

The  
College Library  
and the  
Community

*An Inaugural Lecture*

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF  
RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

D. A. Clarke

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*An Inaugural Lecture  
given in the University College of  
Rhodesia and Nyasaland  
on 14 October 1960*

*by*

D. A. CLARKE  
*Librarian of the College*

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## THE COLLEGE LIBRARY AND THE COMMUNITY

**Y**OU may remember the difficult passer-by who, as reported by Paul the Silentary, asked the penetrating and deflating question *τίς τίνι ταῦτα λέγεις*; [I] who are you? and to whom are you saying this? It seems to me that anyone who gives a public lecture ought first to answer these two questions.

In your generous introduction, Mr. Principal, you have saved me the invidious task of reciting my own credentials; but I ought perhaps to make it clear that my thinking is inevitably coloured by the fact that my professional upbringing has been in large libraries—I first worked in a library with 6,000,000 books, then moved to one with 400,000. When I arrived here there were half a dozen: but that statistic is improving daily, and all our planning for the future is based on the conception of a great, unitary, comprehensive collection.

The audience I have in mind is precisely this one. I am speaking only *urbi* and not *orbi*, to a group of Salisbury people who are predominantly not library experts but who are nevertheless sufficiently interested in libraries to have come here tonight, and not at all to the wider body of professional librarians to whose scrutiny the hazards of publication may ultimately expose this talk.

At the very beginning of the life of a newly established library, before any planning at all is done, it is necessary to define the responsibilities which it is to undertake, and the tasks which it is to perform.

Today the Library has perhaps reached the first climacteric of its existence. In this year, which happens also to be

the close of the first of the five-year financial periods into which the growth of the College is divided, the Library is approaching the end of the first, constructive, phase of its development. The building, designed to shelve 350,000 volumes and to seat 500 readers, and accommodate ancillary services, is complete, and an initial stock of over 50,000 volumes and 1,250 current periodicals has been built up. So now that we are moving into a new phase of the Library's development—perhaps one of consolidation—it is appropriate to review once more what I take to be the responsibilities of the College Library, and the services which it can provide to fulfil them.

These responsibilities are three. Our first and overriding duty is to our own staff and students. Then we have a responsibility to the wider community of learning: for a University's duty to promote learning cannot be limited to its own members. Finally, as its only general learned library, we have inevitably a duty to the Federation as a whole.

As I have said, the first duty of the Library is to the College itself, whose every legitimate need it must furnish. This involves providing a general library, adequate not only to support the courses of formal instruction, but also to enable undergraduates to become familiar with the most important contributions to thought in fields (such as philosophy and religion, music and fine art) which are not yet formally taught in the College, but which may interest any student who has the lively and inquiring mind which it is the College's most important duty to encourage.

This stimulation can best be achieved in a unitary library, where all subjects are housed under the same roof, and all the bookshelves are open to the reader, and there

are tables and chairs everywhere so that the student can sit down and get on with his inquiry with the relevant books all round him. This is particularly important now that the traditional disciplines are ceasing to live in watertight compartments, and that scholars in every field are learning that researches in other fields may cast light on, and fertilize, their own.

It follows that, however few may be the subjects formally taught in the College, the Library must be wide ranging. In the main subjects which are not taught, there must at least be small collections: and as they are small, they must also be well chosen, so as to cover the field in a thorough and well balanced way. This also carries a staffing implication: the library staff must comprise people with academic experience of, and a lively interest in, a wide range of subjects, so that the best books can be chosen and the reader helped in a way which will stimulate, rather than dampen, his interest.

In addition to this broad coverage of non-teaching subjects, every library ought to have a few special collections, which will give it character as well as being a significant enrichment of the national resources. These may well be idiosyncratic: for instance the exhaustive collection of early cookery books in the Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds, or even the vast body of science fiction which is being assiduously gathered together in the Houghton Library at Harvard. Such collections ought, however, to arise from considered policy rather than accident: I have in mind that the Reference Department of the New York Public Library, one of the greatest academic research libraries in the world, has an exhaustive collection on poultry science which has arisen purely from a policy of reinforcing existing strength, or the lack of the

determination to delegate the responsibility for this subject to a more appropriate institution.

