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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC  
LIBRARY SERVICES**

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## CHAPTER 4

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES

### 1. Introduction

The late eighteenth century had witnessed the birth of great socio-economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, which had led to internal migration and the rapid growth of new population centres. In addition, the increase in population during the nineteenth century exacerbated this problem of uncontrolled migration from rural to urban areas. These phenomena included overcrowding, poor housing, ill health, and a high proportion of children (by the 1850's some 30% of the population was under 14 years old). The Webbs saw the four evils which impacted on local government as "the massing of men in urban districts, the devastating torrent of public nuisances, the catastrophic increase in destitution and pauperism, and the consequent prevalence of crime and sedition".<sup>1</sup> The central government's response to this was ever more repressive legislation, harsher court sentences, and intervention by the standing army — solutions seen by a parliament consisting of the landed class (which also supplied the local justices) as the only ones possible.

The Industrial Revolution was also accompanied by benefits, whose effects were only slowly seen and appreciated — a new though limited sense of democracy, new social institutions, improving health and longevity, and a national prosperity which was grudgingly percolated to all classes through more socialist legislation such as the Public Libraries Acts. The historiographer of the fascinating nineteenth century is not presented with a succession of events which provide a clear story of linear progression, but rather with a complex matrix of factors as turbulent as the times themselves. The evolution of local authority public institutions through library legislation is only one of the threads which may be disentangled from this matrix.

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<sup>1</sup> Webb, S. and B. *The development of English local government 1689-1835*. (London: (Oxford University Press. 1963.) p.91.

## 2. Development of local government

Until the eighteenth century, local government was concerned mainly with poor relief, but the Industrial Revolution and 'social evolution' ("the ravages of diseases, the growth of scientific knowledge, and changes in political life") provided the stimulus to more rapid development. The cholera epidemics of 1831 and 1847 forced local authorities to put into effect a number of policies connected with public health, helping to weaken the *laissez-faire* principle which had existed.<sup>2</sup> During the early part of the nineteenth century, however, English local government was still emerging from the pre-Industrial Revolution period. By this time the mediaeval manorial system was obsolescent, the main units of community government being the chartered boroughs and the ecclesiastical and civil parishes. These parishes were not limited to rural areas, and in fact the London conurbation itself consisted essentially of the ancient city and the ancient parishes until the 1899 London Government Act replaced the vestries by twenty-eight Metropolitan Borough Councils.<sup>3</sup> English local government was (and is) legal and not prescriptive, and independent and not hierarchical.<sup>4</sup> In effect this meant that parish and municipal councils obtained their respective authority from parliamentary statute law, but were not subject to central government direction whilst acting within that law.

### 2.1 Relationship with central government

The relationship between central and local government was not always an harmonious one. The ancient boroughs — many of which were decayed market towns of quite small populations — had been given their special status by royal charters which detailed the powers and privileges of the corporations and burgesses. These charters set the townships apart from their surrounding counties (which had been governed by the landed gentry under the manorial system) and allowed a more radical entry into parliament in opposition to the country faction. The 'freedoms' of these boroughs were jealously guarded, though their parliamentary representation was often in the hands of the landed families rather than the middle classes. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 created new boroughs and their councils, and subsequent legislation empowered them to offer a whole range of community services. The government of the parishes themselves

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<sup>2</sup> Clarke, J.J. *The local government of the United Kingdom*. (London: Pitman. 15th ed 1955.) p.37.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 12th ed 1939. pp.60-61 and 83.

<sup>4</sup> Jenks, E. *An outline of English local government*. (London: Methuen. 1894.) pp.14-15.

was fragmented between the vestries and *ad hoc* rate-levying bodies <sup>5</sup> such as the Board of Guardians (under the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act), and the Highways Board (under the 1835 Highway Act). <sup>6</sup>

In spite of increased bourgeois and Radical representation in parliament, however, there remained a "deep-rooted parliamentary distrust of local authorities — an attitude derived in some measure from the corruption and abuse of power associated with the unreformed municipal corporations of the days before the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835 and with parochial 'close' Vestries, particularly those in London". <sup>7</sup> This misgiving was seen in the restrictions imposed on councils by which each enabling piece of legislation could only be adopted following a community meeting, and by the restrictive nature of much of this enabling legislation — though often these restrictions were gradually lifted over the years.

At the same time, the increase in services provided by the local governments during the nineteenth century resulted in "a struggle between the ratepayer and the taxpayer". Local authorities and their communities wished to retain and even expand their work, but the pressure of these developments forced them constantly to seek relief from the rate burden from the central government. <sup>8</sup> It was inevitable that grants in aid would be followed by a degree of central control over policy matters, though the local authorities were largely left to implement those policies.

## 2.2 Need for legislation to provide services

Local government authorities could only provide the services allowed under parliamentary legislation, and it was common for auditors to disallow expenditure for services which had not been legalised in this way. Councillors then became personally liable for such illegal costs. General legislation consisted of the various Acts of Parliament (such as the 1846 Baths and Washhouses Act <sup>9</sup>) which allowed certain local authorities to maintain specified services once the legislation was adopted, whilst private

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<sup>5</sup> Whiteman, P.M. Books, baths and burials: notes on certain nineteenth century adoptive Acts. *Journal of Librarianship*, vol.5, no.2, April 1973. p.133.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke. *op.cit.*, 15th ed 1955. pp.57 and 352-353.

<sup>7</sup> Whiteman. *op.cit.* p.135.

<sup>8</sup> Smellie, K.B. *A history of local government*. (London: Allen & Unwin. 4th ed 1969.) p.51.

<sup>9</sup> 9 & 10 Vict. c.74.

Acts (such as the 1865 Oldham Borough Improvement Act <sup>10</sup>) which was promoted on behalf of a particular local authority and restricted to it. Sometimes, provisions in a private Act appeared in later general legislation — an example is the private 1852 Liverpool Library and Museum Act <sup>11</sup> whose inclusion of the provision for the purchase of books and other materials (in addition to receiving gifts) was extended to the general 1855 Public Libraries Act <sup>12</sup>.

### 2.3 Central legislation for local government

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the old system "of the obligatory and gratuitous service of the ordinary citizen in public office" was fast disappearing, and local authority transactions were largely grounded on a cash economy. This economy was based initially on competitive tendering, and not until 1819 were parishes allowed to appoint a salaried officer — in this case the Overseer. The tendering system may have resulted in lower costs, but it inclined also towards poor services as contractors sacrificed efficiency and quality of work to personal profit. <sup>13</sup> At the same time, the cash nexus created a class of ratepayers who increased in number as the tendering system gradually gave way to the employment of an increasing number of local government officials who were paid wages and salaries.

Non-compulsory parliamentary legislation allowed ratepayers to vote on the adoption of services in their own localities, which not only encouraged a form of local democracy but created a "new cleavage of interest between those citizens who felt themselves directly benefited by this or that municipal service, and those who were conscious only of paying for it in new and onerous taxation". <sup>14</sup> The creation of rate-aided public institutions therefore depended on permissive legislation, and on a sufficient number of ratepayers envisaging some personal advantage. Later in the century (once the permissive legislation had been adopted, permanent local government officials appointed, and the local councillors elected and well entrenched), the local authorities could extend the services within the provisions of the various Acts without direct reference to the rate-paying community.

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<sup>10</sup> 28 & 29 Vict. c.311.

<sup>11</sup> 15 Vict. c.3.

<sup>12</sup> 18 & 19 Vict. c.70.

<sup>13</sup> Webb. *op.cit.* pp.120-121.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.122.

Although primarily a national measure, the 1832 Reform Act also began a process of local government reform when the parliamentary franchise was removed from the 'rotten boroughs' — the ancient chartered townships which so often had few inhabitants but which sent representatives to parliament, whilst the new populous industrial towns of the North and other parts of the country had no representation. These parliamentary boroughs were often in the pockets of the landed class "to maintain the political ascendancy of a party, or the political influence of a family", and the votes of the limited number of franchise holders could be bought for cash or by blackmail. In other places the royal charters contained "clauses by which the right of electing Members of the House of Commons [was] limited to the select bodies which they created".<sup>15</sup>

The Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations, which issued its report in 1835, found that the existing municipal corporations had originated at different times and in different ways but normally under royal charter. Such municipalities were urban areas of privilege, the governance of which was vested in a council composed of leading citizens; that is, commerce and industry based middle class persons as opposed to the landed gentry who were politically and socially dominant in rural county areas. The Webbs point out that "one of the barriers to reform, whether of national or of Local Government, was the Municipal Corporation, with its decaying groundwork of vocational organization, its oligarchical constitution, its trade privileges and monopolies, not to mention its representation in the House of Commons".<sup>16</sup>

The Industrial Revolution caused considerable social problems in the new townships which were being created outside the established system of these ancient boroughs, and at the same time the new capitalist *entrepreneurs* found themselves outside the system of government monopolised by the landed classes. These and other tensions helped to create a movement towards a new political democracy at both the local government and parliamentary levels, which led to the widening of the franchise as well as greater working class representation through the trade union movement as the nineteenth century progressed.

The 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, passed in the year of Buckingham's first unsuccessful attempt to legalise public institutions, was an important attempt at civil and representational reform. By this Act, the Close Bodies in some 178 towns were

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<sup>15</sup> Sections 73 and 13 of the 'First general Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in England and Wales', 1835. reprinted in: *The growth and reform of English local government*, edited by W. Thornhill. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1971.) pp.31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Webb. *op.cit.* p.92.

abolished and elected Town Councils established in a move which (together with the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act) "meant, as the subsequent history has demonstrated, the definite acceptance of representative Democracy throughout the whole sphere of Local Government". Equally important, however, was the difference in autonomy between the 1834 and 1835 Acts; for the operation of the former the central government retained various controls as an essential feature, whilst this was scarcely present in the latter legislation.<sup>17</sup> Although the principle of property qualification was retained, most of "the barriers which had divided the English people into mutually exclusive groups were, in 1834-6, so far as Local Government was concerned, almost wholly broken down".<sup>18</sup> It may be argued that the precedent of elected Town Councils encouraged the ideas of sections of the Chartist movement and others who wished to see public institutions established under local provision and popular control.

The link between poverty and illness had been recorded by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws in 1834, but reforms to municipal sanitation were often slow in being effected. Under the Towns Improvement Clauses Act of 1847, commissioners and others appointed under special Acts obtained powers for street cleaning, paving and lighting. Following the cholera epidemics, the Public Health Act of 1848 provided local boards of health in places which did not have health commissioners, to be elected by rate-payers.<sup>19</sup> Poverty and disease cost the community money, so public health measures could be seen as an investment.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1882 was a consolidating Act, repealing the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and forty-two other Acts, and partly repealing a further twenty-six others. The major new legislation incorporated in it was in giving effect to the finding of the 1876 Royal Commission which had identified more than one hundred towns not subject to the 1835 reforms. Of these they recommended that seventy-four qualified as boroughs whilst thirty-two did not. The 1882 Act thus established a uniform system of borough government throughout the country.<sup>20</sup>

Often referred to as the County Councils Act, the Local Government Act of 1888 established County Councils in rural areas and County Borough Councils in large urban areas with populations of about 100,000 and over. The purpose was to transfer the local

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<sup>17</sup> Smellie. *op.cit.* p.31.

<sup>18</sup> Webb. *op.cit.* pp.142-143.

<sup>19</sup> Clarke. *op.cit.* 12th ed 1939. p.55.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 15th ed 1955. p.46.



government functions exercised by the Crown appointed Justices at the Quarter Sessions to elected local authorities. These Councils could delegate their functions to committees in the same way that boroughs did.<sup>21</sup> At the same time the opportunity was taken for the national Exchequer to discontinue its system of grants in aid to various local authorities (such as vaccination fees and highways), by allocating certain probate and licence revenues in lieu. For the central government this had the advantage of having to deal with only a small number of counties, which would then be responsible for re-allocating the finances. For the County Councils the advantages were the receipt of revenues expected to increase, and which were not based on occupancy as were local rates.<sup>22</sup>

Certain services operated by municipal councils were not included in this Act so that, for example, the Public Libraries Acts did not apply to the County Councils until 1919. However, the establishment of Councils under the 1888 Act did have some impact on libraries — the Customs and Inland Revenue Act of 1890 increased duties on beer and spirits, and under the Local Taxation (Customs and Excise) Act of the same year it was provided that eighty per cent of this additional revenue should be paid to the counties. Permission was given for all or part of this "whiskey money" to be spent on technical education, and some of this assisted the technical education work being undertaken by a number of public library systems (see Chapter 7 below).

The final major local administrative reform of the century was the Local Government Act of 1894, which abolished the poor law Guardians in rural areas, and the Local Boards in towns, both of which has been responsible for public health. Borough Councils became the urban sanitary authorities, whilst in rural areas the parishes became part of Urban or Rural District Councils which had similar functions and which were linked to administrative counties. Parish meetings in rural districts could be called, in which all electors could participate, and in the more populous areas Parish Councils could be elected with certain powers as local authorities<sup>23</sup>

## 2.4 The committee system

During the course of the nineteenth century, the growth of local government functions led to the development of the committee system, and a number of local

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.47.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* pp.455-457.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* 12th ed 1939. pp.55 and 83.

government authorities found themselves *inter alia* responsible for educational management or the partial provision of education services, at several levels:-

- (a) Schools (elementary and secondary),
- (b) Vocational schools (Schools of Science and Art — see Chapter 7),
- (c) Universities (see Chapter 8).

In addition to the various educational services authorised under the Public Libraries and Museums Acts, several municipal councils used their Library Committees to administer other services for which no other special committee existed. These additional functions were denoted by joint titles, and in most cases it was the Library Committee members rather than the librarian who combined their functions, though there were important exceptions.

