Historic England

The English Public Library 1945-85

Introductions to Heritage Assets

Summary

Historic England's Introductions to Heritage Assets (IHAs) are accessible, authoritative, illustrated summaries of what we know about specific types of archaeological site, building, landscape or marine asset. Typically they deal with subjects which lack such a summary. This can either be where the literature is dauntingly voluminous, or alternatively where little has been written. Most often it is the latter, and many IHAs bring understanding of site or building types which are neglected or little understood. Many of these are what might be thought of as 'new heritage', that is they date from after the Second World War.

This guide looks at the development of public libraries in England after the Second World War. It places their architecture – external and also internal – within a period of considerable political, social and economic change. Post-war aspirations set new challenges for the country's library services, which had already begun to expand considerably in the 1930s. Outwardly, new library buildings continued – financial constraints permitting - to reflect civic pride and aspirations, while inside new layouts, fixtures and fittings provided for an increasingly middle-class readership. Children's services were ever-more important, while larger libraries offered facilities such as local studies and record libraries, and later computers.

This guidance note has been written by Elain Harwood and edited by Paul Stamper.

It is one is of several guidance documents that can be accessed at
HistoricEngland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/listing-selection/ihas-buildings/

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Front cover
Redcar Library, interior. A good example of a 1960s library, with lightweight, flexible shelving on an open plan. The steel structure was adopted at the request of the local authority to support the local industry. It was built in 1968-71 by Ahrends, Burton and Koralek, and demolished in 2011.

Contents

Introduction

England's library service was at a watershed in 1940. A national library structure had followed legislation in 1919 that removed restrictions on the rate-income that local authorities could gather and allowed county councils to build public libraries for the first time. Nevertheless, there remained a sharp divide between older towns and cities with public library traditions dating back before 1914, and provision in newer population centres and the countryside. While much has been published on earlier public libraries, the story of how this divide was broken down and the whole system radically modernised after 1945 remains relatively little known. The story is rapidly becoming an important one, as major examples are threatened with closure; those that have been demolished are noted in the text.

As in many other areas of improved welfare, post-war aspirations had their origins in the late 1930s when county branch libraries started to be built in significant numbers. The Library Association (the regulatory body for librarians, since 2002 the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) made wide-ranging surveys of libraries in Europe and North America in 1936-7, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. In Britain's new pre-war libraries lectures or meetings for adults and children's storytelling sessions were encouraged, the latter reflecting the emphasis placed on children's libraries in Sweden and Denmark, while the most progressive authorities contemplated developing record collections. These years saw the public library movement turn decisively away from its roots in working-class literacy and temperance towards a more general readership that embraced the middle classes, and this trend continued after 1945. A survey in 1972 showed that two-thirds of library users were children (for whom publishing soared), students, housewives and the elderly. Since that time, as opportunities for expansion have declined, library services have focused on providing for low-income groups, including children, students and pensioners, for non-English readers and (in a return to tradition) for the adult unemployed without access to books or computers at home.

In recent years public library service provision in the United Kingdom has been undergoing radical change, particularly since severe cuts to local authority budgets by the Government in 2010. A local authority is statutorily bound to provide a library service, but the extent of the service, who provides it, and where and when, are not prescribed. Since 2010, local authorities have been following a range of options from direct provision, to asset transfer to community groups, or a mixture of these. Currently (2016) many purpose-designed library buildings face a number of threats and risks. These include closure, asset transfer, re-use as a library, or new use. Refurbishment or conversion for new use may involve re-configuration of internal spaces and loss of historic or architectural fixtures and fittings such as period shelving, panelling, fixed desks, light fittings, stained glass, ironwork, murals, decorative tiles, sculpture or reliefs. Historic plan form comprising dedicated spaces

