There and Back Again: A Public Library History 1850-1914

A study submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Librarianship at

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by

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Abstract

Background

The modern public library has a rich history that is often overlooked in the wider studies of social history. Furthermore with the financial and societal problems facing public libraries at the moment it has become evident that a further investigation into this rich history is warranted, to potentially identify areas of commonality and to enhance the professions understanding of its historically important role within the civic and communal environment of the country.

Aims

This project aimed to collate both historical and modern conceptions of the principles behind the service of the public library to identify similarities and differences. Additionally it was considered of prime importance to demonstrate the usefulness of historical examination on current practice, especially if recommendations could be produced. Four main objectives were identified: to analyse a number of staff accounts and historical accounts to produce areas of crossover and difference, to make staff aware of the strong history behind the profession and its relevance to modern practice, to produce a list of best practice recommendations on the utilisation of historical ideas on the modern profession, and to assess the viability of history as a reforming tool.

Methods

Two methods were employed to achieve the objectives of the project. An extended literature review of the historical documentation of the free library movement was undertaken to identify common themes to be used within the interviews. Furthermore the material collected within the literature review was subjected to a comparative historical methodology as this specific discipline was seen as the most effective. Secondly six semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff from Rotherham libraries to ascertain modern perceptions of the service but also to gauge staff perceptions of modern library development. Both sets of results were analysed thematically.

Results
The literature review demonstrated that many campaigners and reformers of the time were concerned primarily with the educative capabilities of the public library, especially in benefiting the economic situation of individuals and the nation as a whole. The moral improvements of communities and development in general was emphasised by reformers and certainly the historical functions shadowed current practice. The interviews demonstrated that most staff saw the relevance of the principles espoused by Greenwood and Edwards and could see close parallels. They also identified existing areas where there is clear crossover and similarities, with the educative functions of the current service provision being emphasised specifically.

Conclusion

The research was successful in generating a number of recommendations for current practice as well as demonstrating the historical validity of past developments on current practice. It also demonstrates the usefulness of conducting historical research to draw lessons from the past and that the core principles whilst slightly obscured by the passage of time, are still prevalent today.

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1: Introduction

Ever since its inception the public library in the UK has faced an uncertain future, constantly being challenged by some threat or other to its continued existence and the professional values underpinning the service (Black, 1999, 13). As the recent recession continues to bite, the value and worth of public libraries to the communities they serve has been called into question by public and government authorities and perhaps more significantly there is now more than ever a lack of awareness of the original principles and functions of the public library (CILIP Update, 2009, 3). While many historians shy away from imposing contemporary values onto past movements and societies, it is perhaps in the past where a clear statement of the aims and values of the public library can be located, especially as the values espoused by Edward Edward’s of ‘information and education’ are so coterminous with the modern public library (Bentley, 1999, 81; Passmore, 2010, 123; Berger, 2010, 187; Edwards, 1886, 23). Perhaps it is time therefore to analyse the practitioners of the past and to reconnect with values that can be applied within today’s modern environment, to revitalise the public library service in the face of continued cuts and challenges to its societal authority (Welskopp, 2010, 228). The utilitarian philosophy espoused by Jeremy Bentham provides the ideal vehicle to deliver this analysis, as despite the lack of vogue within political circles of utilitarian ideology, their emphasis on social engineering, maximum happiness, self-improvement and by extension community improvement, has the capacity to resonate to this day (Pearson, 1984, 19; Sanderson 1991, 48; Mill, 1848, 101). Therefore the philosophy of utilitarianism provides the ideal prism through which to map the decisions and ideas of individuals like Edward Edward’s, Thomas Greenwood and William Ewart onto today’s modern library practice. The period 1850-1914 also grants the opportunity to evaluate the nascent values of the newly established service and as a result three main themes of community
cohesion, self-improvement & economic betterment and civic participation can be seen as indispensable to the period and this study (Munford, 1958, 35; Smith, 1958, 68).

1.1: Historical Background

It is perhaps first worth considering the overall historical context of the public library movement before moving on to define a few key concepts. It is important to note that the public library movement did not spring up overnight but rather its development can be viewed as more fragmented. Subscription based libraries and Mechanic Institutes can be regarded as the forerunners to the free library and it is perhaps these institutions which formed the basis for a significant expansion of the new free libraries after 1850, especially regarding the creation of library collections (Munford, 1951, 10). These institutions can be perceived to espouse the diffusion of knowledge and worker development that formed the basis for utilitarian conceptions of the role of the public library within Victorian society. This is especially true of the Leicester Mechanics Institute’s rule book which states as its core principle ‘the diffusion of general and useful knowledge…and the cheap instruction of its members in the arts they practice’ (Leicester Mechanics Institute, 1833, 3). The Mechanics institute therefore is perhaps vital for understanding the focus of free libraries on the continued advancement of professional knowledge and Edward Edwards’s strident views on technical education and lecture series within the free library (Edwards, 1885, 34).

The public library movement is also a product of the tumultuous transformations taking place within Victorian society at the time. The rapid pace of industrialisation and urbanisation engendered an environment in which social conditions and societal values were in a constant state of flux (Black, 2008, 11). As a result of the rapid influx into urban centres, living conditions were understandably poor with little regard for sanitation and adequate working conditions. Keats remarked on this situation in Isabella in which he claimed that the newly established industrial environment caused ‘many a weary hand to swelt…in noisy factories’ (Keats, 1830, 4). It is unsurprising therefore that the working classes sought entertainments and solace in the drinking houses and gambling dens, in order to cope with the alienation experienced by many from society. For reformers like Edwards and Ewart such a situation was unbearable and it is perhaps out of the rational recreation movement, a response to perceived working class vices that the free library gained one of its core principles of societal
amelioration. The 1845 Museums act provided a much needed impetus for the introduction of a free library and similar legislation surrounding public spaces and parks contributed to an increasing concern for the leisure time of the working classes (Snape, 1995, 14). Therefore the free library’s commitment to the improvement of its clients can be seen to stem from this desire to reform the recreational time of the working classes, in order to produce a much more harmonious and stable society, something which contributed greatly to the 1849 select committee on public libraries and the 1850 public library act’s focus on recreational reading.

After the 1849 Select committees recommendations that the government provide funding or grants for the erection of new public libraries, one can perceive the beginnings of the desire to obtain state sponsored funding for public libraries, especially as this was a cause consistently championed by both Greenwood and Edwards (Greenwood, 1891, 69). While the 1850 act provided the principle of free public libraries the provisions within the legislation itself were inadequate, especially as the local rate tax was woeful in providing the amount of literature demanded by local populations (Black, 1999, 120). The lack of a levy to purchase books and the population qualification of 10,000 inhabitants meant that despite the success of the bill, adoption was relatively sporadic and amendments to the bill throughout the 1850s and 60s were needed, in order to allow smaller towns to set up libraries for their boroughs (Pemberton, 197, 130). It should be noted however that libraries up until the 1900’s primarily relied upon donations for the influx of new stock and certainly charitable donations by individuals such as Andrew Carnegie were vital in providing the wealth of information that public libraries claimed to hold (Sturges, 1996, 257). It wasn’t until the 1919 library act that funding was placed in the hands of the newly created local authorities, that the lack of continuous funding was solved. Certainly the unsteady economic foundations of the public library of the late Victorian age is worth studying, especially as a lack of resources is a problem which permeates today’s public library service.

1.2: Definition of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism espouses an empiricist critique of society, seeking to encourage a rational interpretation of events and developments within society and encouraging individuals to consistently follow the rational course of action (Pearson & Williams, 1984, 67). This allied with an emphasis on utility, which stresses that the accumulation of useful materialist knowledge provides the greatest happiness physically and mentally, forms
the basis of the movement (Pearsons & Williams, 1984, 70). This interpretation of useful knowledge is key in understanding the library movement at the time as, according to orthodox utilitarianism, education is the primary means of developing man’s rational behaviour and advancing the reasoning process. This would explain therefore the utilitarian’s commitment to expanding the public library system as a result of this strong vein of social engineering (Sanderson, 1991, 34).

It should be noted that while Jeremy Bentham’s theories are valid within the movement of utilitarianism, it is perhaps John Stuart Mill who elucidates the commitment to societal progress more effectively, an aspect vitally important to this piece of research. Mill’s success at reconciling egotism with collective development is vital in understanding the importance of the library, as the individual pursuit of happiness and self-help reconceptualised in communal terms, Mill writing about an ‘Indissoluble link between individual happiness and the good of the whole’ (Mill, 1970, 9; Sanderson, 1991, 74). It is this equation which is most useful in understanding the public library movement through the prism of utilitarianism, especially as education and knowledge were seen to provide the vital utility for the improvement of society as a whole (Sanderson, 1991, 74).

The logic of communal and individual self-betterment manifested themselves into a utilitarian commitment to empower the citizen through the construction of useful knowledge and civic awareness. The manifestation of this commitment to civic empowerment is discernable in the focus on education as a means of banishing ignorance and providing the opportunities for individuals to formulate their own opinions on government actions and policies (Black, 1999, 60). It is this aspect of utilitarianism which is immeasurably important when analysing both Greenwood’s and Edward’s commitment to the public library, as an institution based around the banishment of ignorance in political matters (Sanderson, 1991, 71). Finally it should be noted that utilitarian’s conceived the notion that knowledge created the ‘good citizen’ and that community pacification was vital for the economic and societal welfare of the country. Therefore it is against this background of economic progress and social amelioration that the utilitarian’s commitment to libraries can be framed and which provides an invaluable prism through which to analyse past and present library practice.

1.3: Definition of Social Inclusion
It is perhaps worth defining social inclusion, to identify the aspects of social inclusion that will be prevalent throughout this project. It should be noted that there are a myriad of interpretations as to what social inclusion represents and pinpointing an all-encompassing definition can be problematic. For the purposes of this study however Cappo’s definition will suffice as it states that social inclusion represents a society where ‘all people feel valued, their differences respected, and that their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity’ (Cappo, 2002, 5). This is a very basic conception of what social inclusion represents and therefore Vincent’s focus on community librarianship is key for the purposes of this study, as this purports that community inclusion is key for reintegrating disenfranchised individuals from minority categories into the community, thereby bridging any social divides within the community and upholding the principle of societal dignity (Pateman & Vincent, 2010, 120). Conversely it is worth defining Social Exclusion as a definition of social inclusion cannot stand without defining the processes and developments that result in individuals being excluded from mainstream society. Cappo once again provides a useful definition for the purpose of this study, arguing that social exclusion ‘is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into a community (Cappo, 2002, 10). In addition to this definition Percy Smith’s seven dimensions of social exclusion are immeasurably important to this study, providing a framework when analysing library initiatives, historical and contemporary. These dimensions include:

- Economic (Long term unemployment, income poverty)
- Social (Homelessness, Crime, Disaffected Youth)
- Political (Disempowerment, lack of political rights, lack of confidence in political processes)
- Neighbourhood (Decaying housing stock, Environmental degradation)
- Individual (Mental and physical ill health, educational underachievement)
- Spatial (Concentration/marginalisation of vulnerable groups)
- Group (Concentration of above characteristics in a particular group i.e. elderly, youth etc.) (Percy Smith, 2000, 56)
This clearly highlights the multifarious nature of social exclusion and therefore social inclusion or social justice must be equally multi-dimensional in providing answers to these challenges. Therefore an integrated conception of social exclusion/inclusion needs to be taken, especially as the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre suggests that it is ‘not enough to examine the issues individually, rather the links between must be explored’ (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2006, 3). This is an especially useful approach due to the variety of initiatives undertaken by public libraries, past and present, in combating forms of social exclusion.

