



Cover illustration: A view of Birmingham c. 1886. Courtesy of the Local Studies Department, Birmingham Reference Library.

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Editorial

The first issue of the *Local Studies Librarian* seems to have made a ripple rather than a splash to judge from the amount of correspondence received. Nevertheless feedback seems to suggest that publication is worthwhile. What we need, however, is participation — it is *your* journal. More correspondence and offers of contributions would be welcome.

This issue is something of an experiment, with the major part of it devoted to a single topic. Newspapers have always been an important source of local information, but their value is not always appreciated. Historically this has been partly due to lack of indexes, though as Stephen Green notes in his article, this is now being remedied. The three contributions on the topic are versions of papers delivered and discussed at a meeting in Newcastle in April, and because of their general interest are printed here. Would *you* like to see more issues dealing with specific topics, or is a more mixed group of articles preferred?

Our request for feedback on 'History on your Doorstep' produced only a small response. Many libraries produced some sort of list to accompany the series, but how many went further? 'Too busy already' is sometimes the argument advanced against active promotion of the local studies collection — but is this fair on those who could benefit from our resources but are not already committed users of the library? The local collection is an important part of community information service — indeed probably the major source of information on the development of the community — so surely we ought to attempt to create an awareness of the availability of local information not only in the central local studies collection but in branch and district libraries as well. What are *you* doing about it? Promoting our service is important: we have a duty to the public to make sure that the material we collect is exploited.

One obvious way of doing this was by providing links with the BBC series 'History on your Doorstep'. Many libraries did so, and some comments on library reactions and a review of the series appear later in this issue. While not perfect, this was one of the few large-scale attempts by the media to introduce the general public to the subject, and the BBC recognised the importance of local libraries as information sources. The series is to be repeated on BBC 1 on Sundays at 1.25 pm. from September 27th. This should reach a wider audience than the original transmission which clashed with 'Top of the Pops'. Here is another chance to promote your service — why not take it?

The historian and local newspapers

During the past twenty years the main focus of historical scholarship has shifted perceptibly from high politics, diplomacy and the constitution towards popular movements, living standards and working conditions. To quote a former colleague, 'we are all social historians now.' The onward march of social history has been well charted by Professor Harold Perkin, who, as recently as 1967, was appointed to the first chair in social history to be established in Britain.¹ A by-product of the process has been the enormous enhancement of the local newspaper as a source for historians. When the chief preoccupations were with statutes of the realm, House of Commons division lists and the framing of peace treaties, a perusal of the local press was unlikely to prove fruitful. It is a different matter when the questions to be asked are 'How cruel was the Victorian poor law?', or 'when did once distinct local communities become absorbed by urban growth?'.

This process has been paralleled by a similar expansion in the study of local history, at all levels from CSE Mode Three to courses awarding MA degrees. Here too the local newspaper is seen as a key source. Indeed, where nineteenth and twentieth century British history is concerned, whether studied with a strictly local perspective, or to illuminate a wider question, the local newspaper is arguably the most valuable single source in existence. More recently still, the press has become seriously studied in its own right. As a medium for popular education, political debate, commercial promotion and cultural diffusion, the local newspaper is an important part of the history of a community, as well as being the best resource for researching such history. In recent years a great range of scholarly investigation has been undertaken into the history of periodicals at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.²

The local studies librarian who has to deal with such a wide range of users of local newspapers will find the task less daunting if there is a clear awareness of what data can, and can not, reasonably be extracted from files of local newspapers. It is also helpful to have an appreciation of factors governing the general characteristics of newspapers: price, size, quality of paper and print, frequency of publication. What follows is designed to provide a brief answer to these questions.

A key determinant of the price of a newspaper was the incidence of the various taxes upon periodicals which were in force between 1712 and the midnineteenth century. These taxes were of three kinds: an excise duty on each sheet, a levy on each advertisement inserted, and a duty, by weight, on the paper used. Various eighteenth century measures plugged the loopholes and raised the rates until, between 1815 and 1833, the taxes were at their peak. A newspaper of that period commonly cost sevenpence, of which $5\frac{1}{2}$ d was consumed by taxation. Reductions of the advertisement duty in 1833 and the excise duty in 1836 were followed by the abolition of all three kinds of tax by 1861.

