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**Alistair Black**. *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914.* London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996. vii + 353 pp. $100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7185-0015-3.

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This book, by Dr Alistair Black of the Department of Information Management at Leeds Metropolitan University (UK), was originally published in 1996 and is based on his 1989 Ph.D. from the University of North London entitled "The English public library as an agency for social stability, ca. 1850-1919." As a frequent writer and conference contributor on British public library history, particularly concerning its formative years, Dr. Black is particularly well suited to his subject matter. He is also currently Chair of the Library History Group of the Library Association (UK) and is joint editor of Volume Three of the Cambridge University Press *A History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* (forthcoming).

The book consists of 268 pages of text, divided into an introduction and eleven chapters. Six brief appendices provide some basic data extracted from a few library annual reports between 1876 and 1903 concerning the occupations of borrowers and what was borrowed. Included amongst the three pages of references to primary sources are the personal papers of prominent figures in the UK public library movement, various government select committee reports, institutional records from over thirty public library authorities in England, and other miscellaneous materials, such as photographs and newspaper cuttings. Secondary sources are not listed separately in a bibliography, as this would produce "an over-long and diffuse list" (p. 278). Instead, Black includes sixty-four pages of notes and references, together with a nine-page index. There is no illustrative material whatsoever.

Black's volume is an immensely valuable and challenging addition to the literature of British public library history, as is suggested by the books title, *A New History of the English Public Library.* In what sense is it new? In part the answer relates to Black's methodological quarrel with much of recent library historiography in the UK. Black claims this has often focused on describing public library developments, via detailed factual examinations of individual libraries, which cover the what, when, who and to some extent the how. But any in-depth analysis of the why of public library development as a whole has been left undone until now. It is mainly in this sense that Black's book, "an interpretation" (p. 4), is new, as it diverges from the characteristic methodology of past research and writing in the field (p. 16). It is also totally different from the only other all-inclusive monograph on British public library history, Thomas Kelly's "exhaustive though mostly descriptive" (p. 4) *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975.* If you want a chronological, linear based review of what took place between ca. 1850 and 1914 in the UK in respect of public libraries, this is most decidedly not the book for you. It is no revision of Kelly.

There is a second, related aspect of Black's claim to newness, and this concerns where he wishes to position his work. Black wants to move away from the closed, inward looking-world of much library history, which generally avoids making connections with the social, political, economic, and cultural world outside itself. By locating his study "in the field of cultural history," Black hopes to bring his history of the UK public library to a wider audience (p. 4). To accomplish this, he examines the public library from the perspective of certain intellectual and social contexts of the nineteenth century, intending to show how crucial these contexts were to public library development, just as to other aspects of contemporary life. At the end of Chapter One, in which he discusses his analytical model, he outlines the aim of his study as to establish "a theory of provision which can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to diverse early public library development" (p. 25).

Black is concerned with broader contextual issues, rather than the nuts and bolts of public library development, and in particular he concentrates on the intellectual or philosophical climate in which these libraries were established and subsequently developed. In his view it was utilitarianism, and especially its wish to promote economically useful institutions, which provided

the initial stimulus behind the moves during the 1830s and 1840s to establish public libraries in the UK. This drive culminated in the 1849 Select Committee and the enabling legislation of 1850. Later in the century, further impetus to public library growth was derived from the rise of idealism and its desire to support those institutions, such as public libraries, which would further the aesthetic, spiritual and cultural development of the individual and society. The dominance of idealist thinking during the last part of the nineteenth century in the UK is seen as the base for the enormous upsurge in public library openings during this period. >From 1850 to ca. 1880, considerably less than one hundred local authorities had taken advantage of the public libraries legislation; in the thirty years from 1880 that number rose at least three times. It is such a staggering growth, that looking for its powerhouse is worth attempting.

In Chapters Three through Five ("The Utilitarian Flywheel," "The Principal Pioneers: Ewart and Edwards," and "Culture, Materialism and the 1849 Select Committee") and in Chapter Seven ("The Idealist Flywheel"), Black thoroughly examines those tenets of utilitarianism and idealism which he considers directly related to the role, values, and functions of public libraries. But he does not only analyse the works of the major philosophers in these movements–such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, T.H.Green and Henry Jones–he also looks at the writings and activities of those prominently involved in the practical promotion of public libraries, individuals such as William Ewart, Edward Edwards and Samuel Barnett. Furthermore, especially for the later nineteenth century, Black provides numerous examples from speeches, newspaper articles and other documents, in which individual librarians, local authority representatives, and public library supporters use the language of idealism. These examples underpin his central argument, linking an intellectual climate with real bricks and mortar development.

