
W.C. Berwick Sayers, librarian and teacher

JAMES G. OLLÉ

An appreciation of William Charles Berwick Sayers (1881-1960) on the centenary of his birth. Sayers was a member of that small but remarkable group of librarians who gave some measure of distinction to the British public library service during the early decades of the present century. Most of his career was spent with Croydon Public Libraries, first as deputy to L. Stanley Jast, and then as Chief Librarian. But his work as a practising librarian, though well above average, and in its day outstanding in the provision of library services for children, was eclipsed by his success as a writer and teacher of librarianship, particularly in the field of library classification.

SAYERS AS A PRACTISING LIBRARIAN

One could say of Berwick Sayers what he himself said about his friend Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the composer:

The whole of his life, from its inauspicious beginning until the end, was one of joyous striving, cheery optimism.... Nor is the story wholly devoid of incident. It is nevertheless one presenting real difficulties to the biographer. There are no startling catastrophes, no sudden dramatic moments to give the writer the opportunity of clever description. In many ways it was an even course. Still, the life of such a man, told with candour and without adulation, cannot be wholly devoid of interest.¹

That Sayers's life was not devoid of interest is apparent from the several essays in which he recalled it. In none of them is there the slightest trace of rancour or regret.

Sayers was born at Mitcham, Surrey, on 23 December 1881. His father was 'an artistic decorator', one of whose commissions was to decorate the chancel arch of Mitcham parish church with stars against a blue background. This led his young son to believe that his father had also painted the stars in the sky.

When the boy was 5 the family moved to Bournemouth, then a small, quiet seaside resort favoured by the gentry. In 1895, when the population was only 30,000, the Town Council opened its first public library. The following year Sayers joined its staff, as a junior assistant, at six shillings a week.

Although the Bournemouth Public Library was small, it offered Sayers a good beginning. The librarian, Charles Riddle, was an enterprising young man who had

been deputy to James Duff Brown at Clerkenwell where, two years previously, Brown had pioneered safe-guarded open access in Britain. Riddle was his loyal lieutenant and first convert. Hence, the Bournemouth Public Library was the second to have open access and the first *new* library to have it. It was Sayers's good fortune never to know the frustration of closed access and the miseries of the indicator.

Sayers was even more fortunate in 1904, when he was appointed deputy at Croydon Public Library, in succession to Ernest A. Savage. Apart from a short break of eight months, the rest of Sayers's life and career was to be spent in Croydon. 'I came to Croydon', he said, 'with the intention many young men have had of "setting the Thames on fire"', writing *inter alia* an immortal poem, and incidentally doing library work. My qualifications were literary only; I had no other.'²

When Sayers first knew it, Croydon was a recently created county borough with a population of 140,000 and growing fast. Thanks to the enterprise of the railway companies, which had given it a complicated network of lines and an abundance of stations, a quiet little market town had become a large and prosperous one. It was the favoured dormitory of many of London's office workers. Sayers came to love Croydon. Eventually he became one of its historians, and took pride in the fact that he was a resident of long-standing in a town where many of the citizens were transients. 'There is a fluidity about the general population of Croydon', he wrote, 'which is inevitable in a town which grows at a great pace, and where people are subject to the attracting and dispersive forces of London.'

Sayers's first problem at Croydon was to come to terms with his new chief, who was a man out of the ordinary both in character and appearance. To his loyal, hard-working staff Louis Stanley Jast was a genius and an eccentric, a marvel and a mystery; an untiring organizer and experimenter who could be found late at night prowling around the Central Library with a tape measure, and who by day might be surprised in his office rehearsing a speech, or praying to an unknown god.

Upon making inquiries about Jast, before joining him, Sayers was delighted to discover he was a poet. As Sayers fancied he was a poet, too (he had first appeared in all the glory of print, at the age of 13, with some verses 'laudably sententious and pious', in the pages of a local newspaper), he thought that Jast and himself 'might be congenial minds in a world very uncongenial then to poets'.

Although Jast proved to be a good chief and a lifelong friend, his innate generosity and kindly humour were belied by his appearance, which was daunting. He had a massive head, with fierce upturned moustaches, carefully waxed, so that he looked remarkably like Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, in mufti. Although Sayers must have been wary of him at their first

meeting, he managed to take part in an intelligent but rather odd conversation. 'We discussed Le Huc's *Travels*,' he said, 'Byronism and the *Tenebrae* of the Catholic Church.'³ James Duff Brown once told Jast that he was a dreamer, which was true. He was also a brilliant librarian. Under his direction the Croydon Public Library was transformed. 'We all believed', said Sayers, 'that Croydon was the best library in the world.' Many things which have long since become commonplace were novelties when Jast introduced them at Croydon: the card catalogue, close classification, reading courses for adults and children, exhibitions, lectures, a library bulletin, privilege issues, and a reference library which provided a dynamic information service.

