Nineteenth-Century Working Men's Reading Rooms

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Abstract.

This thesis explores the establishment, operation, and cultural significance of nineteenth-century working men's reading rooms in Britain, focusing on the North of England and Scotland. These reading rooms, which proliferated throughout towns and villages during the Victorian era, served as pivotal spaces for intellectual engagement, self-education and social interaction among the working class. By examining a variety of sources, including newspapers, periodicals, and archival records, this study reconstructs the physical and social environments of these reading rooms. The research highlights how these spaces, often initiated by local elites or industrial employers, were managed and utilised by their patrons. The thesis delves into the committees that governed these rooms, illustrating the power dynamics and the often paternalistic control exerted by the middle and upper classes.

Key chapters analyse the funding mechanisms, literature provided, and the diverse recreational and educational activities available in these rooms. Case studies of specific reading rooms reveal the varied influences of local industries, demographics, and community interests. Additionally, the thesis examines the role of women, who, though less frequently members, contributed significantly to the support and operation of these reading rooms. This work contributes to the broader understanding of working-class culture, the history of reading, and the development of public leisure and educational institutions in the nineteenth century. It underscores the importance of these reading rooms in fostering a culture of reading and self-improvement among working men, while also highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by these institutions in balancing control and accessibility.

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Firstly, I want to express my gratitude to the University of Strathclyde for funding me throughout this doctoral project. I also want to thank the AHRC for funding the Piston Pen and Press Project and the PP&P Project for allowing me to work with them on this ambitious and successful project. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Dr Michael Sanders and Dr Oliver Betts on this project and learned much from them. Most of all, I wish to thank my supervisor and mentor, Dr Kirstie Blair, who maintained faith in me and supported and guided me throughout. As things changed throughout my PhD, I am grateful for those who have supervised me throughout; Dr David Goldie, Dr Sarah Edwards, Dr Donna McCormack and Dr Jordan Kistler. Additionally, I am grateful for Dr Eleanor Bell's assistance in navigating these changes. I would also like to acknowledge the support from my fellow PhD students, who have provided friendship and camaraderie throughout.

My research would not have been possible without the assistance and information of the librarians and archivists in archives around Scotland and the North of England. I particularly would like to thank the A K Bell Library in Perth, National Library of Scotland, Manchester Library Information and Archives, Manchester University Archives, Kendal Archives, Aberdeen University Archives, Mitchell Library, Cumbria Archives, Brampton Library and Archives and Bolton Archives.

I am also very grateful for the opportunity to present and share my work at different conferences and the fantastic opportunities to travel to these with the Piston Pen and Press Project. I would particularly like to thank the Research Society of Victorian Periodicals, the London Nineteenth-Century Studies Seminar, and the British Association of Victorian Studies for giving me that platform. I would also like to thank the Journal of Victorian Periodicals for publishing my work and allowing me to share my research.

Finally, I must thank my family and partner for their support over the years; without them, I could never have completed this project. Last but certainly not least, for his endless interest in nineteenth-century working men's reading rooms, I thank my dog, Milo.

Notes.

- Parts of this thesis were previously published under Iona Craig ‘Control and Enlightenment: Nineteenth-Century Miners’ Reading Rooms,’ *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 28.3, pp.434-45.

- I utilised the *British National Archive* and *ProQuest* for many newspaper and periodical sources. Page numbers are related to their given page numbers. Due to the wide range of newspapers and periodicals used, I will not list each individually in the bibliography.

- I have used Grammarly, a paid grammar-checking software, throughout this thesis.

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Nineteenth-Century Working Men's Reading Rooms.

Introduction.

> Let us look at an ordinary village reading-room. It is long and narrow. The floor is bare, or partly covered in linoleum. The walls are washed. There are a few pictures: reproductions in colour after Birket Foster, an engraving of Maclise's picture of Wellington and Blucher, three or four botanical charts, the church almanac coloured by hand – probably by some young parishioner not unacquainted with *Ministering Children*, and a copy of the rules. The rules are always prominent. They fix the subscription – sixpence per month – and name the penalties which follow if it is not paid; they forbid gambling, smoking, bad language, and the removal of books or papers; they state that the hours of opening are 10 to 10, that coffee and cocoa are obtainable from 6p.m., and so on. At one end of the room is a bagatelle-board. The chairs are of solid wood. On a side table is a pile of back numbers of the *Illustrated London News* and one or two odd copies of the *Sketch*. On the mantlepiece are boxes of dominoes, draughts, and chess.
>
> Above these is a library, contained on two long shelves. The books are odd volumes of *Chambers Journal*, a complete set of *Chambers Miscellany*, two or three Waverly novels, Beetons *Dictionary of Geography, Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a few Ballantynes, a volume of *Sunday at Home*, five or six volumes of *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and a score or more of books, mainly devotional. Such are the attractions of the village reading-room.[1]

This excerpt from *The Academy*, published in 1897, offers a compelling portrayal of the village reading room, encapsulating its essence and serving as a fitting prelude to this thesis. Despite the article's condescending tone, indicative of a perception of these spaces as outdated by the late 19th century, it provides a detailed inventory of the

[1] 'Village Reading Rooms' in *The Academy*, October 9, 1897, p.3.

typical components comprising such establishments. This study delves deeper into the various elements outlined in the passage, shedding light on their significance within the context of reading room culture. Central to this depiction is the physical environment of the reading room: a cold and austere setting characterised by bare floors and washed walls adorned with modest artworks, including paintings depicting popular themes such as military figures like Wellington or botanical charts. The prominence of rules and subscriptions underscores the importance placed on maintaining order and morality within these spaces. At the same time, the provision of non-alcoholic beverages and specific opening hours reflects a commitment to catering to the needs of working men. The literature itself suggests a working-class audience, with feminine undertones from the likes of Cook and Stowe. However, the condescending tone indicates a disapproval of these works, suggesting them to be unsophisticated. Furthermore, the passage sheds light on the multifaceted nature of activities within the reading room, encompassing intellectual pursuits through access to small libraries and periodicals and social engagement facilitated by games and leisure activities. Additionally, the hint at the religious elements of the literature and the reading room's connection to the church signals the broader societal context in which these institutions operated.

While the excerpt may not offer a literal description of a specific reading room, its value as a primary source is magnified by its author's broad overview of reading rooms in general. The excerpt gives a general outline of the average reading room in the 1890s and, more importantly, their perception. The detail within and the attitude towards the room reflect broader trends within reading-room culture. Moreover, the selection of publications such as the *Illustrated London News* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to represent the typical selection gains additional significance considering the excerpt's generalisation. Rather than assuming these publications were confined to specific rooms, the passage implies their extensive presence across most reading rooms. As nearly all aspects of the description correspond with findings from my research, it suggests a certain level of insight and expertise on the part of the article's author. This alignment further bolsters the credibility of the excerpt as a primary source, reinforcing its value as a window into the prevailing norms and practices of reading room culture in the late 19th century.

I aim to construct a comprehensive portrayal of the typical provincial reading room while acknowledging each establishment's diverse array of differences and nuances. Despite an 'average model', each reading room is uniquely shaped by factors such as local industry, the influence of local elites, funding availability, resources, competition from other establishments, local interests and its own management structure. By providing this overview, I hope to contribute to further scholarship on working-class reading history, education and leisure. The introduction to the seminal book *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, written by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor from 1996, states that 'places in which reading happens, and the company the reader may keep undoubtedly change the nature of that reading'.[2] This aptly emphasises the profound impact of reading environments on the nature of reading itself. While the above-mentioned book may not explicitly list reading rooms as a place of reading, it stresses the importance of understanding the context in which reading takes place. This recognition stresses the significance of studying reading rooms, as they played a crucial role in shaping the reading experiences of working-class individuals during the nineteenth century. Reading rooms, as communal spaces dedicated to reading and intellectual engagement, exerted a considerable influence on their members' reading habits, preferences and interactions. By describing the environment of reading rooms, I provide a framework for better understanding the experience of the reader within these establishments.

The predominant focus on provincial reading rooms sheds light on a historically neglected aspect of recreational and cultural life in Britain. Jeremy Burchardt claimed in his article '"A New Rural Civilization": Village Halls, Community and Citizenship in the 1920s' from 2006, that the main reason for reading rooms (which he believed to be harbinger of village halls) was stemming the decline of the rural population.[3] As the following quote from the speaker at the foundation stone laying of the Bowness Public

[2] James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, 'Introduction', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.1-21 (p.12).
[3] Jeremy Burchardt, '"A New Rural Civilization": Village Halls, Community and Citizenship in the 1920s', in *The English Countryside between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?*, ed. by Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt, and Lynne Thompson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006) pp.26-35 (p.27).

Hall and Reading Room claimed, these institutions were an attempt to brighten the dullness of country life and in doing so prevent migration to the cities:

> Institutions like the Bowness Public Hall and Reading Room fulfill many excellent purposes which are not merely utilitarian. They help, as Mr. Lowther remarked, to relieve the dullness of country life for those who live in a limited community life all the year and year after year. Any measures which have a tendency to make village life brighter and less irksome are worthy of encouragement, for it is this dullness and lack of means of intelligent recreation which largely account for the migration from the country to the town. Public halls and Reading Rooms help to promote social intercourse and the intelligent study of public affairs, and the people of Bowness, we trust, will have every reason to take, as the speaker said, "a patriotic interest and pride" in the Lindow Hall.[4]

Even in the smallest villages, the abundance of reading rooms represents the concerted efforts to provide residents with a semblance of the diverse entertainment available in cities while adhering to rational recreation principles. By exploring these provincial reading rooms, I will demonstrate the multifaceted strategies employed to enhance the quality of life in rural areas and foster a sense of community cohesion and pride.

One of the foremost challenges I encountered in this study was the abundance of reading rooms. Throughout the nineteenth century, these institutions were prolific, with virtually every village hosting one, towns boasting several, and cities containing hundreds. The fluidity contributes to this complexity, with closures often followed by new openings in the same vicinity, resulting in many establishments scattered across the country and throughout the century. Their ubiquity renders the study of reading rooms indispensable for comprehending the industrial class's reading habits, leisure activities and cultural landscape during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This ubiquity also presents a significant challenge, as I aim to generalise findings across a vast and heterogeneous array of establishments. This study endeavours to distil generalisations from the extensive array of reading rooms encountered, aiming to offer historians a conceptual understanding of the establishments and environments where

[4] 'New Hall for Bowness: The Foundation Stone Laying', *Carlisle Journal*, September 23, 1910, p.5.

working men engaged in various activities. These spaces served as arenas for receiving news, studying, learning to read, playing games, socialising, practising public speaking and even crafting literature. Rather than seeking to provide an all-encompassing view of every nineteenth-century reading room, I have adopted a more focused approach to offer a nuanced version of the opening quote —an overview of the average reading room, synthesised from the collective experiences gleaned from thousands of establishments.

Many historians of Victorian education recognise that reading rooms existed, often mentioning them in conjunction with libraries, mechanics' institutes, mutual improvement societies and similar establishments. Yet, there is a lack of detailed research into their operations. This thesis addresses this gap by providing a dedicated study investigating the nature, function and significance of reading rooms in nineteenth-century Britain. One of the difficulties of analysing this thesis' supportive literature and its impact on the fields is the number of fields this study touches upon. This includes culture, temperance, education, recreation, mutual improvement, moral reform, politics, sociology and the development of the nineteenth-century press. All have attracted extensive research: this work should contribute in a small way across all these research fields.

The most apparent field I contribute here is the history of reading. Richard D. Altick, in his seminal 1957 book *The English Common Reader*, believed that a democracy of print flourished throughout the nineteenth century. He proved this by looking at the opportunities and experiences of the readers. Through a similar methodology, the study of reading rooms extends the concept of the democratising of print through its availability to the working class within reading rooms.[5] In 2011, in Jonathan Rose's 'Altick's Map: The New Historiography of the Common Reader', he suggests researchers of the common reader should step away from the theories of reading and look towards presenting more details, data and information-focused research. In doing so, he believes, we will painstakingly add detail to the map that Altick

[5] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), passim.

(metaphorically) drew in 1957.[6] This thesis hopes to play its part in adding to that map, though within a broader context than initially intended. Though this work is not overtly detailed, it should help those navigating the reading habits of provincial working-class readers.[7]

Brian Graham conducted the first dedicated historical study of reading rooms, focusing on the Carlisle Working Men's Reading Rooms, in 1983 as part of his work *Nineteenth Century Self Help in Education. Mutual Improvement Societies. Case Study: the Carlisle Working Men's Reading Rooms*. Graham's study provided a detailed examination of the Carlisle reading rooms, which were self-managed establishments, and has served as a foundational reference for subsequent research on reading rooms.[8] As will be discussed throughout this thesis, the Carlisle reading rooms were not representative of the average reading room found throughout Britain during the nineteenth century. The unique characteristics and management structure of the Carlisle reading rooms may have skewed perceptions within the historiography, leading to a distorted understanding of these establishments.

In 1999, Jeremy Burchardt provided a concise overview of reading rooms as potential precursors to the modern village hall.[9] He later developed this in his 2006 article, '"A New Rural Civilization: Village Halls, Community, and Citizenship in the 1920s', published in *The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline*. Burchardt acknowledged that reading rooms were, 'in many respects the most direct precursors of village halls', thereby recognising their pivotal role in shaping rural community spaces and placing them into the broader timeline. Furthermore, Burchardt acknowledged that these rooms operated under the direct influence of major local

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[6] Jonathan Rose, 'Altick's Map: The New Historiography of the Common Reader', in *The History of Reading Volume 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics*, ed. by Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 15-26.
[7] For general reading on literary consumption, Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), and David Vincent, 'Reading in the Working-class Home', in *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 206-226.
[8] Brian Graham, *Nineteenth Century Self-Help in Education: Mutual Improvement Societies: Case Study: The Carlisle Working Men's Reading Rooms*, Vol. 2 (Nottingham: Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1983).
[9] Jeremy Burchardt, 'Reconstructing the Rural Community: Village Halls and the National Council of Social Service, 1919 to 1939', *Rural History*, 10.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 193-216 (pp. 203-4).

landlords.[10] Chapter 1 will build on this idea and dissect the nuanced relationship and dichotomy between the elite and the working class. Indeed, the dynamics of power and influence within reading rooms were often shaped by many factors, including social status, economic resources and community dynamics.

In her 2009 article titled 'The Rise and Decline of Village Reading Rooms,' which is a case study of reading rooms in Norfolk, Carole King presents a more comprehensive study of village reading rooms. King seeks to counter Burchardt's claim that reading rooms were 'gatherings of a cross-section of the population' by arguing that these spaces were restricted by factors such as 'gender, finance and class.'[11] This fails to acknowledge that Burchardt did note in his 2006 article that women were often excluded from reading rooms.[12] The place of women in reading rooms will be briefly discussed in another section of this introduction. King's article significantly contributed to the history of reading rooms by delineating their characteristics and role within Victorian village life through a case study of Norfolk. King focuses on managing and influencing the middle and upper classes and recognising reading rooms as sites of rational recreation and paternalism provided valuable insights. King's brief description of the decline of reading rooms in the 20th century highlighted their changing fortunes. This study builds on this overview by providing a broader national assessment and a more in-depth look at the individual aspects of reading rooms. It will further explore the underlying reasons for and implications of their decline.[13]

Andrew Hobbs' 2018 book, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900*, offers a modern perspective on reading rooms and their place within the broader landscape of provincial press consumption. In his second chapter, titled 'Reading Places,' Hobbs provides a vivid snapshot of the varied reading habits and establishments in the town of Preston during different periods. By metaphorically walking the reader through the town in 1855, 1875 and 1900, he offers insights into the diverse array of reading establishments and the competition reading rooms faced from

[10] Burchardt, '"A new rural civilization"', pp.27-8.
[11] Carole King, 'The Rise and Decline of Village Reading Rooms', *Rural History*, 20 (2009), pp. 163-186 (p.163).
[12] Burchardt, '"A new rural civilization"', p.27.
[13] King, 'The Rise and Decline', p.183.

other venues. It illuminates the social dynamics and class segregation within this more metropolitan setting. Hobbs' book not only enhances our understanding of the provincial press but also provides valuable insights into the role of reading rooms within this context. [14] This work informs my understanding of the place of town-based reading rooms within the broader context of literary consumption during that period. I also intend to expand his work on the provincial press by providing greater detail on its consumption within provincial rooms.

In an article from the *Newcastle Chronicle* titled 'Random Recollections of a Pressman,' the 'Pressman' vividly depicts the challenges individuals face in accessing news, particularly in rural areas, before the widespread establishment of reading rooms. Reflecting on the difficulties encountered by the Chartists of the 1840s in organising mass movements, he writes:

> There were then no daily newspapers or the telegraph to dish up the current events of the day hissing hot and the few high-priced local weekly newspapers did not trickle into the villages till nearly a fortnight after publication. Sometimes a local weekly paper had to do duty for a whole parish, each subscriber getting it in turn, and before it had finally made the rounds, possibly a month after publication, it was generally in a most tattered condition- "news" in shreds and patches.[15]

This account vividly illustrates how the limited availability of newspapers and periodicals effectively excluded those unable to afford them from meaningful engagement in political discourse or even broader national cultural conversations. Without delving too deeply into sociological concepts, it is evident that reading rooms addressed a market demand for reliable information, a notion aligned with Habermas's ideas.[16] Newspapers, the primary source of information, offered insights into politics, local communities, national affairs and global events. Additionally, access to books facilitated education on various subjects. Moreover, the serialisation of fiction in numerous periodicals created an opportunity for a communal experience of literature

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[14] Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), passim.
[15] 'Random Recollections of a Pressman' in *Newcastle Chronicle*, April 10, 1886, p.15.
[16] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 55-65.

consumption. It is conceivable that many readers in a town would follow the same fictional series, leading to discussions in workplaces, public houses and, of course, in reading rooms. This communal engagement that reading rooms facilitated transformed the act of reading into a socially interactive experience, enriching the fabric of community discourse and cultural exchange.[17]

Reading rooms also contribute to Habermas's concept of the public sphere by fostering the development of 'civil society'. [18] By virtue of the moral expectations imposed on the working class to access reliable information, these spaces compelled individuals to conduct themselves civilly while in attendance. The establishment of reading rooms emerges as a pivotal element in developing the public sphere and civil society, as outlined by Habermas. By providing a space for the dissemination of reliable information, fostering social interaction and promoting civil behaviour among the working class, reading rooms effectively expanded access to the public sphere. This democratisation of knowledge and discourse empowered individuals previously excluded from such realms and facilitated the creation of a more inclusive and participatory civic environment. Drawing upon Habermas' concepts of the public sphere and civil society, this thesis accentuates the transformative impact of reading rooms on political participation and societal cohesion. By expanding access to information and fostering inclusive dialogue among the working classes, reading rooms paved the way for a more participatory and egalitarian civic environment. This was the intention of their creation by the Chartist, as discussed in Chapter 4. As this study elucidates, the legacy of reading rooms would shape the trajectory of societal transformation and democratic governance.

The study was undertaken in support of the 'Piston Pen and Press Project', a three-year project investigating the literary engagement of industrial workers in the North of England and Scotland from the 1840s to the 1910s.[19] This project aimed to compile a broad database of individuals and literary institutions with industrial

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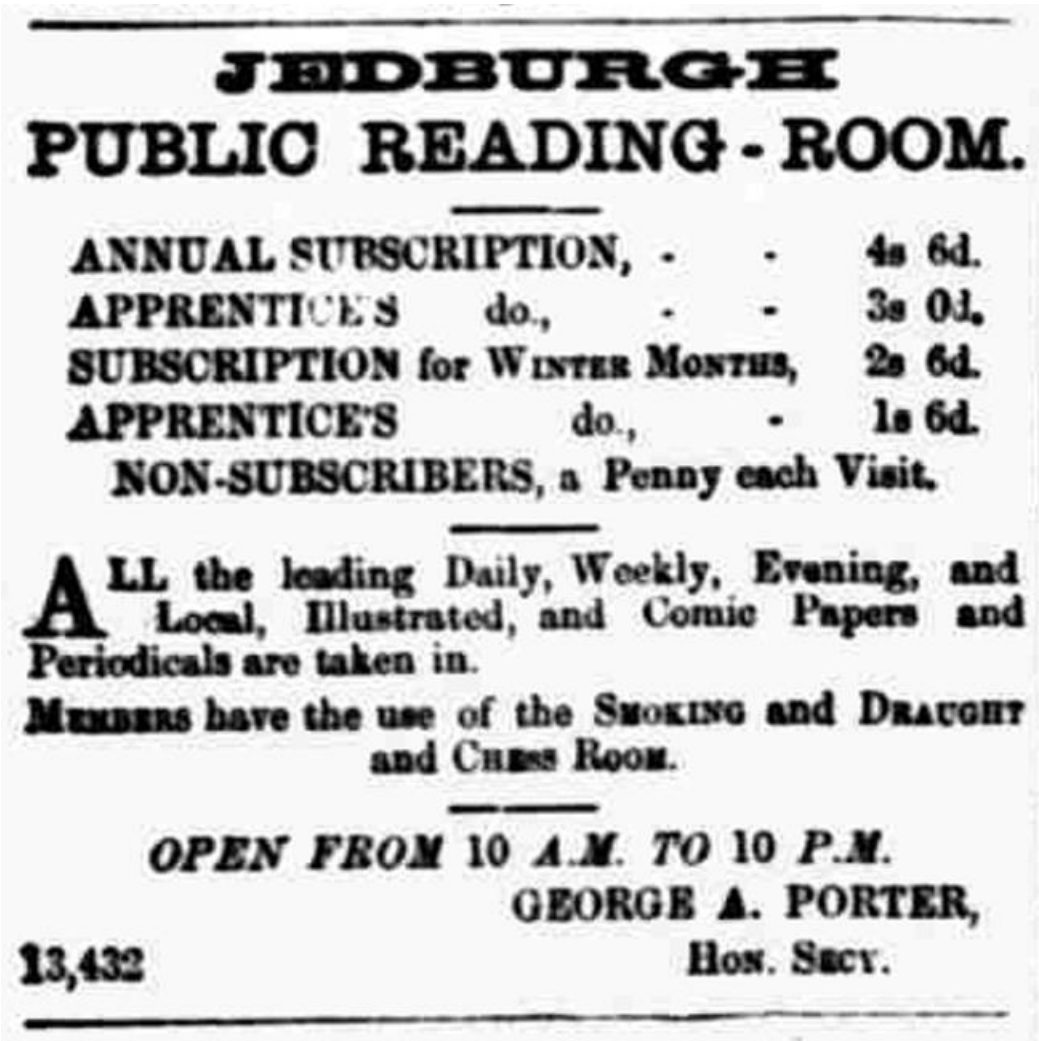
[17] For more information, see Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (London: University of Virginia Press, 1991).
[18] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation,* pp.22-25. Further reading: James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[19] *Piston Pen and Press*, 'Database', n.d. <https://www.pistonpenandpress.org/database/> [Accessed July 2, 2024]

affiliations. My specific contribution to this endeavour involved researching the availability of reading rooms for industrial workers. This process involved scrutinising hundreds of documented reading rooms within the defined scope, briefly encountering hundreds, if not thousands more. While not every source I encountered is referenced in this thesis, many reading rooms exhibited common characteristics such as similar periodicals, operating hours and subscription costs. Despite the inability to cite every source individually, the extensive examination of approximately a thousand reading rooms has provided insights that contribute to the overarching generalisation alluded to earlier in the introduction.

The bulk of my findings regarding these reading rooms was sourced from newspapers. Particularly for reading rooms in city centres and larger towns, newspaper advertisements were the primary information source. Often, these advertisements were listed consecutively.[20] These advertisements were invaluable, providing detailed insights into the rooms' names, locations, subscription fees and the range of periodicals offered, which served to attract patrons. Additionally, these advertisements often shed light on the supplementary amenities available within these establishments, including but not limited to recreational activities such as games, refreshments, designated smoking rooms and spaces for social interaction such as conversation rooms. Such detailed advertisements offer a glimpse into the popularity and appeal of these reading rooms among their intended audience and provide valuable clues about the broader social and cultural context in which they operated.

[20] 'Cowgate Reading Room', 'Dundee Exchange Reading Room', and 'Dundee Royal Exchange Reading Room' in *Dundee, Perth*, and *Cuper Advertiser*, April 8, 1856, p.1.



JEDBURGH
PUBLIC READING-ROOM.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION, - - 4s 6d.
APPRENTICE'S do., - - 3s 0d.
SUBSCRIPTION for WINTER MONTHS, 2s 6d.
APPRENTICE'S do., - 1s 6d.
NON-SUBSCRIBERS, a Penny each Visit.

ALL the leading Daily, Weekly, Evening, and Local, Illustrated, and Comic Papers and Periodicals are taken in.

MEMBERS have the use of the SMOKING and DRAUGHT and CHESS ROOM.

OPEN FROM 10 *A.M. TO* 10 *P.M.*

GEORGE A. PORTER,
HON. SECY.

13,432

Figure 0.1 'Jedburgh Public Reading-Room' in *Jedburgh Gazette*, December 1, 1888, p.1.

On a more provincial level, the day-to-day activities of local reading rooms were frequently documented in the pages of regional newspapers. These publications often dedicated columns to reporting on various aspects of these establishments, ranging from announcements about the inauguration of new reading rooms to the publication of entire speeches delivered during annual meetings. Additionally, reports on reading room fundraisers, concerts, lectures, dances, picnics, sports days, competitions and even the resale of newspapers could be found scattered throughout the provincial press. This extensive coverage not only underscores the significance of reading rooms within their local communities but also highlights the enthusiastic efforts of reading

room committees to promote their facilities to the public. While the abundance of information available in these newspapers can be overwhelming, it proves immensely valuable to researchers seeking to study the evolution and impact of reading rooms nationally or in their respective locales.

The accessibility of modern digital archives, such as *the British Newspaper Archive Online* and *ProQuest*, has facilitated this expansive study. Through these platforms, researchers have unprecedented access to a wealth of historical newspapers and periodicals, enabling comprehensive investigations into subjects like Victorian reading rooms. The ability to conduct term searches within these archives allows for the swift retrieval of pertinent information, often leading to quick answers to specific inquiries.[21] Previously, such extensive research would have been impractical, as it would have required exhaustive travel to local archives. Indeed, prior studies, such as those conducted by Carole King and Brian Graham, likely relied on limited case studies due to the logistical challenges of data collection.

It is important to note that this study has not solely relied on online research. Archival research was required as online databases are currently restricted to only the selected digitised papers. While the vast quantity of online information is overwhelming, it represents only a fraction of the complete narrative surrounding reading rooms. This study employs a balanced approach to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis. Alongside the wealth of information assembled from newspaper archives, a deliberate effort has been made to examine further into select reading rooms. For these chosen establishments, located primarily in Scotland and the North of England, I could access various physical resources housed in local archives. These resources include minutes of meetings, financial accounts, rules and regulations, catalogues and other pertinent documents. By combining information from newspaper archives and local archives, this study aims to present a holistic view of reading rooms, encompassing their broad societal impact and internal organisational

[21] For further reading, Paul Gooding, *Historic Newspapers in the Digital Age: Search All About It!* (London: Routledge, 2016), passim.

structures and operations. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis while avoiding overwhelming the reader with an exhaustive compilation of data.

Like newspaper reports, periodical articles offer valuable insights into the broader context and impact of the reading room movement. While these articles often do not focus on specific reading rooms, they provide a broader commentary on the state and significance of the movement as well as attitudes towards it. This broader perspective from contemporary sources allows for a deeper understanding of the general attitudes and motivations surrounding reading rooms during the Victorian era. Throughout this thesis, particular periodical articles are repeatedly referenced as they touch upon key themes discussed. One such example is the article titled 'Popular Reading Rooms' in *Chambers Journal* from 1863, which offers commentary on strategies to make reading rooms more appealing to working-class men. This source sheds light on the disparity between the offerings of paternalistic classes and the actual desires of working men, revealing important insights into class dynamics and cultural preferences of the time.

Another noteworthy source is the article titled 'Matt the Miner; or, A Fellow Workman's Influence', referenced throughout this thesis as 'Matt the Miner.' While purporting to be a true story, there is no evidence to suggest the existence of the colliery mentioned in the narrative. Nevertheless, the story presents an idealistic account of a miner establishing a reading room to avert a strike at the colliery successfully.[22] This narrative serves as a poignant example of the paternalistic fantasy surrounding the perceived power and potential of reading rooms, as well as the middle-class romanticisation of moralising industrial workers.

Another set of works I will frequently reference is by Henry Morley, particularly his articles in Household Words titled 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' and 'Bees of Carlisle', published eleven years apart in 1851 and 1862.[23] These articles offer insights into one of the most renowned working men's reading rooms, the 'St John Street

[22] 'Matt the Miner; or, a Fellow Workman's Influence' in *After Work*, August, 1881, pp.137-140.
[23] Henry Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words*, Conducted by Charles Dickens, September 13, 1851, pp.581-5, and Henry Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle' in *All the Year Round*, January 18, 1862, pp.403-5.

Reading Room' in Carlisle. This reading room has garnered historical interest in the past, notably from Brian Graham and his book on the subject.[24] What distinguishes Morley's work is its portrayal of reading rooms that operate independently from upper-class influence. These reading rooms are run by working men for working men, with a primary focus on education and comfort. This stands in stark contrast to the paternalistic fantasy depicted in narratives like 'Matt the Miner'. Instead of being instruments of control or moralisation by the middle or upper classes, these reading rooms serve as empowering spaces where working men can access knowledge and leisure on their own terms.

In addition, I have made frequent use of another notable set of sources due to their portrayal of paternalistic ideals, albeit with a somewhat more pragmatic approach than 'Matt the Miner'. This is the work of Janetta Manners, the Duchess of Rutland. Manners authored two books on the subject: *Some of the Advantages of Easily Accessible Reading and Recreation Rooms and Free Libraries* in 1885 and *Encouraging Experiences of Reading and Recreation Rooms* in 1886.[25] The first book was originally a collection of open letters written by Manners to Queen Victoria, which were published in *The Queen*. These letters outline Manners' vision for the establishment and management of reading rooms, drawing from her perspective as a duchess seeking to support the working classes. They discuss the practical aspects of running reading rooms, including successes and failures of prior endeavours, and provide recommendations for the selection of literature and the overall management of these spaces. Manners' books serve as a blueprint for the intentions behind various aspects of reading room operations, such as the selection of appropriate literature, the prohibition of alcohol and card games, and the inclusion of music. While they may not accurately reflect the experiences of working-class individuals who frequented these rooms, they offer valuable insights into the ideals and aspirations of the upper classes

[24] Graham, *The Carlisle Working Men's Reading Rooms*, passim.
[25] Janetta Hughan Manners (Duchess of Rutland), *Some of the Advantages of Easily Accessible Reading and Recreation Rooms and Free Libraries* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), and Janetta Hughan Manners (Duchess of Rutland), *Encouraging Experiences of Reading and Recreation Rooms … Being a Sequel to "Advantages of Free Libraries and Recreation Rooms."* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1886).

regarding the provision of recreational and educational opportunities for the working classes.

One of the primary objectives of this thesis, and a crucial aspect to establish early on, is the definition of 'reading room.' This term was flexible during the nineteenth century and continues to be so in modern times. In contemporary usage, a 'reading room' often refers to a space within a library where library resources are read, typically labelled as a 'general reading room.' The term 'reading room' in the nineteenth century had multiple connotations. It commonly described a room within a library, Athenaeum, exchange, mechanics' institute or similar establishment dedicated to displaying and reading newspapers, periodicals, and reference books and provided space for reading books borrowed from the institution's lending library. In many instances, the term 'reading room' was interchangeable with 'news room,' a term prevalent in the earlier half of the nineteenth century but faded out by the twentieth century. However, the most common use of the term 'reading room' in the nineteenth century, largely obsolete today, referred to a standalone establishment. These reading rooms housed newspapers, periodicals, and reference books and often maintained a small lending library. Additionally, they typically offered other recreational facilities, operated under their own management, and were as ubiquitous in communities as modern-day local cafes.

This study will primarily focus on the latter type of reading room, particularly those provided in the provincial North of England and Scotland. Examples of 'news rooms' will also be utilised, especially earlier in the period and within larger cities and towns, as they fulfilled a similar role. While reading rooms outside of the northern locations may occasionally be referenced, they are relatively rare in the scope of this study. It is important to note that reading rooms in London differed significantly in nature, cost and attendees due to their metropolitan character. Although there was a desire for similar establishments in London, any attempts to replicate those found in the North would typically fail relatively quickly. [26] Therefore, any examination of a

[26] 'Want of Reading-Rooms in London' in *Chambers Edinburgh* Journal, September 6, 1845, pp.152-153, and 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, December 26, 1863, pp.411-2.

London reading room could potentially skew perceptions of the standard village room prevalent elsewhere.

The dual use of the phrase 'reading room' in Victorian times may not only have caused confusion for contemporary scholars studying reading rooms but also posed challenges for the Victorians themselves. An example from 1882 in the industrial town of Runcorn in Cheshire illustrates this confusion. During a committee meeting of the Runcorn Public Library convened to discuss adding an additional 'reading room' to the library, confusion arose as to the type of reading room that was being discussed and its relation to the library:

> I wish to correct one statement made by Mr. McDougall. It is only fair to Mr Hazlehurst that the explanation should be made. He says Mr. Hazlehurst has modified his scheme from a newsrooms to a reading-room. It seems that Mr. Hazlehurst has not done so, and that everyone has misapprehended his meaning; that from the first to now he did not intend anything further than a room, so that the ratepayers could quietly read the books in the library, and the weekly papers and the magazines.

The confusion persisted to the extent that the establishment of the room had been discussed at a meeting of the council commissioners before anyone realised, they were discussing different meanings of a 'reading room.' To clarify matters, the initiator and philanthropist behind the reading room was invited to the meeting to explain precisely what he meant by 'Reading Room.' It was revealed that the reading room would be a building rented from the council, fully furnished with illustrated and other weekly papers, monthly magazines and a small library. It would be governed by the Public Library Committee. [27] The confusion experienced by the Victorians themselves regarding the terminology surrounding reading rooms underscores the potential for modern-day researchers to misunderstand or mislabel these institutions similarly. This study aims to clarify and distinguish reading rooms as a standalone entity. By distinguishing reading rooms as independent establishments that were part of a larger

[27] 'Proposed Reading Room for Runcorn' in *Northwich Guardian*, December 23, 1882, p.3.

movement, this research aims to shed light on their vital contribution to the intellectual and recreational pursuits of the working class during the Victorian era.

Throughout the century, many reading rooms were titled 'Working Men's Reading Room.' Even when not explicitly named as such, these spaces were predominantly intended for working men. This assumption is pervasive throughout this thesis, with members often being referred to as male. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there were instances of women attending reading rooms dating back to as early as the 1850s.[28] Their ability to become members, the frequency with which they took up membership, and their attendance varied significantly from one reading room to another. In this thesis, I do not specifically explore women readers, partly because this has already been researched. For instance, Chris Baggs' article from 2005, 'In the Separate Reading Room for Ladies are Provided Those Publications Specially Interesting to Them': Ladies' Reading Rooms and British Public Libraries 1850-1914,' extensively examines women's access to periodicals and separate reading rooms within the context of public libraries.[29] Similarly, Abigail A. Van Slyck's work in 1996 examined women in 'reading rooms' during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, focusing on Victorian America. Her analysis primarily revolves around reading rooms within public libraries and the impact they had on women. Slyck's research offers valuable insights into the physical and intellectual spheres created by these spaces and sheds light on the significance of women-only literary spaces during the nineteenth century.[30] Hobbs suggests that a woman reading a newspaper by herself in a public place was unusual at any time during the nineteenth century, so much so that it was used as a trope to suggest women had a 'masculine' character. He further highlights a specific instance in Barrow in 1889, where the segregated news rooms of the public

[28] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution and News Room for the Year Ending April 15, 1851* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: M. Benson, 1851), p.7.
[29] Chris Baggs, '"In the Separate Reading Room for Ladies are Provided Those Publications Specially Interesting to Them": Ladies' Reading Rooms and British Public Libraries 1850-1914', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38.3 (2005), pp.280-306. He also addresses ladies' rooms in, Chris Baggs, '"The Whole Tragedy of Leisure in Penury": The South Wales Miners' Institute Libraries during the Great Depression', *Libraries & Culture*, 39.2 (2004), pp.115-136 (p.120).
[30] Abigail A. Van Slyck, 'The Lady and the Library Loafer: Gender and Public Space in Victorian America', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 31.4, Gendered Spaces and Aesthetics (1996), pp.221-242.

library witnessed a significant gender disparity, with men outnumbering women in attendance by a ratio of fifteen to one.[31]

At Dunblane Reading Room, efforts were made to welcome women. In 1888, women were granted discount memberships, although the exact rationale behind this decision remains unclear.[32] Additionally, subtle adjustments were made to accommodate female patrons, such as the conversion of the urinal to a lavatory.[33] During the opening day of a fundraising bazaar for the room in 1898, the Earl of Moray, accompanied by the Countess of Moray, emphasised the importance of reading room associations for both sexes. In his address discussing the value of such rooms, he mentions both men and women, 'By careful attention to their reading, young men and women could carve for themselves a successful career in the world.'[34] This reading room also brings up an interesting question about women's involvement in the rooms outside of their attendance. The other two speakers at the bazaar - 'Mr Wallace of Glassingall' and 'Colonel Home Drummond of Blair Drummond'- congratulated their wives' hands-on efforts in supporting the room and their philanthropy. Additionally, of the sixteen stallholders at the event, fifteen were women. There also appears to be, through Lady Georgina Home Drummond, a connection with the Scottish Girls' Friendly Society.[35]

Women's involvement with reading rooms, both the impact reading rooms had on women's lives and the contributions women made to their development, deserves a more dedicated study. While this thesis does not provide that, it does acknowledge their contributions and aims to lay the groundwork for future studies. By examining elements such as women's membership, the accommodations tailored for them in reading rooms, and their impact on funding and administration, this thesis endeavours to provide a preliminary framework for understanding the roles and experiences of

[31] Hobbs, *A Fleet Street*, p.55.
[32] Perth, A.K. Bell Library (AKBL), MS20/2/3, '5th September 1888' in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1888-1890*.
[33] AKBL: MS20/2/4, '8th March 1891' in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1890-1892*.
[34] 'Dunblane Library and Reading Room Association, Grand Bazaar' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 24, 1898.
[35] 'Dunblane Library and Reading Room Association' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 24, 1898, p.7.

women within provincial reading rooms throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.[36]

The evolution of reading rooms can be traced back to the 18th-century coffee houses, which served as social hubs where middle-class patrons could enjoy coffee and refreshments and engage in discussions while perusing newspapers.[37] Initially concentrated in metropolitan areas, these establishments gradually transitioned to charging either for refreshments or a nominal fee for entry, with the focus shifting towards providing access to newspapers and periodicals.[38] This transformation laid the foundation for the emergence of commercial penny reading rooms, which gained popularity, particularly in urban centres, during the first half of the 19th century. This transition marked a significant shift in the accessibility and democratisation of information as reading rooms expanded beyond exclusive coffee houses to cater to a broader demographic, including working-class individuals seeking affordable access to printed materials and news.

In the 1840s, a significant shift occurred in the landscape of reading rooms with the emergence of establishments catering specifically to working-class individuals, spurred by the burgeoning Chartist movement. This will be addressed more extensively in Chapter 4. Chartism, a working-class movement advocating for political and social reform, recognised the importance of disseminating its message and information among the working masses. As part of their efforts, Chartists established reading rooms where meetings were held, Chartist periodicals were distributed, and debates ensued over various ideological factions within the movement. These Chartist reading rooms played a pivotal role in shaping the face of Chartism, serving as hubs for political activism, education and community engagement. Beyond merely providing access to printed materials, these spaces became platforms for fostering political consciousness, organising collective action and mobilising support for Chartist goals, including suffrage reform and improved working conditions. Moreover, Chartist reading

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[36] Further reading on women and reading during that period, Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1993).
[37] Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), passim.
[38] 'Coffee-Room: 4 George Street, Perth' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, May 16, 1844.

rooms were not merely passive repositories of information; they actively contributed to preparing for potential uprisings and revolutionary actions.[39] Through discussions, debates and strategic planning, participants in these reading rooms played an integral role in shaping the direction and tactics of the Chartist movement. The legacy of Chartism in the realm of reading rooms extends beyond its immediate political objectives. The infrastructure and organisational frameworks established by Chartists laid the groundwork for the development of standard working men's reading rooms.[40] These subsequent iterations of reading rooms, inspired by the Chartist model, continued to serve as vital spaces for education, socialisation and community empowerment among working-class individuals.

The 1850s witnessed a significant surge in the establishment of subscription reading rooms, marking a transformative period in the evolution of communal spaces for intellectual engagement and social interaction. These reading rooms, organised by local committees and operated on a non-profit basis, became increasingly prevalent across towns, villages and cities. The genesis of subscription reading rooms varied, reflecting diverse pathways to their inception. In some instances, these rooms evolved organically from informal arrangements among groups of individuals who pooled resources to purchase newspapers collectively.[41] Over time, these informal gatherings evolved into fully-fledged reading establishments, driven by a shared desire for access to information and intellectual stimulation. Alternatively, subscription reading rooms could be initiated through concerted efforts by a few individuals within a community or by local entrepreneurs recognising the demand for such spaces. Regardless of their origins, these reading rooms operated on the basis of subscriptions and donations, with funds utilised to sustain operations, procure reading materials and maintain facilities.

The prominence of Dr. George Birkbeck's mechanics' institutes in the education of working-class men during the Victorian era is well-documented and widely

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[39] 'Newcastle' in *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, Chartist Intelligence, February 6, 1841, and 'Raise the Charter from the Pot-house!', *Notes to The People*, Vol. II, 1852, pp.623-625.
[40] William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organization of the people* (1840; New York: Humanities Press, 1969) p.9.
[41] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', p.582.

recognised by historians which has led to a certain level of overshadowing of reading rooms.[42] The closest work to explaining the relationship between reading rooms and mechanics' institutes is Edward Royle's article from 1971, which addressed the relationship between the mechanics' institutes and the working class and their disenchantment with them in the 1840s and 50s. He noted Fredrick Engel's assessment that 'working-men naturally have nothing to do with these institutes and betake themselves to the proletarian reading-rooms and to the discussion of matters which directly concern their own interests'.[43] The following section explores the relationship between reading rooms and mechanics' institutes, examining various observations that highlight how reading rooms evolved into sanctuaries for working men in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By examining this relationship, a better understanding of the position held by reading rooms within the educational landscape of Victorian Britain can be ascertained.

In J. W. Hudson's seminal work*, The History of Adult Education*, initially published in 1851, he critiques the Mechanic Institutes and advocates for more tailored institutions catering to the needs of working-class men. Hudson's observations revealed that the mechanics' institutes had become dominated by the middle classes:

> The universal complaint that Mechanics' Institutions are attended by persons of a higher rank than those for whom they are designed, applies with equal force to the Athenæums and Literary Institutions of the country. It will be found on investigation, that Athenæums have ceased to be the societies of young men, not only the roll of members, but a glance round the news-room will show an assemblage of men of middle age, principle of firms, professional men, managing and confidential clerks, factors, brokers, agents, and wholesale shopkeepers, who form both the directory and majority of the association.[44]

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[42] For further reading, Thomas Kelly, 'The Origin of Mechanics' Institutes', *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 1.1 (1952) pp.17-27.

[43] Quote from Fredrick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England 1844* as published in *Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels on Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), pp.274-5, taken from Edward Royle, 'Mechanic Institutes and the Working Class, 1840-1860' in *The Historical Journal*, 4.2 (1971), pp.305-21.

[44] J. W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education* (Longman: Brown and Co, 1851), p.vii.

This infiltration of higher social classes into these institutions had a cascading effect. Employees or managers of local industries, uncomfortable with the prospect of studying alongside their employers, gravitated towards the more informal atmosphere of Mechanic Institutes:

> Hence it has been assumed, that the employer and the employed are to be seen side by side perusing alike the newspaper and the review, drawing knowledge from the same fount; but such is not the fact, the clerk turns aside from his employer, either from respect or humility, and when he joins his companions he generally gives utterance to his discontent by an intimation that he shall join the mechanics', for he will not subscribe to an Institution where "the governor" is present.[45]

This discomfort was reciprocated by mechanics and working-class men, who sought spaces free from the influence of clerks or managers. As Hudson observed, 'the same influences are produced in the other Institution, the warehouseman, the packer, the carter, and the mill-hand shun the society of the clerk and the foreman, and they in turn quit the Institution which was established expressly for them.'[46]

The ripple effect of this phenomenon left mechanics and apprentices without dedicated institutions to rely on. Hudson claims there is a necessity that 'another attempt should now be made to provide entertainment and instruction for the bulk of the working men and their families.' Recognising early initiatives such as the 'penny news-rooms' in Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh, alongside the emergence of coffee-houses in London, temperance refreshment rooms across the country and the significant increase in Mutual Improvement Societies in the northern and eastern counties of England, Hudson suggests a solution. He advocates for the establishment of 'branch societies' affiliated with the Mechanic Institutes, which would 'supply the chief wants of the actual working population, and they have the means within themselves of furnishing the intellectual food required in smaller societies.' This emphasis on smaller, more localised societies is particularly significant to Hudson,

[45] Ibid, p.vii.
[46] Ibid, p.vii.

who contends that the intellectual needs of agricultural labourers remain unmet. He argues that, especially in the North of England, the Union of Mechanics' Institutes finds itself unable to adequately cater to the demands of village Institutes.'[47]

In the same year, Henry Morley, a university-educated journalist and literary scholar, published an article titled 'the Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words*, echoing sentiments like Hudson's while witnessing the nascent development of working men's reading rooms:

> The Mechanics' Institutes gave education, and the Reading-rooms relaxation, as well as instruction, to a valuable class of artisans; but there were mixed with them a large proportion of clerks, shopkeepers, and small gentlemen. The artisans, in many instances, lost control over their institution; in many instances they were themselves of a rank or in circumstances superior to the common workman.[48]

Morley believed that the institutions had lost their place as safe havens for working men due to the patronage and management of the middle class and that the answer to this was self-governed working men's reading rooms. Morley reiterated the common workman's loss of control over mechanics' institutes eleven years later in 1862, while discussing the success of reading rooms exclusively run by working men:

> Mechanics' Institutes were even then already lost to the mechanics; tradesmen and their sons, and apprentices, with clean hands and clean coats, had ousted the men in fustian out of their committees, and at last out of the very reading rooms.[49]

Morley's imagery of 'clean coats' versus fustian not only reflects a class divide within these institutions but produces this image of the dirty and rugged but comfortable and laidback local working mens reading room. The juxtaposition between the pristine attire of the tradesmen and the rough, work-worn fustian of the common mechanic serves to

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[47] Ibid, p.xiii.
[48] Fred Hunter, 'Henry Morley (1822-1894), apothecary, journalist, and literary scholar', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 8, 2009, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/19286, and Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', p.582.
[49] Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle', p.404.

highlight not just a disparity in social standing but also a contrast in the atmosphere and ethos of these spaces.

Figure 0.2: 'Working-Men's Reading-Room: Just Opened at Carlisle.', *Illustrated London News,* December 20, 1851, p.732.

Morley's imagery not only captures the social dynamics at play but also helps to paint a vivid picture of the unique character and appeal of the local working men's reading room as a refuge from the rigors of everyday life of industry workers. He portrays reading rooms as more of a proletarian stronghold for common workmen and their endeavours for self-improvement, contrasting with the larger and often better-funded mechanics' institutes. The management of reading rooms was a contentious issue and will be examined in further detail throughout the thesis, but it is crucial to understanding reading rooms place within the wider educational and recreational landscape.

At the Transactions of the Social Science Association in 1861, Dr. Robert Elliot presented a paper focusing on the 'Working Men's Reading-rooms, as established in

1848 at Carlisle.' In his presentation, Elliot outlined several objections to mechanics' institutes raised by the working class:

1. That the management is not in the hands of the mechanics.
2. That politics and religion are excluded.
3. That the institutes are only one in each town, and centrally situated.
4. That they are closed on Sundays.
5. That the instruction given is desultory, unconnected, and more scientific than elementary.
6. That weekly payments are not taken.[50]

Elliot countered this list with a long list of predominantly opposing positives of reading rooms including ‘the members enjoy the desired freedom of reading books, as well as newspapers, on party politics and sectarian religion’, ‘the number and variety of reading rooms in a town afford an agreeable accommodation to men of different tastes and habits’ and ‘In these rooms instruction of the plainest and most elementary kind is afforded, at appointed times; and as many of the members, on joining, cannot read, provision is made for reading newspapers aloud at stated times.’[51] This paper encapsulates the prevailing sentiment and rationale behind the belief that working men's reading rooms were better suited to cater to working men's needs than mechanics' institutes.

Echoing Elliot's sentiments, Ludlow and Jones, in their work *Progress of the Working Class 1831-1867* from 1867, asserted that the objection towards mechanics' institutes was not that they were ‘too good for the working man’ but rather that they were ‘often beginning to be not good enough’.[52] When examining alternative forms of adult education, Ludlow and Jones discussed reading rooms, describing them as ‘much humbler institutions’ that have ‘supplied the deficiencies of the Mechanics’

[50] Robert Elliot, ‘On Working Men’s Reading Rooms, as established in 1848 at Carlisle’, *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science 1861*, ed. Geroge W. Hastings (London: John W Parker, Son, and Bourne, 1862), pp.672-85 (p.676).
[51] Ibid, pp.677-8.
[52] J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Class 1831-1867* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1867), pp.174-5.

Institutes, where the latter has failed to meet the wants of the working man.'[53] It is important to acknowledge that many descriptions of reading rooms may be romanticised or narrowly focused on a few examples. In reality, most reading rooms were not governed by working-class people, as will be explored later in the thesis. Similarly, these perceptions of mechanics' institutes are to be scrutinised as there is evidence that they were still commonly patronised by working-class men.[54] The likely truth is that it varied from town to town, depending on the other literary facilities with the town and the towns own social and class dynamics, and these above discussions are anecdotal. Understanding the relationship between reading rooms and mechanics' institutes and the potential perception that reading rooms were the sphere of the rugged industrial worker is crucial for comprehending the place of reading rooms within the spectrum of working-class education and recreation. The reality of their membership shall be discussed in Chapter 1.

To provide a more in-depth understanding of provincial reading rooms and illuminate the diverse influences and the potential for individual power dynamics within them, a dedicated chapter will investigate their operational mechanisms. This chapter will provide a detailed examination of the administrative structures, focusing mainly on the roles of committees and the constitutions under which these rooms operated. Moreover, the study will scrutinise the funding mechanisms that sustained these establishments. It will explore various funding sources, including donations, subscriptions, and income generated from recreational activities and refreshment sales. By analysing the financial underpinnings of reading rooms, the study aims to elucidate the factors contributing to their sustainability and success. Through this exploration of their operational frameworks and financial models, the chapter seeks to provide insight into the organisational dynamics that shaped the functioning of reading rooms and their impact on the communities they served.

Chapter 2 will address the literature provided by examining four distinct case studies. These case studies offer insights from diverse regions, including central

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[53] Ibid, p.177.

[54] Martyn Walker, 'The Origins and Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement 1824-1890 and the Beginnings of Further Education', *Teaching in Lifelong Learning*, 4.1 (2012), pp.5-6, doi:10.5920/till/2012.4132.