The fiscal emancipation of the press did not, however, produce a transformation in format. The cramped columns of small print, imposed by previous financial stringency, remained conventional for most newspapers to the end of Victoria's reign. Instead, the savings accruing from the removal of taxes were expended in increasing the number of pages, commonly from four to eight (for weeklies), or, more significantly, in converting from weekly to daily publication. The provincial daily press dates from the repeal of the stamp tax in 1855. Early foundations were mostly morning newspapers, price one penny, but from the 1880s the emphasis swung increasingly towards evening newspapers, price one halfpenny.³

Daily publication required much more advanced — and costly — equipment than weekly publication, and the technological breakthroughs achieved in printing during the nineteenth century were very great. The composing department tended to lag behind the print-room, until the advent of the linotype in 1889 (first installed in England at the Newcastle Daily Chronicle) made good the deficiency. Previously type was reused repeatedly, so that a worn typeface in a local newspaper can often be taken as a clue that the publication was struggling financially. Quality of paper is a less reliable guide. Eighteenth century newspapers, made from rags, have worn considerably better than nineteenth century papers made from esparto grass and woodpulp. Disintegrating files of Victorian newspapers provide the most cogent argument for the use of microfilm, despite the attendant inconvenience.

Turning from format to content, a distinction should immediately be drawn between eighteenth and nineteenth century periodicals. The local historian who turns to the columns of eighteenth century newspapers for information on local elections, controversial material about poverty and public health, or local opinions about national questions, is likely to be disappointed. Provincial periodicals were relatively few and far between. They served a region rather than a locality, and could not become absorbed in strictly local questions. The conductors preferred to publish the sole medium in the region and so did not wish to provoke the establishment of a rival periodical by adopting too partisan a line. Where a rival newspaper did appear, political content often took the form of a syndicated political letter, such as Wye's Letter, rather than of an indigenous expression of opinion. The local oligarchies which ran municipalities and counties did not readily provide copy for reporters (who, in any case, were a rarity) in the way that elected councils and boards did in the Victorian period. The most fruitful departments of an eighteenth century newspaper, therefore, for the local historian, are the advertisements and the columns giving information about market prices, postal services and stagecoach times. The latter category is particularly useful to the economic historian, but advertisements have a wider appeal. Quack medicines, theatre bills, farm auctions, professional services and electoral addresses were all commonly featured in the advertisement columns. Systematically studied, they can provide data for a wide range of historical enquiries.

The following advertisement, from the Newcastle Journal, 9 January 1779, provides a good example of the eighteenth century approach to public appointments:

Wanted at May day next a School Master that can be well recommended to teach Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. He will have a yearly salary of £20 with a house and a few acres of land at Marley-hill upon reasonable terms. Any person who voted for Mr. Bowes last election will have the Preferance, if well recommended and duly qualified.

Advertisements remain a useful source for the historian where nineteenth century newspapers are concerned. Other departments, however, merit close attention. The major new feature was the editorial column, rarely in evidence before the 1790s, but attaining increasing importance during the next hundred years. Political motives weighed very heavily in the foundation of provincial newspapers, particularly in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The proprietor, or principal shareholder, was commonly an active local politician, and frequently the member of parliament for the town. 4 The editorial column — often more of an editorial page, with three or four lengthy leading articles — could serve as a valuable mouthpiece for political views. It merits study as a medium of public opinion, but it is a vexed question whether it moulded that opinion or merely gave voice to it. The reporting columns could also be brought into service. Joseph Cowen, for instance, member of parliament for Newcastle, and proprietor of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle. could count on verbatim reports of his major speeches, occupying as much as 18½ column-feet of a single issue of his newspaper. With the aid of the railway, the telegraph, and the news agencies, Victorian provincial newspapers could bring their readers far more rapid and well-informed coverage of national and foreign news than had been possible for their predecessors.