As well as this major review of the two philosophies and public library development, Black examines other aspects of the "utilitarian-idealist, material-aesthetic dichotomy" (p. 6), which forms the crux of his analytical model. Chapter Five, "Economic Concerns: Useful Knowledge and Political Economy," investigates the connections between public libraries and economic advance, whilst Chapter Eight, "Cultural Concerns: In Search of an Assertive Middle Class," discusses themes such as social control and the emergence of a middle-class consciousness. He also uses this dichotomy in the last two main chapters, one on contemporary librarians and the second on the built environment of the library. Chapter Nine examines the social engagement and effectiveness of those librarians "at the coal-face of cultural dissemination" (p. 193), and finishes with a Foucauldian analysis of "public librarianship as a controlling discourse" (p. 220). Chapter Ten discusses how examining library buildings, both internally and externally, fixes them to the society that produced them, concluding that such an examination of library architecture lends weight to the idea of the public library as "an agency encouraging social stability" (p. 254).

All in all, Black has produced a very dense, wide-ranging and painstakingly researched history of public library development in England between the 1830s and 1914. However, in his attempt to produce a working model of this provision over such a long period of time and by concentrating on the intellectual context in particular, he has raised a number of major questions. But maybe that is part and parcel of producing a challenging new history. I am unable to comment on Black's analyses of utilitarianism and idealism, although he does show convincingly that specific goals within these philosophies do coincide with the roles, values and functions ascribed to public libraries in the UK. This coming together is frequently revealed in the contemporary language used in describing those roles, values and functions. They may use a common language, but how does that help assess the nature and strength of any linkage? As Black asks, "do esoteric philosophies precipitate social change or follow and reflect on it?" (pp. 5-6). A cautionary note is also evident when he talks of creating "a model of provision which can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent to diverse early public library development" (p. 25).

The link between "esoteric" philosophy and action on the ground is far easier to make for utilitarianism. Black persuasively parades William Ewarts utilitarian credentials, and as Ewart was the man behind the 1849 Select Committee on Public Libraries who successfully piloted the subsequent legislation through the Commons the following year, it is not hard to see how the intellectual context had shaped events. However, even here I am doubtful of the genuine power of the intellectual context. If it was so strong, and if the model of provision that Black is putting forward is to work, then why did so few authorities actually adopt the enabling legislation over the next thirty years? Could it be that there were other, far more mundane reasons why individual localities did or did not develop public libraries, regardless of the intellectual environment around them?

When we reach idealism I find the dynamic influence of the intellectual context far less obvious. Admittedly

Black has found statements from various individuals associated with the practical goals of idealism, and these statements do link the philosophy to the value of developing libraries. But the influence of these individuals on public library development can hardly be bracketed with that of their utilitarian counterparts, Ewart and Edward Edwards. Moreover, there is nothing in the writings of the two idealist philosophers discussed by Black, namely Thomas Green and Henry Jones, which specifically relates to libraries. When Green became a town councillor in Oxford in 1876, the town already had a public library, but Black provides no evidence that Green saw public libraries in general as an element of the self-realisation through education that he advocated. Perhaps, in contradistinction to utilitarianism, idealist thinking had more of an indirect influence. This would appear to be Blacks position.

In a crucial section of Chapter Seven, Black claims that idealist thought "was clearly represented in the development of the public library before 1914" (p. 157). Yet as he immediately admits "the contemporary literature of the public library provides little evidence that idealist philosophy was widely read by the institutions protagonists." He continues by conceding that "there is even less evidence that the material which was read proved directly influential." But he points to the significance of the "utterances of public library protagonists, which bore a remarkable resemblance to the language of idealism." Building a workable model of public library provision in the UK in the later part of the nineteenth century on the basis of an indirect influence as revealed through language use is akin to skating on thin ice. In respect of the language used, would it be unreasonable to ask: "well, what other language would they have used, other than that of the dominant contemporary philosophy?"

