**Back to the Future: Library History as Forecast**

*Abstract*

UNESCO and IFLA have longstanding history in influencing librarianship from international perspectives: their joint ‘Public Library Manifesto’ (1994) describes “well-informed citizens”, with the ability to “exercise their democratic rights” as “depend[ing] on … free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information” (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994). Without such savvy citizenry, the manifesto suggests, “[f]reedom, prosperity and the development of society” as “fundamental human values” may come to be in flux. Positioning the public library as an “essential agent” in this process, it being “the local gateway”, the 1949 original manifesto declares “[t]he public library: a democratic agency”, and decrees an international commitment to it being “established under the clear mandate of law - it should be maintained wholly from public funds” (Thomas, 1992). While Buschman (2007) and Buckland (2008) may disagree on the exact loci of democratic theory in relation to LIS, Larsen (2020) reminds us that (at least in Nordic countries) “several national laws on public libraries have been reformulated to encompass the libraries roles as public spheres” and that they have a “democratic and inclusive mission”, with Buschman (2021) noting “[t]he library-in-the-life-of-the-public-sphere raises salient questions of libraries and their role in democratic societies: what are they for and what do they do?”. This paper, also taking its lead from Black (1996; 2006) and Wiegand’s (2011) historiographic approach, explores 19thc. English public library development and legislation in the context of public sphere theory (Arendt 1961, 1965, 1970, 1998; Habermas 1991; Warner 2002; Fraser 1990), demonstrating that ‘[h]istory … can help us plan the future’’ (Black, 1991) by proposing the public library’s potential as an UR-site of democratic counterpublic discourse.

Historical research into the founding and subsequent development of English public libraries has often been conducted with an eye on its mid-Victorian initiation.[[1]](#footnote-1) Scholar Alistair Black has noted, however, that theories of public library development ‘might have been developed sooner with the assistance of historians working in broader fields,’ finding that in general such historians have tended to ignore ‘the cultural domain of the public library’[[2]](#footnote-2) altogether, while library history scholars have continued to point to the field’s ‘internalist’ nature – ‘afflicted by tunnel vision and blind spots’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Similar calls for reappraisals of public library history also focus on what Muddiman has described as its ‘social identity,’[[4]](#footnote-4) with a recognition that the realm of activities and practices in which the public library deals necessarily spread out from its immediate circumference to become enacted and embedded within the wider spheres of individuals and individual communities and their everyday lived interactions and experiences[[5]](#footnote-5) – important aspects of which (especially in the phenomenological sense) continue to elude further study and examination. Alongside these useful self-examinations, much “emotional heat” as well as “intellectual enlightenment”[[6]](#footnote-6) (to hack Jesse Shera’s phrase) has also been experienced by LIS scholars focused on ‘the public sphere and its relationship to libraries’, a ‘controversy’ in Buschman’s terms to which clear answers have also remained studiously elusive,[[7]](#footnote-7) not least, it can be argued, in the context of public libraries specifically, since as Ingraham notes, ‘[f]or all its familiarity, the idea of a “public library” is deceptively complex’.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Heeding all these issues, ideas and proposals is, in the first instance, the underlying emphasis to this brief exploration here, and as such this short study (based on a longer work in progress)[[9]](#footnote-9) offers an introductory exploration and interrogation of what Buschman succinctly enquires as to ‘libraries and their role in democratic societies: what are they for and what do they do?”[[10]](#footnote-10) It also aims to layout an original conceptual framework of analysis, which it is proposed may prove fruitful to guide the field of librarianship over the next decade, and beyond, that is, by turning to library history it is also possible to envision libraries of the future.[[11]](#footnote-11)

With this in mind, I want to suggest it is necessary therefore to return us to origins and origin stories: to look for answers in the nascent movements, moments and experiences in (relatively) recent library history. The work of political thinkers Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner in particular, are drawn on to inform this analysis, providing notions and understandings of “democracy” and “public sphere” theory which, it is argued, may prove productive in revealing some of the inherent complexities contained within answering Buschman’s question, while also potentially pointing to how public forms of libraries may carry these concepts as constitutive elements (suggesting a double-helix-type relationship perhaps). These works, and the work of other scholars, are also employed to help to tease out the relational threads that bind public forms of libraries to concepts of citizenship and ideas of democracy that in turn hold a ‘deep elective affinity’ to the concept of ‘civil society’.[[12]](#footnote-12) Through such an interdisciplinary analytical approach it is hoped that a better understanding of ‘core value[s] of librarianship’; ‘[w]hat in librarianship transcends national boundaries’; and, in particular, what role public libraries, specifically, might play in relation to democracy and in ‘expand[ing] democratic conversations’ may be found .[[13]](#footnote-13)

Debates amongst library history scholars (and other interested parties) in terms of claims relating to the “first” “public library” (certainly a sought-after accolade) demonstrate well some of the complexities associated with the concept itself. The history of libraries is a well-traversed route and not necessary to expound upon here (not least due to issues of space – the reader is referred to further references in the footnotes),[[14]](#footnote-14) but the salient point to draw from these studies and investigations is defining terms and term definitions, since as Edward Edwards noted long ago ‘[t]here is still greater difficulty in some cases, in correctly determining what constitutes a *public* library strictly so called’.[[15]](#footnote-15)

It is generally recognised that a range of libraries (private, parochial, parish, subscription etc.) provided (at various points in history) access to information (understood as predominantly book-based pre-20th century), however, it is not until the nineteenth century that such *access*, specifically, moves to encompass whole swathes of a country-wide population through legislative responses by a sovereign country. *The Public Libraries and Museums Act,* enacted in August of 1850,[[16]](#footnote-16) was the first legislative effort to provide a national framework for public library development in England and Wales.[[17]](#footnote-17) Functioning, therefore, as a legalistic birthing milestone in the life of the English public library, the legislation itself also repeats this landmark, representing itself the first national step by a sovereign state government to provide a legal framework to establish “public libraries”, funded through municipal (i.e. collective forms of) taxation.

