).
48. L.S. Jast, The Organization of British trade: the commercial library (Manchester, 1917), p. 4.
49. Huddersfield Examiner (3 November 1921).
50. Jast, op. cit., p. 4.



51. Even the Board of Trade's Commercial Intelligence Branch did not charge fees, though there had been a proposal to impose them before 1914 on the grounds that for enquiries of an "elaborate character" firms and individuals would be willing to pay a "reasonable fee". However, the proposal was rejected, the objection being that fees would prove "most unpopular and unworkable". Board of Trade, Commercial Intelligence Department, Report on the proposal to charge fees at the Commercial Intelligence Branch (1909), and Memo on the charging of fees, Public Records Office, BT11/3/C6034/09, and BT11/3/13507/09.
52. T.C. Abbot, 'Commercial libraries', Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 476.
53. Daily Dispatch and Manchester Chronicle (17 August 1922).
54. Newspaper World (11 March 1933).
55. Publishers' Circular (29 May 1920), reporting on the Liverpool Public Library's Handbook to the commercial reference library, which recounted the opening ceremony in August 1917.
56. E.A. Savage, A Librarian looks at readers (1950), p. 176.
57. Birmingham Public Libraries, Handbook to the commercial library (1919).
58. British Colonial Printer (31 May 1919).
59. See the discussion on technical education in Chapter 8 above.
60. Bournemouth Guardian (22 June 1918).
61. Bournemouth Guardian (12 July 1919).
62. North Eastern Gazette (27 May 1919). The Library Association also saw the 'student' worker as an individual to be encouraged. The message sent to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1917 concerning government help for public technical libraries identifies two core beneficiary groups. First, the advanced student or research worker - the public library could act as an agency for an esoteric central collection. Second, the artisan and elementary science/technical student - technical manuals and periodicals could be provided for them in the library. Library Association Special Committee on Commercial and Technical Libraries, Minutes (26 April 1917).
63. Coventry Herald (10 May 1919).
64. Library Association Record, 19 (1917), p. 495. Jast in a discussion on technical libraries.
65. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 122, col. 1779 (1919).
66. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 122, col. 1773 (1919).
67. Yorkshire Evening Post (6 January 1920).

68. C. More, Skill and the English working class 1870-1914 (1980), pp. 220-221.
69. Savage, op. cit., p. 180.
70. Ibid., p. 181.
71. Jast, op. cit., pp. 3-4.
72. Leicester Mail (23 May 1919).
73. Abbott, op. cit., p. 472.
74. Bradford Library, Art Gallery and Museum Committee, Minutes (21 May 1917).
75. Report to the Board of Trade by the Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence, Cmd. 8815 (1917), p. 11.
76. Report to the Board of Trade by the Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence, Cmd. 2044 (1904), p. 7.
77. Jast, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
78. Glasgow Corporation Public Libraries, The Purpose, equipment and methods of the commercial library (Glasgow, 1916), p. 9.
79. Leeds Public Library, The Commercial and technical library (Leeds, 1919).
80. Manchester Guardian (18 November 1920).
81. Times (4 April 1919).
82. T.W. Hand, 'Memo on securing publicity for scientific and technical libraries', Library Association Special Committee on Technical Libraries, Minutes (26 April 1917).
83. Jast, op. cit., p. 6.
84. Letter from B. Lasker to J.B. Morrell (12 May 1916), included in J.B. Morrell [Internal report on] business libraries (26 July 1916), Rowntree-Mackintosh Archives.
85. Bradford Public Library Committee, Minutes (9 January 1918).
86. Jast, op. cit., p. 6.
87. Birmingham Public Libraries, Handbook on the commercial library (Birmingham, 1919), p. 5.
88. Oldham Evening Chronicle (17 July 1919).
89. Leeds Public Library, op. cit. Leeds also facilitated extra use by having its business library open an hour longer each weekday evening compared with 'lending' opening times.



- .90. Yorkshire Observer (17 July 1918).
91. 'Leeds commercial library', article in Yorkshire Evening News (c. October 1923), Leeds Public Library Cuttings, Vol. 2 (1920-1930), p. 50.
92. Yorkshire Evening Post (22 April 1919). Letter to the editor, signed 'Progress'.
93. Birmingham Public Libraries, op. cit.
94. Athenaeum (26 September 1919).
95. E.A. Clarke, 'Dunlop Rubber Co. Ltd.: the work of the library section service department', Library Association Record, 23 (1921), p. 377.