In this Library it would be very desirable to build up a collection of examples of fine printing from the best presses, from Ratdolt's *Euclid* of 1472 [2]—one of the great landmarks in the history of printing—to the lectern Bible designed by Bruce Rogers for the Oxford University Press in 1935. This collection should not be a museum or gallery piece, intended only to give students an idea of the artistic achievement of the printer. Each volume should also be a scholarly edition of an important text.

Apart from this general background coverage, a Library's principal duty towards its students is to provide collateral reading for courses on a generous scale. It should not provide textbooks—books which the student must have on his desk for daily reference—but should lavishly provide the other material which he needs to consult during the course. The selection of this material should be liberal, so as to present to the student a range of material written from contrasting viewpoints on each problem: but it should be responsible, in that every book is chosen for a specific reason. Dr. Keyes Metcalf, the doyen of American university librarians, once said that 'a small library cannot afford, for reasons of space and money, to buy any book unless it fills a specific need, and is a first-class book of its kind' [3]. This is perhaps a counsel of perfection, which a College library cannot follow, for, quite apart from the psychological impossibility of enforcing such rigorous standards, it may well be that there is no first-class up-to-date work in a particular field, or that a second-rate book nevertheless embodies a significant point of view not found elsewhere. Nevertheless, it does express a standard which we must bear in mind.

In a college such as this there is a further problem, because the College Library is in many cases the only available source of books for students. Competition for the same book will therefore inevitably arise when a whole group has prescribed reading at the same time. There are two approaches to this problem: to hold several copies of a particular volume, and to restrict severely the period for which a copy may be borrowed, so that everyone is able to consult it before the deadline. In large American libraries the vast student population, combined with the greater emphasis on detailed prescribed reading, has led to extensive 'reserve collections', with multiple copies of a wide range of standard works available for strictly limited loan: and in Britain too the rapid expansion of student numbers seems bound to lead to the establishment of undergraduate libraries on similar lines.

Here we have so far limited duplication to keeping one lending copy and one non-lending copy: and have coped with the problem of peak demand for prescribed reading by setting on one side the books recommended for a particular essay and strictly limiting the period of loan. This involves a problem of educational policy, which is perhaps psychological: for though these arrangements do ensure that every student is able to consult the needed book before his deadline, one suspects that he only consults the books chosen for him by his teacher, and does not go into the general library and see what else has been written on the subject and expose himself to, and evaluate, fresh points of view. (An examination of the use of this Library made by readers, which is now in progress, seems to confirm this suspicion.) It may therefore be that full service to readers is only being achieved by an educationally unsound degree of spoon-feeding.



The financial resources of the College are never likely to allow us to establish a distinct undergraduate collection, with extensive duplication of a wide range of books. I can only urge that, in addition to the reservation of a small number of recommended titles, students should be urged in every possible way to be more enterprising in the search for ideas.

One important service that a library can render to both staff and students is to help them to make the best use of its resources. It is no use having even the best collection of books and journals if readers cannot make full use of it. Hence it is fundamental that as many books as possible should be on open shelves, and arranged in the most helpful order. But inevitably readers must be taught how to use a library.

This task is twofold. Firstly, students must learn how to find out the information they need: how to use an encyclopaedia or *Whitaker's Almanack*, for example. The ultimate duty of a college to its students is clearly not to fill their minds with a vast array of hard facts, but to teach them how to find out the facts they need, and the opinions which others have formed by thought about those facts; and then how to correlate that material and think about it and criticize it for themselves. The place to learn the essential skill of finding the facts, and the existing body of thought on any topic, is the library.

Secondly, however well a large library may be arranged, there is inevitably a technique of using it to be learned. For instance, when our existing library building has grown to its planned capacity of 350,000 volumes, the catalogues which are the essential key to it will contain over one million cards, and even the alphabetical arrangement of the entries will call for a detailed understanding which will have to be acquired.