There are, of course, previous legislative efforts that enabled public library development in particular regional locations, e.g. New York state’s 1796 Act, which ‘simply permitted private citizens to form associations–“societies”–to purchase and share collections of books. They were considered public because they promoted the public good, because “it is of the utmost importance to the public that sources of information should be multiplied and institutions for that purpose encouraged,”’[[18]](#footnote-18) as well as legislative and legal responses which enabled particular types of libraries to operate which technically members of the public might have access to (e.g. the 1708 Parochial Libraries Act; David Drummond’s will – dated December 1691 – which enabled the founding of Innerpeffray library in Scotland; Henry Chetham’s 1653 will, which provided funds to found five parish libraries for ‘’the common people’’ of Manchester and Bolton; while Ulm city library in Germany was founded from the bequest of lawyer and pastor Ulrich Krafft in 1516 etc.).[[19]](#footnote-19)

There are also the efforts and responses of thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of individuals, who provided collections of books to people in their respective communities during this same pre-20th century period, such as libraries attached to mechanical institutes, factories and schools (dame schools, Sunday schools) etc. Notwithstanding these individual and community efforts of the above types of libraries, though offering some form of recognisable library service (albeit at its most basic level of the ability to access books), they can be distinguished by: a limited range of access (e.g. factory libraries were typically accessible only by factory workers); the requirement of some sort of payment or fee for access (e.g. libraries attached to public houses or coffee houses); the “postcode lottery” of whether a wealthy, random benefactor/clergyman/other interested party deigned a particular local community worthy of funding such development; or as Morris simply observes ‘[t]he books they contained have not been freely available for anyone who wanted to borrow them and take them home to read’.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Morris, both a legal and library history scholar, has also noted that ‘the use of the word ‘free’ [is] a word which few writers seem to have given sufficiently careful thought’, going on to note that ‘[m]any library buildings of the late nineteenth century incorporated the word ‘Free’ in their threshold […] The reasons for this word surely deserve more careful thought than hitherto’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Certainly, *one* of the main reasons for such textual decorative features in many of these new library buildings (and the ‘colloquial title’ of ‘Free Libraries’ used in the Houses of Parliament ‘original title of Bills introduced in the Commons in 1876, 1877, 1881-4, and 1887 (twice))’, as Morris acknowledges (and similarly “across the pond” in early examples in the US), was likely to specifically distinguish them from previous library forms: the “Leeds Library”, the “Liverpool Library”, “Norwich City Library”, the “Publick Bibliotheck of Kirkwall” and the “Orkney Library” are all examples of pre-19th century libraries operating in England and Scotland which functioned as subscription libraries, and although technically catering to “any” member of the “public” (and often hence commonly known or termed as “public libraries” to their local populations and communities) their fees and membership dues ensured that only those with sufficient wealth were able to participate (i.e. during this period, certainly not most members of the “working classes”, that is, the general population).[[22]](#footnote-22)

Mindful of Morris’s charge of omission, however, there is in fact a very significant point to be made here in regards the word “free” becoming attached in the nineteenth century to municipal libraries operating for the benefit of the public, beyond a simple demarcation. This is emphatically that inattention to the word “free” has arguably obscured some of the ‘radical nature’ of what was being proposed by this coming-into-being of a municipal public library: ‘the fact that use of the new libraries would be free’: [[23]](#footnote-23)

*‘And it be enacted That Admission to such Libraries […] shall be free of all Charge’[[24]](#footnote-24)*

Within this legal construct, it is argued, some of the public library’s fundamental and unique relationship to concepts of power, democracy, citizenship and freedom is revealed, and demonstrates that in its natality it arrives (parsing Hannah Arendt) with, and as, a ‘character of startling unexpectedness’[[25]](#footnote-25) – exposing here too in its origins what could be termed a radical, miraculous, revolutionary political action, in that ‘the original meaning of the word ‘revolution’ that the idea of which all revolutionary actors have been possessed and obsessed, [is] namely, that they are agents in a process which spells the definite end of an old order and brings about the birth of a new world,’[[26]](#footnote-26) with Edward Edwards, it is argued, the English public library’s principal revolutionary architect.

Evidence this aspect of “free” is particularly meaningful can also be found by considering that, only four years previous to the 1850 *Public Libraries Act,* the first English legislative attempt to provide basic definitions for what constituted conditions considered unfit for human habitation (the 1846 *Nuisance Removal Act*) came into being too, with the *Public Health Act,* in 1848, marking, for the first time, acceptance of government towards its responsibility for the population’s general health. As Munford observes, ‘[t]he list of social services and amenities wholly or partly lacking … was a long one’ during the first half of the English nineteenth century, such that ‘[p]iped water supply was in its infancy. Street cleaning varied from occasional to never’.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Legislation, no matter permissive, which introduced the concept of *universal* and *free* access to information – ‘a source of literature and knowledge’,[[28]](#footnote-28) seems at first, within this social and legislative context, anachronistic, and indeed a radical, if not revolutionary act, at a time when quite clearly ‘however excellent food for the mind might be, food for the body was what was now most wanted for the people’[[29]](#footnote-29) since in reality ‘[o]ne complaint common to almost all [of the] working class […] was the constant, low-level hunger.’[[30]](#footnote-30)

Other social amenity legislation from this period, and the parliamentary debates producing it, also includes one outstanding aspect which distinguishes the 1850 Act by virtue of this same feature’s specific exclusion: the incorporation of the capacity to charge an individual for the specific use of facilities relating to the amenity offered.[[31]](#footnote-31) This ‘charge’ clause is present in both the 1847 Towns Improvement Act:

*The commissioners may from time to time make such reasonable charges for the use of such baths, bathing places, wash-houses, and drying grounds, as they think fit[[32]](#footnote-32)*

as well as in the 1845 Act for Encouraging the Establishment of Museums in Large Towns:

*And it be Enacted, That the Council of any such Municipal Borough may, from time to time, fix such rates of payment for admission to any such Museum, as the Council may think expedient, not exceeding the sum of One Penny for each person admitted[[33]](#footnote-33)*

as well as occurring in MP James Silk Buckingham’s ill-fated earlier attempts to introduce legislation (very similar to the 1845 and 1850 Acts) in the preceding decade, in the forms of his 1835, 1836 and 1837 *Public Walks and Institution Bills*.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The manifestation of tax-supported municipal libraries with “free” access, likewise vying for the spotlight in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Maine (as the earliest examples of regional state-level legislation occurring in the US in this same period of English national legislative action) also begins, I wish to argue here, both as a radical act of collective engagement and action (the “collectivity” principle should not be glossed over in favour of the “financial” element) as well as a revolutionary act (in the Arendtian political sense), which evidences and illuminates the tri-partite relationship between public libraries, the public sphere and forms of democracy (as well as manifesting as a form of action which symbolically marks a particular type of ‘unexpected’ beginning, q.v. Arendt also), following understandings to be found in the work of Hannah Arendt, in particular, and the works of Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, amongst others.