Political historians can profitably study correspondence columns (although they commonly reflected the viewpoint of the recipient newspaper), and electoral addresses (often as significant for what they do *not* say as for the worthy sentiments expressed). Social historians can trace the rise of mass-spectator sports. The connection between betting on horse-races, and the rise of the evening newspaper was particularly close — as protagonists of the more sober morning publications did not fail to point out. Some proprietors managed to serve both God and mammon by excluding racing tips from their morning papers, while publishing the results in their evening editions.

The historian of social welfare and urban improvement can find in the dense reports of local newspapers a mine of information about the work of boards of poor law guardians, boards of health and highways, town councils, school boards and the like. The minute books of such worthy bodies often omit controversial material which was given prominence in the more partisan periodicals.

This list of uses to which local newspapers can be put is by no means exhaustive. The following poem, summarising the contents of a Victorian newspaper, appeared in the Newcastle Courant on 18 February 1876:

'PAPA, WHAT IS A NEWSPAPER, AND WHAT DOES IT CONTAIN?'

Organs that gentlemen play, my boy, To answer the taste of the day, my boy.

> Whatever it be They hit on the key,

And pipe in full concert, away, my boy.

News from all countries, and climes, my boy.

Advertisements, essays, and rhymes, my boy.

Mixed up with all sorts Of flying reports

And published at regular times, my boy.

Statistics, reflections, reviews, my boy,

Little scraps to instruct and amuse, my boy.

And lengthy debates Upon matters of State

For wise-headed folks to peruse, my boy.

. . . Lists of all physical ills, my boy,

Banished by somebody's pills, my boy,

Till you ask with surprise

Why anyone dies,

Or what's the disorder that kills, my boy.'

Maurice Milne, School of English and History, Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic.

Notes

^{1.} Perkin, H. Social History in Britain. J of Social History, 10(2), Winter 1976, pp 129-143.

See, for instance, publications such as The Wellesley Index, Routledge 1-, 1966-; The Victorian Periodicals
Review, Research Soc. for Victorian Periodicals, 1-, 1968-; Shattock, J & Wolff, M. eds. The Victorian periodical
press. Leicester U.P. 1982.

^{3.} See Lee, A.J. The origins of the popular press in England, 1855-1914. Croom Helm, 1976.

For examples in North East England see Milne. M, Newspapers of Northumberland and Durham. F. Graham, 1971, p 213.

The Newspaper Library and the Local Library

No description of the British Library Newspaper Library's views of its responsibilities can be static, since they are constantly evolving in response to national need. Taking the long perspective, over the years since the Newspaper Library was established at Colindale in 1903 its role has turned from being a passive repository of newspapers comparatively unused, to an institution offering services to the public who visited it but in isolation from all other resources within the nation, to its present and recent position of acting as a national focus within the overall pattern of national provision.

The Newspaper Library has identified so far ten points where it may assist in improving the quality of national provision. Many of these points have been discussed or sponsored by the Working Party on Access to Newspapers which was set up in late 1979 after the process of consultation consequent upon the publication by the British Library of its consultative paper *The Newspaper Collections and the Future*. Its terms of reference were:

To consider the most suitable arrangements for the co-ordination and dissemination of information about the storage, microfilming and availability of newspapers and to make recommendations.

Since its inception it has held nine meetings. Its membership is designed to reflect the spectrum of interest in newspaper librarianship, and includes representatives from the Library Association, SCONUL, COCRIL, and the National Library of Scotland. It is now in the process of reporting back to the British Library with its recommendations. One of these recommendations is that a similar body, with an amended membership if necessary, should be put on a permanent footing as a consultative group to the Newspaper Library. Such a group would be able to act as a formal — but not exclusive — channel for the communication of the views of other libraries and users interested in newspaper collections.

Now let us turn to the ten point plan:

 One of the most important achievements of the Working Party has been to draw up a draft statement, still subject to national comment, about the local archival responsibilities of libraries for the preservation and retention of British newspapers. It has been published in the Newspaper Library Newsletter No.3, and copies will be willingly supplied on request.