It is also worthwhile considering where these utterances pointing to the influence of idealism were made. Many for instance come from public library opening ceremonies as reported in local newspapers or professional journals. Such events were both celebratory and self-congratulatory (and were positively reported in the newspapers and journals), and my own experience of reading such reports normally makes me take what is said at them with a large pinch of salt. I do not know how often I have read in such reports that this or that library was the "best," "finest," "biggest" example in the area, when clearly it was not. What is also interesting is that the language used at contemporary opening ceremonies of miners' institute libraries in South Wales was similarly "infected" with idealism. Was it perhaps the case that the contemporary language of utilitarianism or idealism was used when opening any library aimed at the "common reader"? The precise shape of the library provision was of secondary importance. Utilitarianism certainly pervades the verbal atmosphere when Mechanics Institutes were being established in the 1820s and 1830s. By the time idealism was at its height, the public library was simply one of the most appropriate ways of fulfilling the idealist goal of disseminating culture. The fact that it was a free or public library was not quintessentially relevant.

An opening ceremony invites the use of a certain style and level of language to justify what had taken place, a language which those called upon to speak would use quite naturally. But using such language does not necessarily point to a profound influence. Justifying a public library in a public speech might include highlighting the economic advantages for an individual in using the library (utilitarianism), or underlining the wider cultural benefits for society of using libraries (idealism). However, because other justifications were not given at these particular events does not mean that far more mundane and practical influences were not at play and were not equally, if not more important. Only a brave (or foolhardy) man is likely to admit at the grand opening of the local public library that the sole reason for having the new institution was Andrew Carnegie's money. Or that for reasons of civic pride (and to save their embarrassment) they had to keep up with the next town down the road, which had opened its library last year. These influences may be hard to unearth in ceremonial reports, but they do appear elsewhere in local newspapers during the period preceding the adoption of the acts and the subsequent glittering opening. I was intrigued recently to note that in the rural Welsh county of Merionethshire, eight separate very small towns and country parishes adopted the Public Library Acts between 1892 and 1899. Was this the indirect influence of idealism or a case of literally keeping up with the Joneses?

Black suggests that "it is no coincidence, perhaps, that the heyday of idealism, between 1880 and 1920, was the very period when the public library experienced its most substantial expansion" (p. 157). Perhaps, but perhaps it was. After all, there are other motivating reasons, which either singly or in combination could also help explain this rapid expansion. Firstly, there was the changing financial situation. Benefactors, especially Carnegie (who began bankrolling the UK public library movement in 1879, but not in earnest in England until 1899) played major roles in overcoming the reluctance of many authorities to spend ratepayers' money. Moreover, by the end of the century there were generally more ratepayers,

which meant larger rate income. Again this would militate against the non-adoption plea of financial poverty. But there are other possible reasons that need more careful investigation.

By the 1880s the fears voiced by some of the original opponents of public libraries that as unknown quantities aimed at the working class they could become hot-beds of revolution had not been borne out. On the contrary, a certain aura of familiarity now surrounded the institution, such that any locality would have few political anxieties in opening a public library. When the public library advocate, Sir John Lubbock, spoke during the unsuccessful campaign to have the Acts adopted in Tunbridge Wells in 1888, he even suggested that a public library would help prevent the spread of socialism in the town. Further on the political front, did the changes in the procedures required to adopt the Acts have any discernible effect on development? Essentially these changes moved the decision away from a democratic but probably more volatile process which involved polling the local electorate to a bureaucratic decision taken by elected representatives. In Tunbridge Wells, for instance, adoption was turned down in 1888 by 1570 votes to 567–a massive defeat. Yet within seven years and following, the major change in procedure outlined above and, the installation of a new mayor committed to public libraries, a specially convened meeting of the town council adopted the Acts without a whimper. It is a again hard to see why the influence of idealism should have reversed the tables so dramatically. What precisely was the role of civic pride, so important a concept to the later Victorians? What effect did Queen Victorias Jubilee in 1887 have? According to Kelly "the patriotic fervour it aroused gave a notable impulse to the founding of new libraries" (p. 16). But did it start a band-wagon, producing a critical-mass of public libraries, which led to yet more?

This list of other possible motivating factors does not imply that the intellectual contexts of utilitarianism and idealism had no influence on events at all. That would be naive and fly in the face of the wealth of evidence that Dr. Black has so carefully amassed. But the reasons for opening individual libraries varied enormously, and attempting to build a model that explains both those individual openings and the aggregated growth of public libraries in the UK over a sixty-year period is a very difficult task. There is also still a very important role to be played by further detailed examination of individual public libraries. But such examinations must involve a closer analysis and more careful interpretation of the relevant primary sources, and a realisation that the why is being investigated, as well as the what, when, where etc.