Arendt, in a series of works spanning 1958-1970, reminds us that ‘[p]ower corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert’,[[35]](#footnote-35) its ‘only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with’ and that ‘by acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization’ within ‘the public realm, the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all’, it is possible that a ‘power potential’ arises where ‘activities which by themselves constitut[e] the space of freedom,’[[36]](#footnote-36) can occur, though ‘freedom can so easily be mistaken for an essentially nonpolitical phenomenon’ but it ‘develops fully only when action has created its own worldly space where it can come out of hiding, as it were, and make its appearance.’[[37]](#footnote-37)

Habermas parses Arendt’s understandings as a ‘discourse-theoretic concept of political autonomy’,[[38]](#footnote-38) that is, self-governance – producing legislation – effected through elective, non-coersive discussions enacted in public, however, there is more to be unpicked from her thinking here, and from which it is possible to negotiate a clearer understanding both of the complex role, and indications of form, that public libraries manifest in such contexts, and an argument towards why they spring into existence during this particular period of the nineteenth century – the history of European events during this period, the “Age of Revolution”, tantalisingly hinting again at how power and freedom (including autonomy, political and otherwise) are therefore necessarily embedded in a public library’s conceptual, symbolic and embodied forms. It is hoped that by exploring these Arendtian disclosures, an approach for ‘determin[ing] how librarianship is defined in and outside of the context of a library, as well as beyond sectors’,[[39]](#footnote-39) is made more possible and that further insight into ‘what [public libraries] are for and what [public libraries] do’ may be gained.

Firstly, Arendt’s insights suggest that the age-old mantra of the “neutrality” of the public library is entirely mythical, or rather, wrongly attributed. Examples of the reality of this fallacy are easily evidenced by turning to US civil rights-era issues of public library access,[[40]](#footnote-40) for a start, but Arendt also encourages us to remember that the very coming into being of these ‘free town libraries’ in nineteenth century England were themselves individual *political* acts: a collective action by a particular municipality who came together as individual citizens in public to hold a discussion and then to vote on whether to enact the 1850 Act in their particular township (and in the knowledge that their pockets would be taxed to fund this). The public library, as both philosophical construct and actual embodiment, is ergo an act of political power and holds within itself also the constitution of freedom. The coming together of the people of Norwich on September 27th, 1850 (for example), to exchange opinions in public and then proceed to take a vote to establish the ‘Norwich Free Library’ (or the ‘Free Public Library’), forty-four days after the 1850 Public Libraries Act is passed by parliament and given royal assent (14th August, 1850),[[41]](#footnote-41) as ‘the body corporate of this town, alive to their duty, lost no time in appointing a committee for the purpose of considering how far they could apply the act to the city of Norwich […] and there never was a question passed by the Corporation with greater unanimity than th[is] one,[[42]](#footnote-42) mirrors the ‘spontaneous organizational efforts of the people themselves’[[43]](#footnote-43) as Arendt describes, with the Norwich body corporate (as municipal corporation) akin to the ‘idea of the ward system’ or ‘townships’ which Arendt flags as ‘the salvation of the revolutionary spirit’.[[44]](#footnote-44)

This Arendtian ‘spirit of revolution’[[45]](#footnote-45) can arguably be said to be constitutive, in fact, of the public library construct itself – Ditzion provides us with an account of ‘the establishment of a town library at Peterborough, New Hampshire’, describing it as ‘unique in that here we have an instance of what appears to be the spontaneous generation of an entirely new form’, for ‘here, without the stimulus of private donation, without the permission of state legislation, without the semblance of a model in the mother country, a tax-supported town library was born’ through the people of Peterborough coming together to publicly pass a vote to provide funds for this construct.[[46]](#footnote-46) Both townships’ actions represent exactly the Arendtian ‘power’ which can only come into being ‘when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges; only such power which rest[s] on reciprocity and mutuality, is real power and legitimate’.[[47]](#footnote-47) Such activities are, following Arendt, ‘activities which by themselves constitut[e] the space of freedom,’[[48]](#footnote-48) – that is, the public library’s coming-into-beingness at this point of its natality (pinpointed here as 1850) can be revealed as a form of political freedom.

Secondly, Arendt helps continue to define the outline of a public library’s form and function through her discursive perceptiveness of freedom and its relation to democracy, power and the public sphere. As ‘all authority […] rests on opinion’, ‘the actual content of freedom […] is participation in public affairs, or admission to the public realm’[[49]](#footnote-49) she writes, and ‘[t]he equality attending the public realm is necessarily an equality of unequals who stand in need of being “equalized” in certain respects and for specific purposes’.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Using the work of Michael Warner (and others) is of particular help here, with his perception that ‘[a] public is a space of discourse organised by nothing other than discourse itself … It exists *by virtue of being addressed*’, that is, it manifests as ‘an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Not texts themselves create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time’, as ‘[i]n order for a text to be public, we must recognise it not simply as a diffusion to strangers but also as a temporality of circulation’ which also, however, ‘requires preexisting forms and channels of circulation’.[[51]](#footnote-51) This conception of publics as spaces of discourse, requiring conduits or agents of transmission and distribution, situates all forms of libraries within this purview that is, as agents of public discourse diffusion, with the public library, in particular, it is argued, taking on superagency here.