One corporation which several times used the Library Committee in this way was the Liverpool City Council, where the imposition of additional functions for the Committee allowed the City Council to take on new services without the immediate creation of new sub-committees. This allowed the Council time to experiment with new services, and then to reorganise the executive and administrative system either as the new service developed or as new Acts of Parliament changed the situation. So Liverpool's original "Special Committee to consider the practicability of the establishment of a Public Library" <sup>24</sup> became the Library and Museum Committee, <sup>25</sup> and then the Free Public Library and Derby Museum Committee. <sup>26</sup> Its career as an odd-job committee began in 1858 when it was officially called the Gardens, Library and Museum Committee, <sup>27</sup> and so it remained until 1865 when the caretakership of the parks and gardens was taken away and the third 'professional' function was recognised by the new title of the Committee of the Free Public Library, Museum and Gallery of Arts. <sup>28</sup>

Soon afterwards this committee was entrusted with the care of the corporation's North and South Schools, with the designation of Library, Museum and Education Committee, <sup>29</sup> and the variant name of Free Public Library, Museum, Gallery of Arts

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<sup>24</sup> Liverpool: Library and Museum [Committee]. *Library and Museum Minute Book*, vol 1, 3 April 1850. [This Special Committee consisted of nine members of the City Council.]

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 9 November 1850.

<sup>26</sup> Liverpool: Library, Museum and Arts Committee. *2nd Annual Report* (1854). titlepage.

<sup>27</sup> Liverpool: Gardens, Library and Museum Committee. *Minutes*, 11 November 1858 to 5 March 1863.

<sup>28</sup> Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum, and Gallery of Arts Committee. *13th Annual Report* (1865). titlepage.

<sup>29</sup> Liverpool: Library, Museum and Education Committee. *Minutes*, 9 November 1866.

and Education Committee.<sup>30</sup> From 1868 it was usually referred to as the Library, Museum and Arts Committee<sup>31</sup> in recognition of its three chief services under the Liverpool Library and Museum Act, 1852. However, other variations are known: Free Public Library, Museum and Schools Committee;<sup>32</sup> the Free Public Library, Museum and Gallery of Art Committee;<sup>33</sup> the Free Public Library, Museum and Walker Art Gallery Committee;<sup>34</sup> and the Public Libraries, Museums and Art Gallery Committee.<sup>35</sup> Some other tasks were not denoted by a change of name, however, but by the appointment of sub-committees such as that for Technical Instruction.

At Hyde in Cheshire, a Joint Committee was set up consisting of a newly appointed Sub-Committee for Technical Instruction of the Town Hall Committee and a Mechanics Institute Committee who were its directors.<sup>36</sup> A Technical Instruction Public Library Committee of the corporation held its first meeting in the following year<sup>37</sup> and within a year the situation became administratively more complex with the appointment of Sub-Committees for the Old Building,<sup>38</sup> and the then Present Building respectively.<sup>39</sup> Soon afterwards these two amalgamated to form the Building Committee, concerned with the premises for the joint public library and technical institution which were to form part of the same site but with separate entrances.<sup>40</sup> A Library Sub-Committee is mentioned about the same time,<sup>41</sup> so that it appears that the Technical Instruction Public Library

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30 Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum, Gallery of Arts and Education Committee. *16th Annual Report* (1868). titlepage.

31 Liverpool: Library, Museum and Arts Committee *Minutes*, titlepages to vols 7-20 (1868-1891).

32 Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum and Schools Committee. *17th Annual Report* (1869). titlepage.

33 Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum and Gallery of Art Committee. *20th Annual Report* (1872). titlepage.

34 Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum and Walker Art Gallery Committee. *25th Annual Report* (1878). titlepage.

35 Liverpool: Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Gallery Committee. *43rd Annual Report* (1896). titlepage.

36 Hyde: Town Hall Committee. *Minutes*, 11 August 1892.

37 Hyde: Council. *Minutes*, 27 April 1893.

38 *ibid.*, 14 March 1894.

39 *loc. cit.*

40 *ibid.*, 13 June 1894.

41 Hyde: Library Sub-Committee. *Minutes*, 27 February 1894.

Committee immediately formed separate sub-committees for the two branches of its work, with the joint Building Committee for that aspect of the Council's work. Within two years they seem to have been regarded as independent committees; in 1895 the three chairmen of the Technical Instruction, the Library, and the Building Committees respectively were instructed to form a special Sub-Committee to appeal against rating assessments.<sup>42</sup>

The Education Committee was first mentioned in 1894 in the Minutes, and was concerned with evening continuation schools;<sup>43</sup> there had been a School Attendance Committee of Hyde Corporation for some years, in common with other municipalities, which exercised a magisterial function.<sup>44</sup> The public library opened in 1894 and although its committee was popularly referred to as the Library Committee in its printed matter,<sup>45</sup> its official Minute Book had the designation Technical Instruction Free Library Committee stamped on it in gold lettering.<sup>46</sup>

In Oxford, however, the Library Committee's involvement with the initial local application of the Technical Instruction Acts did not result in a change of designation.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand the duties of the Town Council's twelve-man Nixon's School and Blue Coat School Committee did result, when transferred to the Library Committee, in a change of name to the Libraries and Schools Committee which included technical education amongst its responsibilities.<sup>48</sup> A number of municipal library committees in England in the 1890s were also committees for technical education, and their titles often reflected this (see Chapter 7 below).

Nottingham is a unique case of change of name denoting association with higher education of another kind. The public library there had begun in 1868 in the former Artizans' Library rooms. The Corporation was also interested in technical education in

42 Hyde: Technical Instruction Committee. *Minutes*, 26 September 1895.

43 Hyde: Education Committee. *Minutes*, 17 April 1894.

44 Hyde: Council. *Minutes*, 28 September 1892.

45 Hyde: Library Committee. *1st Annual Report* (1895). titlepage.

46 Hyde: Technical Instruction Free Library Committee. *Minutes* (Book 2) 1894-1907. [Book 1 has not been traced.]

47 Oxford: City Council. *Minutes*, 1 October 1890 and 19 November 1890. [These show different memberships for the Technical Instruction and Library Committees.]

48 *ibid.*, 16 November 1882; Oxford: City Council. *Standing Orders for Council*. p.9.

the city, so that when the possibilities of establishing a University College became somewhat more substantial it took the initiative (without much idea of the consequences, but with outside finance) in forming the institution under its own control. This was reflected in the designation of its University College and Free Library Committee,<sup>49</sup> reflecting the Council's concept of the new complex of buildings being an educational centre incorporating the older established public library. Exeter and Liverpool public libraries also had initial connections with the establishment of University Colleges; in the latter case this was never designated in the committee's title because of its negative opinions on the subject. In the case of Exeter too there was no change in designation, but here the Public Library Committee was in fact a sub-committee of the body of Governors of the Royal Albert Memorial through whom all proposals to the Town Council had to pass.<sup>50</sup>

These committee systems developed in response to local needs as the responsibilities of local governments increased, and except in the few cases where legislation laid down the regulations there was little uniformity nation-wide. Their powers varied — some exercised control and merely reported to the town councils, whilst others recommended actions which were then decided by full council meetings. At Nottingham, for example, the Local Government Act of 1858 led to an overhaul of the committee structure and duties, and resulted in the re-allocation of tasks between ten smaller committees having greater responsibilities. The Nottingham Improvement Act of 1874 stated that the actions of committees were deemed to be actions of the Council. By 1879 the committee system was again "getting out of hand, and certain reforms were made including the amalgamation of committees, e.g. the University College Management Committee and the Free Libraries Committee were joined together as the University College and Free Library Committee".<sup>51</sup>

Local authority committees throughout the country were important because the attitudes and philosophical beliefs of their elected and co-opted members determined the type and range of the services provided to local communities. As the century progressed, local government officers became professionalised through their various Associations, but the committees continued to exercise considerable influence on policy.

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<sup>49</sup> Nottingham: University College and Free Library Committee. *Report*, 7 February 1881.

<sup>50</sup> Whitton, J.B. *History of libraries in Exeter*. (Sheffield University M.A. study. 1968/9.) p.53.

<sup>51</sup> Gray, D. *Nottingham through 500 years: a short history of town government*. (Nottingham: Nottingham Corporation. 1949.) pp.200 and 208-209.

### 3. Post 1850 public libraries

Hole claimed that the mechanics' institutions had failed to reach the operative class and had failed in their primary aim of conveying scientific instruction. Dealing with the "three principal methods employed by them for the diffusion of knowledge — the library, the lectures, and the classes — he saw libraries as "the most valuable feature of these Institutes as hitherto conducted". Nevertheless, Hole noted the complaint that so many of these libraries were used for amusement rather than for instruction.<sup>52</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he did not advocate excluding fiction from the institute libraries but rather a higher standard in book selection. A similar criticism had been voiced with regard to the circulating subscription libraries, and was to emerge again during the course of the nineteenth century in connection with the new rate-supported public libraries.

Millwood's thesis of 1969 dealing with technical education in Leicester, had little to say about public libraries other than the somewhat derogatory remark that: "Most of the Institutes that sprang up throughout Britain rapidly degenerated into free public libraries used by the lower middle class, and only a few (notably London, Manchester and Leeds) managed to fulfil, adequately, the functions for which they were originally intended".<sup>53</sup> This statement suggests that the actual demands of the working and lower middle classes were not being met by the bodies which the mechanics' institutions had become, but that 'free' public libraries were satisfying at least some of their needs.

#### 3.1 Legislation

"The early public library legislation joined a group of statutes which subsequently became known collectively as 'the adoptive Acts', namely:

- The Lighting and Watching Act, 1833
- The Baths and Washhouses Acts, 1846 to 1925
- The Burial Acts, 1852 to 1906
- The Public Improvements Act, 1860
- The Public Libraries Acts, 1892 to 1919".<sup>54</sup>

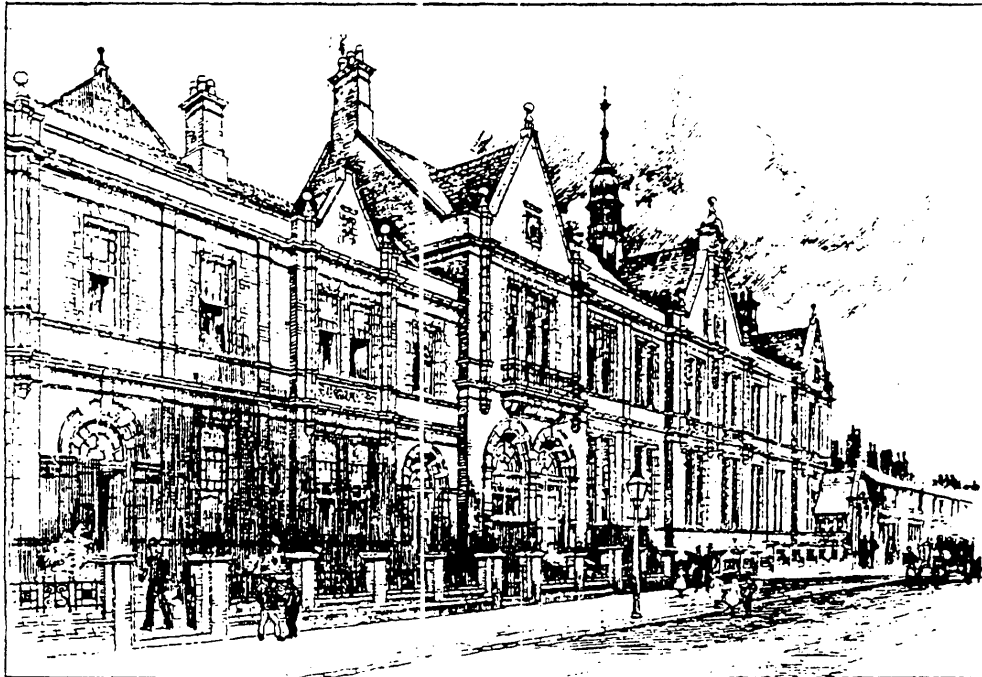
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<sup>52</sup> Hole, J. *An essay on the history and management of literary, scientific, & mechanics' institutions; and especially how far they may be developed and combined, so as to promote the moral well-being and industry of the country.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans. 1853.) pp.26-27.

<sup>53</sup> Millwood, M.J. *The development of technical education in Leicester 1860-1938.* (unpublished Leicester University M.Ed. thesis. 1969.) p.19.

<sup>54</sup> Whiteman. *op.cit.* p.135. [citing the Local Government Act, 1933 (23 & 24 Geo.5. c.51. s.305).]

These early public library Acts were passed between 1850 and 1890, and followed the 1845 Museums Act which had also been adoptive. Library legislation must be seen against the background of nineteenth century socio-political history, and in the context of other local government legislation (as noted in Section 2 above).



**Figure 4.1: Openshaw (Manchester) Public Library and Baths** <sup>55</sup>

### *3.1.1 legislation before 1850*

On 10 July 1835, William Ewart made his only contribution to the discussion in the House of Commons on the occasion of the annual vote of £20,000 "for Commissioners for erecting school-houses for the education of poor children". Instead of talking about elementary education as might have been expected, he drew attention to the lack of public libraries in Britain compared with continental countries — possibly having national libraries in mind, although Buckingham was just about to introduce the first of his Public Institutions Bills into the House of Commons. Ewart stated his conviction that "the best mode of securing the happiness of a people, is to educate them; and that, in furtherance of that object, public libraries are most necessary, in order to

enable them to educate themselves". He hoped that the Government would deal with the problem that session.<sup>56</sup>

Ten years later, Ewart's Bill to allow certain local authorities to provide and maintain public museums of science and art (see Table 4.1 and Chapter 5 below) became law, and in 1850 he negotiated through the House of Commons the Public Libraries and Museums Act which was based on it.

### *3.1.2 the Act of 1850 and later legislation*

A study of the legislative history of the country helps to give a useful insight into the changing concepts of its social life, and a study of library legislation helps an understanding of the changing concepts of professional librarianship. It would seem that the early Acts of Parliament initially influenced the public library services offered, but that those working in the field (as committee members and librarians) in turn influenced the legislature as the century progressed and the profession developed.

#### *(i) The 1849 Select Committee on Public Libraries*

William Ewart is generally credited with the legislative work involved in the events leading up to the introduction of the Acts of Parliament which encouraged the establishment of public libraries and museums, and Edward Edwards with the bibliothecal activities. It was Ewart who proposed that there should be a Select Committee on Public Libraries, and Edwards who was the star witness and the person who undertook the inquiries and investigations designed to produce evidence favourable to the concept of rate-supported institutions. In view of the activities of Buckingham in the 1830s, to which Ewart appears to have contributed only a minimal amount of time and effort, it is surprising not to find the former as a principal instigator in the 1840s and 1850s. Of course, Buckingham had resigned his parliamentary seat, but nevertheless we may have expected to find him spearheading the public campaigns in favour of museums and libraries at these later dates also. Ogle reported that Ewart had considered calling Buckingham as a witness before the 1849 Select Committee, but decided against it as he considered that "he would be too loquacious".<sup>57</sup>

Ewart does not appear to have taken up the cause of public libraries with any great concern until the early 1840s, and his comments in Parliament would not seem numerous enough to justify the *Illustrated London News* in 1846 listing the establishment of public

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<sup>56</sup> Barrow's *Mirror of Parliament*. (London: 1835.) p.1836.