Scotland, Yorkshire, Northumberland, and Manchester. Moreover, they encompass a range of industries and town sizes, spanning from small villages to large cities. The selected reading rooms represent a spectrum of temporal contexts, from an early establishment in 1852 to one at the close of the century. Through these case studies, the study aims to conduct an analysis of specific catalogues and collections. By scrutinising the influences shaping these collections, the chapter seeks not only to depict how they reflect the average reading room but also to clarify the distinctive features that set them apart. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the various influences on the literary materials found within these rooms, thereby shedding light on their potential impact on the lives of their members. By providing an overview of the diverse influences shaping reading room collections, this study aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the cultural, social, and economic dynamics at play within these institutions.

Chapter 3 will explore the multifaceted role of reading rooms beyond their primary function of reading. With particular emphasis on recreation, the study will explore the various leisure activities conducted within these spaces, including games, music and socialising. Additionally, it will examine the diverse educational opportunities offered, such as lectures, debates, classes and penny readings. Moreover, the chapter will address the accommodation—or lack thereof—for the illiterate within reading rooms, highlighting its significance within the broader context of Victorian education initiatives. Furthermore, the chapter will underscore how reading rooms transcended their initial purpose and evolved into central hubs of town social interaction. They became integral to working-class individuals' leisure and cultural activities, particularly in provincial settings.

Finally, a dedicated chapter will examine one of the primary intended beneficiaries of reading rooms: industrial workers. It will trace the origins of working men's reading rooms by examining the role of reading (or news) rooms in the Chartist movement. It explores these rooms' connections to the working class, radicalism, physical and moral force, education and temperance. Understanding their origins sheds light on the complex identity struggles these rooms faced later in the century. This chapter will then offer a closer examination of rooms specifically established to

cater to the needs of workers in local industries, whether initiated by the owners of factories, mills, mines, unions, or by members of the local community. The study will explore how these initiatives represented an endeavour to exert control over and moralise the workforce. Specifically, the chapter will scrutinise the disparity of the provision of education, reading materials and leisure activities within these establishments. By delving into the motivations behind their establishment and the nature of their offerings, the chapter aims to uncover the ways in which reading rooms served as instruments for shaping the attitudes, behaviours, and cultural lives of industrial workers. Through this focused exploration, the chapter will shed a light on the complex dynamics of power, control and social engineering inherent in the establishment and operation of reading rooms catering to industrial workers.

Chapter 1. Committees, Funding and Control.

Introduction.

This chapter endeavours to provide an overview of the operation and management of average village reading rooms while also acknowledging the inherent challenges in doing so. Several factors contribute to the complexity of this task. Firstly, the sheer number of reading rooms in Britain during the long nineteenth century, which numbered in the thousands, necessitates a selective approach to resourcing to demonstrate broader observations and construct generalisations. Secondly, the variability among these rooms is considerable – each shaped by distinct local industries, influential individuals and funding structures. Thirdly, the scarcity of resources, particularly surviving comprehensive records such as full membership rolls, committee minutes and financial accounts, poses a challenge for in-depth analysis and understanding of the internal dynamics of individual rooms and their external influences. Despite these challenges, glimpses into the functioning of average reading rooms can be gleaned through available data and contemporary commentaries. These insights shed light on the power dynamics between the middle and upper classes and working men within these spaces and the strategies employed to mitigate such imbalances. I will exemplify this by examining the membership and activities of two reading rooms, Dunblane and Wylam Reading Room.

Subsequent sections explore broader debates surrounding reading room management, utilising examples such as the self-managed Carlisle Reading Room and instances of resistance against middle-class influence, particularly in Carlisle. Committee structures of three standard village reading rooms – Ardrossan Reading Room, Brampton Reading Room, and Dunblane Reading Room – will be analysed to illustrate the prevalent middle and upper-class presence and their efforts to promote paternalism, moral reform and rational recreation. Throughout the analysis, the Dunblane Reading and Recreation Room serves as a focal point due to the availability of multiple sources, particularly yearly financial accounts, full membership rolls and committee meeting minutes. These resources facilitate a comprehensive

understanding of how factors such as membership, committee dynamics, middle-class influence and finances are deeply interconnected within a single reading room.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on the financial dynamics of reading rooms, highlighting the significant societal contributions made to establish and sustain these facilities. A comprehensive overview of their finances is provided, emphasising subscription models and their financial inadequacies. Additionally, the impact of newspaper re-sales on both reading room operations and reading habits is explored, alongside considerations of various forms of donations, which often perpetuated a bias favouring the interests of the donators – the higher classes. Furthermore, fundraising efforts such as bazaars and concerts are examined to understand community contributions to financial stability and as forms of rational recreation. By investigating the organisers of these events, insights into the role of women in supporting reading rooms emerge. A section explores the significance of billiards as a revenue source, revealing its transformative effect on reading rooms, eventually leading many to evolve into billiard halls.

Membership.

Determining who frequented the average working men's reading room might seem straightforward—after all, the name says it all: 'working men'. Yet, looking further into the demographics of these spaces poses a challenge, given their universal appeal. It is reasonable to assume that specialised rooms, like Navvies' or Miners' reading rooms, catered primarily to their respective occupational groups and perhaps their families, but others could have used them. Political reading rooms, such as Liberal or Conservative Reading Rooms, hint at distinct clientele, but unfortunately, surviving membership rolls for these are scarce. In this section, I investigate two village reading rooms— one from 1851 and another from 1891— to shed light on their memberships and offer a glimpse into the diversity of their patrons.

The first study examines the Wylam Reading Institution and Newsroom, which opened in 1851. In the 1850s, Wylam was an industrial town boasting a colliery, an

ironworks, a leadshot manufactory and a brewery, with a population of around 1,000.[55] As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the room was established by the local colliery owner. In 1995, Philip Brooks and Denis Peel calibrated their membership with 1851 census data.[56] Of the 73 members, 67 were male, and six were female. Brooks and Peel successfully matched 61 members with the census records. Among these, 67% worked in the local colliery, with one serving as a foreman at an ironworks, three as agricultural workers and the remainder in various trades. Notably, 50% of the identified members were under 30, and 70% were under 40. The connection to the colliery owners can explain the number of members related to the colliery. It is unclear why there was a lack of members connected to the Iron Works. Despite this, the room primarily attracted young industrial working men, consistent with broader trends in reading room attendance.[57]

The second case study focuses on the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room, specifically the membership roll from 1891.[58] Situated in central Scotland, Dunblane was known as a 'Mill town' with an approximate population of 3,000.[59] Though there were multiple membership rolls, I selected 1891 because I could cross-reference it with the census that year using *ScotlandsPeople*.[60] While most male members were successfully matched, locating female members proved challenging, as many were listed with only their prefixes and last names. Consequently, only eight out of 25 women could be confidently identified. This limitation hindered the analysis of female members' occupations but allowed for a study of their numbers and marital status.

The analysis also grappled with the issue of repeated names, necessitating careful consideration to distinguish accidental repetitions from genuine occurrences. For instance, the presence of two individuals named James Guthrie, both residing in

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[55] 'Wylam Township Census Data', Northumberland Communities, n.d. <northumberland.gov.uk>, [accessed March 23, 2022].
[56] *Wylam Reading Institution & News Room: 145 Years of Change and Development* (History of the Book Trade in the North, 1995).
[57] 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers Journal*, pp.411-2, and Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', and 'Village Clubs and Reading-Rooms' in *The Leisure Hour: a Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation*, September 19, 1868, and Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle', pp. 403-5.
[58] AKBL: MS/20/2/1, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Membership Roll 1891*.
[59] 'History of Dunblane' in *Dunblane Info, n.d.* <https://Dunblane.info> [accessed March 23, 2022].
[60] Census 348/1, accessed via *ScotlandsPeople (*SP), n.d. www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk [accessed June 12, 2022].

Dunblane, raised questions about their membership status. Further investigation revealed familial ties—one had a sister who was a member, while the other's wife also held membership. Additionally, two of the female members were daughters of the local minister, an honorary member of the room. This correlation between female members and their relations within the room is notable, hinting at a potentially broader pattern that could emerge if all female members were successfully located.

Despite the room being effectively run by the Young Mens' Christian Association, its membership was not exclusively male, with a ratio of 80% male to 20% female, nor was it exclusively young—the average age of the identified members was 31. 65% of members fell below 30, and 82% below 40. [61] Noteworthy outliers included a 79-year-old retired military captain and an 86-year-old individual who passed away between the membership roll and the census.[62] On the other end of the spectrum are a 15-year-old male domestic servant, a 15-year-old male apprentice ironmonger and a 14-year-old male Law Clerk. Of the seven women found, five were in their 20s, one was 34, and one was 55; however, no solid conclusion can be drawn due to the rest not being in the census. While most members were between 18 and 35 at 62%, 55% of the total membership were males within this age range. The room was not exclusive to the young men of the YMCA but catered to a broad cross-section of society.

Members' living situations also varied significantly, though most were single and living with a family member. 73% of the located members were unmarried, 23% were married, and 4% were widowed. Of the women, only three were married, and one was widowed, leaving 84% of the women unmarried. For the members' positions within their household, 43% were labelled 'Son' alongside the 3% labelled 'Daughter', 2% labelled 'Nephew' and 1% labelled 'Grandson'. 3% were the 'Sister' to the head of the household, meaning just over half the room's members lived within a family member's household. 30% of the members were 'Head' of their household, and 14% were lodgers. There was also one 'Servant' and three labelled 'Wife'.

[61] AKBL: MS/20/2/4, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Rules and Regulations*.
[62] SP: Dunblane 348/55, 'Robert Cochrane', Death Certificate, 1891.

None of the eight women found worked, except perhaps for one labelled ‘farmers daughter’. Among the male members, 30% were industrial workers, including thirteen mill workers, two railway workers and seven men who worked in the Calico Printing Works. Thirteen workers worked in the general trades, and ten were merchants. There were eight agricultural workers and two general labourers. There were six law clerks, two manufacturing clerks, one clerk for the Calico Printing Works and five general clerks, making clerk the most common job for members. Additionally, one retired military captain, two bank workers, three public sector teachers, a domestic servant, and three members who worked for the church, including a minister, an assistant at the Episcopal church, and the Cathedral caretaker, were members. This membership shows a wide range of professions. This reading room was not a space dominated by industrial workers. Once you consider the agricultural workers, some general trade workers and general labourers, the blue-to-white-collar ratio is around half and half.

These statistics provide valuable insights into the demographic composition of the average village reading room. The two examples presented here offer contrasting snapshots— one from the North of England in 1851 and the other from central Scotland in 1891. One at the beginning of the movement and one nearing the end of their popularity. Despite their differences, both rooms saw the participation of women, albeit in varying proportions, and were predominantly frequented by young people. The most significant difference between the examples is the occupational backgrounds of their members. The 67% of industrial workers in 1851 attending Wylam dropped sharply to 30% of industrial workers in 1891 Dunblane reading room. The Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room had a much more comprehensive array of workers - with clerks, ministers, agricultural workers and public school teachers all members of the room alongside the wool spinners and paper mill dyers. This represents a modern 1890s town with a more complex and varied job market than an 1850s colliery village and a reading room catering to all the towns ‘working men’. This, it is considered, could drastically change the room's atmosphere, facilities and dynamics as it attempted to cater to both clientele. It may have also made members of certain classes uncomfortable being

around other classes, as discussed in the introduction concerning the mechanic institutes.

More studies of membership rolls, particularly those reflecting different periods, room types, or local industries, would provide a more substantial overview of who attended these rooms. The fact that reading rooms were in almost every village, town, and city across the country for over 60 years makes it impossible to say, 'This is who attended reading rooms' as a general statement. Each village or town had different industries, opposing establishments like libraries, mechanics' institutes, or influential figures. This short study backs up the idea of the mid-century reading room providing a literary sanctuary for industrial workers and other working-class men, particularly as a working-class alternative to the mechanics' institutes. It appears that reading rooms had developed beyond that by the 1890s; at least in Dunblane, they were an institution for all working men and non-working women. Still popular with the local industrial workers, their members included a range of workers – making attending the local reading room not part of the identity of the working classes but a part of the everyday life for all locals.

Committees.

In 1863, in an article in *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* titled 'Popular Reading-Rooms', the writer sheds light on the delicate balance required in managing a reading room for working-class men. The article cautions against the condescending oversight of well-meaning but out-of-touch benefactors, stating that when 'kindly-disposed people [open a reading room] professedly for the "working-classes"' that it results in upset as 'few like to be told that they are being looked after'. Therefore, when the committee is filled with local middle-class men such as 'Mr This, and the Rev. That, and Dr Tother', the local artisan would think 'Thankee, gentlemen, but we'd rather not.'[63] The article argues that such establishments should be run by

[63] 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers* Journal, p.411.

those who understand the needs and wants of working men, which, according to the article, is wholesome amusement with the opportunity for self-education.[64]

The debate over who should run a working men's reading room was a heavy point of contention in Carlisle in the mid-century. In the article 'The Labourer's Reading Room', Henry Morley describes a reading room in Carlisle that was established by working men for working men. It stayed under the management and funding of working men for twenty months:

> It was not perfection yet, it was true; but for twenty months only, out of the pence of working men, it was wonderful. Well, such institutions got on very quietly at first: there was nobody to interfere with them whilst in their infancy.[65]

Morley presents this as an idealist haven and an example of the ideal auto-didact act of self-improvement from working men. Things would change once the room gained a good reputation and attracted the attention of a rich man:

> But when they got a name, and somebody dropped in upon them with a better coat on his back than the members wore, the whisper was passed round "Who is that?" "Oh! It is So-and-so," was the reply passed back again[66]

Morley's account illustrates the gradual shift in control as influential figures began to assert themselves within the committee, eventually displacing the working-class members:

> and the gentleman had not been three months among them till it was proposed to put him on the committee. He was put on, and did not feel very comfortable. Being brought up in a different sphere, he had not the same feelings that they had; he was rather more polished, and felt rather uncomfortable; but in the course of time a couple of his companions got in by his influence, and, in their turn, the working men were left in a minority, and felt uncomfortable.[67]

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[64] Ibid, p.411.
[65] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', p.582.
[66] Ibid, p.582.
[67] Ibid, p.582.

These people did not get control of the reading room via donations or financial means – instead, it was purely on their influence within the town. According to the article, this was initially encouraged by the regular members of the rooms. Morley claims this left the reading room with incapable leadership, as those now on the committee could not understand the wants and needs of its members:

> The gentlemen appointed to look after the interests of the institution could not do it; it was only the working men themselves who knew what they wanted. Each in his own sphere knew what would suit them; and it was folly to think that those above them could know better than themselves what they wanted.[68]

The author almost blames and chastises the working men for placing them in this position. There was an apparent belief that these institutions should be isolationist and that those in charge of the room have a duty to protect them from the influence of those trying to use them to project educational, behavioural, or moral standards upon working men.

This story underscores the significance of the roles and responsibilities entrusted to the committee, including their selection process and the frequency of elections. Morley utilises this anecdote to offer insights into the composition of a typical nineteenth-century reading room committee and how its members leveraged their influence to assert control. Morley aims to raise awareness and caution against repeating such errors by highlighting common occurrences. The author believed that a committee composed of non-working individuals could shape the reading room's offerings, often diverging from the preferences of the working-class patrons. This underscores the crucial role of the committee in determining the facilities provided, particularly literature, emphasising their control over the reading room's direction.

In response to the fear of middle-class control of their reading facilities, in 1848, ‘a few poor men, most of them handloom weavers’ from Carlisle ‘clubbed their wits together for the means of getting a daily newspaper.’ Their initiative gained rapid popularity, attracting fifty subscribers within the first week. As this initiative evolved into a formal reading room, a rule emerged stipulating that only those receiving a weekly

[68] Ibid, p.582.

wage could serve on the committee. This regulation did not secure the room's long-term success. After a few months, waning interest led to dwindling membership and the imminent abandonment of the facility. A man called Dr. Elliot 'and other members of the middle class' stepped in to support the room. Their assistance, including guidance, financial contributions and books, was offered without seeking authority within the room – 'their aid was fairly given, fairly taken, no abandonment of independence on the part of the workmen being asked or offered.'[69]

This encapsulates the article's essence: a working men's reading association thrives on the initiative of its members, who should be actively involved in its establishment and management through a committee structure. However, it is also vital to remain open to assistance and financial support from others. As the author succinctly puts it:

> So it will always be, unless the workmen act and govern for themselves, abide within their jackets, and provide, to the utmost of their power, for their own wants, full of self-reliance, although free from self-sufficiency.[70]

This sentiment stresses the importance of self-governance and self-reliance while acknowledging the value of external support. Eleven years later, an article in Household Words corroborated the success of these reading rooms. It reported that the room continued to operate smoothly, becoming a model for similar initiatives across Carlisle and Cumberland [Cumbria], forming a thriving network of reading rooms in the region.[71]

Morley likely possessed substantial knowledge about the operations of reading rooms, making them relatively reliable sources despite their potential biases. They offer a detailed glimpse into how such institutions were typically managed, a perspective that complements my limited examples. I aim to research these committees through case studies further, drawing comparisons between elected committee members and local census reports. Unfortunately, it was uncommon for reading rooms to publish their elected committees in newspapers, limiting the available data. In this section, I examine three reading rooms located in small to medium industrial towns: the

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[69] Ibid, p.583.
[70] Ibid, p.583.
[71] Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle', p.404.

Ardrossan Reading Rooms Committee of 1860, the Brampton Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society Committee of 1878, and the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Committee of 1892. These towns were large enough to have their own census districts and reading rooms yet small enough to minimise name repetitions, facilitating more accurate comparisons. Census reports provide crucial information, including age, household position, marriage status, and employment. Employment status is particularly intriguing, especially given the involvement of various employers in these rooms. These factors contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how established and influential committee members were within their respective towns.

Ardrossan Reading Room Committee, 1860.

Name	Age	Marriage	Employment	Additional Notes
Provost John Barr	61	Married	Contactor House and Coal Proprietor – Employs 100 men[72]	First Provost of Ardrossan. Provost for 38 years. Owned a lot of land in Ardrossan.[73]
Captain Matthew Crawford	76	Widower	Retired Shipmaster[74]	
Captain Peter McFee	59	Married	Harbour Master	Lived at Harbour[75]
William Mutter Esq.	55	Married	Land Proprietor[76]	Was Commissioner on a Valuation Appeal Court with Provost Barr in 1878[77]

[72] SP: Census 1861 - 576/22/1.
[73] Tom McGrattan, *Saint Peter in Chains Ardrossan* (1988), and 'Ayrshire', *Ordnance Survey Name Books*, OS1/3/1/84.
[74] SP: Census 1861 - 576/24/7.
[75] SP: Census 1861 – 576/25/13.
[76] SP: Census 1861 – 576/22/20.
[77] 'Valuation Appeal Courts: Ardrossan' in *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1878, p.5.

Archibald Currie	42	Married[78]	Ex-Baillie and Shipowner	A close acquaintance of Provost Barr[79]
Arthur Guthrie	36	Married	Bookseller[80]	He would eventually run the local reading room through his company[81]
Hugh Willock	37	Married	Ironmonger Registerer, Employing two men and one boy[82]	Secretary & Treasurer of Reading Room[83]

Figure 1.1: Ardrossan Reading Room Committee, elected on the 20th of November 1860. [84]

The Ardrossan Reading Room from 1860 serves as the first example, representing a typical Scottish medium-sized town during the emergence of reading rooms as popular fixtures. It affirms Morley's criticism that facilities intended primarily for the working-class men of the town, especially young men, were often overseen by older, affluent individuals with established influence. The presence of a shipowner, harbour master and retired shipmaster, particularly notable in the preceding year's smaller committee, underscores the respect commanded by such figures within a maritime community. This scenario exemplifies how respect and power within local industries translated into positions on reading room committees. Notably, Provost Barr stands out—a figure of immense influence in Ardrossan, so much so that a street bears his name. Barr's extensive holdings included coal works, brick and fireclay works, and paraffin oil works.[85] In addition, he co-owned a shipbuilding company in Ardrossan, established in the 1840s, employing over 300 individuals by 1854.[86] Barr played a pivotal role in community affairs, donating land for the Free Church and public school

[78] SP: Census 1861 – 576/23/47.
[79] 'Ardrossan: Death of an Ex-Magistrate' in *Glasgow Herald*, 20 September 1895.
[80] SP: Census 1861 – 576/25/3.
[81] 'Authur Guthrie: Bookseller, Stationer, Librarian, and Publisher' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, June 19, 1891, p.2.
[82] SP: Census 1861 - 576/25/1.
[83] 'Sale of Newspapers' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald,* November 24, 1860, p.1.
[84] 'Sale of Newspapers' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald,* November 24,1860, p.1
[85] 'Doura Oil Works', *Scottish Shale,* n.d. <https://www.scottishshale.co.uk/places/oil-works/doura-oil-works> [accessed October 15, 2021].
[86] Catriona Levy, *Ardrossan Shipyard: - Struggle for Survival 1825-1983* (Ardrossan Local History Workshop, 1983), pp.1-6.

and serving as chairman of the Ardrossan school board throughout the 1870s and 1880s.[87] This portrayal reaffirms Morley's grievances about influential individuals dominating reading room committees. Assessing the impact of having such influential employers on the committee during this early period is challenging due to the absence of minutes or attendance records.

Barr's close ties with many other committee members, whether personal or business-related, suggest that the committee formed a tight-knit group comprising either influential individuals already in positions of power or those leveraging their existing influence to secure election for others. It seems unlikely that Barr himself directly influenced the selection of his associates, given that many of them were already serving on the committee when its composition expanded from four members and a secretary to six members and a secretary in 1860, with the addition of Provost Barr and Arthur Guthrie, the bookseller. Guthrie would eventually oversee the room under his company, 'Arthur Guthrie & Sons,' by 1891.[88] Additionally, Hugh Willock replaced William McJannet, a coal merchant and shipping agent, in 1860.[89] By 1865, McJannet and Provost Barr jointly owned the coal works in Doura, and by 1875, they had also collaborated on establishing brick and fireclay works in Doura.[90] These members were large contributors to the local economy and likely employed many of the room's members. This influence and network resulted in holding power within the local reading room committee.

What is noteworthy about this committee is not just who was elected but who was not. Noticeably absent were young industrial workers. This absence raises questions about whether these individuals were unwelcome on the committee, lacked the influence to secure votes or chose not to participate. If working men shied away from committee involvement, the reasons could vary widely. Perhaps they felt

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[87] Tom McGrattan, *Chains Ardrossan*, p.2, and 'Ardrossan Parochial Board' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald,* July 6, 1872, p.4, and 'the School Boards' in *Glasgow Herald,* November 12, 1875, and 'School Board Contest' in *Ardrossan Saltcoats and Herald*, May 3, 1879.
[88] 'Authur Guthrie: Bookseller, Stationer, Librarian, and Publisher' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, June 19, 1891, p.2.
[89] 'Ardrossan Public Reading Room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, November 12, 1859.
[90] Doura was a small coal village; it has now been amalgamated by the town of Irvine. 'Doura Oil Works' in *Scottish Shale,* n.d. <https://www.scottishshale.co.uk/places/oil-works/doura-oil-works> [accessed October 15, 2021].

uncomfortable rubbing shoulders with town leaders, including their employers. Alternatively, they might have doubted their own educational qualifications to make informed decisions or preferred not to invest their limited spare time and energy in committee duties when others were available to take on such responsibilities. Unfortunately, answering these questions proves challenging without records detailing who sought committee positions. Commentators from the time suggested that discomfort in mingling with 'superiors and a perceived lack of influence contributed to this trend. There was also a prevailing sentiment that the town's affluent elite should naturally assume leadership roles in social institutions like reading rooms.[91]

Brampton Reading Room Committee, 1878.

Position	Name	Age	Marriage	Household	Employment
Trustees	Rev. Henry Whitehead	55	Married	Head	Vicar of Brampton[92]
Trustee	James. B. Lee	43	Married	Head	Solicitor[93]
Treasurer	John Johnstone	49	Married	Head	Saddler, Employing 1 Man & 1 Boy[94]
President	Robert Scott	70	Widower	Head	Dyer[95]
Vice President	John Reay	41	Married	Head	Master Taylor Employing 2 Men & 2 Boys[96]
Secretary	John Joseph James	29	Unmarried	Son	Stonemason[97]
Librarian	George Creighton	-	-	-	-
Committee	Robert Brown	56	Married	Head	Police Constable[98]

[91] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', pp.582-4, and Morley, 'the Bees of Carlisle', pp.403-5, and 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers Journal*, pp.411-2.
[92] Ancestry UK (AUK): Census 1881 – RG11/5149, p.7.
[93] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/14, p.19.
[94] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149, p.23.
[95] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/49, p.2.
[96] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/41, p.7.
[97] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/56, p.4.
[98] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/66, p.24.

Committee	John W. Phillips	39	-	Son	Watchmaker[99]
Committee	John George Atkinson	28	Married	Head	Tailor & Cutter & Methodists Preacher[100]
Committee	Joseph Parker	30	Married	Head	Shoemaker[101]

Figure 1.2: Brampton Reading Room Committee, 1878.[102]

The Brampton Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society committee offers insights into a later period, circa 1878. It represents the northern region of England, although Brampton's location is so far north that many of its committee members were born in Scotland. Despite its later timeframe, this committee resembles that of the Ardrossan Reading Room, albeit not as pronounced. Like Ardrossan, it is dominated by established town members, some of whom are employers, although to a lesser extent. The committee is safeguarded by trustees, a Vicar and a Solicitor, ensuring that the interests of the room remain protected from undue influence, regardless of who might seek to wield it. Unlike in other examples, the remainder of the committee holds designated positions. Among them are tradesmen, some of whom employ a few workers, while others, like Robert Brown, serve in respected professions such as police constable. Although lacking a figure as influential as Provost Barr, this committee still falls short of representing the primary clientele of the reading room.

Despite Brampton's diverse industries, including mining, printing and clock making, textiles emerged as the primary industry represented on the reading room committee. Surprisingly, despite the prominence of mills and mines as leading employers in the town, there was a notable absence of weavers or miners on the committee.[103] While this room boasted a higher proportion of working men on its

[99] AUK: Census 1871 – RG11/5209/59, p.6.
[100] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/49, p.23.
[101] AUK: Census 1881 – RG11/5149/65, p.22.
[102] National Library of Scotland (NLS): 5.5223, *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society etc.,* (1878), p.7.
[103] 'Brampton', *Cumbria County History Trust,* n.d. <https://www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk/township/Brampton> [accessed October 13, 2021].

committee than the 1860 Ardrossan Reading Room, it remained predominantly middle class in composition, with a distinct lack of representation from the local industrial workers and no men younger than their late twenties.

Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Committee, 1892.

Name	Age	Position in Household	Marriage	Employment
William McGregor	32	Son	Unmarried	Wool spinner[104]
Thomas Kinmouth	35	Son	Unmarried	Worsted Overlooker[105]
John Kerr	26	Son	Unmarried	Plumber[106]
Alexander Guthrie	26	Son	Unmarried	Manufacturer Clerk[107]
Peter Scott	34	Head	-	Blacksmith[108]
William Hill	25	Lodger	Unmarried	Railway Signalman[109]
Charles W Townsend	19	Son	Unmarried	Clerk[110]
John Campbell	20	Son	Unmarried	Lawyers Clerk[111]
James Scobie	21	Son	Unmarried	Public Sector Teacher[112]
Robert Campbell	24	Head (Lives with Sister)	Unmarried	Tailor[113]
John Anderson (Secretary)	27	Lodger	-	Bank Accountant[114]

Figure 1.3 Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Committee, 1892.[115]

[104] AUK: Census 1891 – 348/2/34.
[105] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/15.
[106] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/11.
[107] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/9.
[108] AUK: Census 1901 - 348/6/12.
[109] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/5/21.
[110] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/2.
[111] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/1/16.
[112] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/28.
[113] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/44.
[114] AUK: Census 1891 - 348/2/36.
[115] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading & Amusement Association Annual Report 1892.*

The Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Committee of 1892 is a distinct example of a small-town reading room established in the late nineteenth century. Initiated by the local gentry and supported by the Dunblane Young Men's Christian Association, it garnered full support from the local community. With a membership totalling 145 individuals in the sample year of 1892, this committee reflects the diverse demographic of the town, as discussed in the previous section.[116] Despite Dunblane's industrial backdrop, with several mills and dye works, the committee comprised a mix of local industrial workers and white-collar professionals.[117] It consisted primarily of unmarried young men spanning various career levels, from wool spinners to Public-Sector Teachers. This demographic skew toward unmarried males likely stemmed from the active involvement of the Young Men's Christian Association, reflecting its focus on youth engagement and development.

Unique to the rooms I have come across, the committee is appointed exclusively from the Young Men's Christian Mutual Improvement Association, as outlined in their Rules and Regulations.[118] Additionally, the room boasted a secondary committee, dubbed the 'special occasions' committee, comprising four reverends and a secretary from a silicon carbide refractory company. This support structure seems designed to bolster the main committee, composed of relatively inexperienced individuals, by providing guidance and support from experienced and respected members. While it might appear obscure and undemocratic to exclusively elect members from the YMCA when the room was open to all, this approach had its merits. By doing so, the committee was compelled to represent its younger working-class members more, enabling the town's elders to step back and assume advisory roles within the 'special occasions' committee. This strategy mirrored the restrictions observed at the St John Street Working Men's Reading Room in Carlisle, where only wage earners were permitted to sit on the committee.[119] These restrictions prevented the local gentry or employers from exerting undue influence over the reading room, thereby paving the way

[116] It has been assumed that all committee members are male. Unlike the males, all women in the records are addressed with their prefix.
[117] 'History of Dunblane', *Dublane.info* <https://dunblane.info/about-dunblane/history> [accessed October 10, 2021].
[118] AKBL: MS/20/2/4, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Rules and* Regulations.
[119] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', pp.581.

for the town's working men to take charge of their own recreational and educational provisions. Ensuring committee members were drawn from the working class ranks facilitated a more equitable distribution of power and decision-making within the reading room, aligning with the ethos of self-governance and empowerment among its primary patrons.

These brief studies offer a comprehensive examination of the composition of the average reading room committee. It encompasses examples ranging from committees dominated by older, established, and influential individuals to those featuring a blend of employers, influential figures, and tradesmen. Additionally, it delves into the case of the Dunblane Reading Room, which implemented regulations to prevent the local upper classes from dominating the committee. As a result, the Dunblane committee mirrors the demographic diversity of its members, comprising industrial workers, clerks and tradesmen, thereby fostering a more representative leadership structure aligned with the interests of its patrons. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for identifying the control of literature and leisure working men could access through these institutions.

Reading Room Finances.

The funding of reading rooms evolved significantly over the nineteenth century. Initially, reading rooms stemmed from the coffee rooms of the eighteenth century, catering to the affluent commercial and manufacturing elites. These early reading rooms relied on costly subscriptions and revenue from refreshment sales.[120] By the mid-nineteenth century, the concept of reading rooms shifted towards providing educational and recreational opportunities for the working class. To make subscriptions more affordable, rates were subsidised through donations and fundraising efforts. Charitable donations played a significant role, supplemented by events like bazaars and concerts, which gained popularity by the 1880s. Another standard fundraising method was the sale of newspapers used in the reading rooms, often conducted through auctions held yearly or quarterly. While this practice persisted from the 1840s to the 1920s, it

[120] Bob Harris, 'Cultural Change in Provincial Scottish Towns, c. 1700-1820', *The Historical Journal*, 54 (2011) pp.105-141 (p.11).

gradually became more of a tradition than a substantial source of income.[121] Towards the end of the century, the popularity of billiards revitalised reading rooms, particularly among young working men, becoming a primary source of income for many establishments. Though King believed the billiard era was short-lived, it appears to have been popular from the early 1890s to the First World War.[122]

Understanding the financial structure of reading rooms is crucial when examining the class dynamics involved within the rooms. Reading Rooms being permanent fixtures meant they required substantial financial backing. Those who provided this financial backing could obtain influence over the room and, in turn, influence the literature, recreation and educational facilities provided. This refers not only to those who donated large sums but also to those who paid their subscriptions, chose to spend their money in the rooms, paid to attend events or bought second-hand newspapers. Graham's study of Carlisle addresses the complexities of patronage and self-reliance within reading rooms, adopting a somewhat cynical view. He portrays reading rooms as an 'instrument for consolidating their own position and fashioning large sections of the working class in their own image' through donations.[123] This perception is gleaned from the works of Morley and the singular focus on the example in Carlisle. On the other hand, King's study of Norfolk provides a more concise overview of financing methods, dedicating a brief portion to subscriptions, games, room rentals, exhibitions and lectures as sources of revenue for reading rooms.[124]

This study on reading room finances draws upon examples from various reading rooms across different regions and periods to illustrate the diverse forms of fundraising and their evolving popularity over time. Utilising newspaper reports, contemporary commentaries from proponents of moral reform like Janette Manners, and critics of middle-class control such as Henry Morley, the study offers insights into the dynamics of funding reading rooms. Additionally, reading room minutes shed light on the decision-making processes behind funding choices. A particularly valuable resource is

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[121] 'Sale of Newspaper' in *The Stirling Observer*, December 20,1849, p.1, and 'Public Library & Reading Room' in *Forfar Dispatch*, December 16, 1920, p.1.
[122] King, 'The Rise and Decline', pp.163-186.
[123] Graham, *The Carlisle Working Men's Reading Rooms*, pp.43-44.
[124] King, 'Village Reading Rooms', pp.178-9.

the financial accounts of the Dunblane Reading and Recreation Room, which engaged with multiple funding avenues described in the study. Although limited to 1889 to 1896, this source provides a comprehensive understanding of various funding schemes employed by the reading room. [125] A comprehensive overview of this resource will be provided at the end of this section, offering insights into the room's funding streams.

The charts below demonstrate the different percentages of each and the changing success of each method over the short period of the first five years of the association:

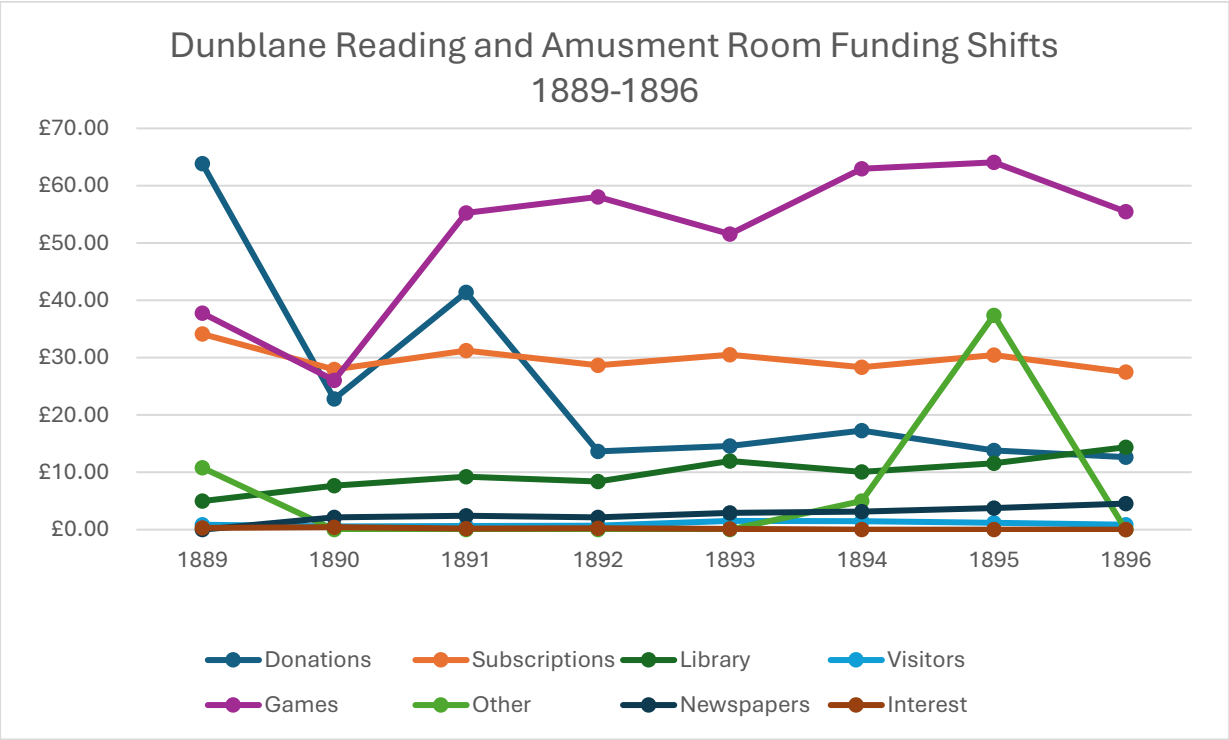

Figure 1.4: Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Funding Shifts 1889-1896.[126]

[125] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[126] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.

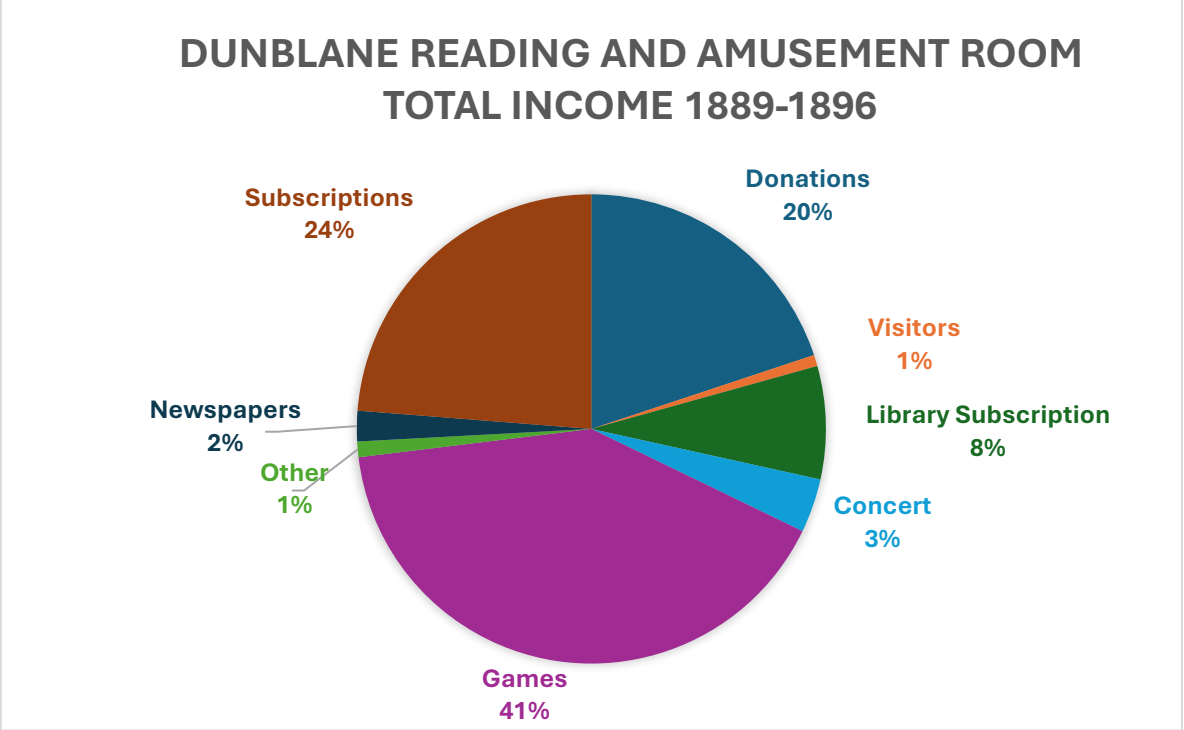

Figure 1.5: Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Total Income 1889-1896.[127]

The primary sources of funds were games, with a notable increase in income following the purchase of a billiards table in 1891. This highlights the significant role of billiards in the room's finances. However, the table purchase did not lead to a substantial change in subscription income. Subscriptions and donations were also critical, comprising the most significant portion of the received funds. Donations were particularly substantial when the room opened and when the billiards table was acquired in 1891, underscoring their importance during significant investment periods. Nevertheless, subscriptions provided a steady income stream and, over seven years, generated more total income than donations, including additional revenue from library subscriptions. Income from newspaper sales was minimal, accounting for only 2% of total income, indicating its limited financial importance by the 1890s despite its continued popularity. Other funding sources were similarly limited.

For many reading rooms, subscriptions formed the cornerstone of their funding, providing a consistent source of revenue. Subscription prices varied considerably; for

[127] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading Room, Membership Books and Minute Books, 1888-1909.*

instance, a commercially operated reading room in Edinburgh, established in 1832, charged £1 5s annually.[128] Similarly, the Tontine Exchange Reading Room in Glasgow, founded in 1841, also charged £1 5s for a yearly subscription.[129] By 1855, the subscription fee for this Glasgow reading room had increased to £1 7s 6d.[130] Later in the period, an exchange reading room in Leith, Edinburgh, established in 1889 and open exclusively to merchants and bankers, charged £2 2s for town members and £1 5s for country members.[131] These fees would be beyond the means of many working-class individuals. The higher subscription fees for these rooms might have conferred a sense of exclusivity, appealing to wealthier members or signalling affluence, akin to modern-day golf clubs. It is worth noting that such rooms likely thrived primarily in larger cities, where enough affluent patrons could sustain them.

The average working men's reading room offered much more affordable access than exclusive establishments. For instance, in the small town of Brampton near Carlisle, a reading room established in the 1850s charged:

> The payment of *One Penny* per week shall be paid by each Member, and that the income derived from subscriptions, donation, fines, &c. shall be expended in the purchase of books, newspapers, and periodicals[132]

Similarly, the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room in 1878 charged one shilling per quarter, with half price for those under 18.[133] In Jedburgh Reading-Room in 1888, different membership tiers were offered, including a standard annual membership at 4s 6d and a reduced rate for apprentices at 3s. They also provided subscriptions for the winter months at 2s 6d or 1s 6d for apprentices, making access even more affordable.[134] Considering that newsagents in the 1850s would hire out newspapers for around a penny an hour, being able to access many newspapers throughout the week

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[128] 'Café Royal' in *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, April 23, 1832, p.1.
[129] 'A Receipt for James McEwan's Subscription to the Tontine Reading Room, 1841' in *The Glasgow Story,* SP.2002.5.3 <www.theglasgowstory.com> [accessed April 15, 2022].
[130] 'Tontine Exchange Reading Room' in *Glasgow Courier*, November 10, 1855, p.3.
[131] 'Leith Exchange Reading Room' in *Leith Burghs Pilot*, November 30, 1889, p.1.
[132] NLS: 5.5223/7, *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society, Brampton* (1878), p.3.
[133] Rules of the *Aldbrough Library and Reading Room*, *with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington: 1880), p.4.
[134] 'Jedburgh Public Reading-Room' in *Jedburgh Gazette*, December 1, 1888, p.1.

at convenient times for just a penny opened up newspaper access to the working class outside of public houses.[135] During the same period, the Ardrossan Reading Room charged 20s annually for Residents and 10s for non-residents, which, for residents, is more than four and a half pennies a week.[136] That allowed you access to both the library and the reading room. When a competing reading room was opened in Ardrossan, which charged just 10s for residents and 5s for non-residents, the original reading room separated its pricing to allow for reading room subscription only.[137]

In 1902, when Andrew Carnegie provided funds to purchase a reading room in Stratford-on-Avon, it was observed that the penny rate would be insufficient to support the building. Consequently, the Mayor was tasked with making a public appeal for an equipment and maintenance fund to ensure the reading room's sustainability - 'the Mayor [was] to make a public appeal for an equipment and maintenance fund, as the penny rate will be wholly inadequate to support the building.' This example stresses the necessity of supplementary funding sources to maintain what had effectively become a community space.[138] Throughout the period, low subscription costs were vital in working men's reading rooms achieving their objective - granting working men access to literature and news. However, sustaining a reading room solely on a penny or two per member per week subscription was not feasible. Affordable reading rooms often required significant subsidies, particularly if they wished to procure books with the intent of beginning a library.[139] A statistical example of the unsustainability of subscription is again demonstrated within Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room. The table below shows how the average expenditure would be over four times as much as the subscription income.[140] It should be noted that it is a reading and recreation

[135] *The Times* was lent out at one penny per hour by a book seller in Jedburgh who would also sell all newspapers at published prices and second day newspapers at half price. 'The Times at Half Price' in *Kelso Chronicle*, October 6, 1854, p.1.
[136] 'Ardrossan Reading-room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, May 12, 1855, p.1.
[137] 'Ardrossan Public Reading Room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, November 12, 1859, p.2, and 'The Ardrossan Library and Reading Room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, June 19, 1891, p.8.
[138] 'Mr. Carnegie's Offer to Stratford-On-Avon' in *Nottingham Evening Post*, Friday 18, April 1902.
[139] *Carlisle Journal*, November 1, 1859, p.3, and 'The Members of the Brampton Working Men's Reading Room' in *Carlisle Journal*, May 12,1865, p.5, and 'Local Intelligence' in *Cumberland and Westmorland Advertiser*, Local Intelligence, August 20, 1867, p.2.
[140] It should be noted that around 10% of the expenditure was spent on maintaining the games which would contribute to its own income and therefor, in theory, would not be required to be funded by subscription.

room, and a large amount of the expenditure would be spent on maintaining the recreation equipment. As will be discussed, despite the high costs, recreation was self-sustaining and brought in additional income that could subsidise the reading facilities.

Year	Ordinary Member Subscription	Library Subscription	Expenditure
1889	£34 2s 6d	£4 19s 6d	£126 17s 2d
1890	£27 19s 3d	£7 13s 6d	£82 13s 1d
1891	£31 5s 3d	£9 4s 6d	£152 16s 9d
1892	£28 13s 6d	£8 7s 6d	£110 18s 9d
1893	£30 10s 3d	£11 19s 0d	£102 6s 11d
1894	£28 7s 3d	£10 1s 6d	£148 12s 3d
1895	£30 9s 0d	£11 11s 6d	£136 7s 8d
1896	£27 9s 6d	£14 7s 6d	£128 13s 9d

Figure 1.6 Dunblane Reading and Recreation Room Expenditure Vs Members Subscription Income.[141]

Earlston Reading Room, established in 1852, implemented a first and second class membership system. The first class membership cost 5s a year, 3s per half year, 2s per quarter, or 1s per month, while the second class membership was priced at 2s 4d per year, 1s 2d for a half year (limited to starting on the 1st of January or the 1st of July), or 1s per quarter. First class members enjoyed unrestricted access to the library 'every lawful day, holidays excepted, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. for the issue and return of books,' whereas second class members were limited to accessing the library 'every Thursday evening from 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m.'[142] Although this system may appear elitist, it provided an opportunity for individuals unable to afford the standard 5s subscription to gain full access to the reading and recreation rooms with restricted library access for less than a penny a week. This effectively allowed wealthier members of the community

[141] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[142] NLS: 5.1926, *Catalogue & Rules of the Earlston Library and Reading Room, Instituted 1852* (1909), p.3.

to subsidise access to literature without patronising the members, and, as they were receiving a benefit from it, the tier lessened their right to influence over the room.

Like many reading rooms, Earlston supplemented its income by allowing visitors to access its facilities, typically charging one penny per visit.[143] An 1844 'Coffee-Room' in Perth, which had a reading room that would charge a subscription 2s 6d quarterly, permitted entry to its reading room for one penny or upon the purchase of 'a Cup of Coffee, a Glass of Lemonade or Ginger Beer.'[144] Most reading rooms also offered long-term visitor options, providing weekly or monthly tickets. While income from visitors would have been appreciated, it was not substantial.[145] As Figure 1.5 shows, revenue from visitor tickets accounted for only 0.8% of the Dunblane Reading and Recreation Room's overall income between 1889 and 1896. Temporary residents were charged 2d per visit or 9d per month.[146] The cost of visiting at the Dunblane room was a point of debate for the committee in 1891 - 'the chairman then read a request which had been exhibited for a month in the premises to the effect that rule 13 regarding the admission of Visitors be reduced from to 2d to 1d'.[147] The minutes do not state whether or not this was implemented. Still, visitor income doubled in 1893, possibly due to the suggested price change being implemented and attracting more visitors.[148] The existence and use of visitor tickets underscore the significant role reading rooms play in people's lives. Even while travelling, individuals were willing to pay and take the time to enter reading rooms to stay updated with newspapers and periodicals.

In cities like Dundee during the 1850s, subscription charges for reading rooms varied widely, ranging from 12s 6d to 25s annually. These different rates were often advertised successively in newspapers, reflecting the diversity of available reading

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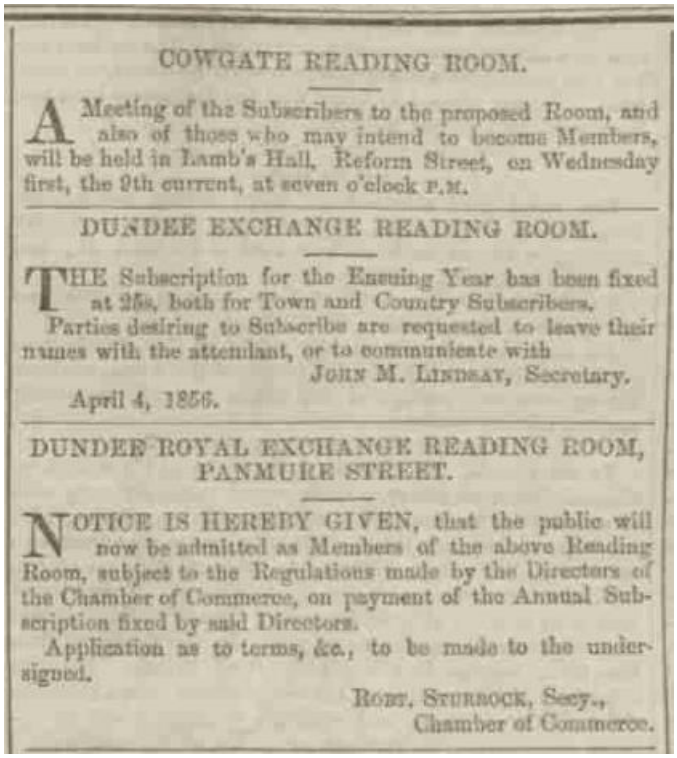
[143] Ibid, p.3, Also a Penny at Berwick, 'Institute Reading Room: (The only Public Reading Room in Berwick.)' in *The Berwick Advertiser*, Friday 2 February 1917, p.2.
[144] 'Coffee-Room: 4 George Street, Perth' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, May 16, 1844, p.1.
[145] Early example: 'Gentlemen Visitors will be supplied with Admission Tickets to the News-Room by the Secretary, or A. Guthrie, Bookseller, at the rate of 2s. 6d. per Month', 'Ardrossan Reading Room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, May 12, 1855. Later example: 'Reading Room, Billiard Rooms, Card Room, Domino Room, Daily Ticket 1d. Monthly Ticket 6d.', 'Peoples' Club and Institute' in Kirkcaldy, *Fifeshire Advertiser*, September 11, 1909, p.6.
[146] AKBL: MS20/2, *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[147] Ibid, '17th Feb 1891'.
[148] Ibid, 'Statement for Transactions of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association for Year Ending 31st January, 1893.'

rooms, as seen in the figure below.[149] The presence of numerous reading rooms in cities allowed for higher-tier establishments, leading to significant differences in pricing. Additionally, during the mid-century, reading rooms sometimes offered discounted rates for specific groups like 'Farmers' or 'non-residents,' with prices differing by as much as a third. For example, one advertisement stated:

> The premises occupied by the DUNDEE READING ROOM and LITERARY INSTITUTE having been greatly improved, are now Re-opened. Annual subscription, 15s; Farmers, 5s.[150]

This pricing structure suggests that even rural workers could periodically access news and reading materials when they came into town for market. This may also explain why collections of papers and periodicals would be left out long beyond their renewal to allow infrequent visitors access to older literature. The reduced rate reflects their less frequent attendance at the room and the room committee's intention to attract their patronage.

