

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF  
LIBRARIES IN BRITAIN  
AND IRELAND

★  
VOLUME III  
1850–2000

The period covered by this volume of *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* presents challenges of a kind and on a scale not found in earlier volumes. Since the mid-nineteenth century an unprecedented expansion and diversification of library activity has taken place, which is reflected in the range of topics covered in this third volume. Libraries have become an industry rather than a localised phenomenon, and librarianship has developed from a scholarly craft to a scientific profession. The complexity arises in part from the place of libraries within a society that has seen itself as increasingly ‘modern’ in its commitment to public knowledge, education and democracy, and also to organisational efficiency and economic advance. Obviously it is libraries and librarianship that take the central position, rather than the wider scene which can be studied in depth elsewhere; however, it is not possible to provide a satisfactory account of library developments without a full appreciation of the social, economic and political environments that have produced and sustained libraries, and a proper balance between the two aspects must be maintained.

The types of library studied go well beyond the obvious categories of public, national and academic libraries, for each of which extensive coverage of the genre and of particular specialities is given. Education reached far into new social areas, with the aid of self-help institutions like the South Wales miners’ libraries as well as the ubiquitous Carnegie Free Libraries (and the People’s Network of the late 1990s). Scientific, medical and industrial libraries strongly influenced attitudes to information, not only in the library world but much more widely, particularly as pioneers in the technology of information which has led to the Internet. The needs of the professions, and other special-interest groups, have also influenced the libraries that serve them. At another extreme, the commercial lending libraries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directly affected the style of the English novel – and perhaps moral attitudes. Subscription libraries have survived possibly rather better than their commercial rivals, and the phenomenon of book-collecting, the ‘private library’, is not neglected.

Although the volume covers a much wider selection of libraries than has to date been attempted in a single volume, it is clearly not possible to cover every library (or indeed every type of library) in the space available. Nor is it possible to deal with every activity connected with librarianship, the boundaries of the various sectors being decidedly permeable. But the picture that emerges is one of great diversity, with ramifications reaching between sectors and internationally.

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF  
LIBRARIES IN BRITAIN  
AND IRELAND

General Editor  
PETER HOARE

Libraries pervade the culture of all literate societies. Their history illuminates that culture and many of its facets – the spread of literacy, the growth of scholarship, changes in educational practices – as well as reflecting changing social and political philosophies and practices. As a result, they have often developed in ways which could not have been foreseen by their founders.

The fundamental principle, of collecting for immediate and future use and enjoyment, has usually been combined with a social aim, the sharing of books and information among a wider group, which has become one of the characteristics of libraries today. This is one reason why libraries cannot simply be seen as a discrete phenomenon: throughout their history they must be considered part of the society they serve. This context includes the whole reading environment, the vital connection of libraries with social or cultural development, and the political framework which has become increasingly important in the past hundred years; economic and commercial aspects have also become more significant, as they have for the history of the book. The profession of librarianship has matured, especially in the last century, and has in turn affected the development of libraries: indeed it is the interaction of librarians and users that has provided much of the dynamic for that development. Changing methodologies of scholarship and the vicissitudes of private reading, too, affect the way libraries have developed.

Libraries vary enormously in form, in size and in purpose, and their nature has inevitably changed over the fifteen centuries encompassed in these volumes. In consequence the three volumes have different emphases and reflect different approaches to the historical record, but they share a common theme. This has inspired the project since its first inception on the initiative of Professor Robin Alston (whose library history database has been invaluable to many contributors), and under the aegis of the then Library History Group of the Library Association and its former Honorary Secretary Graham Jefcoate. Notwithstanding these differences in approach, the history of libraries is a continuum, and the divisions between the three volumes of what is essentially a single work are less precise than the volume titles may indicate. Developments for some years around the mid-seventeenth century may be treated in both Volume I and Volume II, though often in different contexts; and a similar overlap for the mid-nineteenth century exists between Volume II and Volume III. Readers concerned with these periods should be sure to consult both volumes.