Emirbayer and Sheller describe such Warnerian channels or conduits as ‘networks of publicitythat are rooted within civil society’ – here the public library as individual node – and arguably point to libraries (and archives) as being ‘the most far-reaching (and long-lasting) of all’ in their interactions with publics and the public realm or civil society, as they ‘us[e] print or symbolic communication to disseminate information not only through spatially extensive networks, but also over long periods of time’.[[52]](#footnote-52) They also disclose further evidence of public libraries significant role as a node in the ‘communicative networks that turn critical attention back upon and, ideally but not necessarily, aim further to democratize civil society itself (“civil publics”).’[[53]](#footnote-53) This also maps to understandings of public libraries as ‘sustaining institutional structures’ of democracy,[[54]](#footnote-54) and in fact, spaces which all public forms of libraries manifest as can be conceived as forms of publicity networks in this sense, with the public library, in particular, taking a specific role ‘in certain respects and for specific purposes’ (following Arendt) especially in relation to notional and material forms of democracy and citizenship; power and freedom; free will, free speech, human agency and autonomy. Warner’s understandings also point us to the insight that as the circulation of discourse remains at the core of all concepts of library forms and functions, this can account for the way a public library appears as both internal and external to concepts of democracy, citizenship and freedom, ‘both notional and material’ at one and the same time, perhaps accounting for its ‘deceptively complex’ nature and suggesting a double-helical relationship, or, following Buschman, its necessarily ‘autopoietic’ state.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Returning to Arendt, with these insights attached, it is possible to gain an awareness that this ‘public realm’ of ‘unequals’, situated here as public spaces of discourse, can respond and redress such inequalities through its own coming-together power (i.e. generate legislative responses to remedy unjustness), but also points towards the implication that in fact a core tenet of the public library is to facilitate “equalization”, and to work towards remedying injustice (or at the very least administer countermeasures), though, following Arendt, this will be bounded ‘in certain respects’ based on ‘specific purposes’. Evidence from library history demonstrates that such ‘purposes’ are likely to include, for example: ‘intellectual improvement’; ‘source[s] of literature and knowledge’,[[56]](#footnote-56) ‘enabling individuals and individual communities to become ‘better citizens’; and, through being ‘an essential benefit to the citizens’, ‘a secondary aid to the welfare of the people’ at large it both represents, and fosters and sustains, actions of “citizenship” itself at one and the same time.[[57]](#footnote-57) Such insights can also provide knowledge for the field around what activities public forms of libraries should administer and maintain: perhaps rather than asking whether a public library should provide a tool library, Arendt’s awareness instead shows us that we should ask the question ‘Would a tool library facilitate equality?’.

Both Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner (amongst many others) have taken Habermas to task for idealised notions of the “public sphere” (in Arendt’s usage as above, ‘public affairs’ or the ‘public realm’) and Fraser and Warner’s conceptions of “counterpublics”: the understanding that *the* “public”, as one singular and totalising entity, elides and erodes a comprehension that it is in fact made up of a series of publics, some with ‘subordinate’ status, that is, ‘defined by their tension with a larger public’, is of particular importance with regard to Arendt’s understandings of ‘equality of unequals’ here, and to constructs of public libraries also. All these types of counterpublics, whether subaltern or not, still enable ‘a horizon of opinion and exchange’, though such exchanges remain ‘distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power’ due to their “counter” status.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Arendt’s observations home in on the connecting points between “opinion”, which when voiced in “public” realms as a form of mutual discourse, can enable claims to, and the forging of, “power”, with the sense that such thought, speech and action must first be grounded in real “freeness” – the freedom of the individual to think, speak and act for herself publicly – in order for it to constitute true free political thought-speech-action. This, in turn, and somewhat paradoxically, suggests that these factors (“opinions” voiced “freely” in “public”) are both the requirements as well as the effects of committing to the concept of ‘*public* freedom’, that is, a ‘tangible, worldly reality […] the man-made public space or market-place […] where freedom appears and becomes visible to all’[[59]](#footnote-59) and where “power” can manifest as individual citizens, freely coming together in public voice to effect change (“action”).

Arendt’s perception here provides the insight that, in effect, a public library’s symbolic and embodied forms are constitutive of power, freedom and democracy, as well as speaking again to the public library’s ‘deceptively complex’ form. This is demonstrated by the tri-partite nature in which these concepts are to be found in all public forms of libraries, in its most elementary explication: the provision of a “free to all” model of public access to information (here also glossed as ‘opinion’ or ‘discourse’). In addition, because its embodiment consists of, quite literally, people (‘publics’) coming together *in public* to encounter discourse (opinion~information), in and through the texts (information sources – physical, digital or otherwise) they seek to interact with (and that the public library specifically holds in trust for them to access, as a node in the ‘network of publicity’) *as well as* through the discursive interactions that are the result of physical (or digital) actions between individuals entering this public library space, that an intricate, entangled and complex relationship between freedom, power and democracy can be seen to be embedded in, and constituent of, all public forms of libraries. Unpacking Arendt’s understandings of ‘public freedom’ and ‘power’ (and with the help of Warner and Fraser’s analysis) also enables the discovery that ‘power’ is always latently manifest in all public forms of libraries, since ‘power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with’.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Arendt’s recognition of this latency of public sphere inequality, the ‘equality of unequals’ in the ‘public realm’, prefigures the necessary corollary that, as Habermas acknowledges, ‘’[o]nly when […] information [comes to] be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutionalised influence over the government through the instrument of law‐making bodies’,[[61]](#footnote-61) that is, individuals will continue to remain unequal, ‘subaltern’ or ‘subordinate’ within the “public sphere” wherever their access to information similarly remains subordinate and, when provided with specific limitations of access (whether literal, or through financial limits, or accessibility issues due to the nature of forms of discourse, which can follow codified discursive practices or triumph as the dominating discursive practise), this in turn limits their influence over government, ultimately thereby limiting their “freedom” also.