## Chapter Seventeen

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the cultural and material themes of early public library development, with the intention of synthesizing them into a thesis of social stability. These themes continue to inform the debate on modern public library provision. The public library's cultural purpose has recently been placed under the economic microscope. Economizers and ideologues, in government and elsewhere, have proposed a rationalization of the municipal library's traditional operations - despite the fact that public libraries have done more than any other municipal institution in terms of self-evaluation of performance.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that information needs (included is the broad demand for knowledge) would be best satisfied if provision were taken out of the public sector or, less radically, charged for at the 'economic rate'. Information is perceived by modern economic liberals as a tradeable commodity; not as a public right.<sup>2</sup>

Criticism of the public library has been but one element in the attack which has recently been staged on the arts generally. Arguably, those who have wielded political power in the 1980s have looked upon the arts as a 'wet' issue. The pursuit of culture is seen as akin to the unfavourable traditions of the British leisure class, including the Bloomsbury group and its 'false' Keynesian economics. The arts are seen as effeminate and out of character with the aggressiveness required to achieve the economic success which commercial society demands. Humanistic culture is given no place in the enterprise culture.<sup>3</sup> The age of the balance sheet and the accountant has similarly affected public libraries. As Bob Usherwood has written:



In 1977, official concern [Department of Education and Science] was with library services to the disadvantage; a decade later the Office of Libraries and Arts is more concerned with a costing, not a value, system for public libraries.<sup>4</sup>

In observing these modern trends there is a real danger of being 'Whiggish'. Retrospective analysis can be employed to show that current tensions are merely the inevitable fruition of past development, that past failure to choose more decisively between cultural and material roles has meant that the public library is now paying the price of indecision, in not evolving a convincing fundamental philosophy. Using the past to buttress a present view can result in linear explanations which ignore historical discontinuities. A determined attempt has been made in this thesis to avoid this pitfall. As far as possible, analysis has been subjective, in that note has been taken of the motives of providers as stated at the time, in the contemporary social, economic and ideological context. Further, though the persistence of certain trends is undeniable - for example, the library as a force for liberation and political awareness - a linear explanation is palpably absent from this present study. Extreme advocates of commercialism and 'go-getting' view culture and materialism as highly antagonistic. This study has argued, however, that in the pre-1919 era champions of progress and 'getting-on' were prepared to view culture as complementary to their materialistic intentions.

The utilitarian pioneers and business benefactors of public libraries were not Grandgrind stereotypes, but were convinced of the efficacy of culture to assist material progress. Idealist promoters acknowledged that a diffusion of culture would reinforce capitalism - though in a modified form - by creating the harmony in social

relations and the improved human existence from which prosperity would flow. Material advance was an *externality* of culture dispensed by the public library. Public libraries did, of course, provide commercial and technical data which was *directly* relevant to economic performance and individual prosperity. But they also facilitated these material benefits *indirectly*. Public libraries attempted to fashion not simply more educated, and hence productive, workers; but also a more flexible workforce, schooled in theory as well as practice. As educators in citizenship they aimed to manufacture tamer, more reasonable, and thus more profitable workers. Public libraries sought an improved quality of life; serving as havens from the squalor and pace of industrialism, and offering a respite from the counter-productive monotony which the division of labour had wrought - yet inevitably releasing spiritually refreshed readers back into the fray of an acquisitive machine society.

Such indirect means to securing economic advance might have relevance to today's increasingly complex, specialized, hurried and polluted society. However, modern public library thinking attributes considerable importance to the supply of information directly relevant to increased prosperity. The importance of satisfying business needs is frequently proclaimed - perhaps partly as a sop to those questioning the utility and public funding of free culture via the public library. Information has been bestowed a position commensurate with the key economic variables of capital and labour, because it is the one resource which is not depleted, but reproduces itself when used.<sup>5</sup> Yet, it is by no means certain that the public library's *raison d'etre* should be defined by any strong emphasis on direct economic benefits. As in the Victorian, Edwardian and First World War eras, economic benefits accrued indirectly might be considered as potentially more



profitable - and not just materially; but also in the access they give to humanistic culture as a basis for an improved, more just and more stable society.

This study has attempted to evolve a theory of early public library provision. It has been suggested that those who encouraged the free access to knowledge in municipal libraries did so for both cultural and material ends. Pursued independently these ends aimed to help stabilize industrial capitalist society. But even greater social stability flowed from the symbiotic relationship between the two. It is anticipated that this theoretical exploration (and the evidence assembled to support it) will prove useful to historians outside library history who have to date largely neglected the public library in their researches; but also to library historians seeking to broaden their subject field. It is also hoped that historical arguments presented here might contribute to the search for a much-needed modern public library philosophy. Theoretical assessments of public library history can serve to encourage today's librarians and prospective librarians to pay closer attention to function, as opposed to processes and techniques. In an era dominated by narrow vocationalism, specialization and material concerns, it is now even more crucial than it would normally be to make firmly worded statements on the ethics of public library provision.