<sup>57</sup> Ogle, J.J. Edwards and Ewart and the Select Committee on Public Libraries of 1849. *Library Association Record*, vol 1 (1899). pp.696-708.



libraries as the first item in his schedule of interests.<sup>58</sup> It is not even clear exactly what he meant by "public libraries freely open to the public" at this time, because institutions like the British Museum and the Cambridge University Library were popularly referred to as 'public libraries' even though not so freely open to the public.

On 15 March 1849 the House of Commons "ordered that a Select Committee be appointed on the best means of extending the establishment of libraries freely open to the public, especially in large towns, in Great Britain and Ireland", and on 23 March a membership of fifteen was nominated with Ewart as chairman. The report was quickly prepared, and on 23 July the House ordered it to be printed.<sup>59</sup> This certainly indicates the close interest which Ewart was paying to the matter at this time, and it was largely his efforts which led in the following year to the Act which permitted municipal libraries to be established. Much of the evidence before the 1849 Select Committee appears to view public libraries as being the national ones (such as the British Museum library), or local imitations of them, though forty-eight types of libraries were identified in the index to the Report. These range from academical libraries, to foreign libraries, naval libraries, and Working Men's Association libraries. There was no lack of book collections scattered throughout Britain and overseas, but they tended to be small and constantly endangered.

The printed report (which occupies 317 pages of text in addition to 80 pages of detailed index) concluded that there should be "libraries of two sorts: libraries of deposit and research; and libraries devoted to the general reading and circulation of books". After noting the poor provision in Britain compared with the United States of America and countries in Europe, the Committee stated that "they have recognised in the establishment of Libraries, the general principles that they should be based on a firm and durable foundation; that they should be freely accessible to all the public; that they should be open during the evening; and that they should, as far as possible, be Lending Libraries". It was not envisaged that legislation would attempt to do more than provide the permissive basis for a firm and durable foundation by authorising a special rate, and unlike Education there would be no government department to oversee the working of the Act and to make grants in aid.

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<sup>58</sup> Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, vol 57, 3rd series (1841). cols 396 *et seq*; *ibid.* 76 (1844). cols 1075 *et seq*; *ibid.* 82 (1845). cols 1140 *et seq*; *Illustrated London News*, 25 July 1846.

<sup>59</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries, together with the proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix.* (1849). Paper 548, vol XVII.

(ii) The Public Libraries Act, 1850

As a result of the Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849, Ewart was given leave to bring in a Bill in February 1850, and he subsequently moved that the Committee be re-appointed.<sup>60</sup> Before the report of the second Select Committee was printed, the first general Act of Parliament was passed<sup>61</sup> allowing the mayor of any municipal borough with a population of more than 10,000 to call for a vote of persons on the burgess roll. The mayor was to respond to a request from the town council to do this, in order to allow the electorate to decide whether or not the voluntary Act to levy a library rate should be adopted within that township. The Museums Act of 1845 was repealed,<sup>62</sup> but museums established under that Act were to continue under the new Act. It can hardly be said that the Museums Act had had a significant effect on the cultural life of the population in England, and the slow rate of the adoption of the 1850 Libraries Act "for the Instruction and Recreation of the People" must also have disappointed its promoters.

The 1850 Act limited the rate to 1/2d (1/4p) in the pound, which could only be spent on the purchase or renting of land or buildings "for the Purpose of forming Public Libraries or Museums of Art and Science, or both", as well as for erecting and repairing such buildings. The same income could be used for heating, lighting, furniture etc., and for staff salaries. Admission was to be free to the public, but town councils were authorised to borrow money for the buildings on the security of the rates. With so much expenditure from so small a rate, it is not surprising that the Act envisaged that furniture as well as "Books, Maps, and Specimens of Art and Science" would be donated to the new institutions. Furnishings (though not the other materials) could be purchased using the library/museum rate, and municipalities often had to resort to taking over the stock of mechanics' institute and other local libraries and museums. Of course, to some extent this had the desired effect of ensuring the continuation of certain cultural institutions at a time when they had already passed their peak as independent voluntary bodies relying on the subscriptions of members, but the new public institutions inevitably began as impoverished services.

It is instructive to trace the background of various features of the 1850 Act, and their origins in the 1845 Act as well as the unsuccessful Bills of Buckingham in the

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<sup>60</sup> *The Spectator*, vol 23 (1850). p.150.

<sup>61</sup> 13 & 14 Vict. c.65. An Act for enabling Town Councils to establish Public Libraries and Museums. (14th August 1850.)

<sup>62</sup> 8 & 9 Vict. c.43. An Act for encouraging the Establishment of Museums in large Towns. (1845.)

1830s (Table 4.1). The development of the public library movement was hampered throughout the nineteenth century because the principle of voluntaryism still outbalanced the growing concept of community control, service and ownership. Gradualism was the inevitable policy of compromise adopted in order to overcome opposition both in Parliament and in the municipalities.

**Table 4.1: Features of museum and library legislation 1835 to 1850**

	<b>Buckingham's Bills 1835-37</b>	<b>Museums Act 1845</b>	<b>Libraries Act 1850</b>
<b>body</b>	towns	boroughs	municipal borough
<b>population</b>	10,000	10,000	10,000
<b>rate</b>	6d in the £	1/2d in the £	1/2d in the £
<b>majority</b>	2/3 ratepayers at open meeting	---	2/3 of votes in a poll of burgesses
<b>spent on</b>	buildings for cultural centre (library, museum, classes); parks and gardens	museum building etc (science and art)	library building museum building furniture heating, lighting staff salaries
<b>donations</b>	books and specimens	museum objects	books and specimens
<b>entrance fee</b>	free	1d	free

Buckingham's concept of an indoor rate-supported cultural centre incorporating several educational services with corresponding open air recreational facilities, had of necessity been narrowed down to the municipal provision of libraries and museums. Within a year of the 1850 Act the call for such a centre was renewed by a writer on the provision of adult educational facilities. He wrote: "The establishment of Free Circulating Libraries, will be regarded as a boon, but the time (we will hope) is not far distant, when every large town in the kingdom, will support from its local rates, its people's college, containing its free circulating library, free news-room, free lectures, and free evening classes".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hudson, J.W. *The history of adult education*. (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans. 1851). p.ix.

(iii) The 1850-52 Select Committees on Public Libraries

The new Select Committee was appointed on 14 February 1850, again chaired by Ewart. Much of the time was spent in connection with the British Museum, and with other large deposit libraries overseas. Several further witnesses were examined orally, and in particular Lord Seymour's questions to Edward Edwards appear somewhat unfriendly — perhaps indicating the growing hostility between Edwards and his superior at the British Museum, Panizzi, who was also a witness. An extensive appendix reprinted replies concerning foreign libraries, and the report itself was ordered to be printed only a few days before the 1850 Act received the Royal Assent.<sup>64</sup> On 30 July 1851 the third Select Committee on Public Libraries was appointed "for the purpose of receiving, and ordering to be printed, additional Returns respecting Foreign Public Libraries",<sup>65</sup> and this was followed on 18 March 1852 by a similar Select Committee with the same functions.<sup>66</sup> The reports of these last two committees consisted wholly of written returns which were sent through the Foreign Office by the various British diplomatic representatives, but which added nothing to the development of municipal libraries in England.

(iv) The Liverpool Library and Museum Act, 1852

The proposed presentation by the Earl of Derby to the Liverpool Corporation of his late father's extensive Natural History collection prompted "A petition of the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the borough of Liverpool for leave to bring in a Bill for the establishment of a Public Library, Museum and Gallery of Arts at Liverpool, and to make provision for the reception of a Collection of Specimens, illustrative of Natural History", to the House of Commons on 5 February 1852. Presented by Joseph Brotherton, the Bill passed through Parliament with little difficulty, and received the Royal Assent on 3 May.<sup>67</sup> The Act provided that: "The Council shall establish and maintain a Public Library and Museum, with a Gallery of Arts, and may receive Gifts and make Purchases of Books, Maps, Plans, Pictures, Drawings, Engravings, Sculptures, Specimens of Art or Science, or other Articles which they shall deem suitable and proper to be deposited therein..." and that suitable buildings should be provided. Much of this Act concerned

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<sup>64</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries, together with the proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, and Index.* (1850). Paper 655, vol XVIII.

<sup>65</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries, with an Appendix.* (1851). Paper 630, vol X.

<sup>66</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries, with an Appendix.* (1852). Paper 532, vol V.

<sup>67</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol 107 (1852). pp.15, 20, 34, 99, 112, 125, 170, 184.

regulations for the Derby collection. and although the Public Libraries Act of 1850 allowed the establishment of a library, and museum which would have accommodated Lord Derby's gift, and indeed the art gallery also, the powers conferred by the special Act went beyond this. The major differences were that items could be purchased as well as donations received; that a 1d (1/2p) rate could be levied for the services under the private Act; and that: <sup>68</sup>

It shall be lawful for the Council to provide, in the Building appropriated for the Public Library and Museum, suitable Rooms for Lectures, and to cause Lectures to be given on Subjects of Science or the Arts in such Building, and to make such reasonable Charges for Admission to such Lectures as to the Council may seem fit; provided, that the Surplus of any Money received for Admission to such Lectures, after defraying the Charges incident thereto, shall be placed to the Credit of the Rate by this Act authorized to be levied.

These powers set the foundation for one of the most pervasive and innovative public library services in Britain, and also influenced to some extent both the future library legislation of the country and the thinking of other librarians with regard to the services which should be offered.

(v) *The 1853 Abstract Return of Libraries and Museums*

The number of towns adopting the Public Libraries Act of 1850 was in fact quite small, and throughout the century the existence of mechanics' institutions and circulating libraries of various kinds was seen as a valid reason for not establishing rate-supported public libraries. The 1853 Abstract noted *inter alia* eight towns which reported that they had not adopted the Act because of the existence of other libraries and museums (most places had some kind of library open to a limited section of the inhabitants). Of these eight, Leicester had already adopted the 1845 Museums Act but the remaining places indicated that the town councils at least were content with the existing situation: <sup>69</sup>

CHICHESTER. There is an excellent Museum and a Library belonging to the Philosophical Society and Mechanics' Institute in this town, supported by donations and subscriptions.

LEICESTER. The town of Leicester possess a very valuable collection of ancient books, principally on theology, which is kept in a room at the Town-hall, and which is open gratuitously to the public. The use of this Library, however, from the character of the works, is almost exclusively confined to the clergy and dissenting ministers.

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<sup>68</sup> 15 Vict. c.3. An Act for establishing [*sic!*] a Public Library, Museum, and Gallery of Arts at *Liverpool*, and to make Provision for the Reception of a Collection of Specimens illustrative of Natural History presented by the Earl of *Derby* for the benefit of the Inhabitants of the Borough of *Liverpool* and the Neighbourhood thereof, and others resorting thereto (3d May 1852).

<sup>69</sup> Parliament: House of Commons. *Parliamentary papers* (1852-1853), vol.CI, paper 312. pp.3-8.

LINCOLN. There being an excellent Joint Stock Library, and a Mechanics' Institution, with a respectable Museum attached, in Lincoln, it has not been thought requisite or expedient that any steps should be taken for establishing a Public Library or Museum under the Act...

NORTHAMPTON. No Public Library or Museum has been established under the Acts... There is, however, a very extensive Library belonging to the Mechanics' Institute, which is accessible to all classes on moderate terms.

RETFORD, EAST. No Library or Museum has been established in this borough under the [Acts]. A society called "The East Retford Literary and Scientific Institution," the object of which is to promote literature, science, and the diffusion of useful knowledge, was established in the year 1843. There is a Reading-room, Library and Lecture-room provided by the Town Council. The property of the society is vested in the Town Council for the time being... The Town Council grant the rooms free from rent, and also an annual donation from the Corporation funds of £5."

ROMSEY. This borough possesses no Museum or Public Library, nor any Mechanics' Institution. There is, however, a Reading Society, with a Library; also another society, called "The Young Man's Society." Both are respectably conducted, and lectures are frequently delivered."

SWANSEA. In the year 1838, a Library and Museum was established by private subscriptions, consisting of a large Library, a Museum of Natural History, Antiquities, &c., intitled, by command of the Queen, "The Royal Institution of South Wales," and now under Her Royal patronage.

TRURO. No Library or Museum has been formed under the Acts... But the Royal Cornwall Library has been long established in this town, and the Royal Institution of Cornwall, also located here, has attached to it a large and increasing Museum.

By the time that the time that the Abstract was printed in April 1853, the returns indicated that only five townships (Canterbury, Dover, Leicester, Sunderland, and Warrington) had utilised the 1845 Act, a further five (Bath, Bolton, Manchester, Oxford, and Winchester) had adopted the 1850 Act, and two (Liverpool and Salford) were operating independently. Most places indicated either that they had not yet taken a vote, or that their population was under the 10,000 limit. Several places calculated that the half-penny rate would bring in an insufficient sum for the purpose, and Oxford suggested that the lack of power to purchase books under the Act required reconsideration.

*(vi) The Public Libraries Act, 1855*

The 1850 Act was repealed some five years later when a new Act passed through Parliament, designed to facilitate the establishment of public libraries by other local government authorities.<sup>70</sup> Under this Act, the mayor of a municipal borough of over 5,000 people became entitled to accede to the town council's request to call a public meeting to decide on the matter of adopting the Act, and the Boards of Improvement

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<sup>70</sup> 18 & 19 Vict. c.70. An Act for further promoting the Establishment of Free Public Libraries and Museums in Municipal Towns, and for extending it to Towns governed under Local Improvement Acts and to Parishes. (30th July 1855).