These problems are the more urgent because many students arrive at the College with very little idea of how to use books. School libraries are, with one or two brilliant exceptions, very poor. Government grants for book purchase are ridiculously small: and schools which can find considerable sums for sporting equipment make no effort to build up a library. In one large school, known throughout the Federation for the lavishness of its amenities in all other respects, there is virtually no school library at all, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is regarded as such a valuable piece of public property that it is kept locked behind glass in the headmaster's study.

So each year, when students first come to the Library, they are given a talk, and also a printed guide, explaining the use of the Library and what other libraries' services are available. The next week they come to the Library again in smaller groups, and are shown the books which are of the greatest interest to them. But the most important aid to readers is inevitably the library staff. It is quite essential that there should always be available to help readers a graduate librarian who has experience of the problems of students and retains a lively specialist interest in a particular field. One of the fundamental problems of University libraries all over the world today is the recruitment of library staff of genuine academic calibre and interests to fulfil this fundamental task of getting the right book to the right reader at the right time.

The Library's duty towards the College's research workers is less easy to define, and far less easy to fulfil. The research worker does not only need published articles describing work which other people have done on his specific problem, to provide the base point from which he must press on his own inquiries—and incidentally to show

what lines have already been tried in vain. He must also see papers on other subjects which may cast a fresh light on his own problem. This means that, although modern research is producing more than a million published papers a year, in addition to 60,000 different books and about 100,000 unpublished reports [4], a learned library may well be asked for any of them.

It is of course quite impossible to provide these from the library's own stock. All that any library can do from its own resources is to have in each field the main journals for which an actual demand can be predicted: and then to have—as we have here—a really first-class battery of bibliographical tools: so that from catalogues of the great learned libraries, trade lists of the books published in the major languages, national bibliographies, and above all from abstracting journals, we can find out precisely what has been published on each topic, and how to get hold of it when we need it.

As, then, the literature of scientific research is so varied and voluminous that no individual library—even the world's greatest and richest—can hope to be self-sufficient, it is necessary to make the fullest use of inter-library co-operation: and here we come to the second circle of a College library's responsibility, that to the community of learning.

Universities exist for the promotion of learning: every learned library should place its resources at the service of any other scholar who needs them, subject only to the overriding lien which each institution's own members must have on its own resources.

That is the altruistic claim: sheer necessity, arising from the extent of the literature, reinforces it. The varying special needs of individual institutions give rise to special

strengths in one library which fill the weaknesses of another: and these can be, and are, systematically organized. Thus in every major country there is a central record of the periodical holdings of its libraries, and routines have been established for borrowing and lending between them. Many libraries also have photographic departments, holding that if a whole bulky volume has to make two postal journeys, and be unavailable to the library's own readers for several weeks, simply to allow a research worker to consult a short article in it, it is cheaper, and more convenient for all concerned, to send him a photographic copy that he can keep.

This Library plays its full part in this co-operation, and is active in the national interlending organizations not only of the Federation and the Union of South Africa but also of Britain and continental countries. Inevitably, as we have a relatively small collection but an active body of research workers, we depend enormously on borrowing from other libraries to meet their needs. But our collections in certain fields, notably all aspects of East and Central Africa, are so rich that on balance we already lend more than we borrow: and as the Library grows, the balance will become even more pronouncedly outward.

Co-operation between learned libraries can be pressed further. Their varied interests and corresponding strengths and weaknesses can be systematized by agreements to specialize in particular fields, so that the whole field of learning is covered within the whole group of libraries concerned, and specific libraries undertake to buy everything on a stated topic, and can be relied upon to have it and make it available for loan. This is being done in each of the regions of Britain; and a detailed survey of library holdings is now under way to pave the way to establishing

a similar system among the major libraries of Southern Africa.