As many scholars focusing on print culture and the history of the book acknowledge, access to printed texts – a dominating, and predominant, channel of public discourses of information, alongside newspapers, periodicals and journals – in nineteenth century England for the general population, commonly referred to as the ‘inferior ranks’ (e.g. see Hannah More’s contemporaneous accounts)[[62]](#footnote-62) or the “working classes” was (leaving aside for the moment issues of discursive access) emphatically defined by price, and until mid to late nineteenth century changes in the book market, which, as Eliot observes, ushered in a new era of “cheap print”,[[63]](#footnote-63) the cost of individual new books remained beyond the easy, everyday reach of the “working classes”[[64]](#footnote-64) since, as one bookseller as witness to an 1818 Select Committee described, ‘[b]ooks are a luxury, and the purchase of them has been confined to fewer people. In general, those who would be disposed to purchase books, have not the means of so doing, and are obliged to be frugal.’[[65]](#footnote-65)

This is not to discount the possibility of working class readers buying books – via careful savings of wages and a focus on frugality in daily existence – however, turning to work done by economic historians it remains clear that the purchase of new books before c.1850 was well beyond the typical, everyday means of all members of the working class, whether high wage earning (for example, engineers, carpenters and other skilled workers or artisans, i.e. those working in crafts and trades which required some level of professional knowledge – such as leather cutters – or had strong organisational principles providing monopoly-like limits to entry, such as compositors) or not.[[66]](#footnote-66)

While it was certainly the case that more ephemeral printed literature such as cheap newspapers – alongside the manifold slim publications pattered about the streets by itinerant hawkers – reached (with limits attached) the households of the working class, their more weighty (and expensive) counterpart, the printed book, remained during the early first half of this period, on the whole a rather distant ownership prospect for most. Access to more ephemeral forms of printed information, such as newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and periodicals, though to some degree less limited in attainability for the general population, similarly remained typically financially prohibitive too, however. The infamous “taxes on knowledge”,[[67]](#footnote-67) which included the newspaper tax – first instituted at a half pence in 1712, rising to three and a half pence in 1797 and reaching a high watermark of four pence in 1815 – was perceived as the most pernicious in terms of governmental attempts to influence the print market and inevitably ‘restricted the circulation of most newspapers to upper-income groups […as] Few persons could afford to pay a minimum daily price of 6*d*. or 7*d*’.[[68]](#footnote-68) Notwithstanding the rise of coffee houses, public houses and beer shops, where a *paying* customer might, for ‘[a]n hour, or longer if he thinks proper […] Read anything’ or indeed ‘read everything’, which, in the case of Mr Letchford’s British Coffee-house in Bloomsbury – a ‘lowest-priced house’ whose clientele were ‘a hard-working class of people’ – meant access to ‘[n]ine daily papers’, alongside the hot beverages and ‘penny loaf and a pennyworth of butter’ on offer,[[69]](#footnote-69) *free* access to such information sources, similarly therefore arguably remained definitively limited for the general population.[[70]](#footnote-70)

As Joldersma and Deakin Crick observe in their critique of Habermasian notions of the public sphere and citizenship, ‘[a]dequate information, including reason, is required so that each citizen can be in a position to freely adopt or reject an understanding of the world or a social norm. This requires citizens to be embedded in an informal communication network called the public sphere […] Although citizens in the public sphere do not write legislation, they nevertheless have a crucial function of providing commentary, critique and more generally, informal legitimation.’[[71]](#footnote-71) It can be seen therefore that providing free access to newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and books (the typical forms of initial public library collections in the nineteenth century) enabled, for the first time, the general population access to spaces and forms of public discourse which had previously been unavailable and off-limits (to some extent) to them and thereby in tandem limited their access to the public realm as ‘equals’, demonstrating here too a relationship to power – ‘power as information and control’[[72]](#footnote-72) – and underlining too, the radical and revolutionary nature of this legislation as a form of political action. In addition, this new-born access presented members of the working class with an extended capacity of access to knowledge discourses (including here as a form of knowledge the types of discourses produced by imaginative literature), as well as knowledge of local, national and international affairs (and what might be termed public discourses which also enter the political public realm), in turn, enabling them to exercise their own reason or judgement in analysing and critiquing such information, and thus helping form, following Arendt, *opinions*, as ‘[o]pinions arise when citizens actually confront one another in a public space, look from their different angles at a matter of public concern, and hear what the others have to say.’[[73]](#footnote-73) The unstamped press, ‘small, invariably radical papers of varying quality and success’,[[74]](#footnote-74) which circulated amongst the working class ‘mak[ing] their way to the hearth of the most secluded cottage […and] to every corner of the Britains [sic]’[[75]](#footnote-75) certainly represented this self-same circulation of opinion, ‘a space of discourse organised by discourse’,[[76]](#footnote-76) in Fraser and Warner’s terms a *counterpublic* opinion or discourse, since as the working classes had ‘no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups’ they moved to fashion, invent and revolutionise their own.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Employing Arendt’s notions of the public sphere as an ‘equality of unequals’, it is evident, however, that during this period of the nineteenth century the general population remained determinedly “unequal” in terms of their information access rights and freedoms and that the 1850 *Public Libraries Act*, as form of political action, contains ‘the actual content of freedom’, by virtue of it enabling ‘admission to the public realm’.[[78]](#footnote-78) That this permission to enter materialises in more than one form *intrinsically*, when a public library comes into being, is, I would like to argue here, where its unique ability to manifest power and freedom lies, and why it remains a core feature of democratic societies (with the corollary that when its form and status are diminished theresoever a diminishing of democracy necessarily occurs too), as well as evidencing its ‘deceptive complexity’.

Both literal and symbolic admission to the public sphere occurs in the sense of the Act enshrining a right of public (“free”) access to the ‘Lands and Buildings […] and also all Books, Maps, and Specimens of Art and Science […] and Articles of every Description which may be presented to or purchased for any such Library’, through being ‘held by the Council in trust […] for the Benefit of the Inhabitants of the Borough and others resorting thereto’;[[79]](#footnote-79) while, if we conceive of a library as an embodied form of public discourses, as Michael Warner’s interrogation of Habermasian literary public spheres encourages us to, it is possible to discern the radical and revolutionary potential, especially in relation to power and freedom, that, in particular, exists in a public library’s lifeform, performing the literal free, public circulation of discourses~texts, day after day, as part of its institutional duty to exist as an ongoing space of encounter for discourse.