Districts of a similar size were empowered to call a meeting of ratepayers at the request of ten rated inhabitants. In parishes it was the Overseers of the Poor who had to call a meeting on request, and the Vestries of two or more neighbouring parishes could combine to attain the minimum population of 5,000 for this purpose. Finally, specific power was given to the Lord Mayor of the City of London to accede to the request of the Aldermen and Commons to call a public meeting of ratepayers. In all cases a two-thirds majority of the ratepayers actually attending the meetings sufficed to ensure the adoption or rejection of the Act, a provision presumably inserted on the assumption that mainly interested persons would attend. This provision was one of the points which had caused opposition to Buckingham's Bills twenty years before.

The 1855 Act followed the 1852 Liverpool Act by raising the library rate to one penny in the pound, which doubtless facilitated the viability of the new institutions but also gradually strangled future developments because this restriction remained in force until 1919. Borough Councils, Improvement Boards and Parish Councils could "erect any Buildings suitable for Public Libraries or Museums, or both, or for Schools for Science or Art". Again following the 1852 Act, all Councils were authorised to "purchase and provide the necessary Fuel, Lighting, and other similar Matters, Books, Newspapers, Maps, and Specimens of Art and Science, for the Use of the Library or Museum, or School, and cause the same to be bound or repaired when necessary, and appoint salaried Officers and Servants..." The mention of newspapers and of the need to bind and repair materials indicates that questions as to the legality of these features may have been raised by ratepayers or auditors. No specific mention is made of lectures in the Act in spite of the lead given by Liverpool, and although this ubiquitous service may be considered as a function of the Schools if opened under the Act, there was by no means universal agreement as to either their desirability or legality.

*(vii) The 1856 Return of Public Libraries*

On 19 May 1856 the House of Commons ordered a further Return to be printed.

<sup>71</sup> In addition to the places noted in the 1853 Abstract, seven other towns (Birkenhead, Cambridge, Hertford, Kidderminster, Norwich, St Helen's, and Sheffield) reported having adopted the Acts, and another three (Cheltenham, Islington, and the City of London) stated that the motions to adopt had been lost. Sheffield had reversed its previous rejection with a poll of 838 for and 232 against the Acts, a swing apparently due to an increase of 269% in the turnout of voters attending the public meeting. Not all towns were taking advantage of the permitted increase in the library rate, and the provision of library, museum, science and art facilities was somewhat uneven at this

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<sup>71</sup> Parliament: House of Commons. *Parliamentary papers* (1856), Paper 221.

stage. It was still too soon for the smaller places of 5,000 people and upwards to consider adoption, or of parishes combining to permit the levying of the library rate. Warrington commented that its "institution consists of a museum and library combined ... its promoters regard the library as only part of the general scheme of an institution for the promotion of science, literature, and art", but apparently nowhere had the 1855 Act yet been used to provide schools of science or art. Most of the libraries seem to have been small, whilst the museums were quite highly regarded for their educational and recreational value. The number of visitors to the latter usually far outstripped the number of volumes used at the former.

(viii) The 1857 Return of Public Libraries

By the following year five townships (Haslingden, Kingston-upon-Hull, Limerick, Paddington, and St Marylebone) had voted against adoption of the Acts, and only two (Leamington, and the combining parishes of St Margaret and St John in Westminster) had voted in favour. Lichfield was in the process of advertising for tenders to build a Free Library and Museum.<sup>72</sup> This was hardly encouraging news for the promoters of library legislation, and it was another thirteen years before a further return was printed.

(ix) The Public Libraries Amendment Act (England and Scotland), 1866

In the meantime, however, legislation was passed in 1866 to try to facilitate the adoption of the Public Library Act by removing the population limit, and by reducing the majority required from one-third to one-half.<sup>73</sup> This did not, of course, make adoption financially easier for there was no central government grant for local libraries, so that even though power may have been given to small communities to vote for a library rate, the resulting income would have been quite inadequate to administer an effective library service. One alleviation of this position was the amendment allowing parishes adjoining a borough to contribute towards and participate in a joint library service, with the consent of both ratepayers and the town council. This Act was applicable to both England and Scotland, and had the effect of amending the Public Libraries Act (*Scotland*) 1854 as well as the Public Libraries Act of 1855.

(x) The two 1870 Abstracts of Returns of Libraries and Museums

Three years later, a further return was called for "showing all the Boroughs and Places in the United Kingdom that have adopted the Act of 18 & 19 Vic. c.70, and

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* (1857), Paper 274-Sess.2.

<sup>73</sup> 29 & 30 Vict. c.114. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Act. (10th August 1866.)



others, for establishing Public Libraries and Museums and Schools of Science and Art", and this was printed in 1870. Returns were received from England, Scotland and Wales, but none from Ireland,<sup>74</sup> and twenty-two places in England were named as not having sent in a return. Of the 249 places in England alone from which returns were received, only 32 stated that they had adopted relevant legislation including several so recently that services were not yet in operation. Exeter was awaiting the books to be transferred from the local Institute, Berwick had adopted the Act but had not put it into effect due to subsequent opposition of ratepayers, Leeds and Wolverhampton had appointed committees but had not yet established services, and Carlisle had adopted the Act only to enable it to receive the Patents for Inventions donated to it some years before. Ipswich, Northampton and Stockport had established museums but not libraries under the Act.

Even at this date, when the zenith of the mechanics' institute movement had passed, a number of local authorities referred to the existence of such libraries as negating the need to adopt the Act. Carlisle listed eleven subscription libraries and reading rooms, as well as a school of art in the town. On the other hand, upper middle-class Margate laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the "lower class of burgesses" as follows:

In November 1867 a Library and Museum, and the freehold of a Scientific Institution, established here about 30 years ago, and which, from failure of funds, was obliged to be closed, was offered to the town for purchase, upon very advantageous terms, and a strong effort was made to procure the adoption of the Act 18 & 19 Vict. c.70; but although the measure was strenuously supported by a very large number of the most respectable burgesses, they were outvoted by a majority composed of the lower class of burgesses, whose numbers greatly preponderated, although they would have been principally benefited by the adoption of the Act.

Such indifference and hostility in many places was only slightly counterbalanced by the extension of public library services in such cities as Birmingham and Manchester, where branch libraries were being established in working-class districts. On the eve of the operation of the first of the elementary education Acts, the provision of public libraries for children and adults was still very patchy throughout England.

(xi) *The Public Libraries Act, 1855, Amendment Act, 1871*

In the following year the Public Library Act was extended to Local Boards established under the Public Health Act of 1848 and the Local Government Act of 1858, in order to allow districts governed by such boards to levy a library rate and provide a service.<sup>75</sup> This put such boards on the same footing as boroughs, improvement areas and parishes, and allowed growing townships such as Rugby to operate a public library.

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<sup>74</sup> Parliament: House of Commons. *Parliamentary papers* (1870), Papers 168 & 168-I.

<sup>75</sup> 34 & 35 Vict. c.71. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Act, 1855. (14th August 1871.)

(xii) The 1876 Return of Free Libraries

It was becoming apparent that it was not enough to know the depressingly low rate of adoption of the Act by local government authorities in the country, but that there was a need to gather data similar to that provided by Birmingham and Manchester in the 1870 Abstracts. Consequently, in 1875 the Commons approved the issuing of a questionnaire by the Home Office to seek details from libraries established under the Acts (thereby excluding such places as Liverpool and Warrington). Although the total number of returns from places in England was only forty-five, the statistical data presented to Parliament and printed in the following year is a valuable source of information concerning the finances and working of the public libraries concerned.<sup>76</sup> Details were requested under the following headings:

- I. BALANCE SHEET (if any):
  - II. PARTICULARS of RECEIPTS and EXPENDITURE for Year ending at last Report:
  - III. TABLE showing (separately for Lending and Reference Libraries),-
    - (a.) Classification of Books in the Library according to Subjects;
    - (b.) Number of Volumes in each Class in the Library;
    - (c.) Total Number of Volumes Issued in each Class during last Twelve Months;
    - (d.) Average Number of Times that each Volume in each Class has been Issued during the Year;
    - (e.) Per-centage of the Total issues of each Class of Books to the Total Number of Volumes Issued during the Year:
  - IV. NUMBER OF VOLUMES Issued to BORROWERS:
  - V. NUMBER OF BORROWERS, Classified according to Occupation:
  - VI. TABLE showing--
    - (a.) Population according to the Census of 1871;
    - (b.) Date of Adoption of the Act;
    - (c.) Date of Opening of the Library;
    - (d.) Date of Opening of the Museum (if any);
    - (e.) Volumes in Lending and Reference Libraries respectively;
    - (f.) Number of Borrowers in each;
    - (g.) Total Issues for last Year in each;
    - (h.) Average Times per Annum each Volume is Issued;
    - (i.) Average Number of Volumes per Annum Issued to each Borrower:
- SUMMARY of the above RETURNS for--
- (a.) Corporate Towns;
  - (b.) Places other than Corporate Towns.

Not all of the places sending in returns could provide the required details requested under each sub-heading; for example, Manchester kept no record of the number of volumes issued to each borrower, so that although the breakdown of borrowers by occupation was usually known (no doubt recorded on the form of application for membership) it did not prove possible to state the number of volumes issued to each occupation of borrowers.

The sub-heading "Receipts" on Form II provides useful indications of how these public libraries added to their inadequate income from the penny rate. The sale of waste paper (presumably discarded newspapers if not books) was a feature of several libraries, and printed catalogues of the books in the libraries were sold by most. These catalogues were especially useful as the stock was normally 'closed access', and potential borrowers were not able to browse through the shelves. Fines and payment for tickets were common sources of income; Birmingham received 6d (2.5p) from the sale of Langford's *History of the Free Libraries*; Canterbury received £2 for an old book case; Doncaster gained £2 1s 10d (£2.09p) from "advertisements in cases"; Hertford charged £2 for gas at entertainments; Leeds received £6 17s 4d (£6.87p) from bookbinding; and Leicester a useful £40 from "rent of cellars, &c.". Most of these additional sources of income were relatively minor though no doubt welcome, but South Shields did better, with £229 2s (£229.10p) for "rents, large hall and lecture room", and £22 1s 6d (£22.08p) from lecture receipts.

(xiii) The 1877 Further Return of Free Libraries

In the following year a further return was printed, giving similar data from thirteen places in England including Liverpool and Warrington.<sup>77</sup> Not all of these had public libraries, however; King's Lynn noted that its library was not established under the Acts, Winchester reported that its old building had been closed for four years and a new one only just provided, and three other towns reported that the adopted acts had not yet been put into effect. At this time the summary table suggests that approximately four million people lived in places covered by public library services, of whom perhaps over 700,000 borrowed from the lending or reference libraries. The actual figures are difficult to estimate because the amount of overlap between usage of the two types of library service is not known, but the report calculates that each volume was issued 4.8 times on average during the year, and that 6.04 volumes were issued to each borrower. These libraries held over one million volumes between them, of which 1,729 were in foreign languages and 1,166 were for the blind. All this was operated on an income of £60,544 and incurred a deficit of some £5,000 overall.

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* (1877), Paper 277.

(xiv) The Public Libraries Amendment Act, 1877

In the same year a short amending Act was passed which had the effect of abolishing the public meeting, and substituted the issuing of a voting paper to each ratepayer instead.<sup>78</sup> The options were to be a choice between adopting and not adopting the Act (a straight "yes/no" vote) and also subjection to a library rate less than the maximum allowed. In the event of the latter being adopted, the rate could only be raised to the one penny limit as a result of a second vote at a later date. This new procedure had the effect of reducing the influence of vocal persons on the matter, but the rating concession (designed to encourage adoption) made it more difficult for a service to be operated especially in smaller places.

(xv) The Public Libraries Act, 1884

Doubts had been expressed from time to time throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century concerning the interpretation of various sections of the 1855 Act. Some of these were raised by ratepayers anxious to limit the expansion of local government services, and others by auditors of a legalistic mind. The 1884 Act helped to clarify three such matters.<sup>79</sup> Firstly, the power of local authorities to accept parliamentary grants in aid of schools of science or art which had been established under the Public Library Act was confirmed; this meant in effect that such schools could be in receipt of income from the library rate, from education grants, and from student fees. Secondly, it was confirmed that "buildings may under the said sections be erected for public libraries, public museums, schools for science, art galleries, and schools for art, or for any one or more of those objects". This was necessary because it had been questioned whether a local authority had power to erect buildings for all of these, or merely for one of them. Thirdly, it was confirmed that once any one of these had been established under the Act, any or all of the others could be established subsequently without further voting by ratepayers. Of course, if the rate levied were less than the maximum allowed, then a further vote might be necessary to permit the levying of a higher rate to pay for the additional services.

(xvi) The 1885 Return of Public Libraries

In 1884 another return of places which had adopted the public libraries Acts was ordered, and this was printed in summary form the following year.<sup>80</sup> The information sought was similar to that of eight years before, though details of lending and reference

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<sup>78</sup> 40 & 41 Vict. c.54. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Acts. (14th August 1877.)

<sup>79</sup> 47 & 48 Vict. c.37. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Acts. (28th July 1884.)

<sup>80</sup> Parliament: House of Commons. *Parliamentary papers* (1885), Paper 106.

library loans were not included. Unfortunately for the social historian the analyses of occupations of members were also excluded from the new questionnaire. Details from 94 places in England were tabulated, as well as from other townships in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In addition to the statistics themselves, some of the supplementary remarks have their own value. The mayor of Blackpool, for example, "observes that since the adoption of the Public Libraries Act in this town, a marked intellectual improvement has been observed in the inhabitants". Difficulties in questionnaire design and completion are noted at South Shields, where "the number of readers as distinguished from borrowers cannot be exactly stated", whilst Warrington observed that "the books in lending library are also used for reference".

Liverpool mentioned the free lectures operated during the winter under its local Act, stating that "the total attendance at 50 lectures given in 1882-83, was 52,949, or an average of 1,059", whilst Wolverhampton noted that there were "science and other evening classes, free weekly lectures on popular literary and scientific topics, and a field club for students". Other libraries stated that details of readers were not kept, and Leamington admitted that "the borrowers' register has not been revised since 1861".

