

THE
Library
Assistant's
MANUAL

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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT'S MANUAL

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PREFACE

This textbook is intended to be an introduction to the elementary principles of librarianship for non-professional staff in libraries, and it attempts to describe simple library routines in a non-technical manner. It should be useful to anyone studying for a library assistant's qualification, and to those engaged on in-service training courses. It is hoped that it will provide an introduction to library work for new entrants and to those who are thinking of taking up a career in libraries.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

AACR	Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules
ALS	Automated Library Systems
ASLIB	Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux
AV	Audio-visual
BBIP	<i>British books in print</i>
BHI	<i>British humanities index</i>
BLLD	British Library Lending Division
BNB	<i>British national bibliography</i>
BTI	<i>British technology index</i>
CANS	Citizens Advice Notes Service
DDC	Dewey Decimal Classification
DES	Department of Education and Science
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ISBN	International Standard Book Number
LA	Library Association
LASIP	<i>Library Association subject index to periodicals</i>
OCCI	Optical Coincidental Cataloguing Index
OED	<i>Oxford English dictionary</i>
RLB	Regional Library Bureau
SLA	School Library Association

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USERS AND THEIR NEEDS: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The public library movement was launched in Britain with the Public Libraries (England) Act of 1850. This act allowed for the establishment of town libraries, to be free and open to all ratepayers, provided by funds from local rates. Because the right to establish such a library on the part of any municipal authority was permissive rather than compulsory, many years were to elapse before the entire needs of all the potential reading public across the country were to be served.

A further act, the Public Libraries Act of 1919, gave the opportunity for greatly increased library provision, empowering county councils to adopt the Libraries Act for those districts within their respective areas which had not already done so. The new county library systems established buildings for branch libraries within their respective areas, in the small towns and large villages where no libraries had previously existed. Even in small villages and hamlets, centres were set up in schoolrooms or other suitable existing buildings, where periodical exchanges of book stock could be arranged. These libraries were, and still are, organized from a county headquarters, normally sited in the county town.

It was only as recently as 1964 that public library provision became compulsory. The passing of the Public Libraries and Museums Act in 1964 meant that for the first time all parts of England and Wales were given as of right a comprehensive and nationally-linked library service. With local government reorganization in 1974 came changes in the boundaries of public library authorities. Some county branch libraries were

transferred to adjacent municipal authorities and became branch libraries served by the central library of the municipal authority, instead of as formerly, by the county headquarters. But whether under the auspices of a county or municipal authority, and of whatever size or type, all public libraries continue as the Kenyon Report (1927) proposed that they should, 'to serve not only the earnest seekers after knowledge, but also all those who are . . . gratifying an elementary curiosity, and those who are seeking relaxation and recreation.'

Having the library of his or her choice easily accessible and open at convenient times are obviously the first requirements of any potential borrower. It is essential that public libraries are sited centrally in their respective cities, towns or villages, preferably on or near main roads giving access to public transport, and on sites where car parking facilities can be made available. Libraries built adjacent to or as part of a shopping complex are thus helped to attract and retain a borrowing public. Well-placed libraries are able to advertise and draw attention to their facilities by the use of posters and by well-arranged displays in their outside windows and foyers. If the majority of the public who never use libraries are to be persuaded at least to explore them, the possibilities for self-advertising on the part of libraries need to be much more actively pursued.

The lending department

Once inside the building, almost certainly the first person the potential borrower will make contact with is the library assistant, who is thus given an excellent opportunity for performing a very useful public relations exercise. A good first impression of a library often stems from the tactful way in which the discerning assistant can provide information and help with form-filling. Sensitivity to the individual needs, and indeed the fears, of differing personalities is needed. Older people in particular often lack confidence, and can be helped by unobtrusive guidance.