By the early years of the century the town of Croydon had developed a cultural life of its own and Jast and Sayers became part of it, Sayers the more profitably because he was a musician. Jast was tone-deaf. It was during his service as Jast's deputy that Sayers became the friend of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the composer, who was a local celebrity. When Coleridge-Taylor died in 1912, at the age of 37, his widow invited Sayers to write her husband's biography, which he did. *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: musician* (1915) achieved the rewarding status of a second edition (1927), but it is not a worthy example of the biographical art. Although still the standard life of Coleridge-Taylor, it pictures him almost entirely as a public person, and even then relies heavily on press notices and business correspondence. Only occasionally does the narrative come alive, as when it tells of how Coleridge-Taylor lost his temper with a boy who jeered at him because he was coloured. Sayers declared that he had known Coleridge-Taylor 'intimately for many years', and wrote lyrics for him when he was living in Bournemouth, yet strangely there are only a few oblique references to Sayers himself in the biography, and these cannot be located from the index.

A further biography Sayers was asked to write would almost certainly have been more satisfactory. The Library Association, rather belatedly, commissioned Sayers to write the life of Jast, who died in 1944. But the invitation came too late. Sayers was still gathering material for this work when he died. That Sayers had some talent for biography is evident from his admirable short study of Henry Keatley Moore (1937). Keatley Moore, who was Jast's zealous chairman, was the leading figure in the public library movement at Croydon.

In April 1915, Sayers left Croydon for Wallasey, where once again he succeeded Ernest A. Savage, this time as Chief Librarian. The Croydon staff said farewell to Sayers and gave him a handsome oak filing cabinet, but in December he was back. Jast had gone to Manchester as Deputy City Librarian. Instead of advertising his post, the Croydon Libraries Committee, without bothering to get the approval of the full Council, invited Sayers to accept the post of Chief Librarian, which he did without hesitation. He took office in December 1915, at £300 a year.

Sayers's reputation as a practising librarian has always been less significant than his reputation as a writer and teacher of librarianship. It is true that, as a practising librarian, he was not as inventive as Jast or Savage, but there are several things he did particularly well. One of them, which will be discussed later, was the provision of an attractive library service for children. Here he excelled both Jast and Savage.

When Jast left the Croydon Public Libraries they were way ahead of most other public libraries in the country. Sayers kept them so. He was handicapped by a Central Library which was an annexe to the late Victorian Town Hall, and more a testimony to late Victorian notions of civic grandeur than to the principles of practical library planning. Sayers was able to plan several new branches, notably Shirley (1937) and Mitcham Road (1938), and he made every library an arts centre where there was a constant programme of lectures, recitals and exhibitions. He also provided small libraries in the local hospitals and in those schools where the children were remote from a branch library.

The 1919 Public Libraries Act permitted excellence but did not enforce it. The British public library service of the interwar years was not altogether bad, but it was very uneven. This point may be easily illustrated by comparing the public library service at Croydon with that of another county borough of equivalent population. In 1937, Croydon and Portsmouth each had a population of about a quarter of a million. Croydon Public Libraries had 63 professional staff; Portsmouth had 27. Croydon had a complete pattern of junior libraries; Portsmouth had none. Croydon offered £300 a year to a branch librarian; Portsmouth offered £110. Croydon spent about 2s. 2d. per year per head of population on its library services; Portsmouth spent about 11d.

Sayers was one of the few public librarians of his day who was able to convince his council that the public library service deserved a generous income. Unfortunately, Sayers's success in gaining liberal financial support for the Croydon public libraries, and an international reputation for excellence, were stumbling blocks for his successors, who had great difficulty in convincing the council that even further improvements and further support were necessary.

Sayers was inclined to write in exalted tones about the purpose of a public library, or any library. 'The uses of a library', he said, 'are many. Chief amongst them is the adventure of the soul in the fields of knowledge.' But an examination of Sayers's annual reports shows that he was no mere theoretician.

In 1938, Sayers was President of the Library Association. This was an honour well deserved. In his presidential address he was, as always, optimistic (Savage said that Sayers would be optimistic 'at the bottom of a ditch') and looked to the day when all public libraries would be attractive and efficient, and all libraries would co-operate with each other. But the last years of Sayers's library service were overshadowed by the Second World War and the austerity which followed it.

