From Civic Space to Virtual Space: The Past & Future of Early Public Library Buildings in Britain

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Project: 2002 – now complete


- Joint Project:
  - Leeds Metropolitan University
  - University of Liverpool

- Funded by UK Arts & Humanities Research Council
Public Library & Society: Periods

- 1. Civic PL: 1850-1883
- 2. Endowed PL: 1883-1919
- 5. Postmodern PL: 1975-
PLAN OF LIVERPOOL SHEWING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- Lending Libraries and Reading Rooms for Adults and Children
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- Lending Library and Reading Room for Adults
- Lending Library for Adults
- Reading Room
Public Library & Society: Ideology

- Philosophical flywheels: utilitarianism & idealism

- Social control: embourgeoisement theory; Foucault

- Social control rejected
  - Popper & social engineering
  - Habermas and the public sphere (‘third place’)
  - Gramsci
First Generation of Public Library Buildings: 1850-c.1883

- A new institution & building type
- The first buildings
- Naming the parts
- Model lay-outs
- Librarians and architects
Corporation of Liverpool.

Library, Museum, and Arts Committee.

The following twenty-ninth winter course of free lectures will be delivered in the Picton Lecture Hall of the Free Public Library, William Brown Street.

Doors open at 7:30 p.m. Lecture at 8 p.m.

Admission free.

A few seats are reserved in body of Hall, admission threepence.

Entrance by side door.

W. H. Picton,
Chairman, Lecture Sub-Committee.

Peter Cowell,
Secretary.

- Philanthropy and the 1887 Jubilee Campaigns
- Medium and small buildings
- Philanthropy becomes big business
- Carnegie, Bertram & design control
- A mania for bricks and mortar
The Modernist Turn: c.1919-1939

- Small town & suburban libraries

- A big city library: Manchester
  - The architectural competition
  - The decision
  - Planning visit to USA
  - The library takes shape
  - Opening
Thematic Study 1: The Library as Monument and Machine

- Monument defined
- Civic pride, influence of philanthropy, restraint
- Evelyn Saxton & the Liverpool Public Library

- Machine defined
- Librarians & library economy
- Lessons from America
- Jast, Manchester Public Library & the supernatural
Thematic Study 2: The Reading Room

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Democracy and the public sphere
- Autodidact tradition
- The reading room as ‘broadband’
Thematic Study 3: Open Access

- Readers help themselves
- The Clerkenwell experiment – James Duff Brown
- Opponents of open access
- Safeguarded open access spreads
- Architects and open access
- Open access triumphs
Thematic Study 4: The Children’s Library

Drivers
- Education
- Children’s publishing
- Imperial decline & the degeneration of the race
- Emergence of childhood

Growth of children’s provision

Design: from school & shelter to child-centredness
Historic Public Library Buildings

Today

- Old for new?
- British Library
- Repositioning the public library: community librarianship, computers and buildings
- Flagship libraries – Brighton, Peckham, Idea Stores
- Recent renovations – Leeds, Croydon, Southampton, Hove, Putney, examples from USA
- Mass observation of buildings