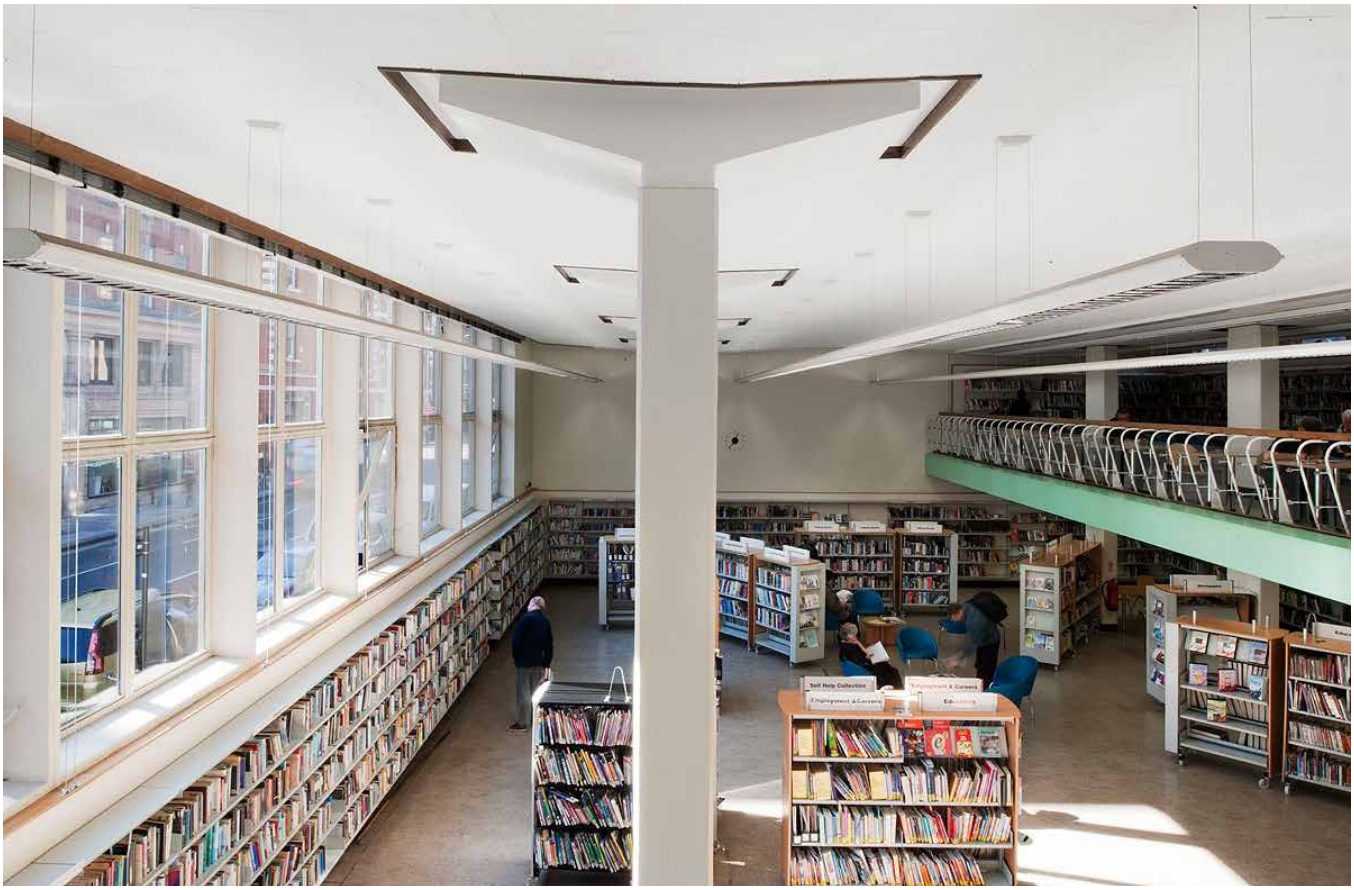

Figure 1
Holborn Library, London, 1959-60, S. A. G. Cook, Borough Architect. This was the most influential of all post-war libraries for its range of facilities, including an area for children's story reading and a lecture theatre, together with a mezzanine balcony that was widely imitated.

such as a children's library, newspaper room, local archives room and the position of the staircases, door openings and so on may be altered to make way for computer terminals, 'break out' spaces with modern, moveable furniture or areas for refreshment. Alterations for improved disabled access, drainage and plumbing are likely to form part of a refurbishment programme. Not least, new arrangements for maintaining the good condition and repair of the buildings will be made between the various parties. When making alterations to a listed library, a conservation plan or heritage asset management plan may sometimes be desirable. Historic England is updating its guidance on *Managing Local Authority Heritage Assets: Some Guiding Principles for Decision-Makers* (https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/managing-local-authority-heritage-assets-document/) , to encourage the adoption of such plans by local authorities for their heritage assets, including public libraries.

This survey is complemented by one treating the preceding period, The English Public Library 1850-1939

1 Historical Background

1.1 The background to post-war library building

Libraries at Coventry, Exeter, Plymouth, Liverpool and elsewhere were destroyed or badly damaged in the Second World War, and damage to the British Museum's Duveen Galleries also affected its library. But the war was also a boom time for reading, reflecting a widespread energy for new ideas; Swindon and Banbury belatedly adopted the Library Act and temporary libraries opened in air-raid shelters, the largest at Bethnal Green Underground station. Libraries became centres for events held under government-sponsored 'Holidays at Home' schemes introduced to cheer up the Home Front. Yet in 1942 a survey by Lionel McColvin for the Library Association described shabby, under-stocked buildings with limited reference facilities, and called for government grants and larger library authorities, proposals that were controversial among librarians and committees proud of their autonomy.

The Butler Education Act of 1944 identified the importance of public libraries as places for private study, and the Robbins and Newsom Reports on education in 1963-4 highlighted the need for large study areas to serve those in adult education as well as older schoolchildren. The branch library opened at Hesters Way, Cheltenham, in 1963 to serve a large council estate included a reference room aimed at children seeking space to do their homework.

