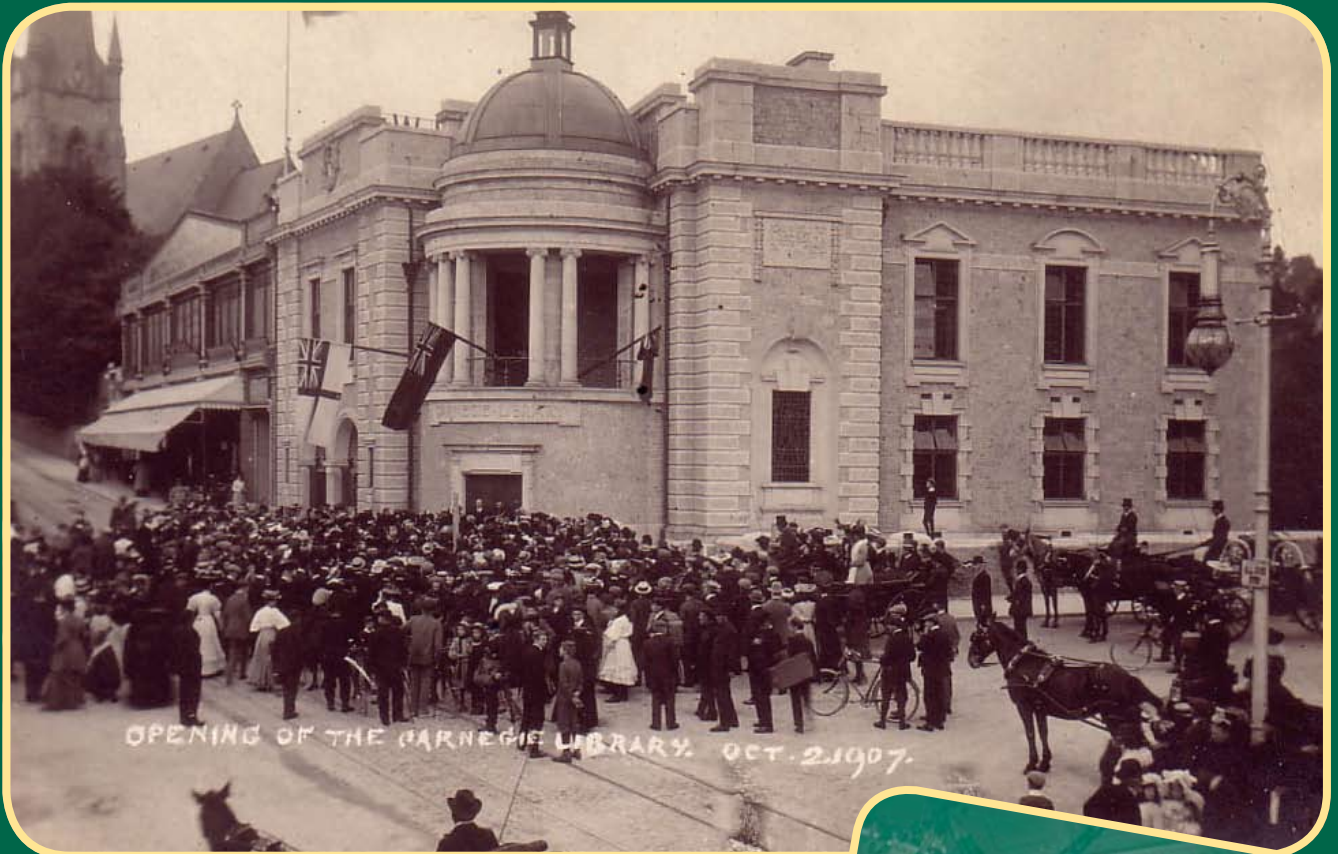


A History of Torbay Library Services

by Lorna Smith



TORBAY
COUNCIL
LIBRARY SERVICES

Centenary 1907-2007

Torbay Library Services 1907-2007



Souvenir Poster
from 1907

It was in August 1850 that the first Public Libraries Act received royal assent. It gave powers to local councils of populations of over 10,000 to set up libraries, museums and art galleries to be financed by the product of a halfpenny rate. In 1855 an Amendment Act raised the amount to one penny. At that time there were two Circulating Libraries and Reading Rooms in Torquay, Edward Cockrem at 10, The Strand and Robert Wreford at 8, Braddons Row. These were available only to well-to-do people.

Gentlemen, who were members of the Torquay Natural History Society (Torquay Museum Society), had the use of the Society's reference library. In November 1857, the Working Men's General Improvement Society called a meeting to discuss the setting up of a Reading Room and Library. The Chairman, Edward Vivian, when introducing the proposal, suggested that the adoption of the Public Libraries Act would be more beneficial. However, his idea was not taken up and the original proposition was accepted, and a Reading Room providing newspapers and magazines and a Library providing books was set up in the Temperance Hall through the co-operation of the Temperance Society.

From this meeting came a letter signed by the requisite number of people requesting the Local Board of Health to call a meeting of ratepayers to discuss the adoption of the Act. The meeting was duly called on 22nd December 1857 but it was pointed out that it was not legal, proper notice had not been given, and some present and some signatories were not ratepayers. Doubts were expressed as to whether a Board appointed under the Public Health Acts could consider matters other than Public Health. The Chairman accepted the illegality but suggested that as they were gathered they could express opinions and have a discussion. The consensus at the end was against adoption and the whole question slid into oblivion.

It was to be another twenty years before anything happened. In the meantime there had been other amendment acts and this seems to have stirred local interest. A public meeting was convened on 19th January 1877 and voted in favour of asking the Local Board of Health to adopt the acts. A petition with the requisite number of signatures was presented to the Board, who duly called a meeting on the afternoon of 25th May. There was some opposition, principally because the rates would be raised again, having just sustained an increase to pay for the Tottiford Reservoir. However, on a show of hands, the proposition was passed. It was pointed out that many present were not ratepayers and a poll was demanded. This was put into immediate action and kept open until 6 p.m. reopening on the next day, Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The result was 118 for, and 346 against.

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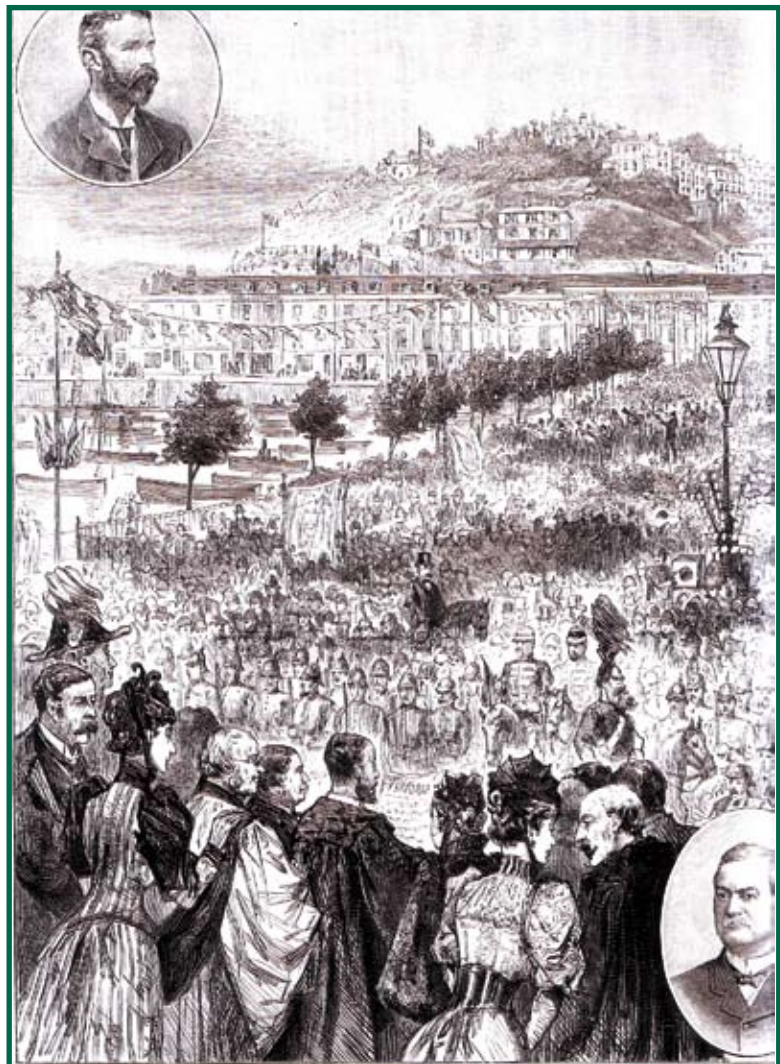
In the nineteenth century Cockington was a separate urban authority. On 12th May 1887 at noon a meeting of ratepayers was called to consider the adoption of the 1884 Act which had opened the way for smaller authorities to have a public library. The proposition was carried 9 for 8 against. There was an immediate protest. The meeting had been badly advertised with insufficient notice; the time was inconvenient for the majority of ratepayers; and the attendance could hardly be called representative. A further meeting was demanded and was held on 31st May in the evening. There was a large attendance and the motion of the previous meeting was rescinded.

