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Abstract

Sitting down to read a work of fiction was a well-established leisure activity within British society by the early-twentieth century, but one that was mainly enjoyed by the country’s more leisured classes. After the First World War, however, changes to the publishing industry’s working practices, coupled with the growth of the ‘open access’ system in public libraries in

the 1920s and the spread of twopenny libraries in the 1930s, created a new type of reader, drawn principally from the country's working-class communities. This article reveals that the spread of the working-class book reading habit prompted a series of discussions among the country's cultural elites, publishers, and public and commercial librarians regarding how that social group engaged with the written word. Many of these commentators were highly disparaging of the working-class's reading and book borrowing habits and, based on a prejudiced understanding of that social group's cultural capital, sought to influence the types of reading material available to them, particularly with regard to what was accessible in the country's public libraries. The article argues that while the outbreak of the Second World War may have tempered these discussions somewhat, class distinctions surrounding the reading habit continued to shape people's participation in it, thus revealing that even during a period when class divisions were supposedly blurring, attitudes towards social class and leisure remained essentially unchanged.

Text of article:

In April 1943 the editor of *The Portsmouth Reader*, a quarterly in-house magazine published by the town's library service, lamented that "a certain section of the middle classes, sometimes known as 'Suburbia'" failed to make use of their public libraries, preferring instead to obtain "new books" from circulating libraries.¹ The editor believed that this group of people was discouraged from using the service because they associated public libraries with "the less fortunate sections of the community." This association had been caused, the editor argued, by the local government's practice when setting up public libraries to "bracket" the service with public baths and washhouses; amenities that were established to provide clean washing

facilities for the community's lower class population.² In an attempt to attract this group of middle-class readers to the town's public libraries, the editor observed that the library service had "traveled far" since its beginnings and that people from a range of social backgrounds now supported it, including "[t]he great artisan and skilled tradesmen class [...] the professions [and] titled people." "We shall not rest content," the editor continued, "until every class of the community realizes the scope and purpose of its own Public Library." While the editor did not see this as a matter of "class distinction"—because it was asserted that "literature acknowledges no boundaries"—it is clear that for the people in 'Suburbia', where they obtained their reading material, and who they associated with while they were there, was something that mattered a great deal.

This episode reveals that even during the Second World War, a period in which the boundaries between the social classes were supposedly blurring, class was still central to people's understanding of, and participation in, leisure.³ As this article will show, despite, or perhaps because of, the growth of the book reading habit in Britain during the early-twentieth century, initiated by the publication of cheap novels, the growth of twopenny libraries, and the developing 'open-access' system in public libraries, class attitudes towards that leisure activity became ever more polarized.⁴ While all classes could participate in the act of reading books, and while, as Kristin Ewins and Christopher Hilliard have recently argued, the middle and working classes occasionally read the same types of book, the processes *behind* reading as a leisure activity remained largely class-bound.⁵ What books people read and where they chose to obtain their reading material was still principally governed by their affiliation to, and the constructed perceptions of the behaviors associated with, their social class. Indeed, the so-called 'battle of the brows', in which members of the cultural elite, ranging from author

Virginia Woolf to critic Q.D. Leavis, member of the *Scrutiny* group and author of the polemical 1932 study *Fiction and the Reading Public*, castigated ‘middlebrow’ fiction and society’s appreciation of it, was at its height for much of this period, and did much to influence the class-bound nature of people’s reading habits.⁶

This article thus assesses British society’s reactions to the growth of the book reading habit, particularly working-class reading practices, and evaluates the ways in which class relationships were rendered through the leisure medium. It demonstrates how class continued to shape society’s book reading habits and therefore challenges recent assumptions by the likes of Hilliard which suggest that because people from different classes sometimes read the same types of book, a blurring of those class boundaries took place.⁷ As this article will show, the growth of the book reading habit among the working classes prompted interest in and anxiety over how that social group would engage with the written word, particularly among those working in the publishing industry, the book trade and the country’s public and circulating libraries. Indeed, in their attempt to situate themselves (or their services) above the tastes of their working-class clientele, public library officials became central to the debate about what was, and was not, ‘worth’ reading. Of course, due to its deep cultural roots, reading caused less concern within wider society than those leisure activities that were new, such as cinema-going.⁸ Nevertheless, the working classes’ growing interest in the book reading habit ensured that significant attention was paid to how that social group used the leisure medium, with their participation in it invariably being subject to much, and at times highly vitriolic, criticism.⁹ While it should certainly be acknowledged that people from different classes did occasionally read the same novels, the manner in which society’s discussions about the working-class reading habit played out illustrates quite clearly that class prejudices remained stubbornly in

place despite the democratization of culture promised by the broadening of such leisure activities during the course of the twentieth century.

The importance of class in continuing to shape British society's recreational activities in the twentieth century has been confirmed by a range of scholars in recent years. In *Classes and Cultures*, for example, Ross McKibbin noted that people's cultural practices remained 'self-contained and largely determined' by class.¹⁰ Brett Bebbler, meanwhile, has argued that, along with other determinants such as 'race', gender, and generation, class "configured identities and mentalities," thus helping to shape the way people thought "about themselves and their recreations."¹¹ More detailed investigations into society's book reading habits have similarly confirmed that class was a key determinant in molding people's behaviors, with McKibbin concluding that society's tastes in popular literature remained "strongly segregated" well into the twentieth century.¹² This article will build on this literature by revealing how society's book borrowing habits were principally shaped by people working within the publishing and book lending trades. By utilizing material in library archives and the publishing trade press, the article will evaluate the opinions of and objections towards the working-classes' book reading habits by trade personnel to reveal the ways in which such judgments helped to shape class responses to the written word. It will demonstrate how, under pressure from leading figures in the publishing trade, some public librarians attempted to revise their book stocking practices to improve the quality of books held in their libraries. However, working-class readers were not to be browbeaten, and this article will also demonstrate how resistant that social group was to the many criticisms of their reading habits. Not only did the working-class reading habit flourish in the period, but public librarians frequently had to bow to the demands of their working-class clientele by continuing to stock in their libraries the types of book that social group wanted to

consume, despite their reservations about doing so.¹³ This article thus reformulates understandings of class relationships during a period in twentieth-century British society when leisure habits were supposedly becoming more egalitarian and the rigid class divisions of earlier periods have been argued to have become more fluid.¹⁴

