

IV<sup>e</sup> SECTION.

5<sup>e</sup> question.

## ESSENTIALS

### WHICH SHOULD BE POSSESSED BY PREMISES FOR A POPULAR LIBRARY

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The accommodation considered necessary for a Municipal Library in Great Britain depends, as does the arrangement of the rooms, on the size of the building and upon local conditions. The size of a municipal library is dictated by its income which is derived from a limited rate and consequently bears only an indirect and uncertain relation to the number of persons likely to use the building.

The area from which this rate is drawn is often extensive, and in such cases it is necessary to establish branch libraries in suitable positions.

The departments mainly provided in municipal libraries are: Lending Library, Reference Library, Periodical Reading Rooms, Juvenile Lending Libraries and Reading Rooms, and occasionally Ladies' Reading Rooms and Lecture Rooms. Of these the first three are almost invariably provided, though in libraries with a very limited income it is hardly possible to get together a reference collection of any value, and this department cannot in such cases pretend to provide more than a small « quick reference » collection.

Where the library area required the establishment of branches it is of course unusual to distribute the reference collection (except as regards « quick reference » books) and this is therefore stored intact at the central library.

The modern tendency towards the storage of books is to

make the collection practically useful and as comprehensive as possible, and to discard out-of-date works in favour of the more recent publications.

By this method the shelving accommodation can be limited.

With regard to periodical reading rooms, either one room for newspapers and magazines is provided, or two rooms, one for each class. In the latter case the magazines are sometimes kept in the Reference Reading Room.

The provision of daily newspapers is almost invariably in British Municipal libraries, although the practical advantages of this policy are doubtful. At any rate there is no doubt that, owing to the space which has to be provided for their perusal (often more than a fifth of the whole cubic contents of the library) and the cost of buying them, they detract considerably from the efficiency of the library in other, perhaps more legitimate, directions. In fact, in some of the most modern buildings no provision has been made for daily papers, save as regards the advertisements of « Situations vacant » which are out cut and displayed early in the mornings.

Juvenile departments are every day coming to be considered more important, and in some cases, separate lending libraries are provided for children. Separate rooms for ladies are sometimes provided, but their usefulness is very doubtful, since they are found to require as much supervision as juvenile rooms and add as much to the difficulties of administration, without producing the same obviously good results.

Lecture rooms are found a great addition to the usefulness of libraries and have been provided even in branch libraries, with excellent results.

The arrangement and disposition of the various departments depend very largely upon the methods of administration adopted in regard to each, and with these it is not proposed to deal in this report.

Beyond the special considerations dictated by the methods of administration there are, of course, some general rule which must be observed.

Light and air must, of course, be secured in all public rooms and artificial, as well as window ventilation must be provided.

Sufficient space must be provided in reading rooms to allow not only of ample elbow-room for readers, but of easy passage to and from different parts of the room. Not less than 20 square feet per reader should be provided, and an allowance of 25 square feet is preferable.

In recent years, more especially since the Carnegie gifts have relieved library authorities from the burden of building loans, a more generous provision has been made for the accommodation of readers. More space per person has been allowed, and this augmentation of floor areas has, in some cases, enabled students to be given separate tables and some degree of isolation. Many of the older buildings are very crowded, both in the book store and public reading rooms, and it is a welcome departure to find that in modern libraries an attempt is being made to make the individual reader more comfortable and the work more efficient by the provision of plenty of room.

All reading rooms, especially reference reading rooms, must be situated as far as possible out of reach of noise, external and internal. To this end they should be placed away from the frontage if this be on a busy thoroughfare, while the lending library and juvenile department should be so placed that those using them do not have to pass backwards and forwards in the neighbourhood of the reading rooms. In many town libraries where the frontage is only sufficient for one room and a passage, the periodical reading room is placed in the front of the building with the reference room at the back, the lending library being placed in the centre, so as to give supervision of both rooms from the lending library counter. This is a bad position for the periodical reading room, as it subjects readers to internal, as well as external disturbance, and is in most cases adopted because it is not sufficiently realised that if a periodical reading room is worth providing at all it is a negation of its utility to place it in such a position that readers using it are

liable to disturbance. Where such an arrangement is devised, it is because the requirements of supervision in public libraries are misunderstood or exaggerated by most architects and library authorities, a point which may well be dealt with in conclusion.

Supervision of readers by the staff and by other readers is one of the most essential considerations in library planning. A few years ago, the need of supervision by the staff appeared to be the one factor in library design recognised by architects. The problem was usually approached from this point of view to the exclusion of all others, and the real requirements were almost invariably misunderstood. Though matters have improved generally in this direction, yet a considerable number of recent designs have shown a tendency to sacrifice the practical utility of the library to a demonstration of supervisability more apparent on paper than effective in practice. Until the necessity for a good working plan and actually effective rather than apparently effective supervision is strenuously insisted upon, the assessors, and therefore the competitors, in library competitions are likely to follow old and bad precedents.

The chief factor to be considered in connection with supervision is the number of the staff, and where this is limited to say two, they will probably both be employed, for most of their time, in the lending library, which will also be their workroom. In such a case they will probably have sufficient leisure to exercise a certain amount of intermittent supervision over the other rooms, and if there is a reference library it should be so placed that the same attendants can serve the reference readers and the borrowers in the lending library.

No such library, that is to say, one served by a staff of two, should have any public room on an upper floor.

So far then as libraries with a very small staff are concerned, that is to say small single libraries and most branch libraries, the lending library counter or enclosure may be regarded as the centre of supervision for the whole building, and staff supervision must in such cases be supplemented by the

supervision exercised by one reader over the other. In the case of two floor buildings of course there must be a minimum of two centres of supervision, say the lending library counter on the ground floor and the reference library counter on the first floor.

I have said that this is the minimum, for in libraries which are largely used, the attendant in the lending library and reference library respectively have usually as much as they can do to serve and supervise their own departments. This will involve separate superintendence for the remaining rooms and, in some cases, an attendant to supervise each public room in the building.

It is not uncommon to see in the plans of a large library which would be staffed by several assistants, every practical consideration sacrificed to the supposed need of supervision from one point, and many impracticable plans are the result of the idea that the sole function of the staff is supervision, and the failure to realise that their number must depend upon the number of readers and borrowers with whom the library has to deal and not upon the plan.

Facilities for supervision should be considered in the light of the number of attendants required for the actual work of the library, and the architect's object should be to see that the need of supervision shall not necessitate an increase in this number: he should not endeavour, when designing a library, whose work will require 10 assistants, to plan a building which can be supervised by one. Such arrangement will not decrease the number of assistants employed and will almost certainly involve arrangements inconvenient alike to the administration, and to the public.

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