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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITY
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CHAPTER 9

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTRES

She was not severe upon individuals so much as incredulous of the kindness of destiny, fate, what happened in the long run, and apt to insist that this was generally adverse to people in proportion as they deserved well. Even this theory she was ready to discard in favour of one which made chaos triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and everyone groping about in illusion and ignorance.

(Virginia Woolf)¹

1. Introduction

Much has been written during the present century seeking to place public libraries firmly in the rôle of adjuncts to 'education' by virtue of their provision of information in the form of books, periodicals and audiovisual media. Some would see them as being educational institutions in themselves and not merely as 'handmaidens' of the 'real' (or formal) educational bodies, but there appears to be little evidence that present local authorities view them as being the instruments of public education which many of their nineteenth century predecessors did. The 'teaching' role has largely—but not completely—disappeared, and although in schools and other educational establishments their own libraries are now often termed 'learning resource centres' (or some similar phrase), their proactive functions seem not to be well recognised and developed.

This research project did not set out to examine the print-based functions of nineteenth century public libraries, but rather their more conscious post-school and adult educational activities which were inaugurated to meet the perceived needs of their local communities at the time—as opportunities were presented and taken.

2. The development of public libraries from voluntary institutions

The main theme of this research report is that local government authorities throughout England were enabled to begin the creation of public institutions

¹ Woolf, V. *The voyage out*. (London: Vintage, 1992.) ch.17, p.235. (The Definitive Edition, edited by Elizabeth Heine.) First published 1915.

approximating to those envisaged by J.S. Buckingham in the mid-1830s, by means of the Public Libraries Acts from 1850. In addition to the general circumstantial evidence for this throughout the country, there were a number of places where the physical assets of the voluntary institutions were taken over by local authorities to form part of their multi-media 'public library' services. In other places the voluntary institutions continued to exist for many years side-by-side with the public ones—particularly in the larger cities. In Nottingham, for example, (where the public library was opened in 1867) the Mechanics' Institution celebrated its jubilee in 1887 with an exhibition of local literature and the publishing of its own history. Its library by then contained some 18,000 volumes, 885 had been added during the year, and issues had increased by over ten thousand to 81,670 volumes. Lectures had been very well attended, and the membership stood at over 3,000 people.² On the other hand the city library and university had benefited in 1883 when the Nottingham Literary and Philosophical Society was dissolved, and its property was offered to the city institution. This included its scientific collections, 640 volumes of books, and sets of pamphlets and journals of other societies in addition to a small amount of money.³

In Burnley (population 101,000) it was not until 1898 that it was decided to build a public library under the local Act, but the site depended on a scheme for a new technical institute and central schools.⁴ Before this the voluntary institutions provided the only libraries and post-school education. In its jubilee year the Burnley Mechanics' Institute had 1,600 members, a library of over 11,000 volumes, elementary science and art classes, and debt free property worth £14,000. Dr Brumwell, presiding at the celebratory banquet, suggested that the Institute should be extended to a Working Men's College, so that the working people of the town and district could graduate from it to the Victoria University. The point was "heartily taken up" by following speakers.⁵

In a few places the mechanics' institutions were not superseded by public libraries until the twentieth century. This was especially the case in 'railway towns'—in Swindon the Great Western Railway Mechanics' Institution (which in 1888 printed a new catalogue of its then 16,000 volumes, including juvenile works)⁶ acted as the public

² *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.58 (citing: *Fiftieth annual report of the Nottingham Mechanics' Institution*).

³ *Library Association Monthly Notes*, vol.4, nos.6/7, June/July 1883, p.97.

⁴ Greenwood, T. (ed.). *British Library Year Book 1900-1901: a record of library progress and work*. (London: Scott, Greenwood & Co. 1900). p.95.

⁵ *Library Association Monthly Notes*, vol.4, no.1, 15 January 1883, p.9.

⁶ *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.154.

library until the town adopted the Acts in 1942.⁷ In Horwich, the new mechanics' institution was built by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company at a cost of £3,000, and opened in December 1883 with 1,800 volumes.⁸ This small township did not have its own public library until 1906, and it was transferred to become a branch of the Lancashire County Library in 1932.⁹

2.1 The take-over of premises and book stocks

In general, however, public library services were replacing the mechanics' and other voluntary institutions throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In many townships this was effected by a transfer of the book stock of the voluntary institutions to the new public library authorities. Sometimes the actual buildings and even the librarians themselves were taken over by the local authorities. These voluntary institutions may have been offering many facilities already, or had confined their activities to a library (which was often the most popular and enduring feature). In Chester, a subscription library had been established in 1826 and was known as the City Library. Some fifty years later it was converted to become the public library, which contained the remnants of its commercial predecessor for many years.¹⁰ In the same county the book stock of the former Dukinfield Village Library was taken over when the public library was opened in 1895.¹¹ At South Molton (Devon) the former mechanics' institution offered the Town Council its books, fittings and its capital of £250 to form a public library.¹² At Cockermouth the mechanics' institution decided to hand its library of 3,000 volumes and its bird collection to the Urban District Council to start a public library, because of its own "unsatisfactory financial position". It attributed its failure "to the cheapness of literature and to the increase of Local Reading Rooms".¹³

⁷ Kelly, T. *A history of public libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1965*. (London: Library Association. 1973.) p.456.

⁸ *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.157.

⁹ Kelly. *op.cit.* p.446.

¹⁰ Axon, W.E.A. The libraries of Lancashire and Cheshire. In, Library Association. *Transactions and proceedings of the second annual meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom, at Manchester, September 1879*. (London: Trübner & Co. 1880.) p.52.

¹¹ Greenwood, T. (ed.). *Library Year Book 1897: a record of general library progress and work*. (London: Cassell & Co Ltd. 1897). p.145.

¹² *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.158.

¹³ *Library World*, vol.1, no.7, January 1899, p.127.

At Hyde the passing of the Technical Instruction Acts stimulated the trustees of the local mechanics' institution to transfer its assets to the corporation, and it was reopened as a technical school and public library in 1893. Three years later there were some five hundred students of science, art, technical and commercial subjects, and a new technical school costing £7,000 was being erected. The rate was bringing in £400 and the institution was receiving a further £586 in grants,¹⁴ indicating the importance of revenue-raising legislation in determining a township's ability to offer services. In South Shields a deed in Chancery was drawn up vesting the Mechanics' Institution, building, and contents in the new public library authority in 1873. As in other places many of the books were found to be unsuitable, and some 2,000 were immediately discarded as being too worn out for further circulation.¹⁵ The old Stanley Library in the township of Lynn was taken over as the public library in 1899. It was reported to have contained 16,000 volumes, "but a large number of these were found to be in a lamentable condition, and 1,500 had to be rejected altogether, and were sold by auction for 7s 6d (37p)".¹⁶ At Newcastle-upon-Tyne the Trustees of the Mechanics' Institution agreed to hand over the building as public library premises on condition that the art and science classes continued—and the Corporation took over the liabilities.¹⁷

Sometimes public opinion alone was not enough to persuade local authorities to adopt the Public Libraries Acts and other legislation, but direct action had to be taken by individuals or by groups. In 1888, Lord Brassey presented the town of Hastings with "the School of Art Building and Reference Library" costing about £15,000 and said that the building could be used as a free library.¹⁸ At that time the town had a population of some 50,000 inhabitants.

Leigh in Lancashire presents an interesting case where a voluntary institution set out to persuade the local authority to take it over, as a public institution. The present municipality of Leigh was formed in 1875 from four separate townships. Three years later the Leigh Literary Society was formed mainly as a debating society, but public lectures were also a feature. In 1879 it organised Cambridge University Extension lectures on English Literature in the Town Hall, and in 1883/4 the Society established

¹⁴ *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, vol.5, no.22, April 1896, p.261.

¹⁵ Ogle, J.J. *The free library*. (London: George Allen. 1897.) p.245.

¹⁶ *Library World*, vol.1, no.12, June 1899, p.260.

¹⁷ *Library Chronicle*, vol.1, 1884, p.140.

¹⁸ *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.79.

science and art classes there. In the latter year it founded its own reference library after unsuccessfully pressing the Local Board to do so, but wrote into its Deed of Covenant a clause allowing the Trustees to hand over the collection to the Local Board if and when it adopted the Public Libraries Acts. In 1890 the Society launched a public appeal for funds to build a Technical School and Public Library, and building commenced.