[149] 'The Subscription Book of the Dundee Reading Room and Literary Institute' in *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser*, December 10, 1852, p.2, and 'Cowgate Reading Room', 'Dundee Exchange Reading Room', and 'Dundee Royal Exchange Reading Room' in *Dundee, Perth*, and *Cuper Advertiser*, April 8, 1856, p.1.
[150] *Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser*, June 9, 1854, p.1.



COWGATE READING ROOM.

A Meeting of the Subscribers to the proposed Room, and also of those who may intend to become Members, will be held in Lamb's Hall, Reform Street, on Wednesday first, the 9th current, at seven o'clock P.M.

DUNDEE EXCHANGE READING ROOM.

THE Subscription for the Ensuing Year has been fixed at 25s, both for Town and Country Subscribers.

Parties desiring to Subscribe are requested to leave their names with the attendant, or to communicate with

JOHN M. LINDSAY, Secretary.

April 4, 1856.

DUNDEE ROYAL EXCHANGE READING ROOM, PANMURE STREET.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the public will now be admitted as Members of the above Reading Room, subject to the Regulations made by the Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, on payment of the Annual Subscription fixed by said Directors.

Application as to terms, &c., to be made to the undersigned.

ROBT. STURROCK, Secy.,
Chamber of Commerce.

Figure 1.7: Advertisements in the *Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser*, April 8, 1856.[151]

Examining the finances of a reading room allows for the understanding of how working men could access reading materials and their dedication to doing so. If a mill worker in the 1850s earned a typical wage of fifteen shillings a week, they could afford a 1d visit with twenty minutes of work, a 1s three-month subscription with four hours of work, or roughly the cost of four papers. An annual second-class subscription in Earlston in 1852 could cost this same mill worker nine hours of work or three-quarters of a day.[152] Of course, this varies depending on wage and subscription costs, particularly within urban areas, as seen from the example of the city of Dundee above. The Earlston example of the average mill worker being able to access a collection of dailies, weeklies, and periodicals, both local and national, as well as a small library (as will be discussed in Chapter 2), for less than a day's work or the equivalent of eight papers, elucidates how these rooms could democratise literature, news and information for the masses. However, it also re-emphasises the reliance on outside support and funding to keep these prices affordable for the workers.

[151] *Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser*, June 9, 1854, p.1.
[152] Hobbs, *A Fleet Street*, p.69.

Newspaper Sales.

The sale of newspapers, particularly in the earlier period, was an essential and universal form of fundraising. These sales, occurring annually or quarterly, would most commonly take place as auctions. However, pre-set prices were not uncommon and would be advertised in the local paper or displayed within the reading room.[153] The newspapers could either be sold as a collection at the end of a year, half year or quarterly or sold in advance to be received by the successful bidder throughout the ensuing year once their usefulness within the reading room was exhausted. This allowed reading rooms to know which newspapers could recuperate part of their cost and helped prevent them from falling into debt by obtaining funding upfront. Magazines, on the other hand, would be sold in lots, as in the Dunblane reading room, 'As the "Fils Bils, & Peoples Friends papers were readily accumulating, it was agreed to sell them in lots.'[154]

The act of purchasing second-hand newspapers indicates a desire to own them despite their being out of date. Individuals often bought them in quarterly or yearly collections rather than individually, suggesting an intent to keep and perhaps even cherish them. While it is unclear whether these newspapers were read and disposed of or retained, this practice allowed readers to assemble novels, prose series and scrapbooks with favourite articles and poems. It also facilitated the referencing of articles written years prior by correspondents. Thus, reading rooms provided working-class individuals access to newspapers and allowed them to own and collect literature. This collective sale sheds new light on how Victorians accessed and accumulated reading materials.

It is also essential to consider that it was not only the members of the reading rooms that had the opportunity to collect these. At the Stirling Reading-Room, the sale was not limited to association members, 'The Public in general, whether Subscribers to the Room or not, are invited to attend.'[155] This may have favoured ownership by a middling class who would not necessarily subscribe to the 'working men's' reading

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[153] 'For Sale' in *Alloa Advertiser*, April 11, 1857, p.1.
[154] AKBL: MS20/2, '1st April 1892', *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[155] 'Sale of Newspapers' in *Stirling Observer*, December 20, 1849, p.1.

room, could not necessarily afford to buy the papers new, but could afford to purchase collections second-hand. Despite this, these resales still made access to literature more accessible for the working classes. It also appears some reading rooms sought to protect their member's right to ownership; Brampton Reading Room allowed for outside purchasers but insisted 'The Members, on all occasions, having the first offer of purchase.'[156]

SALE OF NEWSPAPERS.

THE following PAPERS received into the Ardrossan Reading Room, will be Sold in the Room, on the evening of MONDAY First, at 8 o'Clock, viz. :—

The Times.	The Glasgow Herald.
The Shipping Gazette.	The Daily Mail.
The Illustrated News.	The Ayr Observer.
Punch,	Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald.
The North British Advertiser.	The Ayrshire Weekly News.
Scotsman.	

This being the beginning of the Year, intending Subscribers should come forward at once.

COMMITTEE.

Provost Barr,	W. Mutter, Esq.,
Captain M. Crawford,	Mr Archibald Currie,
Captain P. M'Fee,	Mr Arthur Guthrie.

HUGH WILLOCK, Secy. & Treasurer.

Reading Room,
Town's Buildings, 20th Nov. 1860.

Figure 1.8: Sale of Newspapers at Ardrossan Reading Room, 1860[157]

Ardrossan, by 1860, boasted a wide range of newspapers for resale, as shown in Figure 1.8, with varying fortunes at auction. In this example, the room auctions off the subscription to a preset selection of newspapers. It experienced success in 1855, with the sale of papers realising a significant increase compared to the previous year:

> READING ROOM. - The members of the Ardrossan Reading Room met on Monday evening, when a state of the funds was read, and a list of papers agreed

[156] *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society, Low Cross Street Brampton. Established March 27th, 1858* (Brampton: M. Hogson, 1878), p.5.
[157] 'Sale of Newspapers' in *Ardrossan and Saltcots Herald*, November 24, 1860, p.1.

> to. The sale of the papers this year was very successful, realising fully 20s more than last year.[158]

The room had less success in 1857. This decline prompted a recall of a prediction that the resale of newspapers would become effectively valueless once the Stamp Act had been abolished:

> SALE OF NEWSPAPERS. - On Monday evening last, a sale took place of the newspapers and periodicals received into the Ardrossan Reading Room. The prices this year were generally speaking, so small that they are scarcely worth quoting; verifying the words of Mr Cobden, when urging for the abolition of the Stamp Act on Newspapers, "that in a short time the cheap press would render a second day's copy of the 'Times' valueless.[159]

However, the demise of newspaper resale was not as swift as predicted. Before the abolition of the Stamp Act on newspapers, the Appleby Mechanics' Institute in 1854 sold their annual newspapers at relatively high prices:

> APPLEBY MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.-The Annual Sale of the Newspapers taken in by this Society took place on Thursday night week, when the following prices were realized :-The Times, 42s.; Express, 20s.; Illustrated News, 15s.; The Press, 11s.; Punch, 7s.; Liverpool Albion, 11s.; and the Carlisle Patriot, 7s.[160]

These prices represent 27.5% of the cost to purchase new, less than Dunblane's 33% in the 1890s and substantially lower than Kilmarnock's 39.8% in 1909.[161] Even though the annual expenditure on newspapers before the 1855 Stamp Repeal Act was considerably more and the resale total was higher, the actual second-hand value, and therefore the reading rooms returns, increased over time.[162] This evolution illuminates

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[158] 'Reading Room' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, November 30, 1861, p.3.
[159] 'Sale of Newspapers' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, May 30, 1857, p.2.
[160] 'Appleby Mechanics' Institute' in *Kendal Mercury*, January 7, 1854, p.8.
[161] A total of £63.93 was spent on newspapers and magazines in these years and £21.14 was profited off of their sale. AKBL: MS20/2/3, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, Annual Reports*, and *Kendal Mercury*, Saturday 7 January 1854, and NLS: ACC12089/1, *Kilmarnock Liberal Association Reading Room Minutes* (1909).
[162] Miles Taylor, 'Cobden Richard (1804-1865), manufacturer and politician' in Oxford *Dictionary of National Biography*, May 21, 2009, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/5741.

the changing landscape of newspaper sales within reading rooms and reflects broader shifts in the newspaper industry and consumer behaviour during the Victorian era.

Donations.

Donations played a crucial role in funding standard provincial reading rooms, yet as discussed above, their receipt was not without its controversies. Alongside charity came a sense of obligation, often entailing various forms of influence from the donor. This influence may have manifested in the form of committee membership granted to the donor, thereby giving them a degree of power within the organisation. Alternatively, donors might stipulate that the room adheres to specific moral or religious standards to align with their preferences. In some cases, direct influence was exerted through donations of books or periodicals, allowing donors to shape the literary content available within the reading room, as illustrated in the next chapter.

Returning to the example of Carlisle, Morley argued in 1851 that self-reliance was crucial for maintaining the ideals of reading rooms, which to him was the 'improvement of the humbler class'. Despite this belief, he cautioned against rejecting support from the middle and upper class, noting that such isolationism would undermine the reading rooms' viability. He also cautioned, however, that such donation should not be allowed to come with conditions or imposed patronage, asserting that working men must maintain their independence:

> Aid from others would be wanted generally, small subscriptions of the books and money would be gratefully received. Such aid however must be given or received at the price of no imposed patronage, of no condition; no abandonment of independence on the part of working men must be asked or offered.[163]

This sentiment was echoed in the rules and regulations of early reading rooms like Brampton, which stipulated that donations must be given freely, without any conditions attached:

[163] Morely, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', pp.581-85.

> any donation, whether it be money, books, or otherwise, will not be received by this Institution unless given for its sole use as a free gift, untrammeled by any conditions whatever.[164]

This rule illustrates the commitment of reading rooms to safeguarding their integrity and members from the influence of paternalistic forces. The rules themselves suggest a perceived threat: that donations would be given with conditions and intent to influence.

The Dunblane Reading and Amusement Rooms offers an insight into donation culture in the late nineteenth century, assisted by the knowledge of the room's membership, committee and general accounts. They allowed individuals to become honorary members by subscribing 10s per year or donating books or periodicals of equivalent value, granting no additional privileges. Between 1890 and 1896, donations in the form of honorary memberships accounted for 15.9% of the overall income. Notably, substantial donations from various individuals, including £25 worth of books from Mrs. Wallace, £5 worth of books from Mr. Wallace, and £12 10s worth of books from Colonel Stirling, augmented this figure. Additionally, Mrs. Wallace contributed £4 specifically for magazines (*Blackwoods Magazine* was selected).[165] When these individual donations are considered, they totalled £182 14s 9d, constituting 21.3% of the overall income. These calculations also do not consider the initial donations for opening the room, which, along with the first year's honorary subscriptions, totalled £63 17s, bringing the total percentage of income between 1889 and 1896 to 24.4%. Put simply, donations made up a quarter of the room's income and were essential in both opening and maintaining the reading room.[166]

The list of 'Honorary members' and what they donated to gain the title allows for a closer look into the demographic of those donating to the room. Montgomery Paterson was the most 'generous' honorary member, a 72-year-old retired Chemical Merchant who donated £3 to the room in 1891. The second most significant contributor was Edmund Pullar, the son of the founder of Pullars of Perth, a large dye company

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[164] NLS: 5.5223(7), *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society, Brampton* (1878), p.4.
[165] AKBL: MS20/2, '3 April 1889', *Dunblane Reading Room, Membership Books and Minute Books, 1888-1909*.
[166] AKBL: MS20/2/3, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, Annual Reports*

from Perth that first pioneered synthetic dyes at £2 2s.[167] He also ran the Keirfield manufacturing works in the neighbouring town of Bridge of Allan, which had its own reading room.[168] Edmund Pullar's wife, Anne Pullar, was the president of the Stirling branch of the Women's Suffrage Movement.[169] This relation to the suffrage movement may help explain the encouraged presence of female members within the room.

Another notable honorary member was Alexander Wilson, a 57-year-old worsted spinner who donated £1 to the room. It is unclear how a spinner could be so affluent, but he had a wife and three adult daughters, none of whom worked and a live-in cook and a maid. Rev. Dr. William Blair, who donated 10 shillings, was the minister of the United Presbyterian Church. His daughter, Kate Blair, a 16-year-old scholar, was also a member of the room. It is also likely that another one of his unmarried, non-working adult daughters is one of the unidentified women - 'Miss Blair'. The other honorary members included another minister, a procurator called William Alexander and an unidentifiable person with the 'Honourable' title.[170] The fact that not a single one these honorary members were on the committee gives validity to protection provided by the rule that stated only members of the local Y.M.C.A could be a member on the committee.[171] The mix of local businessmen and ministers were typical of donators of these rooms, though the older, wealthier worker is an intriguing outlier which speaks to diversity of each reading room.

The provision of land and materials for building was a crucial aspect of establishing reading rooms, constituting the most significant cost and often posing the largest barrier to their creation. A few years later, in 1889, in Dunblane, where a room was rented for £9 a year, the initial setup cost amounted to only £50.[172] When full accommodation was to be built in Dunblane in 1901, it required a £1,000 donation from Andrew Carnegie, which had to be met by £1,000 donation from the town.[173] The

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[167] 'Death of Edmund Pullar' in *The Scotsman*, May 10, 1926, p.3.
[168] 'Soiree at Bridge of Allan' in *Stirling Observer*, January 19, 1854, p.3.
[169] Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: A Regional Survey* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.239.
[170] AKBL: MS/20/2/1, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Membership Roll 1891*.
[171] AKBL: MS/20/2/4, *Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Rules and Regulations*.
[172] AKBL: MS20/1/2, *Balance of Funds of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association for Year Ending 4th February, 1890*.
[173] 'Notes & Events of the Week' in *Banffshire Journal,* October 30, 1900, p.3.

accommodation cost for a reading room was substantial, and buying a building was far beyond the reach of working men alone. To cement a room's presence within a town, it would have to gain substantial support from the local aristocracy.

In 1886, in Loughborough, plans were made to construct a Reading Room and Free Library. The setup cost was £1183. Though this room embraced the Free Library Act of 1850, they would still rely on donations. The challenges encountered in creating a reading room and free library in Loughborough were highlighted in a speech by Mr Henry Deane, who noted that the town's resources were limited due to legal constraints on raising funds through rates:

> an influential gentleman of the town-Mr Bumpus- asked him (Mr Deane) to take part in establishing a free library, and promised a handsome donation if the movement could be fairly started. . . it was evident it would be useless to ask the town, as a town, to take steps to provide a free library and reading room, in as much as the Act of Parliament provided that only one penny in the pound could be taken out of the rates for that purpose in the year, which would mean in Loughborough at the time only about £160 per annum. . . an appeal made to the ratepayers and inhabitants generally, resulting in a subscription of £1183. . .one employer of labour, Mr Caldwell, offered £50 if his hands would contribute a like amount out of their weekly wages. The *employés* jumped at the offer. . . the example was followed at other large factories, and a sum of nearly £200 was subscribed by working people.[174]

The donation from Mr Caldwell, a local employer with a personal stake in a reading room being available for his employees (as will be discussed in Chapter 4), only provided the funding on the condition that the men matched it. This demonstrates a desire to have the workers buy in to their own education. As this is a free library as well as a reading room the starting capital required was much more substantial than that of a local reading room.

[174] Speech made on January 11, 1886, reprinted in Manners, *Encouraging Experiences,* p.15.

Lady John Manners, the Duchess of Rutland, present at the event, 'congratulated the working men on what they had done, and also on having secured the assistance of all classes'.[175] Manners, whose series of articles in *The Queen* provided guidance on establishing reading rooms, emphasised the necessity of garnering donations and assistance from individuals across the social spectrum, from workers to the aristocracy, including even the Queen herself. It was not just money and books that Manners believed the middle and upper classes could contribute, but also artistic pieces:

> The idea crossed my mind that reading and recreation rooms might be made more attractive if rich supporters would send any really artistic engravings, prints, or pottery. Flowers are also precious in the eyes of the working people.

She hoped this would make the rooms more akin to 'the pleasantest room in a rich man's house' and suggested their interest in art would derive from 'the delight working people take in illustrated papers.'[176] This appears to be a call for donors to provide working men with more highbrow visual works and art in an attempt to edify the members.

Understanding the donors and their contributions sheds light on how moral reform and notions of rational recreation were imposed on the working class through reading rooms. The donations provided a means for donors to exert influence over the content and operations of these institutions, shaping them according to their own moral and ideological standards. Despite the potential for control and manipulation, many working men's rooms accepted this dynamic as a necessary evil. The fear of losing financial support often outweighed concerns over potential influence, leading to a degree of acquiescence to the desires of donors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some rooms were wary of the potential dangers of donor influence and took measures to protect their autonomy. Rules and regulations were implemented to ensure that donations were received without conditions, preserving the institution's and its members' independence. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending

[175] Ibid, p.17
[176] Ibid, p.20.

the broader context of moral reform efforts and the experiences of the working class within these rooms.

Bazaars and Concerts.

Bazaars emerged as a prevalent fundraising tool, particularly when attempting to gain funding to construct reading rooms. Meanwhile, concerts served as vital revenue sources for ongoing operational needs. Although lectures occasionally supplemented funds, they were more commonly integrated into members' subscriptions. Typically spanning three days, bazaars were staged intermittently, with venues like the Dunkeld and Birnam Recreation Ground and Birnam Institute opting for Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.[177] These events were not exclusive to reading rooms and constituted popular elements of Victorian social life. Bazaars boasted elaborate decorations, sometimes facilitated by specialised companies.[178] An exceptional example was the Scandinavian Seamen's Church and Reading Room in North Shields, which transformed its premises into a representation of Norwegian scenery. Real imported pine trees transformed the hall into a forest, while a wall decorated with a painting depicted a Norwegian mountain view. Pine stalls hung with flags, bannerettes and shields added to the immersive experience. The attractions included performances by the Wellesley Training Ship band and various vocalists, contributing to the festive ambience.[179]

Bazaars were multifaceted events, generating income through various channels. Attendees paid entry fees, purchased refreshments and goods, and participated in raffles, games and competitions. Competitions ranged from hat design contests to washing competitions and rifle ranges, adding a practical engagement for the attendees.[180] Bazaars were also an opportunity for people to see the latest technology such as phonographs, gramophones and Rontgen rays (X-rays).[181] Manners vividly

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[177] 'Dunkeld and Birnam' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 26, 1891, p.12.
[178] 'Carnegie and Company' in *Newcastle Journal*, September 15, 1884, p.1, and The Yorkshire Decorating Company, 'Ball-Rooms Decorated' in *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, May 16, 1885, p.1, and Stone & co., 'Temporary Ball Rooms, Dancing and Wedding Breakfast Marquees on Hire' in *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, February 5, 1891, p.1.
[179] 'Norwegian Bazaar in North Shields' in *The Shields Daily News*, May 17, 1888, p.3.
[180] 'Felton Reading Room Bazaar' in *Alnwick Mercury*, October 11, 1884, p.1, and 'Seaton Reading Room Bazaar' in *West Cumberland Times*, June 21, 1899, p.2.
[181] 'Dunblane Library and Reading Room Association' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 24, 1898, p.7.

described the offerings at the Dunblane Bazaar, showcasing a wide array of crafted items across different stalls:

> Stall 1 (daffodils) showed lovely needlework, and tea cosies being especially artistic. A breakfast tray covered with white linen embroidered in gold, a satsuma tea set, a bride doll, and a "sweet lavender" sachet were amongst the most attractive articles. Stall 2 (roses) was also heaped with beautiful and tempting contributions, including many specimens of poker work, painting, and marqueterie, bronze ornaments, bicycles, and delicate embroideries on satin and linen. The flower and fruit stall was arranged with high banks of ferns and pot plants, baskets tied with ribbons in Parisian style hung from the framework of the stall, and were filled with roses, clematis, &c. There were also grapes, peaches, and tomatoes, all in profusion, and at one end of the stall was a selection of perfumery, sachets, & c. The game stall was well filled. There were concerts and other entertainments given, and a palmist was much patronised.[182]

These diverse revenue streams will not have only contributed to the funding but also recreation, culture and the sense of community. Manners was keen to point out that the items donated were contributed from all classes, reflecting a collective effort at raising funds:

> They had first of all to thank the Dowager Duchess of Athole, who had during the whole time supplied fruit and flowers to the stall, and they had then to thank the present Duchess of Athole, Lady Isabel Gordon, and innumerable other ladies for valuable gifts. From the inhabitants of Dunkeld and Birnam a continuous stream of presents appeared to be flowing; and what touched her very much was that presents were brought by some as to whom she really felt that it must have been a great effort to have spared the time necessary to work the beautiful articles they gave. Presents were also brought by many working men- a nice kitchen dresser, a wheel barrow, and a capital pair of boots, which she didn't

[182] 'Bazaars and Sales' in *The Queen*, August 27, 1898, p.45.

> buy because they were too small for her-(laughter)-as well as all sorts of nice things.[183]

This supply of items and presumedly the expenditure at these events made this form of fundraising an interclass contribution. By the nature of this donation coming through sellable items and expenditure on said items, these donations could not be used to directly exert influence at the point of transaction. Substantial amounts of money were raised at these events. This was heavily dependent on the size of the town or village. The village of Seaton in 1899 raised £136, around £17,000 in today's money.[184] The town of Dunblane raised £550 (£70,000 today's money) in 1898, and the burgh of Kilmarnock raised £950 (£120,000 today's money) for its Liberal Club to build a reading room.[185]

Bazaars were not just fundraising events but also opportunities for community engagement and social interaction. Attended by local gentry, bazaars often featured prominent figures opening the event and actively participating in fundraising efforts. For instance, the Dunblane Bazaar in 1898 was inaugurated by the Earl and Countess of Moray, alongside other local landowners and honorary members of the reading room.[186] Despite the upper class's presence, the ladies or duchesses often organised and led these events, with women managing the sales stalls and men overseeing game stalls.[187] In some instances, women's societies and members of working-class women played pivotal roles in bazaars. In 1914, just before the declaration of war, the Ovingham Reading Room held a Sale of Works, hoping to extend their current reading room. The stallholders were again exclusively women and many members of Women's societies.[188] Though these events were only made possible by the contributions of the women, many reading rooms were still seen as a place for men. Rev T. Hodges

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[183] 'Lord John and Lady Manners on Workmen's Clubs' in *John Bull*, September 8, 1883, p.5.
[184] 'Seaton Reading Room Bazaar' in *West Cumberland Times*, June 21, 1899, p.2.
[185] 'The Liberal Club Bazaar' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, December 22, 1893, p.8. Kilmarnock population of 18,000 in the 1845, 'Kilmarnock County of Ayrshire', *The New Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1791-1845*, 5, (1845) p.543, <https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk> [accessed November 29, 2019], and, 'Dunblane Reading-Room Bazaar' in *Dundee Advertiser*, August 22, 1898, p.6, and Inflation Calculator', *Bank of England*, n.d. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> [accessed July 18, 2022].
[186] 'Dunblane Library and Reading Room Association, Grand Bazaar' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, August 24, 1898, p.7.
[187] 'Colinsburgh Bazaar' in *The Scotsman,* August 16, 1882, p.5.
[188] 'Ovingham Reading Room' in *Newcastle Journal*, Local Bazaars, July 2, 1914, p.3.

discussed the importance of women in Seaton Reading Room Bazaar in 1899, suggesting that their involvement demonstrated their 'interest' in improving the intellect of local men:

> They had shown that they were determined that the men of Seaton should not be behind other men in having means of furnishing the mind (applause) . . . he thought the good on the stalls were a manifestation of the interest that the ladies took in the matter (applause).[189]

Though this is late into the period, and other reading rooms would have women in attendance, the above quote suggests that they were still male-dominated institutions. This minister perceives the women's most significant connection to the rooms as fundraising. This demonstrates how, even if not necessarily in attendance in the rooms, women still had an important role in the history of the reading room movement.

Women also played a vital role in organising other reading room related events such as concerts. Manners attributed the ongoing success of the Birnam Reading Room to the dedicated efforts of Mrs Dickie in organising yearly concerts. These concerts served multiple purposes, from supporting low funds to financing specific projects.[190] For instance, in 1911, Lady Violet F Drummond proposed hosting a concert to raise funds for purchasing a piano for the Dunning Mutual Improvement Society.[191] Moreover, concerts provided much-needed entertainment in the quiet towns and villages, especially during the darker winter months, as discussed in Chapter 3. They often faced challenges, such as inclement weather, leading to postponements.[192] Despite such setbacks, concerts remained integral to the community, often held during bazaars and after opening ceremonies. In these instances, they contributed to the celebratory and community atmosphere rather than solely focusing on fundraising.[193]

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[189] 'Seaton Reading Room Bazaar; in *Workington Star*, June 16, 1899, p.8.
[190] 'Lord John and Lady Manners on Workmen's Clubs' in *John Bull*, September 8, 1883, p.5.
[191] Letter from Violet F Drummond, Pitcairns to Dr Thomson suggesting a concert to raise funds for a new piano for the hall. AKBL: MS19/3 'November 30, 1911', *Dunning Mutual Improvement Society*.
[192] 'Ravenstonedale Reading Room: Public Concert, Tea and Ball' in *Penrith Observer*, February 28, 1888, p.5.
[193] 'Friockheim's New Reading Room: Opened by Captain Sinclair' in *Forfar Herald*, November 10,1899, p.3.

Concerts held to support the rooms often featured tiered ticket pricing, with better seats commanding higher prices. For example, the Anstruther Library and Reading Room charged 'Front Gallery (numbered and reserved) and First Seats, 2s; Second Seats, 1s; Back Gallery, 6d.'[194] Like the subscription, this tiered system allowed for more affluent members of the town to pay more while the less affluent members could still afford to attend, meaning the entertainment was not exclusive to those who could afford 2s. In Dunblane, two concerts were held in 1895—one at the town hall, Victoria Hall, which raised £18 6s 2s, and another at the local hotel, the Hydropathic, which raised £19 2s. Given that the association began the year with a credit balance of £2 17s 10d and ended with £28 15s 8d, it is clear that these concerts played a crucial role in maintaining financial stability. Without them, the association would have faced the prospect of going into debt. As evident from Figure 1.9, the association's funds were meager at the end of 1894, particularly after the expenditure of purchasing a second billiards table. Recognising this financial strain, the concerts were strategically organised to bolster the depleted funds.[195] This emphasises the importance of these concerts as continual fundraisers, required to keep the rooms open in time of financial difficulty or expansion.

[194] 'To-night' in *East of Fife Record*, March 10, 1893, p.1.
[195] They did spend £24 4s 8d on new books for the library in 1895. AKBL: MS20/1/2, *Balance of Funds of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 31st January 1895*.

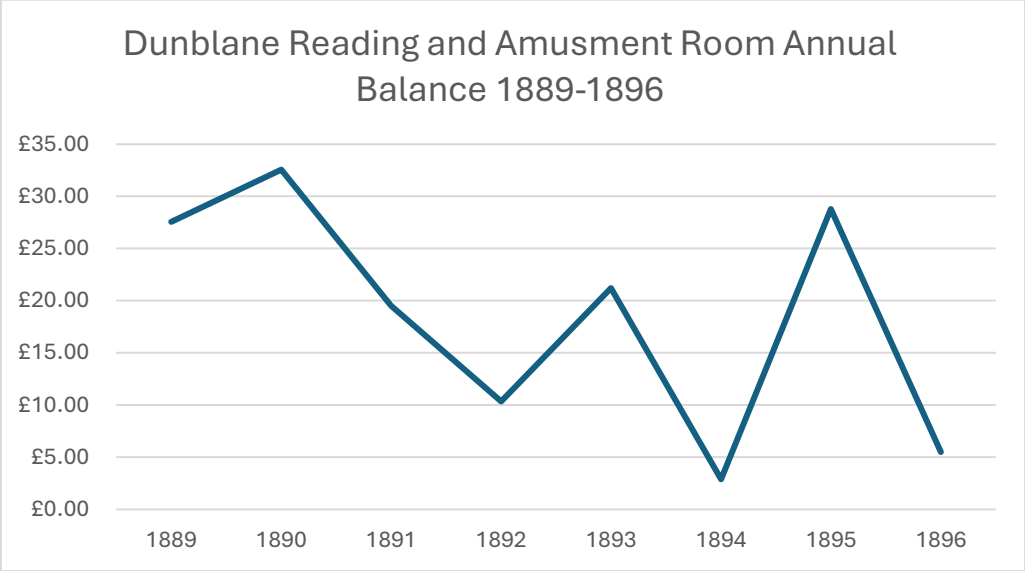

Figure 1.9: Dunblane Reading and Amusement Room Annual Balance 1889-1896.[196]

Indeed, these events served as more than just fundraising endeavours; they provided entertainment and fostered a sense of community among both the members of the reading room and those who supported it. Additionally, they offered women an opportunity to be involved with the rooms, albeit not necessarily for educational purposes but rather to be part of the community surrounding the rooms. Evidently, these events also served as a means for the middle and upper classes to encourage working-class members to contribute to their own funding, thus reinforcing a sense of collective responsibility and investment in the reading room's sustainability.

Billiards.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Billiards emerged as a significant aspect of reading room culture toward the end of the century. Its presence also sparked controversy within these establishments. This upcoming section aims to explore the role of billiards within the funding framework of reading rooms, highlighting its evolution into a crucial element for their survival by the turn of the century. Billiard tables imposed substantial overhead costs. For instance, the billiards table acquired for the Dunblane Reading Room in 1890 amounted to £52, which included fitting and lighting, while the Billiards

[196] AKBL: MS20/2/2, *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.

Ball Set cost £2 15d.[197] Beyond the initial investment, the cannon and bagatelle tables also required significant maintenance, such as recovering.[198] The Dunblane Reading Room incurred a cost of 7s 6d for the cannon table's recovery, which sometimes occurred twice within a year.[199] To offset some of these expenses, a penalty system was implemented as stated in the minutes in 1889, 'parties playing Billiards on Cannon table - a Notice to be put up that any damage done to cloth a fine not exceeding 5/- will be imposed.'[200]

The return on the tables proved to be substantial. Before introducing the billiards table, the cannon table generated £17 3s 7d in revenue, while the Bagatelle table took in £8 17s 4d. When introduced, the billiards was initially priced at 4d per game. The decision on pricing was contentious:

> The price of the game of Billiards on the new table to be 4d for two players or 2d each for any number of players. This was only settled by a majority of one. Five members noted that 4d should be the charge for 2 players & other 5 votes for 3d being charged. The chairman gave his casting vote in favour of the charge of 4d.[201]

Despite the initial apprehension, billiards proved to be a success, bringing in £39 14s 8d in the following year, with only a marginal reduction in revenue from the Cannon table (£10 16s 8d) and the Bagatelle table (£4 0s 4d). This meant the games tables, excluding the draughts tables, which could be accessed for free, generated approximately 32% of the room's revenue, making it the single greatest income source.[202] Despite the initial high cost, the maintenance of the Billiards table was relatively low, costing the room

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[197] AKBL: MS20/2/2, *Balance of Funds of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 31st January 1891*.
[198] A Cannon Table is a French Billiards table or Carom Table. This a billiards table without the pockets. Michael Ian Shamos, *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Billiards* (New York: Lyons & Burford, 1993) pp.15-17.
[199] AKBL: MS20/2, '24 April 1889', *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[200] AKBL: MS20/2, '17 April 1889', *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[201] AKBL: MS20/2, 'March 19 1890', *Dunblane Reading Room*, *Membership Books and Minute Books*, *1888-1909*.
[202] AKBL: MS20/2/2, *Balance of Funds of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 31st January 1891*.

only 2s 9d in 1892.[203] In 1894, Dunblane sold the Cannon and Bagatelle tables for £4 and acquired another Billiards table. Between them, £64 1s 6d was generated in 1895.[204]

Similar patterns can be observed at other reading rooms. For instance, the Kilmarnock Liberal Association Reading Room in 1907 received a significant sum of £177 14s 3d from Billiards, compared to the £74 11s 3d it received from membership subscriptions. The income from Billiards alone was sufficient to cover the year's expenditure of £160 10s 1d.[205] The Committee of the Ardrossan Liberal Association Reading Room acknowledged the financial significance of Billiards in sustaining reading rooms despite increasing pressure suggesting they had no place in political associations:

> There are various games, provided, but the billiards tables seem to claim most attention. There are some who claim that recreation & politics don't go together; and it has often enough been said that there is too much billiards playing, and too little attention given to the political affairs – the object for which political clubs or associations exist; that may be true in some cases, but it must be understood that to carry on aggressive work of any kind money is required, and to do this by private subscription is sometimes not a very easy matter, hence the necessity there is to continue with associations such as ours some form of amusement such as billiards, where there has been for the last 14 years a fluctuating revenue, which has enabled us to carry on political work, although not to the extent one would wish[206]

This section from the 1910 annual report acknowledges that billiards and other games were not inherently aligned with the mission of reading rooms and were often viewed as a distraction from the primary goal of education (or, in this case, politics), but the writer recognises the necessity of such activities to generate funds, enabling the reading

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[203] AKBL: MS20/2/2, *Balance of Funds of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 30th[t] January 1892*.

[204] AKBL: MS20/2/2, *Statement of Transactions of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 31st January 1894,* and *Statement of Transactions of the Dunblane Reading and Amusement Association, For the Year Ending 31st January 1895*.

[205] NLS: ACC12089/1, *Kilmarnock Liberal Association Reading Room Minutes*.

[206] NLS: 12089/3, 'Annual Report = 1909-10', *Ardrossan Liberal Association, Minute Book*.

rooms to persist and sustain their 'political work.' The fact that these rooms could not sustain themselves without these recreational activities changed their very nature and impacted the facilities available to members and the atmosphere in which they accessed these facilities.

At the Ardrossan Liberal Reading Room, two years later, they note a dramatic decline in revenue from billiards coinciding with the opening of a local Picture House. The annual report lamented this decline:

> The usual games are provided but we are sorry to state that there is a considerable falling off in the revenue from the billiards tables. Perhaps the reason for this is the advent of the Picture Houses in the districts. We will hope for better times, however.[207]

Ardrossan Liberal Reading Room abandoned activities in 1929. [208] In providing entertainment and the news, the Picture Houses substantially damaged the reading room's funding structures by undermining their relevance as houses of working-class recreation. This may have been indicative of the recreational competition felt by reading rooms nationwide and played a vital part in the decline of newspaper reading rooms in the 1920s.

Conclusion.

Despite the inherent challenges posed by the vast number, variability, and scarcity of resources (beyond newspapers) surrounding village reading rooms in Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century, this chapter has endeavoured to provide a nuanced understanding of their operation and administration. Through selective resourcing and analysis, glimpses into these spaces' power dynamics, management strategies, and financial intricacies have been illuminated. By focusing on individual examples such as the Dunblane Reading and Recreation Room and broader trends observed across various reading rooms, this chapter contributes to a richer comprehension of the social, cultural and economic forces shaping the landscape of

[207] NLS: 12089/3, 'Annual Report = 1912-13', *Ardrossan Liberal Association, Minute Book*.
[208] NLS: 12089/3, Newspaper clipping next to the '7th July 1929 Meeting', and 'Annual Report = 1912-13', *Ardrossan Liberal Association, Minute Book*.

literacy and recreation in local communities. Moreover, by acknowledging the role of billiards and other recreational activities, as well as the eventual transition of reading rooms into public libraries, this exploration lays the groundwork for further inquiry into the enduring legacy of these institutions and their impact on the democratisation of knowledge and leisure pursuits in British society.

While it is crucial for this chapter to enrich the broader discourse on the class dynamics inherent in village reading rooms, it also offers invaluable insights into their daily operations. Complemented by discussions on literature and recreation, it offers a nuanced exploration of attendee demographics, committee dynamics, the ambivalent reception of middle-class aid, as well as glimpses into the experiences of attending bazaars and concerts, and the financial and social aspects of recreational activities, notably billiards. The chapter also sheds light on the influence exerted by the middle class on reading rooms, illustrating their support's widespread and indispensable nature. This becomes pivotal when examining the role of reading rooms as agents of moral reform. Through various sections, it becomes apparent how this support could translate into control, primarily through committees. Even a limited study on committees reveals how local influential figures could assert dominance over these spaces. Measures such as implementing rules and regulations to allow working men to participate in their committees were put into place to mitigate financial middle and upper class invasion.

Exploring the leadership structures of reading room committees sheds light on the mechanisms used to establish control and implement moral reform, rational recreation and educational initiatives. Understanding the composition of these committees, ranging from those dominated by established figures to those more representative of working-class members offers insights into the strategies employed to wield influence and guide the direction of these community institutions. This understanding is crucial for comprehending the intricate frameworks designed to promote moral improvement, provide constructive leisure opportunities, and exert control over education among the working class in nineteenth-century society. Inevitably, all these factors impacted the reader's experience, as will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Reading Rooms and Literature.

Introduction.

The primary function of reading rooms, as their name suggests, was to provide spaces for reading, predominantly through the availability of newspapers, periodicals, and sometimes reference or lending libraries. This chapter delves into the multifaceted nature of reading rooms, examining their provisions and functions through four case studies: Dunblane, a provincial Scottish town in the 1880s; Wylam, an industrial small town in Northumberland in the 1850s; Aldbrough, an agriculturally centred village in Yorkshire in the 1870s; and an overview of the Free Public Library branch system in Manchester, with a detailed examination of one of its free reading rooms at the turn of the century. By analysing these case studies, this chapter aims to elucidate the range of reading materials accessible to the average working-class man in Scotland and North England across the nineteenth century. An essential aspect of this exploration is the comparison between urban and provincial reading rooms, situating the latter within the broader context of working-class literary habits in nineteenth-century Britain. Through these comparative analyses, this chapter addresses how many of the features in Chapter 1, such as committee selections, donations, funding, and influential individuals, had a substantial impact on the reading habits of working men in nineteenth-century Britain.

The Victorian press and the broader reading habits of the era have been extensively studied and established. While reading rooms have received some recognition, reference to them is generally brief and in association with libraries and mechanics' institutes. For example, Wallins in 1975 recognised that reading rooms allowed those who could not afford 'quality' intellectual and literary periodicals access to them, leading to a certain level of literary meritocracy.[209] In 1989, Lyn Pykett highlighted the significance of understanding the cultural, ideological or historical context in which literary works were produced.[210] By examining reading rooms, this

[209] Roger P. Wallins, 'Victorian Periodicals and the Emerging Social Conscience', *Victorian Periodical Newsletter*, 8.2 (1975), pp.47-59 (p.48).
[210] Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context', *Victorian Periodicals Review,* 22.3 (1989), pp.100-108 (p.103).

chapter addresses a more direct context: the environment in which literature was consumed and people's access to it. In 1983, in 'Reading in the Working Class Home', David Vincent argued that the middle class had no control over what working-class men read.[211] While acknowledging the agency that working-class readers had through their own purchasing power, this chapter challenges Vincent's assertion. Given the limited purchasing power of the working class, the middle class's influence over local reading rooms, especially in provincial settings with few literary institutions, granted them significant control over the supply of reading material. They had no control over the actual reading choices made by individuals in these rooms, but they did have power over the selection that choice was made from.

When considering reading as a communal activity, the restricted selection of texts would undoubtedly shape the community's collective identity, particularly in smaller towns with fewer alternative options. In conjunction with the abolishment of newspaper taxes and the general reduction in press costs, reading rooms played a pivotal role in revolutionising the involvement of the working classes in this 'public sphere' as discussed in the introduction. By providing access to local news alongside more prominent national periodicals, reading rooms facilitated the creation of both local and national identities, fostering a sense of unity in knowledge and discussion among the working class. They served as platforms for public discourse, closely resembling Habermas' vision of the creation of the public sphere, initially conceived in the coffee houses of the early eighteenth century – 'it designated especially an early public sphere in the world of letters whose institutions were the coffee houses'.[212] Reading rooms effectively extended the reach of public engagement and the public sphere to the working class a century and a half later.

As discussed in this chapter, it was prevalent for reading rooms to hold the local provincial press. Andrew Hobbs' recent assertion that the provincial press was immensely popular among the 'vast majority of the population' finds support in the case studies examined here. While his argument relies on circulation numbers and

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[211] David Vincent, 'Reading in the Working-class Home', in *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939*, ed. by John Walton & Jame Walvin, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp.207-26 (pp.217-218).
[212] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation,* pp.30-34.

copies sold, Hobbs acknowledges that these metrics may not accurately reflect actual readership. [213] Hobbs' central argument regarding the popularity of the provincial press is partly attributed to the speed of news delivery but primarily to its role in fostering local and regional identities. Considering the communal aspect of reading rooms and the socially engaged act of reading they facilitated, it is plausible that these rooms worked in conjunction with the provincial press to cultivate a stronger sense of community and identity by enhancing reach and engagement. This is further evidenced by the numerous letters to the editor in provincial papers (and referenced throughout this thesis) discussing the provision, management or everyday occurrences of local reading rooms.

Though it is difficult to ascertain precisely what was selected by the members, the experience of a journalist in a reading room in 1876 provides an insight into the choices made in the rooms and the element that social pressure played in that choice. In a humorous article, the journalist ridicules many readers for 'bolt[ing] straight off to the mantel-piece and pretend[ing] to peruse with excited interest the latest telegrams which have been placed there' suggesting a façade of intellectual interest. He jokes that the members 'love to revel o'er [the] paraphrastic columns' of the local dailies, which were positioned at the exposed northern side of the reading room, while the London dailies were situated in the more popular section of the room, next to the southern facing bay window. As will be expanded upon shortly, periodicals and newspapers may have been placed purposely to influence readership. It could be considered that the London dailies were placed in the most popular spot to encourage their reading.

The writer ironically admires those who were 'struggling through a *Times'* leader with a patience which would be highly commendable were it devoted to any other purpose.' In more detail, the writer recounts the story of a man who briefly peruses the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*, purportedly to vindicate 'the extremely high quality of his literary taste' before noting that this reader settled down to read the dailies.[214] Although the journalist, writing under the pseudonym 'By the Lounger', is the

[213] Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street,* p.9.
[214] 'In a Reading Room' in *Hull Packet*, February 25, 1876, p.6.

person judging the members' reading choices, it does allude to the fact that reading in a large group of your social peers – colleagues, neighbours and perhaps even employers – likely had an impact on what these readers selected for reading. The story also highlights the importance of the placement of reading materials within reading rooms and how it played a significant role in shaping their perception and consumption patterns. For Instance, at the Bradford Library, which was a branch of the Manchester Public Libraries, a dedicated reading room within the building was arranged in a specific manner. Local newspapers and 'principal London ones' were displayed on slopes, which required readers to stand up and face the walls. In contrast, magazines were placed on the tables, where readers could sit and engage with them in a more relaxed manner. This layout is illustrated in Figure 2.1, a photograph of Openshaw Reading Room, another branch of the Manchester Public Library.

Figure 2.1: Inside of Openshaw Branch Library, Manchester. Manchester Public Libraries, Openshaw Branch Library, J. W. Beaumont Architect 1894, Reading Room, 1894, Photographer R. Banks. Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives.[215]

[215] Manchester Library, Information and Archives (MLIA): GB127.M7409/43, *Manchester Public Libraries, Openshaw Branch Library*, J. W. Beaumont Architect 1894, Reading Room, 1894, Photographer R. Banks.

Furthermore, there was also 'one table being reserved for those of special interest to Ladies' indicating both a practical consideration for ease of access and a commitment to accommodating female readers.[216] This form of segregation may have built social barriers for women and what literature they could or would access – though they physically could have read any paper within the room, the presence of women-focused areas may suggest a social expectation that they would only read women-oriented material. It is worth noting that the funding structure of these libraries and reading rooms, typically council-funded, might vary, and the above arrangement might not be representative of the average provincial reading room, which likely did not feature slopes. It hints at a certain elitism associated with different periodical reading materials. The placement of newspapers and London papers on slopes could suggest that reading them was perceived as a more formal and studious activity compared to the more relaxed act of reading a magazine while seated. It may simply be that you were expected to read quicker or be more selective with articles instead of a more leisurely peruse of the magazines. Additionally, the inclusion of a bookcase containing standard reference books, encyclopaedias, concordances, and dictionaries further emphasised the educational and scholarly atmosphere of the reading room.[217]

In conjunction with the rest of the thesis, this chapter contributes to our understanding of who was reading these materials and the environment in which this literature was consumed. By examining the demographics of the readers, the age groups present, the nature of their discussions, their attire, the formality or informality of the room, the presence or absence of smoking, the lack of alcohol, the provision of refreshments, the surveillance by overseers, the opportunities for recreation, the popular times of the year and more, we gain a more comprehensive picture of the atmosphere in which these materials were consumed. This chapter focuses on the reading materials available to the working class in the average reading room during the late nineteenth century, providing an overarching picture of the reading opportunities accessible to the average working man during this period. It does not encompass their

[216] The Bradford Reading Room was established as a reading room and delivery station for books from the central library in 1887. This description is for the rebuild of the room as a Library with a Reading Room in 1915. MLIA: GB127.M740/9/8: *Souvenir of the Opening by the Right Hon. The LORD MAYOR (Alderman McCabe) of the Bradford Library, 20 May 1915* (Manchester: Manchester Public Libraries, 1915).
[217] Ibid.

individual purchases, shared literature or opportunities in other establishments such as public houses or mechanic institutes. Instead, it offers insight into the periodicals and books typically supplied in a communal, socially driven institution. This is achieved by examining not only the catalogues of available materials but also the composition of committees, the members' preferences and the rules and mission statements of the rooms, thus providing the context in which these selections were made.

Aldbrough Library and Reading Room.

Aldbrough Library and Reading Room was established in 1878 in the small village of Aldbrough in East Riding, Yorkshire. This room operated primarily as a reading room, with limited library services available exclusively for book exchanges on Thursday evenings.[218] Aldbrough had no dominant industry and was primarily an agricultural village. This is reflected in the composition of the reading room committee of 1880, which comprised a variety of middle-class working men – two farmers, one of whom employed eight men and five women,[219] a master builder who employed five men,[220] and two gardeners.[221] The President, Dr Walker, was a general practitioner, and Mr. Mayhew, the secretary and treasurer, was a medical assistant.[222] The librarian, who was also a general committee member, was a master carpenter and joiner.[223] All the members come from a variety of careers and would all have been respected members of the community.

The reading room in Aldbrough appears to have a complex history, which may help create a better understanding of the influences of the literature within the room. A letter to the editor in the *Darlington & Richmond Herald* from 1879 recounts the demise of the original Albrough reading room seventeen years prior in 1862 and the ‘tyranny and abuse’ of the ‘powers that be’ over the current reading room. He attributes the failure of the original room to the ‘forcible possession’ of the room and all its assets by a figure he nicknamed ‘Mr Ivygreen’ – likely one of the gardeners on the committee and his ‘kindred

[218] *Rules of the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room*, *with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington, 1880), p.4.
[219] AUK: 1881 Census, 4883/8, p.8.
[220] AUK: 1881 Census, 4883/8, p.8.
[221] AUK: 1881 Census, 4883/14, p.19, and 1881 Census 4883/9, p.9.
[222] AUK: 1891 Census, 4039/4, p.1.
[223] AUK: 1881 Census, 4883/8, p.8.

spirit' – 'Mr Yahoo' (a reference to the foul and loathsome animal-like creatures from Gulliver's Travels). 'Ivygreen' is described as 'quite a large man in the place', and the author suggests it would be dangerous to cross him. The writer claimed of the committee of the previous incarnation of the reading room 'the greater part of the membership resigned, leaving Mr Ivygreen and his friend in full possession'. They subsequently moved the premises, and the establishment collapsed. According to the writer, Mr Ivygreen also had a strong connection with the Church of England and had 'run the gauntlet of the whole of the Methodist Societies'. The letter continues by suggesting that these two gentlemen played pivotal roles in the re-establishment of the room in 1878, shaping its character according to their own preferences. The two men would support each other - one would propose an idea, and the other would second it. In doing so, they reportedly vetoed 'every Liberal paper worth the name'. They even excluded papers which a 'few evenings before' had 'been voted in at a meeting of the whole of the members.' At the next meeting, the members 'at once suggested to Mr Ivygreen the propriety of proposing a vote of censure upon him', which Mr Ivygreen accepted; however, 'the vote was not carried.'[224]

While the letter must be approached with caution as it is written with a clear agenda of outing 'Ivygreen' as a tyrant, it offers valuable insights into power dynamics and influence within the reading room. It highlights a strong religious connection through 'Mr. Ivygreen', which partly explains the substantial collection of religious materials (as will be highlighted later in this case study) and likely why the first rule of the reading room was to not exclude any religious denominations - 'the advantages of this Institution be open to persons of every religious denomination'.[225] This highlights how individuals' convictions and local power structures could shape the literary content of community institutions like the Aldbrough reading room. The writer's strong feelings and convictions towards these people and these matters are also worth noting. For him, at least, control over the local reading room and its literary content is a significant issue—important enough for him to write about it emphatically in his local paper. This suggests that local members were invested in their reading rooms and that

[224] 'The Aldbrough Reading-Room' in *Darlington & Richmond Herald*, February 22, 1879, p.8.
[225] *Rules of the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room, with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington, 1880) p.3.

these institutions were considered of significant public interest, warranting public discussion in the local newspaper.

The Aldbrough Reading Room showcases a distinctive dichotomy between materials selected by the reading room committee and those donated by the local aristocracy. The organisation of the collection facilitates this distinction into two categories: the standard collection, selected by the committee and a supplementary catalogue of books donated by Dowager Duchess of Northumberland, Lady Eleanor Percy (Grosvenor).[226] Lady Eleanor, a descendant of the Whig politician Robert Grosvenor, was the widow of a staunch Tory husband.[227] She appeared to have lived in London in 1881, and her connection to this room is unclear.[228] Of significance is the second rule outlined in the reading room's constitution, stipulating that 'no book, newspaper, or periodical shall be admitted into the Institution but by the consent of the Committee; and that this Institution be conducted on sound religious principles; and no publication of an immoral or irreligious tendency on any account be allowed.'[229] Despite the substantial donation from the Duchess, ultimate authority over the inclusion of materials rested with the committee. This arrangement highlights the coexistence of differing literary influences within the reading room, blending aristocratic patronage with the oversight and discretion exercised by the committee.

[226] Ibid, p.2.
[227] F. M. L. Thompson, 'Percy, Algernon, fourth duke of Northumberland (1792-1865) landowner and philanthropist' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* September 23, 2004, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2192.
[228] AUK: *1881 Census*, 2494/58, p.2.
[229] *Rules of the Aldbrough Library,* p3.