So far I have generally referred to the UK position, although Black's volume specifically says the English public library, a restriction he attempts to justify in two ways. Firstly he talks of "the backdrop for this book being essentially English culture, which can surely be defined differently from the culture of the Irish, Welsh and Scots" (p. 5). As well as being reminded that one of my former university professors thought using surely was the sign of a weak argument, that the author was employing the word precisely because they were not sure, I find this justification unconvincing. Of course there are important cultural differences between the four countries, which may well have helped shape their own library development. Black refers to the "divergent educational and legal tradition of Scotland" (p. 5). In Wales, the effects of the Welsh language, which was the spoken language of the vast majority of the population throughout the nineteenth century, and different religious basis (non-conformity) from England would be critical factors in any examination of its public library development. But if utilitarianism and idealism were so strong, why should they suddenly stop at the English borders?

What was so essentially English about English culture which made it respond to these two philosophies, and why would they have fallen on deaf ears in the other three countries? Common sense suggests that the distinction being made here is largely artificial and one of convenience, rather than of substance. Utilitarianism and idealism may have worn slightly different clothes in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, but their fundamental appeal would have been just as valid. Having put down his initial rider, Black is himself somewhat inconsistent in his subsequent use of English/England and British/Britain. In Chapter Two, for instance, he closes one sector by talking about "the development of modern English society, including the phenomenon of the municipal public library" (p. 33). Yet within slightly more than a page he is asking "but what was the prospect of revolution in Britain before 1850?" (p. 34). But then he is largely forced into this situation, as the literatures of social history, economics, and politics from which he quotes are frequently framed in terms of Britain. For instance, the notes on page 287 refer to books, such as *Britain in Decline: Economic Policy, Political Strategy and the British State* and *British Labour History* and *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848.* Black recognises the problem, when he writes that "it is in national [i.e. British], generic terms that economic malaise is primarily discussed" (p. 5). But it does look as if Black wants it both ways: claiming that the backdrop is essentially English culture, but then quoting when necessary from works whose focus is

clearly British. I found it ironic that William Ewart, the utilitarian man of action in public library development, was Scots by descent and represented the Scottish constituency of Dumfries between 1841 and 1868. Similarly, when examining the idealist flywheel, Black uses as his case study Henry Jones, a Welshman, who taught at two Welsh universities in the early 1880s before moving to Scotland where he spent the rest of his academic career and life. Black has surrounded himself with a terminological problem of his own making, and his first justification for restricting himself to England does not hold up. Why did he not just give his second justification, namely that "the logistics and restrictions of the field research dictated that the source-base be kept at a manageable level" (p. 5). This practical consideration probably reflects the Ph.D. genesis of this book. Further research could discover to what extent, and with what variations, utilitarianism and idealism were related to public library development in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The subject content of *A New History of the English Public Library*, especially its concentration on the intellectual movements of the period, ensure that the book is no easy read. Black describes his approach as "a heavyweight treatment" of the subject, and I confess to frequent recourse to a rather large dictionary to help with the unremittingly dense prose, beginning with the very first heading on the very first page of the Introduction "the epiphyte institution" (p. 1). Elsewhere, phrases such as "deontological enthusiasm" and the use of Foucauldian terminology did not always assist my ease of understanding. What is the books intended audience? The content and the nature of much of the discussion and analysis make it impossible to accept that this is "a highly readable history which should appeal to the general public" (back cover) amongst others. Conversely, it is not a textbook a la Kelly, and "it is not meant to be" (p. 4). Two different groups of undergraduate students who study a module of mine, for which this book could be ideally suited, find it far too heavy going. In line with where Black wishes to position his study, this book is meant for a higher level of academic reader and is partly targeted at such readers outside the library world, "the cultural and social historians" of the back cover. In which case, it was a mistake not to include a traditional bibliography to accompany the text.