Libraries can also co-operate in a more creative field, that of publication. Librarians of Institutes of Education in British universities, for instance, co-operate to produce an index to articles in journals on education. A particularly valuable field of co-operative effort would be the republication of out-of-print books. Many important scholarly books have been unavailable for years because it would be uneconomic to reprint them by conventional methods. Thanks, however, to the technological revolution caused by the marriage of microfilm to xerox reproduction methods, it is now possible to reproduce any book at a cost which is still high for the first copy but is cheap for an edition of 25 or 50. Libraries might well co-operate in such a venture.

Any learned library is faced with the very expensive problem of 'fringe' journals, which are rarely used, but may well be needed some time and so must be available. These are expensive to buy, and cost as much again to bind; and are also expensive to store. There is a movement towards jointly establishing large cheap repositories on inexpensive sites, where libraries can place their secondary material for storage, to be made available on demand to all participating libraries. Examples of this are the Midwest Inter-Library Center in Chicago, and the new communal deposit library now being built for the University of London. Nearer home, the Federal and Southern Rhodesia governments have authorized government departments to deposit little-used back runs of scientific journals in the Library of this College, which is glad, as a duty to learning, to store and service this material. Departments which have done this have not only solved their own storage problems

but also contributed signally towards scientific research in the Federation as a whole.

As the College is, after all, the national University of the Federation, and as the College Library is the only general reference library in the Federation, the Library has a particular responsibility towards research in the Federal area. This responsibility is exemplified and pin-pointed by the Scientific and Technical Information Service which has recently been established.

In 1957 the Federal Government appointed Mr. D. G. Kingwill to report on the development of science in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland [5]. One of his recommendations, which has been accepted and implemented by governments, was that a Scientific and Technical Information Service should be established with government support within the College Library. The intention of the Service is firstly to compile and maintain a central list or 'union catalogue' of the learned periodicals held in libraries in the Federation; and then to provide reference works and runs of journals in those fields in applied science and technology which do not fall within the ambit of the existing College Library, so as to establish a general reference library covering the whole field of science. With these two tools, the union catalogue of periodicals and the central reference collection, the Information Service is intended to answer such factual questions as can readily be answered from reference works and to provide inquirers contemplating research in any specialized field with lists of references to published works on those specific problems; and then to make it possible for them to consult the relevant publications, either by enabling them to borrow the actual volumes or by supplying photographic copies.

The union catalogue is the indispensable key to any

system of inter-library co-operation which involves inter-lending: and the establishment of this union catalogue of periodicals is a fundamental prerequisite for any development of scientific research in the Federation. The work is under way, and we hope it will be published during 1961. Until this is complete we simply do not know what periodicals exist in the Federation, and scientific research is impeded either by the total impossibility of consulting a particular journal or by the necessity to obtain it from South Africa or even from overseas simply because, though a copy may exist in Rhodesia, no one knows where it is to be found.

As the boundaries between the various scientific subjects are becoming so indeterminate, and as findings on one subject are often relevant to something in an adjacent or even an entirely different field, a single central reference collection is indispensable for such an Information Service; and I am glad to say that the Federal Assembly and the Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly have recognized this fundamental fact and passed estimates for the precise purpose of establishing a central scientific library. This central collection is inevitably based on the College Library; for the College Library already has rich collections on the pure sciences and so only needs supplementing in the applied sciences and technology. Thus the cost of establishing the central collection here is considerably less than it would be anywhere else.

The Information Service has already made its first contribution to the development of services to research in the Federation by publishing a *Directory of Libraries in the Federation*, which makes available for the first time a systematic account of the holdings and facilities of over 100 government and other libraries.

A great deal of information about scientific research in progress in Britain is received by the Federal Government's Scientific Liaison Officer in London; and another important task of the Information Service will be to channel each report to the actual person in the Federation whose problem it will illuminate.

The third, and widest, area of the Library's responsibility is to the general public of the Federation; and it is here that the greatest difficulty arises.

As I have said, the College Library is the only general research library in the Federation and in consequence we feel bound to make our collections available to any serious student, as far as the overriding claim of our own staff and students allows.

As far as those who wish to consult books on the Library premises are concerned, there is little conflict of duty. At the moment we have plenty of space for readers, and the books used are not made unavailable for our own staff and students; so we gladly give facilities to read in the College Library. Indeed, one of the principal reasons why the Library is kept open until late in the evening is this consciousness of our duty to the local resident who has genuine scholarly interests which he can only pursue outside office hours.