*The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* does not set out to be an exhaustive history of individual libraries: it is, rather, a general history charting the various trends and patterns of development, which studies different types of libraries and individual libraries as part of that broader view. In this way it aims to illuminate not only libraries and their users but also the wider history of the British Isles. Only in understanding their purpose and their context can the role of libraries be properly comprehended.

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LIBRARIES IN BRITAIN  
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VOLUME III  
1850–2000

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*Edited by*  
ALISTAIR BLACK  
*and*  
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### *Preface to volume III*

Since the middle of the nineteenth century an unprecedented expansion and diversification of library activity has taken place, which is reflected in the range of topics covered in this volume. Similarly library history, though a specialised subject, has attracted a substantial and varied literature over the years. In setting the scope of this volume we have above all been aware of the wide array of library types and library themes that need to be included in a history of libraries in the last century and a half.

Something of the eclectic nature of library provision in this period can be gleaned from the particular example of the historic (but also industrial) city of York, as presented in O. S. Tomlinson's chapter on libraries in the book *The noble city of York*, edited by A. S. Stacpoole and others (York, 1972). In addition to the continuing growth of the ecclesiastical and scholarly York Minster Library, the city saw the development of more social library provision in the form of commercial circulating libraries. Ten of these existed at the start of our period; then from about the time of the First World War library services were provided by the stationers W. H. Smith and Boot's the Chemists, and by a sprinkling of 'twopenny libraries' established between the wars. Other libraries have included the York Subscription Library, the Mechanics' Institute and the Railway Institute; religious libraries, from the Society of Friends to the Bar Convent; professional libraries like the York Medical Society and the Yorkshire Law Society; the libraries of the confectionery manufacturer Rowntree and Company; educational libraries such as the two Anglican teacher-training colleges from the 1840s (now reunited as York St John College), the University of York, founded in 1961, and various school libraries; and, of course, from 1892 the municipal public library. York is also only a dozen miles from Boston Spa, one of the two main sites of the British Library and a major library force locally, as well as nationally and internationally. All these types of libraries command our attention.

*Preface to volume III*

Thus for the uninformed reader, unaware of the variety and depth of library provision in the modern period, a first visit to the contents pages of this volume would possibly spark surprise. A popular expectation, we speculate, is that a history of libraries will merely address the topic of public libraries; but we must also address the huge range of other libraries, not forgetting the context in which they developed – not least the implications of Betjeman’s ironic remark in his poem ‘In Westminster Abbey’:

Think of what our Nation stands for,  
Books from Boots’ and country lanes . . .

The lush texture of modern library history required a rigorous structuring of the varied types of libraries to be described in this volume. However, to give lengthy attention to every single type of library is an impossible task even in a volume of this size: for example map libraries, music libraries and newspaper libraries (all with holdings and services often significantly different from those of the traditional book-centred library), not to mention other multi-media collections, have not been given particular attention, though references to them will be found in more general chapters.

The volume is divided into nine parts. The headings of some parts present themselves readily, thanks to the homogeneity of the chapters they contain. Introductory chapters consider the sources and methodologies appropriate for the study of library history in the modern era, in some cases quite different from those needed for earlier periods, and the place of the library in the modern world (the contextual introduction to the contributions that follow). There are discrete accounts of public, national and university libraries, and a section on the development of the library profession. All these divisions are relatively predictable.

The arrangement of the rest of the material is perhaps less obvious. We were aware that, like the modern age itself, library development occurred at a different pace and in different ways in different places. Hence we have a section presenting the reader with national perspectives – from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales – that cross-cut the wide variety of library experiences described in the volume.

In contrast to the libraries of the state and the establishment, a significant amount of effort has been expended, over the past century and a half, by people establishing, or supporting, libraries *for themselves* – often, though by no means always, in the context of recreational reading. It is particularly important therefore to acknowledge this autonomous social enterprise, which we mark out under the heading ‘The voluntary ethic’.