The transformation of the reading habit

There was a remarkable surge in the supply of reading material for the working classes during the inter-war years, both in book and magazine form.¹⁵ Social and democratic changes initiated by the First World War helped to create a new class of consumer, and it was from within the working classes, particularly working-class women, where these ‘new consumers’ were principally drawn.¹⁶ In response to the demands of this new readership, the publishing industry initiated a series of changes to their practices. Recognizing the time demands placed on these ‘new consumers’, publishers encouraged authors to write novels that could be read without the need for long, protracted reading spells (which would interfere in the busy daily routine of the social groups targeted), and to write fiction that became part of a profitable series.¹⁷ Modern marketing techniques were also used to advertise their products to this new readership, with promotional material being displayed in places frequented by them, such as cinemas, music-halls, and on public transport; newspapers and magazines, meanwhile, regularly carried reviews of the latest book releases or featured bold and enticing advertisements of the same.¹⁸ Attention to aesthetic detail also increased in order to make books more attractive to this readership.¹⁹ Being at the forefront of the lending business, twopenny librarians recognised the value of such attention to a book’s packaging. Ronald F. Batty, for example, stated that “brightly coloured picture jackets are so valuable as an advertisement [...] a brightly-coloured

jacket increases the loan value of a book by at least a hundred per cent.”²⁰ Books were thus being marketed like any other consumer product, leading one contributor to *The Publishers’ Circular* to declare that books were now merely “a commodity”.²¹

Perhaps predictably, such wide-scale commercialization of the book trade also caused consternation among many working in the publishing industry. In a leading article in the same trade paper in 1933 it was witheringly noted that: “Books are not in the same category as soap, chocolates and cigarettes.”²² In 1935 author Frank Swinnerton similarly complained about the industry’s “excessive concern with either publicity or aesthetics.”²³ To no great surprise, many cultural critics were equally dismissive of it. In 1932 Q.D. Leavis argued that: “The effect of the increasing control of Big Business [...] is to destroy among the masses a desire to read anything which by the widest stretch could be included in the classification ‘literature’.”²⁴ It was this aspect, the effects of commercialization on the reading habits of ‘the masses’ that was really at the heart of the matter. Time and again, it was the working class’s desire to consume, as Leavis disapprovingly put it, “fiction that required the least effort to read,” that attracted the most critical opprobrium.²⁵ Indeed, popular reading was, along with other popular leisure pastimes such as cinema-going, identified as akin to a drug habit. One contributor to *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record* thus noted: “The habitual novel reader in most cases is like the drug taker, who will go to any lengths to satisfy his craving.”²⁶

Such a negative climate surrounding the growing popularity of book reading among the working classes ensured that discussion of it remained constant throughout much of the period. More often than not, the observations made are shot through with notions of class distinction. In a 1932 edition of *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record* one contributor noted that: “The poorer classes [...] are not too particular as to what they read so long as the book is

interesting.”²⁷ In 1933 Edward Green, Chief Librarian of Halifax Public Libraries, similarly commented that: “In recent years a vast army of new readers – the product of the elementary school – has been recruited from a lower mental strata, and their intelligent use of the printed page needs more encouragement and direction.”²⁸ The need for “encouragement and direction” – the desire to raise the standard of the working-classes’ reading habits – was common for much of the period, only lessening slightly during the Second World War. Indeed, while one contributor to the debate noted that he was “happy” that book reading “was no longer confined to one class,” he still believed that the popularity of “light” fiction posed a “grave danger to literature.”²⁹ The message was clear, the reading habits of the working classes needed improving. As one contributor to *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record* declared: “We all ought to deplore the flood of cheap and foolish novels written by the half-educated for the uneducated [...] A higher standard of general taste is needed.”³⁰

In such a highly volatile environment, it is not surprising to find that the book lending habits of the working classes were scrutinized. Some commentators were hopeful that the working classes would develop into more sophisticated readers. Cecil Palmer, for example, wrote expectantly in 1933 that “[h]e who reads the penny ‘blood and thunder’ to-day is more likely to develop a love for Robert Louis Stevenson tomorrow.”³¹ Echoing Palmer’s sentiment, school teacher A.J. Jenkinson’s study into the reading habits of children led its author to confidently predict that readers’ tastes could be educated away from “bloods” to more edifying fare.³² Nevertheless, the consensus among most interested parties remained that working-class lending habits needed to be improved. Mass-Observation, who conducted the largest and most wide-ranging of survey’s into society’s reading habits that culminated in a 200-page report in 1942, was keen to emphasize the need to improve the public’s reading habits, reporting that

working-class reading was close to being in a “state of rut” in which readers simply “follow[ed] the taste of the majority,” borrowing “the same books [...] while others especially the classics remain on the shelf.”³³ In her study into the reading habit of working-class girls and women in the 1930s and early-1940s, social worker Pearl Jephcott noted that only certain novels had “a considerable circulation.”³⁴ Time and again it was noted that the novels constantly in circulation in both public and twopenny libraries were overwhelmingly “of the light sort.”³⁵

Librarians, both public and commercial, were thus at the forefront when it came to understanding, and indeed developing, the working-class reading habit. Many took on the improvement mantle with great enthusiasm. In an article offering advice on setting up a factory library, the welfare supervisor and librarian at Rego Clothiers, R. Rose Price, stated that “[t]he workers of this country taken as a whole are still unaccustomed to devoting their leisure to serious reading,” and warned potential librarians to be more assiduous when choosing books for inclusion: “we need not sink to the ranks of the ‘penny dreadfuls’ or the sickly sentimentality of some of the cheap novels obtainable.”³⁶ Price remained aware of the risks of being overtly didactic (“Never let the cultivation of the love of knowledge cause our efforts to appear patronizing”), but nonetheless believed that factory libraries should “lead [readers] on from mere entertainment to wider interests and the love of fine literature for its own sake.” The frequent discussions over the inclusion of fiction in the country’s public libraries ran along similar lines to the remarks made by Price: borrowers should be encouraged to read more edifying fare. In fact, such discussions took on even greater importance in these institutions because their original *raison d’être* was grounded in the grand civilizing mission of the late-nineteenth century.³⁷ Examining the climate within which the public libraries operated thus reveals the extent to which attitudes towards class – and class behaviors – continued to shape

society's views of the public library system and how it should be run, particularly regarding the practice of stocking fiction titles.

Public libraries and class distinction

The public library service's expansion in the twentieth century has been viewed by historians as continuing the 'rational recreation' ethos of the previous century, with library authorities across the country advocating the purchase of 'good' books to improve the reading habits of the working classes.³⁸ The 1927 Kenyon Report, compiled by a committee of the Board of Education, unsurprisingly identified the public library as "an engine of great potentialities for national welfare."³⁹ Many of the country's librarians concurred. Peterborough's public library officials, for example, viewed the service as one which could "contribute materially to economic progress as well as to individual enjoyment in life," concluding: "It is safe to say that no other British institution has such a *potential* for valuable service as the public library." [emphasis in original]⁴⁰ The service was championed as a way to ensure the working classes "become more sober, more industrious and more prosperous."⁴¹ The way to achieve this, Peterborough's library officials argued, was to institute a policy that would "eliminate from the library the mere butterflies of fiction, the three volume novels here to-day and forgotten to-morrow."⁴² Instead, they argued, a shift in stocking practices should take place to ensure that they only stocked books that "would furnish ideas INTELLECTUAL, MORAL, RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND ETHICAL." [emphasis in original]⁴³

Such an aversion towards the inclusion of fiction, particularly 'light' fiction, in public libraries was common nationwide, with similar policy shifts in library stocking practices being promoted. For example, while featuring some novels popular with the working-class readers,