*(xvii) The Public Libraries Act's Amendment Act, 1887*

Some of the local government authorities sending in returns to the parliamentary questionnaire of 1884 indicated that they had established either a reference library or a lending library but not both, and there was a tendency for the former rather than the latter to be provided.<sup>81</sup> Possibly in order to clarify the legality of wider provision, the Act of 1887 empowered library authorities to maintain lending libraries in dual purpose buildings which had not been provided specifically under the 1855 Act. This facilitated the establishment of branch lending libraries in schools and other non-library buildings. A further section on library extension allowed parts of parishes outside boroughs (where the borough did not encompass the entire parish) to be rated to enjoy the library service provided by the borough. The civil units of local government which were created by Parliament in the nineteenth century to replace the mediaeval ecclesiastical and manorial units, continued for many years to provide anomalous situations which had to be the subject of amending legislation.

The 1887 Act also took note of the local government reorganisation of greater London into districts, by conferring on the new boards the library powers given under the 1855 Act to overseers and vestries of parishes. This did not invalidate London parishes adopting the Act unless the districts to which they belonged had already done so.

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<sup>81</sup> 50 & 51 Vict. c.22. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Act. (8th August 1887.)

The 1887 Act applied only to England and Wales, and the City of London (which was an independent local government authority) itself was specifically excluded from it.

(xviii) The Public Libraries Acts Amendment Act, 1889

Two years later yet another small Act was passed, concerned with matters relating to the adoption of the library Acts.<sup>82</sup> Much previous legislation had touched on the matters of the payment of expenses incurred in holding public meetings or voting on the question of adopting the Acts, and of who was a ratepayer for the purpose of the Acts. The 1889 Act repealed section 13 of the 1855 Act, and substituted the provisions that expenses should be charged against a special part of the poor rate in parishes and that an owner of "lands used as arable, meadow, or pasture ground only, or as woodlands or market gardens, or nursery grounds, shall be entitled to an allowance of two-thirds of the sum assessed upon him in respect of such lands for such expenses". This, of course, was greatly to the advantage of the larger landowners as well as the smaller market gardeners.

As far as library buildings were concerned, the powers of two or more adjoining parishes were strengthened to enable them to apportion the costs of erecting or purchasing library buildings, and the costs of "the purchase of books, periodicals, and newspapers for such library, and all other expenses connected with the same". A time limit could be set on the period of agreement, and the mode of adjustment on termination. No mention was made in this Act of a museum, art gallery, or school of science or art.

(xix) The 1890 Return of Public Libraries

The last parliamentary return of the nineteenth century under the Public Libraries Acts was called for in 1890 and published in the same year.<sup>83</sup> This was an update of the return of 1885, and indicated the growth in the number of adoptions taking place at the end of the century.<sup>84</sup> Some 171 local authorities of various kinds (municipalities, Local Boards, London districts, and Improvement Act Commissioners) were providing libraries in England, but not always under the public libraries Acts themselves. Nor had libraries under private local government Acts always followed speedily on their passing. For example, Oldham's Borough Improvement Act of 1865 did not lead to a public library for its population of some 111,343 people until just twenty years later, though the

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<sup>82</sup> 52 Vict. c.9. An Act to amend the Public Libraries Act, 1855. (31st May 1889.)

<sup>83</sup> Parliament: House of Commons. *Parliamentary papers* (1890), Paper 5.

<sup>84</sup> One contemporary comment stated that this Return "simply bristles with errors" (*The Library*, vol.3, 1891, p.14.). Like all such surveys it must be used with some caution.

St Helens public library service was established only eight years after its Improvement Act of 1869.

The most noticeable feature of the return, however, is the almost complete absence of library services to rural parishes. For example, in each of twelve counties (Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Monmouthshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Sussex, and the North Riding of Yorkshire) only one local authority had established a public library service, and this imbalance was not rectified until after 1919 when the Public Libraries Act of that year allowed the County Councils to levy a library rate. Even so, a few smaller townships did have libraries: Queenborough (Kent) with 982, Middlewich (Cheshire) with 3,379 and Horwich (Lancashire) with 3,761 people respectively, each served under 4,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, one of the larger services (253,857 people) was operated jointly by the London parishes of Lambeth and Camberwell under the 1889 Act.

(xx) The Public Libraries Act, 1892

The last of the general Acts in the nineteenth century series was that of 1892, which repealed those of 1855, 1866, 1871, 1884, 1887, 1889 and 1890 as far as England and Wales were concerned. It applied to urban districts and parishes (with a special section for London), and allowed the adopting local authorities to levy a special rate of between 1/2d and 1d in the pound inclusive.<sup>85</sup> A vote of all ratepayers was called for, with a simple majority being sufficient for either adoption or rejection of the Act; no further vote could be proceeded with until one year later, and the wording of the Act may be interpreted to mean that such second vote could be demanded regardless of the outcome of the first. The wide-ranging provision of facilities as first allowed in 1855 was confirmed as follows:

The library authority of any library district for which this Act has been adopted may, subject to the provisions of this Act, provide all or any of the following institutions, namely, public libraries, public museums, schools for science, art galleries, and schools for art, and for that purpose may purchase and hire land, and erect, take down, rebuild, alter, repair, and extend buildings, and fit up, furnish, and supply the same with all requisite furniture, fittings, and conveniences...

The general management, regulation, and control of every library, museum, art gallery, and school provided under this Act shall be vested in and exercised by the library authority, and that authority may provide therein books, newspapers, maps, and specimens of art and science, and cause the same to be bound and repaired when necessary.

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<sup>85</sup> 55 & 56 Vict. c.53. An Act to consolidate and amend the Law relating to Public Libraries. (27th June 1892.)

Salaried staff could be appointed, and when grants were accepted from the Department of Science and Art for the schools under this present Act, then its conditions must be observed. The Act did not, of course, restrict services under any local Acts, and the operation of collecting the library rate in the city of Oxford was specifically excluded from the provisions of this consolidating Act. This Act was slightly amended by the Local Government Act of 1894 as far as rural parishes were concerned.<sup>86</sup>

The public library service during the nineteenth century was largely shaped by this series of Acts, though there were others (such as those dealing with "whisky money") which affected particular aspects. Parliament was mainly concerned to empower a range of local government authorities to establish public libraries and associated facilities, by enabling the ratepayers to levy funds. These were patently inadequate even for an effective library to all sections of the community, but especially so for authorities which wished to provide the associated services also. The concept of rate-supported local cultural institutions envisaged by Buckingham in the 1830s as the adult educational centres of townships had, to a large extent, contracted into the provision of impoverished library and museum resources. The addition of schools for science and art did widen this to some degree, but liberal adult education could hardly flourish under the public libraries Acts in spite of some notable efforts by particular librarians and their committees.

### 3.2 Book-based services

The word 'library' quite correctly connotes a place where books are kept, but a library service is much more than that. It involves policies for the acquisition of library materials, their maintenance, their accessibility by the public, as well as the direct provision of the information which they contain. Furthermore, library materials have never been restricted to the book format alone, and library services have used various media at different times in furtherance of what was seen as their several tasks. The purpose of this thesis is to uncover these tasks and these media in an exploration of the roles which library systems played in the nineteenth century. The following sections are particularly concerned with the printed medium, whilst other media and services are discussed in the remaining chapters.

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<sup>86</sup> 56 & 57 Vict. c.73. An Act to make further provisions for Local Government in England and Wales. (5th March 1894.)



### *3.2.1 the acquisition of library materials*

Following the precedent of the 1845 Museums Act, the 1850 Public Libraries and Museums Act did not provide for the purchase of books and museum specimens but anticipated that donations would follow. As with the mechanics' institution libraries, it was found that donations varied greatly in quantity and quality, and in their appropriateness to the purpose of the institutions and their members. Almost by definition, most donations are someone's rejects. Books may be discarded by their owners because of their poor physical condition or their lack of currency, or because of changing personal interests. The first two reasons suggest that they would also be unsuitable for a public library. The promoters of the public library legislation hoped that 'benefactors' would share their personal wealth by donating useful works in good condition, and certainly this also occurred (as acknowledgments in annual reports have recorded for us—though in many cases one may question the actual value of these works to the library members of the time).

Another important source of materials for the newly established public libraries were the collections of existing libraries in the townships. The Mechanics' Institutions at Longsight (Manchester) and South Shields, the Co-operative Society at Todmorden, and the Village Library at Dukinfield, were examples of bodies whose libraries formed the nuclei of public libraries (see Chapter 9). It can be assumed that the libraries of 'failed' institutions contained works which the local community had found unsuitable — at South Shields some 2,000 worn out books were discarded on transfer, but smaller libraries may have believed that they could not afford to throw away works which were unsuitable by reason of their contents or condition.

The provision in the 1855 Public Libraries Act to allow the purchase of books and other materials led over time to book selection policies, although a comparison between the subjects of books in stock with those issued indicates that the underlying educational philosophies of library committees (which generally kept a close rein on purchases) were not generally based on public demand.

### *3.2.2 library book-stocks*

The subject matter of books held in stock by public libraries naturally differed between institutions due to local circumstances such as the stock of the libraries taken over, the character of donations, and the acquisition policies of committees and staff. Furthermore, the book-stocks changed as the century progressed, following the acquisition of more works and in response to local demands and national phenomena. Because of this it would be imprudent to attach too much importance to national statistics at any given date. Bearing this in mind, the parliamentary figures used by Kelly (Table

4.2) may nevertheless indicate the position about halfway between the 1850 Public Libraries Act and the end of the century, for the lending departments of public libraries.

**Table 4.2: Subjects of books in public libraries (lending departments) in England and Wales, 1876/77.** <sup>87</sup>

	<u>percentage</u>
Fiction and Juvenile	25.2
Geography, History, Travels, Biography	24.5
Literature, Poetry, Drama, Miscellaneous	21.1
Art, Science, Education, Natural History, Geology	9.2
Magazines, Pamphlets	7.4
Not classified	5.5
Theology, Philosophy, Ecclesiastical History	4.8
Law, Politics, Commerce, Statistics	2.0
Books of Reference [in the Lending Section]	0.2
Books for the Blind	0.2
Foreign Books	0.06
Patents	0.03

Almost 71 per cent of these works fall into three main groups of subjects, approximating to the Dewey Decimal Scheme's 800 and 900 classes but also including children's books on all subjects. What is perhaps surprising is the relatively low proportion (9.2 per cent) of books on Art, Science, Education, Natural History and Geology — all of which (with the exception of Education) one would expect to fairly popular or used by students in the schools of art and science. There was a high proportion of books in class 800 (Literature) in keeping with the feeling of many promoters of public libraries which was later expressed in the Library Association's resolution on fiction as follows: <sup>88</sup>

That the function of a public library is to provide good literature for circulation among its readers, and that the same test must be applied to its works of fiction as to the books in other departments; they must have literary or educational value.

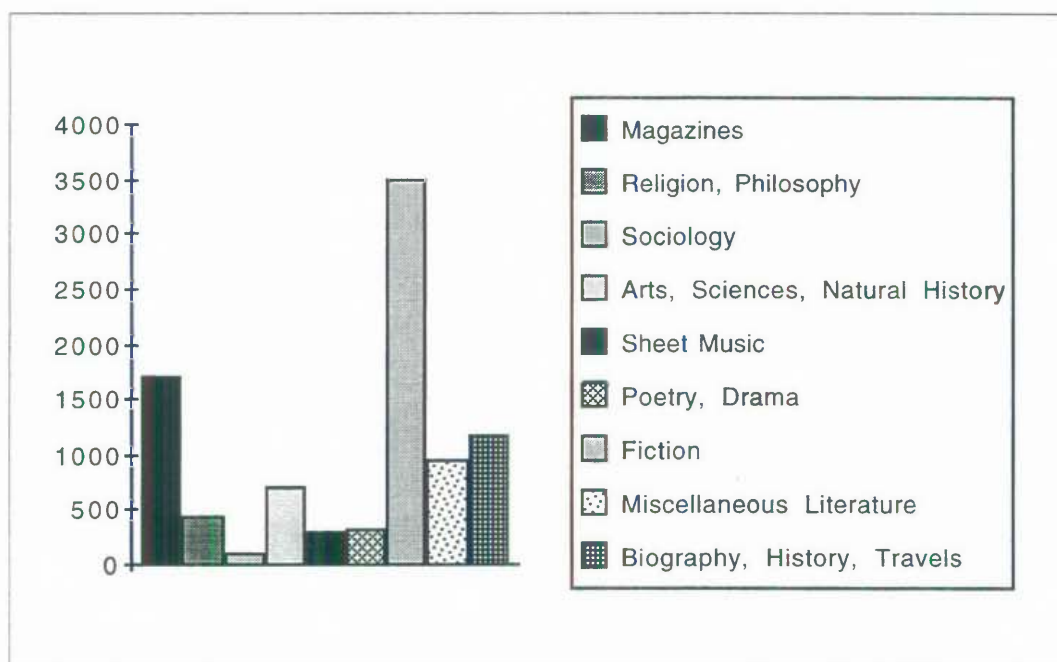
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<sup>87</sup> adapted from Kelly, T. *A history of public libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1965*. (London: Library Association. 1973.) p.493. [based on the Parliamentary Returns of 1876 and 1877.]

<sup>88</sup> news item concerning the Library Association Annual Meeting, in the *Library Association Record*, vol.10, 1908, p.563.

The statistics of 1876/77 themselves do not indicate the actual works of fiction which formed part of the stock of these public libraries, however, so that it is impossible to measure them against the second part of the resolution concerning 'quality'.

As Gray concluded, "it was never clearly stated by their promoters whether public libraries were to be predominantly [*sic*] educational...or recreational", <sup>89</sup> and this ambivalence doubtless affected their book selection policies. An examination of the subject matter of books in stock in a selection of libraries indicates the results of an acquisitions policy. By 1899 it was apparent that an attempt had been made at Aston Manor (near Birmingham) to build up a lending library containing books across the range of subjects, though the result was somewhat uneven (Figure 4.2) The supply of fiction was generous, and the provision of magazines was also an important service.



**Figure 4.2: Aston Manor Public Library. Number of volumes in stock in the Lending Department, March 1899.** <sup>90</sup>

At Carlisle there was a less than adequate overall coverage of non-fiction in the lending department, which tended to be the more popular history and biography with a fair supply of magazines (Figure 4.3). Fiction accounted for just over half of the works held by this library, and there was little on art or science in spite of the Tullie House

<sup>89</sup> Gray, D.E. *Fiction in public libraries 1850-1950*. (London: Library Association F.L.A. essay, 1950.) p.6.