1.4: Description Concerning Rotherham Public Library Authority

This research was restricted to a single library authority, Rotherham, due to time constraints. Rotherham library authority has a variety of large and small library branches and due to the multi-ethnic makeup of most communities, Rotherham library services have a focused approach to social inclusion policies and activities. The service also has a number of combined service centres which provide a variety of additional council functions such as benefits and council tax payments, as well as including a large schools library service. Furthermore Rotherham library also boasts two mobile library services, one focused specifically on elderly and housebound book provision. Rotherham was also selected for this study as a result of its strong connections with the chartist and utilitarian movements, the local Chartist working men’s group founded in 1838. Indeed chartists from Rotherham were instrumental in the failed Sheffield plot of 1840 as part of the campaign for manhood suffrage.

2.0: Research Aims and Objectives

The aim for this piece of research was threefold; to discover ideas from early library thinking and professional development in order to map them on to today’s contemporary service and to enlighten staff about these principles, in order to seek a better understanding of how the original principles can become more relevant within current practice. The final aim was to demonstrate the similarities between the historical and modern contexts that public libraries operate within. To fulfil this aim the research aimed to achieve a set of four objectives:
1. To collate and analyse different historical perspectives on the function and values of a public library service and to demonstrate the similarities with today’s public libraries and highlight the common themes which arise from this.

2. To make staff aware of the historical context of the public library and to identify commonly held beliefs among staff members as to the function of a public library.

3. To compare staff ideas and beliefs with historical perspectives to identify common areas of agreement to better inform staff of the relevance of history on the profession.

4. To produce a list of recommendations on the utilisation of these ideas to form a best practice guide in stressing the importance of history on the public library

2.1: Structure of the dissertation

The second chapter will focus on the literature review with an emphasis on historiographical analysis of the textual sources, to identify common themes and concepts and to draw parallels with current practice and conceptions of service. The methodology of the research will then be outlined discussing overall research approaches undertaken, data collection methods, ethical considerations and any inherent limitations with the research. The results of the interviews will then be presented and will be used to assess commonly held beliefs amongst staff as well as the overall resonance of historical contexts upon the current profession. Furthermore a set of best practice recommendations will be produced drawing on interview and historical data before concluding as well as suggesting further research.

3.0: Literature Review

3.1: Introduction

This review will first assess the relevant historiographical debates to demonstrate the historical validity of this piece of research as well as identifying the relevant historical categories of analysis prevalent within this project. The remainder of the review will be conducted thematically around three key themes identified within the literature; the economic and educational responsibilities and functions of the free library will first be studied, followed by the social and communal provision provided by the free library, before finishing with the
civic and political aspects of the free library movement. Focus will also be placed throughout on the historical and current conceptions of staff roles and duties and the nature of the profession as a whole. These themes and selected topic areas all relate to the objectives and aims of this project.

3.2: Historiographical context

Lyndon B Johnson stated in 1963 that ‘we can draw lessons from the past but we cannot live in it’ (Johnson, 1963). Despite the confidence of politicians in drawing contemporary lessons from past events and their desire to analyse history so that the oft cited mistakes of the past, such as the two world wars, are not repeated many historians still have great difficulty in reconciling the use of history to serve current purposes. Since the 1960s there has been a conscious desire to move away from sweeping narratives of the past towards a more objectified conception of history, one which seeks to determine truth in past events by firmly grounding them in their historical contexts without reference to the present (Berger, 2003, 43). As McCullagh has argued most people within society believe that truths about society only come from other social sciences for example political science, economics etc. (McCullagh, 2011, 1). Many historians also agree with this perception, some post-modernist historians going so far as to argue against the existence of a true historical account (Passmore, 2010, 18).

There is however a case for re-establishing a rather old fashioned approach to history which seeks to establish not only an authoritative account of past events but also seeks to locate those vital historical lessons which can then be applied to the present (McCullagh, 2011, 1). An oft cited argument amongst historians is that such lessons cannot be generated due to the uniqueness of each historical context, which create their own particular set of ideologies, societal circumstances and meaning (Warren, 2010, 29). While this may be true, a degree of generality can be discerned within almost every historical instance and this is immeasurably important when assessing two chronologically distant points in time. It is this level of generality which provides the tools for assessing current theories against a historical measure, which according to McCullagh, not only validates current theories but actively improves them (McCullagh, 2011, 1). Poststructuralist theory asserts that it is impossible to ‘know the past’ and that any attempts to develop a modern conclusion, amounts to a reconstructionist model of history in which anachronistic values are applied to past events
This approach to history however has done a great deal to damage the relevance of the subject, with contemporary society failing to see the value of history to current problems and developments. It is perhaps important therefore to frame the past within its historical context but to actively seek to determine areas of similarity with the present and to detect how far popular ideological theories have changed or remained the same.

Despite the claims within comparative historiography that suggest comparing two chronologically distant periods in time is dangerous and lacks any inherent meaning or interpretation, a comparative study of public library history is still vital in analysing the interplay of the dynamics of both periods (Lorenz, 1999, 110). Comparative history is key for this project as it provides the necessary framework for investigating the multiplicity of viewpoints and concepts and by comparing each event with similar or different occurrences in an alternative context, new historical insights can be generated (Werner, 2006, 156). While it is true that most comparative historians focus on comparing nation-states in their totality, something which has increased considerably with globalisation, there is a case for micro-comparisons of social movements, like the free library campaign of the late Victorian age (Kocka, 1999, 200). As Stefan Berger has suggested ‘a micro-comparison can take account of the totality of structures, experiences and values in a way that is impossible for a macro-comparison’, and generating a stronger, more meaningful comparison (Berger, 2003, 19).

It has to be noted that there is still a strong vein within comparative history that seeks to demonstrate empirically that each historical epoch or subject is unique and to seek to reconstruct the past from pure facts (Ragin, 1987, 37). Comparative history however has the potential to teach the lessons of history and by comparing a failing historical movement with a successful one, a greater understanding of the developments required for a movement to be successful can be discerned. This sort of comparative history has been criticised for imposing moral judgements on past societies and compromising the detached objectivised view of the past upheld by many historians (Berger, 2003, 20). While this may be true no historical account can be completely unbiased and moral judgement must be employed in order to develop those historical accounts that have the most relevance and meaning within society. Durkheim in 1895 saw comparison as similar to natural science whereby ‘variables were isolated and causal relationships proven’ (Durkheim, 1895, 68). By
employing comparative history common themes, trends and commonalities can be uncovered which produce an effective range of developmental opportunities based on past activities.

The final two historical methods of analysis prevalent within this study are the focuses of social history and the history of ideas or intellectual history. Social history is vital as it seeks to represent the movements and developments within ordinary social groups and societies, not necessarily involving the major decision making institutions of the day (Welskopp, 2010, 229). It seeks to propagate a bottom up approach to history, placing primary emphasis on cultural developments in driving societal change and places social structures as the primary agencies of change, a focus which provides another important framework for analysing the public library movement (Bentley, 2010, 163). Social history however has been criticised for aping a Marxist perception of history, emphasising a class dialectic in developments within societies at large as well as perceiving working class agency as achieving an idealised morally perfect society (Welksopp, 2010, 240). This however is to stress the socialist tendencies within social history too far, with social history providing an effective counterbalance to the great man view of history, placing the forces for change within social, grassroots contexts. The study of ideas links extensively with social history and provides a useful tool for assessing the underlying notions and concepts prevalent within any cultural movement or society and therefore its extensive focus on the key ideas underpinning movements is vital for this study. As Popkin has stressed by investigating the historical ideas behind social developments, comparisons can be generalised and can be made relevant and applicable to contemporary circumstances (Popkin, 2004, 78).

3.3: Technical education

As has been stressed above campaigners for a free library throughout the 1800s frequently sought to frame their arguments for these institutions in educational terms, upholding libraries to be, as Lytton suggested ‘libraries are the schoolrooms of grown up men’ (Lytton, 1895, 14). Certainly this educational role was emphasised by a number of leading authors of the period, including Charles Dickens who stated that ‘the new service is a great free school room inviting the humblest worker to come in and be a student’, and it is certainly true that most reformers saw libraries as a vital tool for improving individual and national economic
circumstances via education (Dickens, 1871, 3). It is worth identifying each specific factor of educational and economic provision by free libraries, to comprehend the overall impact of this new role undertaken by libraries.

One of the overriding principles that seems to have fuelled the development of the early public library was the notion that an individual could, as Robert Peel suggested, ‘provide the means to gain increased intelligence and increased intelligence is vital in your worldly pursuits’ (Peel, 1841, 4). The notion of advancing worldly pursuits was widely disseminated by utilitarian’s who regarded libraries as elements of a useful education, providing individuals with the necessary skills to achieve material satisfaction (Black, 1997, 103). The focus on meaningful and effective industrial knowledge cannot be regarded as a new phenomenon engendered by the public library movement or the brainchild of Edward Edwards. Rather this role was fulfilled by mechanic institute libraries for a substantial period of time before the 1850 libraries act and one has to argue that any emphasis on industrial and worker education has to be attributed to these institutions (Hewitt, 2000, 167). This is clearly evident in the Leicestershire mechanic institutes pamphlet where it states that the objective of the institution’s library is ‘the diffusion of general and useful knowledge...and the cheap instruction of the members in the principles of the arts they practice’ (Leicester Mechanics Institute, 1835, 2). It is unsurprising therefore that free libraries would continue this role of the diffusion of knowledge, especially as many of the mechanic institutes libraries were subsumed into the growing number of free libraries (Sykes, 1977, 12). It is interesting to note that Usherwood still points to the primacy of knowledge provision, arguing that libraries still play an important role in providing information for improving ‘life chances’ for those in need and that deprivation within modern society is attributable to a lack of access to information, echoing the original ideals of Greenwood and Edwards (Usherwood, 1989, 10).

3.4: Libraries as Economic Centres

In a treatise on the opening of Liverpool public library in 1861, William Brown remarked that the library had every ‘treatise on mechanism’ and therefore from his perspective it can be assumed that information contained within the public library enabled individuals to ‘pursue commerce and trade’ (Brown, 1861, 7). Mill also viewed the attainment of knowledge and skills as imperative for the realisation of material and
physiological happiness, which the public library could administer through its range of technical books and initiatives, such as public lectures on a variety of technical subjects (Mill, 1848; Munford, 1951). While many library reformers placed an emphasis on useful, material knowledge it should be noted that one of the leading proponents of this perspective emphasised caution, arguing instead that they ‘contain in fair proportions books that are attractive to the uneducated and the half educated as well as those that which subserve the studies and assist the pursuits of the merchant...professional’ (Edwards, 1855, 29). This clearly demonstrates that while many reformers believed that libraries should contribute towards the economic productivity of the nation, many emphasised a more equitable distribution of knowledge, which was seen as key especially as free libraries were upheld as institutions for all. Indeed William Jevon’s encapsulates this utilitarian standpoint effectively in his treatise on free libraries arguing that ‘a library of five thousand volumes open free to the public will be used twice as much... it is a striking case of what I propose to call the multiplication of utility’ (Jevons, 1897, 53).