Portsmouth library services' accession lists include a more limited number of 'light' fiction titles when compared to the range of novels offered in the country's twopenny libraries.⁴⁴ In addition, Portsmouth's library officials used the town's local daily newspaper, *The Evening News*, to champion the educational benefits of the local library service, and encouraged the service's users to choose more edifying fare by listing a number of educational and instructional books that could be borrowed from the town's libraries.⁴⁵ These lists, library officials somewhat optimistically believed, provided a service that would "prove of great assistance to readers."⁴⁶ Manchester's chief librarian, Charles Nowell, meanwhile, noted that the public library's principal aim should be "to maintain a healthy public interest in the novels and romances which are worth reading," suggesting that similar changes in stocking practices would take place in that city's libraries too.⁴⁷ Going further still, librarian Ernest Baker, believing that the supply of cheap fiction corrupted the tastes of working-class readers, suggested that it may be better to stop supplying works of fiction entirely. "[I]f they have not enough energy left to read anything but trash," Baker remarked, "we should be doing them a real service if we could prevent them from reading at all."⁴⁸

There was, then, a general distaste among librarians and library committees for the mass use of their facilities. This was driven, according to L. Stanley Jast, librarian and president of the Library Association, by the belief that the working-class reading habit had "swung almost entirely around amusements."⁴⁹ Indeed, such was the culture of disdain towards the popularity of fiction in the country's public libraries that Peterborough's library officials were keen to boast that the number of fiction books issued in their libraries was "lower than the general percentage."⁵⁰ The fact that the proportion of fiction books issued in Peterborough's public libraries was nearly 70 per cent, a mere five per cent lower than the national average, sums up

perfectly the views of the majority of the public library service's personnel towards the new reading public's book borrowing habits. In such a highly volatile atmosphere, it is not surprising to find that a significant shift in book stocking habits was advocated. What these figures also reveal, of course, is that fiction titles still dominated the library shelves, despite these concerted attempts to change stocking policy.

There were some bold individuals who were willing to challenge these viewpoints and promote the inclusion of fiction in their libraries, even advocating stocking fiction of the 'lighter' sort. In Derby, one library official viewed the availability of 'light' fiction in the town's libraries as important, particularly for the unemployed, because it provided "a means of recreation and study in this period of industrial and financial depression."⁵¹ The most vocal proponent of this view, however, was the chief librarian of Swinton and Pendlebury library service, Frederick J. Cowles. Despite making it known that he preferred readers to borrow "good" fiction, Cowles's virulent championing of the public librarians' right to include all types of fiction, for all classes of reader, in their libraries led to a long-running debate being played out in the publishing trade's major paper, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*. The debate began in 1931 when Cowles printed an article in a local library bulletin that displayed an acceptance of the growth in reading for "entertainment and recreation only."⁵² While Cowles agreed that "as an institution the public library stands for the ideal of an educated public," he believed that because fiction was highly popular "it must be abundantly supplied" in the country's public libraries. He argued that public librarians had "a duty to those ratepayers who desire entertainment and recreation only," and noted:

Many a tired mill-girl finds her little hour of romance in a novel by Ethel M. Dell or

Olive Wadsley. Many a weary miner lives for an evening in a thrilling world of adventure created by Edgar Wallace or Jackson Gregory. Who can say that the provision of such entertainment is not the function of a public library?⁵³

The editor of the trade paper, E. Walton Marston, reprinted Cowles's article, heavily criticizing the author for his views.⁵⁴ Despite, or perhaps because of, Marston's disapproving response, some people in the trade, particularly those serving the 'mass' readership, were moved by his high-handed approach to write in and defend the policy of including fiction in public libraries. Indeed, Cowles's article, and Marston's response to it, generated much discussion in the paper, on both the role of the public library in particular, and the act of reading in general. Many contributors were supportive of Cowles's views; but these were typically drawn from those working in the same field. Chesterfield librarian L.C. Jackson thus stated, "The end to which all libraries are striving is the spreading of education, and education in its broadest sense."⁵⁵

Jackson believed that readers were able to take much from a work of popular fiction: "Many of the works of fiction published to-day, and articulated through the medium of the public library, suggest new ideas, fresh outlooks on life, to the reader." Another supporter of Cowles, Arthur E. Gower, who was librarian and secretary in Grays, Essex, was even more liberal in his views, and extremely critical of Marston when defending the public library's book stocking policies. "The Editor of this journal [...] misses the whole point of public library service," he snapped, adding, "It is not what he wants the public to read, nor does it matter one iota what we librarians want the public to read [...] what they require must be the factor determining the issues."⁵⁶ Gower understood that librarians were the "servants of the public," and claimed, "I would wish no higher office." His concluding remarks expressed his position most clearly,

“Pleasure in reading is the true function of all books.”

Marston remained resolute. In September 1932 he reiterated his and the paper’s standpoint, claiming that its views were “officially supported” by the Publishers’ Association and the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland.⁵⁷ The following month, he took up the issue again, writing that rather than “directing, influencing or leading the public taste in reading towards books of an educational and uplifting character,” the public library was “in danger of becoming mechanized, a mere soulless organization engaged in the squirrel-cage routine of exchanging one novel for another.”⁵⁸ Many trade personnel, predictably drawn from outside the public library service, were similarly unyielding when debating its fiction stocking practices. In fact, the Cowles/Marston debate created a flood of letters defending Marston’s stance, and the debate over library policy rumbled on throughout much of the period, with exchanges made between those individuals who supported Marston’s views and those who were sympathetic to Cowles’s stance.⁵⁹ Marston regularly shored up his defense by reproducing supporting arguments. In 1934 he published a summary of a report of the Libraries Committee of the City of Westminster that signaled a clear policy shift by calling for public libraries to be “relieved of their obligation to cater for this particular taste of a portion of their readers [who prefer] low cultural equipment,” so that they were “enabled to augment the provision of books of a higher class, of a greater claim to cultural or educational value.”⁶⁰

Of course, as editor of the paper Marston had control of what was included within its pages. However, the sheer number of letters and opinion pieces that featured in it that criticized the inclusion of fiction in public libraries, as well as the public’s appetite for it, illustrates an unmistakable determination among publishing trade personnel to make their views known regarding the libraries’ current stocking practices. Cowles also appears to have been singled out

as a figure for derision. Marston frequently reprinted Cowles's articles, and there was never a shortage of negative responses to them. In fact, in 1938, half a decade on from the height of the debate on library policy, Marston chose to publish a lengthy article written by Cowles that once again focused on the continuing condemnation of the public library service and the public's preference for 'light' reading. Rounding on his detractors, Cowles defended stocking 'light' fiction as "a mental opiate or a mental tonic," and stressed that both were "badly needed in these days when so many of us have to live upon our nerves."⁶¹ He poured scorn on "highbrow critics" who, he argued, had yet to make "any sane and reasonable argument against the circulation of fiction by public libraries," and while he agreed that "a library should be the cultural centre of the district it serves," he believed that "before it can become that, it must attract to itself all classes and conditions of readers." These views were roundly condemned.