- The British Library continues to receive a number of requests for 2. financial support for local microfilming projects, since it can provide financial support to other libraries under one of the sections of the British Library Act. Normally applications for grants are considered centrally, but in the case of applications concerning newspapers, responsibility has been delegated to the Reference Division, with the Newspaper Library being responsible for the initial processing and evaluation of such requests. It has to be stressed that the amount of money available to support such applications is comparatively small, and by way of illustration, the year's budget could be consumed by the filming of one long run of one local newspaper. However, one of the main criteria usually employed in considering such applications is that the newspaper which requires filming should not be held centrally in the original by the British Library since the ultimate purpose is to develop a more comprehensive National Archive of British newspapers. Various conditions attach to any grant given, perhaps the most important of these being the selection of a suitable microfilming agency that is able to comply with the relevant British Standard that specifies the requirements for 35mm microcopying of newspapers for archival purposes. As a policy statement, this document is inevitably brief and in outline only, because we recognise that there will be many different cases and circumstances that arise over the course of the years.
- It is the British Library's intention as soon as resources permit to 3. engage in a more comprehensive filming programme of current United Kingdom newspapers. To this end we hope virtually to double our camera capacity from the existing 27 cameras to 51. English local newspapers will be the first to be tackled. But before we make a start on this ambitious programme, we intend to conduct a national survey of what local titles are already being filmed by other agencies, and to assess the quality of the film thus generated. If the film is satisfactory, we hope to purchase it rather than undertake wasteful duplicate filming. It is particularly important in this programme to have the full cooperation of local public libraries since they have by far the best contacts with the local newspaper proprietors whose copyright permission is needed before filming can begin and copies made available for sale to other libraries. Our experience so far, in the seventy titles that we now handle, has been that the newspaper proprietors usually adopt a constructive and co-operative attitude, and indeed often are willing to purchase a copy of positive microfilm of the film for their own purposes. Even so, we do not for one moment underestimate the immensity of co-ordinating this enterprise on a national scale.

- 4. One of the most visible achievements of the Working Party on Access to Newspapers has been its encouragement for the Newspaper Library to issue, twice a year, a Newsletter. Four issues have appeared so far. Although it does have news about the activities of the Newspaper Library, its purpose is wider than that: it is aimed to act as an information medium for all those with an interest in newspaper librarianship and news information and contributions from outside librarians are always warmly welcome.
- 5. The Newspaper Library over the last eighteen months has set about compiling a national union list of indexes to local newspapers. When we started we knew of the existence of only thirty such indexes; now that we are nearing the completion of the project we have been able to identify over 650 indexes.
- 6. The Reference Special and Information Section of the Library Association has in the recent past made steady progress in compiling a Bibliography of British Newspapers. The approach is to compile a volume for each of the historic county areas of England, and so far the volume for Wiltshire has appeared. In 1981 the British Library took over responsibility for publishing the results of these endeavours from the Library Association with the hope that more speedy progress might be made. Already the volumes for two other counties are in the process of production.
- 7. The Newspaper Library is anxious to develop its potential as a referral centre for information enquiries about newspaper. We have always been strong in dealing with questions about newspaper history, although because of the primarily historical nature of our collections we are not equipped to perform the function of a current information service. This is best left to local libraries and to specialised collections of press-cuttings and subject collections. In outline, what we hope to do is to establish a much tighter network of information exchange between the various components in the system, so that enquiries may be directed to the most suitable source.
- 8. One of the strongest advantages that we have in assisting local libraries is to provide them with high quality filming of retrospective runs of their own newspapers at a very reasonable price. Our copies are inevitably much less subject to constant use and therefore deterioration than those in the public libraries. Their pristine nature makes them particularly suitable for being the copies used in filming, as well as the quality of equipment and the experience that we have in microfilming.

- 9. The Newspaper Library is well placed to offer informal technical advice on microfilm camera, processing and reading equipment on an informal basis, although we do not wish to compete for the role that is played on a much higher and more formal technical level by the National Reprographic Centre for Documentation. We also have a training function if we are to be serious about our desire to raise the standards of microfilming thoughout the United Kingdom. Thus we have instigated two one-day microfilm study groups aimed primarily at the technicians within other libraries who have the responsibility for carrying out local microfilming.
- Finally, we hope that in the years to come we can establish an advisory service on elementary conservation techniques for newspaper librarians.