<sup>90</sup> adapted from data in Aston Manor Urban District Council. *Twenty-first annual report of the Free Libraries Committee, 1 April 1898 to 31 March 1899*. p.15.

complex containing the public library, museum, art galleries, and schools of art and science. (Table 4.3). At this time, however, the library had only been open for four years and any acquisition policy had not yet resulted in a balanced stock.

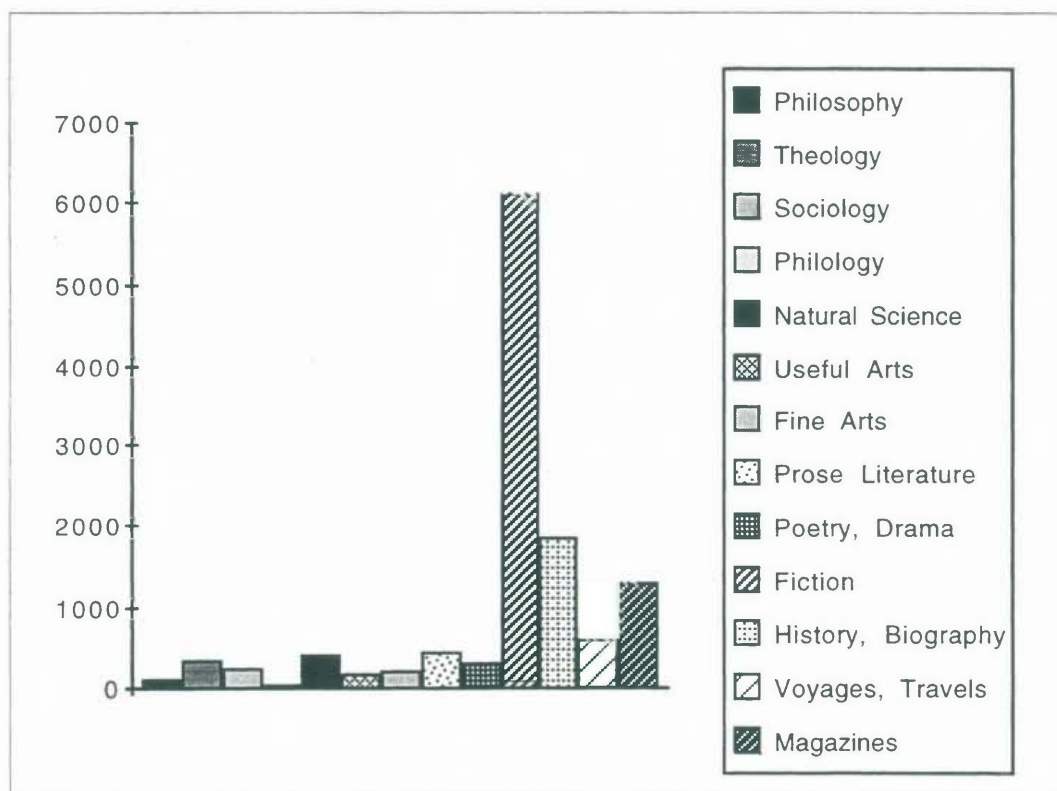


Figure 4.3: Carlisle Public Library. Lending Department stock, 1897. <sup>91</sup>

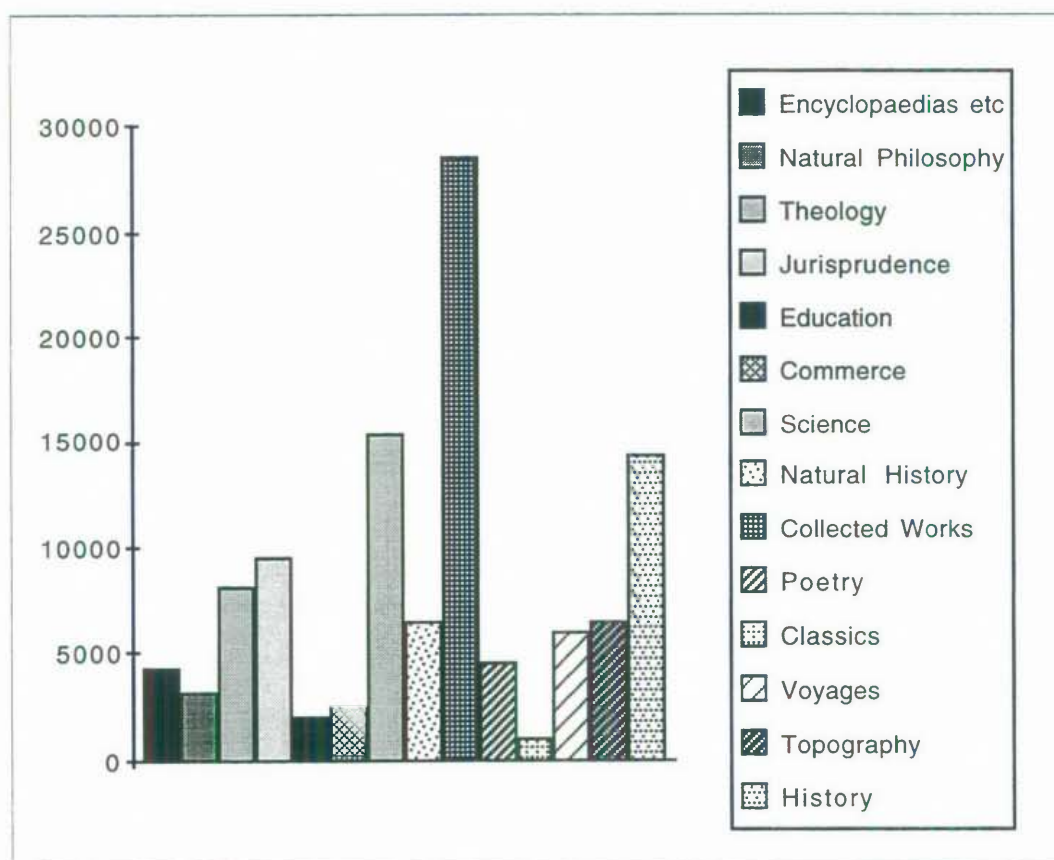
Table 4.3: Carlisle Public Library. Lending Department stock, 1897. <sup>92</sup>

	<u>number</u>	<u>percentage</u>
Fiction	6096	50.8
History, Biography	1846	15.4
Magazines	1293	10.8
Voyages, Travels	610	5.1
Prose Literature	414	3.5
Natural Science	401	3.3
Theology	346	2.9
Poetry, Drama	297	2.5
Sociology	231	1.9
Fine Arts	197	1.6
Useful Arts	160	1.3
Philosophy	88	0.7
Philology	30	0.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12009</b>	

<sup>91</sup> adapted from table in City of Carlisle: Public Library, Museum, Art Gallery, and School of Science and Art. *Annual report 1896-7*. p.9.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

By contrast, much of the 'serious' work of libraries was undertaken by the reference departments which had a specifically informational role. By the end of the century, Liverpool city library had been operating for almost fifty years and this is reflected in the number of volumes and the spread of their subject matter (Figure 4.4). There is, however, a problem caused by the twenty-five per cent of 'collected works', whose subject matter could not be classified (Table 4.4), but apart from this the reference collection was particularly strong in science and history, and with a surprising emphasis on jurisprudence which was possibly due to the commercial interests.



**Figure 4.4: Liverpool Public Library. Reference Department stock, 1899.** <sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Picton Reference Library; adapted from data in Liverpool: Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Gallery Committee. *47th report... to 31 December 1899*. (Liverpool. 1900.) p.10.

**Table 4.4: Liverpool Public Library. Reference Department stock, 1899.**<sup>94</sup>

	<u>number</u>	<u>percent</u>
Collected Works	28488	25.4
Science	15394	13.8
History	14291	12.8
Jurisprudence	9441	8.4
Theology	8061	7.2
Topography	6478	5.8
Natural History	6382	5.7
Voyages	5926	5.3
Poetry	4500	4.0
Encyclopaedias etc	4243	3.8
Natural Philosophy	3156	2.8
Commerce	2555	2.3
Education	1994	1.8
Classics	1047	0.9
TOTAL	111956	

### 3.2.3 books and periodicals issued by public libraries

Luckham examined annual reports and other sources to estimate book issues per head of population and the issues of fiction at various dates during the nineteenth century (Table 4.5) in an attempt to examine the changing pattern on a national basis:-

**Table 4.5: Books issued from public libraries 1867/68 - 1892/93.**<sup>95</sup>

<u>year</u>	<u>issues per head of total resident population</u>	<u>percentage of fiction issued</u>
1867-68	0.30	87.4
1872-72	1.12	84.0
1882-83	1.34	83.2
1892-93	1.20	83.0

There are obvious problems with this initial undertaking, one of which is the use of the townships' total population rather than the number of registered borrowers — though even the latter would not be as accurate as the number of active borrowers which it would be difficult or impossible to obtain. Luckham suggested other factors connected with the

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

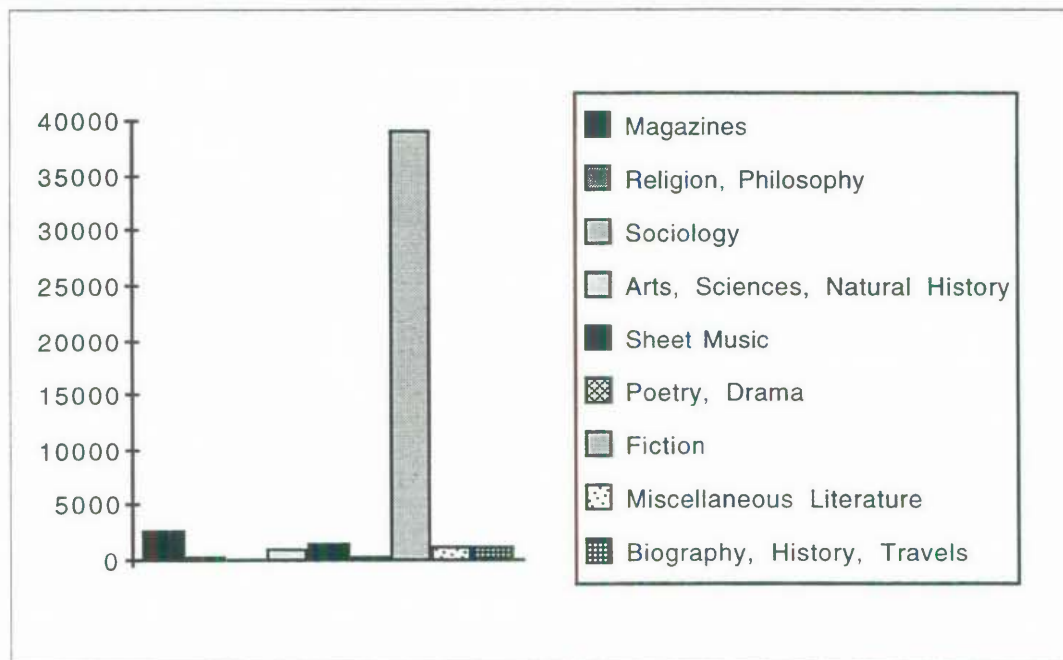
<sup>95</sup> adapted from statistics in a letter from Bryan Luckham to Edward R. Reid-Smith, dated 6 July 1973.

apparent increase in book issues around the time of the 1870 Elementary Education Act:  
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Because the number of [library] authorities is still relatively small then a significant change in policy (which in any case was more likely then) would have a more dramatic effect on the total picture than would be possible today. What I think one might conclude is that the effect of the Education Act by itself is less than might be imagined and is probably less than the collective effect of other factors like increasing population, changing policies about lending, increased expenditure by [local government] authorities on libraries, changing age structures, increased artificial lighting, the availability of alternative sources of books and new kinds of media or their growth alongside the development of public libraries including the sales of books. Obviously these are also all inter-related.

This pioneering study was apparently not completed and was never published, but it is obvious that the 1870 Act itself could not have had such a marked effect on the number of book issues by 1872-73.

An examination of the annual reports of individual public libraries indicates a marked disparity between the subject categories of works held in stock and of works actually issued by lending departments. This may be seen at Aston, for example (Figures 4.2 and 4.5, and Table 4.6), where only in the case of sheet music is there similarity. In the biography, history and travel section—normally heavily used in public libraries—each book in stock was borrowed only once on average compared with each novel being borrowed eleven times.



**Figure 4.5: Aston Manor Public Library. Number of volumes issued by the Lending Department, 1898-1899.** <sup>97</sup>

96 *ibid.*

97 Aston Manor Urban District Council. *op.cit.* p.16.

**Table 4.6: Aston Manor Public Library. Lending Department book stock and issues, 1898-1899.** <sup>98</sup>

	<u>Book stock</u>		<u>Book issues</u>	
	<u>number</u>	<u>percentage</u>	<u>number</u>	<u>percentage</u>
Magazines	1708	18.6	2637	5.6
Theology, Moral Philosophy	448	4.9	332	0.7
Law, Economics, Social Science	101	1.1	44	0.1
Arts, Sciences, Natural History	665	6.2	1064	2.2
Patents	-	-	-	-
Sheet Music	300	3.3	1436	3.0
Games, Sports, Recreations	30	0.3	-	-
Poetry, Drama	314	3.4	304	0.6
Fiction	3498	38.1	39121	82.6
Miscellaneous Literature	957	10.4	1316	2.8
Biography, History, Travels	1160	12.6	1108	2.3
TOTALS	9181		47362	

Liverpool City Library, one of the institutions examined in greater detail for the purpose of this study, is an example of a commercial city with a high proportion of working class inhabitants. The city grew rapidly as its port, and the cotton manufacturing industry of the hinterland on which it depended, increased in national importance. Among those who flocked to it for employment was a large influx from Ireland. In 1864/65 almost 74 per cent of the works issued from the lending department were novels (Figure 4.6 and Table 4.7), with the next most popular sections (miscellaneous literature, and history and biography) coming far behind. A section of books for the blind was being developed, and beginning to be used.