Two years later the Local Board adopted both the Public Libraries Act and the Technical Instruction Acts, and took over the Society's library and new building which was opened in 1894. At the same time James Ward, the Secretary of the Leigh Literary Society's Technical Instruction Committee, was appointed Librarian of the Leigh Public Library and Director of the associated Technical School. He held this joint post until 1904 when he became Director of Education following Balfour's 1902 Education Act.¹⁹

There was a somewhat similar case at Todmorden on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border, where the local Co-operative Society decided to erect a library building and to hand it over with its books to the Town Council. The Public Libraries Acts were adopted in 1896.²⁰ The books with which the public library opened came from several different sources, including the Co-operative Society (8,700 vols.), Bridge Street Sunday School (498 vols.), Botanical Society (400 vols.), and the Scientific Association (125 vols.).²¹ The Local Board's Library Committee also benefited from the proceeds of the sale in 1872 of the library and effects of Todmorden's second Mechanics' Institute (founded in 1859), which were handed to the Board on trust.²²

Local authorities did not always benefit financially from the closing down of voluntary institutions, however. At Taunton, the Somerset Institute auctioned its library of 2,000 volumes and other assets, when it closed in 1883 after more than sixty years.²³ The Devonport Free Public Library was opened in February 1882 in the former Mechanics' Institute building, and consisted chiefly of the institute's library with a few additions. The ground floor was converted to a news and magazine department, whilst

¹⁹ letter from Mrs Norma Ackers, 13 November 1972.

²⁰ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897*. *op.cit.* p.199; Greenwood. *British Library Year Book 1900-1901*. *op.cit.* pp.214-215.

²¹ H[odgins], J.A. Literature and Todmorden: a survey of its literary institutions. *Todmorden Public Library Journal*, No.1, October 1931, p.6. The article was signed by the author's initials only, but Mr J.A. Hodgins was a member of the Library Committee (Todmorden Corporation Council *Minutes 1930-1931*, p.2) and of its Journal Sub-committee (letter from Miss J. Brierley, 19 April 1993).

²² H[odgins]. *op.cit.* p.4.

²³ Library Association *Monthly Notes* vol.4, nos.6/7, June/July 1883, p.97.

the old lecture hall on the upper floor was converted into the lending and reference libraries. The buildings and contents were purchased for £2,500. ²⁴

In Gateshead it was originally hoped that the Mechanics' Institute, which was not flourishing, might have been transferred to the local authority, but the members of the Mutual Improvement Society joined the Institute *en masse* and then objected to the transfer going ahead. ²⁵ In 1888 the members of the Whitehaven Working Men's Reading Room rejected by a large majority a proposal to hand over its effects to the public library. ²⁶ Northampton also presents an interesting case, where the Mechanics' Institute was in such financial difficulties in 1855 that its lectures had been cancelled and it was suggested that its library of 10,600 volumes might form the nucleus of a public library. ²⁷ However, the institution revived and the penny readings became very successful. ²⁸ A scheme was even devised by which a School Principal could obtain admission to lectures for all his residential pupils, borrow twelve sets of books from the library, and gain admission for himself and teachers to the reading room—all for two guineas (£2.10p) per year. ²⁹ Northampton adopted the Public Libraries Acts in 1860, opened a museum in the same year, inaugurated science classes and a library in 1867, and took over the libraries of the Mechanics' Institute and the Northampton Religious and Useful Knowledge Society in 1880. ³⁰ There was by no means a comprehensive movement throughout the country to phase out the voluntary institutions, and to replace them by rate-aided public ones. Each institution and community made its own decision for a variety of personal reasons.

2.2 The recruitment of librarians

The creation of rate-aided public libraries created a new growth industry in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and there were no 'library schools' from which

²⁴ *ibid.*, vol.3, no.3, March 1882, pp.35-36.

²⁵ *ibid.*, vol.3, no.7, July 1882, p.111.

²⁶ *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.115.

²⁷ Northampton & Northamptonshire Mechanics' Institute. [leaflet calling a] *Special General Meeting* for 2 October 1855 (now in the author's possession.)

²⁸ Northampton Mechanics' Institute. *Minute Book No.3*, 12 June 1861.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 11 February 1858.

³⁰ Thompson, B. *A history of the beginnings and early development of scientific and technical education in Northampton, from 1867 to 1894*. (Northampton.) p.1.; Hatley, V. *Education at Northampton during the 19th century*. (typescript. 1970.).

graduates could be recruited. Towards the end of the century there was a healthy trade in recruiting chief librarians from among the pool of assistants who had already worked in one or more public libraries,³¹ and so had absorbed some of the techniques and philosophies of public service which had been developed. Edward Edwards, 'the father of English Public Libraries', was recruited from the British Museum Library to be Manchester's first chief librarian when it was opened in 1852. Although dismissed in 1858,³² Edwards was described as "a pioneer, an enthusiast, and a man of prolific ideas" who placed the "Reference Library upon good and solid foundations",³³ and his work in the national library was obviously of considerable value in the formation of the regional reference library. Tynemouth (Northumberland) public library was opened in 1869, and looked for one of its Librarians further afield when it appointed George Tidey in February 1876. Born in 1836 at Nutfield (Surrey), he had been librarian of the Royal Artillery Library at Dover 1864-1868,³⁴ possibly because of the need for someone with experience of technical literature and librarianship.

Initially, the first chief librarians of these new public libraries were often selected for reasons other than their knowledge and experience of public librarianship. Ollé seems to have been somewhat unappreciative (if not actually disparaging) when he wrote that: "The early public libraries obtained their chief librarians where they could. The larger towns, which offered the better salaries, were often fortunate enough to obtain chiefs with some library experience, if only as librarian of a circulating library, or the library of a mechanics' institute".³⁵ True, these early librarians—with or without previous library experience in the voluntary institutions—were not always successful in developing effective public institutions. There were many factors such as finance, other staff, Committee control, and their own personalities which affected their ability to organise the various services which could constitute the local government educational complexes of the late nineteenth century.

31 Brown, J.D. Where do we get our librarians? *Library World*, vol.3, no.29, November 1900, pp.124-127.

32 Manchester: Library Committee. *Proceedings*, vol.2, 29 October 1858.

33 Butterworth, W. Manchester municipal public libraries. *Transactions 1906-7 of the Manchester Statistical Society*, p.100.

34 Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897*. *op.cit.* p.201.

35 Ollé, J.G. *Library history: an examination guidebook*. (London: Clive Bingley. 2nd ed 1971.) p.78.

Some early librarians seem to have been unconnected with books and libraries, but these were usually in the smaller places. Miss Ellin Verney, daughter of the local squire Sir Edmund and Lady Verney, became Librarian of the Middle Clayton Parish Library when it opened in 1893. With a population of only 205 at the time, it was the smallest community to adopt the Public Libraries Acts and could not afford the services of a paid full-time librarian.³⁶ At Middlewich (Cheshire), the community of 3,704 inhabitants adopted the Public Libraries Acts in 1889 and opened the library in the following year. The Librarian was Thomas Drinkwater, who was reported as being untrained in library work and who in fact devoted only a small portion of his time to the library.³⁷ Gosport was an example of a larger township (26,000) which employed an inexperienced librarian. This was Councillor E.P. Dash, who resigned his seat on Council to apply for the vacancy and was appointed by 13 to 4 votes at a salary of 25s (£1.25p) per week rising to 30s (£1.50p) in two years. He had formerly been a sailmaker in the dockyard, and had a business in the town.³⁸

Others may have had little or no previous library experience, but had been connected with the book trade in some way. At Oxford the first librarian was a local bookseller, Benjamin Blackwell,³⁹ whose family later developed the present international Blackwell's enterprises. He was appointed Librarian at £60 p.a. in 1854 with Harry Collins as assistant at 7s (35p) per week,⁴⁰ but died within the year.⁴¹ The second Librarian was John Dewe, also a bookseller.⁴² He had also been an applicant in 1853, when he had claimed "thirty years' experience in library-keeping, combined with a practical knowledge of book-binding, and the repairing of books".⁴³

36 Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.*, p.173.

37 *ibid. loc.cit.*

38 *Library World*, vol.2, no.23, May 1900, p.305 (citing an unnamed Portsmouth newspaper).

39 Kelly, W. *Post office directory of...Oxfordshire*. (London: W. Kelly & Co. [1847].) p.2204. He was later listed as owner of one of the seven circulating libraries in the city, in: Gardner, R. *History, gazetteer and directory of the county of Oxford...* (Peterborough: R. Gardner. 1852.) p.378.

40 Oxford: Estates Committee. *Minute Book*, 6 May 1854.

41 poster inviting applications for a new librarian replacing B.H. Blackwell deceased, the "election" to be on 29 January 1855 (in Oxford "Scrapbook", p.21).

42 He was listed as owner of a circulating library, in: Vincent, J. *Oxford University, city, and county directory for 1835*. (Oxford: J. Vincent. 1835.) p.50; and later as joint owner of a bookshop, in: *Pigot's Directory, 1844*. (Oxford: Pigot. 1844.) p.25.

43 information from a card, in: Oxford "Scrapbook". p.21.