During these years there had been agitation for the Local Board of Health, set up in 1850, to apply to become a Borough. A meeting convened in 1880 opposed the idea, but ten years later a public enquiry found in favour. Queen Victoria signed the Charter of Incorporation in August 1892. In 1894 the employees of the new Corporation were given a mess-room converted from an old store. It was furnished with redundant benches, tables and chairs from various sources and a book-case in which a well-wisher placed fifty books to be the nucleus of a library; other members of the public and the workers themselves donated newspapers and magazines.

The idea of a Free Library, as it was known in those days, still rumbled on. The Torquay Directory newspaper in its 'Local Notes' of 20th January, 1897 put forward the suggestion of a Free Library as a commemoration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Mayor called a meeting for 11th February, 1897 to consider the question of what to do for the Jubilee. Among various suggestions Alderman Alexander Richardson proposed a Library. A Committee was appointed to consider suggestions and, at an adjourned meeting, several proposals were discussed and voted upon. The Library was thrown out, principally because its maintenance would be a drain on the rates.

Andrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline in 1835. His father was a prosperous handloom weaver. By 1848 industrialisation had ruined hand weavers and the family emigrated to the United States. Andrew showed great business acumen

Charter of
Incorporation
1892



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and by 1860 was a partner in Kloman and Co., iron-founders. In 1873 he turned his attention to the manufacture of steel and founded a steel empire. In consequence of his radical upbringing he considered his wealth should be shared for the benefit of society. In the 1880s he began financing the building of libraries. So it was to him that Torquay applied for funds in 1902. The Town Clerk's letter of July expressed 'the hope that this Borough may share in your beneficence.... The town is in many respects similar to Eastbourne which has so recently received such handsome recognition at your hands'. It was not until June 1903 that a reply was received from Carnegie's Secretary offering £7,500 for the erection of a public library building providing the Act was adopted, and a site provided, the cost of which would not be a burden on the penny rate. The letter was read at the Council meeting of 29th June 1903 and accepted unanimously. The formal adoption of the 1892 Public Libraries Act was made on 1st September.



Back in 1896 the Corporation had purchased Phillip's Nursery, fronting on Castle Circus, with the view to erecting a Town Hall on the site. Nothing much had so far been done, owing to the cost of culverting the Fleet Stream and local opposition but, on 24th July 1903 it

was suggested that the library should be incorporated with the Town Hall. The Borough Surveyor was asked to investigate the feasibility of erecting a library at the Unicorn Street end of the site with the intention of extending the building to house the Town Hall offices, and an Assembly Room at a later date. An open architectural competition with a first prize of 50 guineas (£52.50p) was held, and the assessor H.V. Lancaster appointed by the Royal Institute of British Architects chose from the eighty applicants the design of Thomas Davison, ARIBA of London. Mr. Davison suggested a complete building designed in such a way that an addition could be made later and these plans, with some internal alterations suggested by the Exeter Librarian, Mr. Tapley-Soper were approved on 7th February 1905. The firm of R.E. Narracott of Stoke Gabriel were appointed as the builders. It soon became obvious the £7,500 was not going to be sufficient and another application was made to Andrew Carnegie who gave a further £1,400.

1906 was a busy year; a Library Committee was set up and they, in consultation with the architect, decided on the furnishings while a Sub-Committee chose the book stock, and decided on the magazines and newspapers to be provided. In order not to encourage gambling, it was decided that the betting odds must be blacked out in the newspapers, a practice that carried on until the Second World War. The post of Librarian was advertised locally and nationally in the professional press. Candidates had to be experienced librarians and acquainted with open access (at this period many libraries did not allow readers to browse).

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At the first it was proposed to have an age limit of over 30 and under 40 or 50 but this was voted out, and no age or sex discrimination appeared in the advertisement. From the applications three names were shortlisted and Joseph Jones from Salisbury was appointed



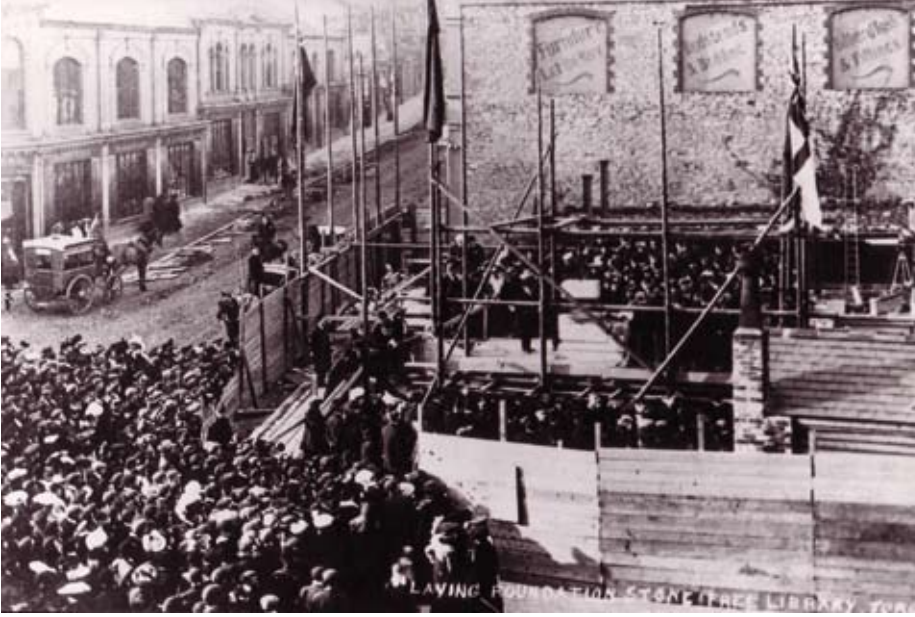
on a salary of £130 rising by £5 increments to £150 per annum. Mr. H Goulden, with 3 years' experience at Goole Public Library, was appointed as Librarian's Assistant on a salary of £50 rising by £2-10/- (£2.50p) to a maximum of £60 per annum. A.W. Smerdon, a clerk in the Education Department, was made Junior Assistant at 7/6d (40p) rising to 10/- (50p) a week. A caretaker was also appointed. It was decided to provide Braille books and a subscription was taken out with the Incorporated National Lending Library for the Blind, and the weekly Daily Mail in Braille was provided too. A separate section was made for children, but they had to be recommended by the Head Teacher, be guaranteed by parents and be over eight. The room was to be open from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays for boys and Wednesdays and Fridays for girls. Suitable adult books were to be placed on shelves adjacent to the junior library on these afternoons, a forerunner of the teenage collection. A letter was received from Mr. G. Bedford, Director of the Torquay School of Science and Art, suggesting that a book-plate would enhance the books and offering to submit designs created by Senior Students. If this were agreeable the bookplates would be a gift from the School. The Library Committee accepted the proposal and the design by C. Mary Hibbs was chosen.

The architect had suggested that a panel should be placed on the exterior of the building inscribed with a suitable quotation. That chosen was 'Read wisely, for a good book is a faithful friend' by Eden Phillpotts. Eden Phillpotts, a popular novelist of his day and hailed as 'the Hardy of Dartmoor', was long a resident of Torquay and future Freeman of the Borough. He was a near neighbour of the Millers, Agatha Christie's Parents, and encouraged the young Agatha in her writing. Mr. Davison also suggested a stained glass window on the staircase and this was given by Mr. J.F. Rockhey. The window depicting Milton and the panel are still in place.



Although it was 14th February 1906, it was brilliant weather when the Mayor, John Smerdon, laid the foundation stone watched by some thousand people. The Italian Band played the National Anthem as the official party took their places. The Town Clerk read a statement outlining the history, and a copy of this with current newspapers was placed in a bottle under the foundation stone. The Mayor duly tapped the stone with a silver trowel and made a speech in which he

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Laying the foundation stone in 1906

expressed a sentiment that is still valid today – ‘The work to which we are setting our hands today is the provision of an opportunity for the entire community of Torquay.’ The Mayor’s Chaplain, Rev. J. Charteris Johnson, said prayers, the National Anthem was sung and the ceremony was over. The builders could now continue to erect the three-storey building using Barton limestone for the walls

and Beer stone for cornices and windows. The building was to cost £6732-10s-8d (£6732.54p). The first floor would have the Reference Library, Librarian’s office and Boardroom, the ground floor the Lending Library and Reading Room, and the basement the Staff Room and store.

The weather was again brilliant for the official opening on 2nd October 1907. A large crowd gathered to watch the Mayor and Corporation walk from the Town Hall at the bottom of Union Street to Castle Circus, preceded by the Italian Band and the Mace Bearer. The Member of Parliament



for Torquay, F. Layland-Barratt unlocked the door with a gold key and the party passed into the building under the lintel proclaiming Carnegie Library. Standing on the Ashburton and Italian marble of the hall floor, speeches were made and a telegram of good wishes from Andrew Carnegie was read. The plaster casts of the Borough and Devon County Coats of Arms were admired in the Reference Library and it was pointed out to the opener that the building had fireproof floors, central heating, electric lights and extract fans to ‘remove the vitiated air!’ The Mayor then entertained the official party to luncheon at the Bath Saloons. The Library opened to the public five days later and in the first year 3,900 people joined. Popularity of the service was helped by the fact that trams had commenced operating earlier in the year, providing the first cheap transport.