Stephen Green, Head of Newspaper Library, The British Library.

Information wanted

Gloucestershire County Library is at present exploring the possibilities of using a *micro-computer in aspects of local history work* i.e. collating a trade directory or census data. The references in the "Local Historian" and "Genealogists' Magazine" have been noted but they would be glad of the opportunity to speak to anyone who has any experience of such exercises. Anyone who thinks that they might be able to help is asked to contact Neville Chapman who is the Reference Librarian at Gloucester Library, Brunswick Road, GLOUCESTER GL1 1HT, telephone Gloucester (0452) 20020 or 20684.

The National Association of Mining History Organisations is discussing a proposal to establish an index of articles on mining history and would like to hear of any similar scheme already in existence. Contact: Mr. M.C. Gill, Secretary NAMHO, 38 Main Street, Sutton in Craven, KEIGHLEY, Yorkshire, BD20 7HD.

Reproduction fees — John Cole, the local studies librarian at Rochdale is anxious to discover whether there are any accepted policies on charging reproduction fees for material used by the media and by publishers. His enquiries so far have produced a rather confused picture with some libraries charging and others not. He would be pleased to hear from any librarian who charges reproduction fees, particularly with regard to the level of fees and the arguments used to get official approval for charging them. Members should contact John Cole, Local Studies Library, Central Library, The Esplanade, ROCHDALE, Lancs. OL16 1AQ. Tel: Rochdale (0706) 47474.

Local newspapers and the public library — some problems

Although I am writing as a local studies librarian in charge of a 1450-volume collection of local newspapers, I have done my share of research using this source, and fully endorse Maurice Milne's remarks on its value. One of my major concerns now is to try to ensure that future local historians have this primary research material available to them.

Most librarians in charge of newspaper collections will agree that they are now posing urgent problems — problems for which the time available for a solution is limited and which come at a time when libraries are stretching resources to maintain services.

The relationship between the public library and local newspapers can perhaps be best described under three heads — acquisition, preservation, and exploitation, with inevitable overlaps. The recent BL working party document states that, *inter alia*, 'Libraries should ensure that there is a publicly available file of each local newspaper in a suitable library, or free access to a file in other ownership'.

In the north-east the publishers of the major 'regional' titles do not allow access to their files under any circumstances, while smaller newspaper offices, which may be more amenable to access, do not normally have facilities for research. None of the university or polytechnic libraries in the region have newspaper collections of any significance. Therefore the whole burden of making newspapers available falls on the public library. This, I should add, is just as it should be, in view of the public library's ability to offer long opening hours, access to all, and professional help.

Free access, however, brings the problem of heavy use and raises the question of preservation. We have to bear constantly in mind that we have a responsibility not only to the present user but also to future generations: we will not be gratefully remembered if all we manage to leave them is a mound of decaying newsprint.

Current use is a problem here in the City Library. Most titles published in Newcastle offer regional coverage, and our files are used by researchers from well outside the city boundary. A survey made in 1981 revealed that, on average, 378 bound volumes of newspapers were used each month. Each consultation means not just damage from readers (intentional or otherwise) but damage from the physical process of retrieval and shelving. Heavy volumes are treated more like sacks of coal than as a unique resource.

The second problem of preservation arises when we consider the newspapers themselves. I have no fears at all for the physical survival of early issues. But from the 1870s, with an ever increasing demand, a 'natural' paper was replaced by a cheap, unstable newsprint which decays when exposed to heat and light. This decay seems inevitable whether or not the papers are used, although of course use hastens the process.