Perhaps the greatest immediate change in the appearance of libraries after the war was to the books, due to the introduction in the 1950s of plastic wrappers from America that enabled the coloured dust jacket to be retained, protecting it and the book from wear. Yet while authorities sought to expand their collections, with gramophone records and sometimes picture-lending services, building was heavily restricted by government sanctions. Most new branches opened in old shop premises, or in rural areas operated from a school or council office for a limited number of hours a week. A few older libraries, like Wimbledon in 1947, commissioned murals from local art colleges to brighten up their children's rooms. Many counties concentrated on expanding their mobile van services, and these became a regular sight on the new council estates built on the perimeters of larger towns and cities.

A lifting of government controls in late 1954 lasted only until the Suez Crisis of late 1956, and it was 1959 before authorities could build freely. Not every authority relied on loan sanction for its building programme, with some, Labour as well as Conservative, building their headquarters and branch libraries out of rate-income; County Durham used this means to get an extensive programme of very simple brick libraries in place by 1961. However, it was 1959-60 before new libraries of any architectural ambition began to be built in significant numbers.

In the interim, public buildings adopted lighter construction techniques, with framed structures permitting larger windows and more open plans, accompanied by rapid improvements in artificial lighting. More important, however,

were new ideas on library planning which saw the introduction not only of more specialised collections that required their own ancillary rooms, but also of exhibition spaces and lecture halls. The Local Government Act of 1948 allowed authorities to raise a sixpenny rate to fund arts companies and run arts clubs, and to build a theatre or concert hall. Many authorities used the Act to build a theatre or lecture hall as part of their library building, and the clubs were an important part of the 'extension programmes' seen as a growing part of librarianship. Thus relatively small libraries were built with a first-floor hall, as at Hangleton (East Sussex) outside Hove, while open planning was favoured for the tiniest branches with only small central bookcases and tables that could be pushed aside for meetings and events outside opening hours. Children's libraries were larger and, where possible, away from adult collections, in their own ground-floor rooms with a separate entrance so that prams could easily be parked. Children's facilities were deliberately distinct, and it was only in the 1970s that special collections for teenagers began to be developed. Newspaper rooms were swept into reference rooms designed with rows of desks and chairs for private study, and the most ambitious libraries included an exhibition area or gallery.

1.2 The earliest post-war libraries, 1955-65

Between 1945 and 1952 four 'permanent' central libraries and forty branches were built, mainly in prefabricated buildings as at Swindon, opened in 1949. Canley, which opened in one of Coventry's suburbs in 1953, was a simple portal-frame structure. Other libraries were built piecemeal, like Orrell, near Wigan, where a lending library opened in 1953, to which children's and reference libraries were to be added later. Manor Library, Sheffield, a design begun in 1939 but completed only in 1953 by the City Architect, W. G. Davies, is a traditional neo-classical building, but as first realised its adult and children's sections were divided by glazed screens (now removed) rather than traditional solid walls.

Models for more modern library designs came from the United States and Scandinavia. They were led by the Frederiksberg Library near Copenhagen built in 1935 by Hans Andresen or Georg Krogh-Jensen, which behind its neo-classical exterior had a double-height lending library with a mezzanine gallery (for less popular books) that freed up the main floor for displays and comfortable chairs. The Library Association made repeated tours to Danish libraries from 1957 onwards which were popular with librarians embarking on building projects. At Hangleton (East Sussex) the librarian, Jack Dove, insisted on an open plan after making three visits to Scandinavia in successive years, and imported Swedish shelving and Danish Falk Stadelmann light fittings. *Swedish Public Libraries in Pictures*, published in England in 1956, showed similarly simple, spacious designs, and Alvar Aalto's Viipuri Library, said by the architect to have been destroyed in the war when the town was captured by Russia from Finland, was admired by Anthony Thompson in 1963 as 'a model modern library in its style, position next to a park and inclusion of a lecture hall'. The Library Association, dominated by those in the local authority sector, had strong views on library design and equipment, which it exerted in its monthly *Record*. Following a comprehensive survey by two librarians, S. G. Berriman and K. C. Harrison, of all libraries opened in 1960-3 published as *British Public Library Buildings* (1966), a series of biannual publications called *New Library Buildings* assessed new buildings from an operational perspective.

The key post-war library in England inspired by Frederiksberg was in Holborn, London, designed by the Borough Architect, S. A. G. Cook, and built in 1959-60 (Fig 1). Cook visited Sweden and Denmark in July 1956, but it is clear from a lecture he gave to the Library Association that May on 'Library Buildings of the Future', when he stressed to his audience the importance of natural daylight, a mezzanine and flexible fittings, that Holborn Library had already been designed. It was not an easy site. The façade followed the proportions of its late-Georgian neighbours but had bands of glazing and concrete panels, while the entrance doubled as a public way to the street

Figure 2
Hornsey Library, London, 1963-5, Ley and Jarvis, listed Grade II. Hornsey Library was inspired by that at Holborn and was similarly admired by librarians, though it was not well-known among other architects. Built on a more open site than Holborn, its planning could be more generous and it included space for art exhibitions. It also has fine works of art.