Thomas Greenwood recognised the importance of the educative function of the public library as he stated that the ‘arts and mysteries of manufacture are no longer taught by word of mouth alone...the master workmen of the 19th century speak through books’ (Greenwood, 1900, 83). The emphasis on technical subjects can be regarded as enduring as Stewart in 1910 remarked that ‘modern works on technical subjects of all sorts are receiving ever increasing attention from public libraries’, a statement which demonstrates the educative merits of the public library (Stewart, 1910, 16). It should be noted however that such emphasis on education was aided not merely by working class enthusiasm for public libraries, but rather the increasing international competition from European states, which engendered an increasing stress on the industrial competencies of Britain (Morris, 1977). This emphasis on foreign competition is evidenced in a library circular from 1896, in which attention is placed on providing ‘the very best opportunities for people of all classes in the matter of self-education and for the acquisition of useful knowledge’ (Lewisham Gazette, 1896). At a time when the shares of world trade amongst Germany and the USA were increasingly dramatically, 15.7% and 35.8% respectively by the turn of the century, it is little wonder that utilitarian’s were keen to frame public libraries as the institution to provide national salvation via knowledge and expertise creation (Crouzet, 1982). Indeed Thomas Greenwood cited this very reason as the rationale and importance of the public library where he...
argued that ‘in the neck and neck race of competition with the Germans and Americans...national sentiment alone should lead every town and large rural district where a free library does not already exist to at once see about the adoption of the act’ (Greenwood, 1900, 56). This manifested itself in a conscious desire for the public library to produce an intelligent worker, one that emphasised intelligence over power; ‘there was a time when the workmen were called hands but the time is coming when they would be called heads’ (Axon, 1887, 8). Emily Badger in a recent article stressed the importance of the public library as a ‘business incubator’ and slowly libraries are becoming instrumental for start-up businesses, or as she refers to the process as ‘democratising entrepreneurship’ (Badger, 2013, 1). Indeed there has been significant calls within the library profession to highlight the business capabilities of the public library and to reemploy the notions mentioned above.

3.5: Labour Exchange and Business Opportunities

Increasingly the free library was regarded as a centre for advancing local business and providing out of work individuals with access to employers and newspaper job advertisements. This development can be regarded as based on the American model of librarianship from 1900 onwards, in which the library was conceptualised as the premier place for providing commercial information (Crunden, 1906). Picton, a leading campaigner for a free library in Liverpool expounded on this point consistently, arguing that the ‘benefit of an institution would be to those engaged in commercial and industrial pursuits manifest’ (Cowell, 1903, 14). This was upheld by the utilitarian reformers as a vital aspect of service provision and something that which not only benefited the material circumstances of the community but provided an arrangement in which the library became the hub of commercial activity (Black, 1999). Contemporary ideology mirrors the emphasis on the economic value to society that libraries provide, especially as both Vincent and Usherwood see the information technology provided by the people’s network, as key in advancing the emerging information and cyber economy of the UK, as well as providing a vital tool for out of work individuals to locate job opportunities through sites such as Directgov (Usherwood, 1989, Pateman & Vincent, 2010).

Thomas Greenwood was also keen to explain the importance of the more commercial focus of the library, especially as he claimed that ‘employers and employees may themselves see the patterns required in other
markets and no place presents more convenient a depository than a library’ (Greenwood, 1891, 45). This would suggest therefore that many reformers saw commercial interests and the informational aspects of the library as coterminous. It should be noted that this type of information only reached out to the leaders of industry initially but rather, reformers like Greenwood saw the advantages of providing commercial information to the working classes, with Edwards and Greenwood aping the National Board of Trade’s suggestion that it ‘might tend to prevent disputes and stoppages of work’ (Greenwood, 1891, 135). Once again one can perceive a clear educational focus to provide the greatest utility for workers and employers alike.

While this may present a top down image of public library use by wealthy business patrons, the newly established free libraries were also able to present viable economic opportunities to the working classes who frequented their doors. The public library newsroom formed a vital link for those individuals out of work, especially if the library managed to attract a large number of businesses (Black, 1999). Indeed as one library assistant noted ‘thousands of men a year find employment through reading the advertisements in the various places in the newsroom’ (Marylebone Public library letter to E.M Exley, 1891; Harris, 1972). Indeed she went on to say that ‘there was always a crowd of out o’works waiting’, and therefore one can see that the public library was effective in providing opportunities for disenfranchised individuals to regain a hold in the labour market, especially at a time of drastic industrial transformation (Marylebone Public Library letter to E.M.Exley, 1891; Harris, 1972). Certainly the working classes saw the inherent advantage in these spaces and reformers were keen to express the ability of libraries to ensure that workers were utilised to their full extent, Edmonton expressing that ‘they provide against the wasting of special talents for want of better opportunity’ (Mumford, 1958, 230). This function can be regarded as coterminous with the modern utilisation of the library by unemployed individuals and the increasing usage of job sites on the peoples network, and one has to argue that provided job opportunities for individuals has increased significantly with the recent instability within UK economic patterns (Pateman & Vincent, 2010).

3.6: Social Amelioration

It is not surprising that public libraries continue to be regarded as the centres of the communities in which they reside (Usherwood, 1989). Indeed this idea was continually being espoused by library reformers
throughout the 1850’s with William Ewart arguing that ‘I have always thought that one of the good results of such institutions would be the bringing of classes together’ (Ewart correspondence with Cambridge Free Library, 1869). Despite the lack of class antagonisms within contemporary society, there is a real sense that modern British society is becoming increasingly uneven in the distribution of material resources and wealth (Pateman & Vincent, 2010). The utilitarian approach to exclusion and animosity toward privilege can be born out in their support for the public library as a social ameliorating force, especially as the public library was seen as vital for the self-realisation of communities (Black, 1999). The Westminster Review summed up this position when it stated that ‘we are unrivalled in all exclusions…the principle of exclusion is unhappily most prevalent and it is the sure mode speedily to render everything worthless’ (Westminster Review, 1827).

Indeed it this capacity for bridging the social gap between classes that motivated utilitarians and reformers alike during their campaign for a free public library. Greenwood envisioned the free library as the one space within Victorian society, truly free from moralistic and class judgments and he observed that ‘Representatives of every class find their way hither in search of much needed information not otherwise so easily accessible’ (Greenwood, 1891, 76). This clearly demonstrates that users of public libraries felt comfortable mixing together within the confines of the library space and this aspect of the service was consistently highlighted by Edwards. Edwards argued that one of the key institutions for bridging divisions within Victorian society, the library, could create a ‘higher order of mental culture’ (Edwards, 1855). In order to achieve this Edwards vigorously believed in providing ‘books of the highest order freely and easily accessible throughout the length and breadth of the land’, as exposure to the high minded ideals contained within ‘high literature’ would help connect the working classes with middle class values and so prevent social rupture (Edwards, 1855, 18).

3.7: Reading for Pleasure

Reading for pleasure has always represented a significant challenge for the library profession, the Great Fiction Question still raging about the feasibility of providing material purely for entertainment purposes (Snape, 1995). The leisure and entertainment functions of the free library movement have often been overlooked, usually integrated into the educational functions of the free library movement. This however is to seriously undervalue the important social functions that reading for pleasure engendered, as this aspect of the fledgling
service generated a great degree of social harmony (Snape, 1995). Greenwood can be seen to argue this point with his emphasis on the library as an alternative to the public house, stating that ‘It is such a perfect luxury to sit down with a really good book and in a few minutes be transported out of this common work a day world into brighter scenes’ (Greenwood, 1891, 63). Greenwood saw fiction as one of the key instruments for improving the drudgery of the harsh working and living conditions of the lower classes and saw fiction as a great social leveller which could be enjoyed by anyone regardless of status and position in life (Black, 1999). It also enabled the working man to avoid the perceived dangers of inactivity and the alehouse, Greenwood highlighting this notion where he states that ‘Of all the amusements which can possibly be imagined for a hardworking man in his daily toil...there is nothing like reading an entertaining book... It relieves his home of its dullness and sameness’ (Greenwood, 1891, 74). Caution must be applied here as many of the arguments for recreational and rational reading were framed against Victorian moralistic arguments, placing an emphasis on ‘good literature’. Greenwood can be perceived to take a more measured approach to recreational reading, emphasising that any fiction was key for moral reform.

Edward Edwards conversely fell firmly within the camp of reformers who saw value only in high minded middle class fiction, especially as a means to combat the increasing proliferation of penny dreadfuls that were perceived to promote ‘licentious and debase ideas’ (Edwards, 1855, 41). It was argued by Passmore Edwards that only good literature could provide the moral values necessary for generating ‘good, temperate Christians’ and that the librarian had a duty in providing wholesome recreation (Greenwood, 1891). This moralistic tendency was not shared by many library reformers, who saw any form of literature as an avenue into the more complex texts contained within the library. It should be noted that the temperance movement has dominated historiography but rather a more diverse range of opinion existed when it came to the provision of fiction resources (Snape, 1991). Furthermore there is sufficient evidence to suggest that many reformers were keen to supply ‘lower forms’ of literature , with Francis Baldwin, a leading figure within the mechanics institute movement, arguing that ‘some amusement to the working classes was essential if each man were to become a useful, active or contented member of society’ (Baldwin letter to Manchester Mechanics Institute, 1837). Indeed Snape has argued consistently that the novelists of the period were in synchronisation with the
prevalent issues within society and that their literature provided an important medium for the public at large to draw their own conclusions and judgements upon their present conditions (Snape, 1991).

Significantly this form of literature was vital in reconciling the woman within Victorian society and as Joseph Lively argued it helped to break up the ‘endless turmoil of dish washing, floor scrubbing... the novel comes as absolutely the sole intellectual amusement... And he is a boor who would deny them such cheap helpful stimulating pleasure’ (Greenwood, 1891, 61). Susan Burke highlights the inclusion from a modern perspective arguing that the inclusion of immigrant women in reading groups and the focus on providing them with good literature breaks up the monotony of their day (Burke, 2008). This is especially true of ethnic minority cultures where the role and opportunities for women are limited and the library according to Burke is vital for expanding the life chances of these women in a neutral safe environment (Burke, 2007). From this perspective therefore it can be discerned that most reformers saw literature, whatever its merit, as vital for individuals faced with unfulfilling lives and as an effective counterpoint to leisure activities which caused destructive behaviour. It should be noted that the provision of fiction was never truly reconciled with some members of the service and as late as 1903 and beyond individuals within the profession were still questioning this form of educational and recreational activity (Snape, 1991). John Churton Collins emphasises’ this point most clearly where he stated that ‘many libraries were completely under the thraldom of those who seek only such recreations as shilling shockers’ regarding them as ‘unmixed evils’ (Collins, 1901).

3.8: Community Development

The utilitarian focus on self-development also extended to the development of communities, as individuals who were self-motivated and exploiting their maximum potential could contribute positively to the material welfare and happiness of their community (Mill, 1838). This notion can be seen in Dawson’s sermon on the utility of public libraries in generating ‘that public spirit which makes a man prefer before his own prosperity and wellbeing, that of the town or country to which he belongs’ (Dale, 1899). This perspective saw the public library as the guardian of the wellbeing and harmony of the communities they served, providing opportunities for individuals from all strands of the social hierarchy to meet and develop bonds that enabled community development (Snape, 1995). Edwards was keen to promote the library as the vital institution for forging social
and communal links in the communities that they graced, arguing that they provided a natural remedy to the ‘many subversive doctrines afloat (Edwards, 1855, 75).