The many disapproving responses to this piece demonstrate that Marston's outlook on the public library's stocking practices, and indeed, the position of the majority of those contributing to the paper, had remained equally unchanged. Issues pertaining to class and reading remained central to the debate. As Eric R. Stone, librarian at Fulham's Central Library noted:

I can see no reason why an institution whose function is primarily educational should endeavour, to the detriment of its own foremost obligations, to enter into vain competition with the cinema and twopenny libraries as a peddler of mental opiates [...] I cannot agree [...] that they should cater for the complete lack of taste reflected in 'A mystery and a love story please'. Let us remember that as librarians, it is our duty not to tamely accept and cater for lack of taste, but to rectify so sad a condition as speedily as

we may.⁶²

Stone's remarks illustrate that the strength of feeling against both the policy of including fiction in the country's public libraries, and the continuing popularity of that type of material among the reading public, remained extremely static throughout much of the period. Indeed, it was only at the start of the Second World War when letters appeared that illustrated a more tolerant stance. Presumably, the stresses of the conflict had caused a slight change of heart, for many contributors now championed the stocking of 'light' fiction in public libraries, and agreed that reading such material offered the public an ideal form of escape from it. Cowles, always the opportunist, took this chance to promote his support of the policy again, observing in October 1939, "quantities of cheap fiction will be required [...] The soldier will carry a book in his kit-bag, the civilian will keep books for his fireside [...] We are a nation of readers, and the war is only going to increase the demand for books."⁶³ For once, Cowles's comments were widely supported, with Frank A. King writing in agreement a few weeks later, "Escape books are needed [...] [a public] agitated by depressing home conditions will want to find a means of escape into the realms of gold."⁶⁴ These sentiments were echoed by local librarians across the country. In Portsmouth, an editorial in the library service's in-house magazine *The Portsmouth Reader* noted that the war had caused a "swing over to light reading."⁶⁵ Rather than view this as a "matter for regret," however, it was now seen as a matter of "sound commonsense." In Derby, meanwhile, library officials called for the town's public libraries to be kept open because they served "two useful purposes" in wartime: "the collection and dissemination of information, and the maintenance of the morale of the public by preserving recreation and educational facilities."⁶⁶ Again, no-one criticised the championing of the use of the service for

its recreational benefits, and while the public library's educational and instructional remits were still heavily promoted, the changing consensus regarding the stocking of fiction undoubtedly reveals that a policy shift took place in wartime.⁶⁷

The twopenny library revolution

While these debates, as well as the editorial comments in Portsmouth's in-house magazine that opened this article, suggest that working-class readers had begun to visit public libraries in greater numbers as the twentieth century progressed, it was another type of institution that did far more to encourage the working-class reading habit: the 'twopenny' library.⁶⁸ Indeed, by frequenting this type of library in ever-increasing numbers across the period, the working classes expressed a strong resistance to the preaching of trade personnel regarding their novel reading habits. The first of these libraries, which required no deposit and charged for each book borrowed, was opened by Ray Smith in Harlseden, London in 1930, and was patronized mainly by factory workers.⁶⁹ So popular did this type of establishment become with the working classes that, only three years later, one contributor to *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record* claimed they could "be found everywhere."⁷⁰ This trend was confirmed in 1938 when E.J. Olson, the secretary of the Commercial Libraries' Association, noted: "In practically every town in England there is now a well run commercial library."⁷¹ The first commercial lending libraries had been introduced in the mid-nineteenth century – W.H. Smith opened its first book-stall in 1848 – but it was only when the twopenny library emerged, liberated from the 'improvement' ethos and thus stocking a wide range of light fiction titles, that working-class readers felt encouraged to use commercial lending libraries in any significant numbers. In fact, the phenomenal growth of this new generation of libraries in

attracting working-class readers led the established commercial lending libraries to re-organize their library departments in an attempt to appeal to, what one of their officials termed, “the ‘Edgar Wallace type’ of reader.”⁷² Despite their efforts to attract working-class readers, the majority of people in that social group remained reluctant to use the established lending libraries. As the chief librarian of the Boots’ Booklovers Library somewhat condescendingly noted in 1935, working-class readers “would hesitate to enter one of the better-class bookshops or libraries because they would feel mentally and socially ill-at-ease in its unaccustomed atmosphere.”⁷³ While these comments are rather distasteful, they do illustrate again that where different classes of reader obtained their reading material mattered a great deal to them, and that the expectations of perceived class behaviors continued to hold sway.

The established lending libraries, such as Boots, Mudies and W.H. Smith’s, served a lower middle-class clientele – the people of ‘Surburbia’ mentioned at the start of this article; the new lending libraries aimed to appeal to those social groups further down the social scale. Some twopenny libraries were standalone concerns, but the majority of them were run alongside existing businesses, such as newsagents and corner shops, so one of their main attractions was that they offered working-class readers a comfortable and accommodating atmosphere in which to browse for reading material. Twopenny library owners, comfortable with their type of clientele, paid much attention to working-class mores, not only taking care of their library’s appearance and the choice of books inside them, but also ensuring that the manner of their staff was appropriate. As Ronald F. Batty advised in his 1938 guidebook *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, “[w]hatever you do don’t thrust your opinions down customers’ throats.”⁷⁴ This was a far cry from the rigid, often condescending, opinions of some public librarians towards their lower-class patrons. Indeed, Batty recommended that potential book-

shop owners “[e]stablish contact with customers, remember their particular likes and dislikes, [and] take a real interest in giving them personal attention on every possible occasion.”⁷⁵ As a businessman, Batty was obviously keen to highlight the financial benefits of adding a library to an existing shop.⁷⁶ However, he was also clearly aware of the cultural role that reading played. “Books mean comfort, leisure, ease,” he remarked, “they call to mind the favourite chair, the favourite pipe and an hour before bedtime.”⁷⁷ Fostering the right environment in which to borrow books was thus the way to make customers feel at home in these new lending libraries.⁷⁸ Once again, this is far removed from the policy of public librarians who had, until the introduction of the ‘open access’ system in the 1920s, cultivated an atmosphere that effectively discouraged lower-class readers from visiting them. In fact, so deep-rooted was the working-classes’ unease in using the public library service that many remained reluctant to use them in the period under discussion here.⁷⁹

It was, therefore, by paying such close attention to their customers’ needs that the new lending libraries became important social hubs within working-class communities. Mass-Observation’s research into society’s reading habits revealed that the principal reason given for the twopenny library’s popularity among working-class respondents was that they were identified as “much more of a social centre than any other type” of lending library.⁸⁰ As one Mass-Observation noted, while books were chosen relatively quickly (the average time taken was reported as five minutes), many working-class women spent a significant amount of time in conversation with fellow library users and assistants.⁸¹ Working-class men, too, often used their time in the local twopenny library for more than borrowing books. One unskilled worker, for example, asked a Mass-Observation (ostensibly suspecting them of being a figure of authority): “It’s all right, is it? I sometimes have a bit of fun in there.”⁸² As Melanie Tebbutt

has noted in her work on women's 'gossip' in working-class neighborhoods, shopkeepers "were frequently at the apex of the communications networks," and including a lending library in a shop only helped to increase the opportunity for these networks to flourish.⁸³ Indeed, so close was the relationship between some twopenny library owners and their patrons, that more than their customers' reading habits were revealed. The owner of one twopenny library, for example, wrote poignantly of his female patrons' unfulfilled desires, his fears for their safety, and, more comically, his concerns about unreturned stock:

To have a book returned with a rasher of bacon (in these days, too!), apparently used as a book-mark, is an experience which compensates for many books which return not at all. So, too, when a child of ten informs you that her 'muvver' wants a 'murder', you smile a little grimly as you recall that the lady's husband, if what you hear is true, may well supply the reality long before you receive back the transcript [...] Young married mothers, seeking in [Ethel M.] Dell what one fears sometimes they have missed in matrimony, present a problem, so voracious is their appetites, so limited one's stock of the food they demand.⁸⁴

Twopenny libraries were thus much more than simply somewhere to borrow books; they were highly popular social centres as well. Pearl Jephcott's investigations into the reading habits of 'ordinary' girls in the mid-1940s identified these very attributes as helping to make this type of library the first stop for many working-class readers.⁸⁵ She also found that they were advantageously situated and, most importantly, open at convenient hours, unlike many

public libraries.⁸⁶ Mass-Observation's research uncovered similar benefits for working-class readers, with one Mass-Observation noting that Ray Smith's Harlesden library was still open when the majority of working-class people finished work (and when public libraries were closed), and declared: "It is here that the 2d. library fulfils its function."⁸⁷ It was thus the twopenny library's accessibility (of both location and opening hours), vivid appearance, and pleasing ambience that were the main attractions for working-class readers. As such, they offered benefits that neither those people running public libraries, nor even the larger commercial lending libraries, could claim to offer completely due to their desire to distance themselves from the 'crass' tastes of many lower-class readers.⁸⁸ Therefore, while the working classes certainly used public libraries, they generally preferred to borrow books from the more homely twopenny libraries. Indeed, as mentioned, for many working-class readers the public library remained a formidable place to visit. Jephcott thus noted that while the girls she observed used public libraries as well as twopenny libraries, they regarded the former as "merely a supplement, and an inferior one at that."⁸⁹ The majority of those questioned by Mass-Observation similarly preferred to borrow material from the twopenny library ("the library round the corner"⁹⁰) rather than the public library; in particular working-class men, who, Mass-Observation reported, felt ill-at-ease in public libraries because of their formalized protocol.⁹¹

If the working classes' use of the public library service caused disquiet among some members of the publishing trade, it is perhaps predictable to find that the phenomenal increase in the number of twopenny libraries caused an even greater unease. Contributors to the trade press criticised both the libraries and the working classes' appreciation of them, with many commentators perceiving them to be a growing 'menace'. The condemnation of twopenny

libraries was based upon a number of factors. Financial imperatives were one of them. With book borrowing increasing, trade personnel feared a reduction in the number of readers actually buying books. One letter writer thus contemptuously described the twopenny library as a “canker” threatening the “legitimate” bookseller, conveniently ignoring the fact that the main patrons of this new type of library rarely purchased books anyway.⁹² Indeed, as Hilliard has rightly noted, booksellers and twopenny libraries “catered to discrete markets.”⁹³ The twopenny library owner’s ability to circumvent trade legislation was also criticised, with E. Walton Marston considering the libraries “unfair competition” because they were “exempted from the provisos of the Shops Acts in the matter of hours of business.”⁹⁴ Public librarians were also critical of the competition the twopenny libraries posed to their services. In Derby, for example, the decrease in book borrowing in the town’s public libraries from the mid-1930s onwards, while arguably influenced by their policy shift in book stocking practices, was blamed partially on the increase in twopenny libraries in the area.⁹⁵ As a consequence, schemes were mooted on how best to regulate the twopenny library’s activities and simultaneously reduce the bond between them and the mass reading public.⁹⁶

The main factor driving the debate against twopenny libraries, however, was related to the class of reader using them and the type of fiction they read. In 1932, W.J. Magenis complained that, “[t]he poorer classes in the suburbs, country town, villages and hamlets get their reading either for nothing or for the minimum cost of 2d a week. They are not too particular as to what they read so long as the book is interesting.”⁹⁷ Elaborating on this the following year, and echoing Leavis’s remarks, Magenis observed that the most popular novels were those “which required no introspective effort to read.”⁹⁸ The working-class’s principal desire, Magenis scoffed, was to read “books that ‘got off the mark at once’, like Wallace,

Oppenheim and Le Queux.” In 1934, one contributor to *The Bookseller* suggested that twopenny libraries offered “less than the best.”⁹⁹ Librarians and social observers likewise criticised the working classes’ attraction to twopenny libraries and the books they preferred to read. In 1934, a report of the Westminster Libraries Committee declared that twopenny libraries supplied books that satisfied the demands of “readers of low cultural equipment.”¹⁰⁰ An independent library proprietor similarly stated in 1938 that twopenny library users “deal with a book not on its individual merits but as so many pages of mass dope.”¹⁰¹ In 1940, a Mass-Observation report similarly declared that the level of reading among the twopenny library’s patrons was “low,” stating that they “prefer books of the light sort, the kind that ‘one can put down and pick up without losing the thread of the story’.”¹⁰² In his wartime survey of York, meanwhile, Seebohm B. Rowntree noted that the town’s twopenny libraries provided “the books most in demand, quite regardless of whether they are worth reading or not. They cater largely for readers who want books which make little or no claim upon their minds.”¹⁰³

Such widespread views, predominantly aired by middle-class critics, reflected the general disdain felt towards the reading habits of the working classes. Twopenny libraries were viewed as encouraging the reading of fiction for entertainment only, with its educational or edifying qualities far from the minds of its readers. However, as with criticisms of the public library, anxiety over the reading material available in twopenny libraries began to ebb away as the Second World War progressed. As one Mass-Observation noted of twopenny library usage in wartime, “I still notice that they are reading light stuff mostly. It seems the average person wants something to distract.”¹⁰⁴ The tendency to read “light stuff” was thus still mentioned, of course, but with less condescension than previously. It was recognised that other concerns were now preoccupying people’s minds. Moreover, these same critics also believed that other

opportunities were beginning to reveal themselves. As a leading article in *The Bookseller* somewhat optimistically noted, “[w]ith cinemas and theatres closed, with sports meetings cancelled and other recreational outlets unavailable, with the wireless programmes consisting largely of news bulletins and official announcements, it is to books that men and women will turn for recreation and solace.”¹⁰⁵ No mention was made as to where these books should be obtained. For once, for members of the publishing trade at least, from where those men and women obtained their reading material appeared to matter less, and what they chose to borrow while they were there, mattered a great deal less too.