The College Library's co-operation with government and other research institutions has already been described: it works smoothly, and the College is already making an important contribution to research, which will be greatly augmented as the Information Service and its central scientific library develop.

The most difficult problem, however, is presented by the private citizen: either the student who is trying in isolation to prepare himself for examinations, or even the person



with the most generalized intellectual interests. These are people whom we want to help, but they are also the ones whose needs conflict most frequently and fundamentally with those of our own students.

The basic difficulty is the lack of an organized library service in Southern Rhodesia. None of the towns has a free publicly-owned open library. All the general libraries are private organizations dependent for their income on subscriptions paid by library users, eked out by derisory government grants. The result of this is that they fail to provide an adequate service, in two ways.

In the first place, because their very existence depends on their subscription income, the first call on their book funds (which become more and more inadequate every year as overheads take an ever-increasing proportion of the total income) is to buy several copies of the latest light fiction best-seller, however trivial, in order to make that number of subscribers happy on publication day: and this inevitably means that a number of more important new books cannot be bought: so that a tour of the shelves reveals rows of multiple copies of books which have lost their vogue, and great gaps among the standard works which should be readily available in any town. And inevitably the more technical specialist material is very poorly covered indeed.

Secondly, a large number of non-Europeans, who have a very genuine need for library service, find themselves unable to use even these library facilities: either simply because of their race, or because they cannot afford the necessary subscription. This number will increase rapidly with the Federation's fundamental need to develop to the utmost the capacity of every one of its citizens.

To fill this gap in the existing library services, the

National Free Library Service of Southern Rhodesia was established in Bulawayo with the aid of an initial grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This lends educational, scientific, and technical books, either personally or by post, to anyone of any race with a serious need for them. Although the Library Service is entirely financed from Southern Rhodesia, it has since 1946 been available to residents throughout the Rhodesias and Nyasaland: and the only cost to even the remotest borrower is that of posting his books back to Bulawayo, at the special postage rate of *1d.* per volume.

In the first instance the Free Library Service endeavours to meet borrowers' requests from its own stock. This stock is especially selected to fulfil the needs of students in remote areas preparing for external examinations by correspondence. In addition the Service attempts to buy for its own central collection the most important of those standard works which should be on the shelves of any town library, but so often are not.

To obtain the books which are not immediately available from its own stock, the National Free Library Service turns to inter-library loan. The effective local sources of supply are few, because, although the Service has what is theoretically a central catalogue of the books in Rhodesian libraries, the only major libraries contributing to it are the Bulawayo Public Library and the College Library, which has reported its holdings to Bulawayo systematically from its very beginning.

Since this is so, the College Library is faced with a most regrettable conflict of claims. The Library constantly receives inter-loan requests for precisely the kind of general book which any good public library ought to have, but of which the College Library in fact has the only copy known

to the union catalogue in Bulawayo: and inevitably these books are preponderantly also precisely the kind, both in subject and in treatment, which is most needed by our own students.

So far the College Library has done its utmost, and probably more than it should, to meet requests of this type. The time may well be approaching, however, when it should cease to be quite so willing to be relied upon to make up, almost single handed, the deficiencies of other libraries. This is particularly true, perhaps, in the more popular social-science subjects. We have ourselves very great student demand for student-level books in this range. There is also a very great public demand, which is referred straight to this Library because public libraries are not fulfilling it. And we are very conscious that the whole of this demand is referred to us because, although there are at least three other major reference libraries in Salisbury alone which specialize in this field, those libraries are only borrowers from the National Free Library Service and are not able to make their important holdings available to it.

We are therefore rapidly approaching a situation in which, with the growth of the College community on one hand, and a rapid expansion of the public demand for serious reading on the other, it will no longer be possible to rely on the College to repair, almost alone, the library deficiencies of the Colony as a whole. What can be done to remedy this situation?