Furthermore it was argued that the free library would provide the chance for individuals within their communities to identify individual desires and responsibilities as communal decisions and benefits, leading to a greater degree of investment in the local community. As Greenwood argued ‘The town which cares for its citizens will establish a public library and take care of it with just as much interest as it will attend to cleansing of the town’ (Greenwood, 1891, 40). For Greenwood and many other library reformers the library was the vital transformative tool within a community, engendering intellectual growth but also encouraging a responsible approach to citizenship and a utilitarian focus on the maximum utility of a community (Mattson, 2000).

Greenwood also insisted that ‘a library at once becomes the centre of the intellectual life of the town and affects the morals and manners of the entire community’, and it was hoped that their presence would rejuvenate communities ravaged by the changes wrought by industrialisation (Greenwood, 1900, 17). Alistair Black has also argued that with the inclusion of a quality library in a community, local business interests and notables were keen to stay in an area where quality information and education were in abundance (Black, 1999). This not only secured growth for the community but it ensured that wealthy benefactors were present should funds become stretched, due to the pitiful allowance provided by the terms of the 1850 act (Black, 1999). It was argued that with the proliferation of rational, educated individuals within communities, extremist and subversive ideas would get short shrift, as Greenwood demonstrated stating that, ‘the wild and mischievous doctrines now taught…would be completely dissipated if men could read and think for themselves’ (Greenwood, 1900, 10).

3.9: Civic and Democratic Participation

Furthermore a great deal of emphasis was placed on the ability of libraries to contribute towards the democratic and civic health of the nation, an idea that was more prevalent in the post war years, however this was still significant during the Edwardian period. Indeed W B Sayers argued that ‘libraries would strike hard against demagogues for men would be able to think for themselves and would not be left at the mercy of tyrants for their ideas’ (Sayers, 1908, 11). This can be seen to connect with the utilitarian ideal of reason, in
which the public library would germinate powers of reason amongst all the classes, enabling democratic awareness to increase. Other library reformers saw the civic elements of public libraries in more negative terms, as Edward Edward’s and other individuals believed that public libraries could decrease social rupture by removing sources of ignorance. Edward’s strident belief in reason is evident where he states ‘what can be more likely to defeat turbulent passion than calm appeals to reason?’ (Edwards, 1858, 86). This can be regarded as part of the moral reform tradition amongst the middle classes, in which libraries were perceived as methods of social control to improve and reform the civic ideas amongst the working classes. Furthermore, as both Greenwood and Edward’s consistently argued for a strong lobbying position for the public library, contemporary library theorists such as Vincent and Usherwood have argued that rather than adapting to government policy, libraries should take the initiative to, ‘communicate value’ (Usherwood, 1989, Pateman & Vincent, 2010).

The library was upheld as the one institution which could provide the grounds for an educated citizenry, something regarded as essential for the burgeoning democratic values within British society (Black, 1999). John Dana encapsulated this model of library provision, citing the inclusion of civic organisation’s ‘leaflets, pamphlets and books’ as a vital means for increasing civic knowledge about governmental matters (Dana, 1903, 3). It was vital for voters to be aware of political developments within society, in order that freedom and utility were not constrained by politicians and a small minority against the interests of the majority. Nowhere is this more stridently expressed than by Sir Henry Jones who argued that the ‘safety of England lay in the way voters were educated’ (Jones, 1910, 26). The library was seen to promote the aspects of good citizenship vital for the running of the nation and by stressing the importance of obligation and duty to fellow citizens of the community, the library was seen as the guardian of the moral life of the political nation. Henry Brougham highlighted this notion when he argued at the opening of Liverpool public library that the ‘whole community will be improved in its duties towards man and in its duties towards the government...which will derive from this institution’ (Brougham, 1878, 14).

4: Methodology
The overall approach towards the research was inductive. Due to the focus on the underlying principles of public librarianship and lessons to be learnt from past practice, it was decided that an inductive approach was better suited due to the generation of a theory from the evidence, as opposed to testing a hypothesis (Leedy, 2009). For this study it was also decided that qualitative data would be the most suitable for highlighting the complexities of ideas and personal beliefs held by staff members (Price, 2002, 109; Creswell, 2009). Furthermore qualitative data is vital for explaining elements of principles and beliefs and is also able to give a greater sense of contextual factors influencing an individual’s ideas (Silverman, 2010). The focus of qualitative data on explanation also fits more easily with the inductive research paradigm’s focus on explanation and the generation of a theory. The research method of analysis is also informed by two core movements within the study of history which fleshed out the validity of using historical facts and ideas to generate ontologies in the present (Southgate, 2010, 279). Intellectual history allows this study to transcend the boundaries of postmodernist scepticism about assigning truths and value judgements to past events, by using Mersenne’s paradigm of reasoned pragmatism, in order to generate readings into future events from the intellectual movements of the past (Popkin, 1979). Social history also provides the medium through which community and civic cohesion can be analysed as it presents a paradigm through which the forces for social change within society can be discerned (Ely, 2010). The final theoretical framework impacting on the research methods is grounded theory however a modified version of Glaser’s framework was utilised with special emphasis on theories emerging from the data but, more importantly the creativity of how the data was handled and translated (Holstien & Gubrium, 2008; Charmaz, 2006).

To achieve the research objectives two sets of data were collected. The first of these is a combination of historical accounts and secondary historiography, which provided the historical context and ideologies to inform the rest of the research (Bentley, 2003). This set of research data consisted of primary accounts from the leading individuals, groups and library authorities involved in the development of the public library between 1850 and 1914, as well as including historian’s arguments. This data was selected according to the following criterion:
1. The literature must focus on the period outlined above, but some deviation either side to aid with the establishing of context is key.

2. That the sources selected provide an insight into the historical workings of the nascent public library and comment on professional and ideological aspects of the institution.

3. Provide strong evidence to inform the three themes of economic and personal development, community cohesion and civic participation.

The second set of primary data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with Rotherham Library staff. Rotherham libraries was chosen due to its strong historical connections with radical reform movements and ease of access. Semi structured interviews are significant for this study as due to the fluidity of the questions being asked, there needed to be a great deal of room to adapt questions to the dynamic nature of individuals beliefs or reaction to data. It also allows a deeper examination of answers provided if individuals produce complex and multi layered answers (Bryman, 2008; Mathers, 1998). The sample population was as broad as possible within the organisation to determine if there was any degree of divergence between managers or front line staff, as to their knowledge of historical contexts or personal philosophies as to the functions of a public library in the 21st century. It is important to bear in mind that when conducting interviews the researchers inherent belief’s and suppositions may well be transposed onto any answers provided and so therefore it is vital to be as objective as possible, providing a tabular rase when analysing answers and ideologies (Richards, 2005). During the course of the interviews the interviewees were subjected to two lines of questioning, with one focusing on showing them historical quotes intent on gauging their reaction to these sources and the second focusing on their opinions and beliefs about public library service. The analysis of the data was constructed around three core themes previously outlined above and which provided a theoretical framework to pin ideas on to, allowing a greater degree of accuracy of interpretation.

4.1: Practicalities

It is important to realise that there were some important limitations to the research being conducted. The focus on a single library authority may seem to be a limitation as it engenders a relatively small interview
group that may not be truly representative of opinion around the country or regionally. This should not be an issue however as the focus on basic principles and tenets of librarianship should remain the same amongst all public library services. A further limitation is the element of bias prevalent amongst any historian’s analysis and every source must be treated with a degree of impartiality to avoid the misappropriation of ideologies on datasets (Lambert, 2010). Finally the time frame has been limited to a period in which many of the notions and beliefs of the period may seem drastically outmoded by today’s standards, so it is therefore important not to assign Victorian and Edwardian morality systems to contemporary society (Warren, 2010). Furthermore the time frame selected does not present a completely holistic view of public library development and certainly the period up until 1965 is of great significance, however due to time constraints this period was dealt with in the vaguest of detail.

4.2: Ethics

The structure of the interview was designed to ensure that no members of staff were exposed to radical ideas or questions of an uncomfortable nature. The questions were designed merely to gauge staff perceptions of the history of the public library movement and any beliefs or opinions as to the function of the modern public library were recorded in a manner that ensures no rupture with their employer. The interviewees had the right to ask any questions about the research and were given the historical context of the research to broaden their understanding to fit in with the research aim of this project. It was proposed that the interviews were to remain in the sole charge of the researcher and the interviewees had the right to withdraw their participation from the project at any stage.

5.0: Interview Results

This section of the dissertation will examine the results of the interviews. All interviews will be referred to throughout the discussion as 1-6. Furthermore the interviewees came from all levels of the organisational structure, from senior management to front line staff, but all interviewees had a distinct connection to service provision. The discussion of the results will be structured thematically around the questions asked to gauge overall opinion in order to identify common areas of crossover and agreement. From these answers a list of recommendations will be produced that also take into account the findings of the literature review.
5.1: Public Libraries as Educators

All of the interviewees stated that the public library was an educational institution, however they did not agree with the strict mechanical and materialist knowledge as advocated by utilitarian reformers (Greenwood, 1900). Instead as Interview 04 demonstrated technical education was regarded as something ‘you learn at school’ going on to argue that basic skills provision was the most important aspect of library provision. Nearly all the interviews echoed this sentiment that, while the public library did have a responsibility to provide educational opportunities, these were confined to enhancing basic skills (Vincent & Pateman, 2010). Interview 06 however generated a different perspective arguing that the service needed to be rebranded so as to be perceived by the general public as ‘an alternative to formal education’ going on to argue that, ‘I don’t think we get the recognition in this area that perhaps in the 1850s you would have had due to the infancy of primary education’. It should be noted however that most interviewees agreed that the library had a duty to enhance the knowledge of individuals using the service and that indirectly the public library does allow for opportunities for self-betterment as outlined by Greenwood and Edwards (Greenwood, 1891; Edwards, 1855). This is demonstrated by interview 03 which demonstrates that ‘we provide plenty of CV building sessions and while it may not be teaching engineering skills and lectures as this suggests it still counts as like education of a sort’. From this perspective therefore basic skills provision can be regarded as aping the utilitarian ideal of self-help and personal betterment and while formal and technical education cannot be regarded as entirely prominent, there is a case for arguing that the liberality of the modern public library provides individuals with the resources that they need to enhance their professional qualifications and knowledge.

It is unsurprising that in nearly all the interviews ‘Universal Job Match’ and ‘CV building workshops’ were consistently emphasised as elements within the educational opportunities provided by public libraries (Usherwood, 1999). Interview number 06, while stating the same elements of service provision, made the added distinction of the libraries non-fiction stock, arguing that as a source of information the library has kept quite close to the original ideals of Edwards, stocking quality material on a whole host of subjects (Edwards, 1855). As interviewee 06 stated ‘I think it this level of involvement that gives out of work and indeed anybody the chance to be exposed to ideas and new concepts’. This clearly demonstrates that providing quality
informational material, one of the core functions of the original free library service has changed remarkably little. Some staff members however, as interview 03 demonstrates, argue that ‘I think with any area of the library we need to promote what we actually offer’, and many argue that the public need to be consistently reminded as to the educational merits of the library.