Figure 3
Kensington Library, London, 1959-60 by E. Vincent Harris, a contrast to the contemporary Holborn Library, criticised at the time but now listed Grade II* for its suave use of classical forms, fine stonework and splendid interiors.

behind; a glazed screen provided separation while offering views into the double-height lending library with its mosaic-clad columns and mezzanine balcony. A staircase lined in timber and Formica led to a first-floor reference library and third-floor lecture theatre; the basement children's library had an area for storytelling. All the shelving, with its built-in signage and fluorescent lighting, was by the architects, as were the trolleys, counters and desks. The *Library Association Record* in November 1960 enthused that 'this library puts British design on the level of all that is best in post-war continental library building. It is a librarians' library, which an architect of brilliant parts has interpreted magnificently'. Subsequent London libraries such as Finsbury (1963-7) and Hornsey (1963-5; listed Grade II; Fig 2) were strongly indebted to Holborn. Luton (Bedfordshire), built in 1960-2, extended the Scandinavian influence to include a screen of Swedish Orrefors glass, presented by local manufacturers and set between the lending library balcony and the reference library.

The influence of Holborn and Scandinavian libraries can also be seen in the small branch libraries built by county councils to serve growing commuter towns. The most important were also regional hubs that co-ordinated the many part-time libraries run from rented buildings and the growing mobile van services. Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, built in 1955-7, was the first, followed by St Austell, Cornwall, of 1959-60 (listed Grade II; Fig 4), both with small balconies housing reference collections set over a children's collection, where the lower ceiling height was intended to give a greater intimacy to an area of low shelving and small tables. Descriptions of Southborough, Kent, a branch opened in 1962 after delays in securing loan sanction with a gallery at one end of a largely open-plan space, show that 'the Beaconsfield plan' was a recognised and repeated item. Smaller libraries defined the children's section by placing it in an alcove with a lowered ceiling.

A Committee on Public Libraries under the chairmanship of Sir Sydney Roberts was appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1957 to consider the structure of the public library service in England and Wales. Its report, published in 1959 and a major influence on the 1964 Library Act, called for more expenditure on buildings as well as books. The years 1960-65 saw an unprecedented spate