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2. See the Green Paper Financing our public library service: four subjects for debate (1988), Cmd.324, and The Library Association, Response to 'Financing our public library service ...' (1988). The Green Paper followed a disturbingly misinformed attack on the public funding of local libraries by the Adam Smith Institute, Ex libris (1986), a response to which was given in the 'The Price of everything and value of nothing', Library Association Record, 88 (1986), p. 311.
3. A. Sinfield, 'How come they don't like us when we gave them so much culture?', conference on Cultural Value, Birkbeck College (16 July 1988), audio cassette held by Birkbeck College (London University) English Department.
4. B. Usherwood, Public libraries as public knowledge (1989), p. 1.
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Bournemouth	Doncaster	Leeds	Oxford
Bradford	Eastbourne	Lewisham	Portsmouth
Bristol	Hammersmith and Fulham	Manchester	Southwark
Bromley	Islington	Nantwich	Swindon
Crewe		Northampton	Tower Hamlets



Westminster

Wigan

Winchester

York

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX I

Occupations of new Borrowers at the  
Portsmouth Public Library 1887-1888

Accountants, Clerks &c.	93	Journalists ... ..	18
Apprentices ... ..	84	Labourers .. ...	45
Architects and Draughtsmen	12	Lawyers & Solicitors	19
Auctioneers and Agents	17	Ladies ... ..	22
Bakers and Grocers ...	28	Machinists .. ...	3
Basketmakers ... ..	3	Mariners & Seamen	75
Booksellers and Stationers	10	Merchants ... ..	5
Boot and Shoe Makers ...	15	Masons & Plasterers	16
Brassfounders ... ..	7	Milliners & Dressmakers	54
Brushmakers ... ..	12	Musicians .. ...	5
Builders and Contractors ...	24	Not Stated .. ...	952
Butchers ... ..	11	Nurses ... ..	3
Cabinet Makers, Upholsterers and Polishers ... ..	9	Officers:—Army & Navy	45
Cabmen ... ..	3	Oilmen ... ..	17
Carpenters and Joiners ...	33	Pastry Cooks ... ..	6
Chaplains and Ministers ...	8	Pawnbrokers... ..	13
Chemists and Druggists ...	12	Pensioners:—Army & Navy	65
Colporteurs .. ...	2	Photographers ... ..	20
Commercial Travellers ...	7	Physicians, Surgeons & Doctors	11
Coopers ... ..	2	Postmen ... ..	12
Carriers ... ..	4	Publicans ... ..	3
Customs & Revenue Officers	16	Reporters ... ..	9
Dairymen ... ..	7	Riggers ... ..	15
Decorators, Painters & Glaziers	30	Secretaries .. ...	12
Domestic Servants ... ..	36	Scholars and Students	124
Drapers, etc. ... ..	45	Schoolmasters & Mistresses	87
Engineers .. ...	18	Shipwrights ... ..	116
Errand Boys ... ..	13	Smiths .. ...	25
Factory Hands ... ..	85	Stokers ... ..	38
Fitters ... ..	37	Tailors .. ...	16
Fruiterers, Gardeners, etc.	17	Tradesmen .. ...	11
Gentlemen .. ...	9	Waiters ... ..	5
House & Shop Keepers ...	74	Warehousemen ... ..	7
Inspectors .. ...	22		
Jewellers .. ...	7		
		Total	2686

Source: Portsmouth Free Public Library, Report (1887-1888).