5.2: Reading for pleasure

Nearly all of the interviewees stated that reading for pleasure has some educational value, with interviewee 03 stating that ‘I think that it expands people’s worldviews still and that it broadens the mind’. Indeed all staff at Rotherham public libraries see the educational and social benefits of reading for pleasure and as interview 06 demonstrates the ‘proliferation of cheap literature’ still poses a significant challenge for the public library to contend with, as Greenwood consistently argued (Greenwood, 1900). Furthermore there is still a perception amongst all the interviewees that for some families’ books are out of their budgetary constraints and that the library is the only place that can really offer them literature, a situation which is remarkably similar to the 1850s. As one staff member commented ‘we grant those excluded groups the chance to read for pleasure when otherwise books would have been overlooked entirely’. While the threat of the alehouse and exploitative working conditions may have greatly receded, staff do think that there is still a great deal of push and pulls on people attentions, especially teenage generations, who may overlook the library completely. Indeed one staff member stated that ‘it’s lovely when they do pick up a book and learn something although it’s a dying art form’.

Furthermore it should be noted that just as Greenwood emphasised the ability of literature to ‘transport’ disheartened individuals into a better place, one member of staff argued that the housebound service ‘provides disconnected individuals with literature to break up the monotony of their day’ (Greenwood, 1885). There is clear evidence that the great fiction debate has not gone away, with a number of staff arguing that with the financial situation becoming increasingly difficult spending on books stock was becoming harder to justify. One staff member even insisted that ‘we can’t fritter away money on the whole Mills and Boon canon, we need to be purchasing the latest best sellers’. Therefore it is easy to draw parallels between the 1850s with Edwards consistently arguing that the library shouldn’t be wasting money on penny dreadfuls and cheap
literature but rather should be focusing on providing substantial works of fiction (Edwards, 1855). Most staff also believed that most customers didn’t perceive fiction as an educational medium, but rather just saw it as a light entertainment with one member of staff suggesting that the power of the book should be reemployed to demonstrate the educational effectiveness of the library.

5.3: Economic Impact

Despite Greenwood’s and Edwards’s assertions that the free library provided an economic impetus to the communities they graced, as well as increasing national productivity, this strictly economic role appears to have been consistently overlooked. Most staff stated that they were surprised that the early library had such a close connection with business interests, for example holding patent information and holding information on profitability of local businesses (Black, 1999). One interviewee declared that such a close alliance with the commercial world ‘threatens the autonomy of the library and that as a public body it should be avoided completely’. There is also a perception that the business world does not perceive libraries as useful to their interests with one staff member arguing that ‘when they do come in asking for information, they are pleasantly surprised by the accuracy of the information provided’. Therefore it appears that while the American public library still enjoys this role as a hub for business interests, the British public library appears to have drifted away from this principle.

Indeed Greenwood’s emphasis on partnership with other services and companies is slowly being explored as one staff. Interview 06 generated an interesting perspective regarding partnership, declaring that ‘I think we are quite good at working with partners to provide expert help and I think that the work with jobcentres to provide job opportunities and chances has been really successful’. Many however were concerned that partnership threatened the autonomy of the library, instead stressing the public functions of the library. Many aspects of partnership work however were seen as beneficial when internally undertaken with other council services, however one interviewee stated that ‘customers aren’t keen on the set up especially privacy side of things because they don’t want to talk to people about their sensitive info and benefits.’ Furthermore as has been discussed the Victorian free library was perceived as a pseudo labour exchange with individuals and employers utilising the library to fill vacancies. Once again this aspect of provision has been devolved to other
areas with the Job centre now seen as the primary destination, however one staff member was able to see similarities, arguing that ‘customers are still told to visit the library by the job centre to browse for jobs, so indirectly we form a sort of electronic labour exchange’. All staff members saw that the funding situation for public libraries was remarkably similar to the Victorian equivalent, with the local government funding likened to the rate agreed by the 1850 library act. Many were keen to see the strict policy towards donations dropped, as this provided some of the libraries ‘with much needed additional and interesting stock, especially when stock budgets are being cut’. Certainly one can draw parallels to the need for donations from leading philanthropists such as Carnegie, in keeping the library afloat.

5.4: Social Amelioration and Civic Participation

Most of the interviews pointed to the fact that the public library still prides itself on being a socially ameliorating force within the communities they grace. Many members of staff certainly argued that Greenwood’s assertion that the library was a great social leveller was relevant to current practice, with one commenting that ‘by attempting to mix individuals together I hope we generate a greater sense of community cohesion’ (Greenwood, 1895). While socially mixing may not revolve around middle class and working class individuals meeting within the library, most library staff hinted at the similarities with ethnic minority using the library service. Interview 04 argued that ‘it’s about making chances for ethnic minorities to meet other individuals from the community in a neutral space’ and certainly this mirrors the original conception of the free library, where working and middle class men could meet in an area free of prejudiced assumptions. Interviewee 05 also highlighted an alternative ameliorating force that ‘between the have nots and the haves in terms of the latest digital gadget and material wealth so maybe actually yeah the library is a great leveller’, hinting at the access to information and social media via library computers and the peoples network.

Furthermore just as utilitarian ideology emphasised the ability of public libraries to actively improve the communities they graced, staff members were able to conceive of the work conducted by Rotherham libraries as actively improving their communities. While the utilitarian notion of community and civic awareness may be a political idea, staff members were able to see how the library improved the life of the community, interview 01 stating that ‘we try and bring communities together...Certainly a lot of the people who help out over
summer are not necessarily the most well connected’. Interview 05 however disagreed with this assumption that the public library is the heart of the community arguing that while they do provide opportunities for locals to become involved, ‘they don’t necessarily see their interests as the same as the communities...there is a real lack of community spirit’. This appears to be an isolated case as most other branch libraries witnessed a good level of community participation in the events held within the library.

The promotion of the service was seen as something in need of attention if the library was able to reach all elements of the community and that due to the increasing individualism of society and the fragmentation of traditional working class communities, the library no longer appears to hold the pre-eminence assigned to it by utilitarian ideology. As one staff member stated ‘Apart from maybe central library perhaps people are unaware of what we can actually do for them’. While this may prevent a rather negative conception of the influence that the modern public library has on local communities one staff member commented that ‘in our local area there has definitely been a marked change in people’s attitudes towards each other and the library’.

Interviewee 06 echoes this view by arguing that the inclusion of volunteers within the service actively improves community ties, going on to argue that ‘I can’t think of any public building that provides the same level of community involvement other than say a purpose built community centre’.

There has however been a marked shift in the attitude of the modern public library towards the political arena. Indeed Greenwood’s and Edward’s assertion that the public library had a much more strident role to play in generating a strong sense of civic and national identity, including a stronger role in political circles has definitely been overlooked (Greenwood, 1891). Nearly all staff members were keen to distance the library from the political arena, arguing that it was their responsibility to be ‘non-partisan’ and ‘neutral’ when it came to the decision making process. Interviewee 04 stated that ‘It would I think ruin the whole point of a free public library if we started attacking the government and I think we would not be able to remain a neutral space’. This appears to be a common theme amongst many staff members, something which is in complete variance to Greenwood’s assertions that the public library needed to consistently lobby for fairer conditions in terms of funding and importance (Greenwood, 1891).
One staff member however echoed Greenwood’s original principles by arguing that ‘There does need to be a greater degree of lobbying within parliament and we shouldn’t be ashamed of that’. This staff member still argued that staff members should keep their personal political viewpoints concealed to maintain the neutrality of the library space, but at the same time still arguing for a more active role in parliamentary affairs. Most library staff did recognise that providing political information has declined significantly over the past couple of years with little demand for party manifesto’s, however one staff member still saw the library as the hub of political information for those who lacked access to the internet at home.

5.5: Relevance of History

Most staff members thought that while it was interesting to look back at the profession at its initial conception, many were cautious about applying the principles of the past to today’s professional values. A typical response was that ‘No I don’t think Victorian values should be applied to today’s practice…I think you would have to look to the future for a better idea of what we should be doing’. Most staff were concerned with identifying the next emerging development within society and shaping the profession around it, in order to provide the greatest flexibility when it came to changing the profession. Many saw the values of the past as ‘parochial’ and didn’t want to remove the openness and friendliness of modern librarianship. It should be noted that most did argue that some of the core values needed to revisited for ‘tips’, especially the similarities between the two financial situations. One staff member however argued that the history of the profession was vital to its survival, arguing that ‘I think we need to remind the public how important and significant libraries have been to the lifeblood of this country’. This staff member also pointed to the core values of the profession being essential to service quality, however she also nodded towards the value of looking into the future and suggested a combined approach to set the public library on the right path.

6: Conclusion

It has been demonstrated therefore that a large proportion of the services initially conceived in 1850 are still prevalent today in some form or other. Certainly the public library still evinces an educative role within society and the fact that it is still geared towards useful knowledge is unsurprising. Despite the lack of formal technical education and lecture series the existence of basic skills workshops and CV building activities demonstrates
that there is still a firm commitment of instilling economically useful knowledge into the population. Furthermore despite the lack of cooperation with local business interests, the library still acts as a rudimentary labour exchange. Job seekers still enter the library but now find their information through electronic channels and one has to argue that the ‘out o’works’ are still prevalent, perhaps more currently. While the emphasis on industrial knowledge has understandably disappeared, due to the collapse of heavy industry within the UK in the last 50 years, many men and women still use the public library as a self-betterment tool, especially via a collection of useful online guides and non-fiction material.

Reading for pleasure is perhaps more accepted nowadays and certainly there is no insistence that borrowers move on to higher forms of literature. There is still a lack of awareness amongst the general public however as to the importance of reading that Greenwood and Edwards consistently emphasised, and this is perhaps still one of the most important functions of the public library today. Certainly the attempt to encourage working class individuals away from alehouses can be mirrored in the attempts of beleaguered library staff to encourage teenagers and busy adults away from less educative activities such as video games and the television. One area in which the public library appears to have stayed remarkably unchanged is in the area of social and communal improvement. Libraries are still considered the centres of the communities they grace and while the utilitarian notion of communal interests may be slightly utopian, there is a sense of civic pride surrounding some communities and their library. Furthermore just as middle and working class men and women could mix amicably in Edward’s conception of the free library, ethnic minorities, unemployed and people of various sexual orientations can still mix freely and in a neutral space without fear of repression. While the public library still creates the knowledge environment for an informed democracy, it should be noted that currently most staff and the profession as a whole shies away from the ardent campaigning undertaken by Edwards and Greenwood.

Finally some staff seem to view the past with a great deal of caution arguing that the future and its promise of technological and societal innovation is the best way forward for the profession. On the whole however most view the principles of the past as incredibly important on todays practice and certainly there is a case for arguing that some of the lessons drawn from past practice are invaluable in revitalising the profession.
6.1: Final Recommendations

The final recommendations emerging from the results of this study are as follows:

1. The educational capacity of the public library needs to be emphasised on a national level, to grant public libraries the status within the educational hierarchy of the country that they deserve. A continued expansion of their basic skills role needs to be conducted, in order to truly realise Greenwood’s self-betterment philosophy.

2. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on partnerships, both internal and external, in granting the public library a greater share of the resources of society. Greenwood’s attention to partnerships should not be underestimated as they provide the library with much needed resources, but enhance the relevance and connections to the rest of society. Furthermore the expertise within partner organisations may enhance activities already being conducted by public libraries.