The Second World War thus caused the attitudes of some people in the publishing and book lending trades to soften towards the working class’s book reading habits. The use of public libraries to borrow fiction, and indeed the role of the twopenny library in providing the same, failed to initiate the same level of debate it has exercised over the previous decade. However, as the opening anecdote of this article reveals, for those people choosing what to read, where to go to obtain their reading material still mattered, and it was the perceived behaviors of their social class that drove their decisions. The working classes may have been using public libraries in greater numbers, but the more homely surroundings of the twopenny library enticed them more. While the middle classes may have been expected to be the most avid visitors of the civic institution, for some members of that social group the public library’s association with working-class facilities was enough to discourage them from entering their austere surroundings. In fact, the manner in which discussions of the public library’s uses by working-class readers advanced as the twentieth century progressed, exacerbated as they were by the highly caustic debates regarding the types of fiction available in them, ensured that these long-standing prejudices remained in place well into the twentieth century. Literature may have

acknowledged no boundaries (although this article has intimated that this claim in itself is debatable), but different classes of consumer certainly did acknowledge them.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of the reading habit among the masses during the early-mid twentieth century caused much consternation for British society's cultural elites. Who was the reading public? What were they were reading? From where did they obtain their reading material? These were the questions that circulated right through the period under investigation. Even during the Second World War, when previously fixed attitudes towards reading for entertainment only were loosening, anxieties remained about who was frequenting public libraries and for what purpose. Those individuals running these civic institutions, while fully aware of the educational role of reading, were willing to accede that some form of light entertainment was necessary in times of stress. While this suggests an element of flexibility within the civic establishment regarding their book stocking practices, the increase in borrowers from the lower social classes caused consternation among those further up the social scale. The popularizing of public libraries seems to have initiated a strong reaction among some sections of British society, who no longer wanted to be associated with the free library service because it conjured up negative connotations for their social group.

Meanwhile, the mutual improvement ethos so central to public library provision in the nineteenth century continued to hold sway in the twentieth, particularly when larger numbers of the working classes were choosing to turn to the written word for entertainment and relaxation. Time and again, discussions took place to ensure that only the 'right' types of fiction were available to them, resulting in some public librarians advocating a shift in their fiction stocking

practices to reduce the quantity of 'light' fiction on the shelves. Nonetheless, the majority of books stocked and borrowed were fiction titles. While working-class readers did visit public libraries in ever-growing numbers, demonstrating a resistance towards the 'improvement' ethos, many still felt uneasy about using them, preferring instead to frequent the more homely domain of the twopenny library. Despite some evidence of a blurring in people's reading habits taking place, then, it is clear that class remained central in shaping British society's reading habits, both in what books were selected and in the different classes' lending practices. Middle- and working-class literary tastes may have begun to overlap, as Hilliard has claimed, with working-class twopenny library users borrowing 'middlebrow' fiction such as A.J. Cronin's *The Citadel* and J.B. Priestley's *The Good Companions* (largely buoyed, in fact, by the popularity of the film adaptations of them) but attitudes towards class and leisure remained largely static.¹⁰⁶

While McKibbin *et al* have demonstrated the pervasive effect of class on popular reading patterns, the ways in which this was shaped by people working in the publishing and book lending trades has been underplayed. However, as this article has shown, it was the many discussions about the tastes of Britain's reading public, constant and oftentimes highly rancorous, that did most to influence people's perceptions of what books should be read and from where they should obtain their reading material. In calling for the people of 'Suburbia' to return to the town's public libraries, the editor of *The Portsmouth Reader* overlooked the fact that it was people of his kind who had, by derogating the types of fiction most popular in their libraries as well as the people who borrowed it, driven them away in the first place. Booksellers and librarians, both public and commercial, may have been catering for "discrete markets," as Hilliard rightly notes, but those markets were routinely influenced by other external factors;

factors that were most clearly delineated by class distinction. Expectations of perceived class behaviors thus continued to shape British society's reading and book borrowing habits well into the twentieth century, revealing that even during the Second World War, a period when social divisions were purportedly blurring, class remained central to people's appreciation of, and involvement in, leisure activities.

Endnotes

¹ Editorial, *The Portsmouth Reader: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Interests of Book Lovers and Museum Visitors*, vol. 6, no. 2, April 1943, 15. Local History Department, Norris Central Library, Portsmouth, UK.

² For a discussion of civic elites' greater control of cultural institutions at the turn of the twentieth century see, H.E. Mellor, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London, 1976), 65-71.

³ For discussions on the war and class levelling see Richard Titmuss, *History of the Second World War: Problems of Social Policy* (London, 1950) and Arthur Marwick, *The Home Front* (London, 1976). For discussions of the continuation of divisions see Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991); Donald Thomas, *An Underworld at War: Spivs, Deserters, Racketeers and Civilians in the Second World War* (London, 2003); M.J. Trow, *War Crimes: Underworld Britain in the Second World War* (Barnsley, 2008); and Stuart Hylton, *Careless Talk: The Hidden History of the Home Front 1939-1945* (London, 2010).

⁴ The 'open access' system was introduced during the 1920s, and allowed greater accessibility to the books on the shelves. Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992), 48-49.

⁵ Kristin Ewins, "'Revolutionizing a mode of life': Leftist Middlebrow Fiction by Women in the 1930s', *ELH*, 82 (2015): 251-279; Christopher Hilliard, 'The Twopenny Library: The Book Trade, Working-Class Readers, and "Middlebrow" Novels in Britain, 1930-42', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 (2014): 199-220. Hilliard proposes that the rise in twopenny libraries in the 1930s ensured that working-class readers were attracted to the writing of 'middlebrow' authors, such as A.J. Cronin and J.B. Priestley.

⁶ Ewins, "'Revolutionizing a mode of life'", 252. See also Alexandra Lawrie, "'The Appreciative Understanding of Good Books': The *Listener*, Literary Advice and the 1930s Reader', *Literature and History*, 24 (2015): 38-52; 42; Lise Jaillant, *Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon: The Modern Library Series, 1917-1955* (London, 2014); Martin Hipsky, *Modernism and the Women's Popular Romance in Britain, 1885-1925* (Athens, 2011); and Kate Macdonald (ed.), *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr. Miniver Read* (Basingstoke and New York, 2011).

⁷ Hilliard acknowledges that behaviours associated with reading, such as book selection and lending, varied from class to class, but claims that the small overlap in the books that the different classes were reading mattered in itself. Hilliard, 'Twopenny Library'.

⁸ For concerns over cinema-going in Britain see Dean Rapp, 'Sex in the Cinema: War, Moral Panic, and the British Film Industry, 1906-1918', *Albion*, 34 (2002): 422-451; Sarah Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship: From Dracula to Dead End* (London, 2005); Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester, 2010); Simon Brown, 'Censorship Under Siege: The BBFC in the Silent Era', in Edward Lamberti (ed.), *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC: Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age* (London, 2012): 3-15; Robert James, "'The People's Amusement': Cinemagoing and the BBFC, 1928-1948', in *ibid.*: 16-27.

⁹ Caroline Sumpter has traced concerns about popular reading habits back to the introduction of the ‘cheap’ press and its association with urban readers. See ‘The Cheap Press and the “Reading Crowd”: Visualizing Mass Culture and Modernity, 1838-1910’, *Media History*, 12 (2006): 233-252.