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During the first twelve months there were some problems with the building. Alterations had to be made to the ventilation in the vestibule and to the electric lighting. An oak memorial tablet with hollywood letters was placed in the vestibule and can be seen now in the porch of the present library. There were staff changes already. Mr. Smerdon resigned after having secured a better job in the Post Office and Mr. E. Ware was appointed in his place. The caretaker also left, although he had been provided with a cupboard at the cost of £3. It was decided to create accommodation in the basement and advertise for a married couple.

This year also saw the foundation of services that have continued for a hundred years. £75 was earmarked to buy books to form a local collection and music scores were purchased to start off the music section. A book in which borrowers could suggest titles for inclusion in the stock was started and lasted for over fifty years. The Torquay Free Church Council suggested a 'Public Engagements Record' in which societies could enter their meetings to avoid clashes of dates - a service that has started and faltered throughout the library's life. The opening hours for Lending and Reference Departments were 10:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Monday to Saturday, with the exception of Thursday, when closing time was 2:00 p.m. This was to avoid the shop early closing days of Wednesday for Union Street and Saturday for Fleet Street and The Strand. The Reading Room was open 8:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m. Monday to Saturday. These times, with only minor alterations, were to stay in operation for sixty years. Membership was free to those on the Burgess Roll (ratepayers). Non-ratepayers could join free of charge but had to be guaranteed by a burgess. Those resident outside the Borough, but employed or studying within it, had the same privileges as non-ratepayers. Other people from outside could pay an annual subscription of 5/- (25p). Two tickets were issued: one for fiction and one for non-fiction. There was a 14-day loan period and books could be renewed across the counter or by post. Fines on books kept overdue were 1d a week and the cost to request a book was also 1d. Initially the emphasis was on books for loan but a good basic reference stock was provided, and a quick reference collection kept in the Reading Room. A card catalogue was available for public use and later printed catalogues were issued. During the early years a series of literary talks and general lectures were arranged. In 1910 two reading circles were set up to study the works of Shakespeare and Dickens. Typed reading lists were produced for all these. The Dickens Circle went on to study the works of the Brontes and the Bible as literature.

In 1910 two reading circles were set up to study the works of Shakespeare and Dickens.

The library became affiliated to the Library Association in 1908 and the plans of the building were displayed at the annual conference. When the conference came to Exeter in 1910, two hundred delegates visited Torquay and were given a conducted tour of the library. However, the building was still causing some problems. The basement was flooded, although the Borough Surveyor was able to rectify the problem for the princely sum of £3. Then, in 1910, it was considered necessary to clean and repaint the exterior woodwork. There was also concern over the erection of the Town Hall and whether it would interfere with daylight. It was now possible for the Library to have a telephone linked to the Town Hall switchboard; another innovation was the installation of three-electric clocks.



William James
Hughan

William James Hughan died in 1911 and bequeathed his collection of early Bibles and other rare books. These remained with the library until the 1990s, by which time they were rarely consulted and were in need of conservation. Arrangements were made for the collection to be transferred to the Exeter Diocesan Library, which is administered by the University of Exeter. Similar problems were to be experienced with the 8,000-volume library bequeathed in 1925 by Professor C.E. Moyses BA.LLD, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Vice-Principal of McGill University. By the end of the twentieth century, only about half of the collection on literature and linguistics were ever used and deterioration was settling in. With the consent of Professor Moyses's nephew, the collection was broken up. Some remained in store for the use of the local public, and the rest were transferred to the University of Exeter.

In 1913, the Library Association held a banquet in London in honour of Andrew Carnegie. Representatives of Carnegie libraries were invited and the Chairman of the Library Committee, the Librarian and the Secretary attended from Torquay. This same year, Mr. Goulden resigned, having secured the post of Sub-Librarian at Huddersfield. In his place, Richard Halliday from Bolton was appointed. Two years previously Edward F. Burt had succeeded Mr. Ware. These two young men were to have a profound effect on the library service over the next half century. Each year in his annual report, Mr. Jones had been recording a steady increase in the use of the library but the next year was to see international events that would change the even tenor of life in Torquay. The opening of the Pavilion Concert Hall had increased the use of the music section, with patrons attending concerts armed with the miniature scores borrowed from the library. Despite the outbreak of World War I Hampstead Public Library suggested a scheme whereby visitors could use their home library tickets at holiday resorts. Torquay embraced this idea on condition that the issuing library took responsibility for any lost or damaged books.

The war began to be felt by mid-1915. In June the Council proposed to discontinue providing *The Times* and *Daily Mail* because of their attacks on Lord Kitchener and his handling of the War. Such a move nowadays would provoke a major outcry but just a few gentlemanly letters were received in protest and, finally, the two newspapers were re-instated. With the influx of Belgian refugees to the town three newspapers were added to the Reading Room – *L'Indépendance Belge*, *Revue des Deux Mondes* and *Le Temps*.

Richard Halliday and Edward Burt volunteered for active service but both were refused on medical grounds. However, Joseph Jones was asked to become Acting Paymaster at Welsh Command Headquarters, Shrewsbury. He requested leave of absence, stating to the Committee that his duties could be divided amongst the staff, with the possible addition of clerical assistance. His request was granted and Miss J. Simpson was appointed as the first woman on staff, on a salary of 10/- (50p) a week.

In the meantime the Assembly Rooms of the Town Hall had become a Red Cross Hospital. More room was urgently needed and it was suggested that the Mayor's

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Parlour, the Reception Room and the Reference Library could be utilised. This was agreed and the Red Cross paid for the necessary alterations to ventilation in the Reference Room. The Librarian's Office became the Reference Library with two bookcases in the passage, and the remainder of the books stored in the basement. The Hughan Collection was put on the landing and the magazines squeezed into the Reading Room. Each member of staff were awarded £2 for their hard work in moving the Reference Library, and later were given a rise in recognition of their extra duties. Despite all this upheaval the Library was re-decorated in pale green at a cost of £59-11s-6d (£59.58p) and new lamps provided in the Reading Room.

Richard Halliday drafted the annual report of 1915 on behalf of Joseph Jones. In it he pointed out that there had been an increase in use of the library, and he attributed this to three facts. The blackout had left people spending long evenings at home, the need to economise meant there was less money to spend at the bookshop, and the influx of refugees and convalescent soldiers provided new custom for the library. He recorded the purchase of the private library of A.J. Davey, comprising some 1,750 books, of which 300 were local history. He concluded the report by saying 'it is a matter of deep regret to report that many periodicals in the Reading Room have been wilfully mutilated and that various articles have been stolen, including umbrellas left in the stands, papers and books [and] even the fire screen from the Reference Room'.

The worsening condition on the war front meant that Edward Burt was called up in October 1916 to be replaced by Miss M. Bailey. Mr. Halliday also received call-up papers but the Council were able to obtain an exemption for him.

The Acting Librarian brought forward three proposals in July 1917. A new branch library for St. Marychurch would include a separate children's department; a children's library would be created in Chelston, and boxes of books would be provided for schools in what at that time were considered outlying areas. It was decided to explore further the possibility of a library in St. Marychurch and rooms in the Town Hall were earmarked for the purpose. The Books for Schools scheme was put in motion and, the following year, boxes were delivered to Babbacombe, Cockington, Ilsham, St. Marychurch Church of England and St. Marychurch Roman Catholic Schools. Torwood School declined to receive any.

The war continued to take its toll. A quiet writing room for soldiers was set up in the basement. The Library's opening hours were cut in order to save gas and



The Town Hall,
Torquay
used as a
Red Cross
hospital

electricity. Miss Simpson, the extra assistant, resigned after volunteering for the Women's Royal Naval Service. However, peace was declared before she left and she was permitted to withdraw her resignation.

1918 saw rumours that the adjacent business of White, Chalton and Co. was closing down and it was suggested in the Library Committee that the Council should buy the premises for expansion of the Library. Mr. White was approached but he had decided to donate the building to the YMCA. The Council offered to give the YMCA alternative accommodation if Mr. White would agree to the Council buying the property but he declined.

1919 saw a return to more normal working. A staff room with a gas ring was provided. A course of Cambridge Extension Lectures was set up and was to continue for a number of years. In May the Red Cross Hospital was closed down and the Library regained its Reference Room. In March Mr. Burt returned to his duties. The Committee wrote to Mr. Jones several times asking when he hoped to return. At first there was no reply, and then he wrote from Cairo saying the Army was retaining him. On applying to the Army to enquire for a possible release date, the Committee was told that Mr. Jones had volunteered to continue in his present post. In the end he resigned and Richard Halliday was rewarded for all his hard work in difficult circumstances by being made Borough Librarian. Almost immediately he lost the services of Miss. Bailey on her appointment as Librarian at Newton Abbot. By far the greatest event, however, was the removal of the restriction on expenditure by the parliamentary abolition of the penny rate capping. This meant that more money could be raised and more spent on books, with less reliance put on donations. This had the adverse effect of swelling the stock to such an extent that the available space was soon insufficient.