Voluntary institutions had also recruited some of their librarians from the ranks of commercial booksellers, and in many cases the positions as librarian were honorary and part time only. In Rochdale, George Hanson had been trained as a bookseller and was the former librarian of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society 1866-1871, before being appointed in charge of the public library.⁴⁴ On the other hand librarians could (as in the 1990s) later become booksellers, and did not necessarily remain in the locality. Edwin Maynard, for example, had been born in 1840 in Whittlesford (Cambridgeshire); he was for some time in the Mechanics' Institute of Newport (Monmouthshire) before being appointed to the public library in Twickenham (Middlesex) in 1887—four years after it was opened. Afterwards he had a career as a bookseller in London and the provinces.⁴⁵

Booksellers frequently ran circulating libraries in connection with their book shops, but these did not normally call for the same skills required of even a mechanics' institution librarian. Peter Payne was appointed first Librarian of the Hinckley Public Library when it was opened in 1888; he had previously been the librarian of a subscription library in Hinckley, which had been established in 1874.⁴⁶ It is uncertain whether he had also been a bookseller, but the skills which he brought to the public library would not appear to be those required to develop the library-based community education centres which many local authorities were initiating.

Many others amongst the first public librarians recruited from voluntary institutions were local people, and this would have inhibited the breadth and depth of their experience. In Dukinfield, both the book stock and the librarian of the former Dukinfield Village Library were taken over when the Public Library was opened in 1895, which suggests the maintenance of the *status quo* in all but finance.⁴⁷ Altrincham public library (in Cheshire) had as its first librarian Miss Florence Beckett, who was appointed to the post of Librarian of the Public Library when it was opened in 1894. She had been trained in the Altrincham Literary Institute and Public Library—which was not a 'public library' under the Acts.⁴⁸

44 Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* p.185.

45 *ibid.* pp.200-201.

46 *ibid.* pp.139-140.

47 *ibid.* p.145.

48 *ibid.* p.71.

The voluntary institutions of the literary and philosophical kind provided many of the early public librarians, and may have been influential in creating the middle class cultural environment which has been the subject of condemnation during the present century. Mr G. Hall Elliott, Sub-librarian of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Literary and Philosophical Society, was appointed Chief Librarian of Gateshead Public Library which was opened in May 1884.⁴⁹ In Preston (Lancashire), William Storey Bramwell, formerly librarian of the Preston Literary and Philosophical Institute, was appointed Librarian of the public library when the Institute was merged with it in 1879 following the adoption of the Public Libraries Acts.⁵⁰

The Co-operative movement was becoming a part of the daily lives of the working classes in the north of England, and its educational functions were increasingly evident despite scattered opposition. In many townships the 'Co-op' (or the 'Pioneers') was not merely a mutually owned shop, but an organisation which provided libraries, lectures and classes for its members. Some of those involved with these educational services were recruited for the public libraries. In Rochdale—with its claims of pioneering the Co-operative movement, George Hanson was appointed as the town's first Chief Librarian in 1871. He had been the librarian of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society since 1866.⁵¹ The Pioneers' Society continued to flourish—in 1882 its circulating and reference libraries contained 15,035 volumes, there were seventeen branch reference libraries and one branch lending library, and the issues from the central library were 45,317 during the year.⁵²

In Nelson (also in Lancashire), the public library opened its reading room in 1889 and its lending section in the following year. David Rushton, who had previously been employed by, and compiled the catalogues of, the Nelson Liberal Club and the Nelson Co-operative Society 1885-1889, was appointed Librarian.⁵³ As noted above, in Todmorden the local Co-operative Society decided to erect a library building and to hand it over with its books to the Town Council, which adopted the Public Libraries Acts in 1896. In the following year the local authority appointed Thomas Sutcliffe as first Librarian of the Public Library. He had been trained in the library of the Todmorden Co-

⁴⁹ Library Association. *Monthly Notes*, vol.4, no.11, November 1883, pp.142-143.

⁵⁰ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* pp.181-183; Greenwood. *British Library Year Book 1900-1901. op.cit.* p.187.

⁵¹ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* p.185.

⁵² Library Association *Monthly Notes*, vol.3, no.3, March 1882, p.37.

⁵³ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* p.174.

operative Society, of which he had been librarian and Secretary to its Education Department between 1884 and 1897.⁵⁴ The wider experience of workers' education which such people brought to the public library service may also have been influential in facilitating the development of the community education centre concept.

The Working Men's Libraries and Institutes seem to have provided only a few people who subsequently worked in public libraries. Two examples are from Carlisle and South Shields. In the former town, John Dixon Stuart of Carlisle (formerly Secretary and Librarian of the Penrith Workingmen's Reading-Room) was appointed as Librarian when the public library was first opened in 1893.⁵⁵ In 1887 Thomas Pike was appointed Librarian of South Shields (opened in 1873). Pike had been born in the town, and for 15 years had been the Secretary of the Workingmen's Institute (established in March 1850 and said to be the oldest in England).⁵⁶ It is difficult to judge their potential for contributing to the development of the public institution concept, but they would both appear to have had an understanding of working class needs.

On the face of it, however, librarians and others who had been employed in mechanics' institutions would seem to have been exposed to the background most favourable to the concept of public institutions. At Hindley (Lancashire) John Smith, who had been trained in the Wigan Mechanics' Institute 1866-1889, was appointed Librarian when the Hindley Public Library was opened in the latter year.⁵⁷ Another person who moved to a new town was Edwin Maynard, who was for some time in the Mechanics' Institute of Newport (Monmouthshire) before being appointed to Twickenham (Middlesex) in 1887.⁵⁸

More often, however, those moving from mechanics' institutions to public libraries were local men (seemingly never women). The Whitehaven Public Library opened in 1888, and the person who was appointed as Librarian (John Simpson) had been trained in the Whitehaven Mechanics' Institution.⁵⁹ In an unusual reversal of the

54 *ibid.* p.199; Greenwood. *British Library Year Book 1900-1901. op.cit.* pp.214-215.

55 Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* p.179.

56 *ibid.* p.196.

57 *ibid.* p.140.

58 *ibid.* pp.200-201.

59 *ibid.* p.205.

normal trend, the Nottingham Mechanics' Institute recruited in 1882 a senior assistant at the city library (Mr J.T. Radford) as its sub-librarian.⁶⁰

The experience of organising science education in the mechanics' institutions was sought after in many places where the public libraries evolved as centres of post-school education. This was the case at Hyde where John Chorton, who had been born at Woodley in Cheshire and trained in the Hyde Mechanics' Institution, became Librarian of Hyde Public Library on adoption of the Act in 1893.⁶¹ His duties included acting as assistant to the Organising and General Secretary of the technical school which was in the same building.⁶² The Vice President of the Mechanics' Institute was John Cheetham, who had been one of the auditors as well as a member of the Science Committee. After the handover to the town council he worked hard on the Technical Instruction and Public Library Committee, becoming chairman of the Library Committee in 1896.⁶³

Leigh (Lancashire) was another industrial township which took advantage of the Technical Instruction Acts. As early as 1884 it was reported that the Leigh Literary Society was engaged in promoting lectures and science classes, and that it was then forming the nucleus of a reference library to be given to the Local Board whenever the Acts were adopted.⁶⁴ In 1892 the Local Board adopted both the Public Libraries Act and the Technical Instruction Acts, and took over the Leigh Literary Society's library and new building which was opened in 1894. At the same time James Ward (born in Leigh 1858), the librarian of the Leigh Literary Society Library 1884-1892 and Secretary of its Technical Instruction Committee, was appointed Librarian of the public library and Director of the associated Technical School. He held this joint post until 1904 when he became Director of Education following Balfour's 1902 Education Act.⁶⁵

After a few years, public libraries were able to obtain some of their Chief Librarians from the ranks of assistants who had been trained in their own or in other (and particularly the larger) public libraries. Alfred Caddie was promoted to the post of

⁶⁰ Library Association *Monthly Notes*, vol.3, no.3, March 1882, p.37.

⁶¹ Greenwood. *British Library Year Book 1900-1901. op.cit.* p.145.

⁶² Borough of Hyde: Technical Instruction (Officers) Sub Committee. *Minutes*, 19 February 1894.

⁶³ Borough of Hyde: Library Committee. *Minutes*, 26 May 1902.

⁶⁴ *Library Chronicle*, vol.1, 1884, pp.175-176.

⁶⁵ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897. op.cit.* p.165; letter from Mrs Norma Ackers, 13 November 1972. (Note: dates for Ward as librarian of the Society given as 1884-1894 in Greenwood. *British Library Year Book 1900-1901. op.cit.* p.154.)