APPENDIX 2

Occupations of New Borrowers at the

Leyton Public Library 1902-1903

Accountants ... .. 10	Customs and Revenue Officers... .. 4
Agents and Collectors ... 27	Cycle Makers ... .. 2
Apprentices and Assistants 60	Distiller ... .. 1
Architects and Surveyors 6	Domestic Servants ... 18
Artists and Designers ... 6	Drapers and Milliners ... 19
Bakers and Confectioners 5	Draughtsmen ... .. 6
Baths Superintendent ... 1	Dressmakers ... .. 24
Bookbinders ... .. 2	Electricians ... .. 5
Boot and Shoe Makers ... 8	Engineers, Fitters, etc. ... 40
Builders ... .. 4	Errand Boys, etc. ... 25
Bullet Maker ... .. 1	Fishmonger ... .. 1
Butchers ... .. 2	Florist ... .. 1
Cabinet Makers, Carpenters and Joiners ... .. 12	Furniture Dealer ... .. 1
Caretakers and Porters... 4	Furriers ... .. 2
Chemists ... .. 5	Greengrocer ... .. 1
Civil Servants ... .. 8	Hairdressers ... .. 2
Clerks, Cashiers, etc. ... 342	Hatters and Hosiers ... 3
Coach Makers ... .. 3	Ironmonger ... .. 1
Cooper ... .. 1	Ivory Workers ... .. 2
Corn Dealer ... .. 1	Journalists ... .. 9
Labourers ... .. 8	Scholars and Students ... 720
Laundry Employees ... 2	Schoolmasters, Mistresses and Teachers ... .. 183
Library Assistant ... 1	Shipwright ... .. 1
Machinists ... .. 17	Soldier ... .. 1
Married Women ... 192	Stationers ... .. 4
Merchants and Manufacturers ... .. 23	Tobacconist ... .. 1
Milkman... .. 1	Tailors ... .. 7
Millwright ... .. 1	Tea Dealers ... .. 2
Ministers... .. 2	Telegraphists ... .. 5
Musical Instrument Makers 5	Telephone Attendants ... 2
Musicians ... .. 4	Travellers ... .. 34
Needlewomen ... .. 5	Upholsterers ... .. 2
Nurses ... .. 6	Waiters ... .. 2
Oilman ... .. 1	Warehousemen and Salesmen ... .. 29
Photographers ... .. 2	Watch Makers and Jewellers ... .. 4
Physicians and Surgeons 4	Wood Engraver... .. 1
Plumbers, Painters and Decorators ... .. 15	Not stated .. .. 589
Police Constables .. 4	
Post Office Officials ... 12	
Printers, Compositors, etc. 28	2616
Railway Employees ... 17	
Saddle and Harness Makers 3	

Source: Leyton Public Library, Report (1902-1903).



APPENDIX 3

Occupations of Female Readers at the South Shields

Public Library's Lending and Reference Departments, 1876

Lending

Actresses	2
Domestic servants	31
Dressmakers	48
Governesses and schoolmistresses	39
Housekeepers	8
Milliners	70
Pupil teachers	51
Saleswomen	38
Scholars	119
Scripture reader	. 1
Shopkeepers	8
Teachers of music	4
Widows	133
No occupation	<u>401</u>
TOTAL	953

Reference

Actresses	74
Dressmakers	42
Milliners	30
Pupil teachers	78
Servants	11
Students and scholars	76
No occupation stated	<u>109</u>
TOTAL	420

Source: Statistical Parliamentary Return by South Shields (1876).

APPENDIX 4

Volumes Issued in the Various Subject Classes in the Lending and  
Reference Departments of the Leicester Central Public Library 1889-1890

<u>Subjects</u>	<u>Lending</u>	<u>Reference</u>
Theology, Philosophy	909	1,969
History, Biography	4,567	3,487
Voyages, Travel	2,637	1,056
Science, Art	4,756	8,296
Law, Politics, Commerce	250	325
Poetry, Drama	915	1,442
Fiction	88,210	523
Miscellaneous Literature	4,921	9,232
Juvenile Literature	38,236	—
Patents	—	2,743
	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTAL	134,401	29,073

Source: Leicester Public Library, Report (1889-1890).



APPENDIX 5

Illustrations of the Various Occupations of Persons Reading  
the Same Book at the Portsmouth Public Library 1887-1888

**Gandot's Physics, Issued 23 Times.**

Artists	...	...	1
Cashiers	...	...	1
Clerks	...	...	1
Drapers	...	...	2
Engineers	...	...	1
Fitters Apprentices	...	...	1
Dressmakers	...	...	1
Scholars	...	...	1
Shipwrights	...	...	2
" Apprentices	...	...	8
Stationers	...	...	2
Stonemasons	...	...	1
Not Stated	...	...	1

**England Under Gladstone, 18 times**

Clerks	...	...	1
Compositors	...	...	1
Dealers	...	...	1
Drapers	...	...	1
Grocers	...	...	1
Housekeepers	...	...	1
Not Stated	...	...	2
Pensioners	...	...	4
Postmen	...	...	1
Schoolmasters	...	...	1
Shipwrights	...	...	1
Station Masters	...	...	1
Teachers	...	...	1
Outfitters	...	...	1