Two immediate steps suggest themselves. Firstly, the union catalogue, which (as I have stressed throughout this talk) is the necessary foundation of that library co-operation which alone makes an effective library service possible, must be put on an adequate basis. The importance of this first step was stressed by Mr. D. H. Varley, the Chief

Librarian of the South African Public Library, as long ago as 1951, in a report on his survey of the libraries of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland [6]. In respect of the scientific periodicals on which all scientific and industrial research depends, an effective union catalogue is already being built up, and will be maintained, by the Scientific Information Service. For the needs of the more general reader a similar key must be provided by the union catalogue of books in Bulawayo. This is in existence, but must be widened so that the entire book resources of the Federation, other than contemporary light fiction, are accurately represented in it. Libraries which borrow through the national service must make their holdings known to it, and available through it. If all libraries co-operated in this way, the situation would improve out of all recognition. If they do not, I wonder whether those libraries which do now co-operate may not soon find the burden too great to bear without prejudice to the needs of their own readers.

The other immediate first-aid measure is to encourage the urban subscription libraries to do more to fulfil their duty towards the serious reader. Everyone ought to be able to rely on finding in his local library the standard reference works—a good up-to-date encyclopaedia, reliable atlases, recent directories, the latest *Whitaker*, the latest *Who's Who*. Equally he ought to find in the lending library the best and most important current publications in all fields. At the moment, the financial structure of the subscription libraries provides a powerful disincentive to the purchase of all but the most immediately popular material. The situation would change overnight if the grants made to these libraries by the government were not simply block grants, but were related to the amount of money that libraries spent from their own resources on non-fiction.

These two proposals could be put into effect without additional expenditure, and they would immediately transform library facilities in Southern Rhodesia by improving the range and quality of library stocks, and by making a great many more books available for country-wide lending. What is really needed, however, is a more fundamental reorganization. This falls into two parts.

The first necessity is that libraries should really be public, and free. At the moment reading is regarded as on a par with any other light entertainment: if you want to read, you must pay for it, and little is provided for which there is not enough demand to make it economic. I maintain that governments and municipalities have a duty to provide their residents with information and access to ideas, just as they have a duty to provide water and street lighting and the three R's. Citizens must have access to ideas and be able to discover facts; otherwise they fail both in their public and in their private responsibilities. The key to this is the provision of free libraries at the public expense. Only then will libraries have adequate and well-balanced book-stocks and a sufficient core of professional staff who have the skill and experience to know the needs of their community and how those needs can be met.

In the towns there should be central libraries with wide-ranging and well-chosen lending collections and adequate reference departments, supplemented by a network of suburban branches so that every resident can get to the library.

In the country there should be village libraries, consisting of a collection of books sent from the town and changed at intervals, under the direction of a library-minded local resident.

We should thus have a national library service, stretching

out to serve the whole reading population. At the apex of the service would be a national library centre, comprising a central lending collection of books, backed up by an exhaustive collective catalogue of all the library holdings in the Federation, and a first-rate collection of bibliographical tools. Then inter-library loans could be really efficiently and equitably run, and isolated readers well served. The whole centre should be controlled by an experienced, energetic, and devoted library organizer. A useful by-product of such a centre would be the production of library assistants, who would get their initial training and experience there, and then go out to serve in other libraries with a real knowledge of what can be done for the serious reader.

This plan, to have publicly-owned libraries in towns, supplemented by a national country library service, the whole being centrally co-ordinated and freely available to all, is not new. It has been mooted for many years, and been put off on the grounds of expense. Such a service is now coming into existence in Northern Rhodesia. A number of their municipalities—so much poorer than those of Southern Rhodesia—are fully accepting all the implications of genuinely free and public municipal libraries: and, with the aid of a small initial grant from the Ford Foundation, the Northern Rhodesia Government is setting up in Lusaka a country-wide rural library service, with a central bibliographical and co-ordinating centre and a training school. It is time that Southern Rhodesia met this challenge. Not only the College Library, but every library authority on every level, ought seriously to consider its duty to the community it serves, and then do that duty.

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