At the beginning of the war Sayers was badly injured, and nearly lost his life,

while serving as a Civil Defence controller. On the night of 24 November 1940, he was on duty in Croydon Town Hall when it was struck by a bomb. Recalling this incident in the excellent volume he compiled and edited called *Croydon and the Second World War*, he said:

The writer had just seated himself at his table, under a window protected by boards. He heard neither plane nor the whistle which precedes a bomb, but suddenly everything round him seemed to dissolve and he felt that a cataract of rushing sand and water was carrying him down to abysmal depths. Almost immediately he came to rest, without any real sense of hurt, in a black darkness. His first sensation was that he was not dead. The second that he must be under masses of debris.¹

Sayers retired from Croydon Public Libraries in December 1947, but for him retirement was never absolute. He had been a staunch supporter of the National Central Library since its foundation, and in his latter years was Vice-Chairman of its Board of Trustees and Chairman of the Executive Committee. He remained, as always, kindly and sympathetic towards the younger generation of librarians, and his pen was never idle.

Although Sayers left the Croydon libraries a good deal better than he found them (which is no reflection on the pioneering labours of Stanley Jast), if that was all he had done he would scarcely be remembered now. But Sayers had the talent and the will to serve the library profession at large, and it is because of this that his name is still familiar. There are four aspects of Sayers's work for the library profession which merit particular attention: his services to the Library Assistants' Association; his contributions to children's librarianship; his success as a teacher and writer on library classification; and his editorial and other labours for the *Library World*.

SAYERS AND THE LIBRARY ASSISTANTS' ASSOCIATION

Sayers soon discovered that working as Jast's deputy meant 'going all out'. He nevertheless found the time and the energy to serve as an officer of the Library Assistants' Association at a crucial stage in its development. The LAA (it did not become the Association of Assistant Librarians (AAL) until 1922) had been founded in 1895 to promote the interests of the growing number of library assistants and assistant librarians who regarded the LA, not without reason, as an association of chief librarians. Savage said that the LAA was founded for library assistants 'to sulk and grouse in', which was clever but unjust. As defined by Sayers, the aims and objectives of the LAA were:

to produce a situation that would provide an assistant with friends in every library; secondly, to establish a platform, because we had many grievances as well as some aspirations to air; above all, to increase our deserving by the acquirement of

qualifications that intelligent people would recognise — we did not even despair of committees and councillors.⁵

Sayers began his marathon labours for the LAA as the enterprising Secretary of the Education Sub-Committee, in which capacity he secured for the LAA several distinguished public figures as speakers. But in 1906 he took over the vital post of Secretary of the association. He held this office until 1909, and again from 1912 to 1915. During the intervening years he served as the association's President.

Michael J. Ramsden, historian of the LAA and AAL, has said that Sayers was 'without question the outstanding figure in the Association's history'.⁶ One has only to glance at the pages of the *Library Assistant* (to which Sayers frequently contributed, and for one year edited) for the period 1906 to 1915 to see that this was true.

When he became a chief librarian, Sayers transferred his allegiance to the LA, but although he was one of its councillors for over 40 years, nothing he did for the LA was comparable to his work for the LAA. As the LAA's Secretary, Sayers had two ambitions — to increase the association's membership and to establish branches throughout the country. To this end he went on a crusading tour of the larger British cities — Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, Newcastle, Brighton, Cardiff — and wherever he went (save only at Liverpool) he left behind him a small branch 'capable of growth'. All this was done by Sayers at his own expense, as the LAA had no funds to spare.

While the membership of the LA, of which Jast was the Honorary Secretary, remained almost static, the LAA's membership grew encouragingly. 'When I left the LAA Council in 1915', Sayers said, 'the membership was 624, a four-fold advance in ten years.'⁷ Two things which Sayers wanted were not achieved until after the First World War — the adoption of a more appropriate name for the association and affiliation with the LA.

SAYERS AND CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES

Sayers is most often remembered for his interest in library classification, but he also had an intense interest in children's libraries. 'The children's library', he said, 'ought to be the foundation of library work.'

One of Sayers's most vivid recollections was of the day he peered through the door of the new Bournemouth Public Library at the books he craved for but was not allowed to borrow. He was then 13, and had discovered to his chagrin that he could not join the library until he was 14. Sayers became professionally interested in children's libraries when he was Jast's deputy. In 1912 he daringly published a book called *The children's library*. This had the distinction of being the first manual on the subject, but, as Sayers admitted, it was based more on the

experience of other librarians than his own, and most of the literature cited was American. Although Jast was interested in children's libraries, he was prevented from providing a good children's service through lack of income and accommodation.

When Sayers went to Wallasey he discovered, so he said, that Savage had left him 'nothing to do'. But one thing Savage had not provided in the town's new Carnegie library was a separate children's department. Sayers made room for one in the old building nearby which had formerly served as the central library. It was an immediate and embarrassing success: within a few hours all the books had been borrowed.