**Vambery's Life and Travels,  
42 times.**

Assistants	...	...	3
Brushmakers	...	...	1
Carpenters	...	...	1
Carver	...	...	1
Clerks	...	...	3
Coachmen	...	...	1
Colonel	...	...	1
Dealer	...	...	1
Grocer	...	...	1
Housekeeper	...	...	1
Major	...	...	1
Milliners	...	...	1
Not Stated	...	...	11
Opticians	...	...	1
Plumbers	...	...	1

**Vambery's Life and Travels, contd.**

Scholars	...	...	4
Shipwrights	...	...	2
Shopboys	...	...	2
Superintendent Insurance Co.	...	...	1
Tailors	...	...	1
Teachers	...	...	1
Telegraph Messenger	...	...	1
Writer, R.N.	...	...	1

**Smiles' Scotch Naturalists, 24 times**

Carpenters	...	...	1
" Apprentices	...	...	2
Clerks	...	...	1
Grocers	...	...	2
Housekeepers	...	...	1
Not Stated	...	...	6
Nurse	...	...	1
Pensioners	...	...	2
Sailors	...	...	1
Scholars	...	...	2
Schoolmasters	...	...	1
Shipwright Apprentices	...	...	1
Teachers	...	...	1
Writers	...	...	2

**Besant's All Sorts and Conditions  
of Men, 42 times.**

Clerks	...	...	2
Collectors	...	...	1
Engineers, R.N.	...	...	1
Grocers	...	...	1
Gunners, R.N.	...	...	1
Housekeepers	...	...	3
Jewellers	...	...	1
Joiner's Apprentices	...	...	1
Not Stated	...	...	18
Pastrycooks	...	...	1
Pensioner	...	...	1
Salesman	...	...	1
Schoolmistress	...	...	2
Shipwrights	...	...	1
Stationers	...	...	2
Teachers	...	...	3
Writers	...	...	2

Grant's Aristotle, 29 Times.		<i>King Solomon's Mines, contd.</i>	
Bootmaker .. .. .	1	Gunners, R N .. .. .	1
Captain, Medical Staff .. .. .	1	Housekeepers .. .. .	5
Carpenter's .. .. .	1	Journalists .. .. .	1
Clerks .. .. .	2	Matron .. .. .	1
Compositors .. .. .	1	Not Stated .. .. .	34
Domestics .. .. .	1	Postmen .. .. .	1
Drapers .. .. .	2	Schoolmasters .. .. .	2
Fitters .. .. .	1	Schoolmistresses .. .. .	2
" Apprentices .. .. .	1	Stationers .. .. .	1
Gold Beater .. .. .	1	Stewards, R.N. .. .. .	1
Grocers .. .. .	1	Surveyors .. .. .	1
H.M.'s Customs .. .. .	1	Teachers .. .. .	5
Housekeeper... .. .	1	Upholsterers .. .. .	1
Not Stated .. .. .	5	Brushmakers .. .. .	1
Painters .. .. .	1	Cashiers .. .. .	1
Pastrycook .. .. .	1	Clerk in Holy Orders .. .. .	1
Shipwright .. .. .	1	Coal Merchants .. .. .	1
" Apprentice .. .. .	1	Compositors .. .. .	1
Shop Boys .. .. .	1	Drapers .. .. .	1
Smiths .. .. .	1	Engineers .. .. .	3
Tailors .. .. .	1	Fishmongers .. .. .	1
Travellers .. .. .	1	Furniture Dealers .. .. .	1
Warehouseman .. .. .	1	Hairdressers .. .. .	1
<b>Haggard's King Solomon's Mines, 111 Times.</b>		Jewellers .. .. .	1
Booksellers .. .. .	1	Lieut.-Colonel .. .. .	1
Carvers .. .. .	1	News Agents .. .. .	2
Clerks .. .. .	12	Portinanteau Makers .. .. .	1
Chemists .. .. .	1	Scholars .. .. .	6
Commanders, R.N. .. .. .	1	Shipwrights .. .. .	4
Constructors .. .. .	1	Soda Water Makers .. .. .	1
Electrical Fitters .. .. .	1	Station Master .. .. .	1
Dressmakers .. .. .	2	Surgeons .. .. .	2
Fitters .. .. .	1	Tailors .. .. .	1
		Telegraphists .. .. .	1

Source: Portsmouth Free Public Library, Report (1887-1888).