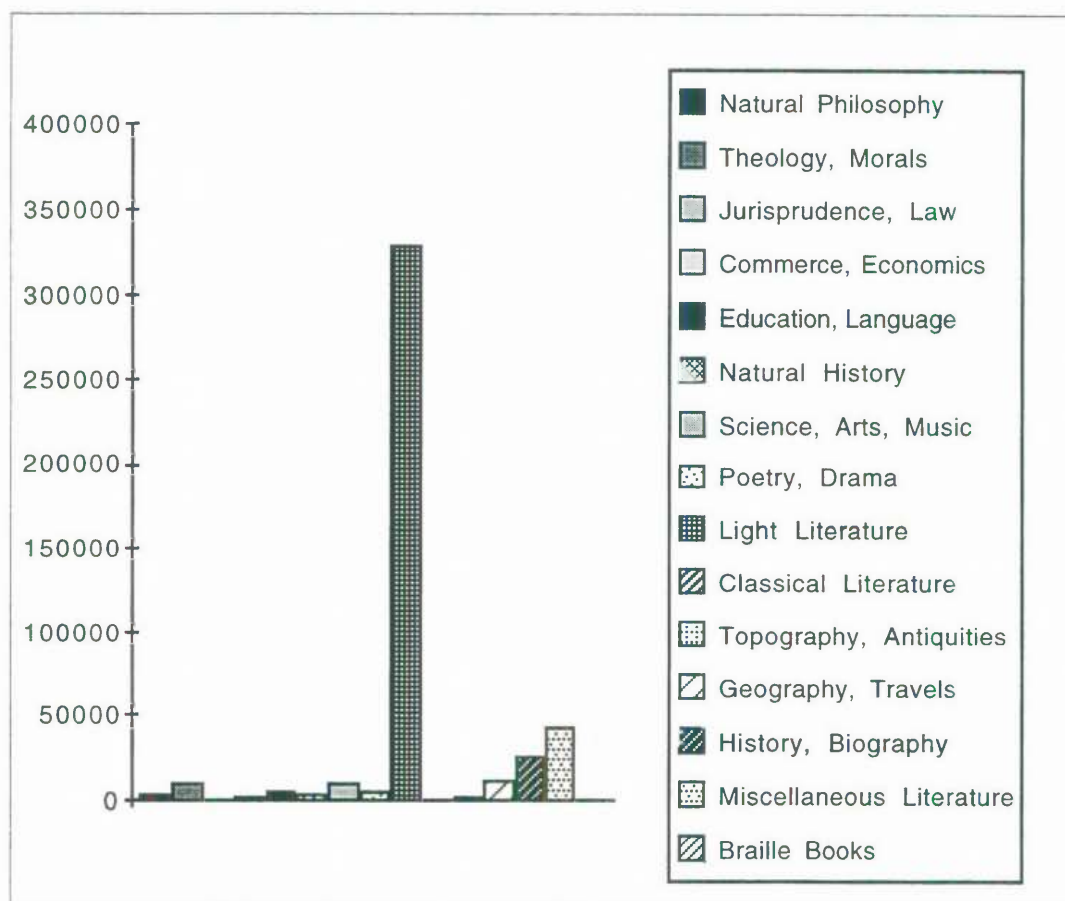


Figure 4.6: Liverpool Public Library. Lending Dept issues, 1864-1865.<sup>99</sup>

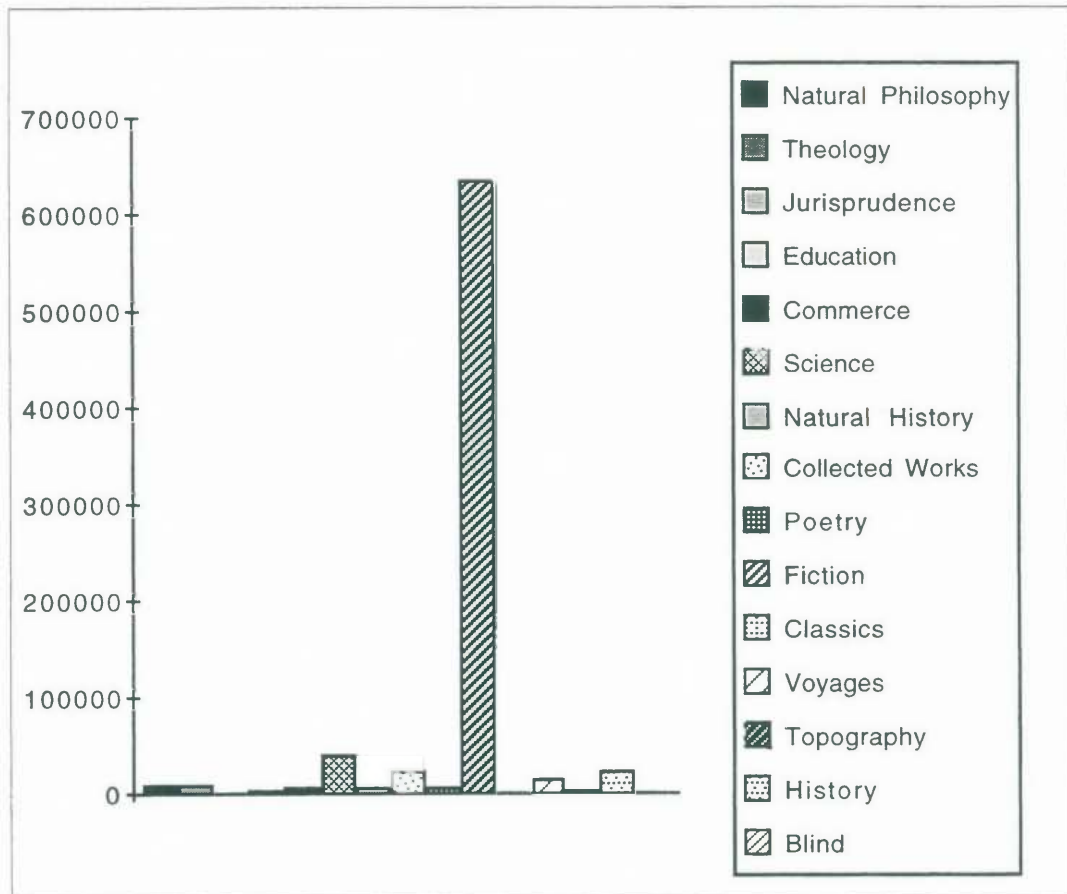
Table 4.7: Liverpool Public Library. Lending Dept issues, 1864-1865.<sup>100</sup>

	<u>number</u>	<u>percentage</u>
Light Literature	326950	73.6
Miscellaneous Literature	41877	9.4
History, Biography	24912	5.6
Geography, Travels	11095	2.5
Theology, Morals	9918	2.2
Science, Arts, Music	9218	2.1
Poetry, Drama	5060	1.1
Education, Language	3997	0.9
Natural Philosophy	3726	0.8
Natural History	2982	0.7
Topography, Antiquities	1568	0.4
Commerce, Economics	1495	0.3
Jurisprudence, Law	605	0.1
Braille Books	482	0.1
Classical Literature	357	0.1
TOTAL	444242	

<sup>99</sup> adapted from table in Liverpool: Free Public Library, Museum, and Gallery of Arts Committee. *13th Annual Report of the Committee of the Free Public Library, Museum, and Gallery of Arts of the Borough of Liverpool. 1865.* p.16.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

By the end of the century the pattern of borrowing was somewhat similar to that of thirty-five years previously, but with the proportion of fiction issued having increased. History was being read less but science rather more, and there was increased usage of the books for the blind (Figure 4.7 and Table 4.8). By this time there were six branch libraries, which normally cater particularly for lighter reading.



**Figure 4.7: Liverpool Public Library. Lending Departments issues, 1899.** <sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> adapted from data in Liverpool: Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Gallery Committee. *47th report... to 31 December 1899*. (Liverpool. 1900.) p.11.

**Table 4.8: Liverpool Public Library. Lending Departments issues, 1899.** <sup>102</sup>

	<u>number</u>	<u>percent</u>
Fiction	633272	81.8
Science	38558	5.0
Collected Works	23256	3.0
History	21207	2.7
Voyages	14866	1.9
Natural Philosophy	8960	1.2
Theology	7806	1.0
Commerce	5707	0.7
Natural History	5644	0.7
Poetry	4407	0.6
Topography	3961	0.5
Education	3442	0.4
Blind	1300	0.2
Jurisprudence	786	0.1
Classics	668	0.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>773841</b>	

However, this is not the whole picture, for books were also consulted in the reference departments of public libraries; these were normally for intramural use only, but they do indicate that readers were using the various departments for different purposes. Science and collected works were the most heavily used reference books, but there was also much more even use of books on other subjects (Figure 4.8 and Table 4.9). Whatever the reason for the book selection policy concerning jurisprudence, noted above, these were less used than might be expected.

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102 *ibid.*

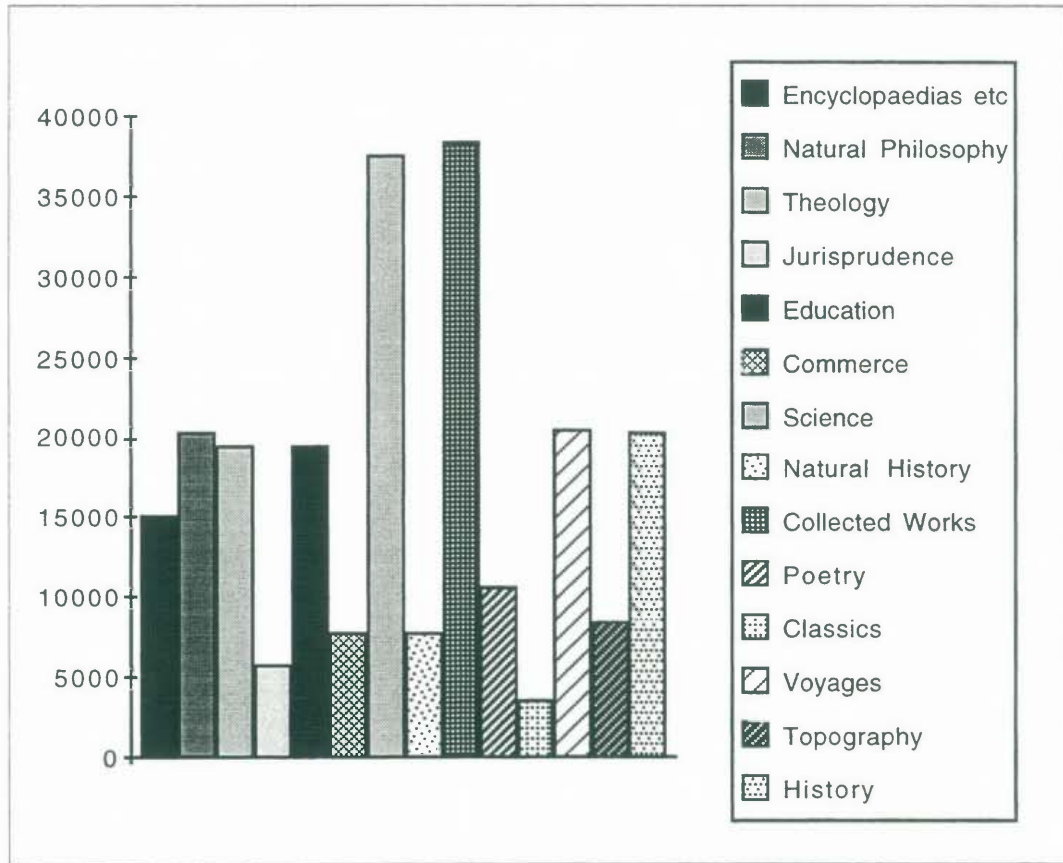


Figure 4.8: Liverpool Public Library. Reference Dept issues, 1899.<sup>103</sup>

Table 4.9: Liverpool Public Library. Reference Dept issues, 1899.<sup>104</sup>

	<u>number</u>	<u>percent</u>
Collected Works	38354	16.4
Science	37497	16.0
Voyages	20543	8.8
Natural Philosophy	20332	8.7
History	20280	8.7
Theology	19360	8.3
Education	19317	8.3
Encyclopaedias etc	14972	6.4
Poetry	10436	4.5
Topography	8398	3.6
Natural History	7736	3.3
Commerce	7678	3.3
Jurisprudence	5592	2.4
Classics	3419	1.5
TOTAL	233914	

<sup>103</sup> Picton Reference Library; adapted from data in *ibid.* p.10.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

### 3.2.4 the fiction question

One of the ongoing debates during the nineteenth century concerned the place of fiction in libraries, both those belonging to mechanics' institutions and the local authority public libraries. At the root of the discussion was whether reading novels adulterated the educational purpose of libraries, or whether they led to the reading of higher works at a later stage in people's development. Sturges and Barr, however, concluded that despite the question of fiction in public libraries being the subject of several papers and the coining of the phrase 'The Great Fiction Debate' during the nineteenth century, "there was no really serious debate at all", and this was due to "a failure of personnel and institutions in the early stages of the professional process to withstand the volume and force of established opinion".<sup>105</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Mason's sample of twenty-five public libraries in England and Scotland showed that although fiction formed an average of about 37.5 per cent of book stock, novels formed some 74 percent of issues.<sup>106</sup> This figure is well below the 83 per cent found by Luckham for all public libraries two years later — which itself had shown a decrease over the years (Table 4.5 above). As with the mechanics' institutes (cf. Leeds in 1852 and Nottingham in 1855: Figures 2.5 to 2.6 and Tables 2.10 to 2.11 and 2.13 in Chapter 2 above), however, novels constituted a considerable part of the books issued from public libraries. Mason pointed out (without providing evidence) that many novels were borrowed but not read, and that this was more true of fiction than of non-fiction. Another reason which he suggested as contributing to the high proportion of fiction issued was that people usually donated non-fiction books to public libraries, and that these "sweepings of their own libraries" tended to be poor examples of their kind and did not tempt readers.<sup>107</sup> A further reason advanced mid-century by Liverpool was that novels were mainly in three volumes and were read more rapidly than "works of a more solid description".<sup>108</sup> About this time (in its first year of operation) novels and romances formed fifty per cent of stock but only

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<sup>105</sup> Sturges, P. and Barr, A. 'The fiction nuisance' in nineteenth century British public libraries. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, vol.24, no.1, March 1992, p.31.