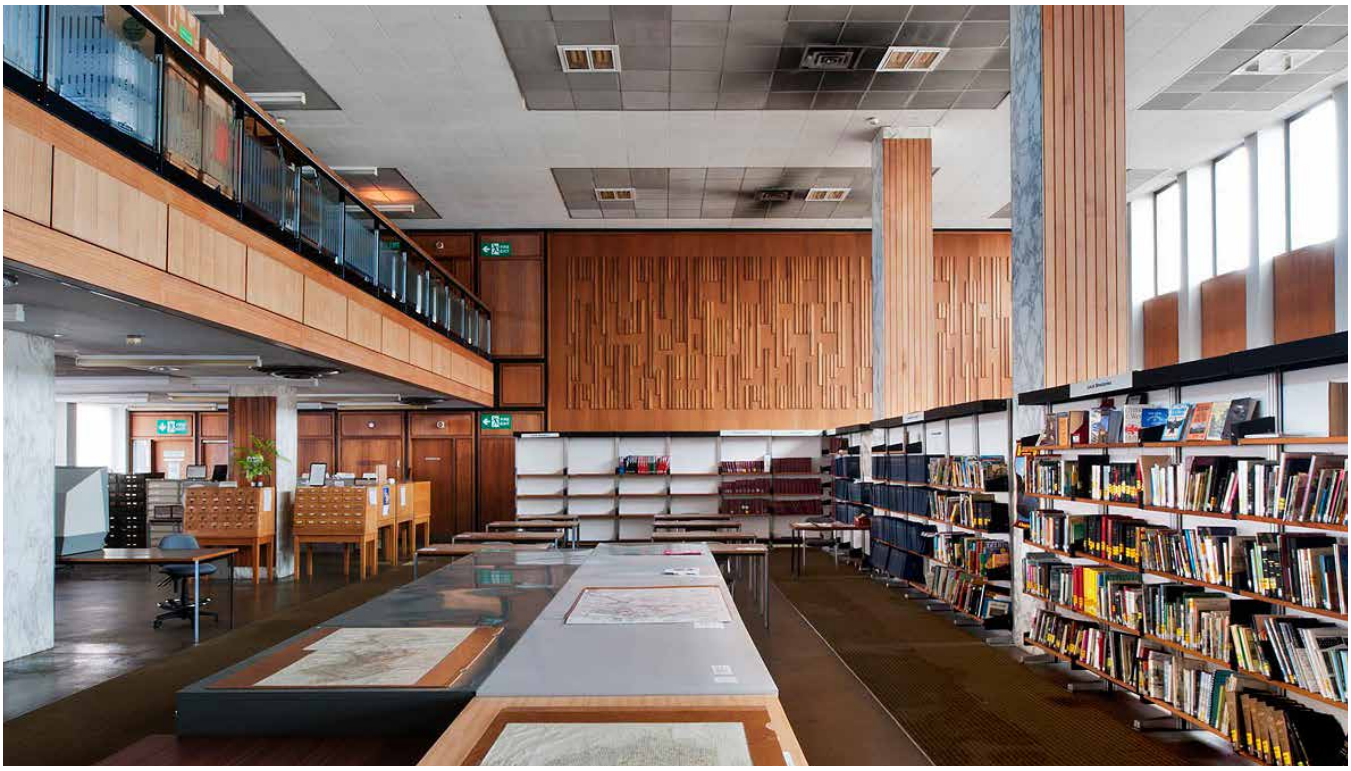

Figure 4 (top)
St Austell, Cornwall, 1959-60, County Architect's Department under F. K. Hicklin, listed Grade II. This is a small library, but it combines a modern steel frame and mezzanine plan with traditional materials – granite, slate and timber – appropriate to its setting. This is one of the most stylish branch libraries of the post-war years.

Figure 5 (bottom)
Bradford Central Library, 1964-7, City Architect's Department. The largest public library in Europe when built, it features large, double-height spaces, a lecture theatre and novel planning in its relationship of reading spaces to stacks.

of library building, with 350 new libraries being constructed in the United Kingdom and nearly as many refurbished, at a cost of £5.2 million.

Sunderland's major extension of 1961 continued the tradition of building libraries in conjunction with a museum, but elsewhere libraries assumed a separate character. Scandinavian styles continued to dominate even as a tougher, Brutalist, aesthetic found favour for other building types. Such was the pace of change in modern architecture that many libraries appeared dated on their opening because of their slow gestation, while interiors were simple – even stark – and hardwearing. The most ambitious new city library of this period was Bradford (West Yorkshire), designed on a monumental scale in 1960 by the City Architect's Department but built only in 1964-7, with ten floors, two mezzanine galleries and a 399-seat auditorium. Whereas in most large libraries less popular books were stored in densely shelved stacks away from the public areas, at Bradford they were placed alongside the reading rooms (Fig 5), a system later repeated at Birmingham (1964-73 by John Madin and Partners) which succeeded it as the largest post-war municipal library in Europe (Fig 8).

For small libraries, a circular or polygonal building proved popular, a solution to the problem of supervision that harked back to the circular Reading Room at the British Museum and to Manchester Central Library, and before them to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon visions for supervising prisons. Long, vertical windows illuminated the spines of books shelved radially around a central issue desk. Circular buildings also made distinctive landmarks. An early example was that by Skinner, Bailey and Lubetkin designed for the Dover Estate, Bethnal Green, London, in 1955, where the circular form of the library and community room, and that of the playground, countered the 'Y'-shaped and rectilinear blocks of flats. The supreme model was Jesmond Library in Newcastle upon Tyne by Harry Faulkner Brown of 1962-3 (Grade II, closed in June 2013), a well-made library whose curved form enlivened a corner site in an inner-city shopping street.

Figure 6
Newcastle City Library, 1963-8, Spence, Glover and Ferguson, a large city centre library demolished in 2007.

Counties that built large numbers of small branches often evolved standard designs, as in County Durham and the West Riding of Yorkshire. For its ambitious programme Essex produced a model library at Broomfield, a commuter suburb of Chelmsford, in 1961, with a timber frame, timber ceilings and shelving built into the walls so the central area could be used for activities. A larger version followed at Burnham-on-Crouch later that year, and libraries serving new towns and estates featured large children's alcoves. Broomfield survives well internally but its façade has been altered.

Lancashire adopted the Library Act in 1924 and opened its first purpose-built libraries in 1931; by 1940 it had opened 22, all of red brick. In the post-war years it became England's most prolific authority, building 81 libraries between 1953 and 1980 'to shine and gleam through loving care and pride' in the county's more drab towns and suburbs, as the librarian and critic J. D. Reynolds extolled in 1966. Rainford, opened in 1957, became a model for later development: a one-room brick-built library with a sloping roof to incorporate a clerestory and a large window at one end. Great Harwood, opened in 1959 (demolished), combined two such elements to make a 'V'-shaped roof, one side containing the public library, the other the librarians' workroom and bookstore. A slightly larger, regional, branch

at Ormskirk in 1960 placed similar modules around a glazed courtyard. Roger Booth, appointed County Architect in 1962, brought these elements into fully standardised designs pioneered at Abram in 1963, a one-room library with a portal frame, a glazed end and a large bay for meetings or private study; a larger version opened at Irlam in 1964. The county also adapted a proprietary range of metal-framed shelving and furniture as the Lancashire Scott-Smith range, which was used from 1963 into the 1970s. One-off designs appeared in new or expanded towns such as Kirkby – an ambitious design with a mezzanine from 1964 – and in sensitive locations such as Ulverston (1965) and Morecambe (1967).