The written formalities completed, some people appreciate being taken on a quick tour of the library, and the library assistant can point out where their special interest areas are to be found. For those who prefer to explore by themselves, a wall-plan of the library floor, or floors, should be provided. In addition, a printed floor plan can be incorporated into a handout or guide to be made available to all new members. Such a guide will include, in addition, information about the library, its rules, services offered, borrowing facilities and so on. It serves the needs of library users by explaining how books can be borrowed, and for how long. It outlines the procedures for reserving books, and indicates how requests for new additions to the library should be made. It informs readers of the inter-library loan network, demonstrating the fact that all libraries, however small, are part of a nationally-linked scheme. Further, it can explain how the library classifies and catalogues its stock, list all the non-book materials that are available, and can also draw attention to any special services offered, such as photocopying. Borrowers will learn from it how to locate books not in normal sequence on the shelves for reasons of size or subject matter. Finally, the guide should state clearly all the essential rules relating to the lending of books and to general use of the library itself.

It is necessary to draw readers' attention to the catalogue. Many people are unaware that they can consult it since they imagine it is solely for the use of the library staff. A library catalogue, whether consisting of five by three inch cards in drawers, cassette tapes, or of the sheaf type, needs to be augmented by displayed instructions concerning its handling. It is becoming increasingly common for school classes to visit their nearest public library, where they are taught, amongst other things, how to handle the catalogue for themselves, and also how subjects are inter-related. This area of work could well be extended: many older people, especially those with more leisure time available, would welcome talks on how to exploit their library and its resources to the full.

The larger public libraries usually aim to provide a readers' advisory service point, where the borrowers' specific information needs can be met. Here all the bibliographical aids are to hand to enable the advisor to answer questions concerning titles of books in print, and of newly-published books not held in the library. The *British national bibliography* (BNB), *British books in print* (BBIP) and the *Bookseller* are always available to serve these purposes. Many libraries pride themselves on drawing up and supplying book lists of special categories of books; such lists (of historical or science-fiction books available, for example) are appreciated and much-used by borrowers. Often a library will compile its own book list on a topical theme, highlighting books that otherwise might remain unnoticed and unknown in their normal sequence on the shelves.

Another way in which libraries can highlight particular categories of books and thus demonstrate a theme that is common to all of them, is by mounting displays. A reader having a specific and localized leisure interest such as flower arrangement can, through a display, be made aware of books on botany and on garden flowers which would normally be shelved quite separately from those dealing with flower arrangement. Such a display demonstrates interrelationships between subjects more directly, and with greater impact, than can the library catalogue.

Displays can also link a library and its books with the world outside. Readers are given the opportunity to broaden and deepen interests through having their attention drawn to books which have formed the basis of radio or television broadcasts. Again, displays planned to coincide with local events draw attention to other community activities. There are opportunities, therefore, for using displays to demonstrate the connections linking many and varied recreational and cultural activities. Similarly, displays can forge links between the public library and educational institutions within its locality, drawing attention in particular to a variety of educational courses offered to people not otherwise involved in statutory or vocational education.

Of recent years many services for handicapped readers have been established by public libraries, and others are being developed. The needs of readers housebound by physical handicap or made immobile by increasing age are met by a supply of reading material from a van delivery service. Large size print books are provided for the partially sighted. But the most inhibiting obstacle of all, of course, is that of illiteracy. To its great credit, the public library sector has responded quickly to the nationally mounted UK adult literacy campaign, with its implications for a different type of book provision. The official adult literacy sign is displayed in many library lending departments, drawing attention to a range of easy reading books of all types. Individual members of staff are being encouraged to specialize in this sensitive and highly important area of work. Certainly much skill is required of such staff, since understanding relationships have to be formed with people who may never before have used a library, and who for this and other reasons are singularly lacking in confidence.

Finally, the lending departments of the larger public libraries, are increasingly offering items other than books for loan; the three most common being pictures, records and cassette tapes. It is usual to allow pictures to be kept by one borrower for a period of roughly three months and to make a small charge for each one that is lent. Some libraries issue records and cassette tapes free of charge whilst others ask for a small fee per item borrowed, or else offer an annual subscription rate which covers the cost of borrowing any number of items within one year.

The reference department

A public library also serves the needs of those seeking information and therefore provides a reference department, or in the case of a smaller library, a reference section. Books and other material provided here must of necessity be on-hand for consultation at any time; therefore they are not as a rule available for loan. This department will house books of a general nature dealing with many subjects, such as

encyclopedias, and collections of newspaper cuttings. It will also house books that for a variety of reasons cannot be allowed out on loan. Rare books, certain large-size books (for example atlases and collections of photographs), expensive books, out-of-print and irreplaceable works can all come into the category of 'reference books'; as can standard works on specialist subjects which people may wish to consult rather than read from cover to cover.