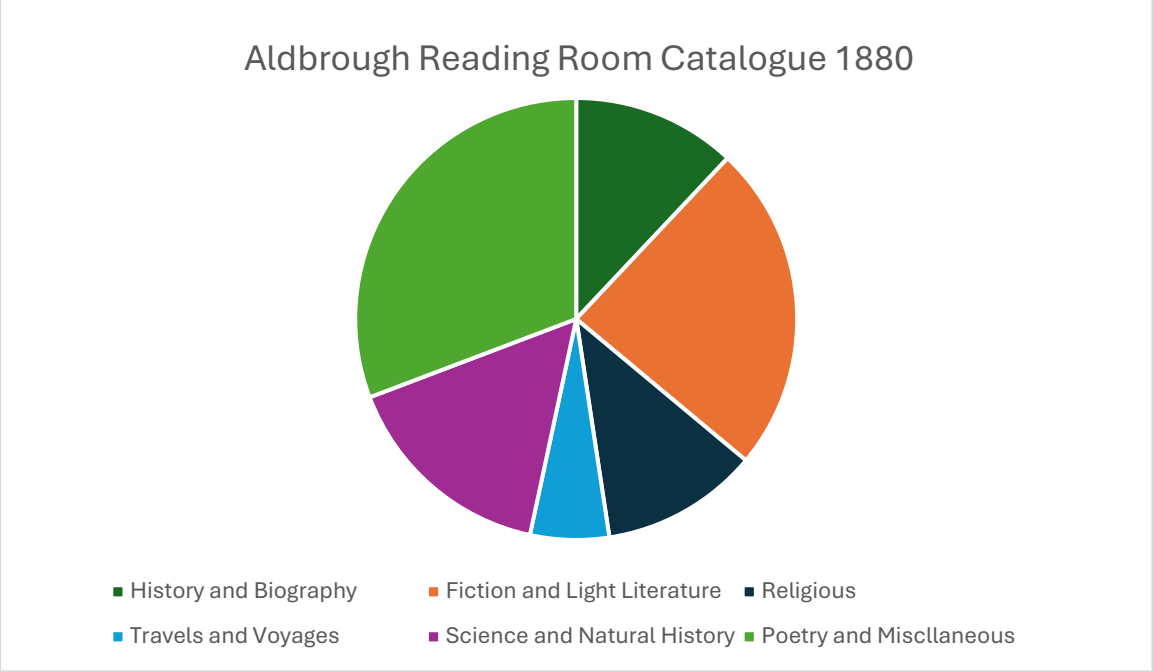

Figure 2.2: Aldbrough Reading Room Catalogue.[230]

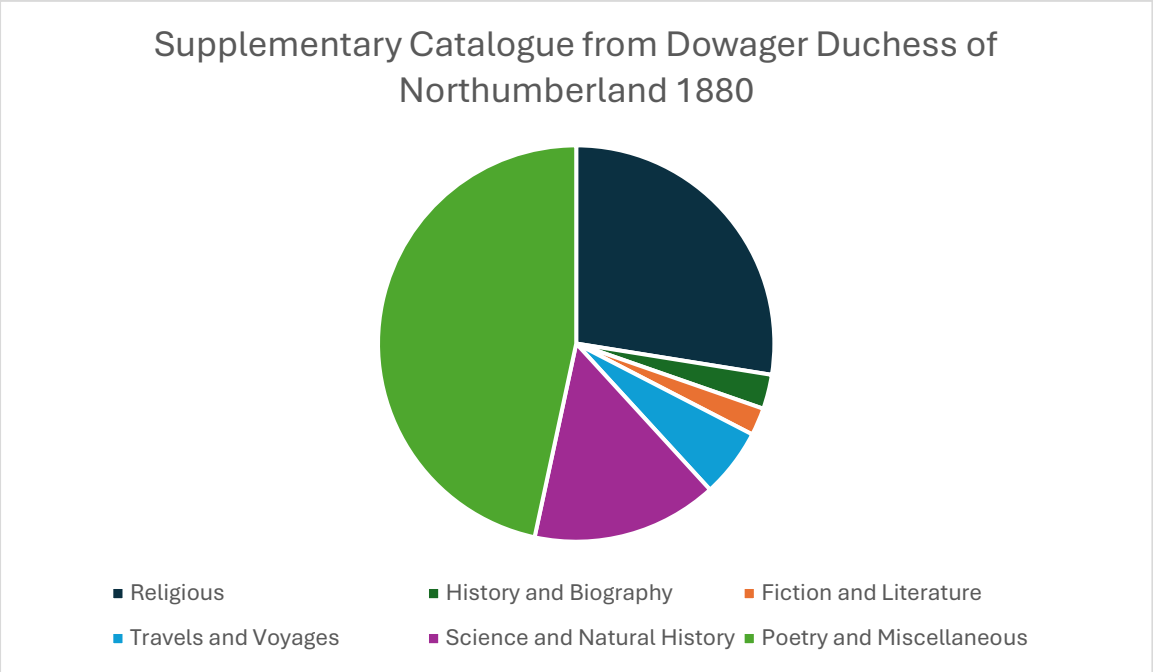

Figure 2.3: Supplementary Catalogue from Dowager Duchess of Northumberland.[231]

[230] *Rules of the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room, with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington, 1880).
[231] Ibid.

The library's collection consisted of 385 volumes, comprising 206 committee-selected volumes plus 179 volumes donated by the Duchess. The room provides a relatively large amount of Christian works, 24 provided via the committee and 49 donated by the Duchess. Having a separate religious category, amounting to 19% of the overall catalogue is a testament to the room's strong Christian elements. While Christian works were also present in the standard catalogue, the Duchess's contributions stand out, with 27% of her donations falling under the religious category, making religion her most considerable contribution. Moreover, beyond the dedicated religious section, several works with Christian themes, such as commentaries on religion, were found within categories like Poetry and Miscellaneous. These included titles such as *The Christian Exodus*, *Remarks on Methodism* (1813), *Thoughts on Important Church Subjects* (by Richard Coxe, 1851) and two volumes of the *Clergy List*.[232] This eclectic inclusion further enriches the religious discourse within the library's collection.

The provision of science and natural history materials constitutes 16% of the total collection, with 33 volumes accumulated by the committee and 27 volumes donated by the Duchess. Notably, the committee's selection leans towards industrial themes, featuring titles such as *The Boy's Industrial Information* (by Elisha Noyce, 1858), *Useful Arts and Manufactures* (by Charles Tomlinson, 1861), *Beeton's Dictionary of Industry and Commerce* and *Great Inventors* (by Samuel Beeton, 1871). Additionally, a significant portion of the committee's collection comprises books on natural history, encompassing 23 out of the 33 volumes. These volumes cover a wide range of topics, including animals, fish, birds, flowers, vegetables, and general natural history. The prominence of botanical and natural history works within the science section may be attributed to the presence of two gardeners on the committee and perhaps even the influence of 'Mr. Ivygreen.'

Much of the Duchess's collection is focused on naval issues and navigation, with thirteen books dedicated to this subject, including works such as *Naval Instructions*: *A Complete Epitome of Practical Navigation* (by John William Norrie,

[232] Books titled as they are in the catalogue. Authors and publication dates are not listed in the catalogue. Presented Authors and dates were researched separately and show initial publication year and not printing years.

1864), *Navigation Laws* and *Lecture on Naval Architecture*. This selection was likely inherited from her husband, whose military career saw him rise from a Navy Midshipman to a Captain during the Napoleonic wars.[233] She is likely donating her late husband's books. This again demonstrates how individuals' particular interests can influence a community's reading options and educational access without any intention or desire to influence in such a way. This will be demonstrated again in the Wylam reading room case study.

Like the standard committee collection, the Duchess's collection encompasses several books on botany, such as *Conversation on Botany* (by Elizabeth Fitton, 1840), Abercrombie's *Gardener* (by John Abercrombie, 1786) and Wakefield's *Botany* (by Priscilla, 1796). Furthermore, the collection included several books on mathematics, including four volumes of *Mathematics of Ozanam* (a mathematician of number theory and geometry). One of the standouts in the collection is three volumes of Jebb's *Practical Treatise,* a manual for the militia on 'fighting made easy', how to defend military posts, and how to attack fortifications. Again, it was likely donated due to the duke's military past, but the presence of a militia manual, particularly within the science and natural history section, in a reading room, demonstrates a sense of endorsement and engagement with militia, military bodies and military action.

The most notable contrast between the committee's and the Duchess's contributions lies in the 'Fiction and Light Literature' sections. The committee amassed 50 volumes in this category, while the Duchess donated only four volumes, consisting of three volumes of *Arabian Nights Entertainments* and one volume of *The History of Rasselas, The Prince of Abissinia* (by Samuel Johnson, 1759). The committee's collection of fiction and light literature is more diverse, including works such as the Hindu tale *Vikram and the Vampire* (Adapted by Richard F Burton, 1870), Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Waverley* (by Walter Scott, 1819), *Tales for Christmas* and *A Prose Idyll of English Life* (by Ellis Brandt, 1876). There is also one labelled 'Tales from "Blackwood"- a selection of the most Famous Series of Stories ever Published Especially Selected from that Celebrates English Publication'. Additionally, several military-related works

[233] Thompson, 'Percy, Algernon'.

(including fictional workers) are present, including *Billets and Bivouacs; or, Military Adventures* and *In the Track of the Troops: A Tale of Modern War* (by R. M. Ballantyne, 1881). Again, the inclusion of these military-themed books within the committee's collection suggests a particular interest in war-related literature among the members involved in the selection process.

Though there were many more 'History and Biography' volumes provided by the committee compared with those provided by the Duchess, at 25 to 5, they both have a similar composition. Within the committee's collection, 19 of the 25 volumes in the 'History and Biography' section are biographies. Similarly, the Duchess's donated collection features one book on history, *Elements of General History* (John W. Barber, 1866), alongside four biographies: *Life of Columbus* (by Arthur Helps, 1868)*, Life of Margaret Beaufort* (by Caroline A. Halsted 1839)*, Life of Alexander Pope* (by Owen Ruffhead, 1769) and *Remarks upon the Lives of all the Kings of England* (1712). This affinity for biographical works reflects a broader trend in many reading rooms, where biographies were popular and often present. Both collections featured volumes dedicated to Wellington within the miscellaneous category – *The Wisdom of Wellington* (1852) and *Selections from the Dispatches and General Orders of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington* (by Gurwood,1842). The committee's biography collection also includes a Life of Wellington (by W. H. Maxwell, 1839-41). The presence of books on Wellington was familiar in reading rooms, reflecting the enduring interest in the military leader.

Within the 'Poetry and Miscellaneous' section of the original collection, a diverse array of materials can be found, ranging from travel guides like *Chambers' Handy Guide to Paris* (1863) to accounts of adventurous pursuits such as *Wild Sports and Life in Zululand* (by Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley, 1879) or further military interest with *Famous Regiments of the British Army* (by W. H. Davenport Adams, 1864). There are self-help books, including Smile's *Self Help* (by Samuels Smiles, 1859) and *On Work and Wages* (by Thomas Brassey, 1872). There were many domestic, women-focused titles like *Home Influence* (by Grace Aguilar, 1847) and *The Domestic World* (by Robert Philp, 1872). It also includes a volume of *Woman's Mission* (by W. M. A. Alcott, 1852) –

promoting ideals of women's purity and submission to men. [234] It is unknown if women attended this room, but they are catered for, albeit with a restricted emphasis on the women's place within the domestic sphere. There may have been an expectation that the male members might have borrowed these materials for their female family members. In line with the temperance movement prevalent in many reading rooms, there are works such as *Illustrated Temperance Anecdotes* (1848) and *Four Pillars of Temperance* (by John W. Kirkton, 1865), reinforcing the committee's commitment to moral reform and sobriety.

Similarly, the Duchess's collection features books addressing living conditions and moral values, including *Dwellings of the Labouring Classes* (a book about philanthropic housing) (by Henry Roberts, 1850) and *Essays on Health and Sickness*. It also has *Woman as She Should Be* (by Hubbard Winslow, 1843), a series of lectures instructing on how Christian women should act and what Christianity has done for women. She also donated Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry Into the Duties of the Female Sex* (by Thomas Gisbourne, 1801), which the catalogue labelled '*Duties of Women'*. The presence of these books, both in the committee's collection and the Duchess's donations, indicates a concerted effort to promote paternalistic ideals and moral reform not only among working men but also among women. It suggests a broader goal of influencing the working class's domestic lives and moral conduct, reflecting a holistic approach to social improvement within the community.

Both collections contain a limited selection of poetry, with the committee's collection featuring three volumes: *Street's Poems* (by Alfred B Street, 1847), *Poetry – Ancient and Modern* and *A Handbook of Poetry* alongside the *Handbook of English Literature*. In contrast, the Duchess's donation includes eight volumes of poetry. Similarly, both collections offer relatively small travel and voyage sections, with the committee providing fourteen volumes and the Duchess contributing ten. Again, in the committee collection, there are some military interest books such as *Anecdotes of the*

[234] W. M. A. Alcott, *Woman's Mission* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852), passim. Though it is most likely Alcott's book, this could also be a book by Sarah Lewis from 1839 also titled *Woman's Mission*. Lewis' book promoted a 'Separate Spheres' ideology, and countering male dominance with Christian moral influence in the domestic sphere. Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission* (London: John W Parker, West Strand, 1839), passim.

British Navy (by Edward Giffard, 1851) and *Major Hough's Campaign in Afghanistan* (by William Hough, 1841). The remaining selection is general travel books that describe different parts of the world and Britain.

Examining the split collection offers an opportunity to analyse deviations between the committee's and the Duchess's contributions. Despite minor differences, both collections generally align in content and principle. They both exhibit strong religious elements, promote domestic ideals and show an interest in military topics. They differ in their emphasis on science and natural history and their specific quirks, such as the Duchess's large donation of books on the navy and the committee's focus on botany. These differences may be attributed to individual influences but had a practical impact on the literature accessible to local working men. The absence of 'Fiction or Light Literature' in the Duchess's collection exemplifies a preference for practical, educational or moralising works over what might have been considered 'lesser' literature, which may have been more desirable to working-class members. Despite its unique quirks and intricacies, the Aldbrough Reading Room serves as a representative example of a standard working man's reading room in the Northeast of England. It illustrates the direct influence that local patrons or influential individuals can have over the reading habits of the local working class, as evidenced by statistical evidence derived from the catalogue.

Wylam Reading Institution and News Room.

Though both Aldbrough and Wylam are northern, provincial examples, the Wylam Reading Room offers a snapshot of an earlier reading room opened in 1850. Unlike Aldbrough, Wylam was explicitly aimed at industrial workers and was heavily influenced by the local colliery owner (who initiated its establishment). [235] This case study provides deeper insights into the literary impact of commercial paternalism in workers' reading rooms. This section ties in with the section on miners in Chapter 4 and

[235] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution and News Room For the Year Ending April 15, 1851* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: M. Benson, 1851) p.3, and 'Condition of the Working Classes, Northumberland & Durham-No. VI: The Coal and Iron Trades Wylam' in *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, June 22, 1850, p.3.

builds on my journal article, 'Control and Enlightenment: Nineteenth-Century Miners' Reading Rooms': this and Chapter 4 provide further insight into the complex dynamics between colliery owners and miners' reading rooms. This case study builds on research within the article and other studies of miners' reading habits, such as Chris Baggs's 'How Well Read was my Valley?: Reading, Popular Fiction, and the Miners of South Wales, 1875-1939', by providing a more in-depth look into the literature provided by a colliery-linked institution.[236]

The committee of the Wylam Reading Institution and Reading Room, in its inaugural report of 1851, articulated its mission of 'ameliorating the condition of mankind' through education. They believed that education should embrace 'man's duties in his relations of social life' and this would 'regulate his conduct in his intercourse with his fellow men' as well as 'inculcating labour as the true source of wealth, and enforcing the means by which the earnings of labour are rendered most available for promoting health and comfort'.[237] The committee's introductory remarks underscore their explicit intent to modify the members of the reading room's behaviour through education provided at this institution. They sought to guide the members' behaviour in interpersonal relationships while advocating for labour as the primary generator of wealth and then to guide what was done with that 'wealth' once they had earned it.

The subsequent portion of the report adopts a tone reminiscent of anti-strike rhetoric, advocating for the education of men in the virtues of supporting and safeguarding the interests of others. It posits that by preserving and respecting the capital of their employers, individuals are ultimately safeguarding their own means of livelihood - 'demonstrating that it is his true interest to preserve and respect the capital of others, as his own means of support are necessarily involved in that preservation.'[238] The report explicitly attributes these sentiments to the Wylam Reading Institution committee members - 'Such are the sentiments of the parties composing the

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[236] Iona Craig, 'Control and Enlightenment: Nineteenth-Century Miner's Reading Rooms', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 28.3 (2023) pp.434-445, and Chris Baggs, 'How Well Read Was My Valley?: Reading, Popular Fiction, and the Miners of South Wales, 1875-1939' in *Book History*, 4 (2001), pp.277-301.

[237] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution 1852,* p.3.
[238] Ibid, p.3.

committee of the Wylam Reading Institution.'[239] This committee was led by J. B. Blackett, the owner of the local mine, as the institution's president. Of the four Vice-Presidents, one, Edward F Boyd, was a consulting mining engineer and a friend of the Blackett family; another a local surgeon; the third, Edward James, was a wealthy Tyneside lead merchant; and the fourth, John Moore, was a 45-year-old Colliery agent. The Treasurer, William Harle, was also a Colliery Agent and the Secretary and Librarian was the village Schoolmaster.[240] The local school was also established and funded by J. B. Blackett.[241] These key positions within the committee were predominantly occupied by individuals entrenched in the local community and closely associated with J. B. Blackett. In contrast, the general committee (those without a position) comprised individuals from the working class, including a colliery overman, a cordwainer (shoemaker), an agricultural worker, a blacksmith, and seven miners.[242]

The absence of documented rules for the institute poses a challenge in understanding the extent of control exerted by various committee members over the selection and restriction of books and periodicals. It is presumed that donations largely shaped the literary collections. Notably, J. B. Blackett emerged as the most significant financial contributor, donating five guineas (£5, 5s) to the cause. Additionally, his brothers each contributed £1, with further financial support coming from entities such as the Wylam Ironworks and Bell Brothers, who donated £1 1s towards the establishment of the room, alongside additional contributions from local residents. [243] Noteworthy among direct book donations was Edward Boyd, one of the Vice-Presidents, who contributed at least 18 volumes to the Parlour Library. [244]

The *Newcastle Guardian*, a newspaper with liberal inclinations, portrays the condition of approximately 220 colliery workers in Wylam as notably positive. It depicts them as:

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[239] Ibid, p.3.
[240] *145 years of change and development,* pp.5-6.
[241] 'Condition of the Working Classes, Northumberland & Durham-No. VI. The Coal and Iron Trades Wylam' in *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, June 22, 1850, p.3.
[242] *145 years of change and development*, pp.5-7.
[243] 'Local and District News' in *Newcastle Guardian*, April 26, 1851, p.5.
[244] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution,* p.5.

> generally well employed, contented, and provided with comfortable houses and neat gardens. These pits are free from dangerous gases and reckoned healthy for the work men, whose average earnings are from 3s 6d to 4s a-day. . .the men seem to be of good class, most of their cottages well furnished, and themselves intelligent and orderly. A good feeling subsists towards the agents, and especially towards the owner of Wylam estate-J. B. Blackett[245]

While it is prudent to approach such positive portrayals with scepticism, the liberal leaning of the newspaper suggests a balanced perspective that appreciates J. B. Blackett's efforts to educate and support his workers and their families.

Revisiting the demographics of the Wylam reading rooms, of the 73 members listed in its inaugural report in 1851, 67 were male, while six were female. Among the 61 members whose occupations were identified in the census, a significant majority, 67%, were employed at the local colliery, with one serving as a foreman at the ironworks, three engaged in agricultural work, and the remainder working in various trades. Notably, the institution boasted a youthful membership, with half of its members under the age of 30 and 70% under the age of 40.[246] The preponderance of young male members hailing from the colliery, as opposed to other local industries such as the ironworks or brewery, likely reflects the influence of Blackett's affiliation with the institution. It is plausible that there existed a certain degree of social pressure or employment advantage for workers to participate in the activities of the room established by their employer. Understanding the composition of the reading room, including its committee members, their objectives for the room, the financial backing it received, and the demographics of its membership, is crucial for analysing the literature available within the room. While definitive conclusions may be elusive, comprehending the influences, objectives and target audience offers a foundation for understanding the reading room's reasoning behind the room's literary provisions.

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[245] 'Condition of the Working Classes, Northumberland & Durham-No. VI. The Coal and Iron Trades Wylam' in *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, June 22, 1850, p.3.
[246] *Wylam Reading Institution & News Room,* pp.4-5.

According to the reading room's 1851 report, the newsroom enjoyed significant popularity, particularly among miners who frequented it immediately after their work shifts:

> The society numbers at present upwards of 70 members, many of whom are young men who attend the News Room every evening, from 6 to 8 o'clock (Sundays excepted). The publications taken in are from the pens of Chambers, Chas. Dickens, Cassell, Hogg, and Eliza Cook, the four Local Newspapers, the Illustrated News, and Punch. The society is also favoured with a good supply of the London Daily and Weekly Papers (gratis) by J. B. Blackett, Esq, and his Brothers, a great desideratum and a valuable auxiliary to the institution.[247]

The presence of works by Chambers, Charles Dickens, Cassell and Hogg in the reading room indicates a provision of periodicals tailored to the tastes and interests of working-class readers, often with radical or liberal leanings. *Eliza Cook's Journal* appealed to a broad working-class audience, advocating for democratic ideals such as increased educational and employment opportunities for women and working-class individuals.[248] It was also a publication predominantly geared towards women, suggesting an effort to accommodate the six female members. Furthermore, the subscription to *Illustrated London News* and *Punch*, both popular among working-class men, demonstrates some commitment to catering to working men's actual interests, though these publications were political and conservative.

The inclusion of four local newspapers reflects a keen interest in the provincial press, indicating a desire for broader engagement with local affairs than just one local paper. The provision of London's daily and weekly papers, supplied free by the president and colliery owner, represents an uncommon addition, again demonstrating how the interests of individuals created unique literary opportunities alongside the standard collection found in almost every reading room. Despite their origin, the committee report claimed these papers were valuable and desired by the members.

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[247] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution,* p.4.
[248] Solveig C. Robinson, 'Cook, Eliza (1812-1889)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, January 12, 2023) doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/6135.

Technical magazines are absent from the reading room's offerings, which may indicate a preference for more accessible and entertaining content among its members.[249]

By 1859, there was a noticeable shift towards a more provincial focus in the list of periodicals in the reading room. The selection now includes publications such as the '*Newcastle Daily Chronicle, The Morning Star, Illustrated Times, Newcastle Guardian and Advertiser, Reynolds' Newspaper*, *Alliance Weekly Newspaper*, *National Magazine, Northern Monthly Journal,* several cheap periodicals, together with a number of provincial and metropolitan newspapers occasionally sent by Mr Blackett.'[250] This shift in the periodicals provided compared to those initially subscribed to by the committee could represent a shift toward the actual reading desires of the working class members – local news – *Newcastle Daily Chronicle, Newcastle Guardian,* regional news - *Northern Monthly Journal*, radical news – *Alliance Weekly Newspaper*, *Reynolds' Newspaper*[251] and even temperance news - *Alliance Weekly Newspaper*.[252] This update on what newspapers were held highlights how the collection has evolved to have a greater emphasis on local, regional, and radical content. The catalogue for the Wylam Reading Institution is documented in the *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution and News Room* for the year ending April 15, 1851. According to the committee, 'The library contains upwards of 330 volumes of useful, interesting, and highly instructive works.' This initial catalogue comprised 270 volumes transferred from a subscription library in Wylam supplemented by 50 volumes donated by Robert Ingham, a 57-year-old Barrister with four servants.[253]

The collection of books in 1851 at the Wylam Reading Institution is categorised into four classes, with Class I being the shortest and titled 'Mechanics, Mathematics, &c.' This section comprises fourteen entries, with the addition of seven volumes of the Mechanic's Magazine donated by Robert Ingham, bringing the total to 20 volumes.

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[249] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution,* p.5.
[250] 'Wylam Reading Institution' in *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, July 27, 1859, p.2.
[251] Louis James, 'Reynolds, George William MacArthur (1814-1879), Novelist, Journalist, and Radical', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/23414.
[252] Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrrell (eds.), *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 1, pp.87-88.
[253] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution,* p.2, and AUK: *1861 Census*, 'Westoe' 72/3787/33, and *Census 1851*, 'Ponteland' 218/2413/2.

Notably, four of the entries in this section were contributed by Ingham, including works on electricity, geology, and geometry. Lardner's work on the steam engine is included, which is relevant to the colliery town of Wylam where the locomotives Puffing Billy and Wylam Dilly were invented. Additionally, Wylam was the birthplace of George Stephenson, often referred to as the 'father of the steam locomotive.'[254] Members could also study the *Treatise on Mechanics* (by Henry Kater, 1831)*, Treatise on Chemistry* (by Henry Roscoe, 1833) and the *Treatise on Magnetism* (by David Brewster, 1837). There were two books on science and art, and one volume each looking at mineralogy, strata and natural philosophy. The technical collection in this section, while providing opportunities for working-class members to study subjects they may otherwise not afford, is limited in scope and depth. It does offer access to works on mechanics, chemistry, magnetism, and science and art, albeit with only one or two volumes per subject, except for the seven volumes of the *Mechanics Magazine*.[255]

In contrast, Class II, titled 'History, Biography, Voyages, &c.,' comprises a more extensive collection with 180 volumes. Noteworthy among these are mining-related works such as Everet's *The Wall's End Miner or A Brief Memoir of the Life of William Crister* (by James Everett, 1838), which details the 1835 disaster at the Wallsend Colliery in which 102 men and boys were killed in an explosion.[256] Additionally, a volume named *Evidence on the Coal Trade*, likely a parliamentary inquest, was donated by Ingham and added to the prevalence of mining-related literature. Other notable entries in this category include two volumes of Sir Walter Scott's *History of Scotland*, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (by Adam Smith 1776) and two volumes of *Pursuit of Knowledge*. Overall, it is evident that this reading room is geared more towards popular non-fiction over a more technical collection.

Ingham donated a considerable amount of books relating to France, including four volumes of the *Memoirs of Napoleon*, three volumes of *Revolutionary Plutarch (French)*(1806)*,* two volumes of *Residence in France, from 1792 to 1795* (1798), two

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[254] M. W. Kirby, 'Stephenson, George (1781-1848), colliery and railway engineer' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008) doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/26397.
[255] *Report of the Wylam Reading Institution*, p.8.
[256] James Everett, *Wall's End Miner or A Brief Memoir of the Life of William Crister* (New-York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1838), passim.

volumes of *a Frenchman's Travels in Great Britain in 1810 and 1811* (by Simond Louis, 1815), *Paris in 1802 and 1814* (William Shepherd, 1814), Simpson's *Visit to Flanders* (by James Simpson, 1816) and Cobbett's *France* (by William Cobbett, 1832). With approximately 75% as many books on France as there were technical books, this donation significantly influenced the composition of the institution's collection. This phenomenon of donation bias highlights how primary donors' personal interests or collections can shape the content of reading rooms. In the case of the Wylam Reading Institution, Ingham's donation reflects his interest in French history, culture and politics. It is important to note that such biases do not necessarily indicate an attempt to moralise or educate the members on a specific subject matter; rather, they often result from the preferences or collections of individual donors. This example is valuable for understanding the composition of reading room collections and can provide insight into why certain subjects may appear disproportionately represented in such institutions. It underscores the importance of considering the influence of donors when analysing the content of reading room catalogues, particularly in cases where the source of specific volumes is not explicitly labelled.

Class III, labelled 'Magazines, Periodicals, &c,' presents a mix of collections and subscriptions. Among the offerings are religious volumes such as Baker's *Christian Investigator* and Baker's *Evangelical Reformer,* alongside six volumes of the *Penny Magazine* Volumes and three volumes of *Tait's Magazine*. It is worth noting that *Nelson's Journal* appears to have been miscategorised as it may not fit the theme of magazines and periodicals. This eclectic mix of religious publications and popular magazines reflects the diversity of reading interests catered to by the reading institution. The presence of religious volumes suggests a commitment to providing spiritual and moral guidance, similar to Aldbrough, while subscriptions to magazines like *Penny Magazine* and *Tait's Magazine* offer readers access to contemporary literature and cultural commentary.

Indeed, within the periodicals subscribed to by the Wylam Reading Institution, there appears to be an element of moralisation. For instance, the inclusion of *The Pleasing Instructor*, also known as the *Entertaining Moralist*, suggests a commitment to providing readers with essays promoting happiness and morality. This publication,

originating from the 18th century, offered readers guidance on leading virtuous lives and cultivating personal well-being.[257] Similarly, the subscription to *The Family Herald*, described as a domestic magazine, suggests a focus on family-oriented content to promote traditional values and domestic harmony. Additionally, Cassell's *Working Man's Friend*, which preached temperance, moralisation and family values, aligns with the broader trend of periodicals targeting working-class individuals with messages of moral upliftment and social improvement. While these periodicals may convey moral messages, it is important to consider that such themes were common in publications aimed at working-class readers during this period. The inclusion of these periodicals in the reading room's collection may not necessarily indicate a specific agenda set by the committee but instead reflects the prevailing ethos of the time, where publications often sought to provide moral guidance and support to their readership.

Paternalism and moralisation become more pronounced in Class IV, titled 'Miscellaneous,' of which 30 out of 54 entries are connected to religion. In addition to the two volumes of Barker's *Christian Investigator* and three volumes of Barker's *Evangelical Reformer*, a significant portion of this category consists of religious material, although it does not dominate the overall catalogue. Alongside these religious works are two collections of poems, two collections of songs, and notable literary works such as Walter Scott's *Demonology and Witchcraft* (by Walter Scott, 1830). Including religious texts and moralistic literature suggests a paternalistic approach aimed at promoting virtuous behaviour and spiritual well-being among the readership. Despite the diversity of content in this category, the prevalence of religious material underscores the reading room's commitment to fostering a sense of moral responsibility and spiritual enlightenment among its members.

The inclusion of Butler's Atlas in the catalogue of the Wylam Reading Institution provided members with a valuable visual and practical resource, offering them the opportunity to better understand the world around them. This atlas, alongside the extensive collection of travel books and volumes such as *The Cities and Principal Towns of the World* (By Dionysius Lardner, 1830), enabled members to broaden their

[257] *The Pleasing Instructor; or, Entertaining Moralist* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Thomas Slack, 1756), passim.

knowledge of places beyond Wylam and Northumberland, fostering a sense of curiosity and exploration. Remarkably absent from the catalogue are reference books such as dictionaries or encyclopaedias. This could be due to their absence within the institution or the possibility that they were readily available in the reading room itself and, therefore, not listed separately in the catalogue. It is plausible that such reference materials were kept on hand to allow members to easily and quickly make sense of the content they encountered while reading in the room, developing their overall reading experience and comprehension. The presence of three volumes labelled as '(Illustrated)' in the catalogue - *Book of English Songs* (By Charles Mackay, 1851), four volumes of *Boswell Life of Johnson* (By James Boswell, 1791), and *Buried Cities of East Nineveh* (By James Silk Buckingham, 1851), is noteworthy. Comprising only six out of over 300 volumes, the illustrated books were relatively rare within the library. This labelling emphasises the perceived value of these illustrated books to readers, suggesting they were considered particularly desirable or unique.

Over time, the reading room's collection expanded significantly. By 1897, it boasted over 1,000 volumes. Additionally, the institution had affiliated with the Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutions, granting access to their library resources. This affiliation likely broadened the scope of available literature and enhanced the educational opportunities the reading room offered.[258] The longevity of the Wylam Reading Room is evident from its mention in the results of a billiards and snooker tournament in 1939, as reported in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. The fact that individuals representing the 'Wylam Reading Room' participated in the tournament suggests that the institution remained active and relevant within the community for at least 90 years.[259] The inclusion of the Wylam Reading Room in such a sporting event highlights its enduring presence and involvement in various aspects of community life beyond its role as a place for reading and education.

The Wylam Reading Room is an exemplary case study of a northern, provincial reading room established primarily for industrial workers under the influence of their philanthropic employer. The detailed committee report provides valuable insights into

[258] 'Wylam' in *Hexham Courant*, November 13, 1897, p.8.
[259] '"Chronicle's" Big Tourney Draw' in *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, April 13, 1939, p.13.

the institution's resources, aims, and intentions, offering a rounded understanding of its organisational structure and objectives. By comparing the committee's composition to census data, it becomes evident that the committee's officers comprised influential members of the community, while the general committee mainly consisted of industrial workers. This class distinction highlights the philanthropic nature of the institution, with the employer and other influential figures taking an active role in its establishment and management. Furthermore, the membership list allows for a superficial analysis of the readers in the reading room, shedding light on the demographic profile of its users and informing a deeper understanding of whom the committee aimed to cater to and who would likely be interested in utilising such a facility. The list of periodicals, along with the updated list from 1859 (likely more influenced by the general committee), serves as both a concrete example of the resources provided in a standard working men's reading room and an illustration of the ideological differences between middle-class paternalists and the actual interests of working men.

The catalogue of the Wylam Reading Institution serves as a valuable source for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive overview of the variety and depth of reading materials available to the institution's members. This allows for statistical analysis, such as comparing the number of technical books to religious texts or examining the presence of specific titles within the collection. Secondly, the categorisation and labelling of books into different ‘classes’ provides insights into the committee's values and priorities. For example, classifying illustrated books or technical works under ‘Class I’ suggests a certain level of esteem or interest in these volumes. Similarly, grouping history, biography, and voyages in the largest class reflects the popularity of these genres among the readers. Conversely, relegating religious books to the ‘Miscellaneous’ category may indicate a perceived devaluation of these texts or a decision to prioritise other genres in the classification scheme. Additionally, the absence of fiction in the catalogue, with fiction being primarily available through periodicals like the *National Magazine*, suggests a deliberate choice by the committee

to focus on other forms of literature or reading materials and discourage the reading of fiction.[260]

What makes this catalogue unique and invaluable is its detailed listing of donated books along with the names of the donors. This feature provides valuable insights into the provincial book collections, allowing for a deeper understanding of the previously discussed donation bias and helping to explain any anomalies in other collections. Overall, this case study offers a comprehensive look into the composition of a standard reading room. By examining various sources such as the catalogue, committee lists, donation records, census data and newspaper reports, a clearer picture emerges of what resources were available in the reading room, who utilised them, who provided the resources, and the motivations behind these contributions. In this instance, the reading room boasted a small yet significant technical selection, a substantial non-fiction section, and a notable collection of religious literature alongside national periodicals, including radical materials. Later, the collection expanded to include more localised materials and periodicals appealing to working-class readers. The predominant users of the room were industrial workers, primarily from the local colliery, although there were also female members. The local upper and middling classes' management of the reading room is evident in their initial decisions regarding subscriptions and book selections, which aimed to ‘regulate’ working men's conduct through education. This intention is reflected in their choice of heavier newspapers and the absence of fiction from the collection.

Dunblane Reading Room.

Dunblane Reading Room allows for the study of a reading room in Scotland towards the turn of the century. As a mid-sized town with a mix of industry and a diverse population, it provides a representative example of the dynamics of a typical reading room and the selection of literature. Additionally, the Dunblane Reading Room offers a

[260] Troy J. Bassett, "Periodical: National Magazine", *At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837—1901*, December 25, 2023, <http://victorianresearch.org/atcl/show_periodical.php?jid=72> [accessed January 30, 2024].

rich array of primary sources, including yearly accounts, committee meeting minutes, membership lists, and detailed descriptions of its establishment, which have been extensively used throughout this thesis. Chapter 1 explores its membership, examines its committee structure and investigates its funding mechanisms. This results in an in-depth understanding of the room's dynamics—its membership demographics, committee restrictions, donor influences, financial limitations, and actual committee discussions. Thus, the literature provided is not examined in isolation but is contextualised within the various influencing factors.

In summary, the local YMCA initiated and managed the reading room, with substantial financial support from the area's aristocracy and contributions from a bazaar organised by local women. Of its 125 members, 80% were male, while 20% were female. Female members were predominantly non-working, while male members encompassed a range of occupations, including industrial, agricultural, mercantile, and clerical roles.[261] Notably, 55% of the members could be classified as 'young men'. The reading room operated under two main committees: a standard committee comprised exclusively of YMCA members, a special committee comprising four ministers, and a 57-year-old journalist serving as secretary. [262] This make-up of the reading room though unique in many ways is representative of the average Scottish, later nineteenth-century provincial reading room – funded by the local upper class, run by religious groups and catering to a broad selection of the population, but predominantly young working-class men.

Within the Dunblane Reading Room, the selection of periodicals was organised into two distinct categories: those determined by the committee and those acquired through donations. Periodicals chosen by the committee were financed through club funds and required committee approval before being ordered under an individual's name:

> 7th Feb 1888

[261] Of the seven located in the census, none worked.
[262] Also, the son of a West India merchant. He still lived with his father at the age of 60. AUK: 'Cochrane William' in *Census 1891*, 348/1/40.

> ‘The following are the papers which it was thought proper to be ordered for the Reading Room from the 16th inst,
>
> *Scotsman, Herald, Leader* – Daily Papers to be ordered from Miss Annand
>
> *Evening Times, Dispatch, Graphic, Punch* – To be ordered from Miss Reilson’[263]

The decision to directly order daily papers by the Dunblane Reading Room was driven by the desire to ensure timely access to publications, allowing members to access them on the day of publishing rather than waiting for them to be passed on by donors a day later. The specific selection of papers in this category, notably the *Dispatch*, *Graphic*, and *Punch*, underscores their perceived importance to the committee despite the additional cost.

It is important to note that this emphasis on directly ordering specific papers does not diminish the value of those acquired through donations. The donated papers and magazines are listed alongside their respective donors, albeit inconsistently:

> Papers and magazines promised free –
>
> *Chalmers Journal* and *Goodwords* by Mr Johnstone,
> *Scots Magazine*, Rev J I I Colquhoun,
> J. K. Currie *Glasgow Weekly Mail*
> Mr P Blanche, *The Bailie*
> G. Montiath *Tit Bits*
> J. Kerr *People’s Journal*
> J. Anderson *Pen + Pencil*
> Mr Scobie *Great Thoughts*
> Mr Matthew McGregor *Observer Weekly*
> *Detroit Free Press*
> Sergeant Walker *Stirling Journal*

[263] AKBL: MS20/2/3, ‘Meeting in Dunblane Public School, 7th February 1888’ in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1888-1890*.

Perthshire Constitutional + Journal Mr James Dall

Fifeshire Advertiser

The contributions from donors predominantly feature provincial press publications, with notable examples including the *Stirling Journal*, representing the local press (given Dunblane's is roughly five miles from Stirling), the *Perthshire Constitutional + Journal* (despite Dunblane being located approximately 26 miles from Perth, it was considered part of Perthshire at the time), and the *Fifeshire Advertiser*, which although more distant, still holds relevance. Moreover, there is a discernible preference for Scottish national periodicals among the donations, ranging from daily newspapers like *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* to weekly publications such as the Glasgow Weekly Mail and magazines like the *Scots Magazine*, *People's Journal*, and *Chambers Journal*. This inclination towards Scottish publications likely reflects their heightened relevance and interest in the local community rather than a deliberate nationalist stance.

The collection of periodicals within the Dunblane Reading Room offers a diverse array of genres, including fiction, religious literature, scientific articles, art, and poetry, alongside daily news, advertisements and general commentary. Notably, most of these publications target lower-middle-class readers, reflecting the bias in donations received. Given that many donors were themselves middle-class individuals, it follows that the papers they contributed would cater to a similar demographic. This curated selection aptly mirrors the typical style and content found in standard provincial reading rooms of the time. It is worth noting that this assortment may not be as expansive as those found in urban-based reading rooms during the same period. Notably absent are specifically technical, feminine, or radical publications.

The inclusion of the *Detroit Free Press* stands out as unconventional, with its presence unexplained in the records. It appears that this newspaper was donated to the room free of charge by a Sergeant Major associated with the Royal Volunteer Regiment. [264] While the rationale behind its inclusion remains unclear, it is plausible that the donor may have had some connection to Detroit through travel or family, who may be sending it to him, and he is then passing it on to the room. Despite lacking a

[264] AUK: '1891 Walker, John' in *Census 1891*, 348/2/28.

direct connection to the local community, this unique addition could have provided members with a distinctive insight into the culture, life and press of a city distant from their own.

The above list was the provision at the establishment of the room – the collection was added to and revised over the next few years. The additions over the years included a musical magazine, *Blackwood's Monthly Magazine*, *People's Friend*, *London Illustrated News*, *Strand Magazine, Fils Bils*, *Harper's Magazine* and *Review of Reviews*. The committee selected these additions, except for the musical magazine. These publications are generally regarded as entertainment magazines, popular among the working classes. This suggests the committee was actively trying to select papers that would be popular with the members and provide recreation rather than just education. In addition to the regular selection of periodicals, the Dunblane Reading Room also made seasonal adjustments to its offerings. During the festive season, special Christmas editions of publications such as *Graphic*, *Illustrated London News* and *Punch* were ordered. Conversely, during the quieter summer months, the committee made the decision to suspend orders for certain periodicals. For instance, in 1894, they ceased ordering the *Evening Times* and the *Scottish Reader* for the summer. This seasonal adjustment may have been influenced by factors such as reduced member attendance or a desire to allocate resources more efficiently during a period of decreased activity.

While the catalogue for the Dunblane Reading Room catalogue has not survived, but the initial collection was inherited from the YMCA and expanded over time through contributions from the local Mutual Improvement Association, the Temperance Union and the committee's selections. [265] Additionally, efforts were made to augment the collection through grants, such as one obtained from the Edinburgh Perthshire Association, which distributed books to existing village libraries. The absence of the catalogue makes it challenging to determine the specific titles available in the library. A speech delivered by the Chairman during the opening of the annual general meeting on February 21, 1889, provides some insight into the potential bias of the collection.

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[265] AKBL: MS20/2/3, 'Dunblane Reading Room meeting on 11th April 1888' in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1888-1890*.

According to the meeting minutes, the Chairman expressed a desire 'that all should endeavour to cultivate a taste for reading & recommending works of history above any other kind of literature.'[266] The preference for history over fiction or travel is unsurprising, as they were often viewed as lower forms of reading. Why the chairman felt a preference over the likes of technical, scientific, geography, biographical and other forms of non-fiction is unexplained, though history was popular in many reading room catalogues. While it remains unclear whether this pronounced bias towards history resulted in a more history-focused collection, it is plausible given the Chairman's expressed preference. This emphasis on history may have shaped the literary landscape of the Dunblane Reading Room, influencing the selection of books and the reading habits of its members.

The only books that can be confirmed not to be in the room are Ouida's *'Moths'* (1880), *Under Two Flags* (1867) and *Held in Bondage* (1863). These melodramatic 'High Society' Novels that address Victorian taboos such as adultery, domestic violence and divorce were withdrawn from the library by the committee after 'being objected to by several gentlemen'.[267] The three books were exchanged for three novels by Annie Swan – a Scottish romantic novelist. Her work was often viewed as Kailyard fiction, projecting domestic ideals and idyllic portrayals of Scottish small-town living, offering a less contentious alternative to the previously withdrawn books. While this decision may reflect a specific fear or bias on the part of the exclusively male committee, it is worth noting that Swan's work still centred on women and provided accessible representations of women-centred narratives. Despite the shift towards more conservative literary choices, the committee remained dedicated to ensuring that literature catering to the interests of female members was available, albeit within the confines of their moral standards.

Indeed, while the absence of a surviving catalogue constrains the case study of the Dunblane Reading Room, it offers valuable insights into the literary landscape of a

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[266] AKBL: MS20/2/3 'Dunblane Reading Room Annual General meeting in Victoria Hall at 8 o'clock on Thursday 21st February 1889' in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1888-1890*.
[267] AKBL: MS20/2/3, 'Dunblane Reading Room, Committee Meeting Wed. 11th July 1888 at 9 o'clock' and 'Committee Meeting Dunblane Reading Room, Wednesday 25 July 1888 at 9 o'clock' in *Dunblane Reading Room, Minute Book, 1888-1890*, and 'Moths' description in *Broadview Press*, n.d. <https://broadviewpress.com/product/moths/#tab-description> [accessed January 3, 2024].

late nineteenth-century Scottish provincial reading room. The example underscores the prevalence of standard and expected periodicals, with a notable emphasis on Scottish-centric publications. This emphasis also extends to the library, as evidenced by the prominence of works by Scottish authors like Annie Swan. The case study illuminates the significant power wielded by the committee over the collection of publications and books. Despite the lack of concrete evidence regarding the prevalence of history books, the chairman's expressed preferences and the committee's actions suggest a concerted effort to shape the literature available to members. Ultimately, this case study serves as a compelling example of the power dynamics inherent in such institutions, where committees hold sway over the types of literature accessible to members and what could be withheld. Replacing controversial novels with works aligning with the committee's ideals reflects a broader agenda to promote specific values and ideals among the reading room's membership, particularly concerning domestic ideals, gender roles and moral standards.

Manchester Free Libraries and Branches.

Figure 2.4: 'Opening of the Manchester Free Library' in *London Illustrated News,* 11 September 1852[268]

Manchester is an outlier in this section and thesis. It provides a valuable comparison to the other case studies and sheds light on the opportunities available in larger urban areas. This section addresses the structure of free reading rooms connected with the central free library, which allowed the masses free access to newspapers and periodicals and provided a vast selection of literature unimaginable within smaller towns and villages.

Manchester's enthusiastic embrace of the Public Libraries Act of 1850 set it apart from other cities, as evidenced by the establishment of the Manchester Free Library and Museum. The committee of this institution articulated its mission as educating not only the general populace but specifically the industrial workers of Manchester. Their stated aim was to provide free and extensive resources for the

[268] 'Opening of the Manchester Free Library' in *London Illustrated News,* 11 September 1852.

dissemination of knowledge and intellectual development across all social strata, with a particular emphasis on those employed in the city's manufacturing industries:

> It is the object of the Manchester Free Library and Museum to provide increased and wholly gratuitous facilities for the diffusion of knowledge and for mental culture amongst all classes, and more especially amongst the operatives employed in the various manufactures of the district.[269]

The Manchester Free Library and Museum implemented a large central library boasting an impressive collection of over 18,000 volumes, all accessible without subscription fees. [270] This commitment to providing free access to literature and educational resources highlights the progressive and egalitarian ethos of the institution.

This case study serves as a testament to the capabilities of urban, council and government-funded reading rooms in promoting literacy, intellectual growth, and cultural enrichment within their communities. Moreover, it highlights the significant literary opportunities afforded to the urban working class, mainly industrial workers, in contrast to their counterparts in provincial areas. The establishment of such institutions democratised access to knowledge and contributed to the empowerment and advancement of marginalised communities, ultimately fostering a more informed and enlightened society.[271] Martin Hewitt's detailed article on its history offers valuable insights for a more in-depth exploration of the Manchester Free Library and Museum system.[272] This case study provides a brief context and introduction to the functioning of this system, focusing on its central mission of providing free access to knowledge and intellectual development, particularly among the industrial workers of Manchester. Additionally, the case study delves into the specific operations of one branch of the Manchester Free Library and Museum, offering a detailed examination of its provision of periodicals. By analysing the supply and accessibility of periodicals at this urban

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[269] MLIA: GB 127.M740/2/8//51, 'Report of the proceedings at a public meeting on the establishment of a Free Public Library and Museum Jan 851' in *Papers Relating to the Establishment of the Manchester Free Libraries* at Manchester Libraries.
[270] 'The Manchester Free Library' in *British Banner*, September 8, 1852, p.7.
[271] Martin Hewitt, 'Confronting the Modern City: the Manchester Free Public Library, 1850-80' in *Urban History*, 27 (2000), pp.62-88 (p.86).
[272] Ibid, p.73.

branch, this section illustrates how the Manchester Free Library and Museum system functioned compared to other case studies addressed within the same chapter.

The comprehensive provision of periodicals by the central library of the Manchester Free Library and Museum in 1884, encompassing over 330 different titles (with multiples not listed), underscored the institution's vast resources.[273] As a large urban facility supported by council and government funding, the library could offer an extensive selection of periodicals and books to the public, all provided free of charge at the point of use. This abundance of reading materials undoubtedly profoundly impacted the local working-class community and their reading and leisure habits. Access to such a wide array of literature would have opened up new avenues of knowledge and entertainment for individuals who may not have had the means to acquire such materials otherwise. Moreover, the availability of diverse periodicals would have allowed readers to explore a range of topics, interests and perspectives, thereby broadening their intellectual horizons and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

The Manchester Free Libraries and Reading Rooms Committee, in its effort to maximise access to library resources, established reading rooms throughout the city that also served as ‘delivery station[s]’ for the central library. With at least 25 branches, including Bradford Reading Room, Chester Road Branch, Cumpsall Reading Room, Harpurhey Reading Room and Hyde Road Reading Room, attendees of these rooms had access to tens of thousands of volumes at no cost.[274] The Manchester Free Libraries and Reading Rooms Committee determined the selection of this literature. In 1886, the committee published figures detailing the utilisation of library resources by the people of Manchester. These figures revealed that 294,444 volumes were used directly within the reference libraries, 440,848 volumes were read within the reading rooms (including

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[273] MLIA: GB 127.M740/2/8//51, *List of Transactions, Periodicals, Serials, and Newspapers in Progress in the Reference Department* (Manchester: 1884).

[274] Bradford was set up in 1887. MLIA: GB127.M740/9/8: *Souvenir of the Opening by the Right Hon. The LORD MAYOR (Alderman McCabe) of the Bradford Library, 20 May 1915*, (Manchester Public Libraries, 1915), and MLIA: M740/9/13/4/1, *Newspaper and Magazine Account for Chester Road Branch* (The Manchester Library Committee, n.d,), and ‘The Manchester Free Libraries Estimates’ in *Manchester Evening News*, 11 April 1899, p.2. Hyde Road Reading Room was established in 1888, ‘A Free Library and Reading Room for Ardwick’ in *Manchester Courier*, May 8, 1888, p.6. List of 25 Branches in MLIA: GB127.M740/1/2/3/1, *Details of Branch Library Buildings*.

those attached to library branches), and 726,448 volumes were taken home by members.[275] Reading within reading rooms still accounted for a significant percentage of book reading— notably higher than within the libraries alone. It is worth noting that many of the books taken home may have also been partially read in the reading rooms. It is significant that within a system that allowed books to be read at home for free, they chose to read within the reading rooms.

The statistics continue to focus on Sundays, perhaps to demonstrate that people were engaged in virtuous activities on the sabbath or simply to argue for the rooms to remain open on Sundays. It stated that on Sundays there were over 155,000 'readers of magazines and newspapers at the branches' in the year. This appears to be a total of visits and not of individual visitors. This is significantly less than the total numbers of visits to the libraries on Sundays at 253,800.[276] Despite the popularity of borrowing books for home use, reading rooms remained actively utilised, even on Sundays, showcasing their continued relevance as community spaces for intellectual engagement and leisure activities even when competing with large free libraries.