Warner’s insight that ‘the notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity’[[80]](#footnote-80) lexically divulges an understanding that as the circulation of discourse features as the core concept of all types of libraries’ functions, this can account for the way a public library in particular, both notionally and materially, appears as both internal and external to concepts of democracy, freedom and citizenship, by its performance of such actions to a public (i.e. performing the literal circulation of texts to a public, day after day, as part of its institutional duty to exist as an ongoing space of encounter for discourse).

In manifesting in both embodied and disembodied forms (e.g. buildings, books, computers, digital spaces etc.) as a free, public service it appears in the real, lived world of human experience as, in Arendtian terms, an actual ‘space of freedom’, but also, at one and the same time (following its suggested double-helix character), represents freedom and its power potential. This suggests why it may be more powerful, in the Arendtian sense, to read a public library book, rather than one from a bookshop, and even more powerful, potentially, to actually read it in the space which is uniquely provided by public forms of libraries, as such acts speak to political notions of freedom. As these embodied and disembodied forms can also manifest as sources of discourse themselves and free access to them is being provided by the public library, access to the public realm (in both Arendtian and Habermasian terms) is institutionally embedded in its existence, as when we ‘think of the public sphere as involving a field of discursive connections’[[81]](#footnote-81) by virtue of a public library’s provision of knowledge~information, the centrality of discourse provision~diffusion in the public library’s mission becomes clear. This perception can also help define why certain forms of discourse should be held or privileged in public library collections, and provide guidance towards questions of contemporary and future library collections and holdings policies in general, also based upon the knowledge of inherent inequalities in the public realm.[[82]](#footnote-82)

This also leads to the perception that just as ‘[i]ntegral to the creation of a working-class public sphere was the radical press […] [which] hoped generate a movement culture,’[[83]](#footnote-83) so to was the creation of public libraries to generate a movement towards a modern, democratic state and understandings of citizenship – exact notions of which we continue to grapple with in the here and now. It is by drawing on library history then, with the guidance of ‘broader fields’, that a perception is gained of the public library as ‘one of the fundamental human rights’,[[84]](#footnote-84) and certainly a ‘fundamental right’ in modern, democratic societies, as ‘[s]uch], rights are “created and defended from below,” often by social movements emerging from within civil society’, and that they remain a necessary public service in civil societies and democracies, as these rights ‘serve to reaffirm and stabilize […] autonomy […] as well as to safeguard democratic advances’.[[85]](#footnote-85)

By definition, then, all public forms of libraries are both ‘democratic agenc[ies]’, and a ‘product of modern democracy’,[[86]](#footnote-86) with a mandate to ‘maintain freedom of expression and a constructively critical attitude towards all public issues […] By offering [the public] impartially, works representing conflicting points of view, it enables [the public] to form their own opinions and preserve that attitude of constructive criticism towards public affairs without which there is no freedom.’[[87]](#footnote-87)

It is hoped that this initial analytic introduction goes some way to addressing and explicating ‘[l]ibrary and information science’s relationship to democratic theory’,[[88]](#footnote-88) where [l]ibrary history [has provide[d] the grounding example of democracy as a discontinued idea’, and responds to Buschman’s observations that the ‘relationship of LIS to democratic theory is aposiopetic in both senses of that word: democratic theory is an unfinished, discontinued idea in LIS, or, in its older Latin and Greek meaning, there is a silence maintained’, in the form of issuing a clarion call, through the bugle of library history.[[89]](#footnote-89) This is something that Jesse Shera well understood, observing that ‘[o]nly history can give us the key to our professional self-knowledge’.[[90]](#footnote-90)

*‘For whom does one write or speak? Where is one’s public? … Every sentence is populated by voices of others, living and dead, and is carried to whatever destination it has not by the force of intention or address but by the channels laid down in discourse.’ [[91]](#footnote-91)*

1. For example, Alistair Black’s *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), in particular, focuses on the social and intellectual contexts of this period which affected public library development while Thomas Kelly’s *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1975 (London: The Library Association, 1977)* charts the progressive growth of public libraries alongside social and educational reform, as well as cultural developments, occurring during this era also and the work of John Crawford often focuses on Scottish library history explicitly. Various scholarly journals (such as *The Journal of Library History* and *Libraries and the Cultural Record*) have also consistently featured studies of individual libraries and MA/PhD theses have similarly followed this route (e.g. Robert John Snape, ‘Public Libraries, Leisure and the Provision of Fiction Between 1850 and 1914: Case Studies of Public Libraries and Library Committees in Darwen, Blackburn and Wigan’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Manchester Polytechnic, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alistair Black, *The English public library as an agency for social stability, c. 1850-1919* (Unpublished thesis, Polytechnic of North London, 1989), pp. 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J-P. V. M. Hérubel, “Clio’s Dream, or Has the Muse Departed from the Temple? Implications for Library History: A Review Essay,” *Libraries & Culture*, Vol.39, No.4 (Fall, 2004): pp. 433; Wayne Wiegand, “Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us about the Present: Reflections on the Twentieth-Century History of American Librarianship,” *Library Quarterly*, Vol.69 (January 1999): p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dave Muddiman, ‘Public Library Outreach and Extension 1930-2000’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), *II: 1850-2000*,ed. by Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, pp. 82-91 (p. 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Examples of criticism which point to both this lack of wider socio-historic detail and analysis, as well as the inward-looking nature of the library history field per se, include: Anne L. Buchanan and Jean-Pierre VM Hérubel, ‘Subject and Historiographic Characteristics of Library History,’ *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 42.4 (2011), 514-533 (p. 515); Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 102-3; Alistair Black, *The Public Library in Britain 1914-2000* (London: British Library, 2000), p. 5; Alistair Black, ‘The People’s University: Models of Public Library History’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries* (see Black, above), pp. 24-39; and for a matching American public library perspective, Wayne A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1956* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2011), p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. J. H. Shera, *Knowing Books and Men; Knowing Computers, Too* (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1973): p.271. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John Buschman, “How not to research public spheres: A new “dream of a physics of librarianship””, *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 44.1 (2021): 1-18 (p.5). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Chris Ingraham, “Libraries and Their Publics: Rhetorics of the Public Library”, *Rhetoric Review*, 34:2 (2015) 147-163 (p.148). DOI: 10.1080/07350198.2015.1008915 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Sara Wingate Gray, *The Animus of the Public Library*, forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Buschman, ‘How not to research public spheres’, p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Call for contributions”, *New Librarianship Symposia* (2021): <https://web.archive.org/save/https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/newlibrarianshipsymposia/cfp.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller, ‘Publics in History’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Feb., 1999), 145-197 (p. 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Call for contributions”, *New Librarianship Symposia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The main emphasis in 19th century-produced library histories remained chronological, such as Edward Edwards’s encyclopaedic efforts, alongside Thomas Greenwood, John Minto and many others, which Sydney Ditzion notes as the ‘early phase of inquiry [… where] library histories were devoted almost in their entirety to the celebration of great book collections, important librarians. Sydney Ditzion, *Arsenals of Democracy*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 2007), p. ix.