Back at Croydon, Sayers could at first do no more for children than Jast. Fortunately, a large newsroom, which had been taken over by the Ministry of Food during the war, was not fervently needed for its original purpose after it. With 'the blessed release from Penny Rate bondage' by the 1919 Public Libraries Act, Sayers was able to convert this bleak chamber into a pleasant junior library. His aim was to make it 'a social centre for children, where certain arts could be practised, a refuge from cold winter streets at appropriate hours after and between school time, and a place where home lessons could be done'.⁸

Sayers was able to appoint a Children's Librarian, a rare post then, at a salary which, by today's standards, was absurdly small. The children's library (or junior library, as Sayers preferred to call it) he organized was not the first of its kind in Britain. The pioneering work had already been done at Nottingham and Cardiff. But Sayers's enthusiasm and imagination produced a galaxy of new ideas with which to experiment.⁹ Within a few years there were readings, story hours, exhibitions, school visits, hobby clubs and a regular Christmas Story Festival. But although Sayers wanted his junior library to be a home from home, he firmly believed that its real value lay in the books provided. He did not overvalue smart furniture and decoration.

In the 1930s, when Allen & Unwin, in association with the LA, published a series of textbooks on librarianship, Sayers was asked to write *A manual of children's libraries* (1932). It was one of the few good titles in a series which did not endure and it was vastly superior to Sayers's first book on the subject. Sayers's notion of a children's library was that it should be 'beautiful, comfortable, comprehensive'. It is a sad reflection on the growth of children's libraries in Britain that what Sayers so wisely advocated should have been so much in advance of his time.

SAYERS'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE OF LIBRARIANSHIP

By his late thirties, when he became Chief Librarian of Croydon, Sayers had lost some of his youthful fire and gusto. As a deputy Sayers was a lively, outspoken

radical; as a chief he was a tolerant but hopeful conservative. The younger Sayers had the gift of being able to do many things at once and all of them well. Helping Jast to develop the Croydon libraries was, in itself, a major exercise. So, too, was the self-imposed task of giving the LAA size and strength. But in addition to all these activities, Sayers found time to write many forceful articles on librarianship. There was hardly a single aspect of it he did not touch.

Thanks to Anne Harwell Jordan and Melbourne Jordan's *Cannons' bibliography of library economy, 1876-1920: an author index with citations* (Scarecrow Press, 1976), we can now get some idea (*Cannons* is not exhaustive) of what Sayers wrote for the British library journals at the beginning of the century. There were only four library journals then, the *Library Association Record*, the *Library Assistant*, the *Library World* and the *Librarian*. Sayers wrote for them all.

As writers, Jast and Brown rivalled Sayers in volume and variety, but at his best Sayers was the master of both in clarity of exposition and skill in argument. Two excellent examples of his early, vigorous style, are 'The mania for bricks and mortar' (1908) and 'Past and present professional training: its results and prospects' (1913). In the former, Sayers condemned those local authorities which had built more libraries than they could support out of a penny library rate. In his attack on Edwardian library architecture, which was not altogether bad, Sayers was engagingly satirical. Having declared that 'with rare exceptions our municipal libraries are the most hideous buildings erected in this architecturally benighted country', he continued:

Recently, buildings have been erected which are adequately planned, but in these the librarian has been allowed an opinion. Of the exterior the librarian can, of course, know nothing. Hence the architect builds a temple of Minerva out of his own sublime inner consciousness. His preferences hover between a church — from a desire to express what he believes to be the ecclesiastical character of books, and to give room for a big newsroom which in his eyes is the most important part of the edifice; a bank — which is to suggest security; and a gaol — which is possibly to suggest that the way of learning is harsh and uninviting. If you examine carefully the library buildings of recent years you will see they all possess the characteristics of one or two of these types of building.¹⁰

In September 1913 Sayers had the courage to tell the annual conference of the LA some unpalatable truths about the recruitment, training, salaries, conditions and prospects of junior library assistants. 'It seems to me', he said, 'that a grave moral responsibility rests with those who conduct libraries to ask themselves if they are justified in offering inducements to young people to enter upon this career in the belief that it has large possibilities.' He demanded for assistant librarians 'freedom from financial crippling and a certain amount of leisure'. He accused library committees of not having the remotest idea of the number of hours worked by their staffs, and the public for demanding more than it was willing to

pay for from its libraries and librarians.¹¹ This is a bolder Sayers than the more familiar one explaining the difference between the classification of knowledge and the classification of books.

