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LIBRARY SERVICES FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE
IN ENGLAND AND WALES
1830-1970

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BY

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TO JACK, DOROTHY, STEPHEN, AND DERRICK

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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH library services for young people had existed for hundreds of years, not until the development of elementary education in the nineteenth century were they available to more than a small minority of children who were at school. Libraries in schools became more widely accessible from the early 1830s through the work of bodies such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, individuals such as the Rev. Richard Dawes at King's Somborne, and some inspectors of schools. Public library service for young people is, of course, a more recent institution, and, apart from the work of a small number of librarians, has been principally confined to the present century.

In my book *A History of Children's Reading and Literature*, I undertook a superficial and uncritical description of the development of library services for young people in relation to that of elementary and secondary education and reading material; but in the present instance the intention is to examine library provision from 1830 to mid-1970 both critically and in some depth. The coverage is naturally more detailed in the earlier than in the later chapters, and increasingly it has been necessary to cite only examples as the activities of librarians have become more prolific. Accordingly, it is possible that I have unwittingly omitted to mention significant work in progress, particularly in the last decade, and should be grateful to hear from anyone who has some further light to shed.

Progress in the field has been uneven, and I have become increasingly aware how much is owed to a relatively small number of educationists and librarians, without whom the existing achievement would have been impossible. It will have been observed that I have dedicated this book to members of my family, but I should also like to offer it in appreciation of the work, sometimes in the face of great opposition, of an increasingly numerous band of men and women who have sought to extend library services for young people.

The emphasis throughout has been placed upon the public library service and its association with schools and other groups, because it is the

most organized sector of the field, but the motivation behind the school library movement and its subsequent application have also been explored. Whilst, as is clear from the title, I have given my attention to England and Wales, I have also introduced comparative references at various points to theory and practice in other parts of the British Isles, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and North America.

My material has been obtained from contemporary government reports, books, and periodical articles; from individuals who have been kind enough to provide me with the fruits of their own research; and from librarians who have either reminisced or described to me their current activities and ideas. A growing amount of research is being undertaken into the history of library services for young people in particular districts, and much information is being revealed, which one person could not possibly obtain. Some time in the future, another historian will be able to draw on the results of this local research, and produce a definitive history of the subject, but in the meantime, I trust that the present volume will be of interest and, perhaps, inspiration.

Finally, I should like to thank my wife for her encouragement and advice throughout a project which has given me a great deal of pleasure tempered with bouts of extreme depression when I have considered how many opportunities have been wasted during the last 140 years. In the course of this volume it will be seen that there has also been much to applaud.

Childwall

1. THE PIONEERING YEARS, 1830-1880

I can hardly conceive a greater benefit to an intelligent boy or girl than to have access to a library containing the works of our great poets, books of history, travel, and natural history, and carefully chosen works of fiction. (HERBERT COWIE, HMI for the Liskeard District, in the Committee of Council on Education, *Report, 1879-80*, p. 248.)

VERY few library facilities were available to most children prior to 1850, apart from those which were provided by day and Sunday schools. It is true that some provision was made in the libraries of mechanics' institutes, and in Birmingham there was a small collection as early as 1797. In 1849, however, Samuel Smiles, the exponent of self-help, informed the Select Committee on Public Libraries that the mechanics' institutes in the large towns were usually frequented by "the middle and respectable classes", and were supported by only "a small proportion of working men receiving comparatively high wages".⁽¹⁾ This restriction in the membership of mechanics' institutes is a factor which has been all too often ignored by nineteenth-century historians in their accounts of the growth of working-class education.

During the 1840s mutual improvement societies were formed by groups of young men in such places as Barnsley, Halifax, Hampstead, Leeds, and Uxbridge. The weekly fee of 3*d.* or 4*d.* which was demanded by mechanics' institutes was too expensive for these young people, who depended upon donations of books for the maintenance of libraries in their societies. At Uxbridge, three evenings each week were devoted to reading from 6.30 p.m. to 10 p.m., and on other evenings, part of the time was devoted to this activity. The members paid 2*d.* per week and subscribed to *The Illustrated London News*, *The News of the World*, *Chambers's Journal*, and approximately thirty other items. The society at Hampstead enjoyed similar facilities, and was supported by gardeners, young journeymen, and the sons of village tradesmen, but it was regretted that "there are in Hampstead hundreds of sandboys, donkey boys, and other youths of similar occupations . . . who could not properly be taken into this institution . . .".⁽²⁾

2. THE EDUCATIONAL IMPETUS, 1881-1900

Even at the age of seven or eight years boys and girls are able to read with great facility, and with some degree of intelligence. This feature in the juveniles of today should be carefully considered by all whose desire it is to promote the welfare of the rising generation. The love of reading should be fostered in such a manner as will afford both recreation and knowledge. (J. POTTER BRISCOE, chief librarian, Nottingham Public Library, at the Library Association annual meeting, 1885.)