There is no doubting the extra effort (and costs) involved in producing such an additional feature, but a traditional bibliography would allow readers from other disciplines to see at a glance what Black had read–and just as crucially what he had not. As a library historian, I feel able to comment on the primary and secondary sources in the field cited by Black, but when it comes to idealist philosophy, British economic and social history of the nineteenth century, and cultural studies, I confess to being on unfamiliar territory. Sadly, experts in those fields, who may be attracted by Blacks adopted approach, would find it difficult to make judgements on the literature he used. One group of source materials he uses from time to time is largely untraceable from the Notes. These are contemporary novels, such as C. Coleridge's *Miss Lucy: A Character Study* of 1909 (pp. 215-16), or A. Kenealy's *The Things We Have Prayed For* of 1915 (p. 236), which Black uses to advantage. Unfortunately they are only referenced at the point in the text where they are quoted from and discussed. This is a pity as it undersells their value as sources and Black's ingenuity in tracking them down and using them.

Dr. Black has undoubtedly consulted an impressive range of primary and secondary sources, from which he has extracted much pertinent material. On occasions, I felt I was suffering from a surfeit of quotes and examples, and I even questioned their appropriateness once or twice. For instance, during his analysis of public librarianship as a controlling discourse (pp. 220-24), he briefly discusses how librarians are concerned with order, as shown by their interest in the science of systematic classification. Two illustrative quotes are taken from a contemporary librarianship manual written by a preeminent public librarian of the time, and from a set of essays on librarianship and bibliography penned by the then Keeper of Books in the British Museum. Highly respected names and appropriate publications. The third example, however, accompanies the statement that "librarians [sic.] professed that: order is Heaven's first law" (p. 222), and is taken from an article contributed to a school magazine, an unusual choice of source. Over abundant use of quotations may suggest to the reader that, like statistics, you can always find appropriate examples to support any case you wish to make.

What I also noticed was how often, despite the general wealth of references and explanatory notes (on average there are nearly 160 for each substantive chapter, or almost exactly six per page of text), they were inexplicably absent at important points. For me this process began very early on, with the quote "sweetness and light" (p. 1). This phrase is used twice more in quick succession (p.9, p.10), once with the adjective "Arnoldian" (p. 9). Perhaps it is to my shame that I do not know Matthew Arnold well enough to immediately recognise this phrase as coming from his *Culture and Anarchy* . I did make the connection, but there is no direct reference in Black's book to where the phrase appears in Arnold. For this I had to re-

sort to a dictionary of quotations, which also informed me that Jonathan Swift used the phrase "sweetness and light" in his *The Battle of the Books* published one hundred and fifty years before Arnolds book.

In a book of this length with so many notes and references, one can expect there to be some errors in citation practice, and even omissions, as the need for a reference can be a matter of personal judgement. Spot checking does uncover some inaccuracies. But slips of this kind are not as worrying as omissions, which are all the more noticeable, firstly when there are normally so many references per page and secondly when they occur at critical moments or after major assertions.

On page 181 when discussing what was borrowed from public libraries, Black writes that "books on natural history were quite popular," and again that "books on travel and geography were also popular free library issues." Apart from no numerical indication as to what is meant by "popular," there are no references through which the reader could verify either statement. In the opening paragraph of Chapter Nine, the following claim is made: "the male (mostly) and female librarians who, before 1914, worked at the coal-face of cultural dissemination have often been accorded a verdict of ineffectiveness" (p. 193). By whom? There is no reference accompanying this allegation. The paragraph continues "throughout its history public librarianship has been berated, frequently from the inside"–again by whom? Again there is no reference. Perhaps these omissions are acceptable as this is the introduction and the rest of the chapter provides the evidence. I do not think it does. Blacks first example is Thomas Carlyle who gives his opinion of a university librarian, some forty years before the introduction of public libraries into the UK. His second example concerns perceptions from the late 1980s, followed by a few more statements of a similar nature, but all dealing with the 1980s, not the 1890s. On the next page (p. 194), the initial assertion is remade when Black writes of "the tendency of recent commentators to tarnish pre-1914 public librarians with the same brush, one of irrelevance and ineffectiveness." But, alas, there is no reference outlining who these recent commentators are, unless Black means the one author, whose article of 1955/6 on technical college libraries, he quotes twice in the same paragraph.