SAYERS AND LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

Sayers's interest in classification was stimulated by three men: first, by his chief at Bournemouth, who gave him a copy of the Decimal Classification, although with the discouraging remark that it was 'too complex for British use'; second, by E.C. Richardson, whose Princeton lectures, *Classification: theoretical and practical* (1901), first brought the problems of library classification into focus; and third, by Stanley Jast, who had daringly used the DC at Peterborough, and who, when Chief Librarian at Croydon, gave classification lectures at the London School of Economics, which Sayers attended. It was Jast, above all, who made Sayers appreciate what Arundell Esdaile called 'this mentally intoxicating study'.

Soon, Sayers felt that he himself could pontificate on the subject. When James Duff Brown published the first edition of his Subject Classification in 1906, Sayers decided that the best way to assess it would be to apply to it a set of criteria of his own devising. These he rashly called 'canons of classification'. They were first published in the *Library Association Record* in August 1907.¹² Thereafter, Sayers was regarded as an oracle on library classification. He was asked to run an LA correspondence course on it and he also became a lecturer in classification at the London School of Economics. Out of his course notes came one of the few British textbooks on librarianship to achieve wide popularity at home and overseas. This was Sayers's *An introduction to library classification*, first issued by Grafton in 1918. In 1954 it reached its ninth edition.

Like most young librarians of my generation, I knew the *Introduction* from cover to cover, from the dedication ('To the memory of Henry W. Checketts and Eric A. Peppiette, who died for England "somewhere in France"') to the bibliography. It was not Sayers's first book on library classification, as in 1915 Grafton had published his provocative *Canons of classification* in which, with the cocksureness of a Macaulay, he had applied his code of criteria to all the major schemes of library classification then in use. 'The origin of these essays', said Sayers,

was my own necessity. As an initiate in librarianship the schedules of certain large, popular systems of classification were placed in my hands, with the laconic information that according to them libraries were classified. In common with many beginners I was plunged immediately into complete bewilderment.¹³

In search of enlightenment, Sayers delved into the literature of classification, with mixed results. 'There are few subjects', he said, 'about which it is so possible to

weave a web of philosophical moonshine as classification; a web so intangible and delicate as to give a meretricious mystery to what is after all a very simple matter.'¹⁴

But was it so very simple? The use of the term *Introduction* in the title of Sayers's textbook on library classification implied that there was more to be said. In 1926, Sayers said it. His *Manual of classification* ranks as an intermediate textbook, if not as an advanced one. This, too, was a success. Sayers himself took it into a third revised edition, and after his death Arthur Maltby revised it further. The fifth edition must be regarded as Mr Maltby's own work, but as a tribute to Sayers his name has been kept in the title: *Sayers' manual of classification for librarians*.

It was through the *Introduction* and the *Manual*, more than any of his other works, that Sayers became well-known and is still best remembered. His several editions of Brown's *Manual of library economy* were painstaking revisions, but they were associated more with Brown's name than his own. *A manual of children's libraries* (1932) and another pioneering work called *Library local collections* (1939) were among the few good library textbooks of their day, but their appeal was limited to a few specialists. But almost everyone in the library profession knew Sayers's books on library classification. They were successful not only because Sayers could write but because he could teach. In 1919 he became visiting lecturer in library classification at the newly founded School of Librarianship at London University, and remained so for many years. His textbooks on classification were shaped and refined by his teaching at this school.

Sayers prepared his weekly lectures with careful attention to their style as well as to their content. The lectures were read, but what Sayers knew, and what far too many academics do not, is that a script which may be good for publication is not necessarily good for the lecture theatre. The most cursory examination of these typescripts, which may be seen in the Local Studies Department, Croydon Central Library, shows why Sayers was regarded by his students as an inspiring lecturer. 'I want you', he said, 'to have patience with your subject, because I quite believe you will gain enthusiasm for it, if only you will take great pains with the initial work of the course.' They did take pains, and several of them did gain enthusiasm.

Sayers was a successful teacher because what he knew he could communicate. What he said was remembered. But, unfortunately, few young librarians could attend Sayers's classes, or indeed, any classes. Most of them relied on his textbooks and on them alone. But good as they were, they were not in themselves enough. Without the benefits of discussion, practical work and personal guidance, many students failed the LA examinations. Nevertheless, if one used them aright one could benefit greatly from Sayers's manuals. To his more resolute readers they were aids to learning, by observation, discovery and practice, rather than guides *par excellence* through the LA's examination maze.

One other reservation must be made. Sayers's supremacy was as an expositor rather than as an original theorist. S.R. Ranganathan, who was one of Sayers's students at the London University School of Librarianship (he would have fled the course but for Sayers's kindly interest), said that Sayers was 'the first person to build up an elaborate, consistent and fairly complete grammar of the classificatory language'.¹⁵

One characteristic of a good teacher is that he will gladly encourage a student who is likely to overtake him. Sayers helped and encouraged Ranganathan without stint, but there came a time when he had to admit that his pupil had soared to heights of classification beyond his ken. Of Ranganathan's Colon Classification, Sayers wryly observed,

I am conscious that the method and complexity of the scheme, mainly because of the author's method of providing a new term for every new process, and thereafter assuming it to be adopted and familiar, has made it impossible for this writer, at least, to do the system justice, or even to explain it to his satisfaction.