THE real impetus to the growth of public libraries in the nineteenth century came after the passing of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, and by 1900 there were over 400 public library authorities in England and Wales. The power of adoption was vested in the ratepayers until 1893, when it was transferred to the local authorities. It is interesting to observe that whilst the decision remained with the ratepayers an average of five districts in England adopted the Acts each year, but from 1893 to 1898 the annual average rose to fourteen. The number of adoptions may, however, be compared with the fact that in 1901 local government in England and Wales was controlled by councils of 67 county boroughs, 28 metropolitan boroughs, 1122 municipal boroughs and urban districts, and 14,900 civil parishes.⁽¹⁾ County councils had been in existence since 1888 but were not eligible to become library authorities until 1919. The fact that local authorities adopted the Public Libraries Act did not necessarily imply that they opened libraries in their areas, but most appear to have done so.

At the opening ceremony of the library which was to serve the Nottinghamshire villages of Carlton and Hucknall Torkard in 1888, Alderman Gripper of Nottingham intimated his view that the new service was a necessary consequence of the growth of literacy, and was the only means of ensuring that the young people of the district had an opportunity to increase their knowledge after they had left school.⁽²⁾ In addition to successive educational legislation, the development of libraries may be related to the formation of the Library Association in 1877, many members of which were enthusiastic that the service should be extended as much as

3. THE EDWARDIAN INTERLUDE, 1901-1914

Until our financial resources are improved, we can only hope to follow humbly in the footsteps of such magnificent institutions as the Carnegie libraries of Pittsburgh, where the provision for children has been carefully and thoroughly considered, especially in the branch libraries. (JOHN BALLINGER, chief librarian, Cardiff Public Library, in *Library Association Record*, November 1903.)

No ONE with any sense of reality could be optimistic regarding the extent of public library services at the commencement of the new century. It is clear that the availability of books for young people was governed by the enthusiasm of isolated individuals who, regardless of the ridiculously low rate at their disposal, thought it important to make provision for this neglected but potentially rewarding section of the community. In 1903 John Ballinger wrote that:

For want of opportunity, thousands of children in towns are not only incurring danger to health . . . but are also making companionships and forming habits injurious to them. Their homes are small and badly lighted, they have no books, and very often their parents and elder brothers and sisters are out of sympathy with their desire to read.⁽¹⁾

It is not possible to draw attention to the development of a tremendous interest in children's libraries between the accession of Edward VII and the catastrophe of 1914, for the simple reason that this did not occur. It is reasonable, however, to pay tribute to those men who, often against considerable opposition, continued to build on the frail foundations of their predecessors.

There was in those years an unmistakable antagonism in various quarters to the concept of making special library provision for children. It was claimed that one library and one reading room should be adequate to the needs of all, although, as has been seen, this had been questioned at Manchester as early as 1861. With few exceptions it was the practice to exclude from the general reading rooms children under 16, and if a service to young people was to be made available, either the age restric-

4. THE YEARS OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE, 1915-1927

Logically a children's librarian should hold as high a rank and receive as much pay as the average teacher. . . . We are too hard up for this to be more than an ideal at present, but it is not an absurd one at which to aim. (W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, chief librarian, Croydon Public Library in *Library World*, November 1926.)

PROGRESS in library work with young people continued to be slow in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, in the years which were bounded by Professor Adams's report to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in 1915 on library provision and policy and the Kenyon Committee's report to the Board of Education in 1927 on the public library service in England and Wales. Opinions differed, however, whether the years could be regarded as ones of success or failure. At the Library Association Conference in London in 1917 John Ballinger, with memories of his own dynamism at Cardiff, spotlighted "the many interesting experiments" which had been undertaken by librarians; but at the same session, L. Stanley Jast bemoaned the fact that "with exceptions of course here and there, we are not creating readers and for that reason I regard most of our work with children as largely ineffective". Not only was the situation unsatisfactory, but it was, in his view, "less satisfactory now than it was years ago".⁽¹⁾ Ballinger was reminiscing and Jast was probably comparing the situation in Britain with the conditions he had found in the United States in 1913.

It is true that in many sections of the library profession little interest was taken in children's work at all. Berwick Sayers was to have addressed the conference at Leeds in 1926 on "The central need in library work for children in England", but the meeting was abandoned owing, it was said, to the pressure of other items on the agenda. In contrast, however, special issues on children's libraries were published by *Librarian and Book World* in October 1924 and by *Library World* in January 1924 and November 1926. Grafton was willing to publish Gwendolen Rees's thesis on "Libraries for children" in 1924, and in 1926 L. M. Harrod, with the optimism

5. YEARS OF DEPRESSION AND WAR, 1928-1944

Most librarians agree with the ideal that only good and attractive books for children should be bought, but many of them take off their rose-coloured spectacles when they choose them; their minds are clouded with the thought of how many half-crowns make a pound. There are cheap books for children which are good and attractive, but they are not many. (MARY F. AUSTIN, county librarian of Nottinghamshire, at the Library Association annual conference, 1937.)

