

The Society's Library

In 2014 the Committee commissioned review of the Society's library at Northcliffe Park. A report was prepared by the librarian which was submitted to the November Committee Meeting and discussed in the course of the following December Committee meeting. A full version of the report has been deposited in the library for the inspection of members. It was also decided to circulate the Recommendations via the website and to request members to consider these recommendations with a view to a brief discussion of these and any related issues that the membership consider appropriate at the Society's A.G.M. on the 4th March 2015.

The library consists of a substantial collection of books and periodicals, the centrepiece of which is a nearly complete set of the *Model Engineer* from 1898 to date. We also have a less complete but still extensive run of *Engineering in Miniature*, a run of the American model engineering magazine, *Live Steam* from volume 12, no. 1, January 1978 to volume 23, no. 1, January 1989 and several other broken runs of other magazines such as the National Traction Engine club's journal *Steaming*.

Books and booklets make up the bulk of rest of the collection. The Percival Marshall/M.A.P. *Workshop Manuals* series is well represented although with one exception we have nothing later than 1975. We also hold copies of some of the well known guides to model, tool and component making by such authoritative figures as Henry Greenly, L.B.S.C., Martin Evans, Lawrence Sparey, L.C. Mason and Edgar T. Westbury. Again the holdings tend to be older copies and there is nothing later than the earlier edition of Evans' *Manual of Model Steam Locomotive Construction* (1983).

From time to time individual volumes of engineering textbooks have been donated. The subjects range from the general to the highly specialised, typically Odham's *General Engineering Workshop Practice*, Adam's *The Engineer's Handbook*, Ripper's *Steam Engines*, Low's *Heat Engines* Youngson's *Slide Valves and Valve Gearing*, Morley's *Strength of Materials*, Jones' *Production Engineering and Tool Design*.

Finally there is a considerable deposition of railway and other enthusiast interest books. These are of variable quality. The best are of obvious value for research purposes, but much of the remainder the majority might best be described as publisher's makeweights. A brief visit to any second-hand book dealer will show the same titles recur with monotonous regularity and with same unlikely prospects of sale. It is a particularly unfortunate characteristic of such books that they are of a large and often non-standard format and thus occupy a disproportionate amount of shelf space in addition to often being of awkward format.

The Northcliffe library is potentially a major asset to the society but a detailed analysis of usage from 1995 to 2014 showed that less than 10% of the members regularly drew upon its resources. A number of reasons have been put forward to explain this. The book collection is of very variable quality. The *Model Engineer* magazine attracts by far the greatest number of borrowers with *Engineering in Miniature* the second but considerably less popular focus of attention. Of the rest of the books a small number had intermittent use but many never left the shelves.

The central question has to be that of how closely is the content of the library aligned to the wider member's interests? The *Model Engineer* and *Engineering in Miniature* have an obvious value but it is felt that even the most attractive parts of the rest of the collection are dated and suffer from the absence of a systematic current acquisitions policy. The collection is heavily biased towards the railway element of the society; other sectors of interest are under-represented. It has to be said that there is a lack of coherence in the collection resulting in a questionable occupation of valuable shelf space. With this in mind the following recommendations are advanced for discussion by the membership.

1. Accessions to the Library collection have been almost entirely a matter of serendipity in the past. This has endowed the Society with outstanding runs of periodicals and a number of other items of value. Against this, there has been a reluctance to turn material away and the beneficial affects have a counterpart in the accumulation of a great deal of useless junk both in the form of books and otherwise. Little discretion has been exercised in accepting material with the result that the shelf space is now fully utilised often with material of questionable or no interest.
2. ***The random dumping of books and other items in the library should cease immediately.*** A library sub-committee should be formed to formulate an accessions policy, to control additions to the collection and to advance the library generally. The sub-committee should be restricted to a maximum of five members, including the librarian and should attempt to span the range of member's interests. Any offers of material in future should be made only to members of the library sub-committee. The sub-committee reserves the right to reject material (without offence) that does not meet the accessions policy.
3. A review of the content of the library should be carried out by the above sub-committee and disposals should be made with a view to freeing up shelf space.
4. An effort should be made to fill gaps in the two main periodical runs. The first line of action might be to appeal to members for the donation of specific missing items. If this fails then perhaps a wider appeal and possibly purchase might be appropriate.

5. It is suggested that a significant omission in the range of periodicals is the absence of *Model Engineer's Workshop*. A partial run could be readily assembled and an appeal to members might fill other gaps. A subscription could then be added to the current *Model Engineer* and *Engineering in Miniature*, possibly asking the publisher's of the former for terms.
6. The Journal of the S.M.E.E. has published major articles of interest in the past. Professor Chaddock, George Thomas and Jim Ewing's articles immediately spring to mind. It is understood that the Society is not currently affiliated to the S.M.E.E. but it might be worthwhile considering this and more particularly considering the acquisition of back copies of the Journal.
7. As far as the book collection is concerned it is important to know what the members feel would be appropriate emphasis. Should there be an active purchasing policy to acquire more up-to-date material such as the current *Workshop Special Practice Series*? Would Martin Evans' *The Model Steam Locomotive* be worth purchasing? What of the members whose interests lie outside steam locomotives? We are notably deficient in traction engine material, in tramways and stationary steam engines.
8. The best general engineering textbooks are usually still available at public libraries (despite the efforts of "modern" librarians to purge books from libraries). The society's acceptance of further books of this nature needs more careful consideration and the potential usage should condition acceptance.