To this Sayers added, perhaps with conscious humour, 'Undoubtedly the best method of understanding Colon is to read its author's own books; there are at least ten of them which are directly upon classification.'¹⁶

With the treatises and classification of Henry Evelyn Bliss, 'the most scholarly of American classifiers', Sayers was more at ease. Of Bliss's second book, his *Organisation of knowledge in libraries and the subject approach to books*, Sayers said, 'As a general statement of its subject I think the book occupies quite the first rank.'

Sayers never made any extraordinary claims for his own work on classification. He said that its purpose was simply 'to learn enough about any scheme whatsoever to apply it intelligently and effectively'. This observation was made in an essay published in April 1959, in which he reviewed his own experience of library classification and speculated about its future. Never a mean-spirited man, he spoke warmly of the work of his younger colleagues in the field, S.R. Ranganathan, A.J. Wells, D.J. Foskett and B.C. Vickery. His last words on the subject were:

The main problems, then, for the future, lie in the discriminating in complex masses of material the 'like' references (retrieving them from the mass) and recording them so that the references can be assembled economically and with the utmost rapidity. This is systematic indexing, involving first classification of every kind of entity (depth classification) and then the most minute and accurate indexing; and employing every device, mechanical and other, punch cards, electronic sorting and selecting and what aids so-ever science has brought and can bring to the 'retrieval of knowledge', and to its manipulation for those who seek to use it. For without such information we cannot progress, possibly cannot survive, in the modern world.¹⁷

SAYERS AND THE *LIBRARY WORLD*

There is one part of Sayers's career which cannot properly be accounted for: his work for the *Library World*. During the long period Sayers was closely associated with it, from about 1915 until his death in 1960, the *LW* was published by the firm of Grafton, a small, old-fashioned business which took no particular care of the records of its publications.

The *LW* was founded in 1898 by James Duff Brown so that he might have a permanent platform for his campaign for better and brighter public libraries. Under his direction (he was its anonymous editor) the *LW* became both a useful and a readable journal. Unfortunately, Brown was forced to vacate the editorial chair in 1912, when he became grievously ill. When he died, in February 1914, the *LW* was acquired by Grafton, and in the following year, it would seem, Sayers became either its editor or advisory editor. Sayers himself declared that the *LW* was edited by Miss Frank Hamel, the redoubtable woman who owned Grafton.¹⁸ But it is reasonably certain that Sayers wrote a vast amount for the *LW*, not only under his own name but anonymously and pseudonymously. Dr W.A. Munford has suggested that Sayers was Eratosthenes, the most prolific contributor to the long-running series called 'Letters on our affairs', an identification I see no reason to doubt.¹⁹

The only explicit record we have of Sayers's association with the *LW* comes from Clive Bingley, who joined Grafton in August 1958. Miss Hamel had died the previous year and the *LW*, under the energetic direction of Roy McColvin, was trying to recover from a period of neglect, due partly to the recent illness of Berwick Sayers, who was then 'Chief of the Editorial Committee' and the anonymous contributor of a monthly news feature called 'Memorabilia'. Mr Bingley remembers Sayers calling upon him with copy for the journal:

He would march through the door of 51 Great Russell Street, usually late on Thursday afternoons after committee or council meetings at Chaucer House, a portly figure, very solid, very dignified, and make his way firmly down the length of the shop to my office at the back.... He would settle himself in an upright chair and after a few preliminaries dip into his little brown leather attaché case and produce sheaves of hand-written copy, with never an omission of anything for which I had previously asked him. He had been doing it for so long that our printers could set up type from his manuscript, which was not among the most legible I have encountered.²⁰

Sayers's last signed contribution to the *LW*, 'Conference prelude', appeared in August 1960. In it he defended the LA conferences, which he liked. 'Even if', he said, 'we talk all night and achieve nothing (apparently), we have added something to the quality of life.'

A profession must have its independent journals. Sayers did not always manage to keep the *LW* lively, but he did a great deal to keep it alive.