In his desire to argue against these characteristics of "irrelevance and ineffectiveness," Black looks briefly at two librarians from the late nineteenth century period, J.Potter Briscoe (librarian at Nottingham) and W.E.A. Axon from Manchester. Black describes the former as "demonstrating a significant social commitment" (p. 213), whilst the latter was "a man of erudite culture and learning" (p. 214) who reflected idealist thinking in his writings and was familiar with the works of Carlyle, Arnold, and Ruskin. This evidence leads Black to conclude unambiguously: "the image of librarians like Briscoe and Axon as social 'interveners' contradicts the received notions of passivity and introspection which have characterized the profession" (p. 215). Black may be correct about the received notions of the public librarian, both within the profession and in the general public. But he has not actually made that case in this chapter. He has re-asserted the perception, but has not effectively shown a range of recent commentators tarnishing pre-1914 librarians with any brush. Moreover, if we consider the language used here, and the book is full of analyses of language use, the verb "contradicts" is far too strong. Can Briscoe and Axon really be seen as "typical" public librarians of the period? Might they be exceptions that prove the rule? Only through investigating a greater sample of the hundreds of public librarians who served between 1850 and 1914 might we be able to dismantle these so-called "received notions of passivity and introspection." Black points out that in some instances "librarians were no more than caretakers" (p. 195); perhaps they were more typical.

This is not an isolated example of loose argumentation. In Chapter Ten when Black begins his discussion of the theory of social control in respect of public libraries, he asserts that "this theory has commonly been voiced with regard to the public library" (p. 243). Yet not one reference is provided showing where this connection is commonly voiced. Similarly, under the heading "Function," Black writes that "inattention to function in design has been one of the strongest criticisms laid at the door of public library provision before 1914" (p. 248). In this case, there is one reference, but only one. Finally, the Conclusion contains the following statement: "Contrary to widely held historical perceptions, the public library was as much a middle-class as a working-class institution" (p.260), with a reference next to the first phrase. This cites just one example, which on its own is difficult to construe as widely-held perceptions. Are targets being set up with little more than minimal evidence, simply so they can be shot down?

Occasionally the language and style of the book is rather strident; witness the exaggerated "contradicts" above. When Black briefly rehearses the social control theory with regard to the public library, he dismisses it by using a five-word sentence for emphasis. "This is a crude analysis" (p. 243). Likewise, he describes some

statements from Altick as "highly contentious" (p. 246). Is it in the nature of a work that is self-consciously different from its predecessors, both in approach and intentions, that it has to be over-aggressive in style and maybe overconfident in assertion? Black writes: "there is no evidence that working-class readers were more intimidated than higher-class readers by supervision or, indeed, the librarys general ambience. There is little evidence that any class of reader experienced intimidation" (p. 246). Finding direct evidence from the working-class between 1850 and 1914, about anything let alone library use, can be very difficult due to a lack of primary sources, but two contemporary examples suggest that intimidation was an issue for working-class female users.

Lady Bell commented in her article "What People Read" (*The Independent Review* vol.7, 1905, 426-40), based on her survey of working-class life in Middlesborough in the first years of this century, that "The Free Libraries are not so largely used by the very poor. It is quite possible that some of these are deterred by the mere ceremonies that have to be gone through to take out a book. A woman who lives in a distant part of town, whose outer garment may be a ragged shawl, fastened with a pin, may not like going up an imposing flight of stairs, getting a ticket, giving a name, looking through a catalogue, having the book entered, etc." (pp. 432-33). In her autobiography *A Bolton Childhood*, Alice Foley refers to collecting books from her local branch library early in the twentieth century as being "quite a business." Having successfully negotiated the indicator system, which often entailed "a tedious repetition," she would creep upstairs to the reading room, "trying to still the clatter of clogs on the stone steps, but on settling down with a picture magazine, up came an irate caretaker, and I was shunted out like an unwanted animal" (p. 25). Perhaps this is not intimidation, but it was scarcely an encouraging experience.

*A New History of the English Public Library* is extremely well produced, with the only major error I could find being the running title to Chapter Six, which reads "librarians" (the subject of Chapter Nine), instead of "Economic concerns." I have already regretted the lack of a traditional bibliography, and I feel that in Chapter Ten on the internal and external architecture of public libraries a few photographs might have provided visual clarification. A running header would have been helpful in the Notes section, indicating which pages of the text were being dealt with on each page of notes. Finally, although many of the primary sources Black used are carefully listed under "Sources" (pp. 276-77), more detail on what records he used from which public library authority would have been of more use than the one blanket reference, and could have been provided at little extra space and effort.