Librarian of Stoke-on-Trent in 1888 after having worked there as an assistant for several years. He was valued as a local man for his local knowledge and interests, becoming also the Honorary Librarian of the North Staffordshire Naturalists' Field Club & Archaeological Society in 1894.⁶⁶ The first Librarian of the Sale Public Library when it opened in 1891 was George Bethell, who had been born in Manchester and had been trained in the public library there. He was appointed Organising Secretary for Technical Instruction for Sale in May 1893.⁶⁷ Charles Vernon Kirkby travelled further for his promotion. He had been born in Leeds and trained as an assistant in the public library there from 1872, before becoming Librarian of the public library at Leicester in 1888.⁶⁸ Such people were bringing with them experience of the developing public library system, and a very small number were taking the examinations (instituted in 1885) of the Library Association—"one of the first two candidates to secure the Second Class Certificate being J.J. Ogle of Nottingham, afterwards well known as librarian of Bootle".⁶⁹

Library authorities were often the recipients of collections from voluntary institutions for the town museums. At Brighouse the newly formed Museum at the Victoria Free Library and Park was largely contributed by the Rastrick and Brighouse Naturalists' Society. It comprised two large upper rooms containing natural history and other specimens.⁷⁰ A few libraries were also recruiting staff for their museum collections, and very occasionally the staff came along with the collections. George Reece, for many years curator of the Worcester Natural History Society's museum which was transferred to the Committee of Worcester public library in 1880, was appointed sub-librarian and curator of the town museum at the same time.⁷¹

3. The educational purpose of public libraries

There is no doubt that many persons in the government, and the middle classes, saw 'free' libraries as institutions for the education of the public—and especially of the working classes. The first Public Libraries Bill was supported by Liberal members of

⁶⁶ Greenwood. *Library Year Book 1897*. *op.cit.* pp.197-198.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* pp.192-193.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.165.

⁶⁹ Kelly. *op.cit.* p.104.

⁷⁰ *Library World*, vol.1, no.12, June 1899, p.260.

⁷¹ Library Association. *Monthly Notes* vol.1, no.11, 15 November 1880, pp.87-88.

Parliament as a help towards the extension of popular education.⁷² At Watford the Working Men's Committee collected contributions towards the building fund for the library and school of science and art.⁷³ In Manchester, W.J. Paul "organised the agitation for a free library among the workshops and factories, and succeeded in raising nearly a thousand pounds from the contributions of working men",⁷⁴ and in many other places throughout England, groups of working men contributed to setting up local public libraries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Greenwood was able to write that:⁷⁵

The other sides of Library work [besides books] which are now flourishing and developing more and more every year consist of courses of lectures on literary and scientific topics; museum and art-gallery work; assistance in the work of university extension; educational work in connection with board schools and technical institutions; and generally of work connected with after-school education.

Nevertheless, in spite of the involvement of many public libraries in non-book educational activities during the nineteenth century, a myth has grown up that they were only warehouses for books. Even Ernest Green (Secretary of the Workers' Educational Association in the 1930s) was able to write: "There still survives a nineteenth century theory that all one needs for a public library is a collection of books and either an old condemned school building, a disused tin chapel or a dilapidated vicarage".⁷⁶ True, his thesis was that modern public libraries could sponsor lectures (to be organised by the W.E.A. and similar external bodies), discussions and other adult educational activities, if purpose-built libraries included lecture rooms. Like many others, however, he appeared unaware that these *had* been a feature of the public library system in England until the turn of the century.

The seeds of the break-up of the rate-supported municipal public library complexes were sown by the legislation which helped them to expand in the last decade of the century. As noted above, the first Public Libraries Act of 1850 restricted the concept to libraries and museums, but this was expanded in 1855 to include schools of

⁷² *The Spectator*, vol.23, 16 March 1850, p.245.

⁷³ *Watford Public Library & School of Science & Art*. (1873.)

⁷⁴ Southern, J.W. Municipal libraries and their development. *Library Association Record*, October 1899, p.614.

⁷⁵ Greenwood. *Greenwood's library year book 1897*. *op.cit.* p.9.

⁷⁶ Green, E. Adult education and the public library. *Library Association Record*, June 1939, p.326.

science and art. Lectures were widely organised (without legal authorisation except in a few local Acts) in connection with libraries, and to a lesser extent with museums and art galleries. Relationships with other educational bodies were forged—both local learned societies, and national organisations such as University Extension and the National Home Reading Union. The Education Acts from 1870 increasingly formalised elementary schooling, and the Technical Instruction Acts of 1889-1891 brought the possibilities of public libraries strengthening their work in this area—though this was not uniformly effected by any means.

Technical instruction, however, gave strength to the development of another tier of local government which had been created by the 1888 County Councils Act. The counties themselves were ancient features of the administration of England, but their importance was minor until the passing of this Act. Even so, their real power came only with the allocation to them of the 'whiskey money', ostensibly for educational purposes but which was sometimes diverted to other purposes as noted above. The county boroughs were in the strongest position, and many of these developed technical instruction in connection with their public libraries which were already providing schools of science and art.

For many municipal libraries the end of their post-school science and technical education came with the passing of the 1902 Education Act, which effectively authorised secondary education and created new technical education boards. New opportunities for co-operation came with the formation of the Workers' Educational Association and other organisations, but the direct provision of educational facilities by public libraries waned in the early years of the twentieth century.

3.1 Some concepts as seen in the literature

Commenting on a hundred years of the light fiction controversy, Paul Sykes believed that he could identify: ⁷⁷

the time of the greatest opportunity for a move in a new direction, away from that policy which has dogged attempts to elevate the importance of public libraries and impaired the credibility of claims for professional recognition by those who work in them. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the social and philanthropic virtues emphasised by the first library protagonists were subsiding in favour of claims for education in general and, in particular, the need to provide industrial operatives with technical skills.

⁷⁷ Sykes, P. *The public library in perspective*. (London: Clive Bingley. 1979.) p. 96.

This recognised the upsurge in library involvement following the Elementary Education Acts of 1870 onwards and the Technical Instruction Acts of 1889 and 1891, but ignored other educational work being undertaken (sometimes tentatively and experimentally) since 1850. One problem is that the literature—in the form of papers at conferences and in the professional press—generally begins towards the end of the century, so giving the impression that library based educational services is a recent movement. True, the demand for fiction had been a serious 'problem' inherited from the mechanics' institutions—but it was indicative not only of people's perceived needs for recreation, but also of increasing literacy and a least a modicum of 'education'.

The reasons for the late beginnings of a corpus of literature are not hard to find. Professional associations and professional periodicals—both those for local government and for librarianship—were established somewhat late in the century. This meant that earlier opportunities for the exchange of ideas and for publicising services were restricted, making it more difficult for the historiographer to gather evidence concerning changes in philosophies and practices during the half century. Data tend to be scattered, incomplete, and possibly biased in that some at least of what was recorded in newspapers, annual reports and similar sources, was designed to give a favourable impression of what may well have been a minority point of view. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine briefly some of the literature in an attempt to note what was being said at the time.

3.1.1 libraries and education

The view of the public library as a place of continuing education and an antidote to social vices was expressed by Lord George Hamilton at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Acton public library (towards which Passmore Edwards had given £4,000) in 1898. He said that: ⁷⁸

Free Libraries offered a means of obtaining information to all who took an interest in public affairs; it also offered the means of self-education to those whose education was unfinished. They served as an antidote to places of resort which lead to the contraction of deleterious habits or practices...

As at the time of passing the first Public Libraries Act, many people at the end of the century still held the middle and upper class view of the public library as an alternative to the public house for the working classes. This had certainly been in the minds of many of the proponents of public institutions in the 1830s and 1840s—for Buckingham it was the central factor in his plans, and for the Educational Chartists and other social reformers

⁷⁸ *Library World*, vol.1, no.6, December 1898, p.97.

it was an important part of their schemes.⁷⁹ Although few of the people concerned survived to the turn of the century, their ideas did. Thomas Greenwood, the prolific writer on public libraries and advocate of their development into community education centres, was the son of a Stockport Chartist who was one of the earliest promoters of the temperance cause throughout Lancashire. Thomas himself, though born in 1851 some six months after his father's death, inherited his father's zeal for supporting temperance and other movements for the general public welfare.⁸⁰ His support of the Sunday Opening movement in face of the opposition of the Sabbatarians was largely on the basis of providing an alternative to the public house.⁸¹

The educational purpose of a public library was also stressed by the Duke of Devonshire, on the occasion of the opening of the extensions to the library and the Technical School. He is reported as having said that:⁸²

... in these days, when education beyond elementary education was free and also compulsory, and when a great deal of education beyond elementary was provided at something considerably under cost price, he thought it would be very poor economy which would grudge the cost of providing libraries which would give to the people the means of applying, and of deriving full enjoyment from, the education by which we now set so much store.

The problem is that it is not surprising that public speakers should emphasise the educational function of public libraries, and there would not seem to be available a large corpus of opinion by the ordinary users and non-users.⁸³ Equally, it is to be expected that the professional literature would also pay attention to educational aspects, especially at a time when 'education' was a national concern and a growth industry. The professional press did not begin until the Library Association of the United Kingdom was formed in 1877, but from the following year (when the *Transactions and Proceedings* of its annual meetings were available in print) until the present time there has been a series of

⁷⁹ a contrary view was the comment by one man that "no greater curse existed than these libraries, and he had rather see a young man hanging about a public-house than spending his time in these places", reported in: Greenwood, T. *Public libraries*. (London: Cassell. 4th ed 1894.) p.82. [citing *The Standard*, January 1891.]

⁸⁰ *Library World*, vol.1, no.7, January 1899, pp.116-117.

⁸¹ Greenwood. *Public libraries*. *op.cit.* pp.458-470.

⁸² *Library World*, vol.2, no.17, November 1899. p.126.