SAYERS'S CHARACTER AND ACHIEVEMENT

When Stanley Jast was chief at Croydon he had two remarkable deputies, Ernest A. Savage and Berwick Sayers. In the course of time both became as eminent in the library profession as Jast himself, but although each of them had an unquenchable and wide-ranging interest in librarianship, their characters and achievements were different. Savage was the preacher of his generation, Sayers the teacher. Furthermore, Savage did his best work in the latter half of his career; Sayers was at his peak in the earlier half. But those who did not know the older Sayers well could easily be misled by his appearance and demeanour, a point well made by John L. Thornton who has said, 'The physique and manner of speech associated with an archbishop rather than a librarian caused some to consider Berwick Sayers pompous, but he was anything but that.' Mr Thornton underlines this observation by quoting a letter which Sayers wrote to him in response to a request for a contribution to the *Indexer*:

Nothing would please me better than to say I would send you a screed in time for the Spring number of *The Indexer*, which I like very much indeed; but when I do a script — and I *will* — you will say that it is only of stale material. I do not pose as an expert in the modern associative types of indexing. All I could do would be some light stuff about my own experience in trying to index things for my own use: my own books; the snags I have met; the fun I have enjoyed; the misleading indexes; the too brief indexes; and the efficient ones that get everything in them, so that if one has read the index one has (save the mark) mastered the book; and then, to close these immediate impressions, the 'index impossible', that registers every subject, aspect, relation, thought and allusion in every sentence, paragraph, page, chapter and in the added things in book, periodical or literary or recorded piece. *Quod est absurdum!*

That's the sort of stuff, 'guff' you may say, which is all I can *hope* to do. Hope is the imperative word. I am up to my eyes in inky murkiness at present.²¹

This was written on 1 February 1960. A few days previously a meeting of the Classification Research Group, which owed so much to Sayers's work on classification, had enthusiastically agreed that Sayers should be honoured on his eightieth birthday by the publication of a *Festschrift*. But he was never to see it, as he died on 6 October 1960. The handsome volume intended to please him was published by the LA, in 1961, as *The Sayers memorial volume*. But he did see what I consider to be the finest appreciation of himself, as it was published in December 1947, on the occasion of his retirement. It was written by his old friend, and one-time colleague at Croydon Public Library, Lionel R. McColvin, who said:

It is very doubtful if any British librarian has made a wider impact upon librarianship in all parts of the world, or is known to and beloved by more of his colleagues, many of them men and women who have never seen him. I have myself met such men,

thousands of miles from home, who have been proud to tell me how they have corresponded with Sayers, enjoyed his help and advice, men to whom Sayers is a symbol of the unity and friendship of the library movement. I'm very glad they chose such a man as a symbol... Sayers has been a good member of his profession because he's also been interested in other things as well — in literature, especially poetry, in music, in education and the interests of the people we have to serve.²²

A regular feature of Sayers's annual reports on the Croydon Public Libraries was a list of distinguished visitors. They came from all over the world.

REFERENCES

- 1 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: musician*, 2nd edn, London, Augener, 1927, ix.
- 2 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Later days', *Library Assistant*, 38 (5) September–October 1945, 73.
- 3 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'L. Stanley Jast', *Library Association Record*, 47 (2) February 1945, 23.
- 4 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, ed., *Croydon and the Second World War*, Croydon, Croydon Corporation, 1949, 54.
- 5 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Some jubilee memories and reflections', *Assistant Librarian*, 48 (4) April 1955, 50.
- 6 Ramsden, Michael J., *A history of the Association of Assistant Librarians 1895–1945*, London, Association of Assistant Librarians, 1973, 48–51.
- 7 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Association memories', *Library Review*, 5 (37) Spring 1936, 210.
- 8 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Children's libraries as I saw them', *Library World*, 60 (698–9) August–September 1958, 24.
- 9 Colwell, Eileen, 'W.C. Berwick Sayers and children's libraries', in D.J. Foskett and B.I. Palmer, eds. *The Sayers memorial volume*, London, Library Association, 1961, 19.
- 10 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'The mania for bricks and mortar', *Library Association Record*, 10, May 1908, 226–7.
- 11 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Past and present professional training', *Library Association Record*, 15, December 1913, 589–90.
- 12 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Some canons of classification applied to the Subject Classification', *Library Association Record*, 9, August 1907, 425–42.
- 13 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, *Canons of classification*, London, Grafton, 1915, 13.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 94.
- 15 Ranganathan, S.R., 'Sayers and Donker Duyvis', *Annals of Library Science*, 8 (3) September 1961, 86.
- 16 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, *A manual of classification*, 3rd edn, London, Grafton, 1955, 211–12.
- 17 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Thoughts on library classification in retrospect and in prospect', *Library World*, 60 (706) April 1959, 206–12.
- 18 Sayers, W.C. Berwick, 'Frank Hamel 1869–1957', *Library World*, 58 (682) April 1957, 153.
- 19 Ollé, James G., 'The Alexandrian letters', *New Library World*, 81 (964) October 1980, 193–5.
- 20 Bingley, Clive, '1958 and all that', *Library World*, 68 (800) February 1967, 214–17.
- 21 [Thornton, J.L.] 'W.C. Berwick Sayers', *Indexer*, 2 (3) Spring 1961, 109–10.
- 22 McColvin, Lionel R., 'W.C.B.S.', *Librarian*, 36 (12) December 1947, 273–4.