In most counties, library construction was an adjunct to a school-building programme, so Nottinghamshire used CLASP (Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme), the prefabricated system initially devised to meet shortages of schools. Mansfield Woodhouse, a regional library with a central courtyard, was opened in 1961 to the designs of Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners, and other private architects (mainly J. D. Dudding and Partners or James A. Roberts) were brought in when the County Architect's Department found itself overstretched. Other small branches adopted Vic Hallam's timber-framed Derwent system, also used in Leicestershire. In Lancashire, Roger Booth developed ONWARD, effectively three standardised systems, beginning with a rationalised traditional construction at Shevington in 1970, but extending to the development of heavily textured concrete panels used as a means of construction.

1.3 Later developments in library design, 1965-85

the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 made it a duty for local authorities to provide a library service, replacing the permissive legislation on which services had previously operated. The City of London finally adopted the Act and opened a library in its Barbican development (Grade II). The Act required a book service that was 'comprehensive and efficient', and it also encouraged authorities to provide pictures and records, to promote cultural activities, and to charge for these and for book reservations. Parish libraries were abolished, but

Figure 7
Lillington Library, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, 1961-2, Borough Architect's Department. A good example of a small branch library from the early 1960s with a strikingly colourful façade, built as the centrepiece of a new housing estate.

Figure 8
Birmingham Central Library, 1964-73, John Madin and Partners, demolished 2016. This library featured a large reference collection on seven floors built round an open courtyard, with a small adjoining lending library and a children's library with facilities for special activities.

most small authorities survived until the local government reorganisation of 1974. Launceston, Cornwall, was one small authority where the free library funded by J. Passmore Edwards in 1900 was surrendered and new premises were built by the county council in 1969-71. The local government reorganisation of 1974 created new and larger authorities, under which remodelled library services tended increasingly to be placed into comprehensive leisure departments, rather than alongside schools within education services.

The 1960s saw a flowering of libraries and broadening of facilities, reflecting not only better budgets but a more liberal culture, its beginning signalled by the removal of the ban on D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960. While city-centre libraries like Holborn and Bradford split their facilities over several floors, smaller libraries could be planned more openly, and by 1965 progressive librarians were looking for sites next to open spaces or within a civic precinct rather than ones constrained by existing buildings. More exhibition and lecture facilities were envisaged, with J. D. Reynolds for the Libraries Association encouraging public consultation and space for a wide range of community activities. Where earlier libraries like Hornsey provided refreshment bars as part of their lecture facilities, now libraries began to include a full-time café, as at Redcar near Middlesbrough (1968-71, demolished; Fig 11), where it was placed at the entrance alongside an exhibition space and pram shelter overlooking the sea. Cafés were also built in older libraries. Redcar and Maidenhead, Berkshire (1970-3; listed Grade II; Fig 10), were model libraries designed by Ahrends, Burton and Koralek on the recommendation of the Department of Education and Science for growing towns, and offered an open ground floor where lending and children's libraries could be laid out to an informal plan with a small first floor used only for special collections and a meeting room. An unusually lavish rebuilding was that at Bebington, on the Wirral, where Joseph Mayer, a Liverpool goldsmith, had founded a public library in 1864. The new premises, by local architects Paterson, Macaulay and Owens from 1967-70, had no less than seven meeting rooms, two halls, a gallery and a separate schools library.

Figure 9
Skegby Library, Nottinghamshire, 1965-7 by M. S. Hessey, Sutton-in-Ashfield UDC Architect, a rare non-CLASP library in the county that adopted a circular plan, popular for small branch libraries in the 1960s.

Figure 10
Maidenhead Library, Berkshire, 1970-3 by Ahrends, Burton and Koralek, listed Grade II. This model town library was planned in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science for a growing town. The red brick harmonised with the town's older buildings, while top lighting is provided by large clerestories under a space frame roof, then fashionable.

Figure 11 (top)
Redcar Library, Cleveland, 1968-71 by Ahrends, Burton and Koralek, planned as the centrepiece of a new civic centre overlooking the sea, with a café and gallery. It was demolished in 2011.

Figure 12 (bottom)
West Sussex County Headquarters and Library, Chichester, 1965-7 by the County Architect's Department (B. Peters County Architect in succession to F. R. Steele). County libraries developed later than those in towns, but were the area of greatest growth in the 1960s. This circular library built around a central staircase used for art exhibitions is an unusually large and lavish example.