    More contemporary, critical and historiographical studies include the three volume series *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* (for example): there are many other titles that explore particular countries, regions, and library types. See references here and in S. Wingate Gray, ‘Locating librarianship’s identity in its historical roots of professional philosophies: towards a radical new identity for librarians of today (and tomorrow)’, *IFLA Journal*, 39.1 (2013): 37-44 for further details. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Edward Edwards, “A Statistical View of the Principal Public Libraries in Europe and the United States of North America”, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. XI (1848), p.250. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *An Act for Enabling Town Councils to Establish Public Libraries and Museums 1850*, 13 & 14 Vict., c. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Although this Act is indeed the first and primary form of legislative framework which directly enabled public library development to occur during this period – by providing the framework for local boroughs to tax ratepayers to establish public libraries in their localities – it is important to also note its widely recognised attempted antecedents. These include several Bills during the 1830s, e.g. *The Public Institutions HC Bill* (1835), which sought to ‘facilitate the Formation and Establishment of Public Institutions for the diffusing of Literary and Scientific Information, including Libraries […] within such Cities, Boroughs and Towns as may require them for the use and accommodation of their Inhabitants’, quoted in Kelly, *The History of Public Libraries*, p. 458; *The Public Walks HC Bill* (1837), which was in effect an amended form of the 1835 Bill and promoted public libraries in very similar language again, quoted in R. J. B. Morris, *Parliament and the Public Libraries* (London: Mansell, 1977), pp.206-9; and the 1845 *Act for Encouraging the Establishment of Museums in Large Towns*, 8 and 9 Vict., c.43 (short title: *The Museums Act)*, which several entrepreneurial local municipal boroughs used to establish public libraries *within* the buildings of their local museums established under this Act – Canterbury (in 1847), Warrington (1848) and Salford (1849) are the three innovative towns which pursued this process, noted in Kelly, *The History of Public Libraries*, pp. 471-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City’s Public Libraries, 1754-1911* (New York: Fordham University press, 2015), p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *An Act for the better Preservation of Parochial Libraries in England 1708*, 7 Ann. c. 14; Jill Dye, *Books and their Borrowers at the Library of Innerpeffray c. 1680–1855* (unpublished thesis, University of Stirling, 2018), pp.23-4; Jessica G. Purdy, ‘‘For the Edification of the Common People’: Humphrey Chetham’s Parish Libraries’, in *Communities of Print* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Alexander Rosenstock, ‘500 Jahre Stadtbibliothek Ulm: wissenschaftliche Tradition und umfangreicher historischer Bestand als Aufgabe und Chance einer kommunalen Bibliothek’, *Bibliotheksdienst* 50.3-4 (2016): 354-370. Edward Edwards in his Select Committee statements also notes that ‘many of the German states, I believe’ levy a rate upon a town for the support of a public library. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries, 23 July 1849* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. R.J.B. Morris, *Parliament and the Public Libraries* (London: Mansell, 1977), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., pp. 30-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Paul Kaufman, ‘Discovering the Oldest Publick Bibliotheck of the Northern Isles’, *Library Review*, Vol. 23 No. 7, pp. 285-287; Clive Wilkin-Jones, *Norwich City Library and its Intellectual Milieu* (unpublished thesis, University of East Anglia, September 2000); [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Morris, *Parliament and Public Libraries*, p.31. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Public Libraries Act 1850,* Clause VII. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univer. of Chicago, 1998), pp. 177–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. 11 & 12 Vict. c.63; W. A. Munford, *Penny Rate: Aspects of British Public Library History, 1850-1950* (London: Library Association, 1951), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As William Ewart, MP, would have it in regard to what public libraries would provide, *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries 1849*, Q938, p.68. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Remark by Colonel Sibthorp during the second reading of the Public Libraries Bill, HoC, 13 March 1850 vol.109 cc.838-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Frost’s interpretation, from analyzing working class autobiographies of this period. G. S. Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2009), p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This charge to a specific individual, included in all other “amenity” legislation except the 1850 Act, was a separate charge, and in addition to that of the overall rate-charge imposed on ratepayers as a communal tax in order to provide the community with the amenity service required, such as a bathhouse, museum, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Towns Improvement Act 1847*, 10 & 11 Vict. c.34. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *The Museums Act 1845*, 8 & 9 Vict. c.43, clause IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. 7 Will. IV.2nd March, 1837, p.4, clause 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence (*New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 201-2, p. 208, p. 244-5, p. 200, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hannah Arendt, ‘What is Freedom?’, in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 146-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. “Call for contributions”, *New Librarianship Symposia* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Audrey Fischer, ‘Recounting the Civil Rights Movement’, *Information Bulletin* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, March 1999). <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9903/lewis.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Norwich Public Library Manuscript Collection*, Norfolk Record Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Laying the Foundation Stone of the Norwich Free Library, September 13th, 1854”, *Norwich Public Library Manuscript Collection*, Norfolk Record Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Arendt, *On Revolution,* p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, p. 249-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ditzion, *Arsenals*, p.4. Ditzion, pp.4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 201-2, p. 208, p. 244-5, p. 200, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p.32. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p. 67, pp. 90-94, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller, ‘Publics in History’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Feb., 1999), 145-197 (p. 145, p. 159). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller, ‘Publics in History’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Feb., 1999), 145-197 (p. 159, p. 145). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Benjamin Barber, quoted in Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition and Jürgen Habermas”, in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, England, 1992), pp. 89-120 (p. 101). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. John Buschman, ‘Democratic theory in library information science: toward an emendation’, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58.10 (2007): 1483-1496 (p. 1485). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. William Ewart MP, *Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries 1849*, Q938, p.68. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “Laying the Foundation Stone”, *Norwich Public Library Manuscript Collection.* [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Warner, *Publics*, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The public sphere: An encyclopedia article (1964)", *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 49-55 (p.49). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More*, 8 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1801), V, pp. vii-viii. <https://archive.org/details/workshannahmore08moregoog> [accessed 12.09.21] [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Simon Eliot, ‘Some Trends in British Book Production 1800-1919’, in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Clear and consistent definitions and demarcations of the English class system in the long nineteenth century and beyond are notoriously difficult to sustain, not least since, as Joyce notes, ‘it all depends upon how one defines class’, and in particular it is important to consider, when attempting such definitional boundaries, that ‘attention to the actual terms in which contemporaries talked about the social order, and to the means through which they communicated their perceptions’ are taken into consideration. On this basis, this study follows Joyce’s Hosbawmian-influenced outlook that denotes ‘dependent, manual, waged workers’ as the primary criterion for membership of the “working class”, or, in reference to More and her contemporaries, the ‘inferior ranks’ or “lower orders”. Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, c.1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