PRINCIPAL PUBLICATIONS OF W.C. BERWICK SAYERS

On librarianship

The children's library, London, Routledge [1912].

Canons of classification, London, Grafton, 1915.

An introduction to library classification, London, Grafton, 1918; 2nd edn, 1922; 3rd edn, 1929; 4th edn, 1935; 5th edn, 1938; 6th edn, 1943; 7th edn, 1946; 8th edn, 1950; 9th edn, 1954.

A manual of classification for librarians and bibliographers, London, Grafton, 1926; 2nd edn, 1944; 3rd edn, 1955; 4th edn, revised by Arthur Maltby, London, Deutsch, 1967.

A manual of children's libraries, London, Allen & Unwin and the Library Association, 1932.

Brown, James Duff, *Manual of library economy*, 3rd edn revised by W.C. Berwick Sayers, London, Grafton, 1920; 4th edn revised by W.C. Berwick Sayers, London, Grafton, 1931. Subsequent editions were published under Sayers's name alone: *Manual of library economy*, 5th edn, London, Grafton, 1937; 6th edn, London, Grafton, 1949.

Miscellaneous

Over some Alpine passes, Croydon, Croydon Guardian, 1913.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, musician: his life and letters, London, Cassell, 1915; 2nd edn, London, Augener, 1927.

The story of Croydon, Croydon, Croydon Central Library, 1925.

Henry Keatley Moore: a brief memoir, Croydon, Croydon Public Libraries Committee, 1937.

Croydon and the Second World War, edited by W.C. Berwick Sayers, Croydon, Croydon Corporation, 1949.

PRINCIPAL WRITINGS ABOUT W.C. BERWICK SAYERS

Autobiographical

'A bookman's browsings', *Library Review*, 17 (134) Summer 1960, 399-403.

'Association memories [LAA]', *Library Review*, 5 (37) Spring 1936, 206-10.

'Children's libraries as I saw them', *Library World*, 60 (698-9) August-September 1958, 22-7.

'Later days [LAA]', *Library Assistant*, 38 (5) September-October 1945, 73-6.

'Libraries and literary pleasures', *Library Review*, 10 (77) Spring 1946, 98-103.

'Some early friends', *Library Review*, 5 (36) Winter 1935, 176-80.

'Some jubilee memories and reflections [LAA]', *Assistant Librarian*, 48 (4) April 1955, 50-3.

'When I began', *Library Review*, 5 (35) Autumn 1935, 112-17.

Biographical and critical

Bingley, Clive, '1958 and all that [Sayers and the *Library World*]', *Library World*, 68 (800) February 1967, 214-17.

Cashmore, H.M., 'W.C. Berwick Sayers', *Library Association Record*, 62 (11) November 1960, 381-2.

Foskett, D.J., and Palmer, B.I., eds, *The Sayers memorial volume: essays in librarianship in memory of William Charles Berwick Sayers*, London, Library Association, 1961. The first three chapters, by J.D. Stewart, Eileen Colwell and S.P.L. Filon, are about Sayers; the remaining twelve are on subjects which were of interest to him.

Fry, W.G., 'The President as poet', *Library World*, 41 (468) August-September 1938, 30-2.

- McColvin, Lionel R., 'W.C. Berwick Sayers', *Library World*, 62 (726) December 1960, 141-4.
- Munford, W.A., 'The library world and THE LIBRARY WORLD. [Sayers and the *Library World*]', *Library World*, 68 (800) February 1967, 211-14.
- Ranganathan, S.R., 'W.C. Berwick Sayers', *Library Association Record*, 62 (12) December 1960, 419-20.
- Ranganathan, S.R., 'Sayers and Donker Duyvis', *Annals of Library Science*, 8 (3) September 1961, 85-99.
- Stewart, J.D. 'W.C. Berwick Sayers', *Library Association Record*, 62 (11) November 1960, 382-3.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help of Mr A.O. Meakin, Chief Librarian, Croydon Public Libraries, and the staff of the Local Studies Department, at Croydon Central Library. Among the sources of information of particular value on Berwick Sayers in this library are the volumes of mounted press cuttings on the Croydon Public Libraries, the file of printed annual reports, and the typescripts of Sayers's classification lectures and poems for children. Some of the latter, although apparently unpublished, are quite charming.