3. The educational benefits of reading fiction material perhaps need to be highlighted, as well as the collection of relevant nonfiction material to the public. While a great many people are already aware of these resources, awareness needs to be generated surrounding the advantages of picking up a fiction book, especially for ethnic minorities.

4. The benefits to communities that public libraries bring need to be highlighted more effectively and libraries should strive to insert themselves fully within the life of the community.

5. Public libraries should gain a more prominent position within the political life of the nation lobbying more forcefully within parliament and relevant institutions, and should also be active in promoting the relevant democratic information during elections and political events.

6. The library as a neutral space for ethnic minorities should be emphasised and promoted, as well as excluded individuals in general in order to decrease alienation within communities.

7. A reintroduction of job advertising and careers based activities within the library needs to be considered to actively promote out of work individuals back into work as well as contributing to the economic life of the country.
8. Business interests should be considered to demonstrate, like the American public library, the value that libraries can bring to local business through economic information and their influence and success within a community. This would also solve many of the financial problems currently facing the profession.

9. A more open attitude towards donations from the public of books and other items that could be placed on the shelves relatively easily. This again would solve many of the problems faced by libraries with ever increasing stock budgets.

10. When conducting staff training, instruction in the history of the public library movement should be provided. This will enable all members of the organisation to focus on original principles and ideas as a guide to the service that they provide. This is especially important for heads of the organisation.

6.2: Future Research

The scope of this essay was limited to 1850-1914 and therefore a potential subject for investigating would be a later period of time, as the post war years and the 1960s also witnessed radical change for public libraries. This is certainly true of the 1960s as it represents a chronologically closer period in time, with a greater emphasis on the civic and democratic functions of the library service that may be conceptualised in a more modern way. Furthermore a wider selection of public authorities may well generate a different set of results as this study was only limited to Rotherham public libraries due to time constraints. Indeed due to the fragmented nature of most public library authorities in Britain different library authorities may be experiencing a completely different set of challenges and their interpretation of what is significant may differ radically. It may also be instructive to compare British librarianship with American librarianship over the same time frame as these two services were not completely different and it would make for an interesting investigation into different approaches towards librarianship. Certainly an investigation into how close the modern American public library resembles its past equivalent would be useful to see if America is more attuned to the history of the library as an institution.

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Appendices

Interview 01
**Question 1:** So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that?

**Answer:** Well I think that, um, first of all the public library should be constantly providing opportunities for groups to feel involved. I know that some people that I talk to are often intimidated by the library as a place and I think that shouldn’t be the case. More importantly though I certainly don’t feel like I can be aware of everyone's you know personal situations and circumstances and um well I think that more awareness needs to be raised around this issue certainly yeah.

**Question 2:** Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s comments on Technical Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

**Answer:** Hmmm well I think that the educational responsibilities of the library are often overlooked and I think we still don’t have the status that formal schooling has when it comes to educating people. I mean in this library we er, well we provide plenty of CV building sessions and while it may not be teaching engineering skills and lectures as this suggests it still counts as like education of a sort. We could do with the recognition though that libraries can have a big impact on the educational system.

**Question 3:** Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

**Answer:** I think self-betterment has taken on more of a business related meaning nowadays. I think that yes the library should be giving those individuals who use the service and want to study on their own the broadest range of knowledge available. Especially in today's environment we see quite a lot of books being taken out on IT issues such as email and Ipads, and without these books I think a lot of people would struggle to function, especially considering that the new Ipad seems to come out every like five months. I think what
lets us down is the lack of exam related resources as I think textbooks are seen as more of a ummm specialist resource.

Question 4: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?

Answer: Oh yeah sure. I think that reading for pleasure is one of the best ways to pick up advanced vocab and to be fair you never get bored of reading a good book. I think that a lot of people take it for granted and don’t really see any educative value in it when it fact if you’re reading a historical fiction novel like Simon Scarrow you’re like learning about Roman history. Well at least I hope people are [Laughs]. But being totally serious for a second I think its key for people who English may be their second language and they’re reading stuff that’s accessible but teaching them English at the same time you know?

Question 5: Yeah I completely agree with you. I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at the their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: Hmm in theory I think it helps bind the community together. However I think that’s something that’s much harder to achieve in practice. I know that while women are much more included nowadays I think the fact that Greenwood attempted to publish gridlines for an inclusive service is remarkable.

Question 6: In your opinion then why is harder to achieve and do you think that current librarianship achieves it?

Answer: Well it involves a lot of outreach and if you’re really busy you’re not going to get time to focus on those kind of activities. I think as well that its often overlooked as an extra thing to do to get brownie points. We don’t do enough but I think that obviously there is a clear desire to do something about it and I think one of the other branch libraries is looking into providing English lessons to non-native speakers. I think that Greenwood is right to suggest though that the public library is a neutral meeting place.
Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today?

Answer: Yeah I would like to think so I mean in an environment where there is little to do I think they can really help people who are adrift of society. We try hard to include those people who don’t have as good a range of life chances and to try and bring communities together. Certainly a lot of the people who help out over summer are not necessarily the most well connected

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: Of course and I think that’s all the more important because of the government’s recent emphasis on e government. The fact that civic participation is held up as the big thing to achieve helps too but I think their does need to be a refocus onto this role of the public library definitiely.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current practice?

Answer: I would think so yeah. I know from what you’ve shown me today a lot of the stuff is pretty modern in its outlook. I’m not suggesting it’s all relevant but certainly [pause 5 Seconds] well the public library still functions in roughly the same way. I’ve also noted that quite a lot of the original stuff has been left by the wayside and I think that when conducting the day to day running of the library you’re not necessarily focusing on these things specifically. But in this economic fuddle we’re in at the moment I think the free library as you called it emphasis on um education and skills creation, you know that kinda stuff is key really. So yeah I would say that it would be great to learn from the past and to communicate the rich history you’ve clearly found.

Transcript 02

Question 1: So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that?
Answer: It um I think should serve the local community and helps them get not just books out. They do lots of events as well as um going on the um computers. I think we are inclusive for as far as possible but sure there are areas that we need to improve

Question 2: Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s comments on Technical Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

Answer: Oooh [laughs] I think they probably do but not as well as in the past due to funding cuts and with all the cutbacks to service and everything um its definitely got worse over the years. I think that’s the trouble I think there’s a lot of red tape to go through at the minute to offer any formal education. A lot of them too they don’t promote the library service as much as they would normally do

Question 3: Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

Answer: Oh yeah of course. The amount of people who come into the library and seek out new topic areas with nonfiction is quite a lot. But umm whether people are aware of this when they read a book about the war I’m not sure. I think with any area of the library we need to promote what we need and the information available which I think then can actually help people decide on careers and what not. I think as well that the partnership that Greenwood mentions is a good idea too obviously it would bring a bit of revenue and extra help in but if they did that it would bring in more opportunities and more job chances as well.

Question 4: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?

Answer: I think that reading for pleasure may be declining with electronic developments nowadays but I think that the libraries are are actually promoting electronic books so I think reading for pleasure in that view is
extending with Kindles and things like that and I’m sure that its worthwhile. I think that it expands peoples worldviews still and that it broadens the mind

Question 5: I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at the their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: I think that it does and I think that more work needs to be done to get them in in the first place but you know hopefully in the future you know it might be a lot better. I’m not sure that we do enough at the moment, and I know that some people see a library and freak out so if we don’t pay attention to their needs then they are just going to not come in. The idea of a social leveller is really interesting especially as in some branches I know the borrowers of a library are from one particular background and it can be hard to break those habits.

Question 6: In your opinion then why is harder to achieve and do you think that current librarianship achieves it?

Answer: Im not sure to be honest coz I think that different libraries have different user groups and different communities so I think obviously it’s a bit hard to say on that level. But yeah yeah I think obviously that where it is more social exclusion as opposed to inclusion I think there needs to be more of an effort you know to get more people in you know therers a lot of a lot of people who don’t feel that they can use a library if they need to. A lot of people think they are posh places and that breaking that thinking is I think important if we are to reach out to individuals.

Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today?

Answer: Yeah yeah I think you can see it today and where they are I think they generally improve the life of the community and it does actually bring a lot of the community together when they do like events in the holidays
and the various reading groups and community groups that use our space. You know from toddler groups [laughs] and there's a broad range of the public reached.

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: I'm sad to say that civic society doesn't really any bells for me or for the majority of people using the service. I'm not entirely sure we are seen as the first port of call for electoral papers and besides at the moment I think that most people are fed up with local government around here so that while I guess we should become more political and attempt to aid individuals looking for political information sadly I think its just something that’s overlooked. There's no big society feeling around here and with the recent merging of local services that role is beginning to get lost in translation. I think staff need a bit more training on that as well to keep up to date with everything as because there are that many different things and sources of info that stuff is being updated constantly.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current practice?

Answer: I think it’s a good idea because I think we’ve lost the original ideas and values of proper librarians and old fashioned librarians and I think it would be nice to go back and see they did things and get some tips even. Its impossible to judge a few things but yeah no a lot of the professionalism I think as this has suggested has been lost and I think to reconnect to that is super important else I think we are buggered [laughs]

Transcript 3

Question 1: So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that?

Answer: Yes [Pause] I do think that it should include as the quote suggests that we do have a responsibility to include different groups. I think we provide a lot of access with computers and erm er you can get books in different languages and all the courses that we provide as well as individual support. I mean we’re always sort
of providing things like you know the hearing loop and the equipment sometimes used on the computers but I think we do do quite a good job actually

Question 2: Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s comments on Technical Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

Answer: Erm I don’t think we do a great deal of educational lessons and lectures at all so I think that aspect of the library service has gone completely. I mean we are here to help people but we are not a job centre, that’s what those places are for specifically. But to actually provide learning for employment chances is stretching the library service a bit thin erm I would imagine anyway.

Question 3: Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

Answer: Well I don’t think we achieve it at the moment completely I mean we do provide different things but not completely. I think yes skills advancement is something really important and you know yourself that our borrowers use the computers for job searches, cv writing that kind of thing and we do help them as this Greenwood suggests. Universal job match I think is our most successful erm program type thing but we’re always on hand to provide cv courses.

Question 4: You mentioned outside companies providing more instruction but what’s your impression on partnering with other library groups and external companies to extend the remit of library services as Greenwood suggests in this quote [shows quote]?

Answer: Yes I think that’s a good idea if it keeps us going and more importantly the funding of the books [5 second pause] you know increases the variety of fiction on our shelves. So yeah I think that’s a great idea. I think we would have to watch how it was approached and how much involvement from external companies there would be in the planning of the library or whatever it is that was being undertaken.
Question 5: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?

Answer: I think it still is an important element of what we do but I think that reading for pleasure has decline recently what with the advent of E books and particularly with younger people, um with that younger generation of readers such as teenagers to 40ish perhaps group and they have so many other things that they are involved in that reading has become less important to a lot of people. I think with educational value people don’t see it like that they just enjoy a good book and don’t want to learn too much about things but I suppose if we had bigger um ethnic membership of reading groups then I can see where the quotes coming from.

Question 5: I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at the their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: I think it does actually yes because of the access we’ve said before for people for everybody I think it does actually. I think quite often people coming in sometimes on a regular basis, not so much here but I think they feel safe coming into the library because they won’t get judged at all. It’s a sort of a free space that is supposed to be neutral I guess and yeah

Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today?