APPENDIX 6

Books Selected at the Portsmouth Public Library 1887-1888

by Borrowers Engaged in Various Occupations

**A CLERK.**

Stanley's History of the Jewish Church, 3 vols.  
 Fortunes Made in Business, 2 vols.  
 Fenn on the Funds  
 Money and the Mechanism of Exchange  
 Norman Conquest, 5 vols.  
 History of Belfast  
 India and Its Native Princes  
 Tale of Two Cities

**CIVIL ENGINEER.**

Fortunes Made in Business, 2 vols.  
 Draper's Intellectual Development of Europe, 2 vols.  
 Ganot's Physics  
 Sport in Many Lands  
 Life of Henry Fawcett  
 Spiritual Wives, by Dixon  
 Wonders in Living Nature  
 United, a Novel, by Sinnett  
 A Look Round Literature  
 Army Society, by Winter  
 The whole of Rider Haggard's Works  
 Animal Anecdotes, by Page

**A JOURNALIST.**

Light of Asia, by Arnold  
 Oliver Ellis, by Grant  
 The Devil's Advocate, 2 vols., by Greg  
 Free Lance Tiltings in Many Lists  
 Russia Under the Czar, 2 vols., by Stepniate  
 Serjeant Ballantines Experiences  
 Curiosities of Law and Lawyers  
 Liberal Movement in English Literature  
 King Solomon's Mines  
 Suicide, its Philosophy, Cause and Prevention  
 Barnaby Rudge  
 Memoirs of a Physician, by Dumas

**A LABOURER.**

Green's Short History of the English People  
 Greenwood's Little Ragamuffins  
 The Graphic and Illustrated London News

Dombey and Son  
 Old Curiosity Shop  
 Tale of Two Cities  
 All Sorts and Conditions of Men  
 By Celiar Arbour  
 Ireland, its Scenery, Character, &c  
 3 vols.  
 Tales from Blackwood  
 Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln  
 Harry Richmond, by Meredith

**A DOMESTIC SERVANT.**

East Lynne, by Wood  
 The History and Life of Bishop Hannington  
 Lady Audley's Secret  
 Look before you Leap, by Alexander  
 Canadian Pictures, by Marquis of Lorne  
 Girl of the Period, by Linton  
 She, by Haggard  
 Dishes and Drinks, or Philosophy in the Kitchen  
 Life of Harriet Martineau  
 Mill on the Floss  
 Her World against a Lie, by Marryatt

**A SCHOOL MISTRESS.**

Adam Bede  
 Hostages to Fortune  
 Lost for Love  
 Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic  
 Seaforth, by Montgomery  
 Oceana, by Froude  
 United, a Novel, by Sinnett  
 Clouds in the East, by Baker  
 Health and Education, by Kingsley  
 Old Mortality, by Scott  
 Weaver Stephen, Odds and Evens in English Religion, by Parker  
 Royal Favor, by Wallis  
 Aurora Leigh, by Browning  
 We Two, by Lyall

**A SCHOOL MASTER.**

Sweet Sleep and How to Promote It  
 A Diary of Two Parliaments, by Lucy  
 History of Crime in England, in 2 vols.

<p><b>A SCHOOL MASTER.</b></p> <p>Biographical Essays  Wonderful Characters  Froude, Short Studies on Great  Subjects, 3 vols.  By Celia's Arbour  Golden Butterfly  Ready Money Mortiboy  She and Dawn, by Haggard  Society in London  Essays from the Spectator  For Cash Only  Mirk Abbey  History of English Literature, 4  vols., by Taine</p> <hr/> <p><b>A DRESSMAKER.</b></p> <p>Cherry Ripe, by Mathers  Her World against a Lie  Too Good for Him  Young Lady Treasure Books  Kidnapped, by Stephenson  Lady Audley's Secret  Oceana, by Froude</p>	<p>Lives of Robert and Mary Moffatt  Bottle's Baby, by Winter  Life of General Gordon  A Lady's Life in the Rocky  Mountains  Middle March</p> <hr/> <p><b>A STUDENT.</b></p> <p>History of a Crime, by Hugo  Life of Frank Buckland  Unorthodox London  The Transvaal War  Burma, Past and Present  Three Years of Arctic Service, by  Greely  Head Hunters of Borneo  The Congo, by Stanley  Autocrat of the Breakfast Table  King Solomon's Mines  Green's History of the English  People, 4 vols.  The Conquest of England, by  Green  Burnaby's Ride to Khiva  He would be a Soldier, by Jephson</p>
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Source: Portsmouth Free Public Library, Report (1887-1888).