¹⁰ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), 527.

¹¹ Brett Bebbler, ‘Introduction: Contextualising Leisure History’, in Brett Bebbler (ed.), *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 2012): 1-10; 2. See also Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty. Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester: 1900-1939* (Milton Keynes, 1992); Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005); James, *Popular Culture*; Christine Grandy, *Heroes and Happy Endings: Class, Gender, and Nation in Popular Film and Fiction in Interwar Britain* (Manchester, 2014).

¹² McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 516. See also David Altick, *The English Common Reader; A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (London, 1967 [first edition 1957]); Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-50; A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (Middlesex, 1974 [first edition 1963]); McAleer, *Popular Reading*; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2001); Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London, 1975); David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989); R.K. Webb, *The British Working-Class Reader 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (London, 1955); Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives; Popular Reading: Popular Writing* (London, 1983).

¹³ This article thus fits into James Curran’s ‘populist narrative’, identifying the consumption of goods as a cultural phenomenon that allows consumers to express a ‘sense of individual identity, social connection and community’, thus helping to ‘empower’ them and ‘render the producer responsive to popular demand’. See ‘Media and the Making of British Society, c. 1700-2000’, *Media History*, 8 (2002): 135-154; 140.

¹⁴ Jon Lawrence has argued that class divisions shifted in this period due to a growth in the number of affluent young people eschewing traditional leisure participation for greater domestic comforts. See ‘Class, “Affluence” and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c. 1930-64’, *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2015): 273-299.

¹⁵ See *The Bookseller* and *The Publishers’ Circular* (from 1931 *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*) for evidence of this increase. As McAleer notes, both periodicals provide evidence of the growth in production of reading matter during this period. Whilst this growth in production cannot be seen as evidence of sales also, McAleer is right to point out that it is indicative of the growth of the reading habit because publishers, being one part of a reciprocal relationship, were clearly responding to an increased demand for their products. McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 44-46.

¹⁶ Bebbler, ‘Introduction’, p. 4. See also McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 53-54 and Xiaotian Jin, ‘Battle of Femininity: Romantic Heroines and Modern Sexuality in the Interwar Middlebrow Women’s Novel’, *Women’s History Review*, 24 (2015): 252-270.

¹⁷ Advert by Ernest Benn Ltd, *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 24 October 1931

¹⁸ See B.H. Clough, ‘The “untilled field” again’, *The Publishers’ Circular*, 3 May 1930, 559. Another author noted that the publisher ‘now elaborately prepares the ground for any new book, plans a campaign for it, advertises much more largely, and vies with his competitors in the use of every legitimate means of publicity’. Frank Swinnerton, ‘Authorship’, in John Hampden (ed.), *The Book World; A New Survey* (London, 1935): 12-35. See also Ronald F. Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library* (London, 1938), 52. Batty, a twopenny library owner, knew the benefits of these methods of advertising for book-shop owners, stating, ‘half-pages in the local paper and slides on the cinema screen twice daily will prove advantageous’; 14. D.C. Thomson’s *Red Star Weekly* regularly contained a section promoting novels that its readers were ‘sure to enjoy’. See, for example, *Red Star Weekly*, 25 January 1930, 33, in which Joan Daniel’s *Two in a Tangle*, and Dorothy Vane’s *The Satin Girl* were featured as ‘Novels You are Sure to Enjoy’.

¹⁹ In 1931, A.C. Hannay stressed the ‘importance of colour as a factor in getting sales,’ and pointed out that books ‘always now emerge from the publishers attired in a gay, brightly-coloured jacket’. A.C. Hannay, ‘Colour in the bookshop’, *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 9 January 1931, 51.

²⁰ Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 38.

²¹ ‘Books are a commodity’, *The Publishers’ Circular*, 11 October 1930, 513.

²² ‘Books as commodities’, *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record*, 22 April 1933, 395. The trade paper changed its name to *The Publishers’ Circular and Booksellers’ Record* in January 1931.

²³ Swinnerton, ‘Authorship’, 34.

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- ²⁴ Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 1932), 17.
- ²⁵ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, 27.
- ²⁶ *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 1 October 1932, 362.
- ²⁷ W.J. Magenis, 'Is book buying declining?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 10 August 1932, 206.
- ²⁸ Edward Green, 'Has reading really improved?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 3 June 1933, 605.
- ²⁹ 'Sir James Marchant on the grave danger of literature', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 29 October 1938, 632.
- ³⁰ Letter from Samuel J. Looker, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 22 February 1936, 260.
- ³¹ Palmer, 'Are Too Many Books Published?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 26 August 1933, 213.
- ³² A.J. Jenkinson, *What Do Boys and Girls Read? An investigation into reading habits with some suggestions about the teaching of literature in secondary and senior schools* (London, 1940), 7-9.
- ³³ Mass-Observation Archive (hereafter M-OA), File Report 48: 'Selection and Taste in Book Reading (Fulham)', March 1940.
- ³⁴ Pearl Jephcott, *Rising Twenty: Notes on Ordinary Girls* (London, 1948), 113.
- ³⁵ M-OA, Topic Collection: Reading Habits, 4/D, ('"Tupenny") 2d Libraries', June 1942.
- ³⁶ R. Rose Price, 'Factory libraries and the choice of books', *Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 21 January 1939, 112-113.
- ³⁷ See David Vincent, 'Reading in the Working-Class Home, in J.K. Walton and J. Walvin (eds), *Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939*, (Manchester, 1983): 207-226; 213. See also Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London, 2001), 58-59.
- ³⁸ Vincent, 'Reading', 213.
- ³⁹ Alistair Black, *The Public Library in Britain, 1914-2000* (London, 2000), 54-56.
- ⁴⁰ 'Fifty Years of Service – 1905-1955: Golden Jubilee of the Opening of the Central Library 2nd December 1905', 8. Storage Box: 1905-1991, Peterborough Public Library Archive, Peterborough.
- ⁴¹ Storage Box: 1905-1991, Peterborough Public Library Archive, Peterborough.
- ⁴² Storage Box: 1905-1991. See folder 1880-1905, newspaper article (n.d.).
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ The accession lists were reproduced in the aforementioned quarterly in-house magazine *The Portsmouth Reader*. For the a list of popular authors and fiction titles in twopenny libraries see Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*; T.E. Callender, 'The Twopenny Library', *Library Association Record*, March 1933; and Garfield Howe, 'What the Public Likes', *The Bookseller*, 19 June 1935.
- ⁴⁵ See City of Portsmouth Forty-Sixth Annual Report on the Public Libraries and Museums, 1929-1930.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ Nowell, 'The Public Library', 188.
- ⁴⁸ Baker is cited in Black, *Public Library in Britain*, 59-60.
- ⁴⁹ Jast is cited in Black, *Public Library in Britain*, 65.
- ⁵⁰ The service boasted that while in England 75 per cent of books borrowed were works of fiction, in Peterborough 'it does not reach 70 per cent'. Storage box – 1905-1991. Peterborough Public Library Serice Archive, Peterborough.
- ⁵¹ Reported in the *Derbyshire Advertiser*, 19 August 1932, 8.
- ⁵² Cowles, 'What is the function of the public library?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 18 April 1931, 466.
- ⁵³ Cowles, 'What is the function of the public library?', 466.
- ⁵⁴ Response to Cowles, 'What is the function of the public library?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 18 April 1931, 466.
- ⁵⁵ L.C. Jackson, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 25 April 1931, 494-495.
- ⁵⁶ Arthur E. Gower, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 26 March 1932, 327.
- ⁵⁷ Editorial, 'Our Views Officially Supported', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 24 September 1932, 299-300
- ⁵⁸ Editorial, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 1 October 1932, 362.