*Preface to volume III*

Equally unobtrusive, though at the other end of the spectrum, is the panoply of libraries created and used by the professions and ‘experts’ – in a wide variety of fields – that so defined the rise of the modern age. Some of the major manifestations of this ‘special library’ phenomenon are presented in a separate section.

Finally, no volume on the library in the modern era would be complete without paying appropriate attention to the implications for libraries of the competing and enabling information technologies of the digital age. While electronic developments permeate the whole recent history of libraries, we have provided space for a discussion of the issues more generally, opening the way for future historians of libraries to take up the continuing story.



## *Abbreviations*

AACR	<i>Anglo-American cataloguing rules</i>
ABA	Antiquarian Booksellers' Association
ABTAPL	Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries
ACSP	Advisory Council on Scientific Policy
AIL	Association of Independent Libraries
ALA	American Library Association; Associate of the Library Association
ANSLICS	Aberdeen and North of Scotland Library and Information Co-operative Service
ASHSL	Association of Scottish Health Sciences Librarians
Aslib	Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BAI	Book Association of Ireland
BAILER	British Association for Information and Library Education and Research
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BC	Bibliographic classification
BETH	Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
BIALL	British and Irish Association of Law Librarians
BIDS	Bath Information and Data Services
BIOSIS	[service offering bibliographic references for life sciences research]
BL	British Library
BLAISE	British Library Automated Information Service
BLDSC	British Library Document Supply Centre

*List of abbreviations*

BLCMP	Birmingham Libraries Co-operative Mechanization Project
BLCPM	<i>British Library catalogue of printed music</i>
BLPC	<i>British Library public catalogue</i>
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
BLRDD	British Library Research and Development Department
BM	British Museum
BNB	<i>British National Bibliography</i>
BNBC	British National Book Centre
BOT	Board of Trade
BRASTACS	Bradford Scientific, Technical and Commercial Service
BUCOP	<i>British Union Catalogue of Periodicals</i>
CAG	Cooperative Automation Group
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCL	Catholic Central Library (Dublin)
CD-ROM	compact disc – read-only memory
CHILDE	Children's Historical Literature Dissemination throughout Europe
CICRIS	Co-operative Industrial Commercial Reference and Information Service
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CLS	Central Library for Students
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
COCRIL	Council of City Reference and Information Libraries
COM	computer output microform
CONARLS	Circle of Officers of National and Regional Library Systems
COPAC	<i>CURL On-line Public Access Catalogue</i>
COPOL	Council of Polytechnic Librarians
CSL	Circle of State Librarians
CUKT	Carnegie United Kingdom Trust
CURL	Consortium of University Research Libraries
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport

*List of abbreviations*

DDC	Dewey Decimal Classification
DENI	Department of Education, Northern Ireland
DES	Department of Education and Science
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DSIR	Department of Scientific and Industrial Research
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DTP	desk-top publishing
DVD	digital versatile disc
EARL	Electronic Access to Resources in Libraries
EDI	electronic data interchange
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Center
ESTC	<i>Eighteenth-century [later, English] short-title catalogue</i>
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FID	Fédération Internationale de Documentation
FLA	Fellow of the Library Association
FO	Foreign Office
GEAC	(proprietary name)
GKII, GKIII	<i>General catalogue of printed books</i> , 2nd (3rd) edition (British Museum)
GUI	graphic user interface
HATRICKS, Hatrics	(originally Hampshire Technical, Research, Industrial, Commercial and Scientific Information)
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council (England)
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council (Wales)
HERTIS	Hertfordshire Technical Information Service (now simply Hertis)
HLC	Hospital Library Council (Dublin)
HMSO	Her (His) Majesty's Stationery Office
HULTIS	Hull Technical Information Service
IAC	Irish Advisory Committee (of Carnegie UK Trust)
IATL	International Association of Theological Libraries
ICI	Imperial Chemical Industries
ICT	information and communications [or computer] technology
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IIS	Institute of Information Scientists