What solutions are available? The main recourse over the last twenty years has been to microfilm. This certainly supplies an answer to the problem of over-use and most libraries have adopted it. There is undoubted consumer resistance to microfilm (to which I shall return) but before long the user will have a choice between microfilm and nothing. Like other libraries (Nottingham comes to mind) we now microfilm all current titles, retaining hard copy for current casual use only. We would also wish to microfilm backfiles, while retaining the originals in inexpensive storage. There is a good case for purchasing microfilm of the BL's pristine, complete runs rather than the library's own frequently damaged and mutilated copies.

Although expensive, rebinding should still be considered, especially for older issues, which tend to contain much more of historical value than their present-day equivalents. Despite the increased expense, there are virtues in rebinding into much smaller volumes, the benefits being in easier handling so that both binding and contents will last longer. The adjunct to rebinding is deacidification and lamination, the only way of prolonging the life of the cheap newsprint I mentioned earlier. Here we run into real problems of cost. (At Newcastle we have recently sought two quotations for deacidifying and laminating one year's issues of a tabloid-sized weekly newspaper — both were over £1000). There is no way that a public library can meet costs of this nature from within its own finances and we have to look seriously at other sources of funds — grants (from universities and polytechnics whose students make so much use of newspapers??), inner city money (where appropriate) and lottery receipts.

Finally the exploitation of the library's newspaper resources and public access. I believe the time must come when *all* newspapers will be consulted on microfilm only with the originals stored cheaply out of harm's way. The main problem is, as mentioned earlier, the public's dislike of the medium (which, I must confess, I share). What libraries can do is to provide microfilm of the highest quality, together with the optimum conditions for its use — motorised readers and reader/printers. The positive aspects can then be emphasised, for example that copies can be provided from microfilm which would not be the case with originals. This should be attractive to a generation of library users which seems to have lost the ability to copy by hand! Microfilm is intractable and every opportunity should be taken to compile indexes.

Many public libraries attempt to lessen use of both microfilm and original newspapers by maintaining cuttings collections on major topics of local interest. We have found this approach very satisfactory at Newcastle; the use of a photocopier greatly lessens the amount of routine work involved. Such hardy perennials as 'Unemployment' and 'The Keilder Reservoir' are easily dealt with in this way.

But the major problem remains — what is to become of our collections of original newspapers? I would welcome any comments, either by letter or in the form of further contributions to *The Local Studies Librarian*.

Frank Manders, Local Studies Librarian, Newcastle upon Tyne City Libraries.

Notes and News

The papers presented by the Local Studies Group at last year's LA Conference have now been published (Library Association Conference, Cliftonville, 1981. Papers: Learning through life. Library Association, 1982, pp39 - 57). The papers are: Local studies at branch level — vicars, pensioners and Whitwalk photographs, by Gay Sussex; The social value of local history: education, politics or nostalgia, by Stuart Daniels; and Adult education and local history, by Jane Anderson.

Within six weeks of the arrival of the microfilm of the 1881 Census returns at Nottingham Central Library, a full index was compiled by members of the Nottinghamshire Family History Society. This includes an index to the villages in the county and also street name indexes to Nottingham, Mansfield, Newark and Worksop. The Census returns and index are available in the Local Studies Library at Nottingham. Nottinghamshire County Library also reports that it is to co-operate with the University of Nottingham in a major project on oral history with the assistance of the Manpower Services Commission. The project is entitled 'Making ends meet: earning a living in Nottinghamshire, 1900 - 1950'. Finally from Nottingham, the Nottinghamshire Local Studies Library card catalogue is now available on microfiche. In author and classified sections, it lists the stock of over 20,000 volumes of books and pamphlets on Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The major collections on Byron and D.H. Lawrence are excluded as these will be published separately.

(Acknowledgements to NEMCON for this item).

Correspondence

Archives Policy

Dear Sir,

I was interested to read your article, 'An archives policy for libraries, museums and record offices?', which appeared in the first issue of *The Local Studies Librarian*. It seems to me that the joint 'Statement of policy relating to archives', prepared by the Museums Association, the Society of Archivists and the Library Association and published in the December 1981 issue of the *Museums Journal*, is less than satisfactory. It would appear to be geared to the needs of the museum and archive professions, with library problems considered very much as an afterthought.