Permission was given for the closure of the Lending Library on the afternoon of Saturday 2nd July for the staff outing!

There were more staff problems in 1921. Mr. Burt was taken seriously ill, a direct result of exposure to gas attack during the war. It was obvious he would be absent for many months and to relieve the consequent staff shortage the library was closed between 1:00 p.m. and 2:15 p.m. each day. However, permission was given for the closure of the Lending Library on the afternoon of Saturday 2nd July for the staff outing! Despite these restrictions the use of the Library was increasing to such an extent that on 3rd December 1921 a record was made when 1342 books were issued. It may have been partly due to the increased use of the town centre building that the Committee decided not to proceed with the proposed branch at St. Marychurch. The Committee was eager to encourage their staff, and Miss C. Williams was congratulated on passing the Library Association examination and awarded a £5 bonus. It was decided that in future every successful candidate should receive a bonus.

Lectures were continued throughout the 1920s and were so popular that the Reference Room became too small to hold the audiences, and so the YMCA Hall next door was hired. It seems the most popular were those held on Saturday evenings. The Library was keeping up to date. In 1924 a typewriter was purchased for £15 and the following year the Minutes quoted the purchase of an 'Electrolux', or in other words, a vacuum cleaner.

With the arrival of the Moyse Collection from Canada a sub-committee was set up to look into the problem of where to display it. It was decided to use the Librarian's Office. Alterations to the counter in the Reference Room made space for Mr Halliday's desk, which also meant that he could oversee the library, thus providing supervision that he felt was needed. This close look at the building brought to the attention of the Committee the congestion in the Lending Library, and in particular the children's section. Shelving from the basement used for the Moyse had cleared some space and it was decided that by erecting wooden partitions a room could be created that with suitable furnishing would make a reasonably pleasant 'juvenile library'. The Mayor donated a clock. The disadvantage of the space was that the entrance involved steep steps down from Union Street. However, with additional opening on Saturday mornings and a member of staff in attendance, this did not deter the children who flocked to it. The opening ceremony took place in May 1925. The guests gathered in the Mayor's Parlour and then proceeded to the library where Professor Moyse's sister, Mrs. Harthill, unlocked the door of the 'Moyse' room with a silver key. The party then descended to the basement where the Mayoress officially opened the Children's Library. The gathering was entertained to tea in the Reference Library.

The Librarian's annual report for 1924/25 included a foreword by the Chairman, the Rev. J. Charteris Johnson. He gave a brief history and, in summing up, said, 'I would now lay the greatest emphasis possible upon the value that all along the Library has been to the town. It occupies a really big place and fulfils a most important and even vital function in its life and welfare. It can reasonably be claimed that there is no other institution so popular with our townspeople, or so attractive to our visitors. From its establishment till the present hour the most scrupulous care has been taken to make it, in the quality and range of its library provision, and the efficiency of its administration, a library of which the Town may be justly proud. Probably it has no equal for its size in the whole country.'

In May 1928 the new Torbay Hospital was nearing completion and the Board of Management offered the old hospital (now Castle Chambers) to the Corporation. The Library Committee was approached but rejected the building as unsuitable and, again, raised the possibility of the purchase of the YMCA premises. Nothing transpired then, but in 1930 the Corporation did finally manage to acquire the building with the set purpose of extending the library and for other municipal expansion.

Also that year, a Branch Library for St. Marychurch was again under consideration. The original idea was reduced to just a Reading Room and the Committee requested the use of the Board Room and the Tower Room. This minute was deleted by the Council. The Committee then asked for the use of the Parish Room and adjoining room but Council referred the minute back. However, in April a rent of £25 per annum was set for the use of the rooms in the Town Hall, but there was no further progress.

Mr. Halliday was busy preparing a classification for the local history books. It was based on the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme in use for non-fiction books

in the library, and is the scheme still in use today in the Local Studies Collection. The local history books were re-catalogued and re-classified in 1929 and became the foundation of the present collection.

Miss C. Williams resigned to get married in 1931, having given fourteen years service. Miss K. Smith was promoted and her place was taken by two young ladies, Miss K. M. Brawn and Miss M. Martin. For the first time, female staff outnumbered male staff, a trend that was to continue to the present day. In 1934, Miss Martin, together with Miss Phare, a volunteer assistant, passed the Library Association examination. During the 1930s, several men and women were allowed to gain experience in library work, something that has always been encouraged. In 1934 the Corporation adopted the Superannuation Act which necessitated naming the posts held. The staff was listed as being Borough Librarian, Assistant Librarian and four female assistants. The following year, Miss Brawn resigned and the advertisement was worded 'for a junior assistant of either sex'. Mr. R.F. Watson was appointed. The staff was further increased by the appointment of two assistants. Then, in 1938 Miss. Phare left, Mr. Watson was promoted and in his place John Richard Pike was appointed, the young man who was to have such a great influence on the Library for the next 43 years.

Barton Primary and Junior School was opened in 1930 and, the following year, a school library was created in the building. This was followed in 1934 with similar libraries in St. Marychurch Church of England, Priory Roman Catholic, Cockington and Torwood Schools. During school holidays children could borrow books at Babbacombe and Ilsham Schools. Through the setting up of the National Central Library, it was possible for libraries to borrow books from that source. This was so well used that it was decided to extend the scheme and involve libraries in loaning books directly to each other. In 1935 librarians met to discuss the setting up of the South West Regional Library Bureau in Bristol to act as a clearing house for requests. The region would cover Cornwall, Devonshire, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. If requests could not be fulfilled from this area, recourse could be made to the other regions through the National Central Library and could embrace libraries outside the United Kingdom. This was the beginning of the Inter-Library Loan Scheme.

Having acquired the YMCA premises, the Corporation were considering how to put it to the best use. The building was not easy to adapt. In 1933 the momentous decision was taken to build an entirely new library in Lymington Road and the Borough Surveyor, Mr. P.W. Ladmore M.I.C.E., M.T.P.I., was asked to submit plans. This would free the library for expansion of the Town Clerk's and Treasurer's Departments and new premises for the electrical showrooms could be built on the YMCA site. At this period the corporation was the supplier of electricity. This same year saw part of the Reference Library taken over by the Town Clerk's Department.

The plans were submitted to the Ministry of Health, who delayed consideration until the plans for the YMCA site were submitted, and it was not until 1935

that they received government approval. Work started at once and the Simplex Concrete Pile Company of London began driving reinforced concrete piles thirty feet deep into the banks of the Fleet Stream. R.E. Narracott, the builder of the old library, won the contract to build the new library and also Electric House (now Connections). There are still similar internal features extant in both buildings. Local limestone from Lummaton Quarry was used to harmonise with the Civic Buildings, with ornamentation in Portland Stone. In the time of the Depression these erections were hailed as means of providing work for the unemployed.

It so happened that the Library Association had set up a Survey of Libraries Scheme at this period. The inspector was enthusiastic over the plans, with their modern design giving adequate accommodation, up-to-date equipment and room for expansion - something that was to prove invaluable thirty years later. The inspector also commented favourably on the book stock, remarking that many of the titles could be found in very few libraries, public or otherwise. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was informed that the Carnegie building would be vacated and the Trust donated £700 for books for the new library.

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By January 1937 the piles were completed and work commenced on the building proper. Owing to the fact that the entrance is in effect on the second floor, no foundation stone could be laid. Instead, a commemoration stone was placed on the left of the door, a time capsule being buried under it. The simple ceremony was carried out on 26th May 1937 by Rev. J. Charteris Johnson who tapped the stone with a silver trowel. He made a speech, the Mayor's chaplain gave prayers, the Archdeacon of Totnes read a passage from the Bible, and the official party adjourned to the Electric Hall for tea.

The Rev. Johnson was the minister of the Belgrave Congregational Church, Tor Hill Road (Central Church has superseded it), and prior to 1907 he had been a strong advocate for a library and was co-opted on to the first Library Committee as Vice-Chairman. The following year he was elected Chairman and held that position in 1908-10, 1912-16 and 1920-38. He worked tirelessly for the Library and had given great support to the plans for the new building. It was only fitting that he should lay the commemoration stone. Sadly he was not to see the opening of the building, dying ten days before.

The weather and the recent death of Rev. Johnson overshadowed the opening of the new building on 26th January 1938. The intention had been for the official party to walk around the corner from the Town Hall but a heavy downpour prevented this. The Mayor, accompanied by the civic leaders of Paignton, Brixham, Plymouth and Exeter, the Devon County Librarian, representatives from the builders and other guests entered the building via the Town Hall communicating door and proceeded to the Balcony in the Lending Library. The Vice-Chairman of the Library Committee, Councillor F.J. March asked for silence in memory of the Chairman. The Mayor, Alderman Rev. Isaac Pugh, declared the Library open. During his speech he said the Library 'would meet the requirements of the public for a very long time' and that in addition to the

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books on view, there was accommodation below for fifty thousand more. This was space that was to be crucial in the years ahead. He appealed also for out-of-print local history books. By a strange coincidence he was the minister of the Furrough Cross Congregational Church. After the speeches he opened the front doors from inside.