I did not always find the Index that helpful. There is textual justification for including Foucauldian concepts, such as "regimes of truth" and "bio-power," although I wonder how many users would think of these as search terms. But is '"larking about" really worthy of an entry, especially when there is no direct index entry for women, despite their being discussed on occasions. Women librarians are indexed under "librarians–women," but it would be difficult to find the passage on page 23 which deals with women as users. Similarly, there is no entry for the working class as such, but only a see reference to "art; class; reading." The first specifically refers the reader to "art and the working classes," as does the third to "reading–working-class." The second, however, gives numerous references to the general term class, plus see also references to "dangerous classes" (!) and "middle-class failure."

The relative lack and obscurity of index entries to women and the working-class reflect the fact that Black's book, despite having the term social contexts in its subtitle, is far more concerned with intellectual contexts. It would have been impossible for this book to deal with every social context, but there is surprisingly little consideration given to women, reading, public libraries, and the two dominant philosophies. If, under applied utilitarianism, public libraries were needed to spread "useful knowledge" as part of the nations attempt to halt economic decline, it is noteworthy that in the ultimate document linking the philosophy to public libraries, the Select Committee Report on Public Libraries in 1849, women scarcely feature. No women were called to give evidence, and of the 3,000 plus questions asked only one mentions women as library users. The mere handful of other questions and answers generally served to confirm that women were less educated and were not and would not be interested in reading. This suggests that utilitarianism did not perceive women as playing any active part in the political economy of the time, and presumably therefore had no need to benefit from the provision of public libraries.

The social position of women had obviously changed considerably by the time idealism came to the fore. But there are no discussions of a gender nature in Black's book, either when directly connecting idealism and public library development or elsewhere, such as during his brief handling of the fiction debate of the late nineteenth century. Did idealism not distinguish between the sexes? Were men and women by this time given equal

status in respect of public library goals? It is interesting to note the turn-of-the-century activities of a Literary and Debating Society linked to the public library at Plaistow, East London. The rules stated that it was for men only: "all male lending library ticket-holders over the age of sixteen shall be eligible for membership." And they meant it, as a subsequent list of Society members by occupation shows.

Nor does *A New History* explore the social context of the rising working class, and how, as it increasingly flexed its economic, social and political muscles during the century, the top-down provision of the pre-eminently middle-class inspired public library was viewed. In the industrial North of England and the mining valleys of South Wales, organised working class movements basically ignored public library developments going on elsewhere in the second half of the nineteenth century and went ahead with providing their own facilities, in their own way, for their own. In Lancashire and Yorkshire in particular, local Co-operative societies opened scores of libraries and reading rooms between 1850 and 1880, outnumbering the number of public libraries opened nationally during the same period. By 1900 this development had largely gone into reverse, with many Co-operative libraries being taken over to form the nucleus of a local public library. In South Wales, more than 150 libraries and reading rooms were opened in local miners institutes. In this case, this process lasted from the late 1860s through to the 1930s and effectively halted public library development in these areas until the county library movement of the 1920s.

As a major contribution to the field, this book deserves close examination. In the end, I have reservations about whether Black has successfully produced a convincing theory of early public library development in the United Kingdom. The picture is more diverse and too complex to allow for one overarching model, however tempting it might be to try to build one. The book is also far stronger on the intellectual contexts than the social and perhaps it might have been better if the latter had been omitted from the sub-title. It might also have made for a more tightly constructed work. As it stands it is not always easy to see the connection between all the chapters. Black seems to admit this problem when he states his intention to "weave a common thread," but goes on: "this is not to say that most chapters cannot be read as separate essays in their own right" (p. 5).

Despite all my comments and criticisms, Black's book is an important groundbreaking study, which should have a profound effect on the way public library historiography in the United Kingdom is conducted from now on. It does not make Kelly's earlier work invalid, nor should it discourage the more "amateur" library historian from delving into the local archives to find the jigsaw pieces that go towards the story of their local public library. But for the professional library historians amongst us, Black has made it impossible to continue our own researches without taking more account of the social and intellectual contexts within which the micro and macro world of public library development took place. The detail he has provided about the links between contemporary philosophical thinking and the reasons for public library provision are especially valuable. I am concerned, however, about the books reception, as I have a suspicion that this work will be cited or generally referred to rather than read carefully, engaged with, thought about or used as a springboard for further research. I hope I am proved wrong.

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