<sup>106</sup> Mason, T. Fiction in free libraries. *Library*, vol.2, 1890, pp.179-180.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p.180.

<sup>108</sup> Liverpool: Free Public Library Committee. *Second annual report of the Committee of the Free Public Library, and the Derby Museum, of the Borough Council of Liverpool; presented to the Town Council, October 1854.* pp.5-6.

forty-three per cent of issues, <sup>109</sup> but by the end of the century fiction formed almost eighty-two per cent of issues from the central and six branch libraries. <sup>110</sup>

The reading of fiction was a feature of nineteenth century culture, and this was reflected in the books issued from libraries of all kinds. As Hugo Reid, headmaster of the Nottingham People's College stated: "They should remember that a man after a hard day's work, was not capable of sitting down and studying a scientific or philosophical work". Reid said that he himself often read fiction in the evenings for recreation, though his belief that light reading "led the mind by degrees to studies of a higher and more intellectual character" seems not to have been borne out by most available evidence. <sup>111</sup> Nor was this a new phenomenon; Kaufman looked at publications during the eighteenth century and concluded that "the record does show a spate of sentimental novels, often sensational and sometimes erotic, accelerating in volume in the second half of this century". He attributed this in part to the increase of female readers, and cited the catalogues of subscription libraries (known to be highly patronised by females), where "throughout the country the average percentage of fiction [stock] is about one-fifth, ranging from the 5 per cent of Allen's library in Hereford to the 90 per cent of Weatherdon's in Newton Abbot". <sup>112</sup> His comment concerning female reading may be true of the eighteenth century subscription libraries (as they were of the twentieth century commercial libraries such as Boot's), but can hardly account for the proportion of fiction borrowed from mechanics' institution libraries in the nineteenth century unless membership was open to them.

Greenwood also comments on the reading of fiction by women — presumably working class women without servants:

Women who are practically domestic drudges, and have no variety in life save the occasional episode of new babies, who from one year's end to another are engaged in an endless turmoil of dish-washing, floor-scrubbing, clothes-washing, bed-making, clothes-mending and general house-cleaning duties, are just the very class to whom the novel comes as absolutely the sole intellectual amusement. There are thousands of such women in every large town, and it is they who read more than one-half of the novels which are

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<sup>109</sup> Liverpool: Library and Museum Committee. *Report of the Library and Museum Committee, to the Town Council, of the Borough of Liverpool, October, 1853.* p.6.

<sup>110</sup> Liverpool: Public Libraries, Museums and Art Gallery Committee. *47th annual report... to 31 December 1899.* p.11

<sup>111</sup> Wardle, D. *Education and society in nineteenth century Nottingham.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1971.) p.180. [original source: *Nottingham Review*, 1 February 1850.]

<sup>112</sup> Kaufman, P. *Libraries and their users: collected papers in library history.* (London: Library Association. 1969.) pp.225-226. [from data cited in his study *The community library: a chapter in English social history.* *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol.57, part 7, 1967.)

circulated by Public Libraries. And he is a boor who would deny them such a cheap, helpful and stimulating pleasure.

He estimated the fiction stock of lending departments in public libraries to be about thirty per cent on average, and issues to be between sixty and sixty-five per cent. <sup>113</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Library Association members were moving towards distinguishing between different classes of fiction, as seen in the following resolution of 1908: <sup>114</sup>

That the purchase of mere ephemeral fiction, of no literary, moral, or educational value, even if without offence, is not within the proper province of a Public Library.

This use of the word 'ephemeral' is reminiscent of the advocate John Webster's evidence before the 1849 Select Committee, where he said that the circulating libraries in Aberdeen contained "novels and other ephemera. They do not at all supply the place of those public libraries which we wish for". <sup>115</sup> A contrary view, however, was expressed at the end of the century by Alexander Ireland when he said that:-

Deprecatory remarks are frequently heard regarding the large proportion of volumes of works of imagination and fiction, compared with those of other departments of literature, which is found in many of the free libraries. Now, a man reads either for entertainment or instruction. I would counsel him to mingle both, not allowing entertainment to absorb too great a portion of his leisure hours. But to works of imagination I attach very high importance...

Before passing from this topic, let me suggest that the supply of works of fiction, while abundant, should exclude third-rate and inferior productions, and everything that is vicious or trashy.

Ireland saw that the value of fiction (or at least the higher 'imaginative literature') could be "to awaken the sympathies, to quicken the moral sensibilities, and enlarge our moral vision" after a hard day's work. <sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Greenwood, T. (ed.). *Greenwood's library year book 1897: a record of general library progress and work*. (London: Cassell & Co. 1897.) pp.114-115.

<sup>114</sup> news item concerning the Library Association Annual Meeting, in the *Library Association Record*, vol.10, 1908, p.564.

<sup>115</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *op.cit.* (1849.) Paper 548, vol XVII. p.59.

<sup>116</sup> Ireland, A. *Address on the moral influence of free libraries, delivered at the opening of the Longsight Branch Library, on Saturday July 23rd, 1892*. (Manchester: Manchester Public Free Libraries. 1892.) p.8.

The high proportion of novels issued by public libraries has been exemplified above. A further interesting case is that of Rotherham, where the preponderance of fiction issued—almost eighty-six per cent towards the end of the century (Figure 8.4 and Table 8.2)—led to the inauguration of a unique newspaper-based reading circle in an attempt to raise standards. The percentage of fiction in stock at that time was thirty-three.<sup>117</sup> Reading circles were held in a number of towns to encourage critical reading during the nineteenth century, many of them in public libraries as part of their educational profile (see Chapter 8).

### 3.2.5 *the educational and educative usage of libraries*

There is something of a paradox between the inspiring evidence given to the 1849 Select Committee and the actual provisions of the 1850 Public Libraries Act, as regards the educational purpose of these libraries. Edward Edwards, for example, stated in his evidence that one of the main purposes of public libraries would be to guide people from "amusements of an unintellectual, and often injurious character, to such amusements as are rational and improving".<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, whilst Ewart (in the debate on the 1850 Public Libraries Bill) said that the libraries would provide "opportunities for self teaching...to the labouring classes",<sup>119</sup> the Act itself did not provide for the purchase of books and museum specimens but anticipated that donations would follow.

By 1877 Peter Cowell of Liverpool was able to state categorically that "free libraries were primarily intended to carry on the education of our schools" but that they also had the subsidiary social function of providing amusement and relaxation.<sup>120</sup> A similar opinion was quite widely held, and expressed by several writers and speakers especially towards the end of the century — though these may often be attributed to the rhetoric called for by the occasion. Sir John Lubbock, on opening the Rotherhithe public library in 1890, said:<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ridal, J. *The Rotherham Free Library Reading Circle: a series of letters (showing its origin) and papers on books read by the members during its first session - 1895-6 - and printed in the 'Rotherham Advertiser on various dates.* (Rotherham: Henry Garnett & Co. 1896.) pp.2-3.

<sup>118</sup> Parliament: Select Committee on Public Libraries. *op.cit.* (1849.) Paper 548, vol XVII. p.21.

<sup>119</sup> Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates*, vol.cviii, 1850, col.760.

<sup>120</sup> Cowell, P. On the admission of fiction in Free Libraries. *Transactions and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Library Association...* (London: Chiswick Press. 1878.) p.66.

<sup>121</sup> Ogle, J.J. *The free library.* (London: George Allen. 1897.) p.89. [citing the *New Review* of October 1890.]



But we do not grudge the cost of schools, and the free library is the school for the grownup. Moreover, I doubt whether either the one or the other is really an expense. A great part, at any rate, of what we spend on books we save in prisons and police. Only a fraction of the crime of the country arises from deliberate wickedness or irresistible temptation; the great sources of crime are drink and ignorance.

Then, reminiscent of the arguments for education as an antidote to crime which were advanced earlier in the century (for example, see Chapter 2, Section 2.4 above) he gave details which are included in Table 4.10 below. Sir John's opinion—that money spent on education would lead to a reduction in crime—was widely held, though there seems to have been no proof of this. What the statistics which he produced do indicate, however, is that the amount spent on poor relief was about the same as that spent on elementary education (of which the state provided less than £6,000,000)—and that a further large sum was being expended on the police and prison services.

**Table 4.10: Net annual expenditure on various local government services in England and Wales, 1889-1890.**

	<u>Lubbock</u> <sup>122</sup>	<u>Smellie</u> <sup>123</sup>
Elementary Education	£8,500,000	£4,280,000
{ of which parents provide	£1,860,000 }	-
{ and subscriptions provided	746,000 }	-
Science & Art Department	500,000	-
Museums etc.	250,000	-
Public Libraries	150,000	-
Poor relief and other Guardian services	8,500,000	8,379,000
Police, prisons and criminal prosecutions	4,000,000	3,749,000
Lunatics and Asylums	-	474,000
Main roads (outside London)	-	1,056,000
Salaries of Sanitary Officer	-	75,000

Lubbock's rounded figures may be compared with Smellie's, which include net expenditure met from the rates and exchequer grants for various local government services. The only significant difference relates to elementary education, where there is an unexplained difference of some £1,514,000 between the two (Table 4.10). Lubbock may not have proved his contention that libraries contributed to education, which in turn

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> adapted from statistics in Smellie, *op.cit.* p.82. [derived from a report of the Local Government Board in 1909.]

led to a reduction in crime, but the amounts spent on museums and public libraries were small in comparison.

After 1890 the number of towns adopting the Public Libraries Acts increased greatly (spurred on by Queen Victoria's Jubilee), but although the central government also increased its control of local government through increased grants this never applied to public libraries. These obtained their main funding from the local rates, with some assistance from the Department of Science and Art where classes were offered by the libraries, and a lesser contribution from the technical education funds in some places.

Much of the formal book-based information work of public libraries was carried out by the reference departments, which in many cases preceded the establishment of lending departments which catered more for recreational reading and informal self-education. It is impossible to quantify the educational achievements of libraries, but much anecdotal evidence exists which notes their value in the development of individuals. Greenwood was more assertive:

...it will generally be found that more than one half [of the local rates] is devoted to covering up social sores, while a mere tithe is spent in administering to the intellectual and moral needs of the deserving well doers. The actual amount of visible good which is accomplished by any ordinary municipal Library, when compared with the workhouse or the jail, bearing in mind the disproportionate expenditure, is so manifest that it is hard to believe there are persons endowed with so much perversity as to miss observing it for themselves.

As a propagandist for free public libraries, he pointed out that some people (who opposed an increase in local rates) seemed to think "that the best interests of a community are served by a ceaseless and munificent care of thieves, drunkards and shiftless wastrels".<sup>124</sup>

Looking back on his lifetime, Sir Walter Besant saw at the end of the century "the free library [as] one step out of a great many which have been forced upon us by changes in our social ideas that are nothing short of revolutionary". These changes included "the opening out of the whole country by railways, the creation of new worlds by emigration, the enlargement of the franchise, the establishment of a national system of education and of a cheap press". Rhetorically, he asked "can we invent or create any institution more likely to awaken in a boy the latent genius than a free library?", and (with somewhat more justification than Carlisle's comment regarding libraries being the universities of the people) he asserted that "the library is a life-long continuation school to which we can

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<sup>124</sup> Greenwood. *op.cit.* p.107.

resort as scholars for the whole of our lives. And the librarian, our greatest educational officer, is the master of that school".<sup>125</sup>

The educational and educative work of public libraries was furthered by the programmes of public lectures (see Chapter 6 below), and the subjects of books issued may usefully be compared with the subjects of lectures attended.

### 3.3 Relationship with other educational bodies

As noted in Section 3.1.2 above, the 1849 Select Committee report identified forty-eight different types of libraries in existence. In many places voluntary institutions and public libraries co-existed in the same towns for a number of years, each attempting to serve the educational needs of the community with limited resources. For example, about 1860 the fictional Kit Ormerod (hero of the best-selling book *King Cotton*) first tried the public library in Throstleton for information concerning the importation of cotton into Lancashire, but could only find books on growing the crop. Trying the local mechanics' institute library he had more success in locating the commercial details which he needed, only to find that the information was fifteen or twenty years out of date.<sup>126</sup> Although from a novel the situation was probably quite true to life — the mechanics' institute libraries were often starved of funds for new books, whilst the public libraries had not yet had time to build up comprehensive collections of their own.

By the end of the century, however, Greenwood suggests that the early rivalry between the managers of voluntary institutions and the new public libraries "appears to be rapidly disappearing". He condemned the mechanics' institution and similar bodies for allowing their libraries to consist "too largely of fiction and other books gathered together indiscriminately", and saw the lack of continuity in the management as being the greatest obstacle to their success. By contrast, public library management was representative and continuing, and Greenwood suggested that the Public Libraries Act would be adopted in many more towns if the voluntary libraries were turning them into public libraries (see Chapter 10 below). At the same time he saw that in some places the voluntary and public libraries could not only co-exist, but could be banded together in the Working Men's Club and Institute Union to create a community of interests.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Besant, W. The librarian as educator. *Library Association Record*, vol.2, 1900, pp.26-29.

<sup>126</sup> Armstrong, T. *King Cotton*. (London: Collins. 1947.) chapter 5, pp.150-162.

<sup>127</sup> Greenwood, T. *Public libraries: a history of the movement and a manual for the organization and management of rate-supported libraries*. (London: 4th ed 1894.) chapter XXVII, pp.485-493.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Public Library Acts in the second half of the nineteenth century were part of the adoptive legislation by which Parliament allowed local authorities to raise rates for the provision of facilities such as bath-houses and cemeteries. In addition there were compulsory reforms to local government administration, and to certain services with special attention being paid to public health. A system of committees was developed to share the work amongst municipal councillors and co-opted members, and at the same time there was an extension of the franchise at both national and local levels. Not until 1870 was general legislation passed for the provision of elementary education, and secondary education in 1902. However, post-school educational facilities were being developed under the aegis the Department of Science and Art from 1853 (used by many local authorities under the Public Libraries Act of 1855), whilst legislation for Technical Instruction 1889-1891 allocated powers and finance to the County and County Borough Councils.

Public libraries slowly developed book selection policies, but donations of books remained an important source for many years. There was some confusion concerning the educational purpose of these libraries, and the high percentage of fiction borrowed caused considerable concern as had also been the case in many mechanics' institutions.