

## II<sup>e</sup> SECTION.

### *11<sup>e</sup> question.*

## ESSENTIALS PROVISIONS WICH SHOULD BE MADE IN THE PLANS OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The number of buildings erected in Great Britain during recent years to accommodate large reference Libraries is so limited that it is difficult to make these the basis of any general inferences as to the tendency of British practice in regard to this class of building.

There are, however, two special characteristics of our modern buildings to which it will be well to call attention before repeating the more general rules to be observed with regard to the planning of these libraries.

The development of the rate-supported library in Great Britain has exercised a considerable influence on our ideas of a library's function. The conception of a library as a museum has, in the case of the municipal library, been definitely abandoned, and sentiment has had to make room for efficiency. The case of a large reference library whether in a municipality or a university is of course different. The «museum idea» is more in harmony with its proper function, and book-collecting is its proper sphere. At the same time, by far the larger part of its stock must necessarily be lying idle for a great part of the time; the number of works more or less frequently in demand being very limited and capable of fairly close definition. The idea of separating such works

from the main stock and storing them in or close to the reading room itself originated with Panizzi, but it seems probable that the development of the science of librarianship is to some extent at any rate responsible for its adoption in such reference libraries as the Mitchell Library and the National Library of Wales, now in course of construction. The resultant saving in time and in the number of attendants is, of course, very considerable.

Further, this method of providing shelving for the most used books in the immediate vicinity of the readers has rendered possible great economy of space in respect of the housing of the remainder of the stock.

In the plans for the new Mitchell Library, Glasgow, for instance, the bookcases on the reading room level are given a liberal spacing, while on the remaining floors the gangways are reduced to a minimum width.

Another method of economising space is the use of rolling cases. These were adopted some time ago in the British Museum Library, as a means of extending the existing shelving accommodation, the rolling cases being hung in front of the others parallel with the gangways.

The modern method of arranging these cases is to place them side by side transversely with the gangways, by which means practically one-third of the whole cubic space of a storeroom can be filled with shelving. These rolling cases are used in the India Office Library, the Bodleian, Cambridge University Library, and many others.

In the new library of the Medical School at Cambridge the space under the galleries of the reading room is entirely filled with rolling cases.

Another arrangement, which though not an innovation, would appear to be on the increase in the modern reference library, is the provision of separate rooms for special collections, for example, the Burns Library and The Jeffrey and Glasgow Collections at Glasgow, the Shakespeare Library at Birmingham and the Hornby Library at Liverpool. Were this not, in most cases, dictated by necessity, the movement should probably be considered retrograde. As it is, however,

bequests of book-collections, like picture collections, are often made on the condition of their being separately housed.

With regard to the separation of special subjects this may sometimes be suggested by special circumstances, and may be useful to students of those subjects, as for example, in the case of the Bible Room at the John Rylands Library, but on the whole it tends to detract from the usefulness of the library to the general reader, more especially where the books on such subjects must be studied in their own room. It is indeed doubtful whether, except in very special instances, this arrangement is desirable. In other cases the form of the publication compels separate accommodation, for example, in the case of prints, maps, newspapers, patent specifications, etc., as in the British Museum, National Library of Wales, and elsewhere.

There are certain other considerations connected with these libraries which should not escape attention.

It is, for instance, very desirable that a large reading room should have no building over it. Freedom from obstructing piers in the room and the facilities for obtaining efficient ventilation and a well-diffused light from above are of paramount importance.

As vertical windows can thus be dispensed with it is possible to place the reading room in the centre of the block and to screen it by the surrounding buildings from street noises. The Mitchell Library at Glasgow is a good example of the arrangement meant.

Though I think it unlikely that the plan of placing a large reading room on the top of a high bookstack, as in the New York Public Library, will ever find favour in this country where we are not accustomed to high buildings, yet in many situations a position on the first floor of the library has much to recommend it, and the disadvantages to readers of having to use a staircase or lift would be often more than compensated.

The door or doors by which readers enter the reading room should be so placed that those entering can reach the

delivery desk without interruption to readers already studying.

It is a good thing to have the entrances, catalogue rooms, and delivery room recessed, if not partially screened, from the main body of the reading room, as in the State Historical Library, Madison, Wis.

When such an arrangement is not possible a good solution of the difficulty is that shown in the plans for the National Library of Wales, where the reading room is practically divided into two, readers entering in the centre opposite the delivery desk. In this plan the catalogues are outside the main reading room, and at some distance from the delivery desk, an arrangement which is not altogether satisfactory, as it is likely to involve a certain amount of extra traffic backwards and forwards across the room. Readers require the catalogues as much when using the room, as when about to enter it.

Bookstacks, except where they are occupied by the least-used volumes only, should, of course, be so placed as to be in direct communication with the delivery desk, and a sufficient number of quick-running lifts should be provided.

Where a collection or the most-used books is stored on the delivery floor of the stack, this must be well lighted, and in this case the lighting of the rest of the stack is comparatively unimportant, as the electric light can be turned on and off, as required. Where the books are not differentiated the whole stack should, if possible, be well lit.

The means of preventing fire in library buildings may be grouped under three heads.

(1) The buildings and fittings should be constructed of incombustible materials throughout, only such hard woods as teak, oak, etc, being used, so that there shall be no fuel within the building. The library should also be protected from conflagrations in adjoining buildings, parapet walls being carried up where necessary to protect skylights, if any, and other vulnerable features. A vaulted stone roof, such as that of the John Rylands Library is a very great protection against this danger.

In the National Library of Wales, the site of which is very exposed, skylights have been excluded in view of danger from lightning.

When lightning-conductors are used, these should be connected with steel book-cases, stacks, galleries etc.

(2) Caretakers' or Librarian's residences, heating chambers, fuel stores etc, should be in separate buildings, as at the John Rylands Library and the National Library of Wales; or they should be effectually separated by open balconies, or fireproof floors and doors, from the main building. The separation of residences has the further advantage of preventing the authorities from rating the whole library as an inhabited house.

In the National Library of Wales the manuscript department, which will contain the treasures of the collection, can be entirely cut off from the rest of the building by fireproof doors.

Fireproof Strong Rooms for archives and valuable books and manuscripts should be provided. There should be proper fireproof receptacles for waste-paper, or other inflammable matter.

(3) It is impossible to entirely exclude all inflammable substances from a library when in use, and therefore hand-grenades or extinguishers, capable of checking small outbreaks, should be provided in various parts of the building.

Buildings constructed and equipped on the above principles can be insured more economically than others.