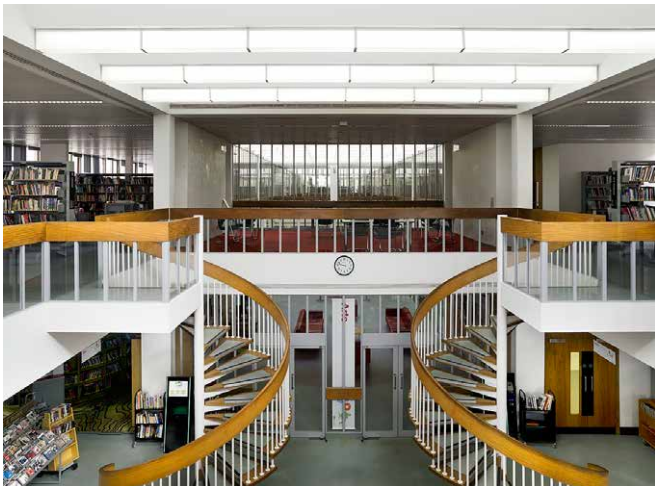

Figure 13
Swiss Cottage Library, London, 1962-4 by Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington and Collins, listed Grade II. This was one of the first post-war libraries to be listed, in 1998. It was beautifully detailed by Spence's team, with double-height lending and reference libraries at either end of the cigar-shaped plan. It has been well restored and modernised by John McAslan and Partners.

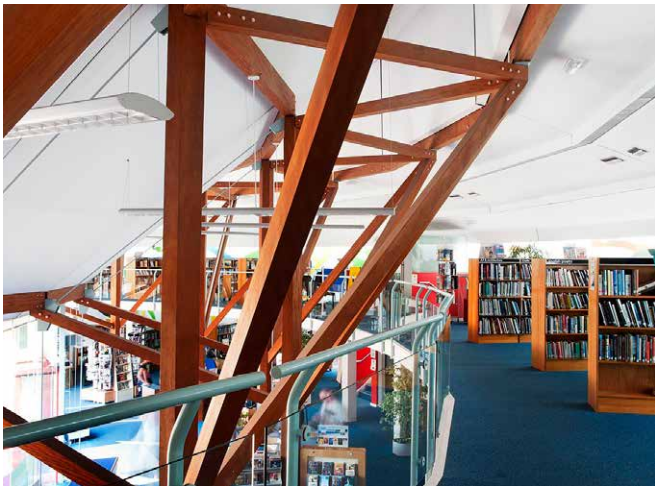

Figure 14
Chandler's Ford Library, Hampshire, 1981 by Hampshire County Council Architect's Department, job architects Colin Stansfield Smith and Barry Bryant. This was a showpiece of the celebrated Hampshire County Architect's Department, best known for its schools, and was designed by its late head, Stansfield Smith, as a single curved space with a mezzanine and rich timber detailing.

The mid-1960s saw the belated opening of new headquarters libraries in the counties, ranging from a neo-classical design by McMorran and Whitby in Bury St Edmunds, serving West Suffolk, to Chichester, a two-storey circular library opened in 1967 by West Sussex. County headquarters commonly included large stacks housing reserve collections and provision for a schools service. A great many small branches followed the 1964 Act, especially in rural areas. Hexagons and octagons also became popular on a small scale, as at Aldeburgh (Suffolk), opened in April 1968, and a surprisingly large one at Morecambe, in Lancashire (1967). They were notably in evidence at West Sussex, from its tiny Selsey branch of 1964, through circular Crawley (1963), to the county headquarters at Chichester (1965-7; Fig 12). West Suffolk had no purpose-built libraries before the opening in 1965 of its new headquarters. Its Library Committee then launched a building programme that mixed new buildings, temporary 'Terrapin' huts and conversions; its award-winning adaptation of Sudbury's Corn Exchange of 1841 into a new regional library in 1968 was an early re-use of an historic building , and was listed Grade II* in 1971.

By 1970 Great Britain's 2,395 full-time public libraries, 8,262 part-time service points and 540 mobile vans held a hundred million volumes, a rapid increase made despite the rising price of books, of which a quarter were on loan at any one time. Expenditure on libraries doubled in 1961-7, supported by rate income and government loans, but thereafter the government again imposed controls on local authority capital expenditure. The announcement of local government reorganisation encouraged the building of substantial libraries as doomed municipalities sought to spend their capital and revenue reserves rather than pass them on to larger authorities – especially where these were likely to be of a different political persuasion. This was first seen in Greater London, reorganised in 1965, with the building of Swiss Cottage (listed Grade II; Fig 13) and Hornsey libraries, both begun in 1963, and at Redcar, subsumed into Teesside as work began in 1968. Redcar, and Bebington (on the Wirral), suggest that new building programmes conceived for other reasons were given added impetus and generous funding so they could become memorials to defunct councils.