Torquay Library
1938

the entrance hall was lined with Lummaton marble, and floored with Travertine marble executed by the local marble masons, Walter W. Jenkins Ltd. On the right were double doors into the Reading Room which ran from front to back of the building, with the walls lined with newspaper slopes and tables running the length of the room. A corresponding room on the left of the entrance hall housed the Reference Library. Bookcases lined the walls with a number of low island



The Mayor at the
official opening of
the new Torquay
Library

bookcases and a good supply of tables and chairs. Opening off from this room was the Devon and Cornwall Collection and the Moyses Rooms. Entry to the Lending Library was through a barrier operated by foot pedal in the counter area. Bookcases lined the walls of the ground floor and balcony and tall bookcases radiated in a semicircle from the counter. Daylight entered from a skylight extending over the whole floor area and small windows in the back wall. The 'juvenile library' was on the lower floor, reached by outside steps to which a handrail was later added. This floor held working and storage areas and the Caretaker's flat. The end of the building housed the Education Department, and behind the scenes were male and female staff rooms. A goods lift connected the car park to the Librarian's office, calling at the two floors between. The Librarian's office opened off the balcony (it is now used as the ICT suite). It was soon found that the balcony steps were dangerous and rubber treads were added. It was also recommended that a handrail should be fixed to the wall but that was not done until this century.

The users of the new building entered a small vestibule, with the plaque from the old library on the left-hand wall and the new plaque on the right. The coconut doormat was made for the Library at the Blind Institution in Plymouth. Through the glass swing doors

History of Torbay Library Services

The building was popular, but the service was to be disrupted by war yet again. The following March, the Committee informed the staff that should hostilities break out they were free to enrol for any form of national service. By the end of the year, Mr. Watson had availed himself of this permission. In September, part of the children's library was lost to the Food Control Department. However, service to the public continued and, in December, arrangements were made for boxes of books to be sent regularly to the Common Reading Room for the elderly of the Watcombe Housing Estate.



Library staff in
1938

The following year saw the positioning of bronze handrails on the entrance steps. The one on the left side is still in place, successfully cutting off access to the letterbox. The other was removed many years later when the ramp was inserted. The War raised many problems, one of the biggest being how to black out the many windows and, above all, the skylight. The staff were instructed that the library was to remain open when the siren sounded, but in the event of bombs dropping the public were to be directed to the basement. The building had, in effect, gained another floor. With the threat of war looming when the building was being erected, the pillars had been specially strengthened to withstand bombardment. The open space previously used as a Corporation staff car park was filled in to make a Food Decontamination Centre as well as an air raid shelter. After the war this was used as a store for deck chairs but was passed back to the library in 1968 to become an invaluable storage space. The influx of evacuees, service personnel and restrictions leading to the greater use of the library by residents put a strain on the service. Book issues nearly doubled and the record of 446,370 for 1941/42 stood for many years. An additional temporary assistant was appointed to help cope. As much as possible was done to serve the community. Boxes of books were supplied to the Cripples Home for Girls, evacuated to Haldon Road. Service personnel were able to join the library without obtaining a guarantor, and the library opened on Boxing Day 1940 to give those far from home somewhere to go. The Food Control Office took over a further room for the writing out of ration books.

In March 1941 Mr. Pike was congratulated on passing the first part of the Library Association examination, but in May his services were lost when he received his call-up papers and joined the Royal Air Force. That same month saw the marriage of Miss Martin, but she was permitted to remain, the first instance of the employment of a married woman.

Two war-time precautions were taken. A trapdoor on to the roof was cut in the Librarian's office to facilitate fire watching. In later years, staff were permitted to use this access during their lunch breaks for sunbathing! The other precaution was the removal of valuable and rare books to the Board Room at the Tottiford Waterworks. This year saw the loss of most of the stock of Plymouth Public

The Committee endeavoured to be unbiased and allowed all shades of political propaganda to be displayed in the Reading Room. In later years this led to Torquay being one of the few public libraries to hold the Daily Worker.

Library during the Blitz. Torquay helped out by sending boxes of books. In gratitude, after the war, Plymouth gave 1-year old yearbooks to the Reference Library, an arrangement that lasted for over 50 years. The following year, Exeter lost their library and again Torquay sent books. With the worsening conditions, Mr. Halliday and Mr. Burt were placed in Category I of the Home Guard, which meant they were on immediate call-out in case of emergency. With the start of the call-up of women the Town Clerk sought deferment for the female staff in order to safeguard the service to the public. The Committee endeavoured to be unbiased and allowed all shades of political propaganda to be displayed in the Reading Room. In later years this led to Torquay being one of the few public libraries to hold the Daily Worker.

With the secession of hostilities Mr. Watson and Mr. Pike, on being demobilised, were given leave of absence to complete their professional examinations. Mr. Watson was not to return; on qualifying he obtained the position of Senior Assistant at Harris Library, Preston. He went on to become an authority on the Prison Library Service and write a textbook on the subject for the Library Association. Mr. Pike did return and was appointed Chief Assistant Librarian, a designation which was changed to Deputy Librarian in 1950.

The Education Act of 1944 withdrew responsibility for education provision from Devon County Council. This was a bitter blow to Torquay Council, who subsequently took delight in pointing out to the County that there were Torquay Library books in Devon schools that they would therefore like returned. When the County Council asked Torquay to continue supplying the schools with books the library declined and again requested the books be returned, although the Committee were happy enough to continue supplying Exeter Prison.

July 1947 saw the end of an era with the sudden death of Mr. Halliday. He had served the library for thirty-four years, guiding it through two world wars and the move into the new building. In his place, Edward Burt was promoted to Borough Librarian. It was this year that Miss A. Gronbeorg from Denmark worked for six months as a volunteer in order to study the British library system.

Things were gradually returning to normal. Two new posts were created and qualified librarians appointed Mr. Keith E. Hardy as Reference Librarian and Miss. D. Vivienne Roberts as Lending Librarian. She was to be made Readers' Adviser in 1951, one of the first in the West Country. Another step was taken towards more modern equipment with the purchase of a duplicator. The Corporation had started coffee mornings in the Marine Spa known as 'The Morning Rendezvous' for which the Library provided magazines and periodicals. When the Food Office was decommissioned, the space had been taken over by the Fuel Office and now the Committee agitated for the return of the room.

Loan of books to old people's clubs was put on a firmer base through co-operation with the Council of Social Service. The library was brightened with floral decorations provided by the Parks Department. These took the form of a potted palm in a gilt coloured basket for the Reference Library, and a trough in the

History of Torbay Library Services

entrance hall with greenhouse flowers. A gardener attended to these plants. In 1949 the one penny charge for a borrower's ticket was finally abolished. Library rules, however, continued to be strictly enforced; one man caught attempting to steal a book had his membership suspended for 6 months.

In 1930 the Corporation had purchased the Torre Abbey estate from the Cary family and used the Mansion House as an art gallery. This had been administered by a separate Committee, which in 1949 was amalgamated with the Library Committee, with the Borough Librarian being made Curator. The joint duties continued until 1974.

The winter lectures continued, with many famous names of the period, such as Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Peter Scott, Gilbert Harding and Godfrey Winn coming to Torquay, supplemented by local lecturers. But with audiences dwindling and the cost of mounting the lectures increasing, it was decided, in these years of austerity, to abandon the programme in 1950. They were revived in the 1960s for a short time.

The lack of finance was holding back the development of branch libraries, but in 1950 the Corporation opened a Community Centre in Hele, and the Library Committee seized the opportunity of providing a library service in one of the rooms, opening on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons and evenings. This was later extended to Saturdays. Unfortunately, the Centre suffered regular vandalism, and the Corporation was forced to close it in September 1952. The Library struggled on for a few months but, after the Librarian was besieged one Saturday afternoon, the Committee reluctantly withdrew the books in January 1953. A search for suitable alternative accommodation proved abortive. Provision in Torquay outside the main library was not attempted again until the introduction of the mobile service after the formation of Torbay County Borough.

After repeated and sometimes acrimonious representations, the Fuel Office finally relinquished the Children's Library in 1951. The opportunity was taken to refurbish the room and relight it with fluorescent tubes. A section was set aside for reference books, including suitable children's magazines, and tables and chairs were provided to encourage study. In the first year, loans increased by 120%.

The 1950s saw the Library entering a period of modernisation, starting with new bookplates, again designed by the Torquay School of Arts and Crafts, the winning designer being awarded £1-1/- (£1.5p). At the request of the Torquay Hotels Association a Hotel and Catering Collection was set up that remained in use until the South Devon College started specialist catering courses with its own library. To try to obviate theft, an embossing machine was purchased to imprint the outside of books, and internal pages were rubber stamped with ownership marks. In the Reference Library, glass doors were fitted to one bay of shelves at a cost of £7-10/- (£7.50p) to lock away books vulnerable to theft. This remained in place until the re-arrangement of the department in 1994. In 1951 more books were loaned than borrowed through the Inter-Library Loan Scheme. Loans were not only in the United Kingdom; a number went overseas, some even behind the Iron

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Curtain. In 1952, overdue fines were increased. 1952 also marked Mr. Burt's fortieth year of service.