The reference department is also the one which holds local history collections, consisting not only of books, but in addition old maps, documents, cutting collections, guide books, booklets and pamphlets. Archives, that is to say local records and other manuscript documents relating to local institutions, form a part of such a collection. Current local information is also kept, and addresses of local government departments, religious and social bodies and societies are made available.

Publications issued by government departments, statistical information, and acts of parliament can all be consulted. *Hansard*, which is the official report of debates which have taken place in parliament, is available at least in the larger reference departments. In addition the reference department, unless the library is large enough to warrant the provision of a separate commercial and technical department, will also contain all the appropriate quick-reference material, in which will be included telephone, street and trade directories, bus, train and air timetables, yearbooks, gazetteers, guidebooks and bibliographical aids of all kinds. Effective use of all these reference sources can only be made after training and much practice. Library assistants should aim to develop an awareness of the source materials available, a knowledge of what they contain and the ability to locate quickly the particular items of information that are required.

Commercial and technical departments

The central public library located in a large town or city generally provides an additional department usually known as the commercial and/or technical department. This serves the

needs of commerce and industry in the area as well as the needs of individual citizens, and those of visitors from outside the area. Information seekers in this department are likely to request very specific items of information, and many inquiries are made and dealt with over the telephone. Some libraries have telex installed. This is a telegraphic machine which receives its messages in printed form. Large companies and businesses, which already use such machines to communicate with their subsidiaries and branches, are able to request information from their library in this way.

The commercial department carries company information of all kinds concerning locally-based firms and also national ones and their subsidiaries. Quick-reference materials such as trade directories, timetables and year books are to hand. Collections of materials relating to other countries, notably in the areas of industry, commerce and travel, are also available. Specialist information of concern to companies is supplied, including works on company law, patent specifications of recent inventions, and British Standard specifications relating to manufactured products. Large-scale maps and street plans of the locality and surrounding areas may be consulted, as may current traders' lists and catalogues.

This is generally the department where current and back copies of daily, Sunday and local newspapers are kept, along with a range of magazines, journals and periodicals both of a specialist and a general nature. Back copies of newspapers and periodicals are held for a specified period usually ranging from one to five years according to the lasting value of their contents. The most important periodicals of all are bound into yearly volumes which become part of the permanent book stock, whilst it is now common practice to make microfilm copies of old newspapers and store these rather than the original papers. To enable the borrower to trace articles relating to specific topics from periodicals and magazines, appropriate indexes for example *British technology index*, are to hand. Once such an article has been traced, it is usually possible for the borrower to obtain a photocopy of it.

The children's department

A public library, serving as it does its entire local community, must provide for the widest range of readers' needs, stretching from those of the pre-school child on the one hand to those of the elderly retired person on the other. No other library system has such a wide readership age. Within the limits of the library's provision for children there is still a wide range of requirements to be met. The children's department has first to satisfy the recreational and leisure needs of its readers by offering a wide-ranging and well-balanced fiction, non-fiction and reference book stock. Secondly it often has to augment the educational resources which are available to the child in school and elsewhere, through the provision of both book and non-book materials. Thirdly, it must ensure that it is organized in such a way that its readers can move automatically on to use the adult section of the library when the time arrives.

Even the youngest children should be made welcome in the library. Those accompanying parents on their visits can be given picture books to handle and to take home on loan. These books could be placed in low-standing browser boxes in strategic corners of the main lending department or else in the children's department itself. The provision of low chairs or floor cushions encourages children to become involved with the books. Story-telling and story-reading sessions are arranged for pre-school children, and these draw attention to the connection between the spoken and the written word.

Although school is the place where the majority of children learn the mechanics of reading, not all schools are in a position to provide the wide range of imaginative, stimulating story books needed to encourage a child to put newly-learnt reading skills to the fullest use. Likewise many secondary schools, whilst providing non-fiction books appropriate to the school curriculum, do not always provide the spread of fiction that would be appropriate to fulfil the imaginative needs of their pupils. There is a special onus