Earlier libraries had often been built in conjunction with other civic buildings, but this did not always find favour after 1945. A large civic complex could still be considered where a single authority could build a town hall, clinic, swimming pool and library, as in older boroughs like Hampstead, but the division between borough and county services limited possibilities. At Bebington the library was the most distinguished element of a large civic group developed by the borough with some support from Cheshire County Council. Nottinghamshire County Council built several libraries and health clinics as single buildings. Rather more county councils, including Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Devon and Essex, built dual-use libraries shared by the general public with new secondary schools or further education services. At Egremont, Cumbria, the library was remodelled alongside the new comprehensive school, in 1962-4; both were being rebuilt in 2013. The creation of a whole range of facilities, with a school, sporting facilities and a library sharing a common campus as at the Abraham Moss Centre (Cheetham Crumpsall) opened in Manchester in 1973-5, remained rare. More common was the opening of new libraries in high-street shops, as in Nottingham where in 1977 the city library gave over its premises alongside the technical college for a former department store. At Chandler's Ford, Hampshire, the county library which opened in 1981 defined a new village centre for a cluster of hamlets that had metamorphosed into a suburban sprawl (Fig 14).

After 1974 a few very big libraries opened to serve the enlarged boroughs created that year, and the new town of Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire). These carpeted libraries offered comfortable reading areas, with specialised reference departments and music collections. The largest continued to include meeting rooms and lecture halls, exhibition spaces and cafés, sometimes alongside tourist information desks and Citizen Advice Bureaus – the last a wartime service whose government funding was renewed in 1973.

The 1970s saw an expansion of libraries in converted properties, as the value of old buildings began to be recognised as part of the reaction to the excesses of the Modern Movement; moreover, conversions of schools, chapels and old parish halls were found to be 50-60 per cent cheaper than wholly new buildings. A growing cost was the provision of larger issue desks and security systems, to challenge increasing book losses and to house early forms of computerised stock controls. Where new buildings were required, as in Buckinghamshire's expanding commuter towns, they took on a vernacular character, well seen at Haddenham (1971-2), Burnham (1973-4, resembling a barn, but with high, square dormers) and Stony Stratford (1975).

2 Change and the Future

While 19th- and early 20th-century libraries are widely admired, and many examples have been listed, post-war architectural styles remain less generally appreciated and the enhanced facilities included in library designs of the period taken for granted. Birmingham Library (rejected for listing against English Heritage advice) is set to be demolished once replacement facilities are built, that at Redcar (similarly rejected and already demolished) still awaits a replacement in 2013. Elsewhere, smaller branch libraries face closure to save money. Others survive by being passed to parish councils to be largely staffed by volunteers, as in Buckinghamshire, or an independent service as in Suffolk. Lewisham Council has transferred management of three libraries to Eco Computer Systems, which runs a recycling business from the buildings to fund their upkeep and the library services there.

Surviving libraries have seen the loss of general reference collections as material has become available on line. Large reference areas like that at Romford, Greater London (1965) have been closed off and converted to offices, while at Luton (1962) the shelves have entirely been replaced by computers, making the original space unrecognisable. Harrow was novel in providing a dedicated reference library as part of its civic centre in 1970-2, which will close in 2013. Many libraries are losing space to other council services, with social services such as 'One Stop' and youth centres moving into ancillary accommodation or (as at Morecambe) moving into the children's library. Areas for books and records are shrinking everywhere.

The latest libraries serve as information centres, as first developed in Manchester before 2000 and most graphically with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' 'Idea Stores', where books occupy only part of a building devoted to a range of learning and meeting facilities. The first purpose-built idea stores in Poplar and Whitechapel (both in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets) were built in 2003-4 to the designs of David Adjaye; a third, by Blisset Adams, opens in 2013.

Few post-war libraries have been sensitively refurbished. The most notable is Swiss Cottage library, originally built by Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington and Collins in 1963-4, and remodelled in 1999-2003 by John McAslan and Partners after it was listed at Grade II. The circulation space was revised with a new entrance hall and staircase, smaller spaces were reconfigured and an extension added, but the main lending and reading rooms were retained and the exterior restored. Circulation in the new building is easier and there is a café, but the homogeneity that was a feature of the original interior has been lost amidst so much opening up and the creation of new partitions. Future schemes need to recognise the growing interest in internal finishes from the 1950s and 1960s. One low-budget scheme of interest is at Kirkby, Merseyside, where the lending library was converted to an art gallery in 1998 to the designs of Graham W. Winckles of Knowsley Department of Planning and Development. The gallery was separated from the library by a clear glass screen and a simple new entrance made, while in converting the old reference area to the lending library the original bookcases were retained.

With large modern library buildings it is possible to create the open plans required for the vast numbers of computer users and for the many school students who still use libraries extensively for their homework. Computers apart, it is the balance of provision rather than actual facilities that have changed in the past fifty years. Recent libraries, such as the Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library set within the Norwich Forum by Michael Hopkins and Partners opened in 2001, tend to have very large atria housing cafés, computer facilities and exhibition spaces, to which the actual book areas are visually linked but which are relatively small. Tourist and information offices are commonly found in entrance halls, while to the rear meeting rooms remain important additional facilities.

3 Further Reading

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