In addition to the Manchester Free Libraries and Reading Rooms, Salford also boasted its own system of free libraries and reading rooms. By 1894, the Salford Libraries and Reading Rooms comprised 'five libraries with reading rooms, and two separate reading rooms – Weaste and Charlestown'. The combined total of books available in these libraries amounted to 80,000, with an annual circulation of 250,000. They also tracked attendance at the reading rooms, which, in 1884, claimed to be 130,000 a year, which they maintained to be 'a remarkable number compared with the total population.'[277] By 1910, this figure had multiplied by almost ten as the Salford Public Reading Rooms recorded 'No fewer than 1,257,486 persons used the Salford public reading rooms in the past year, an increase of 5,682 as compared with the previous year.'[278]

[275] 'Manchester Free Libraries' in *Manchester Evening News*, October 23,1886, p.2.
[276] 'Manchester Free Libraries' in *Manchester Evening News*, October 23, 1886, p.2.
[277] 'Opening of a Reading Room at Weaste' in *Manchester Times*, September 14, 1894, p.5.
[278] 'Salford Notes' in *Manchester City News*, December 31, 1910, p.6.

Examining the Chester Road Branch of the Manchester Free Public Library provides a detailed insight into the periodicals available at one of the library's branches during the early 20th century. This particular branch has been chosen due to the valuable source - *Newspaper and Magazine Account For Chester Road Branch,* which lists what periodicals were taken in and how many of each.[279] While the specific year of the list detailing the periodicals taken in is unknown, the presence of the publications The *Sphere*, first published in 1900,[280] and Pall Mall Magazine, which ceased in 1914,[281] suggests that the list falls within the years between these publications' inception and discontinuation. This gives us an additional insight into what periodicals would have been found in a large urban reading room in the early 20th century. This information sheds light on the interests, preferences and intellectual pursuits of patrons frequenting the Chester Road Branch. This may provide an overview of the prominence of periodicals, especially in areas where other reading options were available. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to compare the selection of periodicals available at this branch with those at other libraries and reading rooms within Manchester and beyond.

The Chester Road Branch of the Manchester Free Public Library exemplifies a distinct departure from the standard provincial reading room model. As part of a large, council-backed institution, it benefited from superior funding, enabling it to offer a more extensive selection of periodicals—99 in total.[282] One notable feature distinguishing it from provincial reading rooms is the availability of non-local local press. The 'Newspapers by Post' section included three Irish papers, *Belfast News Letter*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Irish Times,* and one Scottish paper - the *Scotsman*. These are all national papers. Their presence in the room reflects a deliberate effort to cater to visitors and economic migrants, allowing them to stay informed about events in their home countries. Similarly, three local daily papers (one copy of each) are not local

[279] MLIA: M740/9/13/4/1, *Newspaper and Magazine Account for Chester Road Branch*.
[280] 'The Sphere' in *The British Newspaper Archive, n.d.* <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/the-sphere> [accessed January 17, 2024].
[281] 'Pall Mall Magazine – Indexes to Fiction' in *Victorian Fiction Research Guides,* n.d. <https://victorianfictionresearchguides.org/pall-mall-magazine-indexes-to-fiction/> [accessed January 17, 2024].
[282] The predicted yearly costs to maintain the room was £460 a year, 'Manchester Free Libraries Estimates' in *Manchester Evening News*, April 11, 1899, p.2.

to Manchester – *Birmingham Daily Post, Leeds & Yorkshire Mercury* and *Liverpool Mercury*. While these will have garnered more local interest than the 'Newspapers by Post', they would have held a particular appeal to individuals hailing from or having ancestral connections to these regions, providing them with a sense of connection to their roots.

The Chester Road Branch held 36 daily papers from 17 different publications and 38 weekly papers from 35 different publications. It received four 'Newspapers By Post'. The branch stocked 21 Magazines, each with a single copy (*Railway Bradshaw* is listed twice; it is not clear if this is a mistake or if there were two copies; one is listed as costing two shillings and the other six shillings). Two quarterlies were taken in – *Manchester Quarterly* and *Shipbuilder*. The daily papers had the most multiples, including three *Daily Dispatches*, three *Daily News* and two copies of the *Daily Mail*. By a significant margin, the most multiples were the local Manchester news, with eight copies of the *Manchester Evening News*, four of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, three of the *Manchester Courier*, and three of the *Manchester Guardian*, meaning that half the daily papers were local news. Similarly, one of the three repeated weekly papers is the *Manchester City News*.[283] The prevalence of local news publications suggests a strong preference for local news and information among working-class readers frequenting the Chester Road Branch or at least to those who selected them.

While the sheer number of local newspapers indicates their popularity among patrons, examining the cost and frequency of other publications provides additional context. A unique feature of this list is that it provides the cost and number of each paper or magazine. The price ranged between half a shilling for many of the dailies and seven and a half shillings for the *Miller* magazine. By considering the cost of each periodical in relation to its renewal frequency, we can gain insight into the value that the committee placed on different publications. For example, many weeklies and magazines cost six shillings, and there is only one copy of each; they are likely to be read for the duration of their renewal. So, a *Manchester Quarterly* that costs six shillings

[283] MLIA: M740/9/13/4/1, *Newspaper and Magazine Account for Chester Road Branch*.

is displayed for three months and can easily be shared among the members throughout that time.

There are two copies bought of each of the *Illustrated London News* and *Graphic*, each costing six shillings weekly, whereas each of the eight copies of the *Manchester Evening News* costs half a shilling and will have been bought six times in that same timeframe, meaning it would cost a total of 24 shillings per week, twice as much as the *Illustrated London News* or *Graphic*. It should be noted that these had a week to circulate the members, while the dailies would be succeeded much quicker. This succession means that the *Manchester Evening News* was not necessarily valued twice as much as the *Illustrated London News* by committee or readers but that a higher volume was required to meet the daily reading demand, a cost which the committee was willing to pay. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis. No reading records would have been kept since the papers were left open for anyone to read. The cost versus frequency comparison primarily reflects the committee's perspective on the value of different publications rather than the actual readership patterns among patrons. Nonetheless, the committee's decision to procure eighteen local daily newspapers, including eight copies of the Manchester Evening News, underscores the prominence and demand for local news among the reading room's patrons.[284]

This model of establishing reading rooms in connection to free public libraries was replicated across urban Britain. Liverpool Free Public Library established the Picton Reading Room in 1879.[285] Multiple reading rooms were connected to the Free Public Library in Reading by 1902.[286] Nottingham had a Free Library with thirteen branch reading rooms connected to Nottingham University College.[287] In Birmingham, the reading rooms associated with the Birmingham Free Libraries had about 20,000 readers a day attending in 1895. The committee noted that while the addition of new libraries could potentially decrease attendance at established branches, the establishment of

[284] MLIA: M740/9/13/4/1, *Newspaper and Magazine Account for Chester Road Branch*.
[285] 'The Picton Reading-Room, Liverpool Free Public Library' in *Glasgow Herald*, October 8, 1879, p.5.
[286] 'Free Public Library and Reading Rooms' in *Reading Mercury*, January 4, 1902, p.3.
[287] 'Nottingham University College and Free Libraries' in *Nottingham Journal*, August 31, 1893, p.8.

more reading rooms had the opposite effect, indicating their popularity and importance within the community:

> It is interesting to note that, while some of the older libraries show a loss of issue, owing partly to the proximity of new branches, the attendance in the news-rooms in these cases has in no way diminish, but rather increased.[288]

Even those that did not have branches still prioritised having a reading room within the establishment such as Newcastle Public Reading Room, Library, and Museum.[289]

Despite being open to the public and free of charge, the demographic makeup of these rooms likely remained similar to that of traditional urban or provincial reading rooms, with most patrons hailing from working-class backgrounds. Having both the option of a library and a reading room did give members the option to dedicate their reading time to either periodicals or books. Moreover, the absence of recreational activities, classes, lectures or debates within these reading rooms suggests that their primary focus was providing access to news and literature. Unlike village reading rooms, which often served as social hubs for the local community, these urban reading rooms were primarily dedicated to reading and ordering books and were less vital as central gathering places for social interaction. The generalisation from 'librarians and other observers,' as Hewitt wrote in 2000, was that the clientele of the news rooms was more proletarian than those borrowing from the library.[290] The removal of membership, high volume of attendees, and lack of social dependency separates this urban room from being a local 'boys club' or local who's who of the community, which would be dominant in many village reading rooms, perhaps allowed easier, more appealing access to specific demographics, particularly women. Additionally, there may have been an increase in attendance by the destitute or homeless population seeking shelter, social interaction or amusement.

The comparison between the resources available at the Manchester Free Libraries and those at provincial reading rooms highlights the significant disparity in

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[288] 'Birmingham Free Libraries' in *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 3, 1895, p.5.
[289] 'Newcastle Public Reading Room, Library, and Museum' in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, October 11, 1879, p.7.
[290] Hewitt, 'Confronting the Modern City', p.73.

access to reading materials between urban and rural areas during the late 19th century. By 1886, Manchester Free Libraries had 181,095 volumes of books.[291] At Chester Road Reading Room, there were 99 periodicals available from 77 different publications.[292] This extensive collection ensured that even the poorest residents of Manchester had access to a wide range of literature and information. In contrast, provincial working men could be paying a subscription to their local reading room to access around 300 volumes of committee curated books and around a dozen periodicals of predominantly local news.

Conclusion.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to label the books discussed with the writer and year. As the catalogues only provided the titles of the books, these may not be 100% accurate, particularly as I have placed the year of the initial publication so that they may have been holding later editions or republications. There are only a handful of very new books within the rooms; the age of the literature is mixed. There are some older classic books from the eighteenth century, but many are around 20-40 years old in both Wylam and Aldbrough. This is likely a result of those books being hand-me-down donations.

The most significant contribution of this chapter is to the history of reading. It provides an insight into how periodicals were circulated en masse, particularly among the working class. It contributes to our understanding of circulation figures and provides a basis for how this mass circulation could create both national and local spheres, with almost all working-class members having the opportunity to read the same materials. Conversely, it highlights how these spheres could be restricted to the popular reading materials in these rooms. Much of this chapter focuses on the periodicals and books provided in reading rooms. It makes a more substantial generalisation about the standard periodicals available than the books. While some individual periodicals, such as the *Illustrated London News, Graphic* and *Punch,* were

[291] 'Manchester Free Libraries' in *Manchester Evening News*, October 23, 1886, p.2.
[292] MLIA: M740/9/13/4/1, *Newspaper and Magazine Account for Chester Road Branch*.

standard in almost every reading room, the chapter also identifies broader patterns in providing national and provincial papers and magazines. In contrast, the selection of books was more variable, though patterns emerged in popular topics such as history, travel, and religion. More insightful than the books provided is the analysis of what was excluded, such as the distinct lack of fiction and certain banned works, demonstrating the committees' control and influence over restricting reading materials.

Consistent with the rest of this thesis, this chapter addresses the role of the reading room within the national effort to influence and control what people read through various institutions throughout the nineteenth century, as discussed by historians such as Richard Altick and Robert Snape.[293] The running theme throughout the first three case studies—the studies of provincial reading rooms—is control, influence and restriction. Each case focuses on a different method of exerting this control. The first, Aldbrough, demonstrates two forms: the influence of local individuals who gain power within the committees and that of a major donor, drastically changing what was available for readers. Wylam illustrates the impact of corporate paternalism and the power of funding, which allowed providers to have ultimate control over the literature offered. This case study shows how this control resulted in the provision of heavier literature and a lack of fiction, though this did change over time, likely due to a general committee consisting of working men. Dunblane serves as an example of how reading materials were actively selected and, more dramatically, banned by the committee. This banning illuminates the belief in the moral danger posed by certain books and the committee's ability to withhold ideas and influences from its members.

The inclusion of the Manchester free reading rooms draws a comparison of the available facilities between the urban and provincial working classes, rounding out the imagery of working-class reading culture at the time. There was a shift to provide the working classes with reading material, primarily through reading rooms in both town and country. The Chester Road Reading Room exemplifies that ideal and illustrates what periodicals could be provided when the budget is much more substantial. Doing

[293] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, passim, and Robert Snape, 'The National Home Reading Union', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7.1 (2002) pp.86-110.

this represents the priorities of those selecting the materials, which were predominantly the local press. This demonstrates what the urban members could access and what those in towns and villages were missing out on. The list shows a broad section of periodicals, including many technical periodicals and periodicals from other cities and home nations. Seeing these as options highlights the decisions of local reading rooms to exclude them.

These case studies reveal a complex interplay of control, influence, and restriction within the literature provision to the working classes. The detailed examination of Aldbrough, Wylam and Dunblane shows how local power dynamics, corporate interests and committee decisions shaped the literary landscape available to readers, though within a framework of the natural patterns of literature provision within reading rooms. Though donation was one of the primary forms of literary influence, it was also essential for creating libraries within these institutions. The committees primarily focused their funds and attention on providing periodicals; without book donations, these reading rooms would have limited libraries, restricting most working-class reading opportunities to periodicals.

Periodicals were the primary focus within reading rooms, with priorities given to illustrated periodicals followed by the provincial press. This information may contribute to our understanding of the popularity of both categories, as they were likely most popular among those who could not afford them and were predominantly read within reading rooms (and other communal forms of periodical distribution). Consequently, these periodicals were read substantially more than their circulation figures suggest. Ultimately, this thesis addresses the critical role of periodicals and books in the recreational life of the working class, particularly within reading rooms. This chapter explores these materials' general patterns and selection processes without attempting to specify precisely which periodicals and books were available. It aims to assist future studies of such catalogues and provide historians of the Victorian working class with context regarding the opportunities, influences and restrictions on the reading lives of reading room members.

Chapter 3. Recreation, Education and Regulation.

Introduction.

For many backers, founders, and funders of local reading rooms, the principal motivation was to provide rational recreation within the framework of moral reform. In practice, this often meant enticing working men away from public houses and other vices. While rigorous educational or religious study was the preferred form of recreation, it was recognised that a more relaxed approach, including fun recreational activities, would attract a broader spectrum of members. Though the dissemination of literature, particularly newspapers and periodicals, was the primary objective of the average village reading room, it was not the sole focus for either patrons or organisers. This chapter looks beyond the written word to shed light on the plethora of activities that took place alongside the quiet pursuit of reading. In doing so, it uncovers the multifaceted nature of reading rooms and their impact on the lives of working men and the communities they served. By examining the educational facilities such as lectures and night classes, the entertainment provided through concerts and penny readings, and the camaraderie and predominantly homosocial culture fostered through conversation, debate, and recreational games; this chapter solidifies the reading rooms' place within the realms of moral reform and rational recreation.

While this chapter does not assess the success of reading rooms as vessels of rational recreation, it addresses some discrepancies between the middle-class paternalistic fantasy of many of the activities discussed and their reality within the average provincial reading room. Furthermore, it briefly explores the relationship between these facilities and the illiterate, arguing that reading rooms had the potential to accommodate those unable or unwilling to read. This broader inclusivity led to a wider social impact than benefiting the literate minority devoted to self-improvement. It also acknowledges that some activities, particularly lectures, require a certain level of literary engagement for members to fully benefit from them. The timeline for this

subject is broad, as reading rooms have consistently served purposes and hosted activities beyond solely reading, evolving over the years. In the early part of the century, the focus was on beverages. By the 1850s, lectures and classes had become commonplace. Around the same time, games and other recreational activities became available within reading rooms. This aspect shifted throughout the period, with draughts and chess giving way to billiards by the end of the century.

Some sources used within this chapter are commentaries on recreation within reading rooms rather than straightforward reports. These sources should be viewed critically, considering the opinions they aim to convey. For example, Henry Morley's 'Bees of Carlisle' and 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' from *Household Words*, as well as the article 'Popular Reading Rooms' from *Chambers' Journal*, advocate for reducing middle-class control and the pressures of moralisation within reading rooms.[294] In contrast, pamphlets from the Duchess of Rutland and the fictional story 'Matt the Miner' seek to portray reading rooms and their recreational offerings as solutions to the perceived misdemeanours of the working classes.[295] Although these commentaries may not accurately depict recreation within these rooms, they are crucial for understanding contemporary perceptions and aspirations regarding reading rooms.

This chapter focuses on the upper and middle class's paternalistic commentary and desires for reading. It compares them to more hands-on resources such as newspaper advertisements and reports on annual meetings to contrast the fantasy with the reality of reading room recreation and education. In doing so, this chapter makes a valuable, original, and standalone contribution to our knowledge of recreation and education within reading rooms beyond reading. King, in her 2009 study 'The Rise and Decline of Village Reading Rooms,' which focused on a case study of Norfolk Reading Rooms, recognised that reading was not the only activity in these rooms, mentioning games and concerts throughout her paper.[296] While examining provincial newspapers, Hobbs described a valuable image of the different forms of newspaper consumption,

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[294] Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle', pp.403-5, and Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', pp.581-6, and 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers Journal*, pp.411-2.
[295] Manners, *Encouraging Experiences,* passim, and Manners, *Some of the Advantages*, passim, and 'Matt the Miner', *After Work*, pp.137-140.
[296] King, 'The Rise and Decline of Village Reading Rooms', pp.163-186.

including a reading room where he acknowledged reading as a social activity.[297] He also describes a scenario where reading rooms fostered diverse political debate by forcing those of different creeds to sit together.[298] Beyond these points, research on other activities has not yet been deeply discussed, even if recognised. By dedicating an entire chapter to these activities, I aim to provide a more in-depth and rounded understanding of reading rooms, their atmosphere, appeal, and place within society.

This chapter also contributes to the well-researched landscape of Victorian working-class leisure and reinforces many established concepts within the field.[299] E.P. Thompson's concept of 'Rituals of Mutuality' among the Northern working class is evident in the recurring evidence of community.[300] Similarly, Raymond Williams's view that post-industrial revolution 'working-class culture' was built on collective and mutual relationships is exemplified and bolstered by working men's reading rooms.[301] Peter Borsay's 1989 summation that historians view popular/working-class leisure as an articulation and reinforcement of neighbourhood and community ties informs my understanding of the recreational activities provided within reading rooms. This perspective encourages the view that these activities are part of a broader working-class community experience.[302] The only active revision pertains to David Vincent's 1983 study 'Reading in the Working Class Home,' in which he claims that reading and the pursuit of self-improvement for the working class were solitary and isolating activities that 'engendered a retreat from many traditional forms of communal recreation.'[303] I will argue below that reading did not 'cause the reader to distance himself from the pastimes of his friends and neighbours,' instead, reading rooms facilitated reading and education in a way that encouraged community and relationships, integrated with many contemporary popular forms of recreation.

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[297] Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street,* p.77.
[298] Ibid, p.85.
[299] James Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978), and Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).
[300] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 2013), pp.456-469.
[301] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, *1780-1950* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), pp.68-71.
[302] Peter Borsay*, A History of Leisure: The British Experience Since 1500* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).
[303] David Vincent, 'Reading in the Working-class Home', *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939*, (1983), pp.206-226 (pp.217-218).

Food and Beverages.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the origin of the working men's reading room stems partly from Lovett's, and more generally the Chartists', ideas for spreading literature access to working men. However, their concept stemmed from the coffee houses. A more intricate history of the development of coffee houses is available in Brian Cowan's *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (2005). Coffee houses, preceding reading rooms, held a close connection with printed literature, particularly newspapers.[304] An example of this connection is the Original Working Man's Coffee House in Edinburgh Grassmarket, which in 1853 not only offered refreshments such as a 'Cup of Coffee and Round of Bread and Butter' for 2d or a 'Plate of Meat with Potatoes' for 3d but also had a reading room within the coffee house, or at least called the room in which you would consume your food the reading room. It would cost 'One Halfpenny' if you wished to access the coffee house's reading rooms without purchasing food or drink.[305] This habit of paying for your coffee and gaining access to news did not entirely disappear as reading rooms began to distinguish themselves from the 'café.'

Though it was not as common to provide 'refreshments' within reading rooms as it was to offer smoking rooms or recreation, it was not unusual. A modest reading room kitchen is described in 'A Humble Reading Room,' an article in the *Glasgow Citizen* from 1853, which praised a basic, low-cost reading room in Glasgow Saltmarket. The writer describes a simple kitchen that was only able to serve a handful of beverages: 'On entering, we passed a small kitchen to the right, with a fire burning briskly, and a shelf along the wall, supporting some half-dozen coffee-cups, with three or four bottles of lemonade.'[306] Again in Scotland, a few years earlier in 1848, the 'Working Men's Coffee and Reading Rooms' were established in Dundee. Described as 'Model rooms,' there were at least five established by 1863. These rooms offered a reading room within

[304] Cowan, *Social Life of Coffee*, pp.83-87.
[305] 'Original Working Man's Coffee House' in *Edinburgh News and Literary Chronicle*, August 27, 1853, p.5.
[306] 'A Humble Reading-Room' reprinted in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, January 25, 1845, p.64.

them where entry was free to those ‘taking refreshments’; if not, it was a halfpenny a visit or one shilling for a quarterly ticket.[307]

From a commentary written in the local paper in 1849 criticising this scheme, the scheme's purpose is laid out: ‘Its object is to establish reading-rooms for the working classes, where coffee and news may be had on the lowest possible terms. In this way it is expected that our working men will be allured from the dram-shops and drawn to the new reading-rooms.’ The commentator, while supportive of the temperance sentiment, is sceptical: ‘While satisfied that intemperance is the great cause both of the crime and misery which abound, we are not satisfied that coffee will be able successfully to compete with whisky—even with the addition of news to give a relish to the former.’ This quote shows that coffee was the central function of these establishments, with the news being the main attraction.[308] Beyond these examples, there was a general expectation for refreshment in reading rooms. This is expressed in a report regarding the YMCA, which laid out the standards for the average YMCA and the facilities their reading rooms should provide: ‘The reading-room should be light, cheerful, and attractive; well supplied with newspapers and periodicals, perhaps also with chess and draughts, and convenience for the supply of tea and coffee.’[309] These rooms were not the stand-alone reading room establishments that this thesis focuses on, but they demonstrate the top-down desire for beverages to be provided within reading rooms and the belief that it would benefit working men.

In a pamphlet published in 1853 by the Acting Committee of the Scottish Association for Suppressing Drunkenness, intended for private circulation, the committee sought to connect refreshments with reading rooms for the working classes. The pamphlet provides clear instructions on how such an establishment should be run, including the building layout, wages for workers, probable outlay for facilities, cost of ingredients, suggested standard prices for refreshments, and profit and loss spreadsheets. The committee believed the refreshment rooms to be very lucrative. For example, they claimed that the Refreshment Room for the Working Classes at John

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[307] ‘Working Men’s Coffee and Reading Rooms’ in *Dundee People’s Journal*, March 14, 1863, p.1.
[308] ‘Coffee and News-Rooms’ in *Dundee Courier*, March 14, 1849, p.2.
[309] Provided to Jannetta Hughan Manners by the honorary secretary of the YMCA. Manners, *Encouraging Experiences,* p.58.

Knox's Corner in Edinburgh yielded a profit 'of at least £150 a year' after expenses.[310] According to this committee, the best profit was made through 'coffee and soup, whereas butcher-meat yields very little profit.'[311] From the perspective of temperance or 'suppressing drunkenness,' the supply of alternatives to alcohol was viewed as highly important. In this pamphlet, even the provision of reading material is given a brief seven-line note compared to the two-and-a-half pages of guidance on the provision of refreshments.[312]

In my research, I have encountered only one mention of a reading room that served alcohol. This room was discussed by the secretary, Rev. W. F. Tregarthen, of the Southern Counties Adult Education Society at the society's annual meeting in 1861. Though it is unclear where this reading room was located, the secretary suggests it was aimed at a working-class clientele with the express purpose of regulating their recreation:

> The SECRETARY said that in his own parish a reading-room had been established, and he had no hesitation in saying that it had done the greatest possible good. He thought it extremely desirable that a well-regulated reading-room should be instituted in every village, in order to provide a comfortable place to which the working classes could resort.

Though beer was served to draw the working classes from the public houses, its consumption was regulated, with each member being allowed 'two half pints of beer, but no more.' Tregarthen claimed that the non-alcoholic option of coffee was ten times more popular than beer. In fact, he claimed the beer was so unpopular that it expired before the members consumed it:

> The Rev. W. F. Tregarthen said, that when he last visited the reading-room to which Mr. Best had alluded, he had asked for some beer, but found it was so bad

[310] *Report by the Acting Committee of the Scottish Association for Suppressing Drunkenness* (Edinburgh: 1853) p.1.
[311] Ibid, p.2.
[312] Ibid, pp.3-5.

> that he could not drink it; and he was told that the reason was because there was so little demand for it that it became bad before it was sold.[313]

Tregarthen suggests that this is evidence that the working classes could be 'trusted' with the option of alcohol: 'This showed what would be the result if the working classes of this country were only trusted.' This did not convince all other Southern Counties Adult Education Society members. Other members, such as the Rev. H. Moule criticised the concept of providing alcohol in reading rooms:

> he should be very sorry to encourage them in habits which had been productive of so much harm, and he should, therefore, deprecate the sale of beer, &c., in village reading rooms. He believed that the introduction of good lectures would do much towards emptying the public-houses.[314]

Putting trust in the working men's hands did not become standard. Instead, almost all food and beverage provisions within these establishments were made in direct opposition to alcohol.

The notion that the provision of food was uncommon in working men's reading rooms, except those closely connected to temperance, is epitomised by perhaps the best-known example of the self-run reading room – St. John Street in Carlisle. Morley's description from 1862 in 'The Bees of Carlisle' does not mention the working men's-led reading room providing any refreshment. Morley goes into detail about the refreshments provided in the nearby Temperance Hall's reading room, to the extent that he even provides a costed soup recipe. Morley himself praises the provision of food, suggesting it is a positive way to—without charity—provide sustenance to working men and give the labourer's wife a cost-effective break by selling the soup at 'a penny a pint,' with the additional benefit that this will 'leave a trifling profit.'[315] Morley does not explain why the St. John Street reading room did not provide this service, except perhaps an indication of cost—the initial 'steam apparatus for soup manufacture on the amplest

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[313] 'Southern Counties Adult Education Society' in *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, October 5, 1861, p.6.
[314] 'Southern Counties Adult Education Society' in *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, October 5, 1861, p.6.
[315] Morley, 'Bees of Carlisle', pp.404-5.

scale' cost £100, the same value as the land the Temperance Hall was built upon.[316] Such an outlay would presumably be well beyond the budget of a 'self-reliant' reading room.[317]

With the limited references discussing refreshments for reading rooms coming primarily from sources such as Manners, 'Matt the Miner,' YMCA, temperance halls, and the Scottish Association for Suppressing Drunkenness, it is entirely possible that the emphasis on healthy non-alcoholic refreshments reflects a middle-class fantasy of reading rooms. Even the story of the 'humble reading room' in Glasgow, an early example of a working men's reading room, is told from a condescending perspective, and the stated provision for refreshments appears to be extremely limited.

The average village reading room did not provide refreshments, or at least they were not customarily advertised or discussed in the minutes for the vast majority of rooms I have come across. This is likely due to the cost, space, and manpower required to run catering facilities. It is plausible that if there had been a genuine desire for such facilities, or if they had been as profitable as these sources suggest, committees would have found a way to provide food and drink, as they did for many other popular amenities, such as smoking or billiards. Though there was a slight hangover from coffee houses and their relation to access to literature and news, this did not endure throughout the Victorian period. The provision and desire for such facilities came more from a wish to look after or patronise working men and morally rehabilitate them than from any desire to fulfil the members' actual needs and wants.

Lectures.

Public speaking was a regular part of Victorian society and occurred throughout many working-class institutions. This chapter has little to add to our understanding of the culture of lectures within the nineteenth century, as it is expansively covered by Anne-Julie Zwierlein, Heidi Weig, and Sebastian Graef in their two volumes on the

[316] Morley, 'The Bees of Carlisle', p.403.
[317] The concept of the reading room being 'self-reliant' is discussed in the related article from 1851 – Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', p.581.

subject from 2022.[318] Instead, this section focuses on their use as a form of entertainment and educational facility distributed to the provincial working class through the pre-existing and expansive structure of village reading rooms. The transition from lectures being a middle-class leisure activity to a form of rational recreation for the working class in the mid-nineteenth century was well established by Martin Hewitt in 1998. Their widespread presence in reading rooms bolsters Hewitt's notion that lectures were a form of mass moralising and the timeline he sets out, linking with the growth of working men's reading rooms.[319] Joseph Meisel argued in 2001 that public speaking lay at the core of the structural transformation of public institutions and their relationship to society as much as written works.[320] While this chapter does not seek to contribute to our broader understanding of Victorian oral practices, it recognises that lectures were at the heart of working-class education from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A famous example is Dr George Birkbeck, who provided free public lectures annually on 'mechanical arts' in Glasgow between 1800 and 1804.[321] These became very popular and continued after his departure to London in 1804. These lectures developed into the creation of the first mechanics' institute in Edinburgh. This cemented the relationship between lectures and working-class self-education throughout the century, including within reading rooms. The travelling lecturer became a profession, touring different reading rooms or other educational facilities.[322] Reading rooms played a large part in their distribution to working-class men: the standard local reading room had seasonal lectures, running throughout the winter and commonly conducted by local educators, gentry, or clergy.

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[318] Anne-Julie Zwierlein, Heidi Weig and Sebastian Graef (eds), *Culture of Lecturing in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Vol.1 (University of Heidelberg, 2022), passim, and Anne-Julie Zwierlein., Heidi Weig and Sebastian Graef (eds), *Culture of Lecturing in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Vol.2 (University of Heidelberg, 2022), passim.
[319] Marin Hewitt, "Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Dawson, and the control of the lecture platform in mid-nineteenth century Manchester." *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 25.2, (1998).
[320] Joseph S Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), passim.
[321] Matthew Lee, 'Birkbeck, George (1776-1841)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004) doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2454.
[322] 'Lectures and Reading-Rooms' in *Saturday Review of politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 2.55, Nov 15, 1856 (London), pp. 638-639.

The value of lectures as an effective method of educating the industrial classes was debated throughout the nineteenth century. Their sustained popularity alludes to a general agreement that they were effective forms of entertainment and education. In 1825, before reading rooms became commonplace, a popular Whig MP, Henry Peter Broughman, who campaigned heavily for both adult and children's education, including state education,[323] summarised his perceived value of lectures:

> The preparation of elementary works is not the only, nor, at first, is it the most valuable service that can be rendered towards economising the time of the labouring classes. The institution of Lectures is, of all the help that can be given, the most valuable, where circumstances permit; that is, in towns of a certain size. Much may thus be taught, even without any other instruction; but, combined with reading, and subservient to it, the effects of public lectures are great indeed, especially in the present deficiency of proper elementary works.[324]

In a much later source, Manners, in 1885, in her pamphlet on the advantages of reading rooms and libraries, suggests that 'It would enhance the attractions of libraries to thoughtful, if uneducated people, could lectures be given from time to time, suggesting a systematic course of reading.' Her implication here is that reading room (or library) lectures are there to serve the less educated and provide a basic understanding that will enable and instruct further reading.

This sentiment is extended by a less positive analysis of the effectiveness of lectures from 1856. 'We have heard much, if not too much, of late, of what Lectures and Reading-rooms can do, or ought to do-or, in the rose-coloured aspirations of unpractical talkers, are destined to do.' This quote is from an article in the Saturday Review (a Peelite Liberal Conservatism newspaper) from 1856 called 'Lectures and Reading Rooms'. It claims that lectures in relation to reading rooms are overvalued and lending libraries are the only true form of grassroots education. It targets the lecturers themselves, 'There is a class of professional lecturers who go about the country with

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[323] Michael Lobban, 'Brougham, Henry Peter, first Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778-1868)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2021) doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/3581.
[324] Henry Peter Brougham, 'Practical Observations upon the Education of the People, addressed to the Working Classes and Their Employers' in *The Emergence of Victorian Consciousness, The Spirit of the Age*, ed. George Levine (New York: The Free Press, 1967), pp.202-223 (p.212).

cut and dry courses of science; but the good they do, and the information they convey, are very doubtful.' The article even goes so far as to suggest that little can be learned from lectures, 'Lectures do not present a short cut to the citadel of knowledge- "solid and permanent instruction cannot be conveyed by them." They are useful as stimulants, but they are not necessarily - often they are necessarily not-instruments of education.' The quotation within is from an excerpt from a speech by the Duke of Newcastle at the Retford Working Men's Association. The article quotes another excerpt of this speech which again emphasises the connection between lectures and reading: '"the value of lectures is to stimulate and excite private study. If a lively lecturer quotes Longfellow, the statistical result will be that so many additional copies of Longfellow will be purchased by his auditors."' [325] While the Duke of Newcastle clearly supports lectures, the article bastardises this quote to belittle the value of lectures, suggesting that the only value of a lecture is to point its listeners in the direction of books (not novels, as the article points out).

There are many examples of different lecture schedules, but one particular schedule for the Working-Men's Free Reading Room in Monmouthshire in Wales, from 1866, provides an overview of the average set of lectures curated towards working men:

> "The Geography and Topography of Palestine" by Rev R Smith of the Leys
>
> "The Giant Cities of Basham" by Rev J Venn Canon of Hereford
>
> "The British Constitution" by S. R. Bosanquet, Esp. of Dinastow Court
>
> "Samuel Budgett, the Successful merchant" by S. C. Bosanquet, Es, of Wonastow Court
>
> "The origin, history, and Use of the Bell." By Rev W Hill.[326]

The subjects are varied, mostly among history, geography, and travel. They are not technical or scientific, nor work/industry-specific, but they appear to be accessible and designed to attract the interest of the curious but average industrial man (or woman).

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[325] 'Lectures and Reading-Rooms' in *Saturday Review*, pp.638-639.
[326] 'Working-Men's Free Reading Room, St John's Street' in *Monmouthshire Beacon*, November 3, 1866, p.1.

They are not subjects that are necessarily basic or targeted at those who are illiterate (those who cannot read the daily news or the subjects themselves); instead, they are niche subjects that could potentially feed into a broader interest. This represents what could be found in the average reading room, as is the sample of those lecturing. Three of the five are taken by ministers, and another, S. R. Bosanquet, was the chairman of a company with eight servants in his house.[327] I have been unable to locate the remaining lecturer, but 'S.C. Bosanquet' was likely related to the other Bosanquet and thus also wealthy. All these lecturers will have been respected middle-class members of the community who most likely had a vested interest in the moral rehabilitation of the town's population.

In the small village of Pathhead in Midlothian, the local reading room's course of winter lectures became a 'local institution' which were 'looked forward to by many, as a pleasant means of wiling away an hour in the long winter evenings.' The lectures, which were selected by a lecture committee and cost 4s 6d for a ticket to attend all the lectures and 1s 6d for individual lectures, were varied in subjects – in the year 1881 they had lectures entitled 'Varieties of American Life', 'Abraham Lincoln', 'Chemistry of Food', 'Plants their leaves, flowers and fruits', 'British and American Humourists', 'Minstrelsy and Humour', 'Lays and Legends, or the poetry of History and Tradition' and a United Presbyterian minister lecturing on 'Luther'. Again, this series of lectures provided a variety of subjects that appeared to be more focused on entertainment, curiosity, or practicalities that would interest working men. They also dedicated two nights to elocution, providing a more practical lesson for the attendees, who were perhaps inspired by the lectures to pursue public speaking themselves.[328]

The Whig MP Brougham in 1825 imagined lectures for the working classes to focus on mathematics, astronomy, and geology, but thought that the non-practical, less comprehensive nature of the lectures meant the desirable 'branches of knowledge' would be limited in their effectiveness as lecture topics:

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[327] AUK: *Census 1861*, 3985/24/1.
[328] 'Lectures' in *Fife Free Press,* Pathhead, October 29, 1898, p.5.

> The branches of knowledge to which these observations chiefly apply, are Mechanical, Philosophy and Chemistry, both as being more intimately connected with the arts, and as requiring more explanation and illustration by experiment. But the Mathematics, Astronomy, and Geology, the two former especially, are well fitted for being taught publicly, and are of great practical use. Nor is there any reason why Moral and Political Philosophy should not be explained in public lectures, though they may be learnt by reading far more easily than the physical sciences.[329]

His suggestion that moral and political philosophy is easier to learn by reading than 'physical sciences' not only suggests that lectures have more educational value in some subjects over others but in some subjects were valued over reading.

The cost and income of lectures are unknown and will have been significantly variable. Again, Brougham commented on this in 1825, and though this was three decades before town and village reading rooms became commonplace, he considered the difficulties in the provincial provision of lecturers compared to the urban, including the cost and availability of local lecturers:

> The yearly cost of a lecture in the larger cities, where enlightened and public-spirited men may be found willing to give instruction for nothing, is indeed considerably less than in smaller places, where a compensation must be made for the lecturer's time and work.

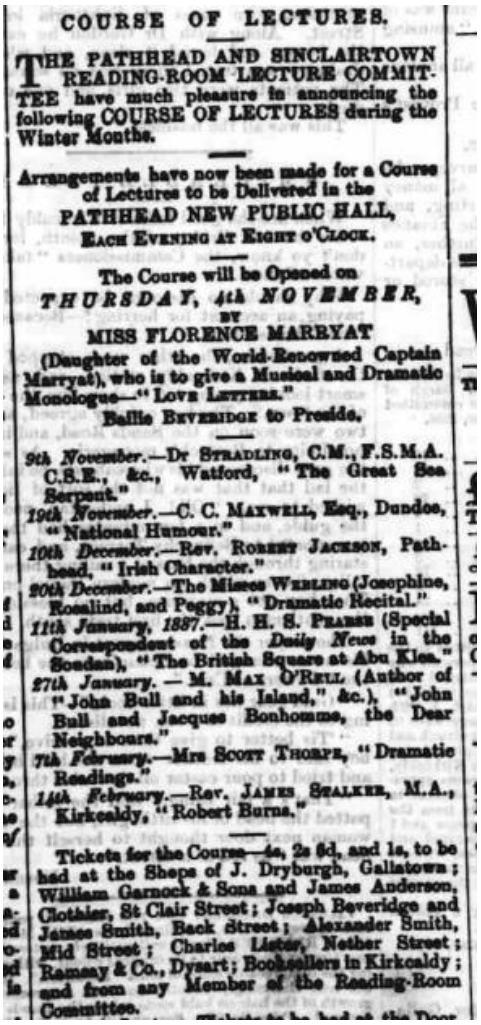
He does consider that even in small towns, there could be those willing to volunteer, but he points out how the lack of payment to working-class lecturers would undermine the independence of the working class or lower the standard of the lectures provided to them:

> But it seems advisable, that, even where gratuitous assistance could be obtained, something like an adequate remuneration should be afforded, both to

[329] Brougham, 'Practical Observations', p.12.

> preserve the principle of independence among the working classes, and to secure the more accurate and regular discharge of the duty.[330]

While this is not reading-room specific and predates the widespread establishment of such rooms, it outlines the challenges village reading rooms would have faced. It comments on the provincial working classes' quality of education and the greater requirements for intra-class mutual improvement. As evident in prior examples, the costs associated with lectures generally meant they gave even more influence to the local elite.



COURSE OF LECTURES.

THE PATHHEAD AND SINCLAIRTOWN READING-ROOM LECTURE COMMITTEE have much pleasure in announcing the following COURSE OF LECTURES during the Winter Months.

Arrangements have now been made for a Course of Lectures to be Delivered in the
PATHHEAD NEW PUBLIC HALL,
EACH EVENING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

The Course will be Opened on
THURSDAY, 4th NOVEMBER,
BY
MISS FLORENCE MARRYAT
(Daughter of the World-Renowned Captain Marryat), who is to give a Musical and Dramatic Monologue—"LOVE LETTERS."
Bailie BEVERIDGE to Preside.

9th November.—Dr STRADLING, C.M., F.S.M.A. C.S.E., &c., Watford, "The Great Sea Serpent."
19th November.—C. C. MAXWELL, Esq., Dundee, "National Humour."
10th December.—Rev. ROBERT JACKSON, Pathhead, "Irish Character."
20th December.—The Misses WERLING (Josephine, Rosalind, and Peggy), "Dramatic Recital."
11th January, 1887.—H. H. S. PEARSE (Special Correspondent of the *Daily News* in the Soudan), "The British Square at Abu Klea."
27th January.—M. MAX O'RELL (Author of "John Bull and his Island," &c.), "John Bull and Jacques Bonhomme, the Dear Neighbours."
7th February.—Mrs SCOTT THORPE, "Dramatic Readings."
14th February.—Rev. JAMES STALKER, M.A., Kirkcaldy, "Robert Burns."

Tickets for the Course—4s, 2s 6d, and 1s, to be had at the Shops of J. Dryburgh, Gallatown; William Garnock & Sons and James Anderson, Clothier, St Clair Street; Joseph Beveridge and James Smith, Back Street; Alexander Smith, Mid Street; Charles Lister, Nether Street; Ramsay & Co., Dysart; Booksellers in Kirkcaldy; and from any Member of the Reading-Room Committee.

Figure 3.1: 'Course of Lectures, The Pathhead and Sinclairtown Reading-Room Lecture Committee'.[331]

[330] Ibid, p.12.
[331] 'Course of Lectures, The Pathhead and Sinclairtown Reading-Room Lecture Committee' in *Fifeshire Advertiser*, October 16, 1886, p.1.

The Pathhead and Sinclairtown Reading-Room Lecture Committee advertised their course of lectures for the year 1886 on the front page of the *Fifeshire Advertiser*. This example reinforces some presumptions about the accessibility and general interest of the subjects. The program includes substantial dramatic and literary content. Having a lecture on Robert Burns and another from an author (or, more accurately, a translator discussing the book he translated) suggests an expectation that the audience would be engaged with literature and not wholly reliant on lectures or other oral means for their education. [332] The lecturers again appear to be middle-class: Dr Stradling with a C.B.E, C.C. Maxwell—a town councillor and retired confectioner—and a 'Special Correspondent for the Daily News in the Soudan.'[333]

Penny readings provided a more entertaining form of oral literature consumption, typically involving songs, poetry, and recitations of popular literature.[334] In his 2001 book, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes, Jonathan Rose claimed that penny readings institutionalised oral reading.[335] While they were not a staple part of reading rooms in the same way as lectures, they were relatively popular. The provision of penny readings suggests that reading rooms steered more towards wholesome entertainment rather than solely pushing education or mutual self-improvement. Penny readings held within the reading rooms tended to be available to the whole community, not just the members. For instance, the Newlyn Reading Room and Library in 1876 held a Penny Reading on a Saturday evening featuring the 'Pickwick Papers' and F.C. Burnand's 'Happy Thoughts.' This Penny Reading was free for members but cost 1d for non-members.[336]

Some penny readings were held outside of, but in connection with, the reading room, used as fundraisers, and attended to by the public.[337] For example, at the United Reading Room in Penrith, a penny reading was attended by 'some larking, noisy young

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[332] Max O'Rell, *John Bull and his Island* (New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887).
[333] AUK: *Census 1881,* 282/17/8, and 'Course of Lectures, The Pathhead and Sinclairtown Reading-Room Lecture Committee' in *Fifeshire Advertiser*, October 16, 1886, p.1.
[334] For further reading on Penny Readings - Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class'*, passim.
[335] Rose, *The Intellectual Life,* p.84.
[336] 'Newlyn Reading Room and Library' in *The Cornish Telegraph,* Amusements, February 22, 1876, p.2.
[337] 'United Reading Room: Penrith' in *Cumberland and Westmorland Advertiser*, October 18, 1864, p.2, and 'Penny Readings at West End Reading Room' in *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser*, March 14, 1868, p.4.

men' whom the chairman thought 'ought to not be admitted to the reading in future, unless "under the protecting wings of the mummas."' While this humorous derision of these 'young men' suggests attendance by the general public, it also implies that women were commonly in attendance. [338] Including penny readings demonstrates a lighter side to oral practices in reading rooms - spoken word was used to entertain and not just educate. This may have had a more direct appeal to non-literate working classes as well as all members of the rooms.

The educational effectiveness of lectures and penny readings was contentious, but their popularity was undeniable. The average lecture expected a certain level of education and curiosity, but they were not specific or technical. They either cost the average village reading room considerable money or were provided by volunteers who wished to spread their knowledge, often respected community members such as ministers or business owners. Since lectures were primarily commissioned by middle-class committees and conducted by middle-class lecturers, they fit better into the category of paternalistic education rather than autodidactic mutual improvement (though it was not unheard of that they would be conducted by working-class men themselves).

Night School.

The fictional story' Matt the Miner' illustrates the idea of reading room classes being used as a form of working-class mutual education. In the story, there are classes within the reading room called 'night-school,' taught by Matt's eldest son, which 'for the present was to be free.'[339] The reality of this varied between institutions. Reading rooms were generally viewed as a supplement to the school system and other forms of educating the working class. Following the 1870 Education Act, there was a renewed focus on providing individuals with opportunities to utilise their compulsory education and expand upon it. This is, at least, the Duchess of Rutland's conclusion in *Some of the Advantages of Easily Accessible Reading and Recreation Rooms and Free Libraries* from 1885:

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[338] 'United Reading Room: Penrith' in *Cumberland and Westmorland Advertiser*, October 18, 1864, p.2.
[339] 'Matt the Miner'*, After Work*, p.138.

> The more we enter into these considerations, the wider the field for useful exertion appears to extend; but I must now leave the subject, believing that the nation which is bestowing so much education on children will not suffer the time and labour given to study to be thrown away for want to opportunities afforded to those young boys and girls, who are blooming into youths and maidens, or becoming toil-worn men and women, of keeping up the knowledge in many cases painfully acquired, but which may prove of inestimable value to them if carefully cultivated when the days of compulsory learning are past.[340]

This yearning for the continued pursuit of knowledge applied to both private and public consumption of literature and lectures also included a more practical, curated approach—classes.

These classes were seen as a meritocratic opportunity for those with ambition to educate and raise themselves, as put forward in the 1863 article 'Popular Reading-Rooms':

> By an abundant supply of hearty genuine boys' books, it ripens the power of reading, which is too often somewhat small, even after the scholar has left the school, and by judicious addition of voluntary classes, enables those who are ambitious of rising in the world to continue their studies.[341]

The suggestion that attendees' reading ability is 'often somewhat small' implies that these voluntary classes had to cater to a less advanced audience. Reading rooms funded by companies for their workers tended to offer more advanced, technical, and work-specific classes, as discussed in Chapter 4, but the average provincial reading room, funded by local subscriptions, tended to provide basic reading and writing classes.

Other associations also provided classes, predominantly mechanics' institutes, the YMCA and the YWCA, and associations established purely as evening schools.[342]

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[340] Manners, *Some of the Advantages*, p.91.
[341] 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers's Journal*, pp.411-2.
[342] 'Present and Future of Mechanic Institutes' in *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, Iss.205, December 5, 1857, pp.364-366, and Manners, *Encouraging Experiences,* pp.69-76, and Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words,* p.584.

This made evening classes in cities commonplace and even competitive with each other.[343] The provision of classes within provincial towns depended on the town's size, the existing educational provisions, and the success and capacities of the local reading room. Providing classes could be very expensive and financially risky for a reading room. The most substantial cost was usually the provision of a room. Smaller, provincial reading rooms that were initially built to function solely as reading rooms may have been held back by this limitation. Other outlays included teachers, slates, and schoolbooks; some rooms charged a weekly fee for classes to cover the cost of the teacher and either sold the materials to attendees or required them to purchase them independently.[344] In these cases, the cost of the classes was passed on to the members who used the facility.

In an early reading room in Hampstead, London (outside of this study's general field) in 1845, the teaching was done 'wholly gratuitous, and is given partly by gentlemen who take an interest in the institution, and partly by some of the members themselves.' The committee of the institution believed this created greater cohesion between the different classes:

> The committee cannot close their report without offering their best thanks, in the name of the members, to all who have so kindly devoted a part of their leisure time to the teaching of the classes. No paid master would have been so efficient, since, besides the instruction communicated, there is the additional great advantage of bringing together the different ranks of society, and thus making all feel themselves members of the same community.[345]

The fact that the classes were taught by both 'gentlemen' and 'members themselves' implies mutual respect between the classes. This London example shows working-class acceptance of middle-class intervention in their education.

At the generally accepted blueprint for the autodidactic reading room, St John Street in Carlisle, classes were established a year after the institution's founding in 1849. Morley claimed that the management of the room did this in response to its

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[343] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words,* pp.581-585.
[344] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words,* pp.581-585.
[345] 'Hampstead Reading Rooms' in *The British Magazine*, 29, March 1846 (London) p.349.

success in its first year; this success created financial security that allowed the room to establish classes and pay for supplies. Other costs were minimal since the society owned the property and used capable members for teaching. Starting these classes was seen as the natural evolution of self-provided education and the next step in the association's development. The classes were basic and aimed at those who were 'deficient' in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as members' children. They cost members one penny a week to attend, and the association would bulk buy supplies to sell to students at 'prime cost,' charging them one penny per week until their debt was paid. Classes had an average attendance of 50, which the room reported as a great success. The room's committee claimed the classes were so popular they could only accommodate half of those wishing to attend, with people queuing for an hour to secure a spot. Adults were even leaving the classes to make way for the boys to attend. The popularity drove the room to establish a second school. The report states that the 'fitting-up' of both the first and second schools 'cost a considerable amount of money,' but the members strongly supported the notion. The popularity of these classes and the substantial investment in more illustrates the value the members of this reading room placed upon the classes.[346]

The development of reading room classes highlights these institutions' dual role in promoting education and fostering community cohesion. While fictional depictions like 'Matt the Miner' idealise these classes as arenas for working-class self-improvement, the reality was more complex and varied by institution. It is unknown how many of the intricacies from the blueprint set out by the rooms in Carlisle were replicated throughout the nation, particularly in smaller provincial rooms. Though not ubiquitous, these classes were a common feature in at least the larger reading rooms, catering to the educational needs of local working-class men by teaching basic reading and writing skills. They contributed to the wider educational landscape of Victorian Britain, whether through working-class self-education or, more likely, community-based development spearheaded by the local middle classes.

[346] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words,* pp.581-585.

Conversation and Debate.

Conversation was a critical element of the average village reading room. The atmosphere of lively debate distinguished it from the quiet, focused study of libraries and mechanics' institutes. This atmosphere was often represented as closer to that of a public house, though middle-class commentators tended to view the lively debate of the reading room as self-improving education in contrast to the disruptive ruckus of the public houses that reading rooms fervently contested. Conversation was such an essential part of the reading room experience that many had a separate conversation room. In the 1863 article 'Popular Reading-Rooms' published in *Chamber's Journal of Literature*, Sciences and Arts, the desirability of a conversation room is discussed:

> It is well, moreover, to have two rooms in your establishment, one of which may be devoted to conversation, or which will at least accommodate the talkers, while the other is kept comparatively quiet. Most men like to chat over the news as well as read them; nay, the best scholar will often read aloud to the rest, with pauses for general comment.[347]

This reading aloud of the work meant that all members of the debate had consumed the same material and were debating with or against the point of view of a singular article, even if their points were influenced by other material they had read. It also allowed the illiterate or those simply too tired to read to be involved in the debate and have their opinion heard.

The active engagement of those not reading was not universal. A slightly different experience of being in one of these conversation rooms, including examples of the complex subjects debated, is provided in an article about 'Readers and Reading' in *Good Words*, an evangelical periodical:

> In the reading-room of the institution they keep themselves posted in current criticism on leading questions of the day, as it is to be found in the pages of such publications as the *Quarterly, Edinburgh,* and *Fortnightly Reviews; Fraser's* and *Blackwood's Magazines;* the *Saturday Review, Spectator,* the *Times,* and *Pall*

[347] 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers's Journal,* p.411.