⁸³ some of the arguments against public libraries (loafers, infectious diseases, trivial fiction, reading as a passive activity, etc.) are noted in: Greenwood. *Public libraries*. *op.cit.* pp.81-83. On the other hand it could be opined "that in most cases such arguments were merely rationalisations of deeper prejudices deriving from vested interests, among which those of the property owners and the brewers figured most prominently". Kelly. *op.cit.* p.114.

journals carrying articles and conference papers. Frank Campbell claimed that of the five hundred or so papers read before the meetings of the Association between 1877 and 1897, some fifteen dealt with 'Education and libraries', and one with 'Culture and libraries'.⁸⁴

Unfortunately, Campbell listed only the main topic headings and not the actual papers, so it has not been possible to substantiate his claim. An average of twenty-five papers on librarianship given each year is not excessive in view of the introduction of monthly meetings of the Association—but accepting his total, a search of the literature suggests that only a proportion of these papers were subsequently printed. This immediately identifies a bias, and it would be useful to know the basis on which selection was made by editors from among those actually submitted for publication.

Three librarians whose papers on 'libraries and education' were read at meetings and later published in the 1890s were Ogle of Bootle, Turner of Wolverhampton, and MacAlister who was Honorary Secretary of the Association. Ogle had the most to say—on this as on other topics! In his paper at the 1891 Annual Meeting⁸⁵ he noted optimistically that university extension and technical education meant that: "Now our clever boys, however poor in their origin, may ascend without hindrance from the elementary day school to the University, or from the artisan's evening class to the Technical College, and thence to a proud position in the world of invention, discovery, or industry". He continued, however: "But, what is done for the thousands of boys who are not clever, the plodding ones who leave school with credit perhaps, but not with distinction?" His natural answer to his own question was the 'free public library'. Saying that the great object of education was the development of character, he countered the critics of fiction by saying that "the best modern fiction is one of the prime factors in this kind of educational work". At the same time one fifth of books issued in public libraries throughout the country were works "of what is usually called solid information", in addition to which the reference libraries were resources for all—without which university extension and technical education would not be so successful. Ogle advocated what are now called 'readers advisers', and instanced books written entirely from library sources.

⁸⁴ Campbell, F. Past and present papers of the Library Association: our aims and objectives. *Library Association Record*, vol.1, 1899, p.14.

⁸⁵ Ogle, J.J. The place of the free public library in popular education. *The Library*, vol.3, 1891. pp.401-407.

Three years later he looked at the committees rather than the services,⁸⁶ opening with the assertion that: "The Public Library Acts clearly acknowledge Public Library Committees as educational authorities competent to direct a not inconsiderable part of the secondary education of the people". They had been aided by the 1884 Act through the Science and Art Department in coming "into closer union with the main educational currents of their localities", and the Technical Instruction Acts had consolidated their work. They co-operated also with independent committees such as the University Extension Local Committee, and the School Board. He asked:

Why cannot there be an enlarged School or Education Board more directly responsible to the Town Council or other local rating authority, consisting partly of elected members and partly of co-opted experts on educational matters? Such bodies ought to undertake the management and inspection of all Public Libraries, Museums, Art Galleries, elementary day or evening schools, secondary schools and technical schools supported or subsidised by the public purse.

Such a proposal was not likely to find favour in most local authorities, however, and seems not to have been seriously considered by other bodies. Ogle did not press this idea, though he did suggest a closer connection between libraries and elementary schools as far as services were concerned.⁸⁷

Turner's contention was that a public library should be "the bridge by means of which an intelligent youth may pass, if desirous, from the elementary school to the university" or (quoting the National Association) "the bridge over the unoccupied space which now exists between the end of the primary instruction and the commencement of industrial life". He was mainly concerned, however, with the scientific and technical instruction facilities at Wolverhampton public library over the years.⁸⁸ MacAlister (not a public librarian) commented that others had seemed to think that a library should properly develop into a place for "technical classes, lectures, and books", but suggested that if our forefathers had been far-seeing enough to have established national education on a broad and comprehensive basis, we should have had such institutions instead of libraries, pure and simple". This identified the reason for local authorities using the Public Libraries Acts to develop public institutions—though he did not approve, and believed that libraries should remain book-based. His solution was that libraries should operate a subject

⁸⁶ Ogle, J.J. The relationship of the public library committee to other educational bodies. *The Library*, vol.7, 1895, pp.129-134.

⁸⁷ Ogle, J.J. *The connection between the public library and the public elementary school*. (London: Wyman. 1899.) [Board of Education Special Report.] pamphlet.

⁸⁸ Turner, F. The place of the public library in relation to elementary, secondary, and higher education: being, mainly, an account of the work accomplished at the Wolverhampton Public Library Technical College. *The Library*, vol.6, 1894, pp.168-176.

specialisation scheme, and co-operate with educational institutions by ensuring access to works required by students.⁸⁹

3.1.2 lectures in libraries and museums

Library lectures were recognised as a feature of the non-formal adult education programme of local authorities, which were restricted in what they could legally undertake. Frank Campbell acknowledged this purpose in his call for more information to be made available about the lectures:⁹⁰

... remembering that education and culture were two of the fundamental objects of the original library movement, we require an *Annual Report Relative to Lectures* held (or not held) in connection with libraries throughout the country, with details of the facilities for lectures and literary gatherings at each library.

He stated that four of the approximately five hundred papers read before the Library Association between 1877 and 1897 concerned lectures. Unfortunately his call for special annual reports on library lectures went unheeded.⁹¹

The first article on library lectures seems to have been by William Axon in 1878, in which he condemned the one-off lectures and said that: "Library lectures should have for their special object the indicating of the books on some specific topic or class of literature".⁹² Justin Winsor, of Harvard University Library, thought that the bibliographical knowledge of librarians made them the best such lecturers.⁹³ In the same year, Councillor Bailey of Salford gave what appears to be the first talk on the subject—firstly to the Manchester Literary Club⁹⁴ and then (in 1879) to the Library Association.⁹⁵ Condemning the high proportion of fiction issued, he said that every

⁸⁹ MacAlister, J.Y.W. A plea for a closer connection between public libraries and other public educational institutions. *The Library*, vol.6, 1894. pp.207-210.

⁹⁰ Campbell. *op.cit.* p.6.

⁹¹ *ibid.* p.14.

⁹² Axon, W.E.A. On library lectures. *Library Journal*, vol.3, 1878. p.48.

⁹³ Winsor, J. Library lectures and other helps. [Letter dated 15 May 1878.] *Library Journal*, vol.3, 1878, p.121.

⁹⁴ Bailey, W.H. *On the value of public lectures on the books in free libraries: read before the members of the Bibliographical Section of the Manchester Literary Club, December 3rd, 1878.* (Manchester: Ireland & Co. 1879.)

⁹⁵ Bailey, W.H. Lectures in connexion with public free libraries. In, Library Association. *Transactions and proceedings of the second annual meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom at Manchester... September 1879.* (London: Trübner. 1880.) pp.34-37. Discussion reported pp.95-96.

library should be the "basis for a series of lectures on the books which it contains". His treatment of the topic suggests considerable input by Axon.

It was not until 1892 that another substantial talk was devoted to lectures, when Robert Dent gave a short historical overview of what had happened in such places as Manchester, Liverpool, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bootle and Aston (his own library). There had been various reasons for introducing lectures, and they were of different kinds, but he thought that when the "philosophic pill" had been suitably gilded by the optical lantern, some artisans might be tempted "to become borrowers from the public library, or students within the walls of its reference department".⁹⁶ He took up the subject again in 1899, arguing that many who had not acquired the habit of reading were nevertheless getting a good return on their library rate.⁹⁷

In 1894, Briscoe gave his paper on the scheme for "half-hour talks with the people about books and book-writers", first introduced at Nottingham and taken up by Loughborough, Hucknall and Peterborough. Talks were given at twelve branch reading-rooms so as to facilitate attendance throughout the city.⁹⁸ Not to be outdone, in 1899 Peter Cowell gave an account of the various Liverpool 'popular' lectures, affirming that they had a marked effect on the use of books. Illustrated single lectures on scientific or historical subjects were well attended, while courses on literature or economics by university lecturers saw diminishing audiences.⁹⁹ Between 1900 and 1914, six more papers appeared in the British professional journals, supporting lectures as adjuncts to the educational work of libraries.

3.1.3 technical education and libraries

At a conference in 1894, Ogle affirmed that:¹⁰⁰

the [Public Libraries] Act of 1884 was a decided advantage to the Library movement, inasmuch as it was the means of bringing many Libraries through the relationship of the committees with the Science and Art Department into closer union with the main educational currents of their localities... In many cases the good educational work done

⁹⁶ Dent, R.K. Free lectures in connection with free public libraries. [A report read at the Paris meeting of the Library Association, September, 1892.] *The Library*, vol.6, 1894, pp.354-360.

⁹⁷ Dent, R.K. Library extension work lectures. *Library World*, March 1899, pp.162-164.