Monthly book lists of new stock were inaugurated for both adult and children's books. In 1953, these were supplemented by specialist lists, covering popular subjects such as photography and astronomy. This in turn led to 'in depth lists' the initial one being produced to celebrate the first National Library Week. This was called 'Parents' Collection' compiled by the Children's Librarian, Miss Pamela Luxton. It was, in effect, a catalogue of the Under-5s collection in the Lending Library, which offered picture books for pre-school children. An earlier list on catering was enlarged and revised in 1969 by Miss Beryl Santer. In 1958, a scheme to ensure that a copy of every non-fiction book published would be in at least one public library in the country had been launched. Two of the subjects allocated to Torquay were Language and Cinema, and each subject had its own list created ('Book List on the Cinema' by Mr. Barry Delve in 1970 and 'Book List on the Study of Languages' by Mr. Michael Dowdell in 1971). The list that had influence outside Torquay was that produced for the second National Library Week in 1967, 'The Hundred of Heytor: a guide to the printed sources relating to South Devon' by Miss Lorna Smith. Two supplements subsequently appeared, the first of which included a list of local newspapers. This led to Miss Smith being commissioned to compile a 'Finding list of Devon newspapers' for the Devon History Society. Because of this, the British Library Newspaper Library, when setting up the Newsplan Scheme to list all provincial newspapers, used Devon County Council to inaugurate the pilot scheme. 'The Hundred of Heytor' was revised in 1973 and included fiction set in the South Devon area. With the re-organisation of local government in 1974, all libraries came under Devon County Council administration, and book lists were centralised. After the creation of the Unitary Authority in 1998 the Library was returned to Torbay and book lists were produced locally again.

Mr. Burt, in his 1954/55 report had noted: "An increase...in the...number of books issued...seems to indicate that television has not had the detrimental effect on reading which most people anticipated". However, although the number of books borrowed throughout the 1950s increased, the emphasis was changing. A sharp decline in fiction reading accompanied an upsurge in non-fiction borrowing, particularly practical books on DIY, car maintenance, cookery and hobbies and handicrafts.

Modernisation continued: with the fitting out of the Reference Library with fluorescent tubes in 1956 the lighting update was complete - and was saving the Committee £100 a year in electricity costs. An adding machine was purchased in 1958 and in 1960 a more modern duplicator was transferred from the Town Clerk's Department.

October 1957 saw the golden jubilee of the Library Service. The occasion was celebrated in three ways. Art students were invited to submit designs for a frieze for the Children's Library, a prize of £10 being offered. A pamphlet was published giving a history of the Library written by Mr. Pike. On Thursday

10th October, the Mayor, Council, co-opted members and spouses made a tour of inspection of the premises, followed by tea in the Town Hall. The Torquay Times, in reporting the event, noted that the Vice-Chairman of the Library Committee, Councillor F.J. March, had held that position since the new building opened in 1938, and that Mr. Burt had been serving the library for 46 years.

In 1959, Mr. Hardy gained a post in Swindon, and with the prospect of reorganisation following the parliamentary Roberts Report on the 'Structure of the Public Library service in England and Wales' it was decided that the position would not be filled. Instead, Mr. Dowdell and Miss Smith, both of who were in the process of qualifying, would undertake the duties between them, and a junior assistant would be appointed to cover. A further junior was appointed in 1960 to help with the increased use of the service. Then, in 1961, Mr. Burt took retirement having completed 50 years of service, an achievement that could never be repeated. Following precedent, Mr. Pike was appointed Borough Librarian and Curator.

The new Borough Librarian, in his first annual report, drew attention to the fact that 1961 had been the busiest year on record. This had meant that queues of borrowers filled the hall and vestibule and spilled out on to the pavement. The extension of the loan period from a fortnight to three weeks had not had the expected effect of reducing the number of library visits, and he suggested that a modern way of issuing books should be adopted. Saturdays were the busiest day of the week. Each member of staff was literally moving tons of books, and in order to give them some respite, tea-time closure of half an hour on Saturday was introduced.

The early 1960s saw an increase in services for children. Miss Luxton was officially made Children's Librarian. The Children's Library opened on weekday mornings during the school holidays, and informal talks were given to both primary and secondary classes at the Library. Arrangements were made with the Headmaster of the Boys' Grammar School for sixth formers to attend 'sources of information' instruction, lessons where the use of reference books was explained.

Fears that the Borough would lose the right to maintain a library under new legislation before Parliament proved unfounded, so the position of Reference Librarian was re-instated and Mr. Dowdell, now a Chartered Librarian, was appointed in 1963 - a position he was to hold for twenty-nine years. Also in 1963, the Library took another leap forward when it was decided that books would be issued by the photo-charging method. Basically, this system photographed the borrower's ticket and the books borrowed. It involved the use of punch cards, but the Borough Treasury had just installed new equipment. There was some trepidation among the staff because the use of punch cards to record the book stock had not been successful. However, all was well this time. It had been planned that the system would commence on 1st January 1964, but the necessary alterations to the entrance to the Lending Library and the counter area were not completed on time, so it was not until the summer that the system was operational. It was the first modern issue system to be used in Devon. At

During the 1960s, the scope of the service began to widen. The Writers' Circle was given permission to meet in the library on Thursday afternoons.

the same time, the Reading Room was halved in size, creating much needed extra shelf space for the Lending Library (what is now the Interact area). These alterations were carried out by R.E. Narracott and Son and entailed the closure of the Library for a fortnight. With the installation of the camera, it was possible to microfilm documents and books for local history purposes, and a microfilm reader was obtained. Coupled with this was the photocopying of unique documents kindly loaned by local people. The antiquated telephone system was superseded by a semi-automatic telephone exchange, allowing for 2 outside lines.

During the early 1960s the private subscription libraries had closed one after another. First The Times, followed by W.H. Smith and, finally, Boots led to an influx of new borrowers with high demands. This coupled with a growing population and greater leisure time, increased the use of the library, so another 2 assistants were appointed, the salary of one being partly paid for by an increase in the reservation fee from 3d (1p) to 1/- (5p). There was an outcry over the increase, but the number of books reserved did not diminish. There were also complaints about 'modern novels'. The Librarian reported to Committee that each complaint was taken seriously, with any 'offending' book being read by more than one member of staff; if it was felt that the complaint was justified, the book was removed from the open shelves. The Committee endorsed this procedure. 1964 saw the outline approval for a mobile library but this was thrown out by the Finance Committee and continued to be overruled year after year.

In November 1964 Miss Roberts resigned, having gained a post with Exeter City Library. Miss Santer, who had qualified the previous year, was appointed Lending Librarian in her stead. The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 had come into force, and the Library had to increase the number of professional posts in order to fulfil the law. A new post of Cataloguer/Senior Assistant was created to which Miss Smith was appointed, having qualified at the same time as Miss Santer.

During the 1960s, the scope of the service began to widen. The Writers' Circle was given permission to meet in the library on Thursday afternoons. It should be remembered that only the Reference Department was open to the public at this time. Collections of books were prepared to accompany Workers' Educational Association study courses. A Hospital Library Service was implemented, run by the Order of St. John and the British Red Cross but with books supplied by the Library. Since Victorian days there had been a Medical Society in the town, where general practitioners and medical hospital staff met to discuss problems and hear lectures. A collection of books had accumulated for which the Society had no permanent home until the purpose-built Medical Centre was erected in the Torbay Hospital grounds. This included facilities for a library and the Public Library was asked if it could undertake to classify and catalogue the books. Miss Smith was seconded for one afternoon per week until the work was completed. This led to the classifying of the town's Public Health Department's Library. Later still, advice was given on the classification of Paignton Zoo Library and advice training given at the Stover School for Girls in Newton Abbot. When sheltered housing was built at Hatfield Cross, a collection of books was installed

and regularly changed, and later, all residential and old people's homes were given the opportunity to avail themselves of this service. The introduction of large print books proved very popular, both in these collections and at the public library.

The Library featured in international news in 1966 when nine of the staff went on 'strike'. At the monthly meeting, the Chairman of the Library Committee had commented on the unsmiling attitude of junior staff. Unfortunately, he made this comment in front of the Press

before the Committee had gone into camera. The members of staff in question subsequently refused to serve the public and the library remained closed for half an hour. Trades Union Nalگو was called in and a meeting between all the staff and the Chairman, with a Nalگو representative present, smoothed the matter over. The Chairman later publicly admitted that he should have reserved his remarks for a private time. 20 or so years later when most people had forgotten the affair and none of the 'strikers' were left on the staff, Nalگو chose the Library as one of the places to take part in a nation-wide one day token strike because of 'the militancy of the staff'!



Library Staff

There was some excuse for tension among staff, for, as well as the pressure of increased use of the library and the introduction of a new concept in the ways books were loaned, hanging over all were the radical changes in local government. As far back as 1958, the Local Government Act had a section, the South Western General Review Area. The Local Government Commission for England had reported to the Minister in 1965, and he had agreed to the proposal to establish the County Borough of Torbay, the amalgamation of Torquay Borough, Paignton and Brixham Urban District and Churston Ferrers Parish Councils. From the Libraries point of view, it meant serving four areas instead of one.