> *Mall Gazette*. These they read as a means of getting a broad, general, both-sided view of questions that may be agitating public opinion for the time being; and have read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested the criticism in the reading-room, they will in the conversation-room discuss the subjects to which the criticisms relate, together with the relative merits of impartiality of the criticisms themselves. Many a pleasant and profitable hour have I spent in such a conversation-room, listening to or taking part in friendly-conducted but vigorously-contested debates on such questions as the Darwinian theory of descent, the morality of Jesuitism the true method of history, the practical possibilities of the co-operative principle, Professor Tyndall's Belfast speech, Mr. Gladstone's Vatican Decrees "expostulation"[348]

This appears to be an idealised account of the goings-on in a conversation room, suggesting something closer to a mutual improvement society or a classroom discussion of assigned reading rather than a light-hearted, lively debate. Despite this, the source outlines how conversation was sparked and conducted in these institutions. The assumption that those participating would first read relatively advanced periodicals and then base the conversation on that reading suggests that these conversation rooms, or conversations held within general reading rooms, were not there to accommodate the illiterate but actively excluded them.

When used as described by the above source, these conversation rooms encouraged the public speaking and debate skills of those already educated and engaged with literature and current affairs. The article continues by describing the lighter side of these debates, suggesting that they were not all severe debates of science, politics, and morality:

> I have mentioned these "heavier" subjects, but they are not the only kind that will be discussed when a number of the reading men find themselves together and i' the vein for conversation. They will go from grave to gay, from lively to severe - from, say, the limits of scientific investigation to a "good thing" in the comic papers or a witty saying of some public man; from the account of a "roars

[348] 'Readers and Reading' in *Good Words*, December 1876, p.316.

> of laughter" exciting breach of promise trial to the cutting up administered to some vapid novel in a "slashing" article in the *Saturday Review*, or the trenchant satire of the *Pall Mall Gazette* anent some passing example of social hypocrisy or bigotry.[349]

However, still it is only considered that 'reading men' were involved in this. The reality of this experience most likely varied according to the clientele of a given reading room and the atmosphere created by the members, committee, funders, and what was supplied within the room.

Oral practices and public discussion were an essential part of William Lovett's vision for reading rooms, if in a more formal manner than what was conducted at most village rooms. He hoped that such public discussions would encourage and develop future educators and political leaders:

> The utility of public discussions on useful subjects, —when properly conducted, is beyond estimation; for, independent of the facilities they afford for instructing men in the art of publicly imparting knowledge, instructing their fellows, and defending their rights, discussion is the best touchstone of truth.[350]

This 'touchstone of truth' signals toward public discussion within this reading environment being used as a form of assessing the knowledge being obtained by the room's members and separating the value of that knowledge:

> A man may spend a life time in reading and storing his mind with knowledge; but without subjecting his intellectual stores to the test of discussion, by which the sterling ore may be separated from the dross, he will continue to carry about with him as of equal value, false theories, romantic speculations, —crudities, and conceits of every description.[351]

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Chartist vision of reading rooms would dominate the development of their character. This intent on having them be a platform for lecture,

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[349] Ibid, pp.316-17.
[350] Lovett and Collins, *A New Organization,* p.51.
[351] Ibid, p.14.

debate and public speaking set the tone for these rooms and had a lasting effect on the nature of reading rooms.

Beyond serious debate regarding their reading or local politics, the local reading room would function as a more relaxed social hub where locals could interact, create friendships, or even flirt. The following humorous excerpt from the *Wharfedale & Airedale Observer* in 1905 tells the story of some boys entering the reading room in Saltaire, a textile mill village outside of Bradford, Yorkshire. On that rainy day, the boys returned to the reading rooms after summer, flirted with the girls, and, as the writer suggests, disrupted the elders:

> Last winter, boys made a habit to congregate in the Saltaire reading room of an evening with the apparent object of annoying elderly folks by making as much noise as possible; and now that the long evenings are coming on again, it would appear that the boys, having spent a quiet summer, are going to make a great effort to remind the world that they are not dead. On Monday evening, when the rain descended, some boys tumbled headlong into the reading-room, and seeing two young girls sitting down alone by a table in a quiet corner, decided to keep them company. Having failed to attract the studious maids' attention by ordinary means, the boys set about coughing for all they were worth, and the studious maids, having a sense of humour, cast a demure look at the boys, and smiled. The maidenly smile naturally highly pleased the boys: it was just what they wanted, and they lost no time in making hay whilst the sun shone. They opened a facetious conversation. "Feel tired, Mary?" "Reading a love tale, Jane?" -these were the kind of questions with which the maidens were bombarded, and the maidens, entering into the spirit of the catechism, were soon joining heartily in the outbursts of laughter which assailed the delicate ears of elderly readers. As we are only in the month of August yet, this was evidently but a little preliminary canter. Those who are pining for complete comedies must wait patiently till the winter evening come. The boys are training.[352]

[352] 'Noisy boys in the reading room' in *Wharfedale & Airedale Observer*, August 25, 1905, p.5.

This extract is a snapshot of the average, industrial, provincial reading room and, through humour, exhibits the atmosphere and relationships built within one. It provides an example of the anticipation that reading rooms were more popular, especially with younger people, in the winter months and thus livelier. The fact that this article or letter is not an outright complaint but a humorous story suggests that the attendance by these young people was not so much disdained by the elders but instead reluctantly viewed as bringing life to the room. The writer's approval of the young ladies studying in the room and a subtle admiration or fondness for the boys and the fun time they are having portrays the room as a welcoming social place that combines sociability with quiet study. It even appears to be an acceptable ground for flirtation, as it is a mixed-sex community venue.

Conversation adds an additional dimension to our understanding of literary engagement—learning skills and ideas connected to, but not exclusive to, literature. This offers historians an abstract concept of literary engagement that we cannot replicate simply by reading the same works they did. Although we will never know precisely what was discussed, we can appreciate the added acts of analysis and expression. Due to reading rooms and other similar communal establishments, reading was not necessarily an isolating or peaceful activity for working men; instead, it could be a social, community-based activity.

Musical Entertainment.

While music was not welcome within most reading rooms, it still played a role in many room communities. Concerts were commonplace in Victorian culture across all classes and populations as discussed in Chapter 1.[353] Although reading rooms were not the sole providers of musical entertainment, especially in medium-sized towns and larger, it was not unusual for them to host concerts alongside similar institutions to raise funds. These concerts were widespread and varied in cost and success from town

[353] Catriona M. Parratt, 'Making Leisure Work: Women's Rational Recreation in Late Victorian and Edwardian England' in *Journal of Sport History*, 26.23 (University of Illinois Press, Fall 1999), pp.471-87 (p.478), and Stanley Sadie, 'Concert Life in Eighteenth Century England' *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association, 1958-1959*, 85 (1959), pp.17-30.

to town. The following examples illustrate their place within the reading room community, the wider community, their financial benefit, and their contribution to rational recreation.

Musical concerts were a popular form of fundraising for reading rooms. In the north of Scotland, the Wick and Pulteneytown Mechanics Reading Room held a 'promenade concert' in 1855, making a profit of £6 16s for the room. It was held in the local Temperance Hall and chaired by the Procurator Fiscal.[354] This connection to the temperance hall and the Procurator Fiscal's chairmanship exemplifies how these concerts and reading rooms, in general, had a close relationship with temperance and the local middling class. However, they were attended by the working class as examined at the Knowetop Reading Room in Motherwell in 1893. This room, which charged a one shilling per quarter subscription, held several musical performances throughout the winter season.[355] It charged 6d per ticket, but crucially sold these tickets exclusively through the Reading Room Committee or 'at the various Works in the district.'[356] For one particular concert, the tickets were sold from the Time Office of the Lanarkshire Steel Works, targeting local workers and their families—the kind of men who were members of the room.[357] This suggests the concerts were for their members and other working men, not the local middling classes or aristocracy seeking funds.

Musical evenings were not only about raising money but could also be part of the regular entertainment structure for the members. In Newlyn, a medium-sized town in Cornwall, the reading room hosted Musical Entertainment 'every Friday Evening,' featuring vocal and instrumental performances. These events were free for members and cost 1d for non-members.[358] The frequency, low cost, and location within the reading room indicate that this was not a town-wide fundraising event but regular wholesome entertainment for the members, akin to a weekly live music night in a public house. In Ardrossan in 1887, locals built a reading room to prevent the drunken

[354] 'Concert' in *John O. Groat Journal,* February 16, 1855, p.2.
[355] 'Knowetop Reading Room' in *Motherwell Times*, March 4, 1893, p.2.
[356] 'Grand Musical Entertainment' in *Motherwell Times*, April 1, 1893, p.2.
[357] Knowetop Reading Room' in *Motherwell Times*, January 21, 1893, p.2.
[358] 'Amusements' in *The Cornish Telegraph,* February 22, 1876, p.2.

destruction of their town by the navvies building the harbour. They provided readings and music to entertain the men:

> What was much wanted was a counter-attraction to the public-houses. During the winter months, when we had so much wet and stormy weather, pleasant evenings would be provided to the men, in the shape of readings and music[359]

The locals believed that reading material alone would not be enough to entertain the navvies or tempt them away from the public houses, but they thought verbal or musical entertainment would suffice. Similarly, a Navvy reading room funded by the Mission in Neston hosted a night of musical entertainment in March 1895. They performed songs like 'The Old Folks at Home', 'A Motto for Every Man', 'Hearts of Oak', 'The Englishman', 'The Midshipmite' and 'God Save the Queen' accompanied by a pianoforte and a violin solo.[360] Looking at the song 'A Motto for Every Man' more in-depth, this song claims to teach listeners how to be happy. It preaches about not worrying as 'grieving is a folly' and that every man should live by the motto - 'put your shoulder to the wheel', meaning to respond to problems by applying oneself. It also has other lessons within it, such as not getting into debt if you have the money, 'Credit refuse' if you have 'money to pay' and encouraging savings 'And a penny lay by for a rainy day'. It also encourages bravery, economics, cleanliness, and charity, emphasising the following: 'But Charity always commences at home'.[361] This is only one song in the repertoire, but it sums up the morals and attitudes that the mission and other paternal sources wished to impart through reading rooms: this song performed at a concert for the members is an example of direct preaching.

The only example found in this study of a musical instrument being provided within the reading room is in the Reading and Recreation Room in Letchworth, a large town in Hertfordshire (outside of my geographical parameters). There was a piano in this room, but 'lovers of music' were only 'at liberty to indulge in their fancy' on Wednesday and Saturday evenings between 9 o'clock and 10 o'clock. This tight

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[359] 'The Navvies at Ardrossan: Proposed Hall and Coffee Hut' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, October 7, 1887, p.4.
[360] 'Neston' in *Cheshire Observer*, March 23, 1895, p.3.
[361] 'A Motto for Every Man' in *The Lyrics, A Casquet of Vocal Gems from the Golden Age of Music Hall* A Motto for Every Man - Harry Clifton (monologues.co.uk) [accessed November 27, 2023].

restriction was put in place to minimise disruption to readers.[362] Some reading rooms offered music classes. Derby New Reading Room, provided for the 'men employed on the Midland Railway' in 1857, offered singing and music classes alongside classes in French and drawing.[363] In Edwinstowe, a rural village in Nottinghamshire, an early reading room in 1841 wished to start music classes alongside their calendar of lectures and readings, primarily accommodating agricultural labourers and woodmen.[364] While music classes were not standard, these examples highlight their varied uses: in Derby, classes were part of advanced education for rail workers, whereas, in Edwinstowe and Ardrossan, they were part of a structure of rational recreation.

While direct musical engagement within the reading rooms was often restricted to maintain a conducive atmosphere for reading, the music nonetheless permeated these spaces through concerts, fundraisers, and communal activities. These musical events served various purposes, from raising funds and providing wholesome entertainment to reinforcing moral and educational values. Examples from Wick and Pulteneytown, as well as Motherwell and Ardrossan, illustrate the diversity in how music was integrated into the fabric of these institutions, reflecting broader middle-class goals of promoting rational recreation and temperance. Music classes, though more common in higher calibre reading rooms, highlight music's role in advanced education and community building. The integration of music into reading room culture underscores the importance of multifaceted approaches to leisure and learning during this period.

Games and Other Recreation.

Games were the cornerstone of promoting rational recreation, particularly among the working class who were perceived to be less focused on literature and self-improvement. This is again exemplified by the reading room built for the navvies in Ardrossan in 1887, where the committee debated keeping the room strictly for missionary purposes versus allowing smoking and providing games:

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[362] 'Reading and Recreation Room' in *Citizen (Letchworth)*, December 19, 1908, p.5.
[363] 'The Derby New Reading Room' in *Reynolds's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 19.485, October 24, 1857, p.200.
[364] 'Village Reading-Rooms' in *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, 10.569, February 13, 1841, p.64.

> the proposal to take the use of the halls on Saturday nights for mission work only might drive many men to the public houses that evening. She favoured the providing of amusement then, and if they did not allow smoking the men would not patronise the hall very much. A benefit to the committee would be the enlisting of one or two workingmen to advise them as to what the men would best enjoy in the way of games.[365]

This also suggests there was ignorance among this entirely middle-class committee about what the average industrial worker would find entertaining. Despite this ignorance, there was an apparent effort in this reading room and throughout the country to provide fun, communal recreation in reading rooms to moralise the industrial classes. While most of this chapter focuses on non-literature practices with an eye towards provisions for the illiterate, the only source suggesting using games specifically for the amusement of the illiterate is in 'Matt the Miner,' the fictional middle-class fantasy. This extreme view that games were there to 'amuse those who could not read' is not mirrored in any other source used within this thesis.[366] Games were often viewed as a lower form of recreation by paternalistic sources, used by those less dedicated to self-improvement and education. These sources did not view games as merely entertaining the illiterate, while those who could read simply studied next to them.

In 'Popular Reading Rooms' from *Chambers's Journal* in 1863, the author argues that working men work too hard to be strong-armed into studying in their spare time and advocates for light amusement to make the reading rooms popular amongst working men. According to this article, the lack of light recreation was the pitfall of mechanics' Institutes:

> This has been the story of many mechanics' institutions. They have failed, or have been gradually taken possession of by another class. The fact is, call the institution by what name you will, we want places in which more provision is made for wholesome amusement than for self-education. It is a mistake to suppose that there is any great thirst for book *learning* among those who work

[365] 'Navvies' Coffee Hut and Reading-Room' in *Irvine Times,* October 8, 1887, p.3.
[366] 'Matt the Miner', After Work, p.139.

> hard all day; it is not in the nature of things. Nobody is to blame. . .Very few men can tax their muscles all day and their brains all the evening. You can't expect a man to fill up his leisure moments of his time with *study*, however light. Some will do, no doubt.[367]

This suggests that there was a preference among the industrial workers for recreation over study. The articles suggest that the reading rooms needed to be geared towards the majority of working men who wished to have light recreation while also accommodating those who wished to engage in self-improvement and study. This was opposed to mechanics' institutes and mutual improvement societies, which would attract working men already keen to work on their education in their leisure time. Whether reading rooms were predominately used for light recreation or whether most working men did take the opportunity for self-study is unclear, though it is interpreted throughout this thesis that recreation was a large part of reading room culture.

The entertainment supplied in each reading room differed, including more unusual games such as 'Carpet Bowls' or quoit.[368] Some games were standard practice for a reading room to provide, namely chess, draughts, and dominoes, but one very popular yet expensive game was billiards. This became a central part of reading rooms and, as discussed in Chapter 1, became integral to reading rooms' popularity and financial stability towards the end of the century. Card games, particularly whist, were controversial but common. Their cheapness made them easy for the room to provide, as a pack could be bought for 1s (example from 1872).[369] The relationship between cards and gambling led to reluctance to provide them in reading rooms, at least among moralising paternalistic commentators. As one upper-class commentator, the Duchess of Rutland wrote:

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[367] 'Popular Reading-Rooms', *Chambers's Journal,* p.411.
[368] 'Ryhope Colliery, Opening of a New Lecture Hall and Reading Room', *Shields Daily Gazette*, November 23, 1868, p. 4, and 'Village Clubs and Reading Rooms' in *The Leisure Hour: A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation*, September 19, 1868, pp.596-597.
[369] 'New Year's Cards' in *Buckingham Express*, December 28, 1872, p.1.

> One lady told me to beware lest reading-rooms should be used for gambling purposes. This danger may be averted by enforcing a regulation that gamblers must be excluded.[370]

Gambling was banned within many institutions and was often one of the most prominent of the reading room rules.[371]

The most common games were board games—. The equipment for these games, such as draughts, chess, and dominoes, were also relatively cheap and commonplace. 'Popular Reading-Rooms' suggests that a reading room would be 'seriously defective' if there were no quiet room for reading a book or a game of chess played without interruption.' Since reading rooms tended to possess multiple boards for draughts and chess, they became ideal centres for local draughts or chess clubs.[372] An extreme example is the reading room in Invergordon, a harbour town in the Scottish Highlands, being established as the 'Draughts Club and Reading Room.'[373] These standard games and clubs provided entertainment, distraction from life, and a facility for homosocial activity outside of work.[374] They likely also increased membership to reading rooms and provided the local town with another form of recreation and community among those who wished to play. An article from 1897, which looked at the growing popularity of chess clubs, recognised the importance of institutes and reading rooms in providing chess to 'all classes of people':

> Now almost every place of any consequence has one or more such clubs; and many of the more populous manufacturing villages have some sort of chess organisation attached to their institutes or reading-rooms.[375]

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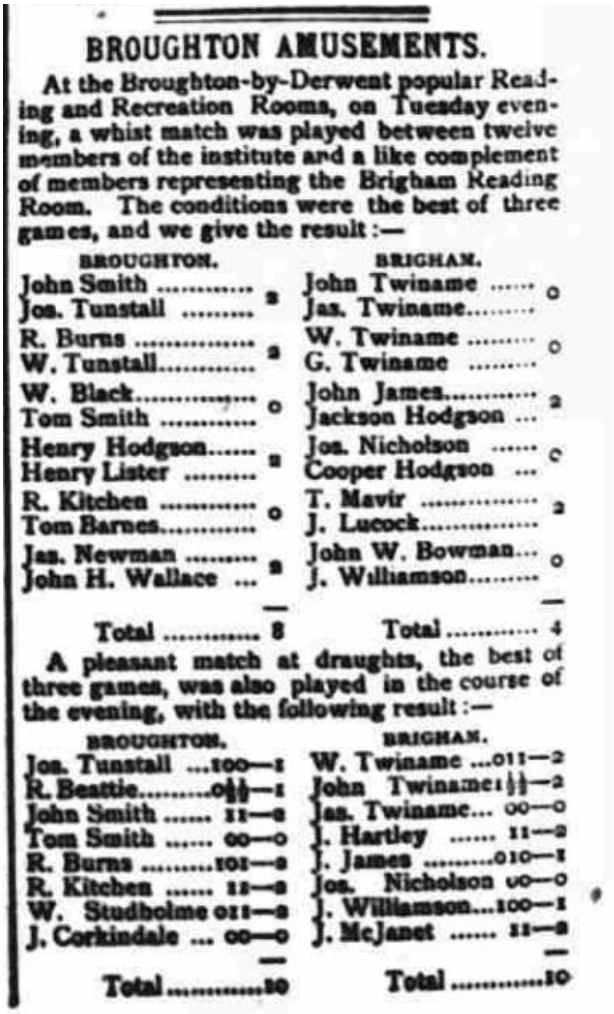
[370] Manners, *Some of the Advantages*, p.81.
[371] *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society etc.,* (1878), p.5, and *Rules of the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room*, *with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington, 1880), p.3.
[372] 'To Draught Players' in *Motherwell Times*, 25 February 1893, p.2
[373] 'Invergordon Draughts Club and Reading Room.' In *Invergordon Times and General Advertiser*, 13 October 1886, p.1.
[374] For the relationship between Chess and homosocial activity, Jenny Adams, 'Pieces of Power: Medieval Chess and Male Homosocial Desire' in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol 103, No. 2 (April 2004) pp.197-214 .
[375] 'Chess and Chess Clubs' in *Good Words*, January 1897, p.47.

The tone of this article suggests that the provision of chess and the existence of chess clubs in relation to reading rooms both provided this provincial industrial class with an opportunity to play and indicated that they had a desire to play.

Tournaments were often held within the club, competing at the different games supplied within the room. Common competitions included billiards, draughts, and chess.[376] These competitions, though likely motivated by bragging rights, often had prizes. One useful example from Knowetop Reading Room in modern-day Motherwell (Glasgow) lists the prizes and their value for a Draughts Tournament held in 1893, '1st, Silver Watch (value 30s); 2nd, Chain (value 15s); 3rd, Draught Board; 4th, Draught Men.'.[377] These relatively high-value prizes suggest a certain level of participation, investment, and perceived value of the competition. Towards the turn of the century, inter-establishment competition would become inter-district. Teams would represent their local reading rooms against other reading rooms within the area (again) in draughts,

[376] 'Greenside Reading Room Billiard Tournament' in *Penistone Stocksbridge and Hoyland Express*, November 3, 1899, p.3, and 'Billiards Denver Finalists' in *Lynn Advertiser*, May 10, 1946, p.8, and 'Brough Reading Room' in *Penrith Observer*, November 13, 1923, p.4.
[377] 'Knowetop Reading Room' in *Wishaw Press*, November 18, 1893, p.3.



BROUGHTON AMUSEMENTS.

At the Broughton-by-Derwent popular Reading and Recreation Rooms, on Tuesday evening, a whist match was played between twelve members of the institute and a like complement of members representing the Brigham Reading Room. The conditions were the best of three games, and we give the result :—

BROUGHTON.		BRIGHAM.	
John Smith	2	John Twiname	0
Jos. Tunstall		Jas. Twiname.....	
R. Burns	2	W. Twiname	0
W. Tunstall.....		G. Twiname	
W. Black.....	0	John James.....	2
Tom Smith		Jackson Hodgson ...	
Henry Hodgson.....	2	Jos. Nicholson	0
Henry Lister		Cooper Hodgson ...	
R. Kitchen	0	T. Mavir	2
Tom Barnes.....		J. Lucock.....	
Jas. Newman	2	John W. Bowman...	0
John H. Wallace ...		J. Williamson.....	
Total	8	Total	4

A pleasant match at draughts, the best of three games, was also played in the course of the evening, with the following result :—

BROUGHTON.		BRIGHAM.	
Jos. Tunstall	1 0 0 — 1	W. Twiname	0 1 1 — 2
R. Beattie	0 ½ ½ — 1	John Twiname	1 ½ ½ — 2
John Smith	1 1 — 2	Jas. Twiname	0 0 — 0
Tom Smith	0 0 — 0	J. Hartley	1 1 — 2
R. Burns	1 0 1 — 2	J. James	0 1 0 — 1
R. Kitchen	1 1 — 2	Jos. Nicholson	0 0 — 0
W. Studholme	0 1 1 — 2	J. Williamson	1 0 0 — 1
J. Corkindale	0 0 — 0	J. McJanet	1 1 — 2
Total	10	Total	10

Figure 3.2: Results of whist tournament played at Broughton-by-Derwent Reading and Recreation Rooms.[378]

billiards, chess and other games.[379] The advertisement of these events, alongside reporting their results in the local press, suggests a certain pride, popularity, and community awareness of these competitions.[380] The camaraderie created by the competitions and their advertisement helped create an identity for the reading room and assisted in removing any distance between a given reading room and its local community. This transformed the room from simply being a facility used by individual

[378] 'Broughton Amusements' in *West Cumberland Times*, March 16, 1889, p.2.
[379] 'Pudsey League' in *Leeds Mercury*, November 2, 1903, p.3.
[380] 'Reading Room Tournament' in *East Riding Telegraph*, February 3, 1900, p 5.

members to a community space fostering solidarity within the team and the town's people who supported them.

While most sources are generally positive about providing recreational activities, one particular source from the *West Cumberland Times* from 1894, titled 'Parish Councils Act 1894 – To the Workers of Cumberland,' provides a negative perspective. Written under the pseudonym 'Tempus Fugit' (the Latin phrase for 'Time Flies' or proverb for 'Time's a-wasting') and addressed to 'My dear Comrades', the writer questions if the provision of reading rooms or libraries within a 'village or small town is a mental blessing or not.' They believe that without billiards, bagatelles, cards, checkers, and dominoes, 'libraries could not exist', but these games make the rooms non-valuable. Gambling is their primary objection to this form of recreation, but they also argue that games distract from the educational and studying aspects of the rooms:

> But have these things not a tendency to divert their attention from the book shelves and reading desk to the billiard table? Don't you think it is no exaggeration to say that the gaming tables are patronised by nine-tenths of the members?[381]

This perspective inadvertently describes the immense popularity of such facilities within the rooms. Even the writer's pseudonym, 'Tempus Fugit,' alludes to their opinion that these games wasted the members' time and 'mental energy'. The writer acknowledges their view is controversial, joking that they 'may get coals of fire heaped upon [their] head for this statement.'[382] This article does not reflect popular sentiment but most likely represents the opinion of an extreme rational recreationist. The overall argument is that if libraries were funded by the local council through rates, funds would not have to be raised through the popularity, membership, and subscription increase that games within reading rooms provided. The people of the town would no longer be distracted by these facilities and could focus on more 'material and spiritual salvation.' This commentary rejects the broader ideas of moral reform and rational recreation, which, as evidenced throughout this thesis, were widely rejected. It draws a straight line

[381] 'Parish Councils Act, 1894, To the Workers of Cumberland' in *West Cumberland Times*, June 2, 1894, p.7.
[382] Ibid, p.7.

between the provision of games and recreation and their use to fund the literary and educational side of reading rooms.

As the ' Popular Reading-Rooms ' article suggests, it is unlikely that games and light recreation were of more importance than literature and educational facilities within the average provincial reading room.[383] However, the importance of recreation should not be underestimated. The fact that many rooms were called ‘Reading and Recreation Room’ is in itself significant. Throughout my studies, I have not encountered a reading room that specifically excluded games, and rarely have I seen one that did not actively advertise its recreational facilities. While providing games was not uncontroversial, they were important for the members, paternalists, and the reading rooms themselves. They increased membership, attendance, and income for the rooms and helped establish their place within the local community and cultivate that community itself. Importantly, they were a large part of the leisure opportunities afforded to working-class men, particularly within provincial settings.

Rules, Regulations and Enforcement.

Rules and Regulations.

1.That this Society be called the “Brampton Working Men’s Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society.”

2. To give those working men who desire to avail themselves of the opportunity, the means of having a comfortable room in which they can read the various newspapers, magazines, and periodicals of the day, together with the advantage of a good Library of useful and instructive books which may be circulated amongst them for the purpose of gratifying their mental desires, elevating their tastes, and of generally improving their minds : firstly, by given the such access at a cheap rate to the various books and publications which, in an isolated state, it would be impossible they could have; secondly, by unfolding to them how they can enjoy mental recreation after the toils of the day are ended, without having

[383] ‘Popular Reading-Rooms’, *Chambers’s Journal,* p.411.

> recourse to the demoralising influence of the Public House; and, lastly, by improving their domestic homes, in so far as it will offer to them those pleasures and advantages which are derivable from the perusal of valuable and interesting books.[384]

The second rule of the Brampton Reading Room and Mutual Improvement Society, which opened in 1858 and was patronised by a local banker, states that the room's mission was not to provide its members amusement but improvement.[385] The books must be 'useful and instructive' in order to 'elevate their tastes, and generally improve their minds.' They then stipulate that the room is there to guide the men's recreation, encouraging them away from public houses. The third primary purpose of the room is to improve the members' 'domestic homes' through the information provided in the library, or plainly put, to supply the members with books on cleanliness and domestic practices. This final section will examine the practical regulations members had to adhere to. I will not look at actual reader experiences but only at the regulations they functioned under. It will also examine how the rooms enforced these rules and some of the punishments for breaking them. This includes a more in-depth look at the theft and damage of literature within these establishments and its criminalisation.

Returning to the Brampton Reading Room, the expectations on members' behaviour are detailed within the regulations. Rule twelve seeks to protect the literature:

> 12. That any Member Found taking any book, newspaper, or other publication from the room, which *bona fide* belongs the Institution, shall be prosecuted as the law direct. *See Notice Board*[386]

Unfortunately, what was on the notice board is unknown. The fact that this rule exists, and not one addressing other belongings of the institution, such as games, suggests a high value was placed upon the literature by the committee and a perception that

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[384] *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society etc.,* (1878), p.3.
[385] AUK: *Census 1861*, 3922/68/11, and *Carlisle Journal*, November 4, 1859, p.9.
[386] *Rules & Regulations of the Working Men's Reading Room and Mutual Instruction Society etc.,* (1878), p.5.

literature theft was common. Rule thirteen addresses the members' conduct whilst in the reading room:

> 13. That any Member found smoking, swearing, betting, gambling, or using any unseemly behaviour whilst in the Institution, shall be liable to expulsion.[387]

The committee highlights what they likely perceive to be the most common and troublesome behaviours: smoking, swearing, and gambling. Including the all-encompassing term ‘any unseemly behaviour’ gives the committee flexibility to punish various behaviours.

The Aldborough Reading Room had similar regulations, which gave the committee the power to deem behaviour ‘improper’ while still focusing on two key issues, gambling and inappropriate language:

> 6. The committee shall have the power of expelling or fining any member not conforming to the Rules, or who may conduct himself improperly, or who shall injure any property belonging to or in the possession of the Institution.
>
> 7. No Gambling, profane or improper language allowed. Any member so offended shall be fined or expelled at the option of Committee.[388]

The wording of these rules gives the committee the ultimate power to either fine members as they see fit or expel any member for any behaviour they see as immoral. As laid out in Chapter 2, the committee of this room was generally middle-class working men, and the selection of this committee was controversial.

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[387] Ibid, p.5 (1878)
[388] *Rules of the Aldbrough Library and Reading Room*, *with a Catalogue of Books in the Library* (Darlington, 1880).

RULES AND REGULATIONS.

1. The payment in advance of 5/- per annum, 3/- half-yearly, 2/- per quarter, or 1/- per month, shall constitute membership of the first class. The payment in advance of 2/4 per annum, 1/2 half-yearly, commencing 1st January and 1st July, or 1/- per quarter, shall constitute membership of the second class.

2. There shall be four general meetings yearly: namely, on the second Wednesday in January, April, July, and October; but rules and regulations can only be altered or repealed at the July meeting.

3. The business of the Society shall be managed by a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and thirteen Directors, who together shall form the Committee—five to be a quorum.

The President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer to act as Trustees.

The whole Committee shall be elected annually, and the old members shall be eligible for re-election.

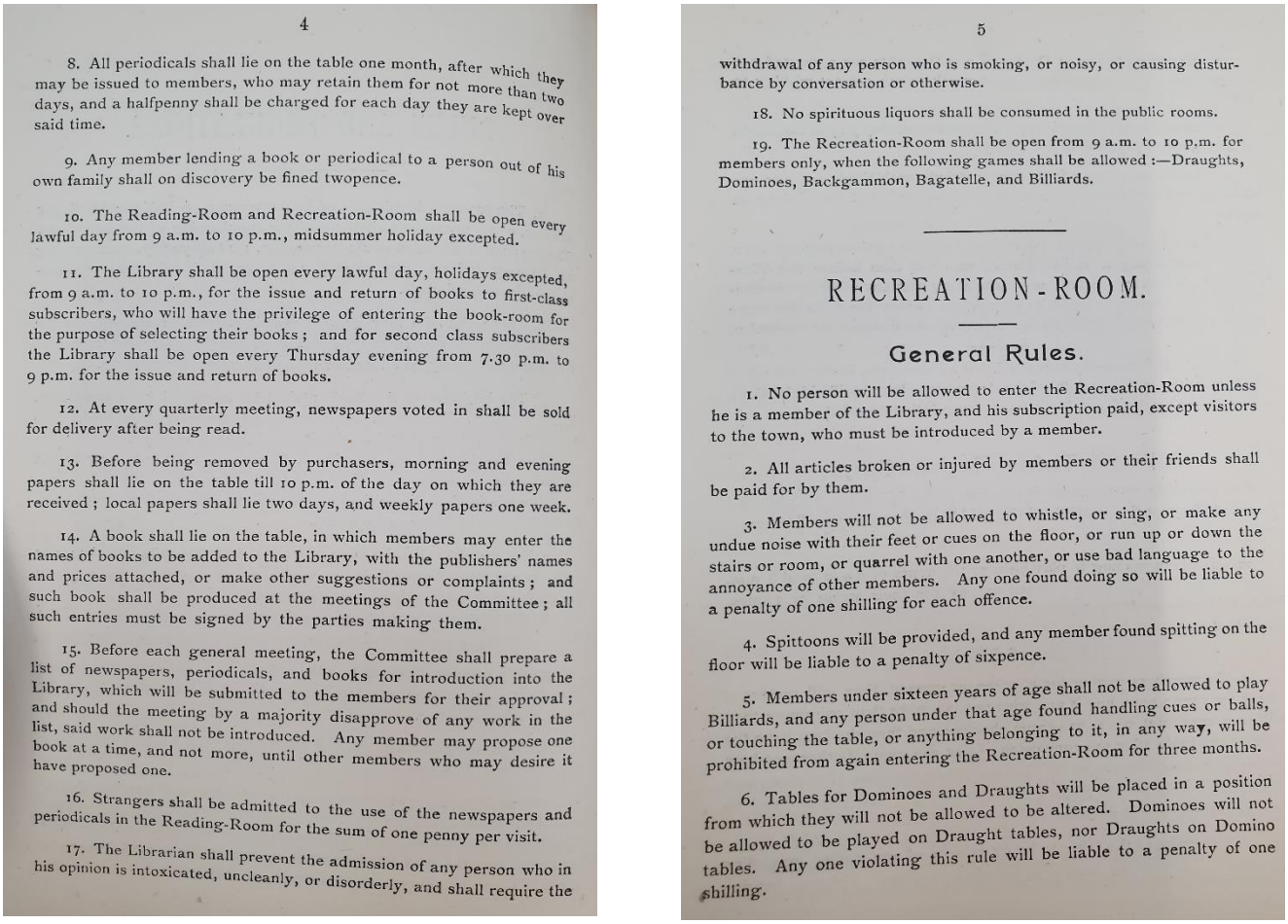
4. No member shall be allowed more than two books at a time, nor to keep any book longer than two weeks, under a penalty of one penny for each week it is retained over two weeks.

In the case of a book exceeding three volumes, and of books of the nature of encyclopædias and magazines, a book shall mean a volume.

5. Any member desiring to keep a book beyond the specified time may have it on renewed application, provided it has not been asked for by any other member.

6. Any member damaging or destroying any book or periodical shall replace the same.

7. The Librarian shall have charge of the Library, Reading Room, and Recreation-Room, and shall be responsible for the safe keeping of the books and all other property in those rooms, or entrusted to his custody by the Committee, and members shall be answerable to the Librarian in the first place for injury to rooms, books, or other property.



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8. All periodicals shall lie on the table one month, after which they may be issued to members, who may retain them for not more than two days, and a halfpenny shall be charged for each day they are kept over said time.

9. Any member lending a book or periodical to a person out of his own family shall on discovery be fined twopence.

10. The Reading-Room and Recreation-Room shall be open every lawful day from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., midsummer holiday excepted.

11. The Library shall be open every lawful day, holidays excepted, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., for the issue and return of books to first-class subscribers, who will have the privilege of entering the book-room for the purpose of selecting their books; and for second class subscribers the Library shall be open every Thursday evening from 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. for the issue and return of books.

12. At every quarterly meeting, newspapers voted in shall be sold for delivery after being read.

13. Before being removed by purchasers, morning and evening papers shall lie on the table till 10 p.m. of the day on which they are received; local papers shall lie two days, and weekly papers one week.

14. A book shall lie on the table, in which members may enter the names of books to be added to the Library, with the publishers' names and prices attached, or make other suggestions or complaints; and such book shall be produced at the meetings of the Committee; all such entries must be signed by the parties making them.

15. Before each general meeting, the Committee shall prepare a list of newspapers, periodicals, and books for introduction into the Library, which will be submitted to the members for their approval; and should the meeting by a majority disapprove of any work in the list, said work shall not be introduced. Any member may propose one book at a time, and not more, until other members who may desire it have proposed one.

16. Strangers shall be admitted to the use of the newspapers and periodicals in the Reading-Room for the sum of one penny per visit.

17. The Librarian shall prevent the admission of any person who in his opinion is intoxicated, uncleanly, or disorderly, and shall require the

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withdrawal of any person who is smoking, or noisy, or causing disturbance by conversation or otherwise.

18. No spirituous liquors shall be consumed in the public rooms.

19. The Recreation-Room shall be open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. for members only, when the following games shall be allowed :—Draughts, Dominoes, Backgammon, Bagatelle, and Billiards.

RECREATION-ROOM.

General Rules.

1. No person will be allowed to enter the Recreation-Room unless he is a member of the Library, and his subscription paid, except visitors to the town, who must be introduced by a member.

2. All articles broken or injured by members or their friends shall be paid for by them.

3. Members will not be allowed to whistle, or sing, or make any undue noise with their feet or cues on the floor, or run up or down the stairs or room, or quarrel with one another, or use bad language to the annoyance of other members. Any one found doing so will be liable to a penalty of one shilling for each offence.

4. Spittoons will be provided, and any member found spitting on the floor will be liable to a penalty of sixpence.

5. Members under sixteen years of age shall not be allowed to play Billiards, and any person under that age found handling cues or balls, or touching the table, or anything belonging to it, in any way, will be prohibited from again entering the Recreation-Room for three months.

6. Tables for Dominoes and Draughts will be placed in a position from which they will not be allowed to be altered. Dominoes will not be allowed to be played on Draught tables, nor Draughts on Domino tables. Any one violating this rule will be liable to a penalty of one shilling.

Figure 3.3: Catalogue & Rules of the Earlston Library and Reading Room, Instituted 1852 (1909).[389]

Most of the rules in the Earlston Library and Reading Room rules and regulations address the members' conduct. Rules four to nine cover the members' treatment of literature, including financial penalties for keeping borrowed books and periodicals past the allotted time – one penny a week for books and half a penny a day for periodicals. If members were to damage the materials, they would have to buy a replacement, and the room librarian enforced this. There was also a fine of two pence for those lending a book outside of their family, which suggests an expectation or acceptance that books were to be borrowed within families, indicating that these catalogues had a reach beyond the members themselves. Similar financial penalties applied within the recreation room, where broken 'articles' had to be paid for.

[389] NLS: 5.1926, *Catalogue & Rules of the Earlston Library and Reading Room, Instituted 1852* (1909)

As per rule seventeen, members were expected to be clean and well-dressed (and sober) to enter the room. This was a contentious class issue. As discussed in the introduction, some argued that the expectations of cleanliness and dress were central issues driving men out of the mechanics' institutes and into the working men's reading rooms. Also mentioned in rule seventeen is that men could be dismissed from the room for smoking, being noisy, or disturbing others through conversation. This does not suggest that all conversation was banned but rather that it should not be excessive. Stricter rules applied in the recreation room, where all undue noise was banned, including whistling, singing, tapping of feet or cues, arguing, or using bad language. Any of these behaviours that might annoy another member could result in a severe fine of one shilling. Other rules in the recreation room included a three-month ban for anyone playing billiards under the age of 16, a one-shilling penalty for playing dominoes or draughts on the wrong table and a sixpence fine for those who spit on the floor instead of in the provided spittoons. The consumption of 'spirituous liquors' was banned. These rules demonstrate that members were expected to be presentable, sober, quiet, and respectful of the literature provided if they wished to access the room. Many of these rules were in place to protect the reading room's contents and environment. They projected the ideal behaviour these rooms wished to instil in working men. Their enforcement methods were predominantly financial, with some behaviours leading to expulsion or denial of access.

An early reading room from 1840 in Sherwood allowed its members to take books home on the condition that their master or parents were answerable for the return and condition of the books:

> Our rules are such as those which usually govern mechanics' libraries, with, however, this difference, that apprentices are permitted to read or take out books, simply on condition of their masters or parents being answerable for their punctual return uninjured, and, to conciliate all parties, we except works on religious controversy and politics.[390]

[390] 'Village Reading Room' in *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, 10, February 13, 1841, p.64.

This suggests that the members were not trusted with the responsibility for the books. The room committee instead utilised external pressure from those with influence over the members to protect the reading material. Protection of the literature from theft and damage was a priority for reading room committees. One tactic was to discourage those who damaged or misbehaved from entering the reading rooms. In Fleetwood, Lancashire, in 1888, they decided to close the recreation room altogether due to 'the damage to property wrought by the lads being considerable.'[391] Much later, in 1943, a reading room in Jedburgh in the Scottish Borders banned "Boys' Own Paper" to discourage juveniles from entering their reading room after 'considerable damage' had been done to the books and papers in the room.[392]

Though theft and literature damage appeared to be common, it was difficult to catch the perpetrators. At the reading room in Leighton in 1865, the committee encouraged the men to report each other's misdemeanours in exchange for a 'reward':

> Wilful Damage At the Reading Room – We regret to see that the committee of the Institute are obliged to offer a reward for the detection of the persons who are in the habit of mutilating the periodicals supplied to the reading room. We are told that the principal pictures are often cut from *Punch*, and that not unfrequently whole articles have been removed from magazines. Newspapers and books have also been missed. As the librarian cannot remain at the reading room during the whole day, it would be well if members frequenting the reading room, would, when they see any damage being done, give immediate information to the secretary, or some member of the committee.[393]

There is an unmistakable sense of frustration within this article. The popularity of cutting out illustrations demonstrates their value to the members and the reading room committee. Though there is no further detail on which magazine articles, newspapers, and books were taken, members clearly wanted to collect these pieces of literature. The committee was willing to pay to prevent this, presumably with the intention of

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[391] 'The Flyde' in *Preston Herald*, January 14, 1888, p.3.
[392] 'Reading Room Damage' in *Jedburgh Gazette*, December 10, 1943, p.3.
[393] 'Wilful Damage at the Reading Room' in *Leighton Buzzard Observer and Linslade Gazette*, August 29, 1865, p.4.

allowing the literature to be read by all rather than to punish bad behaviour. To do so they encouraged the members to report each other to the the committee.

Acts of theft or destruction of reading room literary materials were taken seriously and could lead to the perpetrators' arrest. When a man stole and mutilated books from the Picton Reading-Room in Liverpool in 1884, he was sentenced to six months' hard labour:

> At Liverpool yesterday a young man named Mercer was charged with stealing books from the Picton Reading-room, which belongs to the corporation. It was stated that for some time past books of a valuable character, chiefly relating to art and architecture, but a large number of them were cut and mutilated. The prisoner pleaded guilty. The magistrate said it was a very bad case, and he sentenced the prisoner to six months' hard labour.[394]

A year later at the same reading room, a man was caught stealing plates from books. He was arrested and pleaded guilty, stating, 'Under a very strong temptation I did it. I did so for the want of money to buy plates for a work I was doing.' The police searched his house, recovering 'five large plates and a large number of small ones' as well as 'manuscripts of work the prisoner was going to publish.' The damage was estimated to have amounted to £10 from a collection of books worth £20. The city police court wished to 'greatly strain a point towards' the prisoner and were reluctant to give him the option of a fine. They gave him a £5 fine or one month's imprisonment.[395] This severe sentence as well as a police raid shows how seriously such offences were taken.

In Arbroath in 1926, a man described as a 'young labourer' was 'charged with having maliciously damaged a newspaper within the public reading-room' by cutting it with a knife. The man was caught by the room's attendant using a pocket knife to cut from 'a London newspaper', then dropped the knife and hid it under his foot. He claimed, 'he was using the knife to sharpen his pencil, with the idea of copying out an advertisement. . .The knife which he held at the advertisement slipped as he took his eyes away, and caused the cut in the paper.' The Bailie claimed, 'Annually, there was a

[394] 'Thefts from a Reading-Room' in *St James's Gazette*, July 2, 1884, p.11.
[395] 'Robberies in the Picton Reading-Room, A Peculiar Case' in *Liverpool Echo*, December 20, 1889, p.4.

great destruction of books and newspaper in the reading-room,' suggesting this act was not uncommon or accidental. The Bailie did not impose the £10 fine but instead discharged the man with the 'hope that [this] case will be an admonition to anyone who attends the library.'[396]

The rules and regulations of the above reading rooms generally adhere to the ideals laid out by upper-class commentators. Smoking, intoxication, swearing, gambling, excessive noise, and other behaviour at the discretion of the reading room committees were punishable by expulsion or financial penalty. This meant that if working men wished to attend their local room and access the literature, they had to act (and sometimes dress) in a way the committee deemed acceptable. Protection of the literature itself was of utmost importance to the committees. Misuse could incur a financial penalty or be deemed a criminal offence. The desire to make an example of those deemed to have intentionally stolen or damaged the literature meant the punishment for being caught was severe. The fact that the punishment was severe and yet the theft was still common reinforces the value that working men placed on this literature.

Conclusion.

Though newspapers, periodicals, and magazines were the primary function of any given reading room, along with access to small (or sometimes more extensive) libraries, these were far from the only activities in the average room. Non-literature-based activities were standard within reading rooms throughout the country, focusing on education and entertainment. Classes and lectures fulfilled the ideals of moral reform, while games, penny readings, and musical entertainment provided the rational recreation believed to steer working men away from greater evils. These non-literature-based activities were not purely for the illiterate. They did provide opportunities for the illiterate to engage with the reading room community and, in the case of readings and debates, allowed them to access literature and current news in a way they may not

[396] 'Damaging Newspaper in Public Reading-Room, Charge Against Arbroath Man' in *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, January 19, 1926, p.3.

have had available before. However, many of these activities were additional facilities for those who could read and wished to engage with literature further through lectures or debates, or they chose to spend their free time enjoying a game.

By examining the activities conducted within a reading room—particularly games, conversation, and debate—we gain a more vivid image of what it would have been like in the average village reading room. Alongside quiet study and chess playing, there was also (often in a separate room) a loud, lively atmosphere: a space where working men could learn public speaking and hone their debating skills, a space for light recreation such as billiards or cards, and a space for (predominantly) intra-class, homosocial activity. This informal, lively nature of reading room activity highlights the pronounced difference between reading rooms and the more studious mechanics' institutes and libraries.

In most cases, the education provided through lectures and classes was conducted and/or influenced by the upper classes. The level and subject of the education varied from room to room. Some rooms provided the opportunity to learn to read or write, while others offered the chance to learn French or music.[397] These opportunities, at any level or subject, are crucial to understanding the average provincial working man's educational options and the role that reading rooms had as a post-school educational facility within the community. The presence of these lectures and classes meant the average room provided the opportunity for autodidactic self-improvement and assisted in often paternalistic education. To access these facilities, working men would have to adhere to the rules and regulations of the room set out by the committee. This demonstrates active control of working men's behaviour, which is implemented through the guise of recreational facilities. The punishment for failing to adhere to this behaviour, which may be financial, exclusionary, or even imprisonment, reflects the seriousness of the enforcement of behaviour within these rooms.

Any historian researching the literary (or more general) lives of working men as a case study in any area, company, or even individuals would be amiss not to look at the educational facilities provided by the local reading room to understand what lectures or

[397] The Derby New Reading Room' in *Reynolds's Miscellany,* p.200.

classes may have contributed to their education or influence alongside their literary opportunities. The importance of the local reading room and the entertainment it provided within provincial towns and villages was summed up in an article in the Athenaeum from 1872 titled 'Clubs, Reading Rooms, and Lecture Halls':

> But though the central quarters of town are not without places for the intellectual recreation of young people, the voluntary associations for mental pastime and culture are much more numerous and popular in those suburban districts whose inhabitants live at considerable distances from the region of the theatres, and whose youth are generally constrained, by considerations of economy, to go without amusement, if they cannot find it within or near their own homes[398]

This suggestion that 'voluntary associations' were more popular among those without access to other entertainment reinforced the idea that local, provincial reading rooms were not solely local centres of education but also entertainment. The rooms provided several functions for their locale: education, entertainment, and community. Their reading room draughts or chess teams, their penny readings, night schools, and the opportunity for all community members to attend lectures or musical performances suggest that the local reading room played a more significant part in the community and people's day-to-day lives than simply being a facility to access the daily or weekly newspaper.

This research helps to create further details about (primarily provincial) working men's leisure time, the opportunities for different types of leisure, and their use of this leisure time in a community-focused environment. It also contributes to our understanding of adult working-class education by presenting the reading rooms' relationship to night classes and a more general insight into their access to verbal information through lectures and conversation. Despite being about reading rooms outside of reading, the chapter contributes to the history of reading by providing a rounder image of one of the primary environments in which working men read.

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[398] 'Clubs, Reading-Rooms, and Lecture Halls' in *The Athenaeum*, March 30, 1872, p.401.

Chapter 4. Class and Workers Reading Rooms.

Introduction.

The education of industrial workers has long been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, notably Jonathan Rose in his seminal work, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*.[399] This chapter firstly establishes the early formation of reading rooms accessible to the working class through the Chartist movement, establishing their politicised and radical nature. The chapter then focuses on examining the reading rooms provided for specific segments of industrial labour, namely sailors, miners, navvies and railway workers. While I initially attempted to include an exploration of mill and factory workers, it became evident that these groups predominantly utilised local reading rooms, aligning with the thesis's broader narrative.

By looking into industry-specific reading rooms, I can further explore the class dynamics of these rooms and the motivation behind their establishment through the lens of corporate and local paternalism. This is exasperated by the more conspicuous attitude towards wanting to alter these men's behaviour. It also highlights the differentiation between the opportunities afforded to working men depending upon their employment and class. This chapter examines industrial reading rooms not merely as hubs of literature, education, culture and recreation but as centres of education, social interaction and industrial activism. To achieve this, it will delve into the contexts in which these reading rooms were established, revealing the societal dynamics they encapsulated. This analysis will reflect paternalism's ethos, labour movements' aspirations and the complexities of industrial hierarchies. To enhance our understanding of the differences between various industries, this chapter will explore the motivations behind the creation of these reading rooms, the literature available within them, the educational opportunities they provided, the recreational activities they offered, and the architectural characteristics of the buildings themselves.

[399] Rose, *The Intellectual Life,* passim.

Chartist News Rooms.