THE brief respite from the horrors of the international economic situation lasted until 1929, when the world became embroiled once more in a slump regarded by many as the worst in recorded history. Unemployment in Britain rose and remained close to 3 million until 1933, although by 1937 it had fallen to approximately 1,300,000, and in the immediate years before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, there was an improvement in the economic situation which was reflected in the development of children's libraries, just as they had been adversely affected in the starker years which had been experienced.

In 1939 hostilities began against Germany, and for the next two years Britain was in constant danger of being invaded, a situation which had not existed since the Napoleonic War. Fortunately, the threat was not realized and became unlikely when the Germans, fatally for themselves, turned their attention to Russia in June 1941. During 1940 and 1941, however, many parts of Britain were heavily bombed in order to break the popular morale, particularly London, the seaports, and the industrial centres of the north and Midlands; and in 1944 London was subjected once more to the ravages of flying and rocket bombs. In previous conflicts, nations had to some extent maintained their peace-time existence, but on this occasion all were involved.

Unlike World War I, there was not a sudden mass exodus of men on active service, but the withdrawal from civilian life was more gradual. It is true that in September 1939 all the branch libraries in Coventry were closed temporarily, and a brief suspension of service occurred in various

6. THE BRAVE NEW WORLD, 1945–1959

Librarians in general realise that the future use of libraries, and indeed of books, depends upon the opportunities offered to school children to get used to the methods of libraries, to borrow books freely from them, and to understand the purposes underlying their provision. (H. C. DENT, educational correspondent of *The Times*, in *Books in Your School*, 1955, p. 19.)

WHEN, in previous years, children did not use libraries to the extent expected of them by librarians, it was customary, as has been seen, to blame such disparate factors as the birth rate, cinemas, radio, and even school libraries. Sometimes the excuses were valid, sometimes irrelevant. In the period under review, however, television became a feature of home life, and the viewing of programmes became compulsive to many sections of the population. For perhaps the first time, librarians could legitimately point to a phenomenon which was causing children to read less. The first regular television service was introduced in Britain in 1936, but not until the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 did its use become widespread. Until 1955 the BBC enjoyed a monopoly of television broadcasting, but in that year it was rivalled by the Independent Television Authority which provided an alternative channel. During the mid and late 1950s, therefore, the annual reports of some public libraries revealed a decline in the use made of their lending facilities which they attributed to television, but, towards the end of the decade there was a conflict of opinion as to whether from the reading point of view television was a bad, or, in fact, a good influence. W. H. Milner, the children's librarian of Southwark, commented in 1958:

Television claimed the attention, not only of the children, but adults too, and public libraries as a whole felt its impact. This new medium of home entertainment is now proving to be a stimulus to reading instead of being the deterrent it was at first thought to be.⁽¹⁾

Time was to prove him correct in his analysis of the trends, but this was not to be seen clearly until the 1960s. One important result of television which was to be observed in many libraries during the 1950s, was the eagerness of young people to do their homework on the premises, and this

7. A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH, 1960-1970

There has to be a certainty that one is personally helping to push back the limits of children's librarianship, and this can be guaranteed only by a similar extension to one's learning. (F. R. BARTLE, organizer of library services to young people, Cheshire County Library, at the Library Association (Youth Libraries Group) annual meeting, 1968.)

Two events in the first half of the 1960s were designed to ensure the continued development of the public library service in England and Wales: in 1962 the Bourdillon Working Party made its proposals for *Standards of Public Library Service in England and Wales* which were implicit in the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. It became the duty of the Secretary of State for Education and Science to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service and to ensure that localities satisfactorily carried out their functions in this respect. Proposals for the passing of legislation and the implementation of similar standards in Northern Ireland and Scotland were made by the Hawnt and Robertson Committees in 1966 and 1969. Whilst the standards were not by any means ideal, they did result in progress in many areas, and inquiries into the standards of service at such places as Bath and Gillingham were instrumental in procuring improved facilities. Between 1964 and 1967 there was a 30 per cent increase in expenditure by public libraries in England and Wales, which was partly due to rising costs but also to the Act. Unfortunately, in the latter half of the decade the economy was less buoyant than previously, and the growth of public services was arrested in 1969 by the refusal of the Government to allow its supporting grants to rise beyond 3 per cent. Although expenditure on libraries was not reduced, it barely kept pace with the rising costs of books, buildings, and staff.

Public libraries in Britain had always been adversely affected by the absence of specific government grants as a means to the attainment of standards. From April 1967 the cost of library services was taken into

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