Answer: I think they do enhance the community but I think it depends on where the library is based to how much impact it has. The access to it and do they know it’s there and what our main purpose is. Awareness is a big problem especially here where its not obvious where the library actually and whether its owned by the school or the council or not. Apart from maybe central library perhaps in other areas ethnic minorities are unaware of what we can actually do for them. Better promotion for sure if we had the budget. A lot of the staff have had training on racial equality cultural awareness training and a lot of the newer staff may not have
it due to funding cuts but courses like that are good because you learn a lot from it and I’ve done it myself and it was really interesting but perhaps the newer staff would certainly benefit from it.

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: No I don’t think as public libraries we should have any political role whatsoever I think there are other avenues for people to access this information. I think that this information is just completely unwanted by people especially at the moment and I don’t think we need to necessarily become an active promoter of the big society especially as it hasn’t really effected any major change yet.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current practice?

Answer: I think the use and aggression towards volunteers is historically valid and I think needs to be brought back. I think they have their own time and place really with things such as the summer reading challenge helping out casually with the craft activities but as regards running the library when funding is short is a very poor idea because they won’t have proper training on using the systems and at the end of the day what does it say about us if we allow anyone to come in and do the job. The rest of it though I think we need to move with the times with all these new ideas and keeping up with the times is important more so than looking to the past but I guess there are some areas which could help reaffirm the basic core part of what we do certainly

Transcript 04

Question 1: So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that

Answer: Definitely yeah it’s really important and I think erm by different stock that we have in. Erm so that it appeals to all different sectors of the population and the different facilities we deal with activities for children right up to pensioners don’t we. Oh not to forget computer classes so I think we do a good job at it really although maybe we could hopefully build on that success
Question 2: Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s comments on Technical Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

Answer: Erm yes I think that maybe we don’t do so much of the educative stuff anymore but we do indirectly educate individuals. Technical education seems to me to be more the sort of information you learn at school and I think that job clubs and cv are really important function really and I mean here we have regular customers who come in to check universal job match. I think people have got different levels and you get some novices who are expected to do everything but I think up to a point we should try and provide educative opportunities because I mean CV’s are quite technical.

Question 3: Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

Answer: Oh definitively especially with those people who don’t have computers at home. I think it depends which library you go to sometimes people ask for guidance and we could perhaps do with more help because we get customers who get stuck at points during applications. I mean we’re always there to help them with whatever knowledge they want and I think as a service we do provide that chance for people to read widely about a subject. I’ve been helping someone today you know steve who comes in? He got stuck and but they just seem to throw them in at the deep end and expect them to cope. We perhaps use some training ourselves to know how to use these systems to set stuff out properly especially with the speed at which things change.

Question 4: You mentioned outside companies providing more instruction but what’s your impression on partnering with other library groups and external companies to extend the remit of library services as Greenwood suggests in this quote [shows quote]?

Answer: I think it’s important to join forces so to speak I mean maybe if there was someone here actually from the job centre you would perhaps get a better quality of guidance with employment opportunities and
chances. I mean it would be better having a representative because they just seem to send them here at the moment without any guidance so maybe a closer connection there would be a good idea. We don’t always have the time ourselves to spend labouring on a CV so I think that area could certainly benefit. I think it would be better if there was someone one to one from time to time to do a proper job club. We’ve started that already to an extent within the organisation with the service centres, combining council tax offices with libraries and I think its going to increase and sharing service delivery areas to reduce costs. I think its something that the customers aren’t well the ones we’ve spoken to at dinnington aren’t keen on the set up especially privacy side of things because they don’t want to talk to people about their sensitive info and benefits. I think it needs to be throught out better.

Question 5: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?

Answer: Personally yeah I think it’s great hobby a great thing to do especially with so much information stuck in a book. But I think it’s dwindling depending on what your age group is especially teenagers which are really difficult to target at the moment. There’s so many other things on people’s minds at the moment and so many different pulls on their attention that it’s lovely when they do pick up a book and learn something although it’s a dying art form. I think it’s a good thing for ethnic minorities to do and learn the language through fiction but I don’t know how hard it would be without any English at all they would probably need special guidance.

Question 5: I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: Erm yeah I mean down at Mowbray Garden’s there’s a big ethnic population and I know a lot of different community groups that meet in the library and help them with different aspects of their life and I guess it depends which area It is probably in central as well wheres there plenty of different groups and books
to read. I guess it depends which part of Rotherham you are near I mean hear we don’t seem to get any ethnic minorities within the library

Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today

Answer: I think there needs to be stronger sense of provision for ethnic minorities because I didn’t realise until I worked at Mowbray gardens that they have a whole range of books in Urdu and increasingly now in Polish so I think it gives a chance for the community to share their love of reading and to bring them under roof in a certain sense of calm. Increasingly on the website as well they have different languages to show all the opening times. I think we the staff have all been on training courses regarding various minority groups and I don’t think we’re a bad bunch but most of us have the training to improve the life of the community by making the library a really friendly vibrant place. Well we hope anyway.

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: I think it should stay completely out of politics. I think the reading material should be there that we don’t really promote enough of at the moment to read about it but I don’t think we should be a political institution. It would I think ruin the whole point of a free public library if we started attacking the government and I think we would not be able to remain a neutral space.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current practice?

Answer: No I don’t think Victorian values shouldn’t but applied to today’s practice because you would end up with a rather scary idea of what a librarian is and I think you would have to look to the future for a better idea of what we should be doing. The basic principles by the looks haven’t changed and I think maybe it would be nice to be reminded once and again why we are here and to certainly revamp some areas of provision that we used to excel at but now are a bit flagging behind the times. I think as long as we avoid the parochial values of
the past then I think history can teach us something and hopefully make the library a more inclusive fun place to be in without forcing children to wash their hands.

**Transcript 5**

**Question 1:** So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that?

**Answer:** To be socially inclusive I think we do in public libraries and we do get a large number of groups coming through our doors. I think that Rotherham Libraries prides itself on being perhaps one of the most inclusive library authorities in South Yorkshire, especially with the diverse ethnic populations around. We do a number of activities and events for ethnic groupings and yeah I think we achieve it rather successfully.

**Question 2:** Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s comments on Technical Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

**Answer:** Yes I do perhaps not as direct as what that quote implies but certainly through our efforts of providing job clubs, job match etc we encompass a whole range of skills based exercises.

**Question 3:** Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

**Answer:** I think that’s the more relevant aspect of what we do as a service and I think the public see the library as a place for gathering skills and expertise. We train staff as well so that they can help those people who need advice and guidance when it comes to applying for jobs and navigating websites. If you gain any skills or assistance we need to provide this in order to function as an authority.
Question 4: You mentioned outside companies providing more instruction but what’s your impression on partnering with other library groups and external companies to extend the remit of library services as Greenwood suggests in this quote [shows quote]?

Answer: There are considerations about any kind of budget partnership is only one option that there’s. I think before we do go into it there’s a number of considerations to be made. I wouldn’t worry about the autonomy of the public library having lived in Australia I mean they have public libraries in wine bars over there and people still associate the space as a library, I mean that’s why we have the café here and this decision was taken to incorporate both services. You could see that a library works in a shared space and if the café was the prominent private business then maybe

Question 5: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?

Answer: I do think that reading for pleasure is important today more than ever especially with the advent of e readers it might actually be coming back into vogue. I definitively think that reading for pleasure is good and you do learn things

Question 5: I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at the their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: I think we try to do but we are inclusive when everyone comes through our doors they are made to feel welcome and I hope we are successful in this. I don’t think its about class division anymore I think that has been recast between the have nots and the haves in terms of the latest digital gadget and material wealth so maybe actually yeah the library is a great leveller and you don’t know what profession people have and I htyink thtats what make its neutral.
Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today?

Answer: I think certainly yes wherever we have a public library there has been a marked improvement in the communities there yes. I think that otherwise you wouldn’t be able to justify the continuance of your service and most of Rotherham or each council ward has a large ethnic grouping that may well be considered a minority and its about providing opportunities for those individuals.

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: Right this is a two part answer. Yes we have to be political at a local level in order to secure the funding that we need to continue to operate. I know that my predecessor had to fight tooth and nail consistently to included in the major decisions of local government and I think we need to push this role harder and faster now more than even especially as local government is increasingly under seiger by central. I don’t think we should be as strident on a national level as we risk alienating the support for us as a neutral space. I think there is a real desire to have manifestos and during election time we are always inundated by people asking about candidates and I think its our responsibility to support the democratic process.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current practice?

Answer: Yes you cant look forward without looking back. So much of what you have shown me today has clear connections to the present and engaging staff with our history I think is an excellent idea. Not only to avoid making the mistakes of the past but to really nail down the core values to achieve service excellence.

Transcript 6

Question 1: So my first question to you is to what extent do you think the public library should be socially inclusive and do you feel that current practice is able to achieve that?
Answer: Well erm social inclusion [five second pause] erm yeah I think we do erm in terms of disabilities we
definitely do. I think all of the libraries in the service are conscious of disabled needs especially with disabled
access arrangements, I mean we have the lift here and most of the branch libraries are designed around this
premise. I think we are quite good for ethnic minorities for books I know we have had groups using the library
farsi speakers and thai speakers and we’ve been able to get the books in for them as sets [laughs]. We also do
thai language speakers groups and we can get those through better world books and because of the large thai
population in the area I think we have built up quite a successful rapport with the local community. In terms of
accessibility for computers I think we have all the usual magnifying software and have them on all levels as
well as E books to extend our reach to other areas. The home library service as well is a fantastic tool for
ensuring a broad range of social inclusion especially for those individuals who are house band and can’t
physically make it in to a library.

Question 2: Okay great. Now what I would like to do is focus on the specific themes I’ve already mentioned
and ask you a bit about the historical economic function of public libraries and what they offer to people today
in this area. So my first question in this area is do you think Edward’s Edward’s comments on Technical
Education [Shows quote] have a resonance today?

Answer: Yeah I think it has resonance today I mean I personally agree with the Edwards slant that libraries are
places of education and it is exceedingly important to really sell the library as an alternative to formal
education. I don’t think we get the recognition in this area that perhaps in the 1850s you would have had due
to the infancy of primary education. As a public building we are the number one space for skills based learning,
CV enhancing etc. While the reference part of our service has been somewhat neglected in recent years I think
we still need to hold onto to our erducative status and especially the teenagers who use the library for
homework and the local school who hold joint computer lessons has the capacity to revitalise our formal
educational role. I’m not saying we should have lectures on the principles of quantum mechanics but its not
unheard of for local historians to give talks here about getting involved in local history and further educational
talks.
Question 3: Right so building at that then do you think Greenwood and Edwards are right to identify the public library so closely with the gathering of knowledge for self-betterment and does that theme continue to this day?

Answer: Of course I mean that’s one of the principal uses of the library space at the moment. We have a variety of individuals coming in seeking answers to their questions about the job market, educational opportunities and I think its key to preserve this aspect of service provision. I think we are and have always been the best place for knowledge and workplace support and libraries have plenty of job clubs and I think it this level of involvement that gives out of work and indeed anybody the chance to be exposed to ideas and new concepts.

Question 4: You mentioned outside companies providing more instruction but what’s your impression on partnering with other library groups and external companies to extend the remit of library services as Greenwood suggests in this quote [shows quote]?