I was particularly disappointed with Section 9, which deals with 'Areas of positive collaboration between the professions'. Sub-section 9.1 deals with collaboration in a general way and is fair enough as far as it goes, but the remaining three sub-sections are concerned purely with co-operation between the museum and archive professions and make no reference to librarians. Sub-section 9.2 deals with cataloguing, in particular the development of the Museum Documentation Association's IRGMA system to cope with documents as well as museum objects; sub-section 9.3 deals with the training of archives conservation staff and suggests a common syllabus for archive and museum employees; sub-section 9.4 is concerned with the training of education and design staff and considers the possibility of opening the Museums Association Museum Diploma options to archive service staff.

Multi-media cataloguing, training in document conservation and the increasing employment of specialised education/design staff are all topics of considerable interest to librarians, particularly those involved in local studies. It is most unfortunate that the joint statement gives the impression that these are matters with which librarians are little concerned. Co-operation with archivists and museum curators in all these fields would undoubtedly be of value. Perhaps it is significant that consultation of the Local Studies Group by the joint working party appears to have been minimal.

Don Martin, Principal Assistant, Strathkelvin District Libraries.

Dear Sir,

I hesitate to take issue with so great an authority as Godfrey Thompson (page 4 of your first issue) when he writes of Guildhall in the 19th century as "the only reference library in London open to the public (with the exception of course of the British Museum)". Readers may like to know that, when Bennet Woodcroft opened his Public Free Library of the Commissioners of Patents at 25 Southampton Buildings on Monday 5 March 1855, it not only provided a reference library open to the public for material 'indispensable to the right direction and advance of British Industry' but even, at that early date, allowed the public direct access to the shelves.

25 Southampton Buildings was in the parish of St Andrew Holborn but now, while the front door and reading room are in the London Borough of Camden, some of us, under the same set of roofs, are within the City's boundaries, the old 'liberties'.

Those visiting Chancery Lane for other purposes are very welcome to visit and admire the style of Sir John Taylor's 1902 building — not the first library to be 'full' on the day it opened. We now await the move to Somers Town about the turn of this decade.

A.N. Macgregor, External Relations, The British Library, Science Reference Library, 25 Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, WC2A 1AW

Visit to the House of Lords Record Office

The North Western Branch of LSG has organised a visit to the House of Lords Record Office on 26th November (provisionally). Details of the visit will be circulated to all members in the North West. Anyone else wanting further information should contact either Chris Makepeace, 5 Hilton Road, DISLEY, Cheshire, SK12 2JU Tel: 06632 3346 or Diana Winterbotham, Local Studies Librarian, The Lancashire Library, 143 Corporation Street, PRESTON. PR1 8RH. Tel: Preston (0772 54868).

History on your doorstep — a Review

This series of eight television programmes was broadcast on BBC2 between 14th January and 4th March. Prior consultation was made with the LSG and several members of the Committee participated in initial discussions. Bulk supplies of a BBC-produced leaflet were distributed free to libraries and record offices, listing basic sources for the study of local history (a North of the Border version was also made available, thanks largely due to the initiative of LOCSCOT).

Swavesey, in Cambridgeshire, was the subject of the opening programme — and consisted of a 'conducted tour' of this Fenland village in the company of Jack Ravensdale, local historian and author of the book of the series (History on your doorstep, BBC Pubs., 1982, pbk. £4.50, hbk £8.95). Fred Housego, the taxi driver of Mastermind fame, asked relevant questions at appropriate stages of the 'tour'.

The industrial town of Halifax provided an excellent contrast for the second programme. This broadcast charted the rise and fall of the Crossley family of 19th century industrial entrepreneurs and in so doing reflected the changing prosperity of the town itself. The public reference library was featured for the first time in this episode — several others being given good publicity in later programmes, notably Ealing.

Subsequent programmes covered such diverse topics as, Carmarthen: the making of a medieval town; The story of a house; Reading the landscape; Alloa: a town built on water; Ealing: Queen of the suburbs; and finally Butleigh: 19th century neighbours. This last programme, I thought, was a little too weak to end on — just what was Ann Heeley going to do with all that information she had so painstakingly accumulated, indexed and filed? If write a book, why didn't it say so?