A library service to Brixham had commenced in 1929. The old hospital in Cavern Road was standing empty and the owner, Miss A.M.M. Hogg, gave permission for its conversion into a library. It was felt that the position was unsuitable, and, finally, the Magistrates' Room at the Town Hall was made available, with a collection of books supplied by Devon County Council and volunteers manning it on Mondays and Thursdays. In 1934, the County Council took over the Drill Hall of the Brixham Artillery Volunteers next to the Town Hall, which latterly had been used as a garage, and with the help of a £300 grant from the United Kingdom Carnegie Trust, it was converted it into a library. By 1939, Brixham was the third largest County branch library, coming after Paignton and Barnstaple,



Brixham Library

In autumn 1993, the library moved into a £750,000 state of the art building. In addition to the usual facilities, there was a special fisheries section, compact discs, the Francis Lyte meeting room and a disabled access lift serving the two floors. In 1995 the building was further enhanced by a specially commissioned stained glass window, with imagery symbolic of Brixham and paid for by local firms, institutions and individuals.

Paignton did not gain a library until 1935. It was the responsibility of the Urban District Council to find suitable premises, after which Devon County Council would provide staff, books and necessary equipment. There was public demand for a library in Paignton during the 1920s and into the 1930s but the Council could not find a suitable site. There was a possibility of the use of the two upper floors of the former Liberal Club at The Triangle, Totnes Road, but this was leasehold, and there was disagreement as to whether the lease should be taken for 5 years or 10. A number of Councillors felt that to tie themselves down to 10 years might mean missing a more suitable site. However, the Council finally agreed to the 10-year lease and the Library opened to the public on 18th December 1935. The opening ceremony was interrupted by Rev. J. T. Whitehead, a Congregational minister, loudly complaining at the closing of the Reading Room at 7:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m., and he had to be escorted from the building. Borrowers were allowed one fiction and one no-fiction ticket and children over the age of 12 were permitted to use the Children's section. Visitors' tickets were accepted. There had clearly been a need for a library in Paignton, as evidenced by the marked decline in book issues at Torquay following Paignton's opening. The Councillors need not have worried about their lease, for it was another 25 years before Paignton had a purpose built library at ground level in the pleasant



History of Torbay Library Services

surroundings of Victoria Park. The new building in Courtland Road opened on 25th July 1961 and had cost £29,000. At the time it was the biggest branch of the Devon County Council, and the large reference department, with its own librarian, was blatantly set to rival Torquay's.

The new County Borough inherited both Torquay and Paignton library, but serving the Churston and Galmpton area remained a problem. Under the Public Libraries Act, those living more than one and a half miles from a static library had to be provided with a mobile service. The County Borough was able to arrange with Devon County Council to continue providing the existing service, while a search was made for a site to build a library. A number were inspected, the most promising one being located on the corner of Broadsands Road, which already had planning permission for shops, offices and flats. The developer was asked if he would consider incorporating a library but he was not willing to do so. Other sites were inspected, but Churston Broadway was by far the best, and, finally, the Council persuaded the developer to sell them the site. Government permission to build a library having been gained, sketch plans submitted by the County Borough's Chief Architect, Mr. R.V. Banks, were approved in September 1970, and building work commenced the following February. The new library was opened to the public on 8th January 1973, the official ceremony being held on 1st March. It was an immediate success, with 20,000 books issued in the first 3 months of operation. Its car park and ample on-street parking attracted users from Paignton, Brixham and outside the County Borough area. The total cost of the library, including books and furniture, was £47,000. In 1976, the Library Association issued a survey, 'New Library Building', in which Churston was listed and received praise for its design, the overall opinion being that the atmosphere was exactly right for a small library.



In the early 1970s improvements were made to all 3 existing buildings. At Torquay the Education Department moved out to the former Urban District Council offices at Oldway, Paignton, leaving the whole building for library use. The opportunity was taken to create a rear exit and goods entrance, and bring the Children's Library up to street level. It still had a separate entrance, but after a few years, when the whole of the Reading Room was converted into more Lending Library space, an opening was cut through to the Children's Section. The County Borough had regained responsibility for education, so it was necessary to create a Schools Library Service, and this was established in the old Children's Library. At Paignton a ramp was provided. Internally, the Reading Room was abolished and the Children's Section enlarged and integrated into the Lending Library. At Brixham, better staff facilities were created and the whole building re-decorated. Both Paignton and Brixham were converted to photo-charging and it was installed also at Churston as a temporary measure.

After only a few years, more changes loomed. The Local Government Act of 1972 proposed a complete overhaul of local government. Under this act, there would be a two tier system whereby such areas as Social Services and Education - including libraries - would be administered by County Councils and the new Metropolitan Authorities; other services would remain with County Boroughs and District Councils. Devon was one of the few counties to retain its former boundaries, but all Urban and Rural District Councils were abolished in favour of new District Councils. This meant that Torbay's Libraries would come under Devon County Council, and so, plans for the conversion to the light-pen issue system and a computer catalogue were mothballed.

In 1969, Mr. Antill, the Deputy Librarian, was appointed Chief Librarian in Jersey, and in his place, Mr. Richards was promoted under the new title of Senior Librarian. He was the instigator of the 'Summer Game', a school summer holiday activity to encourage children to read, which was to become an annual event and spread to other school holidays. During this period, the Local History Collection saw an important addition in the acquisition of a long run of programmes from the Pavilion Theatre. The staff had the task of sorting these, but unfortunately they had been stored next to the boiler room and came covered with a layer of coal-dust!

The re-organisation had a profound effect on the library service in Torbay; it became a small fish in a very large pond. The acreage of Devon, and its geographical diversity, meant that there needed to be some decentralisation. Torquay became the centre of the South area, with Mr. Pike as the Area Librarian, with 22 branches, 3 mobile libraries, a prison and many more residential homes and schools under his responsibility. In 1980, an internal reshuffle reduced this to 15 branches, 2 mobiles, the prison, 177 homes and a reduction in the number of schools. Obviously, the number of staff needed to increase dramatically to be able to maintain a service to so many sites. As a temporary measure, the Moyse Room became the Administration Office and the Deputy Librarian's office the staff-room, which was still not adequate, and non-front line staff had to eat at their desks. In anticipation of the proposed computerisation of the issue system and catalogue, Miss Smith had prepared a Subject Index to the classification scheme, and this became the basis of the County Subject Index still in use today in Devon County and Torbay Libraries. In 1980, the computer catalogue came on-line with both the catalogue and the preparation of book stock being centralised at the Exeter headquarters. This eased the space problem, and behind the scenes departments whose staffs had been separated could now be together in one room, which greatly improved efficiency. During this period, the mobile libraries were increasing the number of stops throughout the area.

The age at which children transferred from the Children's Library to the Adult was 14. However, it seemed that teenagers were lost to the Library. It was felt that many found the wide range of novels daunting, and that non-fiction was too erudite and did not address homework or personal problems. It was decided to create a Teenage Section in the Lending Department that would stock teenage

novels and non-fiction aimed at that age group. Certainly, it achieved its aim, particularly in the early days.

In January 1979, Torquay and Paignton finally obtained the long awaited Plessey light-pen issue system. The previous year, the County Council had been able to take advantage of the Government's Job Creation Programme and recruit young unemployed people to prepare the stock by inserting a bar-code in each book and entering it on computer catalogue. The library staff undertook the task of converting the borrowers' tickets. As soon as Torquay and Paignton were up and running, Brixham, Churston, Newton Abbot, Kingsbridge and Totnes were brought into line.

With centralisation and the alteration in the area boundaries came changes to staffing. In 1980, Mr. Pike decided to take early retirement after 41 years of service. He had steered the service through technological changes, but he was to be remembered for his contribution to local history. He had been instrumental in building up the Local History Collection and laying the foundations of the local studies index. He died in 2004, and the following year, his widow unveiled a plaque renaming the local history room 'The John Pike Local Studies Room'. This is the former Moyse Collection Room. In 1985, the local history collection had been moved into this larger room, its previous home becoming an office for the Reference Department. Mr. Peter Bottrill was appointed in Mr. Pike's place. After the formation of the Unitary Authority he continued to hold the position of Chief Librarian.

In 1983 Torbay Hospital created a recreational library in the Lily Derry Day Hospital. This was to serve patients, staff and visitors and was run by the British Red Cross. It became a sub-branch of the Library. The same year, Brixham Does Care commenced a books-on-wheels service to the housebound and ran it unaided for 2 years; after that it received regular exchanges of books from the Library.

During the 1980s, collections of cassette tapes were phased into the Torbay libraries. The initial stock in each case was 500 and there was a loan charge of 20p, although registered blind people could borrow them free. Over the years, the Library had had the needs of those with sight impairment very much at heart, providing braille books, acting as liaison between them and the National Library for the Blind, and running a book club. In 1984, Torquay Lending Library was closed for a fortnight to allow for repairs to the skylight and the replacement of malfunctioning extractor fans. The opportunity was taken to re-decorate the Department, and the Reference Library closed for two days while its walls and ceiling were repainted. How different from twenty-odd years before, when the new heating system was installed, and the staff had worked under the scaffolding, using torches in the evening to serve the public!