> I think I may aver, without fear of contradiction, that I might have made the *Northern Star* the source of an immense revenue if I had made it less of a national organ and more of a class journal. It will also be borne in mind that I was the first person to aim a blow at the circulation of the *Star* by the establishment of public news rooms, and by recommending the reading of the most important portions of its news at the several Chartist assemblies. I did this upon the principle that I would rather have a circulation of one thousand read by and to two millions than a circulation of two millions read by and confined to one thousand . . . And it is a proud consolation to me to know, that although the *Northern Star* no longer possesses its circulation of 43,700 weekly, that, nevertheless, the reduced number is read by three times, aye, ten times, as many as it was in the days of its larger circulation.[400]

This quote from the opening column of the *Northern Star,* written by Feargus O'Connor in 1846, sums up the history, purpose and impact of early news rooms (as they were commonly called during this time). O'Connor claims to be the establisher of public news rooms, to his financial detriment. He illustrates how the creation of the rooms, which the numbers suggest were in their hundreds if not thousands, simultaneously reduced circulation figures while significantly increasing readership. This alone should be considered by any researcher looking into the *Northern Star* or more general circulation figures, particularly around the period when the reading room movement first found its footing. The news rooms, and their ability to circulate his press to the intended audience, turned this paper into a 'national organ' and allowed their influence to be spread to the working class, as O'Connor desired. The press and its circulation played a pivotal role in the Chartist movement, as for many leaders, notably O'Connor, it served as the primary means of communication with their supporters. This enhanced its circulation through news rooms, a crucial component of the movement.[401]

Chartist Newsrooms were the harbinger of the standard working-class reading room. These pioneering spaces marked the earliest reading room establishments

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[400] 'To the Imperial Chartist' in *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, October 3, 1846, p.1.
[401] Paul A. Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor*, *A Political Life* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2008), pp.76-7.

accessible to the working classes. The concerted effort to establish Chartist-exclusive venues signalled a significant shift, diverting working-class access to newspapers away from public houses and coffee houses. This strategic move allowed for greater control over the dissemination of news and the delivery of lectures to Chartist supporters. In addition, news rooms were used as tools to garner support for the different factions of Chartism such as 'moral', 'knowledge', 'physical' and 'teetotal'.

The primary function of Chartist reading rooms was to serve as organisational tools through information dissemination. They provided a means for leaders to communicate with their followers, facilitating the coordination of mass demonstrations or the dissemination of knowledge to influence public opinion. In Alexander Wilson's *The Chartist Movement in Scotland*, a chapter titled '1840: the Year of Organisation', he addresses the significance of the Chartist press and its circulation. While the limited supply of newspapers is highlighted as a crucial concern, Wilson primarily focuses on printing figures without delving into the potential readership for each copy.[402] He does mention a noteworthy instance involving newsrooms in Julian Harney's attempt to establish Chartist Associations across the northeast of Scotland.[403] Recognising that smaller towns could not sustain full-fledged associations, Harney instead aimed to create 'clubs for reading democratic papers.'[404] He successfully established seventeen reading rooms in towns and villages across Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Morayshire, and Inverness.[405]

Robert G. Halls' recent work on Chartist bookshops and other forms of literature outside of the press advocated that Chartism was a world made from print and, therefore, relied on the national distribution network to provide access to the working classes.[406] Previous scholarship has acknowledged the Chartist tendency toward

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[402] Alexander Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1970), pp.114-125.
[403] Julian Harney (1817-1897) was a Chartist and Journalist who edited various socialist newspapers including the *Northern Star*. He was a bibliophile and strongly advocated inter-nation radicalism and revolutionary movements through literature. David Goodway, 'Harney, (George) Julian, (1817-1897), Chartist and Journalist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/42340.
[404] The words of Wilson, *Chartist Movement in Scotland,* p.121
[405] Ibid, p.121
[406] Robert G. Hall, 'A Bookshop of Their Own: Reading and Print in Chartism, 1838-1850' in *The English Historical Review*, 136.581, (August 2012) pp.894-917.

communal reading of the press. W. Hamish Fraser in *Chartism in Scotland* briefly mentions reading rooms in 'Dumfries, Hawick, and other places'.[407] Similarly, Leslie C. Wright highlights the common practice of purchasing communal papers in a 'Paper Club'.[408] Malcolm Chase attempts to interpret the broader readership through instances of group purchasing or resale of the papers. He mentions the Chartists' propensity to gather in public houses, as well as the leader's disapproval of this practice.[409] Though this study acknowledges these other forms of communal reading, I will illuminate one of the most popular forms and the instances of political agitation, sedition, and betterment, which created the foundations upon which the working men's reading room movement was built.

Navigating the significance of reading rooms within the broader narrative of the Chartist movement proves challenging due to Chartism's multifaceted nature, which was characterised by numerous factions. These factions encompassed a spectrum of ideologies, ranging from 'Knowledge Chartism' to 'Physical Force Chartism', 'Moral Force Chartism', 'Teetotal Chartism', and 'Religious Chartism'.[410] Chartist reading rooms served as platforms for promoting these various factions, including physical force, a facet that will be further explored below. By understanding the functions of these reading rooms as a harbinger of the standard village working men's reading rooms, we can better understand how these spaces came to be regarded as instruments for elevating the moral and intellectual standing of the working class and their inherently politicised nature.

Early rooms were not purpose-built buildings with additional facilities, as was common in the latter half of the century. Chartist news/reading rooms were established quickly, utilising other establishments' rooms. They were primarily distributors of news and houses of political unity and debate rather than sanctuaries of relaxation and

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[407] *Northern Star*, 31 July 1841 in W. Hamish Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland* (Merlin Press 2010)
[408] *True Scotsman*, February 15, 1840, and *Scottish Patriot*, 18 April 1840 in Leslie C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953) p.106.
[409] Malcolm Chase, *Chartism, A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) p.45, p.147, and p.291.
[410] Though I recognised this is an oversimplification of the factions, it assists those who are first acquainting themselves with Chartism's leadership and helps me categorise the drive and utilisation of reading rooms.

leisure.[411] Though Chartist Associations existed in larger cities in smaller towns and rural villages the landscape differed Chartist news rooms served as the basic provision.[412] In the industrial textile town of Todmorden in West Yorkshire, several news rooms were opened:

> The "Evening Star" is doing a great deal of good in this locality; it has caused three or four news-rooms to be opened for the labouring class; this calling together the lovers of freedom in each part of this locality, and that means the feelings, views and sympathies of each locality are gathered into one focus, by which means a firm bond of reunion is created[413]

The *Evening Star* was a relatively short-lived Chartist newspaper that ran for seven months and 186 issues from 1842-1843.[414] The suggestion is that publishing a daily Chartist paper increased demand for news rooms and encouraged their establishment. The quote also states a hope that these rooms would bring like-minded people together and create camaraderie and a sense of belonging, in turn strengthening the Chartist cause.

Though the above quote does not specify that these are Chartist news rooms, the connection with the *Evening Star*, the fact that this was printed in the *Evening Star,* and the belief that the members will have a joint identity suggests they would be connected to the movement. It may point towards the title news rooms being generally associated with the Chartist movement. When establishing a news room in Huddersfield in 1841, a meeting was held in the local Chartist Rooms:

> Public Meeting. - On Tuesday evening next, a meeting will be holden in the Chartist Rooms, for the forming of a general news-room for the working classes of this town and neighbourhood; and also for other important business.[415]

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[411] 'Blackburn, October 13. (Correspondence of the Star)' in *Evening Star*, 15 October 1842, p.2.
[412] *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, Saturday 25 September 1841
[413] 'Our Town & Our History', n.d. <visittodmorden.co.uk> [accessed June 28, 2024]. 'Todmorden, Tuesday Morning. (Correspondence of the Star.)' in *Evening Star*, September 28, 1842, p.3.
[414] 'Evening Star (London)' in *British Newspaper Archive* [accessed June 27, 2024].
[415] 'Huddersfield' in *Northern Star*, March 6, 1841, p.5.

Though this room has clear connections with the Chartist, they do not intend to establish a ‘Chartist news room’ but a ‘general news-room’. This, maybe, would ensure that all working men in the town, even those not associated with the movement at the time, would be welcomed. The establishment of general news rooms being established and supported by the local Chartists will have strengthened a perceived association between news rooms and the movement. This association could have contributed to the quick disappearance of the title 'news room' in the 1850s. The rooms’ purpose, power dynamics and funding structures shifted towards those who would not want their establishment to be associated with the radical and Chartist sentiment.

Returning to Todmorden a month later, another note about the town was published in the *Northern Star* titled ‘To the People of Todmorden’:

> Since the commencement of the *Evening Star*, you have opened five news rooms, or rather reading rooms, for I perceive that other besides political information, is being attended to. This is cheering. Let but the labouring class get information, and I defy all the power of the most infernal tyrants to keep you in bondage for any length of time.[416]

This quote attributed to 'R. B.' emphasises the importance of these rooms as distributors of information and knowledge and as agitators of political dissent. Chartists’ proactive drive to establish political provincial reading rooms predates similar efforts by Conservatives and Liberals. The initiative to cultivate these spaces can be seen as laying the groundwork for the broader movement and substantiating the link between reading rooms and the working class.

Though the distribution of Chartist news and literature was the critical purpose of reading rooms, they did not limit themselves to only Chartist materials. A room set up in a Chartist Chapel in Nottingham also held the local papers:

[416] ‘To the People of Todmorden’ in *Norther Star*, October 29, 1842, p.7.

> Nottingham. - A news-room has been opened at the Chartist Chapel for the purpose of affording the working men an opportunity of acquiring political knowledge. The Northern and Evening Stars will be taken in and other local papers.[417]

The inclusion of the local papers suggests they were trying to have a broader appeal than simply reiterating the Chartist message and had the funding to do so. The selection of the local press over the national press or London papers indicates that this is what they believed their members, working men, would most value after the Chartist press.

A vivid portrayal of a Chartist reading room is found in an article by A. H. Kerr for the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1882, titled 'Random Recollections of a Pressman – No. III'. Kerr recounts his experiences attending a reading room in Dumfries during the 1840s, providing insight into the lively debates and diverse literature that characterised these spaces:

> In 1842, and for some years afterwards, I (though residing in the county till 1847) frequently stayed with a relation in Dumfries. The Chartists had a reading-room on the same premises, and, though but a small boy, it was a great and novel treat to me to peruse the newspapers and magazines there. I also heard the members discussing current events, and I found that there were two parties in the Chartist camp- the physical and the moral force of men. I heard much about the then popular Feargus O'Connor, and the famous *Northern Star*, which he edited or owned, was, of course, the leading paper in the newsroom. I made my first acquaintance with Sue's "Wandering Jew," which was then coming out in monthly numbers. But possibly the greatest treat to a country boy, who saw but few newspapers and fewer magazines, was the famous *Penny Satirist*, a publication about the same size, and illustrated with rough cuts, somewhat after the style of the delectable *Police News* of somewhat to-day, only the *Satirist's* matter and illustrations were purely political, and bitter and coarse to a degree. The Royal Family- the Lady Florence Hastings scandal, or rather tragedy, being

[417] 'Nottingham' in *Evening Star*, September 20, 1842, p.2.

> then in full swing-and the aristocracy, were most bitterly lampooned and caricatured. The Government of the day finally suppressed this print.[418]

Kerr's recollection offers a glimpse into the dynamic atmosphere of Chartist reading rooms, where discussions and debates thrived, particularly regarding the different factions within Chartism. His account also provides a valuable list of standard publications within these rooms, with O'Connor's Northern Star reigning supreme. This could also contribute to the debate over O'Connor's unpopularity in Scotland, demonstrating how a study of Chartist news rooms can contribute to the broader understanding of the movement.[419] Moreover, Kerr's narrative illustrates that these rooms not only housed a wide array of Chartist newspapers but also featured what could be considered today as 'tabloids', such as the *Penny Satirist* and the anti-Catholic publication *The Wandering Jew*.[420]

While Chartist reading rooms permitted the presence of non-Chartist publications, disputes often arose regarding what content should be allowed. Including non-Chartist press raised questions about the scope of permissible material within these establishments. *The Chartist* publication, for instance, urged the expulsion of the *Birmingham Journal* from all reading institutions:

> All that is requisite is, to vote the *Birmingham Journal* out of every institute, reading room, coffee house, and private family into which it has obtruded itself . . .That the *Birmingham Journal* is a wolf in sheep's clothing[421]

This characterisation likely stemmed from the appointment of Robert Kellie Douglas, who drafted the Chartist National Petition in 1838 as the editor of the *Birmingham Journal*. Douglas was a moderate anti-violence radical who opposed O'Connor. *The Chartist*'s insistence on expelling the *Birmingham Journal* underscores the political influence wielded by the press and the significance of controlling the content

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[418] 'Random Recollections of a Pressman: No.III' in *Newcastle Chronicle*, April 10, 1886, p.15.
[419] The support of O'Connor in Scotland is a contentious issue. Wright argues that Scotland supported (Brewster's) moral force only and had deep hostility towards O'Connor and his followers. Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland,* and Cole, dispute this, suggesting a geographical divide in support of O'Connor between Conservative Edinburgh and 'starving', industrial Glasgow. Cole, *Chartist Portraits,* p.9.
[420] John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (London: Norton and Co, 2003), pp. 22-23.
[421] 'The Chartist' in *The Chartist*, April 7, 1839, p.2.

consumed within reading rooms and other establishments to advance specific political ideals.

The Chartist news rooms were also used to communicate with members outside of the Chartist press. In Nottingham in 1841, the local Chartist Association wished to express their support for the Convention continuing in London. In order to relay this support, they wrote a letter to the Convention, a letter to the *Northern Star,* and made the resolution 'That notice be given by the Council to the various news rooms of our determination to the support the Convention.'[422] Proving news rooms to be an essential part of disseminating information about current events and communicating with their supporters. They were used to spread sentiment and broader Chartist ideas, as well as current information. Lectures on Chartism would be conducted within the rooms:

> Mr. Gammage, from Northampton, lectures here on Friday Evening, Nov. 4, on the present state of the times, and the People's Charter, in the Chartist Reading Room, Market Place.[423]

and:

> Mr. James Cooper, of Manchester, Delivered a most splendid and soul stirring lecture in the Chartist News Room, Windy Bank Colne, on a Wednesday, the 2nd instant, to a very crowded and attentive audience; after which several news members were enrolled[424]

These lectures are also a form of propaganda and recruitment for the Chartists. However, by the time the audience is attending a lecture in an openly Chartist reading room, they likely already had some interest in the movement.

William Lovett, in collaboration with John Collins, published *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People* in 1840, outlining a comprehensive vision for a nationalised network of schools, halls, libraries, and reading rooms. The overarching aim of these establishments was 'to purify the heart and rectify the conduct of all, by knowledge,

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[422] 'Chartist Intelligence, Nottingham' in *Northern Star*, May 22, 1841, p.1.
[423] 'Salisbury, Nov, 6. (Correspondence of the Star.)' in *Evening Star*, November 7, 1842, p.2.
[424] 'Colne, Nov. 4. (Correspondence of the Star.)' in *Evening Star*, November 7, 1842, p.2.

morality, and the love of freedom.' [425] This vision came to be known as 'Knowledge Chartism'. Lovett envisioned reading rooms as adjuncts to libraries and integral components of the educational infrastructure. In his vision, the rooms initially designated for children's schooling during the day would transform into spaces for adult education, primarily functioning as reading rooms in the evening:

> Every district hall shall be constructed on such a plan as to have (in addition to its other apartments,) two lofty and spacious rooms, one above another, to serve the purposes of school-rooms during the day, and lecture, reading-rooms, &c., of an evening.[426]

This excerpt emphasises the importance that Lovett placed on adult education, specifically reading rooms, in pushing the agenda of the Chartist movement forward. In Newcastle, there is evidence of a Chartist reading room within a school in 1841, 'NEWCASTLE. -Mr. Mason, the county lecturer, delivered a most impressive lecture, in the Chartist Reading Room, Byker Buildings School, to an overflowing audience'[427] It is unclear whether these lectures were part of O'Connor's educational vision or whether he was reflecting on the realistic convenience of these rooms.

Later, Lovett distanced himself from the Chartist movement as it veered towards radicalism and embraced physical force tactics. In contrast, Lovett remained committed to the belief that the working class should pursue a peaceful path to political empowerment, demonstrating their fitness for political power through constructive means. [428] Central to Lovett's vision was the conviction that working-class leadership and education were indispensable tools for effecting meaningful change.[429] Lovett's faith in the political importance of education, particularly access to newspapers, was unwavering. He perceived the efforts of the 'industrious classes' to establish cheap reading rooms and other educational institutions as a testament to their desire to participate in and earn their political freedom actively. This concerted

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[425] Lovett and Collins, *New Organization,* p.9.
[426] Lovett and Collins, *New Organization,* p.37.
[427] 'Newcastle' in *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, Chartist Intelligence, February 6, 1841.
[428] David Goodway, 'William Lovett (1800-1877), Chartist and radical', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2013) doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/17068.
[429] G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London : Macmillan & Co, 1965), p.31.

endeavour, Lovett hoped, would undermine the criticisms levelled against the working class for their perceived 'political ignorance.' In his own words:

> It would be well, however, if those who taunt the industrious classes with their "political ignorance," had first reviewed their political struggles during the last ten or twelve years. If they had considered their efforts to establish the rights of free discussion, to open mechanics' institutions, establish reading rooms and libraries, form working men's associations, and others of a like character; and, above all, their sufferings and difficulties in establishing a cheap press, by which millions of periodicals are weekly diffusing their enlightening influences throughout the empire ; and then, if those scoffers at the ignorance of the millions had considered their present efforts to obtain their political rights, we think they would have reserved their illiberal taunts for others than the working classes.[430]

Indeed, from Lovett's perspective, Chartist reading rooms represented a proactive effort to attain political enfranchisement through self-improvement and moral reform. As explained throughout this section, these rooms served as gathering places for individuals from all sects of Chartism, fostering a diverse and often conflicting array of ideologies under one roof. Lovett argued that this was essential for refining ideas and creating leaders by allowing members to practise debate and public speaking. [431]

Ernest Jones, Feargus O'Connor's closest associate, identified himself as a 'Physical Force' Chartist while staunchly supporting temperance. [432] Jones recognised the pivotal role of reading rooms as venues for information, unity and conversion and as alternatives to the ubiquitous 'pot house', or public houses, where Chartists often convened.[433] Jones, in an article from 1851 titled ‘Pothouse Localitics’ and repeating the phrase, ‘Raise Chartism from the Pot-house’, argued that the Chartist association to the public houses would ‘“stink in the nostrils” of the many, as long as it meets in

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[430] Lovett and Collins, *New Organization,* p.14.
[431] Ibid, p.50-1.
[432] Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, p.342, and Ernest Jones, *A Letter to the Advocates of the Co-operative Principles and to the Members of Co-operative Societies,* Accessed via *Minor Victorian Writers*, ‘Ernest Jones’ <https://minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/jones/c_misc_letters_etc_1.htm#Co_operative> [accessed on February 26, 2020].
[433] F. C. Mather, *Chartism and Society, an Anthology of Documents* (London: Bell & Hyman, 1980), p.99.

places such as those'. He believed that this reputation would undermine working men's political commitment and independence. By congregating in reading rooms or other meeting spaces, Chartists could accommodate temperance and teetotal members while enhancing their public image.[434]

In the article, he also advocated for the place of women within Chartism and that by hosting meetings in the public house, they were isolated from the movement:

> We want the support and countenance of woman in our movement-for the Charter must become a domestic spirit, a tutelar saint, a household god, before it can arise a legislative power! And what shall make it so, - but the support of woman? That which does not emanate from the fire-side of a million homes, will have no lasting basis even amid the cheering of then thousand platforms. It is woman that ever sways, more or less, the mind of man-it is woman that ever moulds the character of the child. And would you take your wives, sisters, and daughters, to the pot-house, among the reek of gin and porter, the fume of fœtid pipes, and the loose ribaldry of incipient intemperance? Again, we want to instruct the rising generation. We want to make *children* Chartist, and then we shall be sure of having Chartist *men*.

It was at least Jones's belief that reading rooms would allow women to be part of the meetings, which would lead to their conversion. This would help engrain Chartism within society, making it more of a unified class belief rather than the radical convictions of some working men. Unfortunately, I have no evidence of women attending Chartist rooms. However, it suggests that the average working man's wife may have played a part in the chartist movement, aided by the existence of reading rooms.

Jones recognised his ideals would cost money that the average working man could not afford but proposed a practical solution to redirect the financial resources typically spent in public houses towards creating a more substantial presence for the movement:

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[434] Ernest Jones, 'Raise the Charter from the Pot-house!', *Notes to The People*, Vol. II, 1852, pp.623-25.

> Twenty men in the pot-house, meeting every week, spend on an average, 6d. each (some far more, some less), that is 10s. per week! Will you tell me that, in any town in England, you can't hire a decent room for *one evening weekly*, for TEN SHILLINGS the night? You might get it for the whole week for less than that. You might establish a reading-room in it- you might found a library- you might open a school- you might make it pay itself, and diffuse the blessings of knowledge and education from it, as from a centre– all which in the pot-house is impossible. All this you might do, if there were only twenty, aye! if there were only ten members in the locality. [435]

Jones perceives meetings in public houses to contribute to supporters' financial waste and believes that money could be put towards the Chartist cause. This stems more from his wish to reduce the revenues of the public houses than from a desire for working men to fund chartist institutions. However, he is advocating for these rooms. He claims it could be established with even a small group of men, ten or twenty. This could provide an insight into the rough number of members who subscribe to one of these news rooms, but the tone suggests this would be a relatively low number. This article was published around the end of the news rooms movement, and the beginning of its development into the reading room could represent the shift in attitudes and intentions behind these establishments.

For Jones, reading rooms were not just venues for education and discussion; they were integral to shaping a well-rounded, educated, and focused Chartist movement. By providing a dignified and respectable meeting setting, reading rooms facilitated the participation of a broader cross-section of society, including women. Moreover, by controlling the available literature, they helped maintain the ideological coherence and unity of the movement. Throughout this thesis, it has been demonstrated that temperance and moral reform were central drivers behind the establishment of most reading rooms. The association of reading rooms with the moral reform of the working class, often spearheaded by the middle and upper classes, may have evolved from their utilisation by Chartists for the same purpose.

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[435] Ernest Jones, 'Raise the Charter from the Pot-house!', *Notes to The People*, Vol. II, 1852, pp.623-25.

Religious Chartism often advocated for a religiously informed approach within the movement, but there was a notable tension with Knowledge Chartism's emphasis on secular education.[436] Despite this ideological divergence, Chartist newsrooms were not completely devoid of religious influence. Evidence suggests that religious activities, such as sermons, occurred in some Chartist newsrooms. For instance, in Windy Bank, Greater Manchester, a sermon was delivered by the Reverend W. V. Jackson to a sizable and engaged audience in the local Chartist News Room:

> COLNE. -The Rev. W. V. Jackson, of Manchester, preached a splendid sermon to a crowded and attentive audience, in the large Chartist News Room, Windy Bank, on Sunday.[437]

Additionally, in a 'physical force' driven reading room in Birmingham, a Hymn was sung, and a chapter of the Bible was read at the beginning of a meeting.[438] These instances suggest that while Chartism predominantly advocated for secular education, religion was too engrained within society and the movement for it to be excluded from their hubs of adult education.

Though, by their very nature, these news rooms were more rooted in 'Knowledge', 'Moral' and 'Teetotal' Chartism, they also played a vital part in 'Physical Force' Chartism. The government themselves perceived them as substantial threats. An example of this is in Salford where the Chartists utilise the room of the local Mutual Instruction Society, 'The room is in Salford in this town, and applied not only to a Mutual Instruction Society but also as a news-room for the Chartists living in that part of the town.'[439] The Evening Star printed a report of the police raiding the room and taking possession of the books and papers inside the building. The description of the events was followed by a reminder that the police cannot inspect their books or papers without a warrant. The article indicates close ties between the Mutual Instruction Society

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[436] William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1876), p.135, and D. G. Wright, *Popular Radicalism, The Working-Class Experience of 1780-1880* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.132.
[437] 'Colne' in *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, Chartist Intelligence, February 12, 1842, p.19.
[438] 'Report of the meeting in Allison Street on Sunday evening, November 3rd 1839 – about 100 persons present', from *Home Office Papers (Public Record Office)*, 40/50 via Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p.242.
[439] 'Blackburn, October 13. (Correspondence of the Star)' in *Evening Star*, 15 October 1842, p.2.

Movement and the Chartists. It reaffirms the value placed upon the content of the books and newspapers by both the Chartists and the authorities.

Another notable instance was in Birmingham, where a Birmingham Police Spy attended the local reading room to spy on their meetings, and he reported records back to the Home Office. He reported that the room would be used legitimately and seditiously; one week, they would meet to make plans to hold a tea party, and the next week, they would discuss 'burning the churches and murdering all that opposed them'.[440] The spy's reports also revealed the Chartists' growing suspicion of infiltrators. They reported that when the magistrate asked the room leaders if they were meeting for 'the purpose of Drilling, Training and procuring arms', they claimed 'they only met for the purpose of reading the papers and discussing upon them.'[441] According to the spy, at these meetings, they would read Chartist papers out loud and discuss what arms were available and where they were stored.[442] While these reports offer a detailed, albeit biased, account of the activities within Chartist newsrooms, they emphasise the perceived threat posed by these spaces in the eyes of the authorities. The infiltration of Chartist reading rooms by spies highlights the importance placed on them as potential fortifications of political unrest.

The authorities, however, were correct, as the news rooms did play their part in planning the uprising. In Low Moor, the Chartists planned to overpower the local soldiers and then continue their crusade down to London to establish the Charter. They were promised the Bradford Chartist Newsroom as a depot for the supplies they planned to pillage, such as bread, clothes, and provisions.[443] These instances demonstrate how 'Physical Force' Chartists utilised reading rooms as logistical centres for their rebellious activities. Such actions likely contributed to a lasting reputation for reading rooms as hubs of seditious activity, perpetuating their association with radicalism and political unrest.

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[440] 'Meeting in Allison Street, Nov 5th 1839', via Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, pp.244-6.
[441] 'Report of the meeting in Allison Street on Sunday evening,', via Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, p.242.
[442] 'Meeting in Allison Steet, November 4th 1839' and 'Meeting in Allison Street, Nov 5th, 1839' in *Home Office Papers (Public Record Office)*, 40/50 via Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, pp.243-4.
[443] 'Evidence given by Harrison at the trial of Robert Peddie for sedition, February 1840', From *Treasury Solicitor's Papers (Public Record Office*) 11/814/2678, via Thompson, *The Early Chartists,* pp.282-3.

Chartist reading rooms emerge as pivotal institutions within the broader context of the Chartist movement, serving as ideological bastions and practical hubs for organising political activities. Initially established as tools for educating and mobilising the working class, these spaces played a multifaceted role in shaping the movement and its impact on society. Chartist reading rooms represented a pioneering effort to democratise access to information and knowledge, departing from traditional spaces like public houses and coffee houses. By establishing Chartist-exclusive venues, leaders could exercise greater control over the dissemination of news and the delivery of lectures to their supporters. Moreover, reading rooms were platforms for promoting various factions within Chartism, from 'Knowledge Chartism' to 'Physical Force Chartism', reflecting the movement's diverse ideologies and objectives.

The infiltration of Chartist reading rooms by government spies demonstrates the perceived threat posed by these spaces to the authorities. Instances of seditious activities and using reading rooms as logistical centres for rebellious actions further cemented their reputation as hubs of radicalism and political unrest. Radical or not, these spaces fostered intellectual and political engagement among working-class communities, particularly in smaller towns and rural villages where Chartist Associations were less prevalent. In doing so, they created the groundwork for the future reading rooms as homes of working-class education and political debate.

With the importance placed upon the circulation of the Chartist press by Chartist leaders and the reliance upon this press as a historical source, this research should inform further scholarship of its readership. By acknowledging this readership, the impact and influence of the Chartist press can be assessed, and a better understanding of its intended audience can be gained. Historians of the Chartist press should consider both the impact of news rooms on the distribution of the press and the impact of the press on the creation of news rooms, as laid out in the example of Todmorden. As far as this study is concerned, these rooms are essential in the history of reading and the development of the working class reading room movement. Their juxtapositioned relationship to both the radical and politicised factions of Chartism and the peaceful, moral, temperance factions of Chartism led to the confused identity of, and power

struggles over, reading rooms in the latter half of the nineteenth century as will be displayed throughout the following chapters.

Sailors' Reading Rooms.

Sailors' reading rooms, strategically positioned across port towns and harbours, were modest yet significant institutions that played a pivotal role in the maritime culture and the broader history of literacy. These spaces, frequently supported by ecclesiastical bodies or funded through charitable endeavours, served as sanctuaries offering respite and moral rehabilitation and as venues for intellectual enrichment and self-improvement. By providing access to local news and literature, these rooms enabled patrons to maintain a connection with the world beyond their vessels, thus fostering a sense of belonging and intellectual engagement. This section delves into the multifaceted nature of sailors' reading rooms, examining their financial instability, their interdependent relationship with religious institutions, and their overarching mission to elevate seafarers' intellectual and moral standards. Through a detailed analysis of both domestic and international examples, such as the English Reading-Room for Sailors in Le Havre, this discussion traces the contours of these institutions within the tumultuous currents of international trade and societal transformation.

While rooted in local communities, British sailors' reading rooms extended their influence far beyond the shores of Britain, functioning as symbolic outposts of British cultural presence in foreign cities. In certain contexts, these establishments assumed a significance comparable to embassies, embodying British cultural values and fostering camaraderie in otherwise unfamiliar environments. However, their presence was not universally welcomed. A notable incident in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1953, where communist protesters attacked the British and American Reading Rooms, exemplifies the contentious nature of these institutions. Tearing apart newspapers during the protest symbolised an attempt to sever ties with Western media and its perceived ideological influence. This incident underscores the dual role of sailors' reading rooms as both sanctuaries for sailors and microcosms of broader geopolitical tensions,

emblematic of cultural exchange, ideological confrontation, and the lingering impacts of imperialism and colonialism.[444]

The economic realities of these institutions also merit attention. The cost of 'getting a sailor drunk' averaged around half a pound, while many sailors' reading rooms offered their services at no charge.[445] This economic disparity highlights the choices sailors faced between spending their shore time in a public house versus a reading room, and it also illuminates the unique operational challenges faced by these establishments. Unlike typical village reading rooms, sailors' reading rooms served a transient clientele, attracted few annual subscriptions, and relied heavily on church support. Fluctuations in international trade and external events further compromised their financial stability. For instance, the English Reading-Room for Sailors in Le Havre, France, experienced a significant decline in attendance following the imposition of a surcharge on arrivals at its harbour, necessitating increased assistance from local English and American residents to sustain its operations.[446]

The *Shipping Gazette* was the cornerstone of sailors' reading rooms, providing indispensable up-to-date information on ship locations. Its significance was such that the Dover Sailors' Reading Room went to great lengths to ensure prompt access to its updates, even arranging express delivery:

> In order that the Dover boatmen may have the advantage of the earliest intelligence of vessels in the channel, the *Shipping Gazette* will be forwarded by express train on the evening of the publication. The *Illustrated London News, United Service Gazette, Dover Telegraph,* and *Dover Chronicle* will be supplied, together with the *Nautical Magazine* and several interesting periodicals.[447]

Beyond periodicals, these rooms often held a 'small library' and 'charts, nautical papers and instruments.'[448] This curated collection, through practical resources,

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[444] 'Prieste Position Still Tense but Settlement Hope Remains' in *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, October 12, 1953, p.1.
[445] Yrjo Kaukiainen, 'Seamen Ashore Port visits of Late Nineteenth-Century Finnish Sailors' in *Sail and Steam: Selected Maritime Writings of Yrjo Kaukianen* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) p.44.
[446] 'English Reading-Room for Sailors in Havre' in *South Wales Daily News*, May 9, 1873, p.3.
[447] 'Sailors' Home and Reading Room' in *Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser*, January 1, 1853, p.8.
[448] 'Sailors' Reading-Room, Kingstown' in *Freeman's Journal*, May 5, 1870, p.3.

catered to the maritime community's specific requirements, reinforcing the reading rooms' role as essential hubs of naval information.

The resources offered by sailors' reading rooms were comparable to those found in traditional reading rooms, with a particular emphasis on local newspapers, often filled with advertisements. While it might seem surprising that sailors, typically in port for only brief intervals, would be interested in local news, the preference for the provincial press likely stemmed from its affordability and accessibility. Managed by the Dundee Harbour Trustees, this reading room was created to replace a nearby free sailors' reading room deemed of limited value. Operating at an annual cost of £30, it featured a diverse selection of newspapers and periodicals aimed not only at informing but also at entertaining the seafaring clientele:

> Here you will have the local papers, giving you all home and foreign news. You will also find the *Shipping Gazette*, supplying the latest shipping intelligence, as also the illustrated papers, at once rejoicing the eye and informing the mind. And last, though not least, you will be regaled with *Punch-Punch* which "cheers but not inebriates." (Laughter and Applause.)[449]

This diverse assortment aimed not only to inform but also to entertain, catering to the varied interests and preferences of the seafaring clientele.

Like most reading rooms, the content available within sailors' reading rooms was subject to strict regulations, often intensified by their strong religious affiliations. For example, the British and Foreign Sailors' Reading Room in Dover in 1853 imposed specific restrictions on the reading materials available on Sundays, reflecting the influence of religious values on these institutions:

> The library includes nearly 200 vols of narratives, histories, voyages, travels, and religious works. The reading room will be open on the sabbath day, except during hours of divine service: but *all* newspapers and books upon secular subjects will be removed and not allowed to be introduced upon any pretence whatever.[450]

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[449] 'Opening of the Dundee Sailors' Reading-Room' in *Dundee Advertiser*, September 23, 1884, p.3.
[450] 'Sailors' Home and Reading Room' in *Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser*, January 1, 1853, p.8.

While there was a clear intent to cater to sailors' interests, the influence of religious values on these reading rooms was evident.

While the association between village reading rooms and the church was not uncommon, the bond between sailors' reading rooms and religious institutions was particularly strong. This heightened connection can be attributed to the need for external funding and the concerted efforts to rehabilitate sailors and reshape their public image. In Blyth, a town renowned for shipbuilding, mining, and the salt trade, three sailors' reading rooms had emerged by the late nineteenth century, all closely associated with religious institutions. One room was affiliated with St. Cuthbert's Church, housed within its Church Institute, while another operated within a Mission. Additionally, a Scandinavian Sailors' Reading Room was established within the 'Somands-Kirken.'[451] They tried to influence not only what the sailors read within the rooms but also what they read outside of the rooms. Some reading rooms promoted religious literature at discounted prices to sailors. Works such as *Spurgeon's Sermons in Gaelic* or *Better Days for Working People* were made available at lower rates, emphasising the room's commitment to pushing a religious agenda upon the sailors.[452]

The Christian ethos underpinning sailors' reading rooms significantly influenced their operations, inspiring acts of charity that transformed these spaces into vital support hubs for seafarers in need. Beyond serving as centres for intellectual and spiritual improvement, these rooms became beacons of compassion and solidarity, offering solace to unemployed sailors during hardship. A poignant example can be found in the Greenock Sailors' Reading Room, where an act of kindness occurred on a Saturday evening. In response to the economic downturn and resulting unemployment, complimentary tea was provided to several sailors, including those from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. This gesture was not merely an offering of refreshment but a symbol of solidarity and care for those facing adversity:

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[451] Scandinavian reading rooms were very common in harbour towns. Particularly during the influx of Timber Imports in Britain between 1860-1910 from Sweden, Finland and Russia. 'Blyth Seamen's Reading Room' in *Morpeth Herald*, November 16, 1895, p.3.

[452] 'Spurgeon's Sermons' in *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, December 16, 1865, p.3, and, *Greenock Daily Telegraph,* May 14, 1884, p.3, and William Garden Blaikie, *Better Days for Working People* (A. Strathan, 1865).

> GREENOCK SAILORS READING ROOM. On last Saturday evening a free tea was given to a number of coloured and other seamen from various parts of the town who are now out of employment owing the dullness of trade. After tea, which was fully enjoyed, Captain Brotchie, Superintendent Ritchie, Mr Swan, Mr M'Dowall, and a coloured seaman edited the meeting with very suitable addresses, interspersed with hymns of praise[453]

This instance at the Greenock Sailors' Reading Room also exemplifies the inclusivity and support extended to all members of the racially diverse maritime profession. It is particularly notable given the context of the time when sailors of colour were often hired abroad to replace ill or deceased crew members but were typically discharged upon arrival in Britain, where they faced significant barriers to employment.[454]

Sailors were frequently stereotyped as rough and unruly, which contributed to a persistently negative perception of the seafaring profession. Sailors' reading rooms were established to counteract these stereotypes by serving a dual purpose: providing professional, educational, and recreational resources while simultaneously functioning as instruments of moral reform. These institutions aimed to address two critical aspects of the sailor stereotype: their perceived lack of education and awareness of current affairs and their reputation for heavy drinking. Historically, sailors were often relegated to a distinct social class, viewed with scepticism and, at times, outright disdain. At the inauguration of the Dundee Sailors' Reading Room, it was explicitly stated that the attendance of sailors at such establishments demonstrated their intellectual capacity, thereby meriting equal respect within the broader community. As articulated during the opening ceremony - 'It is most satisfactory to find the sailors of Dundee showing themselves to be an intelligent class, and worthy to take up a position along with any other class in the community. (Applause.)' [455] This sentiment reflects the belief that by altering public perceptions and showcasing sailors' intellectual engagement, the profession's image could be significantly enhanced. It was further posited that improving the conditions and public image of seafarers, both at sea and

[453] 'Greenock Sailors' Reading Room' in *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette,* October 20, 1879, p.2.
[454] 'Coloured Sailors in England' in *Belfast Morning News*, August 31, 1880, p.4.
[455] 'Opening of the Dundee Sailors' Reading-Room' in *Dundee Advertiser*, September 23, 1884, p.3.

onshore, would contribute to popularising the profession and ensuring its continued vitality: 'the more we do for the comfort of our sailors at sea and onshore, the more we shall popularise a profession on the coasts and shores of our islands. (Applause.)'[456]

The pervasive stereotype of sailors as heavy drinkers also served as a primary catalyst for establishing sailors' reading rooms. Recognising the detrimental effects of alcohol on the seafaring community, these rooms sought to provide an alternative venue for entertainment, camaraderie, and warmth at a fraction of the cost of traditional public houses. Again, at the Dundee Sailors' Reading Room, organisers expressed their hope that the room would divert sailors from the allure of alcohol, thus contributing to the overall improvement of the seafaring class:

> I hope all sailors will prefer that kind of punch to the article supplied by the public-houses, which are far too numerous in this district, and which are far, as Mr Jack and Mr Ritchie know, doing great harm to the seafaring class who frequent our Sailors Home. (Hear, hear.) Meantime may this reading-room be a counter attraction to those ensnaring traps, a shelter from temptation, and a pleasant resting-place for all sailors, whether old or young-whether belonging to the town or here only for a time.[457]

Similarly, in Cork, the reading room was envisioned as a means to supplant drinking with intellectual stimulation and foster a more positive image of the sailor class:

> This elevating reading and news-room offers great advantage to sailors who reside in Cork, and especially to those whose ships lie in the harbour for there they meet others of their own class, and congenial minds, without the risk of being tempted by alcoholic drinks, which they would be subject to if drawn to public houses for society and amusement.[458]

By providing a welcoming environment for socialising and engaging in intellectually enriching activities, sailors' reading rooms aimed to combat the prevalence of alcohol consumption among sailors and reshape perceptions of the seafaring profession.

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[456] 'Opening of the Dundee Sailors' Reading-Room' in *Dundee Advertiser*, September 23, 1884, p.3.
[457] 'The Dundee Sailors' Reading-Room' in *Dundee Advertiser*, September 23, 1884, p.3.
[458] 'Sailors' Institute, or Free Library and Reading Room' in *Cork Examiner*, October 30, 1862, p.4.

The Southwold Sailors' Reading Room exemplifies the enduring legacy of sailors' reading rooms. It has maintained its original function as a refuge for seafarers well into the present day, with operations continuing as of 2020. Founded in 1864 by the widow of a sea captain, the room was established in response to the recognised need for a space where sailors could find solace and companionship during their shore leave.[459] Despite significant financial difficulties in its early years, including a near closure in 1874 due to insufficient subscription income, the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room was preserved through the philanthropic efforts of a local Reverend and a Captain. Their charitable contributions, both financial and material, alongside the support of 'beachmen' and retired sailors, were instrumental in ensuring the room's survival and continued operation. [460]

The history of the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room is not without its controversies. A notable dispute occurred between the local vicar and non-conformists within the town, centring on the role of the clergy in the reading room. [461] Although the resolution of this conflict remains obscure, it is evident that the room's religious affiliations were significant, as evidenced by the presence of at least three reverends during its inauguration. One of them remarked, 'You are fortunate in the possession of a room, where you may meet and read the occurrences of the day, and, better still, you may read and hear words that will make you wise unto salvation.' thus underscoring the room's deep and enduring connections to the church.[462] These religious ties have persisted throughout the room's history, with a particularly symbolic moment occurring in 2002 when a time capsule was placed within its walls. The ceremony, led by a local reverend, included a prayer that acknowledged the room's role as a sanctuary for seafarers and a place of fellowship and spiritual nourishment:

> We thank you for their faith and vision to provide for the seafarers of Southwold and visiting seamen a place of refuge and relaxation. . . May all who come to this

[459] 'History', n.d. <Southwoldsailorsreadingroom.co.uk/history/> [accessed August 30, 2020].
[460] 'Southwold: Sailor's Reading Room' in *The Ipswich Journal*, February 6, 1875, p.8.
[461] Doug Pope*, The Sailors' Reading Room the First 150 Years from 2nd June 1864* (The Southwold Trust 2013), p.17.
[462] Ibid, p.6.

> Room find good fellowship here and may your Holy name be glorified as we seek to follow the good example of Captain and Mrs Rayley.[463]

In the present day, the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room remains a vital part of the local community and heritage. It offers free entry to the reading room and an annual membership fee of £15. Visitors can use the snooker table for an additional fee of £5. This continuation of services reflects the room's ongoing relevance as both a historical institution and a contemporary community hub. [464]

Figure 4.1: Modern photograph of Southwold Sailors' Reading Room main table.[465]

[463] Ibid, p.29.
[464] Southwold Sailor's Reading Room Association: Application for Membership, n.d. <http://southwoldsailorsreadingroom.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Application-20201.pdf>.
[465] 'Robin Greenaway 003' Photos, n.d.< http://southwoldsailorsreadingroom.co.uk/> [accessed July 23, 2022].

Figure 4.2: Modern photograph of outside Southwold Sailors' Reading Room.[466]

Beyond its role in preserving the historical significance of sailors' reading rooms, the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room provides visitors with an authentic experience, offering a unique glimpse into the interior of smaller, local reading rooms. At the centre of the room stands a long wooden table adorned with an array of magazines, as depicted in Figure 4.2. This central feature invites visitors to engage with the diverse selection of reading materials, thereby offering a tangible connection to the past and insight into the intellectual pursuits of seafarers. The intimate and localised atmosphere of the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room contrasts with the grandeur of the central city reading rooms discussed in the introduction, thereby enriching our understanding of the diverse array of reading rooms that once dotted coastal communities. By juxtaposing the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room with these larger institutions, we gain a more nuanced appreciation of the various forms and functions that sailors' reading rooms assumed across different geographical and social contexts. This analysis highlights the Southwold Sailors' Reading Room as a relic of maritime

[466] 'Outside Landscape', Photos, n.d. < http://southwoldsailorsreadingroom.co.uk> [accessed July 23, 2022].

history and an active participant in the ongoing narrative of community, culture, and seafaring life.

In conclusion, sailors' reading rooms, scattered across port towns and harbours, are pivotal institutions in maritime and literary history. These spaces, often supported by churches or funded by charitable means, were more than just sanctuaries offering respite and moral rehabilitation; they were also opportunities for intellectual nourishment and a connection to the world beyond the ships. As this exploration has revealed, sailors' reading rooms faced financial instability, yet their symbiotic relationship with the church and their overarching mission to uplift seafarers' minds and reputations persisted. From their symbolic importance abroad to their role as microcosms of geopolitical tensions, these rooms embodied a complex interplay of charity, education, and cultural exchange. Beyond their immediate function, sailors' reading rooms sought to address stereotypes and societal challenges facing seafarers. By providing alternatives to heavy drinking and opportunities for intellectual stimulation, they aimed to enhance sailors' social standing and well-being, ensuring the vitality and sustainability of the seafaring profession.

Miners' Reading Rooms.

The establishment and role of reading rooms in the lives of Victorian miners reveal a complex interplay of interests among trade unions, company owners, and the workers themselves. The strategic use of these reading rooms was first discussed by Robert Colls in 1976, who portrayed them as tools of manipulation employed by both unions and company owners to exert influence over the workers. Colls argued that the provision of free, company-run reading rooms discouraged workers from joining unions, as these rooms offered access to approved reading materials without the need for union membership.[467] However, Heesom and Duffy, in their 1981 rebuttal, challenged Colls' perspective, suggesting that company-run reading rooms were motivated by a desire to 'develop company loyalty and to kill strikes with kindness'. They posited that

[467] Robert Colls, '"Oh Happy English Children!": Coal, Class and Education in the North-East', *Past and Present*, 73.1 (1976), pp.75-99 (p.91).

company owners sought to demonstrate concern for their workers' welfare and education by providing these facilities, thereby reducing the likelihood of labour unrest.[468]

Stephens further explored the relationship between workers and company-run reading rooms and schools in 2013. He assessed the influence of company owners on education as 'patchy', noting that the harsh treatment of workers often led to widespread suspicion among miners. This suspicion, in turn, resulted in the general avoidance of company-run reading rooms whenever possible.[469] Stephens highlighted that the demanding nature of physical labour, coupled with early marriage and parenthood, made it unlikely that miners would spend their limited free time pursuing education.[470] The difficulty in gauging attendance at these reading rooms further complicates this analysis; for instance, at Dudley Colliery in 1862, membership ranged 'between 60 and 70, out of about 200 workmen on the colliery'.[471]

Duffy revisited the topic nearly four decades later in his 2019 article, '*The Progress of Education in the Northern Coalfield Before 1870,'* dedicating an entire chapter to providing an in-depth history of industrial reading rooms. His research discusses the unions' reliance on company support for financial sustenance and the persistent mistrust of company reading rooms among workers during the early nineteenth century—all explored throughout this chapter. Duffy's most striking conclusion is that while reading rooms and mechanics' institutes were not the central pillars of educational progression, they symbolised the growing desire among workers to engage with written material.[472]

The strategic approach of miners' trade unions to education underscores their recognition of its importance in empowering workers and advancing their interests. John Hall, the General Secretary of the National Miners Association, emphasised the

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[468] A. J. Heesom and Brendan Duffy, 'Coal, Class and Education in the North-East', *Past and Present*, 90, (1981), pp.136-151.
[469] W. B. Stephens, 'Illiteracy in the North-East Coalfield, c.1830-1870', *Northern History*, 37.1, (2013) p.231.
[470] Ibid, p.225.
[471] 'Dudley Colliery Institute and Reading-Room', Letter to the *British Miner* from 'A member of the institute' on November 22nd, 1862, *British Miner and General Newsman,* November 29, 1862, p.6.
[472] Brendan Duffy 'The Progress of Education in the Northern Coalfield Before 1870', *Northern History* 55:2 (2018), pp.178-205 (p.197).

need for miners to elevate themselves through education and literacy in a letter addressed to the 'miners of Tyne, Wear and Tees' Hall outlined a two-step plan: the first step focused on establishing schools at or near each workplace to educate young miners, and the second step involved setting up reading rooms associated with the union to help members apply their literacy skills and gain knowledge. Hall asserted that such initiatives would transform miners into:

> ... a class worthy of being courted in their turn. The first step of the colliers' union should be to see that there is a proper school at, or convenient to each work, for the education of the young; secondly that at each work in connection with the union a proper reading-room be established ...[473]

The National Miners Association's support for reading rooms was driven by the recognition that these spaces provided unions with the means to control the materials available to workers, thereby offering a counter-narrative to the company-owned reading rooms. By establishing their own reading rooms, unions sought to expand their membership by attracting local workers and creating social hubs within isolated colliery villages. These rooms not only offered reading materials but also served as venues for lectures, games, and refreshments, thus enhancing their appeal to the broader community.[474]

The pursuit of sobriety was a central motivation for owners and local temperance groups to advocate for establishing reading rooms. A prominent figure in this regard was J. W. Pease, a Quaker industrialist who strongly supported adult education to promote temperance among his workers. In 1860, Pease decided to equip each of his collieries with a reading room supplied by a circulating library. In 1867 alone, he provided these rooms with 2,000 copies of *The British Workman*, 1,800 copies of *The Cottager* and 1,000 copies of the *Band of Hope Review*. Additionally, Pease offered billiards and other forms of sober entertainment in these rooms, aiming to keep

[473] Letter of John Hall 'to the miners of Tyne, Wear, and Tees', in *The Coal and Iron Miners' Jl.,* Junes 10, 1843.
[474] 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 3 May 1880, p.3.

his workers morally upright and away from public houses while controlling the material they consumed.[475]

The prevailing belief at the time was that the absence of reading rooms in colliery villages would inevitably lead to high levels of alcohol consumption. This sentiment was echoed by a correspondent reporting on the conditions in Boyne Colliery, Durham, who observed that in the absence of alternative forms of amusement and self-improvement, residents flocked to the local public houses in large numbers:

> Drink has here it's votaries; numbers crowd the three public-houses in the village on week evenings; cases of extremes are met with, though happily in small numbers, compared with the population. . . as no other means of amusement and self-improvement are offered in the village. Nothing in the shape of a reading-room, &c, is provided, as I find at other collieries. This may be owing to its youth; probably is it.[476]

The correspondent advocated for the provision of a reading room by 'the owners' as soon as they 'get their works thoroughly under weigh.' They emphasise that this should only happen once the owners have ensured that their workers are paid enough to live comfortably – 'it is hoped they will then turn their attention to the comfort and condition of their workmen; at present it would certainly be impolitic on their part to provide means of instruction and amusement before the prospect of livelihood was fairly realised.'[477] This viewpoint suggests that while reading rooms were valued as a form of instruction as well as a distraction from alcohol consumption, they were not considered a substitute for decent wages. Instead, the correspondent stresses the importance of fair compensation for workers before establishing amenities like reading rooms.

Interestingly, the call for reading rooms supporting temperance did not appear to be limited to owners; workers also advocated for such facilities. In 1862, 'A Coal Hewer' wrote to the *British Miner* expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of educational

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[475] Brendan Duffy 'The Progress of Education in the Northern Coalfield Before 1870', *Northern History* 55:2 (2018), pp.178-205 (p.197).
[476] 'A Visit to the Boyne Colliery' in *Durham County Advertiser*, January 24, 1873, p.8.
[477] 'A Visit to the Boyne Colliery' in *Durham County Advertiser*, January 24, 1873, p.8.

opportunities for miners and their families in the Coxhoe mining district. While not necessarily a teetotaller, the writer criticised the temperance movement for its inability to impact working men significantly. He argued that a properly conducted reading room would do more for cultivating individuals than temperance lectures, as it would provide a constructive alternative to spending idle time in alehouses or on the streets. The writer believed that such an institution would not only educate the miners but also encourage them to become more creative or open-minded:

> We have not a reading-room for the elevation of young men; there is no place for them to pass their idle time but the ale-bench, or the street ends. The teetotallers will exclaim: "have we not a Temperance Hall, and lectures given weekly for the improvement of the public?" Would a reading-room not do more for the cultivation of our species, if it were properly conducted, more than anything that has been brought forward? It would keep more from the ale-bench than temperance lectures. Young men when they are cared for, will being to care for themselves; such an institution would be a blessing to this district; it would exterminate ignorance and vice; it would be a ray that would bring light to the mind.[478]

The anonymity of the letter's author leaves room for speculation regarding their true identity and motivations. While they may indeed have been a coal hewer genuinely concerned about the lack of educational opportunities in mining communities, it is also possible that they were a middle-class individual with paternalistic tendencies, seeking to impose their moral views under the guise of representing the industrial workers' community. Regardless of the author's identity, their critique of the temperance hall's effectiveness in discouraging drinking suggests a certain level of understanding of working-class culture. This acknowledgement implies that the author recognised the limitations of traditional temperance efforts and saw the potential of reading rooms as a more effective means of providing constructive activities and opportunities for self-improvement in mining communities.