- ⁵⁹ See, for example, letter from Lionel W. Jones, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 27 June 1931, p. 785. See also 'Borrowing versus buying, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 29 August 1931, 233.
- ⁶⁰ 'Public library versus twopenny library', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 17 February 1934, 229.
- ⁶¹ Frederick J. Cowles, 'Public libraries and fiction', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 19 March 1938, 421-423. Cowles was responding to a series of letters that had appeared in editions of the paper over a three-week period.
- ⁶² Eric R. Stone, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 26 March 1938, 449. See also letter from Barbara R. Kyle, a Senior Assistant of Fulham Public Libraries.
- ⁶³ Frederick J. Cowles, 'Books in wartime', *The Publishers' Circular and the Booksellers' Record*, 28 October 1939, 426.
- ⁶⁴ Frank A. King, 'Readers want to escape from the war', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 9 December 1939, 571-572.
- ⁶⁵ Editorial, *The Portsmouth Reader*, vol. 4, no. 1, January 1940, 3.
- ⁶⁶ 'Library service in time of war', The Library Association, Derby Public Library Minutes, Derby Local Studies Centre, Derby.
- ⁶⁷ Library officials took the opportunity of promoting the service's educational and instructional uses by reminding borrowers of the great many 'technical' books stocked. These, it was argued, would be of great value to a public eager to help in the war effort. See, for example, the article 'Facing the Facts' in Portsmouth library service's in-house magazine *The Portsmouth Reader*, April 1940, 4.2, pp. 20-21.
- ⁶⁸ For a recent history of the importance of the twopenny library see Hilliard, 'Twopenny Library'.
- ⁶⁹ Ray Smith's library could be found at 72, Park Parade. Smith claimed to be the 'original founder' of the '2d.' library, MOA, Topic Collection 20/4/D. Ray Smith's real name was M.H. Millen. See Hilliard, 'Twopenny Library', 203.
- ⁷⁰ W.J. Magenis, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 3 June 1933, 607.
- ⁷¹ *The Bookseller*, 24 March 1938, 342.
- ⁷² Comments made by a W.H. Smith official. The established lending libraries reduced lending charges and abolished the deposit in an attempt to appeal to working-class readers. McAleer, *Popular Reading*, p. 50.
- ⁷³ F.R. Richardson, 'The Circulating Library', in John Hampden (ed.), *The Book World; A New Survey* (London, 1935): 195-202, 197.
- ⁷⁴ Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 14.
- ⁷⁵ Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 15. The manageress of Ray Smith's Harlesden branch also reported to a Mass-Observer that she responded quickly to her working-class customers demands. M-OA, Topic Collection 20/1/D.
- ⁷⁶ Batty believed that the addition of a lending library to a shop made sound commercial sense, arguing: 'It is amazing the difference a shelf or two of brightly-coloured books can make to a shop'. Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 11-12.
- ⁷⁷ Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 11-12.
- ⁷⁸ Batty, *How to Run a Twopenny Library*, 15.
- ⁷⁹ Mass-Observation's team of investigators found that working-class men were particularly averse to using public libraries. See James, *Popular Culture*, 30. See also Robert Roberts' and William Woodruff's accounts of frequenting public libraries in Salford and Blackburn respectively. *Ibid.*, 29-30.
- ⁸⁰ These conclusions were made by a team of M-O researchers investigating reading habits in the early-1940s. See M-OA, File Report 1332 'Books and the Public: a study of buying, borrowing, keeping, selecting, remembering, giving and reading books', July 1942.
- ⁸¹ M-OA, File Report 1332.
- ⁸² M-OA, Topic Collection 20/4/D, M.35.D. The researcher added: 'Presumably backchat with the young girl librarians.'
- ⁸³ Melanie Tebbutt, *Womens' Talk? A Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Aldershot, 1995), 64.
- ⁸⁴ E.J.M., 'Running a "No Deposit" Library', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 30 September 1933, 345.
- ⁸⁵ Pearl Jephcott, *Rising Twenty; Notes on Some Ordinary Girls* (London, 1948)
- ⁸⁶ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, p. 114.

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- ⁸⁷ M-OA, Topic Collection 20/4/D.
- ⁸⁸ Lawrie, 'Appreciative', 42.
- ⁸⁹ Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 112.
- ⁹⁰ M-OA, Topic Collection 20/3/A. The respondent cited was M.50.D.
- ⁹¹ M-OA, Topic Collection 20/3/A.
- ⁹² See letter from R. Borrás, *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 1 July 1933, 9.
- ⁹³ Hilliard, 'Twopenny Library', 13.
- ⁹⁴ E. Walton Marston, 'Twopenny libraries and the Shops Acts; regulation of hours proposed', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 10 August 1935, 219.
- ⁹⁵ Public Libraries, Museum and Art Gallery Sixty-Third Annual Report for year ending 31 March 1934, Country Borough of Derby, Derby Local Studies Centre, Derby, 3.
- ⁹⁶ See also 'A remedy for "no deposit"?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 17 February 1934, 226, and Frederick J. Cowles, 'A public librarian on the twopenny library', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 10 November 1934, 712.
- ⁹⁷ Magenis, 'Is book buying declining?', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 20 August 1932, 206.
- ⁹⁸ W.J. Magenis, 'Twopence a week: no deposit, no subscription', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 3 June 1933, 605-606.
- ⁹⁹ Gabbutt, 'Are lending libraries really a "menace"?', *The Bookseller*, 18 April 1934, 221. See also 'A book-borrowing campaign', *The Bookseller*, 18 March 1936, 267.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'Public library versus twopenny library', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 17 February 1934, 229.
- ¹⁰¹ 'Plight of the independent 2d libraries', *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 6 August 1938, 221.
- ¹⁰² M-OA, Topic Collection 20/4/D.
- ¹⁰³ Seebohm B. Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Survey of York* (London, 1941), 376.
- ¹⁰⁴ M-OA, File Report 48.
- ¹⁰⁵ 'Carry on, booksellers!', *The Bookseller*, 7 September 1939, 311.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cronin's *The Citadel* was adapted into a film in 1938 and featured in *Kinematograph Weekly*'s 'Box Office Winners' in March 1939. *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 January 1940, E1. Priestley's *The Good Companions* was released as a film in 1933 and featured in *Film Weekly*'s 'Principle picture successes' in the same year. *Film Weekly*, 29 December 1933, 4-5.