The phenomenal increase in genealogical research had resulted in the Library buying the International Genealogical Index on microfiche. With the opening of the new library premises in Barnstaple in 1988, the Devon Record Office now

The mobile library, parked as usual behind Paignton Library, had been set on fire by an arsonist. A man was seen running away laden down with carrier bags. 250 audio tapes had been stolen from the vehicle, some of them later being found dumped in a hedge.

had a presence in North, West and East Devon. So as to obviate the lack in South Devon, the County Archivist suggested that the Record Office should deposit microfiche copies of parish registers, tithe maps and apportionments for the region at Torquay. An Archivist would attend for an afternoon, at regular intervals, when microfiche for parishes outside the area could be ordered and any archival queries dealt with. This scheme is still operational and has led to similar service points being set up, usually in Museums, throughout the County.

In 1989, the Mayor suggested a Torbay Civic Week of Pride. Various events took place, organised by both private societies and public institutions. The Library's contribution was a series of conducted tours behind the scenes and demonstrations of the specialist services provided. These were well received and resulted in an increased use of the library.

In the early hours of 8th September, 1991 a Courtland Road resident alerted the Fire Brigade. The mobile library, parked as usual behind Paignton Library, had been set on fire by an arsonist. A man was seen running away laden down with carrier bags. 250 audio tapes had been stolen from the vehicle, some of them later being found dumped in a hedge. The thief had apparently set light to the vehicle to cover his tracks. The van, together with 2,000 books to the value of £1,820, was lost, and it was only the skill of the Fire Brigade that prevented the Library building being destroyed as well. In the event, the rear of the premises was only slightly damaged. However, within a week, the County Library had provided a temporary mobile and the following March a replacement arrived, which was bigger than the original and included a lift for the disabled.

In 1990 the Schools Centre was refurbished, and 3 years later, a major change was made to Lending and Reference Libraries. The doors to the Reference room were blocked off and an entrance made through the Lending Department, thus creating a more open plan floor area. This necessitated new counters for each department, and the Reference Library was further modernised with new furniture. Electronic opening doors were fitted to the entrance vestibule and the opportunity was taken to install a book security system. The whole cost £75,000. The amalgamation of the two departments necessitated adjustment to the opening hours. For the first time in its history, the Lending Library opened on Thursday afternoons.

By August 1992, both Miss Santer and Mr. Dowdell had retired, having contributed 85 years of service between them. Miss Santer had progressed from general assistant to head of Lending Services and in 1980 to Central Services Librarian, whilst Mr. Dowdell had been Reference Librarian since 1963, having already completed 13 years as a general assistant. In 1998 Miss Smith retired after 43 years, having progressed through the posts of Cataloguer, Senior Assistant (Bibliographic Services), to Senior Assistant (Reference). For the final two and a half years of her career, her reference duties were shared between Torquay and the post of Railway Studies Collection Librarian at Newton Abbot. These were probably the last members of staff who would be able to claim over 40 years of service in one place.

Re-organisation was looming yet again. In April 1991 the Government began consultations on the structure of local government, stating that it believed there should be a move towards unitary, all-purpose authorities to replace the two-tier system. The Local Government Act of 1992 made provision for the setting up of a Local Government Commission to undertake a review which would last for 3 to 4 years. The draft recommendation of the Commission for Devon was for Plymouth to become a unitary authority, with the rest of the County staying the same. A public consultation was undertaken during the summer of 1994 and there was such public support for a unitary authority in Torbay that the Commission changed its original plans.

Torbay became a unitary council on 1st April 1998, and the period leading up to this date involved intensive planning, to enable the library service to achieve the required 'seamless transfer' from being part of Devon County Council to being a Torbay Council service. This was achieved successfully, and so, for the first time since 1974, Torbay now had full control over its library service. Miss Smith was the only remaining member of staff to have been involved in the two previous re-organisations, and she was in demand to share her experiences.

There were some immediate benefits for library users. Borrowers could now return their books to any branch library in Torbay, and renew their books, in person or by telephone, at any library. For the first time, all multi-media services – cassettes, CDs, videos (and, later, DVDs) – were available at all branch libraries. This was part of a move to create a 'one service' ethos in Torbay.

The years following the achievement of unitary status were characterised by two major factors. Firstly, there was the increased involvement of central government in the affairs of local government, including library services. In the past, unless a library authority appeared to have 'gone off the rails', the local council could run its library service with little or no influence from central government. This was to change quite radically. Secondly, there was the need to develop and improve the quality of the service provided. These two factors interacted and were, in many respects, indistinguishable.

Together with all other local government services, Torbay Library Services, as it was now called, was (and still is) required to demonstrate that it was providing 'best value' for the local community. Service or business plans were produced, with targets to be achieved. Performance indicators became important measures of both quality and quantity. Torbay benchmarked with other authorities to compare performance. National public library standards had to be met. Both library users and non-users were consulted extensively to ensure their needs were being met.

A major development in Torbay was the growth of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities for the public. In 1998, there was only one personal computer (PC) for public use in Torbay – a terminal at Brixham that gave access to the library catalogue. By 2003, there were 40

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Internet terminals in the libraries, plus more PCs for other purposes. This was part of 'The People's Network' development which was mainly paid for from Lottery sources. In addition, all staff received ICT training, to enable them to provide assistance to library users. 'Caught in The Web – bytes of Torbay's Past' was a Lottery funded digitalisation project that was created to provide examples of the rich historical, archaeological and architectural history of Torbay. ICT learning centres were established at Torquay and Paignton libraries to offer structured ICT training to

local people. Finally, the library service provided extensive content for the main council website.

Services to children were developed as an investment in the future of our young people. The reading scheme for children inherited from Devon, 'Book Track', was updated in Torbay to become 'Book Express' – most recently, 'Book Quest' – and made available in every branch library. The national Bookstart scheme was introduced in Torbay to demonstrate the value of reading and libraries for babies and their parents and carers. The original scheme for babies aged 8 months was then extended to cover children aged 18 months and, then, 3 to 4 year old children. The library service co-operated extensively with the Surestart centres in Torquay and Paignton, with a grant-funded post introduced at Torquay to support the work of Surestart Torquay and develop the links with the library. The Oasis project was introduced to provide ICT learning to children who were not in mainstream schooling.



Awarded for excellence

Torbay Library Services was awarded Charter Mark status in 2002, one of three quality awards the service received during the early 2000s. This was for demonstrating excellence in public service. By 2006, the award included six examples of national and regional best practice.



Torbay Library has benefited from a number of refurbishments. These included the installation of a lift to all floors in 2001, which meant that, for the first time, there was level access to all public areas in Torbay's libraries. This included the mobile library, where a lift hoist was included as standard. The longest period of temporary closure was experienced in 2006 when the building was closed for 6 weeks.

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A government grant enabled the installation of more seating, lower shelves, a coffee machine, a reading area and interactive zone with graphic novels. The opportunity was taken to carry out essential electrical upgrading, since much of the building's wiring dated back to the original 1938 installation.

In 2004, a new, state-of-the-art mobile library was introduced, replacing the one that had given excellent service since 1992. The new vehicle sported an attractive livery that helped to advertise the service. Ted Brown, Mobile Library Officer, was awarded the MBE in 2005 in recognition of the quality of the service he provided to his users. This was a fitting and timely award prior to his retirement a year later.



1999 was the National Year of Reading, which was fully supported by Torbay Library Services. This was an example of the growing importance given nationally and locally to assisting library users in (to use the jargon) their 'reading development'. There is now at least one reading group based in each library, supported by the library service.

The reference and information service has not been neglected. One of the early post-1998 developments was the extension of 'Lifelines' leaflet information collections to all branch libraries. In amongst all the modern technology came the publication of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, a much fuller up-date edition of the nineteenth century Dictionary of National Biography, which had been supplemented by additional volumes throughout the twentieth century. The modern version ran to 60 volumes and cost £6,500, and was such an important addition to the Reference Library stock that it received a special launch.

In 2005, Torbay Library Services signed up to the national 'Enquire' service, which is another development of the People's Network. Anyone can e-mail an information request, which is then answered by a trained librarian from one of the participating libraries. Together with many staff across the country and abroad, three members of the Torquay staff have been specially trained to respond to enquiries, on a rota basis. Finally, in 2007, the John Pike Local Studies Room was refurbished and modernised. The improvements were well received; it is to be hoped that John Pike would have given his approval!

So, the library service has reached its centenary in 2007. From a stock of 6,950 books administered by three staff, the service now boasts a stock of 225,000 books, CDs, videos and computers, with a full-time equivalent staff of over 50 people. The service has come a long way, through world wars and local

government re-organisations; from hand-written records, through mechanical means of reproduction, to computers. To books have been added audio-visual aids and the Internet, to assist the pursuit of knowledge. The staff may have changed, but the ethos has remained the same throughout – service to all comers. In 2006, the Minister for Culture, speaking of librarians nationally, said, ‘I have been astonished at the huge commitment of staff towards the people they serve’. That statement applies to Torbay Library Services. What of the future? Perhaps a new library for Torquay or Paignton? The Government is looking yet again at the structure of local government; there are ever increasing technological advances, but whatever happens, the library service will still strive to meet the demands and expectations of the people of Torbay.

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