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[478] 'To the Editor of the British Miner', *British Miner and General Newsman*, Correspondence, October 3, 1862, p.4.

This section delves deeper into the motivations behind company-run and union-run reading rooms. It is structured around two case studies, both illuminating different aspects of the establishment of these rooms and the underlying motivations. The first case study examines Hebburn Colliery in Jarrow, Tyne and Wear, focusing on the miners' desire for a reading room and their efforts to persuade the company to provide one. This case study sheds light on the miners' motivations in seeking such a facility and their determination to improve their access to education and knowledge. The second case study investigates a company-run reading room in Ryhope, a small colliery village also in Tyne and Wear. This examination explores the relationship between company-run rooms and unions and highlights the significance of the local reading room as a centre for community engagement and political discourse. Through these case studies, the section aims to enhance our understanding of the multifaceted motivations behind establishing reading rooms in mining communities and their impact on various stakeholders.

Hebburn Colliery Reading Room.

In 1877, the workers at Hebburn Colliery in Jarrow, County Durham, embarked on a determined campaign to establish a reading room, recognising the critical need for intellectual and recreational facilities within their community. Despite initial rejection from the colliery owner due to the unavailability of suitable buildings, the workers' persistence and resourcefulness ultimately led to their success. The campaign was notably spearheaded by an anonymous employee writing under the pseudonym 'Howker,' who galvanised his fellow workers to demand the creation of a reading room. Although his true identity remains unknown, 'Howker' appears to have been a regular columnist for the *Jarrow Express*, frequently addressing issues related to education with a discernible anti-Tory and pro-church sentiment.[479]

In a passionate and practical appeal, 'Howker' proposed that the workers themselves could raise the necessary funds to construct a reading room. He suggested a system

[479] 'Hebburn Colliery Notes by "Howker"' in *Jarrow Express*, February 3, 1877, p. 3, and 'Hebburn Colliery Notes by "Howker"' in *Jarrow Express,* January 20, 1877, p.3, and 'Hebburn Colliery Notes by "Howker"' in *Jarrow Express,* March 3, 1877, p.3.

where each worker would contribute threepence per fortnight, accumulating a substantial sum over time to finance the construction and maintenance of their own facility, independent of the colliery owners:

> HEBBURN COLLIERY NOTES, BY "HOCKER" We have heard a good deal about a reading room at the Colliery, and the men have asked the employers over and over again. I did think the last application would have been entertained: the place was so small they asked for; but now it cannot be done; every place is wanted for other purposes than reading rooms. What do you think of Howker's suggestion? He suggests that the committee who had the field lately should summon the inhabitants to a public meeting, and tell them that is they are determined to have a reading room, they can get one of their own; and they will never know the paying for it. I know for certain that we can get a tidy reading room with house attached for a caretaker, and a large room to hold public meetings in, for the sum of £200 or thereabouts "But how are we to raise the money?" you ask. I will tell you. There are, or we will suppose there are, 500 adults at the Colliery. If these men would subscribe threepence per fortnight, that would raise six pounds five shillings each pay; and for that sum any building society, for there are plenty of builders in Jarrow and the neighbourhood who would be glad of the job to find the material, and take their pay in this manner. The building would be your own in the short space of two years, and have a pretty fair stock of books into the bargain. You would then be independent of employers or anybody else. How are we to get the money collected? some may say. Appoint three trustees, a treasurer, and a secretary, and have the money kept off at the office. I am sure there are very few indeed who would miss threepence per fortnight, even in these hard times. I hope these remarks will be taken notice of by some of your intelligent readers at the colliery, and be put into practical effect. If this should be so, Howker thinks he knows a friend who would do the building well and cheaply, draw the plans into the bargain, and take the money as suggested.[480]

[480] 'Hebburn Colliery Notes by "Howker"' in *Jarrow Express*, May 19, 1877, p.3.

‘Howker’ presented a vision of grassroots empowerment and community resilience, advocating for creating a self-funded and self-managed reading room. While the concept of village reading rooms was well established by 1877, ‘Howker's’ emphasis on independence from the colliery owners and his proposed committee structure to safeguard against corruption was particularly noteworthy. His proposal resonates as a testament to the agency and aspirations of working-class communities striving for social progress and emancipation.

The community’s enthusiasm for ‘Howker's’ suggestion was evident in the letters to the editor that followed. One such response from a fellow collier underscored the resonance of ‘Howker's’ proposal and provided further insight into the lived experiences of colliery workers who lacked access to intellectual spaces. The respondent expressed gratitude to ‘Howker’ for advocating the establishment of a reading room and acknowledged the need for alternative social spaces beyond the confines of home or public houses:

> A READING ROOM FOR THE COLLIERY. *To the Editor of the Jarrow Express*. SIE, - I was pleased to see that that your spirited correspondent, ‘Howker,’ had a good suggestion in his letter last week, and that was about the formation of a reading room at our Colliery. Us men folk, Mr Editor, cannot sit over the fire always, and when we get out we don’t exactly like to be corner-props, nor do we like to walk the streets of Jarrow, gaping into all the shop windows, nor liquoring-up at every public-house, and I just thought what a good hit ‘Howker’ had made in advocating such a place. It would soon pay itself, and would be great blessing on all the Colliery folks who take any interest in reading and such like. ‘Howker’ knows our wants, and I am much obliged to him for having brought the reading room forward. I hope he will peg away at it until we do get one for ourselves; it will take a lot of stirring up before the affairs can be brought to a head. I hope you will find a corner for this, Mr Editor. – Yours truly, A COLLIERY MAN.[481]

The writer’s rejection of passive roles as ‘corner-props’ or aimless wanderers articulated a yearning for more fulfilling activities that would stimulate the mind and

[481] ‘A Reading Room for the Colliery’ in *Jarrow Express*, May 26, 1877, p.3.

foster camaraderie. By endorsing ‘Howker's’ proposal, the writer affirmed the potential of a reading room as a valuable resource for those interested in intellectual pursuits while also contributing to their personal development and well-being. This response highlights the perceived value of such a facility within the colliery community and reinforces the urgency of its establishment.

The swift success of the campaign for a reading room at Hebburn Colliery reflects the determination and collective action of the workers. Just two weeks after the proposal was made, the colliery masters agreed to convert one of their houses into a reading room, demonstrating a degree of responsiveness to the expressed needs of their employees. However, this agreement came with conditions that underscored the owners' desire to maintain control over the initiative:

> PROPOSED READING-ROOM-On Tuesday evening, in Mr Maddison’s Long-Room, a meeting of the employees of the Colliery was held, for the purpose of taking into consideration what steps should be taken with regard to the proposed reading-room in Clementson-row. Mr John Jameson occupied the chair, and briefly stated the object of the meeting. The masters of the Colliery had agreed to renovate one of their houses and convert it into a reading-room. The library was to be furnished, and the men at the Colliery were to pay a certain sum per week for its maintenance. The present meeting was only preliminary, and was more especially for the purpose of electing a committee of six; the masters choosing a committee, and after the motion “that we accept the offer of the masters” had been unanimously carried, the following were nominated, and received the number of votes appended; Messrs Wm. Harrison, 33; John Jameson, 33; Anthony Knox, 27; John Quin, 27; James Liddle, 27; Thomas Verdi, 25;- Mostyn, 29; Wm. Watson, 18. The first six elected.[482]

While the establishment of the reading room marked a significant achievement for the colliery workers, the terms of the agreement reveal a nuanced power dynamic between the owners and the labour force. Despite the owners' apparent generosity in providing the physical space for the reading room, their insistence on financial contributions and

[482] ‘Proposed Reading Room’ in *Jarrow Express*, Hebburn, June 9, 1877, p.3.

control over committee selection reflects an underlying desire to retain authority over the initiative. While granting workers access to a valuable resource, this arrangement also reinforced the owners' dominance within the colliery community.

In conclusion, the successful establishment of the reading room at Hebburn Colliery represents a triumph of collective action and advocacy among the workers. However, it was not within 'Howkers' vision of self-funding and self-government and, therefore, had to adhere to the conditions imposed by the owners. This highlights the complexities of power dynamics within industrial settings, mainly through financial control. This case exemplifies industry workers' ongoing struggle for autonomy and agency, especially concerning their education and recreation. Despite these challenges, the creation of the reading room stands as a testament to the resilience and resolve of the workers in their pursuit of self-improvement and community enrichment.

Ryhope Colliery Reading Room.

The miner's reading room in Ryhope is a testament to such establishments' multifaceted role in Victorian mining communities. It also epitomises the complex juxtaposition of the nature of reading rooms, being both tools of upper-class paternalism and hubs of working-class radical discourse. Over the first ten years of the Ryhope Coal Company's educational and religious initiative, the company claimed it paid £2,800 for the school, chapel, and reading room.[483] The company opened its reading room in 1868 under the steam of the managing owner, John Taylor. It had a main hall, lecture hall, reading room, smoke room, chess room, and quoit ground. The building could hold 450 people and was seated throughout. There was an intention to add a library, but one did not exist upon its opening.[484] At the opening of the room, another owner, William Nicholson, stated the intended purpose of the room:

> it now remained for the work-people to avail themselves of the place, as an institution affording healthy recreation, and a desirable change from the daily routine of life. Institutions like these had for their aim higher objects; they aimed

[483] 'Bishop Baring and the Ryhope Colliery' in *Shields Daily Gazette,* August 19, 1870, p.3.
[484] 'Ryhope Colliery: Opening of a New lecture Hall and Reading Room' in *Shields Daily Gazette*, November 23, 1868.

> to achieve a victory over the grosser inclinations of our race; and in entering the membership of that place it was hoped that – by affording an agreeable resort at all times for the men – it would accomplish its object.[485]

Though he does not specify which 'grosser inclinations,' his objective for the room was to alter the workers' less desirable behaviours by providing alternative, approved, and 'healthy' recreation within a well-suited and 'agreeable' resort. Beyond the meaning of agreeable as 'nice' there is an undertone that the room is an acceptable middle ground for both the owners and the members.

The reading room became an integral part of village life, utilised by the miners to access news and served as a gathering place for community events and social activities, including bazaars and fundraisers.[486] It hosted the celebrations of the foundation laying of the new chapel in 1869, which the company owners attended.[487] The company's investment in educational and recreational facilities appeared to reflect a successful attempt at corporate paternalism. Over time, however, the reading room would become a space out of control of the company owners as it became a hub for discussions on labour rights, political movements, and community activism.

The room would hold discussions on political engagement; for example, in 1874, 'a crowded meeting was held to disseminate the principles of Home Rule for Ireland, in the Reading Room Ryhope Colliery' led by the president of Sunderland Branch of the Home Rule Association. There is a clear liberal-leaning political agenda and discussion allowed within the rooms and with the positive engagement of the audience suggested within the article, one that the workers engaged with.[488] Further, during periods of industrial unrest, such as the strike of 1873 over wages and career mobility restrictions, the reading room served as a crucial meeting place for miners to organise and strategise. Updates on the strike were shared, and votes were cast on whether to accept the employers' offers. A year later, 'a crowded meeting of miners was held in the

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[485] 'Ryhope Colliery: Opening of a New lecture Hall and Reading Room' in *Shields Daily Gazette*, November 23, 1868.
[486] 'Bazaar at Ryhope' in *Shields Daily Gazette*, December 22, 1869, p.4, and 'Concert at Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, April 20, 1876, p.3.
[487] 'The New Church at Ryhope: Laying the Foundation-Stone' in *Shields Daily Gazette*, June 22, 1869, p.4.
[488] 'Home Rule Meeting at Ryhope Colliery' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, January 3, 1874, p.3.

Reading-room at Ryhope Colliery', which determined their vote to remain on strike, within a wider striking movement across the county regarding reducing the work week to five days.[489] The company-funded reading room had become an ideological stronghold for anti-company sentiment. It also gave the movement a physical presence, facilitating collective decision-making among the workers.[490]

A couple of years later, in 1877, the room is again linked to industrial action. A celebration was held in the reading room when the union president was released from prison for threatening a 'non-union colliery employee'.[491] This celebration further symbolised the room's significance as a gathering place for workers' rights advocates. Not long after this, there was a unanimous strike at the colliery, leading to many workers losing their jobs.[492] This led to mass evictions of the colliery houses. In response, the workers met in the reading room to decide their actions, which they concluded should be peaceful.[493] Around this time, the reading room was closed by, in the words of the Durham County Mine Association's chairman, the 'action of the colliery owners'. Though it is not outright stated, it is heavily suggested that it was an attempt to dampen the efforts of the unions and general industrial action.[494]

The local union chairman claimed that the loss of the reading room dealt a significant blow to the union members, forcing them to resort to holding meetings in public houses, where they were vulnerable to interference and scrutiny:

> How often had not their union been damaged and their leading men been laid at their feet as a result of holding lodge meetings at public houses. . .The men could not now meet in the long room of some public-house, because of the changed and changing condition of the relationship between employers and employed. The time was when trades unions were short lived, when their

[489] 'The Miners' Strike, Ryhope Colliery' in *Durham County Advertiser*, May 15, 1874, p.6.
[490] 'Great Strike of Miners at Ryhope' in *Jarrow Guardian and Tyneside Reporter*, July 12, 1873, p.3.
[491] 'Extraordinary Demonstration at Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, August 1, 1877, p.3.
[492] 'The Ryhope Colliers' in *Bradford Weekly Telegraph*, October 6, 1877, p.4.
[493] 700 pit Cottages were evicted. 'The Ryhope Pitmen' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette,* September 21, 1877, p.3.
[494] 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, May 3, 1880, p.3.

> existence was uncertain. They had now become an established social institution[495]

The union's desire to distance themselves from associations with alcohol was driven not only by their aspiration for respect within a temperance-heavy society but also their broader goal of establishing a physical presence and, therefore, becoming an enduring and ingrained part of the community. By moving away from venues like public houses and instead investing in a dedicated reading room and hall, the union aimed to elevate their status and credibility, both in the eyes of its employees and within the community at large.

In 1880, the Durham County Mine Association began constructing a hall in Ryhope, featuring an attached reading room and billiard room, at a cost of £1,200. The owner of the colliery contributed 100 guineas towards its construction, a gesture met with gratitude tempered by lingering mistrust. Addressing the workers at the foundation laying ceremony, the local mayor urged them to accept this gesture as a friendly 'olive branch,' fostering goodwill between employers and employees:

> It would be most unworthy if he said one word against the employers there. They had done, as the chairman had told them, the very handsome and creditable thing of giving one hundred guineas towards the building of that hall. That was holding out the olive branch to them all, and he trusted the effect of that little good might be to help secure a universal feeling of friendliness between the employers and the employed[496]

Throughout this article and the others discussed, there are subtle (and less subtle) hints at repeated tensions, distrust, and dislike of the company owners, not only from the employees and local union but also from the local landowners and clergy. Though they act congenial when it comes to the creation of such establishments, the aforementioned 'olive branch' appears to be in answer to these tensions. The company owners were attempting to mend their image and relationships with the town through this act of philanthropy. The contribution from the colliery owner was generally received

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[495] 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, May 3, 1880, p.3.
[496] 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, May 3, 1880, p.3.

positively, evident in the mine union president's expressed wish to see other coal owners emulate such generosity, 'He had often said he wished he had the transforming power to make every coalowner in the county of Durham into Hugh Taylors'. [497]

The union's significant investment in the building demonstrates their belief in the importance of a reading room as a crucial educational and organisational space within their community. The union were focused less on general recreation and more on enhancing the miners' intelligence and usefulness of its members, thereby improving their overall quality of life. The union president said at the opening of the new room, 'The building of this hall was a step in the right direction, and he had no doubt it would help to strengthen their union and make them more intelligent and useful men.' Additionally, they anticipated that the physical presence of the hall would provide stability to the trade unions, serving as a communal hub for villagers and reinforcing the organisations' longevity and efficacy., '. . .and as they grew in number their organisations would become more perfect, more lasting, more useful to themselves and to their wives and families.'[498]

The case study of Ryhope offers a nuanced perspective on the role of reading rooms in the relationship between workers, owners, and unions. It simultaneously supports Coll's perception that reading rooms were forms of control and manipulation to restrict the supply of literature and Heesom's and Duffy's assertions that the rooms were an attempt to prevent industrial action through the development of loyalty.[499] However, this case study creates a more complex and nuanced narrative of the relationships between workers, owners, unions and their reading rooms. While the company's initial establishment of the reading room may have aimed at promoting education and providing constructive leisure activities, it was generally unsuccessful in maintaining a peaceful and amenable workforce. Despite its association with union activity and industrial action, the original room remained operational for a significant period, indicating a level of tolerance from the owners. When faced with escalating

[497] Hugh Taylors was the owner of several large collieries in the area including the Ryhope Coal Company. 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, May 3, 1880, p.3.
[498] 'A Miners' Hall for Ryhope' in *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, May 3, 1880, p.3.
[499] Colls, 'Coal, Class and Education in the North-East: A Rejoinder', pp.152-165, and Heesom and Duffy, 'Coal, Class and Education', pp.136-151.

industrial unrest, the owners closed the room to quell dissent and prevent further disruption. Or even more directly, to prevent them from using the room to warm up and dry off after their days sleeping in a tent in a field after being evicted from their homes during the strike.[500] Overall, the case study illustrates how reading rooms could organically evolve into hubs for radical and union activities, posing a perceived threat to the owners of collieries. Ultimately, the Ryhope case study exemplifies the multifaceted nature of reading rooms as both agents of social change and targets of suppression within Victorian mining communities.

Navvies' Reading Rooms.

> THE NAVVY'S READING, In a portrait sketch of the British navvy a lady who takes a leading part in the Navvy Mission Society Says: "Navvies are great readers, lying out of doors on summer evenings ; or if on wet days or longer winter nights you go to their huts, you will find some of them busily perusing the *Police News,* the local paper, or often now a tract." These British sons of Anak do not, it appears, relish heavy reading. At the little libraries which have been established by the society, the dull works remain unused on the shelves, but every interesting biography, is sure to be in a most dilapidated condition.[501]

The navvies' engagement with literature is often not the most prominent feature of their stereotype. Instead, as A. J. M. Sykes suggests, their biggest hobby was talking, and they had a reputation for drinking, gambling, fighting, and behaving anti-socially.[502] The above observer from 1884 suggested navvies generally relished light reading, if not the more advanced literature. Their reputation led navvies to a poor relationship with the communities they moved through, garnering a mutual mistrust.[503]

When anticipating the arrival of navvies, some towns took proactive measures to mitigate potential disruptive behaviour by establishing reading rooms. In Fairlie, a harbour town in Ayrshire, in 1878, a group of 'ladies' attempted to build a 'wooden

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[500] 'The Ryhope Miners' in *Sunerland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, September 28, 1877, p.3.
[501] 'The Navvys Reading' in *Edinburgh Evening News*, June 17, 1884, p.4.
[502] A. J. M. Skyes, 'Navvies: Their Social Relations' *Sociology*, 3.2 (1969), p.160.
[503] Ibid, p.160.

erection and furnish it with publications.' They hoped to expand this scheme nationally with funding obtained through three different means. They calculated that if 'every navvie, in this country was each to subscribe one half-penny a week for twelve months, a sufficient sum (over £6000) would be raised.'[504] They hoped to gain the support of the railway companies, as they did at Fairlie, from the Glasgow & South-Western Railways Company, which transported the materials for the building free of charge. Most of the crucial forms of funding, however, came from the locals – 'Besides, the contribution of the navvies would no doubt be supplemented by friends willing to help'. They believed these rooms would 'leave a lasting impression for good upon the minds of the working classes', suggesting their motivation is focused on the instruction of the working classes with a view to moralise the 'gangs' visiting their towns.[505]

Almost a decade later, these principles were followed in nearby Ardrossan. When between 600 and 800 navvies were to descend on Ardrossan in 1887, the town gathered subscriptions and raised over £225 to construct a reading room.[506] At the first meeting, they discussed the concern in the town for the navvies' welfare and the town itself:

> There is a growing feeling among those interested in the welfare of the navvies engaged at the Harbour and Railway works that some organised scheme, whereby they might be interested and benefited, should be inaugurated. . .The objects he had in view were stated in the letter, and included religious meetings for the men on Sundays, social meetings on Saturday nights, and material for a reading room. What was much wanted was a counter-attraction to the public-houses. During the winter months, when we had so much wet and stormy weather, pleasant evenings would be provided to the men, in the shape of readings and music[507]

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[504] 'Shelter for Navvies' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, January 4, 1878, p.4.
[505] Nationally is across Scotland. 'Shelter for Navvies' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, January 4, 1878, p.4.
[506] 'List of Guaranteed Subscriptions towards Proposed Hall and Coffee Hut for Navvies at Ardrossan' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, November 4, 1887, p.1.
[507] 'The Navvies at Ardrossan' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, October 7, 1887, p.3.

Detracting from the local public houses is again a pivotal driving force behind their establishment. Still, it was not the primary driving force behind establishing reading rooms for navvies. In the case of the navvies, like sailors, religious enlightenment was a much more important motivator than it was for reading rooms in other industries. Again, like the sailors' reading rooms, this emphasis on religious enlightenment likely stemmed from the need for more financial backing due to a lack of subscriptions and the existing support infrastructure provided by missions.

The conflict between those advocating for local social stability and those pushing for religious use of the room was evident in Ardrossan. There was a debate over when religious meetings could be held, with the mission preferring Saturday nights, a popular time, while others feared it would drive men back to public houses.[508] They recognised the need for a more balanced approach – if they stuck too strictly to moral principles, they would drive the navvies out of the room and back to the public houses, defeating the point of their investment. The room committee decided there should be facilities for religious services and a place for secular entertainment alongside a coffee hut. The addition of the coffee hut was considered essential for the practical provision of refreshments to the men, but they also believed it would help encourage them to temperance. It will also have been an opportunity to recover some of the running costs of the establishment as a whole. [509]

As navvies moved around, it would be difficult for rooms to be established under members' subscriptions, so at least the initial funds for starting an enterprise would have to come from the town itself. Again, in Ayrshire in 1903, the church pressured the locals to support the local missions and provide reading rooms for the navvies. When requesting donations—monetary as well as books and magazines— they wrote to the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* to remind the town of the economic benefits the navvies provided and suggest that those that benefit should give something back:

> The responsibility is very wide spread, for in the district in which they work and live, there are a large number of people who derive benefit from their presence.

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[508] 'Recreation Room for Use of the Navvies' in *Irvine Times,* The Round Table*,* October 8, 1887, p.3.
[509] 'Reading Room and Coffee Hut For the Navvies' in *The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, October 14, 1887, p.3.

> In the first place, their employers are benefited. Then the neighbouring landlords, on whose land the works are executed, derive pecuniary advantage. The tradesmen, too, of these towns profit largely, for the navvies spend their earnings freely. On these there rests directly some share of responsibility. And indirectly it spreads wider still; if the works are of public utility then on the public in general falls a share of the burden, and to each of us belongs the duty of seeing that these men's moral and spiritual interests are not forgotten.[510]

This guilt-tripping has a dual function—to encourage donations and improve attitudes towards navvies by demonstrating what benefits they bring to the town. Again, there is a transparent religious element to the rooms—improving the men's religious well-being was a priority for the room's supporters and likely an important advertisement for gaining funding.

An example of a room being provided for the navvies outside of the direct control and influence of the Church was in Inverkip, a village in Renfrewshire in Scotland, in 1901. A local Baronet took it upon himself to erect a reading room for the navvies as they built the railway through the town:

> Railway Men's Reading Room. A Comfortable and commodious reading room, which has been erected by Sir M. R. Shaw Stewart, Bart., Ardgowan, beside the huts at the Bogside, for the benefit of the men engaged on the Inverkip section of the Wemyss Bay Railway, was opened on Tuesday evening by a very enjoyable gathering of the men and a few friends.[511]

It is unknown if such individual acts were replicated throughout the country, but the navvies would often be met with a reading room for the relatively short period they were in the town.

Though all these examples are from Scotland, predominantly Ayrshire, there is evidence of similar rooms being set up throughout the country; a sample includes –

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[510] 'Navvies in Ayrshire' in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, May 29, 1903, p.3.
[511] 'Railway Men's Reading Room' in *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, December 5, 1901, p.2.

Westmorland in 1890, Neston in 1895, and Morton in 1896.[512] The rooms which have been studied demonstrate the facilities that could have been available to navvies – reading, music, coffee and religious services – often for free. It shows the motivation behind their establishment, which stemmed from a negative reputation and how this may have limited their access to these facilities and literature. Though these rooms were created with controlling intentions, they provided navvies with reading materials and contributed to their education, culture, and inclusion in the wider public sphere.

Railway Workers' Reading Rooms.

This section aims to contrast the previous discussion on the reading rooms for railway builders with those available to railway workers. In the 1840s, a distinct class of railway workers emerged, characterised by a departure from the rough, unkempt image associated with navvies. Instead, railway workers represented a more polished, uniformed workforce, employed by faceless companies and subject to intricate chains of command. Unlike navvies, literacy and numeracy were essential skills for railway workers; as Frank McKenna points out, they often had to interpret complicated instructions.[513] These workers had to be disciplined, punctual and literate. The provision of reading rooms for railway workers primarily aimed to cater to their existing levels of literacy and intellectualism rather than addressing issues of alcoholism or promoting religious teachings. This section will explore the establishment of railwaymen's reading rooms, often initiated by railway companies in response to workers' requests. It will examine the size of these facilities, which vary considerably based on geographic location. In the North of England, reading rooms tended to be substantial structures or significant sections within company buildings, resembling mechanics' institutes. In contrast, in smaller Scottish towns, these rooms were often confined to a single space within the railway station, serving as a modest area for reading and relaxation for the workers.

These railway rooms tended to be much more long-term and established parts of the town compared to the temporary wooden erections the navvies were provided. In

[512] 'Navvy Mission' in *Westmorland Gazette*, August 2, 1890, p.8
, and 'Entertainment at the Navvy Reading Room' in *Cheshire Observer*, March 23, 1895, p.3, and 'Morton, Entertainment' in *Bingley Chronicle*, November 20, 1896, p.5.
[513] Frank McKenna, 'Victorian Railway Workers', *History Workshop*, 1.1 (1976), pp.26-73 (pp.26-27).

the town of Inverurie in Aberdeenshire, the Railway Mechanics' Reading Room became the heart of the town, hosting gospel services, the Inverurie Locomotive Apprentices' Club meetings, mimic elections with the Mutual Improvement and Debating Society, the local Lawn Tennis Club dances and ambulance classes.[514] It should be noted that this room was opened in 1904 in connection with the Great North of Scotland Railway Company.[515] Similarly, a reading room was established inside the station ambulance halls in Perth. The establishment would host primarily books on ambulance works but also focused on working of an 'instructive character':

> New Reading-room at the Station. In order to allow all railway men to have the full benefit of the hall recently erected at the General Station for ambulance purposes it has been resolved to utilise it also as a reading-room. A full and regular supply of daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, and books is being arranged for. It is intended that the books obtained will deal principally with ambulance work, but other works of an interesting and instructive character will also be placed on the shelves. At present the men have the requisites for recreative purposes, but these will be added to. Needless to say the reading-room in itself will be a great boon to the railway men, many of whom have in the past sorely felt the want of a suitable place in which to spend their spare time. Especially is the case in the winter, when, of course the men are not as busy as during the summer.[516]

The writer suggests that the workers themselves desire the room to be established, unlike the navvies, who had it thrust upon them. There is also no discussion of temperance, moralisation, or religion but an emphasis on instruction and the productive use of 'spare time'. The company invests in instructing its workers rather than moralising or distracting them.

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[514] 'Inverurie Railway Hall Reading-Room' in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, August 6, 1921, p.1, and 'Inverurie Railway Hall (Reading Room) in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, February 26, 1921, p.1, and 'Lecture' in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, District News, April 7, 1921, p.2, and 'The Railway Crisis' in *Aberdeen People's Journal*, October 26, 1907, p.6.
[515] 'Railway Institute at Inverurie' in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 December 1904, p.7
[516] 'New Reading-Room at the Station' in *Perthshire Advertiser*, November 21, 1898, p.3.

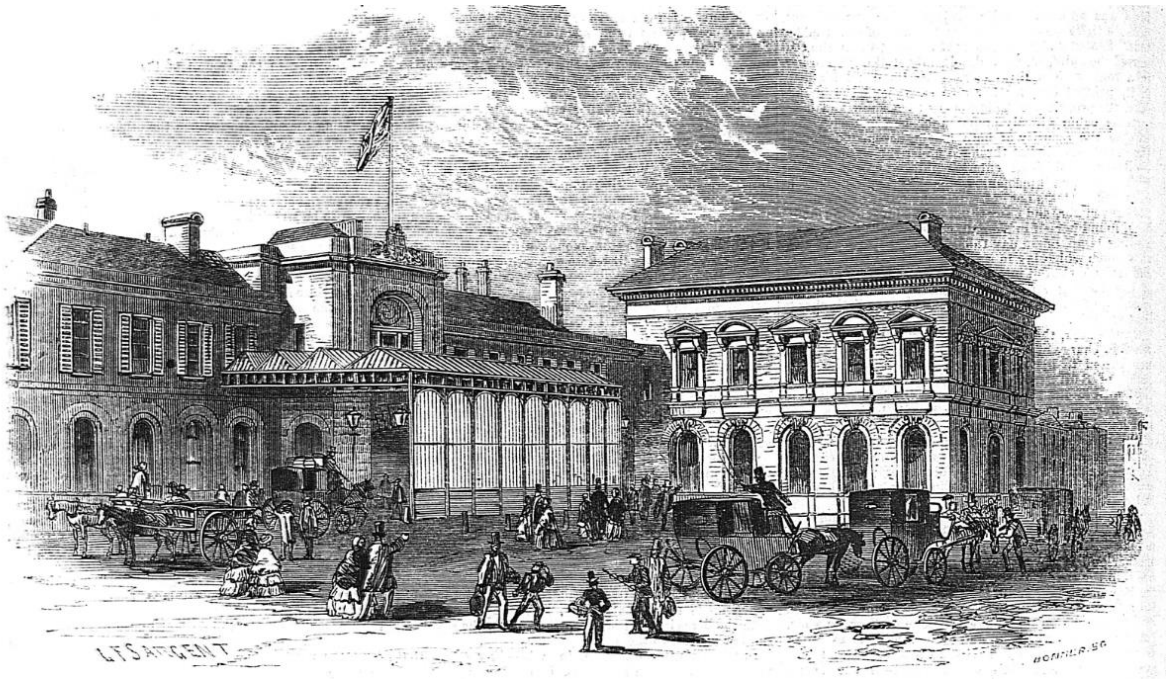

Figure 4.3: Image published with the article on the Derby Railway Reading Room.[517]

In Derby, the Midland Railway built a railway reading room that was so grand that an article was written on its architecture in *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art* in 1857. They suggest that this building is representative of 'many buildings devoted to the instructions and rational recreation of the numerous operatives connected with the various railways.' It describes the reading room as exclusively for the men employed on the Midland Railway and describes the facilities within it:

> The Derby New Reading-room and Library for the men employed on the Midland Railway, is a red brick building, in the Italian style of architecture. It adjoins the railway station, and contains on the ground floor a reading-room. . .library. . .and three class-rooms. . .[518]

[517] 'The Derby New Reading-Room', *Reynold's miscellany of romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 19.485, October 24, 1857.
[518] 'The Derby New Reading-Room', *Reynold's miscellany of romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 19.485, October 24, 1857.

Even the care for the architecture, investing in a large, attractive, red brick building, shows substantial financial backing and investment from the railway company.

The article continues to list the room's facilities, including a larger, more varied library, a hall for lectures and dances and different classes:

> These rooms are exclusively for the men employed on the line. Besides a circulating library, consisting of a liberal assortment of books in the various departments of the arts, sciences, manufacturers, biography, history, animal physiology, novels, romances, poetry, and the drama, this admirable institution will offer facilities for the perusal of the daily papers and periodicals. The classes are to consist of singing, drawing, music, French, and the usual English educational courses. On the upper or first floor is a large hall, sixty-five feet long by forty feet broad. This hall will be used occasionally for meetings of the shareholders, as well as for public meetings of the company. It will also be available for concerts and lectures for the railway *employees*.[519]

While labelled as a reading room, this facility resembles an institute, featuring multiple classrooms and a circulation library. The term 'reading-room' may be retained to uphold its association with the working class, and the article refers to the railway workers as the 'working classes'. The library collection diverges significantly from the typical reading room assortment outlined in Chapter 2, notably offering fiction, poetry, and other forms of light reading. Similarly, the classes provided are distinct from those typically found in reading rooms, with employees having the opportunity to engage in recreational courses, often more advanced than 'the usual English educational courses.' This demonstrates how this stratum of the working class was afforded the option of recreational education rather than solely educational, instructional or religious content, implying they could be trusted with light literature and music classes, a privilege not necessarily extended to navvies or attendees of standard working men's reading rooms. The railway workers in Derby had to pay for the use of this room at one penny a week or thirteen pence quarterly.[520]

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[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.

Some companies offered reading rooms free of charge to their workers, as illustrated in an article in the *Quarterly Review* from 1848, detailing such a room in Wolverton, Milton Keynes. The company covered all costs associated with the facility:

> Before leaving Wolverton Station our readers will no doubt be desirous to ascertain what arrangements, if any, are made by the Company for comfort, education, and religious instruction of the number of artificers and other servants whom we have lately seen hard at work. . .A reading-room and library lighted by gas are also supplied free of charge by the Company. In the latter there are about 700 volumes, which have mostly been given; and the list of papers, &c. in the reading-room was as follows :- Times, Fairly News, Bell's Life, Illustrated News, Punch, Weekly Dispatch, Liverpool Albion, Glasgow Post, Railway Record, Air's Birmingham Gazette, Bentleys Miscellany, Chambers' Information, Chambers' Journal, Chambers' Shilling Volume, Practical Mechanics Journal, Mechanic's Magazine. [521]

The range of papers available in this room was diverse, including standard publications like *Punch*, *Chambers' Journal*, and *Illustrated News*, as well as newspapers from various regions across the country. Additionally, two mechanic-related periodicals were included, suggesting that the company owners encouraged their employees to educate themselves on mechanics during their leisure time.

In 1855, an extensive library and reading room was established in York for the 900 men employed at the North Eastern Company workshop. Initially, the room had between 300 and 400 subscribers, each paying one penny per week, and received 'pecuniary aid' from the company directors and principal officials. Modelled after the York Institute, its primary objective was to provide instruction and improvement opportunities for railway workers. The room's object was to 'give the means of instruction and improvement to the large number of workmen connected with the railway.'[522] With over 2,200 volumes and around 11,000 issues per year, the room aimed

[521] 'The Bubble of the Age; or the Fallacies of Railway', *Quarterly Review*; 1848, 84.167 (1848) p.39.
[522] 'Railway Library and Reading Room Institution' in *Yorkshire Gazette*, June 2, 1855, p.8.

to attract young men.[523] It mainly focused on enhancing their existing education rather than providing a basic one:

> Addressing himself to the committee he urged them to keep constantly in view the importance of making the library and reading room worth supporting, as a means eminently adapted to enable young men to gather the fruits of the learning they may have had at school. . . their desire to render it as attractive as possible, especially to the young men, who he hoped would receive lasting benefit from it.[524]

This emphasis on educating the youth likely reflected the company's long-term interest in benefiting from a well-educated workforce. While advanced classes were eventually cancelled in 1858 due to low attendance, the mutual improvement class was deemed highly successful.[525] Again, like Derby, this room represents a much larger investment from the company and provides advanced educational and literary opportunities for railway workers.

[523] 'York Railway Library & Reading Room: Lecture on the Currents of the Ocean' in *The York Herald*, November 26, 1859, p.10. 'York Railway Library and Reading Room: Soiree At the Guildhall' in *The York Herald*, January 12, 1861, p.7.
[524] 'York Railway Library & Reading Room: Lecture on the Currents of the Ocean' in *The York Herald*, November 26, 1859, p.10.
[525] 'York Railway Library & Reading Room' in *The York Herald*, February 27, 1858, p.10.

STOCKTON & DARLINGTON RAILWAY.

THE Committee of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Reading Room and Library have made arrangements for

A TRIP TO

MIDDLESBRO' AND REDCAR,

ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 27.

A Special Train will run as under:—

LEAVING		Fares there and back, Cov. Car.
BARNARD CASTLE	at 8 30 a.m.	1s. 6d.
Winston - -	„ 8 45 „	
Gainford - -	„ 8 55 „	
Piercebridge - -	„ 9 5 „	
DARLINGTON -	„ 9 30 „	1s.

TICKETS may be had of Mr. THOMAS VASEY, and Mr. JOSEPH LEE, Temperance Hotels, Barnard Castle, and at the Railway Stations.

The Return Train will leave Redcar at 4·30, and Middlesbro' at 4·50 p.m.

Children under twelve years of age half fare.

No Luggage allowed.

Railway Office, Darlington, August 19th, 1859.

Figure 4.4: Advert for a day trip with the Stockton and Darlington Railway Reading Room and Library to Middlesbrough and Redcar.[526]

This is replicated again by Stockton and Darlington Railway Company, which had a large and active reading room backed by the company and local figures such as dukes and bishops. [527] This railway workers' reading room fostered social engagement, which is evident in the organised train trips open to the community, including children, as advertised in Figure 4.4.[528] The company's expansion in 1862, marked by the construction of a significant locomotive fitting shop, necessitated a new building to accommodate the growing workforce. This new facility, replacing the original library and reading room, boasted 'a commodious lecture room, library, large airy reading room, two class rooms, and an apartment in which those who desire it may obtain cheap and substantial refreshments.' Its library selection of over 1,000 volumes has

[526] 'Stockton & Darlington Railway' in *Teesdale Mercury*, August 24, 1859, p.1.
[527] 'Stockton and Darlington Railway Reading Room and Library', *The Durham Chronicle*, Darlington, April 16, 1858, p.8.
[528] 'Stockton & Darlington Railway' in *Teesdale Mercury*, August 24, 1859, p.1.

also been ‘carefully selected’ by the company. Due to its dramatic increase in size and function, the room was no longer called the ‘Stockton and Darlington Railway Reading Room and Library’ but instead ‘Stockton and Darlington Railway Workmen’s Institute’.[529] This name change signalled a shift from a small social society to a substantial company-run institute of education and perhaps a departure from its working-class independent roots.

The stark contrast between the navvies' reading rooms and the railway reading rooms reveals broader societal dynamics. The locals and missionaries demanded and funded the navvies' reading rooms to keep the workers distracted, sober and moral. On the other hand, the companies built the railway reading rooms under the pressure of the workers to provide a place to advance their education and seek light recreation. The railway workers were given novels and poetry, lectures, and advanced essential skills classes; the navvies’ reading rooms provided local periodicals and religious instruction. The stark contrast extended to the buildings, with railway workers enjoying large, grand structures while navvies made do with huts. This discrepancy reflects the temporary nature of navvies' work and the financial constraints of the suppliers compared to the railway reading rooms, which, through substantial investment, became permanent fixtures in cities. Despite both groups being classified as working-class, the disparity in facilities, educational expectations, and educational offerings underscores the class divide between those who built the railways and those who worked on them.

Conclusion.

The history of working men’s reading rooms is steeped in radical sentiment, as proven by their use in planning Chartist uprisings. The government feared these rooms, as evidenced by their raids and sending of spies to monitor what was said within them. The Chartists hoped that reading rooms would be the bastion of rebellion – information dissemination, mass press circulation, and educating working men to improve their station. It also hoped these rooms would develop future leaders and bring political agency to the working classes. However, as time passed, they became the tools of the social elite and corporate paternalism, attempting to use them for moral rehabilitation.

[529] ‘Stockton and Darlington Railway Workmen’s Institute’ in *The York Herald*, October 4,1862, p.7.

The sentiment of moral refinement and temperance was established during their creation within the Chartist movement, but their radical nature was not entirely eliminated, as evident in Ryhope.

Although all the workers mentioned above had access to a reading room, their profession influenced their perception of what such a space entailed. For miners, it was often a modest cottage provided by the colliery owner or the union, where they could utilise their limited free time for basic education, social interaction with fellow workers, and involvement in industrial activism. Sailors viewed reading rooms as a free alternative to the pub while on shore, offering local publications, shipping news, and vital support and assistance for some. These rooms typically offered amenities similar to those found in average provincial establishments. Navvies typically found temporary huts serving as reading rooms, offering some light entertainment but primarily focused on religious instruction, steering them away from local pubs. In contrast, railway workers enjoyed grand and permanent buildings provided by their companies, resembling mechanics' institutes in their facilities. These rooms allowed workers to indulge in romance novels, learn foreign languages, and study mechanics alongside regular reading pursuits.

While all these rooms reflect a form of paternalism within the industrial classes, it is crucial to discern the distinct motives behind each provider of reading rooms to comprehend the variations observed. For navvies, the imperative to moralise and promote religious values necessitated a delicate balance between entertainment and moral instruction. The attempt to provide stability and welcome sailors to the locale and the wider public sphere meant they were provided with local periodicals and shipping news. Railway company owners focused on educating and entertaining their workers and providing advanced recreational activities, albeit at a cost to the workers. Conversely, the colliery owners’ attempts to prevent industrial unrest led to the removal of reading rooms, or at least was the case in Ryhope. This gave space for the local union to provide reading rooms to assert their presence physically. Despite the shared goal of moralising and educating their respective industries, each provider operated with distinct approaches and priorities.

While this chapter examined the management, ownership, censorship, and moral dimensions of reading rooms, it is crucial to recognise that these spaces were integral to the lives and cultures of industrial workers. They served as hubs for education, leisure, and political engagement, shaping the experiences of these workers. Therefore, comprehending the significance of these reading rooms is indispensable for gaining insight into the lives of industrial workers during the nineteenth century.

Conclusion.

In Chapter 4, I mapped out the history of reading rooms, highlighting their complex identity as centres of radical sentiment and industrial rebellion, as well as tools for proselytisers, temperance advocates, moral reformers, and the corporate elite. Throughout this thesis, I have consistently alluded to reading rooms as part of a framework for moral reform. This shift in the purpose of the rooms stemmed from the shift in control facilitated by the need for funding. Early Chartist news rooms were self-funded and self-governed. However, the more substantial institutions within the Working Men's Reading Room movement required external financial support from the higher classes, which often came with conditions and external control. Reading rooms became crucial facilitators of interclass indirect interaction outside the workplace and the church.

The middle and upper classes envisioned reading rooms as peaceful, moral, and exciting alternatives to public houses. Janetta Manners, the Duchess of Rutland, detailed these ideals in two 93-page pamphlets. She argued that the rooms would counter the popularity of public houses, promote thriftiness and cleanliness, and reduce crime.[530] She warned against the dangers of reading rooms as well such as encouraging gambling or the risk of bad books:

> Much of the good to be derived from a library depends on the choice of the books. Some people seem to think anything will do to send to a reading-room, but the utmost care should be exercised in selecting those works which will interest and improve their readers.[531]

She emphasised that any book submitted had to be vetted by the committee, 'There is also a wise regulation providing that a committee shall approve of the books admitted into the library.'[532]

This upper-class fantasy of reading rooms as havens of appeasement is encapsulated in the fictional story 'Matt the Miner; or A Fellow Workman's Influence,'

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[530] Manners, *Accessible Reading and Recreation Rooms,* passim, and Manners, *Encouraging Experiences*, passim.
[531] Manners, *Accessible Reading and Recreation Rooms,* p.2.
[532] Ibid, p.5.

published in *After Work* in June 1881. This story depicts a colliery on the verge of a strike when one miner sets up a reading room in a miner's cottage donated by the owner. This room's success supposedly made the men happier, better dressed, and more educated, preventing the strike and 'before long Luddesdown Colliery was known as having the most contented men, and best behaved for miles around.'[533] However, as evident from the example of Ryhope, this was a mere fantasy. It can be argued that reading rooms indeed had the effect the Chartists intended for them: fostering union among radicals.

The primary purpose of reading rooms for working men should have been to democratise access to news and information. Instead, they were used to try and control working-class culture and sentiment. While they provided mass access to education, literature, and recreation, these provisions were curated by those who held power over the rooms. As argued in Chapter 1, this power was primarily gained through influence and financial donation. The local aristocracy, the church, and the upper middle classes generally governed the local reading room. With this power, they imposed their ideals of moral reform and rational recreation onto working men, using literature and recreation as the lure.

The literature itself was at the behest of these influential individuals, as laid out in Chapter 2. This chapter illustrates the different influences over the literature provided in these rooms: committee power, literary donations, funding, and corporate paternalism. The committee and donors had ultimate power over what could be read within these rooms through selection, donation, banning, and vetoing. They used this power to supply works that encouraged their image of the working-class ideal, such as books on temperance, religion, and domestic ideals. Similarly, this could lead to other less purposeful influences over the representation of interests through donation bias, which may have ultimately caused local bubbles of knowledge. An equally important part of these shareholders' influence was their banning of works viewed as amoral, such as those regarding divorce or radicalism, or those against their political views, such as liberal papers. This demonstrates the desire of moral reformers to not only

[533] 'Matt the Miner' in *After Work*, p.140.

control the physical behaviour of working men while in the rooms but also use literature to alter their long-term attitudes and knowledge. At the very least, they attempted to shield working men from reading materials the committee deemed a bad influence.

Though there may have been a desire to restrict reading rooms to simply reading, it is evident from Chapter 3 that recreation and other activities were essential components of provincial reading rooms. Providing food and beverages while banning alcohol epitomises the attempt to replicate the facilities of the public house, and the place reading rooms had within the temperance agenda. Games helped to provide a welcoming and relaxed environment, meaning these reading rooms were not just about reading and studying. Those in control could watch over and regulate working men's free time by attempting to make reading rooms a stalwart of working-class leisure. Additionally, the rooms and their committees could encourage education through classes and lectures, but the committee had control over these facilities and their content.

This is not to say that all reading rooms were hubs of morality, peace, and contentment. Their origins within Chartist reading rooms shaped them as bastions of working men's political debate and unrest. Though there are some suggestions that Chartist rooms encouraged the betterment of the working classes, such as promoting temperance, it aimed to increase the working classes' legitimacy within the political sphere and justify their rebellion. As described in Chapter 3, debate and conversation were essential elements of the reading experience (as was Lovett's image for rooms), as the inclusion of conversation rooms indicates. The work read was not simply silently digested but consumed alongside analysis and debate.

The example of St John Street Reading Room in Carlisle was the exception that proved the rule. This room and its regulations, insisting that only men who earned a weekly wage could be on the committee, were created in reaction to a fear of upper-class influence over reading rooms. The founders' desire for self-sufficiency suggests they did not believe the support of the higher classes to be beneficial to the members. As stated in a letter by Henry Brougham, a Whig MP and advocate of liberal causes and parliamentary reform, reprinted in 'The Labourer's Reading-Room' in *Household Words* regarding the Carlisle reading room:

> The men who live by weekly wages have established Reading-rooms, *under their own exclusive management*. That this plan afforded the only means of keeping such institutions to their true object - the improvement of the humbler classes[534]

Though it does not state what other objectives the upper classes' influence might implement, it does suggest that their presence corrupts the intentions of these rooms.

This focus on moral reform should not overshadow the democratisation of news, politics, and literature that reading rooms offered the working classes. Instead, it should provide a more rounded view of the framework and conditions in which it was supplied. It informs us that readers could only access a curated selection of literature, who curated it, and for what purpose. It also provides insight into the readers' experience and a better understanding of the choices a working man had to make about his leisure time. The purpose of this research is to contribute to our knowledge of one of the ways working men consumed literature, education, and recreation.

Though I have attempted to generalise the ubiquitous movement of British Working Men's Reading Rooms, I provide a framework of the movement for future scholarship to build upon. For many historians of the Victorian working-class reader, the information on what was commonly read within the rooms and how the selection of these works affects our understanding of circulation will be of most interest. Additionally, many will be interested in the environment within which these works were consumed and the reading rooms' impact on communal reading. The most striking discovery for many will be that reading rooms were far from exclusively for reading. Instead, they served as local hubs for education, recreation, relaxation, companionship, and community.

The turn of the twentieth century marked a transition period for reading rooms, characterised by both decline and resurgence influenced by changing social and cultural dynamics and philanthropic efforts. In the early 1900s, the philanthropy of industrialist Andrew Carnegie played a significant role in revitalising reading rooms

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[534] Morley, 'The Labourer's Reading-Room', p.581, and Michael Lobban, 'Henry Peter Brougham, first Boran Brougham and Vaux (1778-188)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/3581.

alongside public libraries. Carnegie's funding initiatives supported the establishment of numerous reading rooms, enriching communities with accessible spaces for intellectual enrichment and leisure activities into the early twentieth century.[535] Despite this resurgence, reading rooms faced mounting challenges as the century progressed. The increasing affordability and abundance of newspapers and books, particularly popular fiction, reduced the demand for subscription-based reading rooms. Concurrently, the proliferation of free public libraries in towns offered alternative sources of reading materials and cultural activities. Moreover, the emergence of new forms of leisure and entertainment, such as picture houses and billiard halls, further diminished the appeal of traditional reading rooms.[536] These alternative venues provided novel forms of recreation that catered to evolving tastes and lifestyles. Consequently, many reading rooms struggled to maintain relevance and viability, leading to a gradual decline in their establishment and patronage. Some reading rooms adapted by transforming into de facto billiard halls or chess clubs, accommodating changing interests and preferences. By the interwar period, the decline of reading rooms had become increasingly pronounced, with only a handful managing to persist into the mid-20th century. By the 1950s, the once-ubiquitous reading rooms had largely disappeared, leaving behind a reattributed physical presence within villages and small towns.

The twentieth century witnessed a profound transformation in the nature of reading, driven by growing literacy rates, increased access to printed materials, and changing social dynamics. As literacy rates soared and printed materials became more affordable and accessible, reading transitioned from a communal activity to a predominantly solitary pursuit. The era of public readings and communal discussions in reading rooms gradually faded. With widespread literacy, there was no longer a need for public gatherings centred around reading and debating the news, discussing serialised fiction, or admiring illustrations. Instead, reading became a private or silent

[535] *Western Times*, July 26, 1909, p.2, and 'The Primate on Co-operation' in *Aberdeen Evening Express*, November 5, 1889, p.2, and 'Parish Reading Room and Library' in *Banffshire Herald*, Dufftown, October 5,1901, p.7.
[536] NLS: 12089/3, 'Annual Report = 1912-13', *Ardrossan Liberal Association, Minute Book*.

activity, often conducted in the solitude of one's home or the hushed atmosphere of libraries.

Moreover, the advent of new forms of entertainment and leisure activities further contributed to the decline of mass social reading. Whether it was radio broadcasts or cinema screenings, individuals were presented with various alternative leisure options that competed for their attention and time. As a result, the era of mass social reading gradually faded into obscurity, replaced by a culture of individualised reading experiences. While communal reading spaces like reading rooms may have dwindled in relevance, the legacy of these spaces persists as a reminder of a bygone era when reading served as a communal bond and catalyst for intellectual exchange.

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