Emphasis was placed throughout the series on taking a closer look at things normally taken for granted. Whether in village, town or city much could be learnt from simply standing and staring. Keen observation in the field (or street!) coupled with the intelligent use of supporting documents, such as directories, census returns, manorial and other records, was the essence of discovering the *History on your doorstep*.

In conclusion I think it's worth mentioning that many library authorities have produced simple guides to their local collections, as a direct result of the BBC series, and in anticipation of increased demand. Whether that increase in demand has in fact materialised, or not, only you the librarian on the spot can tell. At any rate, the series will certainly not have lessened the demand for our services.

The programmes have perhaps been unjustly criticised by some librarians for being pitched at too low a level for local historians. However, to be fair I'm sure the intention of the producer, Bryn Brooks, was not particularly to preach to the converted but rather to awaken an interest in the public at large. If indeed the series has succeeded in pumping some new life-blood into the body of local history, then surely it will be no bad thing!

Robin Ansell, ALA, Senior Reference Assistant, Win.bledon Reference Library.

P.S. If you missed any of the programmes first time round they are to be repeated on BBC1 on Sundays at 1.25pm starting on September 27th.



Following our request for information in the last issue, a number of libraries have sent in comments. Most of these agree that it is very difficult to measure the impact of such a series in terms of readership, though Leicestershire reported some readers new to the library, and in Somerset there was increased pressure on the County Record Office. The local historian featured in the last programme, Ann Heeley of Butleigh was inundated with letters, telephone calls and callers — so at least there were people watching the series.

All libraries replying had produced leaflets or booklists, and these seem to have been popular — Somerset County headquarters ran out of copies almost immediately and Walsall had to keep on running off more copies. Lincolnshire reported that while their own list was popular, the BBC's was not, possibly because it was thought to be too general.

Many libraries produced displays either in the central library, or as in North Yorkshire, in many branches — for instance at Malton a major display included much material lent by local residents. Some libraries used the programmes as a basis for workshops — Strathkelvin used videos to preface each of the eight they ran, and 140 people came to the three meetings arranged in Edinburgh.

Overall, libraries seem to have been aware of the importance of the series, and attempted to link up with the programmes, as the BBC had hoped. An important point made was that the timing of the programmes was unlikely to attract a large audience: we hope that the repeat will attract more attention, and give libraries a second chance to promote themselves.

Brian M. Hall

At the meeting of the LSG Committee in June, Brian Hall announced that he would be resigning as Hon. Secretary as soon as possible. Brian has recently been promoted to the post of Course Director to the Postgraduate Diploma Course in the Department of Librarianship at Birmingham Polytechnic. He feels that the increased work load that goes with this post would mean that he would not have as much time as he would like to devote to the job of Hon. Secretary of the Group.

Brian became Hon. Secretary when LSG was first formed as a sub-group of RSIS in November 1973 and continued when it became an independent group of the LA. It was largely through Brian's hard work that the transition was successfully accomplished. Brian has worked as tirelessly for the Group and has always been available to give advice on matters relating to the Group, its constitution and the techniques of getting information etc. out of the L.A.

It was through Brian that the Group's "Newsletter", now the "Local Studies Librarian", got off the ground. In addition to his secretarial duties, Brian edited the Newsletter from 1977-1981. Brian has agreed to remain on the LSG committee for the time being in order to act as a link between the editor and the printer of the "Local Studies Librarian". It is hoped that he will continue to serve on the committee as his advice and experience are invaluable.

On a personal level, I found Brian's help and support invaluable when I became Chairman following the unexpected death of Dorothy McCulla. I should like to express the congratulations of all members of LSG to Brian on his promotion and to thank him for all he has done as Hon. Secretary.

The new Hon. Secretary is to be Paul Sturges of the Department of Library and Information Studies, Loughborough University of Technology, Ashby Road, LOUGHBOROUGH, Leics. LE11 3TU. Tel: Loughborough (0509) 263171 ext. 5195. We wish him well.

Chris Makepeace

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