⁹⁸ Briscoe, J.P. Half-hour talks about books with library readers. [Read before the Annual Meeting of the Library Association, Belfast, September, 1894.] *The Library*, vol.7, 1895. pp.18-20.

⁹⁹ Cowell, P. Free public library lectures. *Library Association Record*, vol.1, 1899, pp.146-150.

¹⁰⁰ Ogle. The relationship of the Public Library Committee to other educational bodies. *op.cit.* p.129.

under the powers of the 1884 Act early led to the recognition of the Public Library Committee as the proper authority to administer the powers of a Technical Instruction Committee...

His opinion may justifiably be seen as being somewhat biased in view of his own close connection with technical education—and the "advantage" was soon to disappear with the passing of the 1902 Education Act—but it is certainly true that many local authorities did agree in a practical manner with his contention.

Although many public libraries had been connected with schools of science and art for years, and the 1884 Libraries Amendment Act was about to strengthen the link with the Department of Science and Art, Southward made a plea for libraries to house more technical literature.¹⁰¹ The 1889 Technical Instruction Act was of considerable interest to local authorities and their libraries. One indication of this was the paper on 'The relation of the Free Library to Technical Instruction' given by Alfred Lancaster at the quarterly meeting of the Mersey District Association of Librarians, held on 8 February 1889 at the Bootle-cum-Linacre public library.¹⁰² Lancaster followed his talk at Bootle with a similar paper 'Free Libraries and Technical Education' at the 12th annual meeting of the Library Association in October 1889, held at Gray's Inn.¹⁰³ Speaking after the passing of the first Technical Instruction Act—but before 'whiskey money' was available—as well as lectures he advocated library classes as being more effective. His recommendation that industrial art societies on the German model should be library-based in England was apparently not put into effect.

By the time Lancaster again spoke on the topic, in 1899, the Local Taxation Act and the second Technical Instruction Act had been in operation for several years. His complaint was that libraries were starved of funds to build up their technical literature, and the 'whiskey money' was being passed on to only a handful of libraries—and in totally inadequate amounts.¹⁰⁴ The situation since Southward's talk in 1883 had improved only slightly.

¹⁰¹ Southward, J. Technical literature and free public libraries. *In*, Library Association. *Transactions and proceedings of the sixth annual meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom, at Liverpool, September 1883*. (London: Trübner & Co. 1886.) pp.82-87.

¹⁰² *The Library*, vol.1, 1889, p.112. The text of this paper has not been traced, but it was probably an earlier version of the paper given in October.

¹⁰³ Discussion reported as: Libraries and technical education, *The Library*, vol.1, 1889, pp.384-386. The text was printed as: Lancaster, A. Public libraries and technical education, *The Library*, vol.2, 1890, pp.103-110.

¹⁰⁴ Lancaster, A. The provision of technical books in public libraries from the Technical Instruction Fund. [A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Library Association, Manchester, 5th September, 1899.] *Library Association Record*, vol.2, 1900, pp.13-19.

In recent times, Paul Sykes has concluded that one of the great opportunities for public libraries to be recognised as educational centres in their own right was lost when technical education passed to other local government bodies: ¹⁰⁵

But this ascendant respectability was shortlived, and the 1902 Education Act placed responsibility for technical education firmly upon the new education authorities. The close link which had been forged between libraries and technical education in some towns was severed and, perhaps more than any other event, this accentuated the schism between the functions of education and recreation, as seen in Whitehall. Who is to say whether the light fiction controversy swung the balance of advantage away from public libraries?

This ignores the other areas of education which libraries were undertaking during the nineteenth century, and which developed in various ways during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, writing as he did when the reorganisation of local governments had in many cases seen public library services become merely a part of 'Leisure and Recreation Services', Sykes had asked a question which (though outside the time period of this thesis) needs to be answered.

3.2 Public libraries as community education centres

The opportunity for English local government authorities to become involved in the provision of post-school education from the mid-19th century was not taken equally throughout the country. The main reason for this was that the initial enabling legislation (the Public Libraries Acts) was never made compulsory during the period of this study, and many communities did not agree to adopt the Acts until quite late in the century. Nevertheless, by the time that Parliament was eventually persuaded to authorise secondary education in 1902, well over two hundred public libraries had instituted educational or educative services ranging from Duppa's Class III institution ("those which have library, museum, &c., without lectures") to his Class I institution ("those which have 1. Lectures regularly delivered by professional lecturers; 2. Classes with paid masters; 3. Classes for mutual instruction; 4. Library, museum, apparatus; 5. A school"). ¹⁰⁶ The wonder is not that there were so few local authorities which had aspired to Class I status, but that so many councils had indeed become *de facto* (and largely *de jure*) education authorities.

¹⁰⁵ Sykes. *op.cit.* p.97.

¹⁰⁶ Duppa, B.F. *A manual for Mechanics' Institutions*. Published under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans. 1839) pp.18-19.

3.2.1 examples of library development as community education centres

Bootle, Liverpool, Watford, Wolverhampton and Worcester represent instances where the local authorities became heavily involved in educational provision through their public library committees and services, and whose influence far exceeded that of any mechanics' institution or similar body. As noted in Chapter 7 above, in the last decade of the nineteenth century the Technical Instruction Acts guided the patriotism of many communities into opening or rebuilding public libraries, a number of which shared their premises with associated services. Writing from the technical education viewpoint in 1897, the National Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education noted that: ¹⁰⁷

In a number of localities the technical schools have been, or will be, erected as a part of general schemes which include the provision of other institutions for public or municipal use, viz., in nine localities (Altrincham, Bromley, Chesterfield, Hyde, Keighley, Leamington, Leigh, Macclesfield, and Nelson) free public libraries and technical schools have been, or will be, established in conjunction; in Carlisle and Lancaster the scheme comprises science and art and technical schools, and free libraries, museums, and art galleries; in Northwich and Winsford another feature of the schemes is the inclusion of gymnasiums; while in Tunbridge Wells it is proposed to erect indoor swimming baths, a free library, a museum, a gymnasium, a town hall, and municipal buildings, on land adjacent to a new school of art and technical institute.

This view, following the fairly recent Technical Instruction legislation, ignored the fact that many more local authorities had been providing public libraries, museums, art galleries, lectures, and schools of science and art for several decades under the Public Libraries Acts. The two new features were (a) the inclusion of technical instruction in addition to other educational facilities, and (b) the impetus to planning and building.

There was no set pattern of development, and examples of the way in which public libraries did evolve illustrate this diversity. Middlesbrough's vision was set out at some length in one of its reports: ¹⁰⁸

The formation of a Reference Library will be one step further towards carrying out the objects of the Free Library Acts, adopted by this borough in 1870. Those Acts will not be fully operative in Middlesbrough until, in addition to its Reference and Lending Libraries and its Newsrooms, the town possesses its own Schools of Art and Science as well as a Public Museum. The formation of a Public Museum must apparently be left to the private munificence of some future Civic Benefactor; and, so long as the Trustees of the late Mechanics' Institute retain the control of the Art and Science Classes in connection with South Kensington, it is not desirable that the Free Library Committee should set up a rival institution. But it is desirable, in the interests of the youth of the town, that some

¹⁰⁷ *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, vol.6, 1897, p.479.

¹⁰⁸ [Middlesbrough] Free Library Committee. *The annual report of the Free Library Committee for the 11th year ending 30th September 1882*. p.5.

arrangements should be made at an early date, by which the Free Library Committee may undertake the direction and development of these classes. Independently of this, the Free Library Committee have assisted, to a slight extent, the very valuable Scientific Lecture courses initiated by the Universities of Cambridge and Durham, and they propose to afford this movement the necessary amount of support to ensure its permanent location in this town. By these means the free Library Committee are hopeful that they can render most valuable assistance in the promotion of sound Scientific instruction, and in making it accessible to all classes of the community, as contemplated by the enlightened promoters of the Free Libraries' Acts.

Watford's public library was also a noted community education centre, with several branches of service. The Public Libraries Acts were adopted in 1871, but as the rate would bring in about £80 p.a., subscriptions were sought from the public and funds requested from the Department of Science and Art. The local collection contains copies of several such appeals by the Watford Local Board of Health, which indicate the Committee's ambitious plans for the community. In addition to the public library itself, there were reading rooms, a school of science, a school of art, a subscription news room, lectures, readings and musical entertainments.¹⁰⁹ The Library Committee viewed itself as a *de facto* Education Committee:¹¹⁰

Of the immense importance of the work attempted at the Watford Public Library no thoughtful person can have a doubt. The nation has recently adopted a plan of universal education. On leaving school the more gifted among our people will desire to build upon what they have learned. The Library meets such with its valuable collection of healthy-toned books issued under the superintendence of the Librarian, an Undergraduate of London University, who is always ready as the Committee believe him able, to advise the readers. The various schools of the Library which have recently been amalgamated, under the presidency of Sir John Lubbock, are designed to make provision for the wants of those who wish to carry on their education after they have left school. Nothing is more certain than that if we leave our clever young people without means of self-improvement they will become a source of mischief to the community instead of an ornament and a support, and that we must give place to other nations more careful in gathering up and utilising the wealth of talent ever springing up in the ranks of the rising generation.