*List of abbreviations*

INSPEC	<i>Information Services: Physics, Electrical and Electronics, and Computers and Control</i>
IPCS	Institution of Professional Civil Servants
IOLIM	International Online Information Meeting
ISBD	International Standard Bibliographic Description
ISBN	International Standard Book Number
ISTC	<i>Incunabula short-title catalogue</i>
IT	information technology
JANET	Joint Academic Network
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
JRLUM	John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester
JSCAACR	Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR
KCL	King's College London
LA	Library Association
LADSIRLAC	Liverpool and District Scientific, Industrial and Research Library Advisory Council
LAI	Library Association of Ireland (An Chomhairle Leabharlanna)
LAN	local area network
LAR	<i>Library Association Record</i>
LASER	London and South East Region
LAUK	Library Association of the United Kingdom (later simply 'The Library Association')
LCC	Library of Congress classification
LCSH	Library of Congress subject headings
LIC	Library and Information Commission
LINC	Libraries and Information Council
LIP	Library and Information Plan
LISA	<i>Library and Information Science Abstracts</i>
LJMU	Liverpool John Moores University
LLU	Lending Library Unit [of DSIR]
LOCAS	Local Cataloguing Service (British Library)
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MANTIS	Manchester Technical Information Service
MARC	Machine Readable Cataloguing
MEDLARS	Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System
MEDLINE	(online version of MEDLARS)

*List of abbreviations*

MERLIN	Machine Readable Library Information Network (British Library)
MLAC	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
MLS, MLIS	Master of Library [and Information] Studies (etc.)
MRC	Medical Research Council
NANTIS	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Information Service
NBA	Net Book Agreement
NBC, NBL	National Book Council, National Book League
NCL	National Central Library
NeLH	National Electronic Library for Health
NHRU	National Home Reading Union
NHS	National Health Service
NLLST	National Lending Library for Science and Technology
NRLSI	National Reference Library for Science and Invention
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NLW	National Library of Wales
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center (originally Ohio Colleges Library Center)
OPAC	online public access catalogue
OSTI	Office for Scientific and Technical Information
PC	personal computer (specifically IBM)
PRECIS	<i>Preserved context index system</i>
R & D	research and development
RDC	Rural District Council
RLIN	Research Libraries Information Network
RSM	Royal Society of Medicine
RSLP	Research Support Libraries Programme
SCOLCAP	Scottish Libraries Co-operative Automation Project
SCOLLUL	Standing Conference of Librarians of London University Libraries
SCOLMA	Standing Conference on Library Materials from Africa
SCONUL	Standing Conference of National and University Libraries [later, Society of College, National and University Libraries]

*List of abbreviations*

SCOTAPLL	Standing Conference of Theological and Philosophical Libraries in London
SCOTUL	Standing Conference of Technological University Libraries
SDI	selective dissemination of information
SERLS	South East Regional Library System
SINTO	Sheffield Interchange Organization
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SHINE	Scottish Health Information Network
SLIC	Selective listing in combination
SLS	(later name of SWALCAP)
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
SRIS	Science Reference and Information Service
SSC	Society of Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland
STEIN	Short Term Experimental Information Network (British Library)
STM	Scientific, Technical and Medical (especially as a publishing category)
SWALCAP	South West Academic Libraries Co-operative Automation Project
TALIC	Tyneside Association of Libraries and Information Bureaux
TBC	The Times Book Club
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TIDU	Technical Information and Documentation Unit
UCL	University College London
UDC	Universal Decimal Classification
UFC	University Funding Council
UGC	University Grants Committee
UKCIS	United Kingdom Chemical Information Service
UKLDS	United Kingdom Library Database System
UKOLN	United Kingdom Office for Library Networking
UKOLUG	United Kingdom Online User Group
ULL	University of London Library
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WILSH	Welsh Information and Library Services for Health