Answer: Well I think library staff can only do so much I mean they can do it themselves of course but with so many other things demanding our attention it can be a bit problematic to devote the appropriate amount of time to the person in question. We try to make sure we can help as much as possible but that’s usually carried out here anyway with partners. I think we are quite at working with partners to provide expert help and I think that the work with jobcentres to provide job opportunities and chances has been really successful I mean we also work with the college across the road to pilot these services. Certainly this has been a great success and I think the college is now running their job courses here as they perceive this space as being more effective for their needs. I would be concerned about the autonomy of the library if it was run by a more for profit organisation but then again with the resources we have available at the moment we just don’t have the amount of time or money to provide the quality we run currently

Question 5: You mentioned nonfiction material as a learning resource but do you think that reading for pleasure a concept which has plagued the public library service since its conception [shows material on the debate] still provides a form of self-improvement and education?
Answer: It is and I think like in the past it’s the thing we still get most people coming in for despite the rise of other distractions. Its remarkable that the proliferation of cheap books and cheap e books seems to be a consistent challenge facing the library service as there is an undoubted demand still for fiction and with material culture progressing as it is doing the library loses out to places like amazon. Its important too for an inclusion standpoint as despite the great strides in peoples material circumstances you still get those groups of people who a book is still regarded as an unaffordable luxury and therefore we grant those excluded groups the chance to read for pleasure when otherwise books would have been overlooked entirely. I think when you’re at school and you’re learning to read and the kids who join chatterbooks and other reading groups you are getting the cream of the crop so to speak because they are exposed to these larger vocabularies and a multitude of ideas and new concepts so yeah I would hope that its considered educational. I know for some of the older generation they are constantly learning about new things from fiction and I think that’s important too as this group are perhaps as far away from further learning as you are going to get.

Question 5: I now want to move on to social elements of public libraries looking at the their functions within the community and how they participate in the wider political life of this country. So take a look at this [Thomas Greenwood] and do you think that the public library improves relations within the community as Greenwood insists?

Answer: Hmm it depends primarily where you are within Rotherham but as a neutral social meeting place then yes I think the library can impact upon relationships within the community. I’m not going to suggest that all social groups use us consistently but we try and include all groups within the scope of our activities and by attempting to mix individuals together I hope we generate a greater sense of community cohesion.

Question 7: On a broader level do you think that as Greenwood suggests [gives quote] public libraries have the ability to improve communities and is that something which is noticeable where we are today?

Answer: Defintitely I think we have the right to act as the social hub for the community and I think that a good cross section of the population uses us at one time or another and I think it certainly makes living in the area a nicer experience. More importantly the staff are exceiptional due to culutural awareness training at dealing with these individuals and just having someone who understands what you’re going through can be a great
salve for your wounds now and then. I mean I know the rest of the library profession tends to frown on
volunteers and I’m not advocating here that using volunteers to run a library completely is a good thing, but
getting ethnic volunteers from the community to help out in the library I think makes the library erm a
fantastic tool for ensuring that community ties are healthy. I can’t think of any public building that provides the
same level of community involvement other than say a purpose built community centre but considering that
most are now joined up with libraries I think the distinction is one and the same.

Question 8: Finally do you think that as Greenwood and Edwards suggests [Hands quote] public libraries need
to remember their political dimension and provide opportunities to become involved in politics?

Answer: Yes completely. I think it should be a national thing and we need to raise awareness of our place
within the governance of the country. There needs to be a national campaign raising awareness of what we do
and can do for government and sadly we don’t usually have the funds to launch a concerted campaign other
than a few posters and free advertisements promoting what we do. There does need to be a greater degree of
lobbying within parliament and we shouldn’t be ashamed of that. Obviously I’m not suggesting that staff bring
their own personal political ideas to work because that compromises the professionalism of the service but I
think we need to play a more active role in parliament definitely. There’s also a great demand for political
information and we are obligated to publish the electoral rolls for council wards, constituencies etc so yeah I
think that we give plenty of political information about elections to the public and this is something which as
Greenwood suggests is key for a healthy civic society.

Question 9: This dissertation focuses on the historical principles of public librarianship and therefore do you
think that it’s a valid and worthwhile exercise to analyse the procedures of the past to inform on the current
practice?

Answer: Right erm this is going to sound quite cheesy but you can’t know where you’re going until you know
where you’ve been. I think it’s a great idea because a lot of what we did in the past has perhaps been
forgotten, not necessarily by the staff working within libraries but certainly by the public. I think we need to
remind the public how important and significant libraries have been to the lifeblood of this country and I can
certainly remember my parents taking me to a library as the first port of call for information. I think in the 60s
and before that there was a real sense that libraries were part of the fabric of society and they were really key. I think some of the core principles need to be revitalised for the 21st century and I would add that while looking at the past such as Greenwood is a great idea I think we still have to be focused on the future and be aware of the latest tech and modern sentiments too.

The University of Sheffield. Information School

There and Back Again: A Public Story 1850-1914

Researchers
Matthew Carl mcarl1@sheffield.ac.uk, (Supervisor) Briony Birdi b.birdi@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the research
The aim for this piece of research is twofold; to discover ideas from early library philosophies and professional development in order to map them on to today’s contemporary service and to identify commonly held values and historical perspectives amongst staff to seek a better understanding of how the original principles can become more relevant within current practice.

Who will be participating?
I aim to invite a selection of Rotherham Library Staff including frontline staff, senior/junior/middle management and special services and backroom staff to take part in the study.

What will you be asked to do?
Participants will be asked to read a series of historical sources and to comment on their reactions to the information contained within. Participants will also be asked a series of questions about what they think the purpose of a public library is within today’s society. Each interview will last no more than 15 minutes.

**What are the potential risks of participating?**
The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life. All interviews will be anonymized.

**What data will we collect?**
I am audio recording the interviews, as well as transcribing responses given.

**What will we do with the data?**
I will be analyzing the data for inclusion in my masters dissertation.

**Will my participation be confidential?**
No identifying information will be retained and data from each participant and data from each participant will be assigned a numerical code.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**
The results of this study will be included in my master’s dissertation which would usually be publicly available after six months.

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.
I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)  
Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)  
Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.

The University of Sheffield.
Proposal for
Research Ethics Review

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<th>Staff</th>
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<td>This proposal is for:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Postgraduate (Research) – PGR</td>
<td>This project is funded by:</td>
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**Project Title:** There and back again: A public library story 1850-1914

**Start Date:** 10/02/2014  **End Date:** 01/09/2014
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Principal Investigator (PI):</strong></th>
<th>Matthew Carl</th>
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<td><strong>Email:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supervisor:</strong></td>
<td>Briony Birdi</td>
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<td><em>(if PI is a student)</em></td>
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<td><strong>Email:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.birdi@sheffield.ac.uk">b.birdi@sheffield.ac.uk</a></td>
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Part B. Summary of the Research

B1. Briefly summarise the project’s aims and objectives:

(This must be in language comprehensible to a layperson and should take no more than one-half page. Provide enough information so that the reviewer can understand the intent of the research)

Summary:

The aim for this piece of research is twofold; to discover ideas from early library philosophy and professional development in order to map them on to today’s contemporary service and to identify commonly held values and historical perspectives amongst staff of how the original principles can
become more relevant within current practice. One of the fundamentally important objectives of this research project is to produce a list of recommendations on the utilisation of these ideas to form a best practice guide in communicating the importance of the public library.

B2. Methodology:

Provide a broad overview of the methodology in no more than one-half page.

Overview of Methods:

The overall approach towards the research will be inductive. Due to the focus on the underlying principles of public librarianship and lessons to be learnt from past practice it was decided that an inductive approach was better suited due to the generation of a theory from the evidence, as opposed to testing a hypothesis. To achieve the research objectives two sets of data will be collected. The first of these is a combination of historical accounts and secondary historiography, which should provide the historical context and ideologies to inform the rest of the research. The second set of primary data will be collected through a series of semi-structured interviews of Rotherham Library staff. Semi structured interviews are significant for this study as due to the fluidity of the questions being asked, there needs to be a great deal of room to adapt questions to the dynamic nature of individuals beliefs or reaction to data. During the course of the interviews the interviewees will be subjected to two lines of questioning with one focusing on showing them historical quotes intent on gauging their reaction to these sources and the second focusing on their opinions and beliefs about public library service.
If more than one method, e.g., survey, interview, etc. is used, please respond to the questions in Section C for each method. That is, if you are using both a survey and interviews, duplicate the page and answer the questions for each method; you need not duplicate the information, and may simply indicate, “see previous section.”

**C1. Briefly describe how each method will be applied**

Method (e.g., survey, interview, observation, experiment): Interview

Description – how will you apply the method?

Semi structured interviews are significant for this study as due to the fluidity of the questions being asked, there needs to be a great deal of room to adapt questions to the dynamic nature of individuals beliefs or reaction to data. During the course of the interviews the interviewees will be subjected to two lines of questioning with one focusing on showing them historical quotes intent on gauging their reaction to these sources and the second focusing on their opinions and beliefs about public library service.

**About your Participants**

C2. Who will be potential participants?
Frontline staff, Junior/Middle/Senior Management, Specialist Service Staff I.E Book Link and backroom staff from Rotherham Public Libraries.

C3. How will the potential participants be identified and recruited?

Participants will be selected through their willingness to participate in the study and their relative position within the organisational structure of Rotherham Public Libraries from front line staff to managers.

C4. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

None

C5. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

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If Yes, please explain how informed consent will be obtained?

Participants will be contacted via email and will sign a participation consent form.
If No, please explain why you need to do this, and how the participants will be de-briefed?

C6. Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

None whatsoever

**About the Data**

C7. What data will be collected? (Tick all that apply)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observation</td>
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<td>Audio recording</td>
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C8. What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?
Each interview will remain anonymous with only the student and supervisor having access to the audio files and transcripts. Any audio files after the assessment of the project will be deleted.

C9. How/Where will the data be stored?

The data will be stored on my laptop to which only the student and supervisor will have access, as well as being held within a cloud storage system to which only I have access. USB sticks may also be used to backup data.

C10. Will the data be stored for future re-use? If so, please explain

The transcripts from the interviews may be held for future research into staff’s opinions and all participants will be made aware of this fact.

### About the Procedure

C11. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)? If so, please explain how it will be managed.

No

### Research Ethics Review

Declaration
Title of Research Project: There and Back Again: A Public Library Story 1850-1914

We confirm our responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield’s policies and procedures, which include the University’s ‘Financial Regulations’, ‘Good Research Practice Standards’ and the ‘Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue’ (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In submitting this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of our knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University’s Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, we undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
- We undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting our academic department’s Ethics Coordinator in the first instance).
- We are aware of our responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).
- We understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
We understand that personal data about us as researchers in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (e.g. the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

If this is an application for a ‘generic’ project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.

We understand that this project cannot be submitted for ethics approval in more than one department, and that if I wish to appeal against the decision made, this must be done through the original department.

Name of the Student (if applicable):
Matthew Carl

Name of Principal Investigator (or the Supervisor):
Briony Birdi

Date: 06/05/2014

Access to Dissertation

A Dissertation submitted to the University may be held by the Department (or School) within which the Dissertation was undertaken and made available for borrowing or consultation in accordance with University Regulations.
Requests for the loan of dissertations may be received from libraries in the UK and overseas. The Department may also receive requests from other organisations, as well as individuals. The conservation of the original dissertation is better assured if the Department and/or Library can fulfill such requests by sending a copy. The Department may also make your dissertation available via its web pages.

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*Special restrictions

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