Like Wolverhampton and other places, the local authority in Watford developed the public library service to "turn the education in the Elementary and Secondary Schools to account by placing within ... reach ... the intellectual opportunities of further education and culture through books and classes in the Schools of Art, Music and Literature and Science".¹¹¹

At the end of the century, Carlisle's library-based educational complex consisted of a range of buildings said to "shelter the Museum, Art Galleries, Lecture Hall, School

¹⁰⁹ Watford Public Library. *Appeal for contributions to Building Fund*. 1891.

¹¹⁰ *Watford Public Library, and College of Science, Art, Music and Literature*. (1887.) p.3.

¹¹¹ *Watford Public Library*. November 1889. [leaflet.] p.1.

of Art, and Science School; the whole forming a group of educational institutions to which any city might justly be proud". The museum contained local antiquities and specimens of natural history, old domestic furniture and utensils; whilst the art galleries were usually devoted to loan collections. The lecture hall was used by various local groups, including the Arts and Crafts, Literary and Scientific, Photographic, and Entomological Societies.¹¹² Other towns were established with several departments, sometimes as a gift as at Leek. There, the foundation stone for the Nicholson Institute—given by Joshua Nicholson (head of Messrs Brough, Nicholson and Co., silk manufacturers)—was laid on 11 September 1882. The Institute consisted of a free library, art gallery, museum, and school of art.¹¹³ At Gateshead, the Act was adopted in 1880; when the new public library building was opened in February 1885 it had the library on the ground floor, whilst on the first floor were the picture gallery, a room for art classes, and another room for the Museum.¹¹⁴ The school of art, however, did not really develop until a deputation in the following year asked the Council for one to be organised in the town, pointing out that suitable rooms were available in the library building.

The city library in Worcester had been open for about three years when Mr Downes proposed in the October 1884 meeting of the Library Committee "the creation of one Institution combining Libraries, Museum, Art School, Science School and Art Gallery".¹¹⁵ This comprehensive project came to fruition in 1894 when the new building costing £43,000 was opened comprising all those departments (with the addition of a technical school), as the Victoria Institute—the city's memorial of the Queen's Jubilee. The art department possessed a collection of copies, casts and models; the science department had chemistry and physics laboratories, and several large classrooms for natural and mathematical sciences; whilst the technical department had rooms and appliances for teaching subjects underlying local industries. There was a lecture theatre to be used for University Extension and other lectures open to the public during the winter months. "In the reference library the classics of reference in science, art and technology are provided, so that students may be able to elucidate any difficulty that may arise in the pursuance of their studies".¹¹⁶

112 feature entitled 'Surprise Visits to Libraries: Carlisle', *Library World*, vol.1, no.9, March 1899, p.169.

113 *Library Association Monthly Notes*, vol.3, 1882, p.155.

114 *Library Chronicle*, vol.2, 1885, p.73.

115 *ibid.*, vol.1, 1884, p.156.

116 *The Record of Technical and Secondary Education*, vol.5, no.24, October 1896, p.513.

3.2.2 financial problems in becoming community education centres

Although the 'Triple Alliance' formed the basis of the public library as a community cultural centre, financial problems severely restricted the work which it was possible to undertake. Credland of Manchester thought that the legal powers without corresponding financial support "have proved in some instances a fatal temptation, and a Museum or Art Gallery, or both, has been created as well as a Library. In every case the institutions have been mutually injurious; either one has thriven at the expense of the other or they have starved together".¹¹⁷ This reflected an earlier editorial comment on the situation at Sheffield, that the museum there absorbed a large proportion of the library rate and prevented the addition of further branch libraries to the city's system.¹¹⁸ Against this was the view of Maunde Thompson that: "the germs of a museum in its various branches may be planted in a quiet, unassuming way by an intelligent librarian who watches his opportunities". Topographical collections, local records, domestic papers and the correspondence of local people could be acquired as gifts.¹¹⁹ Indeed, many important local items were not normally for sale, and could only be received as donations to a museum or local history collection.

Stewart's belief was that although parliament rightly allowed local authorities to establish and maintain public libraries, museums, art galleries, and schools of science and art, it was impossible for most townships to support all of these from the one penny (1/2p) rate allowed under the Public Libraries Acts. Most places which had established services in addition to the library, he claimed, had either private Acts allowing a higher rate, or they had also adopted the Museums Act. In addition the Technical Instruction Acts had relieved certain local authorities from the need to maintain schools of art and science from the library rate,¹²⁰ and the Museums and Gymnasiums Act gave a similar facility to those local authorities which chose to adopt it.

Nevertheless, lack of finance remained one of the most serious obstacles to an effective integrated service. At Chesterfield the Stephenson Memorial Hall cost over £13,000 to build, towards which £8,000 was raised by public subscription. The income

¹¹⁷ Credland, W.R. Starved free libraries. In, Library Association. *Transactions and proceedings of the sixth annual meeting of the Library Association of the United Kingdom, at Liverpool, September 1883.* (London: Trübner & Co. 1886.) p.7.

¹¹⁸ Library Association *Monthly Notes* vol.3, no.3, March 1882, p.39.

¹¹⁹ Thompson, E.M. Some hints on the future of libraries. *The Library*, vol.1, 1889, p.406.

¹²⁰ Stewart, J.D. Technical education and public libraries in England. *Public Libraries*, vol.10, no.9, November 1905, pp.455-456.

from the library rate was £182 per annum, of which £64 went on repaying debt charges and £65 was the librarian's salary; this left a balance of £53 for all other expenses including maintenance, administration, and purchase of books and equipment. ¹²¹ (A somewhat similar financial problem was faced towards the end of the century by those local authorities which accepted Carnegie capital grants to erect public library buildings. Many of these authorities failed to appreciate that a considerable income would be necessary on a continuing basis in order to staff, and provide materials for, the various library services.)

One problem was the continuing objection to spending money on lectures (unless specially allowed in private Acts such as that for Liverpool), which could affect the hosting of university extension lectures as well as the offering of a library's own series. At Widnes, for example, when the Library Committee applied to the Local Government Board for power to spend £20 on free public lectures during the winter, the Board replied that they did not think that the Local Government Act warranted such expenditure and that they must therefore reject the application. ¹²²

3.3 Achievements of library adult education

J.W. Muir concluded that: "One of the greatest services which the University Extension Movement has rendered to the cause of higher education has been the stimulation of a demand for some more permanent local institution than the transient presence of a lecturer from another place. The Universities of Sheffield and Reading, Exeter and Nottingham University Colleges have sprung from the seed planted by the extension activity of Oxford and Cambridge". ¹²³ A similar claim could well be made for nineteenth century public library based educational complexes, which stimulated continuing self-education and local technical educational colleges.

Not all modern writers have been appreciative of the concept of libraries as community adult education centres, sometimes because of a narrow interpretation of the rôle of libraries. On the one hand writers such as Paul Sturges have pointed out that lack of finance and "the perpetuation of an immature concept of the public library" mean that

¹²¹ Hunter, E. *The rôle of the public library in the development of technical education in Great Britain and Ireland during the nineteenth century*. (unpublished Sheffield University M.A. thesis. 1973.) p.121.

¹²² *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.136.

¹²³ Muir, J.W. 'England'. In, *International handbook of adult education*. (London: World Association for Adult Education. 1929.) p.82.

libraries should be "independent centres for the provision of reading material and information" only.¹²⁴ On the other hand, authors such as Harold Jolliffe,¹²⁵ Thomas Kelly,¹²⁶ Edward Sydney¹²⁷ and Paul Sykes have approved the need for public libraries to be proactive in adult education by providing more than book-based services and facilities. Sykes particularly noted that the Library Association's "*Memorandum to the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction*, presented in 1919, included an apologia for the supply of fiction and this was referred to in the Kenyon Committee Report eight years later".¹²⁸

Many local authorities throughout England attempted to meet some of the post-school educational needs of their communities in the second half of the nineteenth century by implementing the provisions of the Public Libraries Acts, in the absence of other permissive legislation. The services offered tended to have been based on the work of the voluntary bodies—both directly in that some public libraries took over the work (and often the premises, book stock, and staff) of the mechanics' institutions and similar bodies, and indirectly by giving effect to the various strands of the movement for the creation of public institutions which had been proposed during the first half of the century. In addition, they took account of other events such as the passing of the 1870 Elementary Education Act and took advantage of the 1889-1891 Technical Instruction Acts.

As noted in Chapter 1, the simple and basic hypothesis which determined this research project was: "*that the local government authority facilities provided under the Public Libraries & Museums Acts in effect created the Public Institutions for which socio-political reformers had called in the 1830s and 1840s*". This necessitated an examination of what services were provided by the voluntary institutions, what were called for by the reformers, and what were developed by local authorities using the Public Libraries Acts and other legislation. A search of the literature indicated that many services and facilities were common to both the voluntary and the public institutions, and

124 Sturges, P. Public libraries and technical education 1850-1902: a re-evaluation. *Journal of Librarianship*, vol.18, no.3, July 1986, p.190.