    Press, 1991), pp. 1-2 & p. 10. One final note of caution is worth stating here: that, as Joyce observes, there can remain a ‘very unclear line of demarcation between skilled and unskilled’ workers, as well as a ‘great range of variation between industries’, such that large disparities in status, skills, wages and conditions between all potential members of the “working class” when placed into one such homogenous category can remain obscured, and as such, careful attention must be used when ascribing collective responses derived from individual narratives. Patrick Joyce*,* ‘Work’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950,* ed. by F. M. L. Thompson and others, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), II: *People and Their Environment*, 131-194 (p.174). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Report from the Select Committee on the Copyright Acts* (1818), p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. H. M. Boot and J. H. Maindonald, ‘New Estimates of Age-and Sex-Specific Earnings and the Male: Female Earnings Gap in the British Cotton Industry, 1833-1906’, *Economic History Review, 61* (2008), 380-408; Jacob F. Field, ‘Domestic Service, Gender, and Wages in Rural England c.1700-1860’, *Economic History Review, 66* (2013), 249-272; E. H. Hunt, ‘Industrialization and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain, 1760-1914’, *Journal of Economic History, 46* (1986), 935-966; Hans-Joachim Voth, ‘Living Standards and the Urban Environment’, in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, ed. by Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), *I: Industrialisation 1700-1860*, 268-294; British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 1834 (167) *Factories Inquiry Commission, Supplementary Report, Part I*, pp. 101-2, p. 164, p. 169; British Parliamentary Papers, 1834 (44), *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of The Poor Laws,* Appendix B.2: Answers to Town Queries, p. 2*h*. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The phrase is contemporaneously predominantly used to refer to a range of levies and duties in force during this early English nineteenth century period that were attached to newspapers and weekly periodicals, including a levy on printed advertisements and an excise duty on paper, which all inevitably contributed to higher prices being charged for newspapers and periodicals, as well as books, almanacs, pamphlets and other printed ephemera overall. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Joel H. Wiener, *The War of the Unstamped: The Movement to Repeal the British Newspaper Tax, 1830-1836* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Report from the Select Committee on Import Duties*, pp. 210-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Though, indeed, “times have changed”, such understandings of the economics of information access remain a non-trivial element when turning to discussions based on twenty-first century lived experiences, and contemporary questions relating to public library resources and service provisions need to be driven by this insight. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Clarence W. Joldersma and Ruth Deakin Crick, “Citizenship, Discourse Ethics and an Emancipatory Model of Lifelong Learning”, in *Habermas, Critical Theory and Education*, ed. by Mark Murphy and Ted Fleming (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ebirbayer and Sheller, ‘Publics in History’, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Margaret Canovan, ‘Politics as culture: Hannah Arendt and the public realm’, *History of Political Thought* 6.3 (1985): 617-642 (p. 635). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. R. K. Webb, ‘The Victorian Reading Public’, *Higher Education Quarterly*, 12 (1957), 24-44 (p. 37). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Morgan Rattler [P. W. Banks], ‘Of Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Press’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, 12.67 (1835), 32-43 (p. 41). Wiener (pp. xvii-8) has estimated that between 1830 and 1836 the number of illegal journals published exceeded five hundred and fifty, a not insignificant number when compared to the approximate three hundred and twenty legally published (i.e. duty-paid) newspapers in Great Britain produced annually during this same period. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Warner, *Publics*, pp. 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), pp. 56-80 (p.66). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *Public Libraries Act 1850,* Clause VI. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Warner, *Publics*, pp. 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, M.A. and London: MIT Press, 1992), p.37. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. This insight suggests, for example, that public libraries have a role in providing access to discourses, activities and services which represent and embody specific counterpublics, e.g. the LGBTQ+ community, ethnic minorities. There are many other insights which can be drawn from this understanding which have further practical applications in librarianship. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Kevin Gilmartin*, Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. IFLA Memorandum on the development of public library services, UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries, Vol. X. No. 7 (July, 1956) [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Emirbayer and Sheller, ‘Public in History’, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. UNESCO, ‘Public Library Manifesto’ (Paris: 16 May, 1949), pp. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. André Maurois, The UNESCO Courier (May, 1961), p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. John Buschman, ‘Democratic Theory in LIS: Toward an Emendation’, *Library Publication*s, 67 (2007), pp. 1-35 (p. 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. John Buschman, ‘Democratic theory in library information science: toward an emendation’*, Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 51.14 (2007), 1483–1496 (p. 1484). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. J. H. Shera, ‘On the Value of Library History’, *Library Quarterly* 22, (1952), 240-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Warner, *Publics*, p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)