125 Jolliffe, H. *Public library extension activities*. (London: Library Association. 1962.)

126 Kelly, . *op.cit. passim*.

127 Sydney, E. Adult education and the public library. *Library Association Record*. 1946, pp.275-179; Sydney, E. The role of libraries in adult education, *Journal of Education*. December 1950, pp.662-664; Thomsen, C., Sydney, E. and Tompkins, M.D. *Adult education activities for public libraries*. (Paris: Unesco. 1950.) ix,102 pp.

128 Sykes. *op.cit.* p.97

that the concepts of the reformers were—on the whole—realised in many townships in England by means of this legislation. This is not to say that there was a conscious attempt to put the reformers' concepts *per se* into practice, but rather that the ideas were still generally present in certain sections of the community.

The major features have been detailed in the above chapters, and exemplified by reference to various local authorities throughout the country. It was not possible for local authorities to effect the reformers' concepts completely because there were various concepts circulating in the early part of the century (see Chapter 3 above), and the voluntary institutions (Chapter 2 above) from which the reformers obtained their ideas themselves differed in their features in the many townships where they had been established. It was to be expected, therefore, that the public institutions developed by local authorities in the later part of the century would similarly differ as they responded to local needs (or perceived needs) in their communities.

Furthermore, the Public Libraries Acts on which these public institutions were based were not compulsory, so that they were adopted at different times and applied in different ways. Some features such as lectures were not specifically authorised in the general legislation. Others features such as schools of art and science were authorised, but the finance was not available to maintain them in many places. Appendix 1 gives some indication of the main services common to the voluntary institutions, the reformers' concepts and public libraries—but it also indicates that local authorities developed their institutions in different ways. There would seem to be sufficient commonality to label this as a 'movement', but it was still developing when the legislation of 1902 began the process of dismemberment.

Although there was no sudden replacement of the voluntary institutions by the public library complexes, the development of the latter would seem to have been aided by the transfer of the former's books or museums specimens or premises or librarians—and sometimes all of them—to local authority control. Librarians of mechanics' institutions, for example, would inevitably bring their attitudes and beliefs derived from previous experience to the new institutions. People connected with the voluntary institutions also served on the public library committees, and there were local networks of people pressing for educational and other social reforms—and prepared to work for them as committee members and in less formal groups.

There does not appear to be evidence of a direct link between the Public Institutions envisaged by the earlier reformers, and the later provision by local authorities of services under the Public Libraries Acts. Nevertheless, most public libraries included

some of the desired facilities—and by the end of the century a number of them offered all of the services for which the reformers had called. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the concept of Public Institutions had entered the subconscious mind of late Victorian Society—or at least that part of it which was able to employ the Public Libraries Acts for the development of community educational centres. These centres might include book based library services, museums, art galleries, lectures, classes, and rooms for meetings of local societies—and they were supported in the main from local government rates. These were precisely the features which the reformers envisaged as forming Public Institutions, to be maintained by government funding to ensure viability despite the vagaries of the changing economic climate.

4. Directions for future research

This research project has attempted to discover and present evidence concerning the involvement of English local government authorities in the provision of post-school educational services during the second half of the nineteenth century, using the legislative powers conferred by the various Public Libraries and Museums Acts. In this it has been successful, yet a number of questions still remain which may well be the subject of further investigation by other workers in the field. Six of these are:

(a) Influence of lectures etc. on individual participants.

There are instances of people paying tribute to the importance of public libraries in their careers. At Liverpool, for example, it was noted that a labourer had obtained all his education from libraries, had gained a prize offered by a London publisher for an essay on the education of the working classes, and been appointed manager of a chemical factory.¹²⁹ It is not clear whether that education was entirely book-based, or included library lectures or science and art classes. In general, we do not appear to have information regarding the careers of people who had attended library lectures, and this would seem to be a potential area for investigation. This is not unique to library, museum and art gallery lectures. There would appear to be a lack of information concerning the influence of lectures by other bodies also—for example, those of the University Extension movement.

¹²⁹ Liverpool: Library and Museum Committee. *Eighth annual report of the Committee of the Free Public Library, and Derby Museum, of the Borough of Liverpool, presented to the Town Council, October 1860.* p.10.

(b) The influence of being library lecturers on future careers.

An interesting and valuable contribution to the historiography of university extension was Stuart Marriott's thesis about the people who were involved as lecturers,¹³⁰ and which formed the basis of a booklet on the same topic.¹³¹ The present research gathered only a small amount of data concerning the careers of library lecturers—noted in Chapter 6 and Appendix 3—because this was not central to the topic. Nevertheless, it would seem that a data base on the lines of the sample produced for Appendix 3, but incorporating all known library, museum and art gallery lecturers, could be compiled as an aid to such research into who these lecturers were—and what they became.

(c) The effect of the 1902 Education Act.

Outside the period covered by this research is the effect of the 1902 Education Act on the library's role in post-school education (note Sykes's comment in 3.1 above), as perceived by the central government, local governments, and by librarians. Science and technical education was taken away from library authorities, though co-operation with other educational bodies remained and others links were forged. New opportunities for adult education came in the twentieth century, such as liaison with the Workers' Educational Association and wireless discussion groups.

(d) The recruitment of early librarians, and their previous experience as a basis on which to develop public library services.

It was stated in Section 2.2 above that the voluntary institutions of the literary and philosophical kind provided many of the early public librarians, and it was suggested that this "may have been influential in creating the middle class cultural environment which has been the subject of condemnation during the present century". Another comment was that: "The wider experience of workers' education which such people [from Co-operative Societies] brought to the public library service may also have been influential in facilitating the development of the community education centre concept". It would seem to require an indepth study of these matters before authoritative statements could be made, supporting or refuting these suggestions.

¹³⁰ Marriott, S. *University extension lecturers: a study of employment in English university extramural teaching, 1873-1914*. (unpublished Leeds University Ph.D. thesis. 1980.)

¹³¹ Marriott, S. *University extension lecturers: the organisation of extramural employment in England, 1873-1914*. (Leeds: University of Leeds. 1985.)

(e) The relative influence in different places of the Librarian and the Library Committee members respectively, on the development of the library community education centre.

As noted above, the experience of members—and particularly chairmen—of library committees may also have been an important factor in the development of public libraries as public institutions. One such influential person was Alderman James Wilson Southern of Manchester, who when eighteen years old took the first prize in English Language and Literature at the Manchester Working Men's College—which was soon afterwards merged with Owens College. In 1860 (aged twenty) he was appointed Secretary of the Manchester Sunday School Union, joined the City Council in 1877, became a member of the Public Free Library Committee and its chairman from 1889. He was also a member of the Technical Instruction Committee.¹³² In many towns the library committees formulated all of the policies, and the librarians merely followed instructions.¹³³ Then as now, librarians could be viewed as "somewhat absent and not a little timid in their manner",¹³⁴ although there would also seem to be many exceptions to this stereotype. We do not know enough about who were the really influential people, and once again this would seem to call for an in-depth study of personalities in the many townships which had established public library services.

(f) The image of nineteenth century (i) mechanics' institutions and similar voluntary bodies, and (ii) public libraries, in contemporary and more recent works of imagination.

Some quotations have been made above from several contemporary works of fiction and drama to illustrate how their authors viewed mechanics' institutions,¹³⁵ but no attempt was made to judge how accurate a picture these accounts may have presented. In one of the twentieth century works, mention was also made of a nineteenth century public library.¹³⁶ Serendipity played a part in discovering these works, and although a search was made in pertinent bibliographical reference tools no further monographs were

¹³² feature entitled 'Library Administrators: Alderman Southern of Manchester', *Library World*, vol.1, no.12, June 1899, pp.251-252.

¹³³ cf. Kelly. *op.cit.* pp.99-100.

¹³⁴ *Library Chronicle*, vol.5, 1888, p.115 quoting from *The Bailie* [Glasgow weekly] of 5 September 1888.

¹³⁵ e.g., Disraeli, B. *Popanilla and other tales*. (London: Peter Davies. 1926.) [first published 1827.]; Smith, A. *The adventures of Mr. Ledbury and his friend Jack Johnson*. (London: George Routledge & Sons. new ed c.1856.) [first published c.1841.]; Smith, A. *The Pottleton legacy: a story of town and country life*. (London: George Routledge & Sons. c.1856.)

¹³⁶ Armstrong, T. *King Cotton*. (London: Collins. 1947.)

located—and a deep search was not made because this aspect was not central to the research project. That other works do exist is exemplified by a recent article on libraries which were mentioned in two other novels,¹³⁷ and considering the pervasiveness of lectures, libraries, and voluntary institutions throughout nineteenth century England it is likely that there is indeed a body of literary works which could be used to investigate this topic.

¹³⁷ Gresley, W. and Gilbert, B. Two fictional libraries: Churchover and Bly Market. *Library History*, vol.9, no.6, 1993, pp.203-214.